

Contact Zones and Elsewhere Fields:

The Poetics and Politics of Environmental Sound Arts

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Abstract

How is agency distributed “in the field” and how can the practice of field recording critically manifest the relationship between humans and non-humans?

This thesis posits an original art practice of field recording based on a perspective I am calling “Inter-agential”. Employing the self-reflexive anthropological turn of the 1970’s as parallel critique throughout, I argue environmental sound art has ignored the politics of observer-subject relations and instead engaged place and sound through divisive legacies of conservation and composition.

I propose a hybrid conceptual framework from contemporary sound and anthropological studies that foregrounds issues relating to ethics, agency and representation. These subjects are examined in practice by converting “the field” into a collaborative and contested arena for intervention and performance. The result is a unique and formally diverse body of work that seeks to actively disrupt, critique and re-imagine the ontological foundations of field recording through an original and politicised aesthetics.

All practice-based experimentation has been conducted in one fixed location along the North-East Coast of England called South Gare. It is an industrial and ecologically embroiled site, both in terms of its history and present day impact. I situate this site-specific setting through artistic legacies found in Land Art. This context helps to re-imagine modes of documentation, production and subjectivity within field recording and builds a nuanced understanding of the field in relation to the representation of place and sonic experience.

Key words: aesthetics, bio-critical incidents, contact zones, elsewhere fields, field recording, inter-agential, new materialism, trans-hearing.

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DVD Track listing & Accessibility

I recommend the reader insert the accompanying DVD into a computer/laptop and consider each work on the DVD in relation to its discussion within the thesis. To aid this parallel reading-listening experience, each track on the DVD relates to specific discussions listed on the page numbers below. Two paper-based works that are not reproduced on the DVD - *Mut(e)ual Consent* (2013) and *Tasked to Hear* (2104) - are documented by photographs embedded within the body of the written text. Full details of all works are contained with the bibliographic section “Research Outputs”.

1. *A line Made by Listening* (2011), audio (10:16), p.60.
2. *Peripheral Conversations* (2012), audio (09:01), p.65.
3. *Severing All Ties* (2012), audio excerpt (01:04), p.69*.
4. *30 Minutes of Listening* (2012), film documentation (04:34), p.71.
5. *This Little Theory* (2012), audio (04:20), p.75.
6. *Here & There* (2012), film (01:14), p.79.
7. *A Proposed Vocabulary Exchange* (2013), film (07:21), p.119.
8. *Re-capturing* (2013), film (02:59), p.141.
9. *Elsewhere Field* (2013), audio excerpt (01:43), p.162*.
10. *Clearing up the Mirror* (2013), audio excerpt (01:56), p.177*.

11. *Bio-critical Incidents* (2014), audio (05:52), p.177.

12. *There or Thereabouts* (2014), film (11:32), p.178.

13. *Tasked to Hear* (2014), audio (25:53), p.186.

*Denotes extracts taken from the published work *Bio-Critical Incidents* (2014).

Common Terms

Beneath is a list of terms mentioned throughout the thesis. By introducing these now I hope to give the reader a functional understanding of their use as well as a providing a practical reference tool.

1. Aesthetics

In conversation with soundscape composition and CD legacies as outlined in Phase One. Aesthetics is where political content resides within my practice-based research, not through polemical dogma but poetic and critical interventions that reflect upon field recording's methods of production and modes of representation.

2. Field Recording or Environmental Sound Art

Refers to the practice's broader settings and trends whilst always based in conversation with soundscape studies as a point of contextual departure.

3. Non-human

Employed throughout in reference to field recording's core subjects such as animals or inert matter. The term is interchangeable with "more-than-human".

4. Sound-in-itself

Used in relation to the treatment of sound as a material object stripped of socio-political context. It arrives out of acousmatic legacies discussed during Phase One.

5. The now

Referred to in the context of starting this research within the protracted financial crisis of 2008. The term is a way of keeping art practice in conversation with the political present.

Thesis Introduction

Background

My interest in field recording was cemented during a diploma in Broadcast Sound and Media at the London College of Communication in 2006. Prior to this any creative urge had been absorbed into writing screenplays and short fiction. Creative writing was something I developed whilst undertaking my original degree, a major component of which was in film theory. During this time (1997-2000) I discovered sound recording through the role of the Foley artist¹.

At the turn of 2000 I began recording environmental and incidental sounds without any particular goal. The activity brought me into contact with humans, animals and the outdoors. Through, and with it, I became part of something, no matter how transient or fleeting. Up until the diploma in 2006 I never knew what to do with my recordings. What were these things for? Who were they for? What was the point of recording something that was already there? The diploma undoubtedly made me realise that field recording could be considered a valid endeavour, and that the recorded material itself was primed for artistic production.

In the years that followed I took up as much field recording based work as possible. Through personal projects and commissions I presented work over radio, film, installation and theatre. Yet in 2008, I found myself back at the London College of Communication to pursue a Masters Degree in Sound Art. I wanted a space to reconsider why I used field recordings and to critically understand my work in relation to place and memory. For my final project I produced a book that combined my early interests in writing, alongside sound and photography. The work, titled *A Quiet Reverie* (2008) explored four ruined abbeys in North Yorkshire and attempted

¹ Foley artists reproduce incidental sound effects for film through a variety of studio techniques. For example, the sound of footsteps, doors opening or breaking glass. These elements are typically re-inserted during post-production in order to create the illusion of a real-time and place sound effect.

to weave their turbulent histories with the present day sonic environment. It went on to receive the British Composer of the Year Award in Sonic Arts (2009)².

I distinctly remember the award arriving at a crucial moment, a point of decision. Should I continue to employ field recordings in the same compositional way as I had in my Masters and previously during the Diploma? What were these works really doing? What was my relationship to gathering recordings and re-presenting them? Was I interested in sound as material or as a subject? I knew I wanted to change the way I was working but did not know why or how.

Not long after the award I became periodically incapacitated due to severe nerve pain in my lower back. Apparently, a combination of bad posture and years of repetitive lifting was to blame. Between 2010 and 2011 I received intensive physiotherapy and now, to some extent, I have “managed” the situation; thanks in large part to a regular routine of stretching and bodily self-surveillance. It was during this time of immobility that I began to reflect on the preceding questions and intuitions.

Throughout the pain, walking was not an option, nor too carrying equipment and manoeuvring my body into all types of shapes and spaces. As I lay on my living room floor for seemingly days on end, I became agitated; that everybody “out there” seemed so mobile and fluid. I remember my focus scaled inwards, towards a more sedentary and corporeal sense of being. I thought about duration, stasis and the potential for small-scale studies of areas no larger than my own body. I moved away from a previously mobile pursuit of sound and instead veered towards an appreciation of stillness and the performative potential of listening.

² An annual award given by BBC Radio 3, the Performing Rights Society (PRS) and the British Academy of Song Writers, Composers and Authors (BASCA).

Living above a busy street in North-East London I could hear drones of acceleration outside; sirens wailing; footsteps beneath the window; somebody shouting and the sound of a dog barking occasionally. I imagined being out there amongst it all. I retreated back “here”, to the hum of the fridge and my body breathing [...] My ear, still very much a part of me, became an extension into and through the environment itself. A wandering membrane, equipped with its own feet – ones that allowed me to move beyond my own immediate and confined position, and back again (Wright, 2014).

This somewhat utopian assessment of the situation is based on the primary fact that I am fortunate enough to have my hearing. Yet during this time, listening provided a very real method that took me beyond the confines of my own physically site-specific circumstances and into outside, elsewhere territories and social situations.

In the intermittent periods when my back was fit for purpose I developed a project titled *Exchanges* (2010-2011). By necessity the work required a certain structure. I would stand or sit in one place without any recording equipment and listen for an unaccounted duration. When I felt I wanted or (physically) needed to leave, I photographed the surface below where I had been. Later that evening I would attempt to recall what I had heard during the encounter, writing down a few simple, prose-like lines.

The first outing of the project occurred during a symposium organised by CRiSAP (Creative Research into Sound Arts Practice) named “The Uses and Abuses of Field Recording”: held in London, 2011. Along with seven other practitioners I was asked to consider how I used microphones to “capture something of the world”.

I decided to present the *Exchanges* (2010-2011) project under the title: *I Do Not Want To Press Record*. During the presentation I read the accompanying written text aloud

with each image appearing for twenty seconds³. The last line of the presentation read 'I do not want to press record, I want to listen' (Wright, 2011). A selection of these images has since been included in the recent publication *On Listening* (2013). In the book, the text is displayed in a more poetic and instructional manner; based on the methodological process itself rather than descriptions of the listening event. The accompanying text now reads: 'To remain in one place, over duration and listen. What is imposed? What is lost? What remains?' (Wright, 2013, pp.34-37).

Reflecting upon these experiences it is clear to me now that prior to starting my PhD, during a period of physical stress, recording was simply not an option. Within this particular set of circumstances I began to wrestle with my own relationship to recording and re-presenting sound. I moved away from a specific medium towards an inquiry based on the process of listening: how it can be marked, shaped, documented and shared; I started searching for embodied ways of being in my practice (formally, conceptually, publically); rather than "capturing" I began to think intuitively of "letting go".

³ Based on the Japanese Pecha Kucha presentation format, which requires twenty slides to be shown for twenty seconds each; six minutes and forty seconds in total.

Critical Context

This PhD orientates itself around one central practice known as field recording. The activity involves recording the sounds of a given environment or space. It also concerns recording both acoustic and sub acoustic, human and non-human species and phenomena. Field recording covers virtually every acoustic moment both heard and unheard. Humans, animals, places, machines, aquatic life and celestial events: no acoustic stone is left unturned. Commonly, although not exclusively, based outdoors, the practice is also known as “phonography”. Field recording’s broad remit allows it to operate across various disciplines including geography, social science and anthropology (see Back, 2007; Bull & Back, 2004; Erlmann, 2004; Lacey, 2013; Thompson, 2002). Since the turn of the twentieth century field recording has increasingly moved from hobbyist, science and ethnomusicology traditions, towards an artistic practice in its own right (Montgomery, 2013). As sound is gathered “in the field”, its re-presentation - through installation, publication, playback and performance - has widened the discipline’s reach. Field recording now contributes a key facet within contemporary sound art praxis and discourse (see Cox & Warner, 2004; Kelly, 2012; LaBelle, 2006; Licht 2007), representing ‘a diverse range of practices which explore and investigate aspects of the lived environment, from microscopic to the panoramic, through the medium of recorded sound’ (Carlyle & Lane, 2013, inner sleeve).

This is the context in which I am placing all of my practice-based research: within an artistic endeavour that continually traverses “site” and representational “space”. Specifically, I am positioning my work alongside and against the ontological and aesthetic legacies that have emerged from “Soundscape Studies”. This context is explored in full during the opening section of Phase One, but it is important to note here that soundscape studies is an interdisciplinary field that broadly seeks to

understand the sonic relationship between living things (humans and non-human) and the environment.

It thus depends on the relationship between the individual and any such environment. The term [soundscape] 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).

Soundscape studies will be referred to as a historical context primarily between the years 1969 and 1978. However, it continues to impact upon contemporary practice through a set of traceable legacies and vestiges. Along with its focus upon sound preservation and acoustic heritage, one of the most telling artistic consequences to arrive out of soundscape studies is the assertion that the everyday sonic environment can be treated like a musical composition. This is evidenced through the contemporary proliferation of multi-channel playback scenarios and CD publications that treat environmental sound as an immersive material that can be controlled, manipulated and re-presented to varying degrees of mimesis. Phase One unpacks this legacy in more detail.

As stated field recording is now part of the broader contemporary sound art cannon. It is a (sound art) context that has come under scrutiny for its perceived lack of criticality, theorisation and self-reflection (see Cox, 2011; Kim-Cohen, 2009; Voegelin; 2010). By proxy I would suggest a similar “lack” is evident in contemporary field recording practice, both in terms of its methodologies in the field and compositional focus when re-presented elsewhere. With the exception of the recent publication *In the Field* (2013), no comprehensive or dedicated contemporary literature exists in which field recording is analysed and critiqued in terms of its methodologies or aesthetics. This specific deficiency has led to academic and writer Caleb Kelly (2013) to highlight the need for:

a critical [field] recording practice, one that doesn't merely mimic, the scientific, nor the nature documentary, or believe in a picture postcard fantasy of nature, way over there. This would be a critical recording practice that questions our assumptions about ecology, rather than continuing long held beliefs in the power of nature.

My aim then, is to develop an original body of work that reflects, critiques and re-imagines the artistic end of field recording practice. With specific reference to legacies derived from soundscape studies, I intend to update the field encounter away from its links to preservation and acoustic design. The consequence of this is amplified in the work I have produced: a formally diverse output that leans conceptually upon contemporary strands of anthropology. In presentation, my research integrates contexts from Land Art and visual documentary practices in order to broaden its representational options: to treat sound as a subject of inquiry rather than units for composition. Interlacing both conceptual and practice-based frameworks will, I believe, inject and update approaches to, and presentations of, field recording within the broader setting of sound art.

In order to put field recording and my own practice through the critical grind the research draws inspiration from the self-imposed crisis brought upon by ethnography and anthropology from the mid 1970's onwards (see Gertz, 1973; Hymes, 1974; Ruby, 1982). Fuelled by its culpable ties to European colonialism and a male centric practice, anthropologists and feminists alike began to question the discipline's methods and modes of representation. Scholars James Clifford and George E. Marcus brought about public and global awareness through their publication, *Writing Culture the Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (1987). The text delivered a seismic critique upon the ethics and politics of ethnographic fieldwork, in particular the validity of written, meta-narrative representations in a post-modern

world. A year later Clifford published another critical text: *The Predicament of Culture* (1988).

Both works raised long standing concerns over the crucial participant/observer relationship within fieldwork and the negative potential for authorial abuse, objectification and exoticism: all of which were deemed legacies of colonialism itself. This hegemonic predicament was, as Clifford (1988) proposed, not merely the concern of ethnographers but also the responsibility of academics, artists and writers to respond accordingly (see p.9). As Kim Fortun (2009) alludes to in the 25th anniversary foreword to *Writing Culture the Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, these incendiary essays were framed by the Reagan/Thatcher era, amidst a backdrop of rampant capitalism and social unrest. What was at stake then forced a field to confront its own methods and consequences in the political maelstrom of the “now”. Commencing this research in 2011, I was acutely aware of the parallel here in the UK; my own critique being conducted amidst the protracted social fallout from the financial collapse of 2008. I intend to harness the political spectre of the “now” throughout this thesis in order to bring about a similar, self-imposed period of crisis. It is time to debate the ethics and politics of field recording: its methodologies in, and aesthetic representations, out of the field.

Viet Erlmann (2004) has made a concrete parallel between sound recordings and ethnography previously. Furthermore, John Levack Drever (2002) specifically proposed sonic compositions, made from environmental recordings, could be considered forms of ethnographic representations themselves. I agree with Drever in that soundscape compositions can and do represent cultures, environments and species as much as traditional ethnographic literature or visual documents. However, unlike Drever (2002, see pp.21-22) I am not attempting to establish a new framework for soundscape composition nor break down what it is per se (see Truax, 2008). My focus specifically resides in building a new practice out of a sustained and

critical inquiry into the politics of the field encounter. I want to place an ethnographic lens at the methodological end: in the field. My specific questions to field recording therefore draw upon Clifford and Marcus's own critical understanding of the immediate field encounter. What is the participant/observer relationship within field recording? What exactly do recording technologies capture and what is the effect of such pursuit? How is agency negotiated between human and non-human subjects? How are both subjects, and sound as an aesthetic medium, being represented in practice and discourse?

Now engulfed within the domain of sound art, field recording practice has to become self-reflexive enough to critically analyse its own politics of production and ways of representing the world. This, as I will argue, is something that it has largely ignored due to the blurred preservation and compositional legacies of the soundscape studies model. I believe field recording needs a form of meta-crisis then, for reasons explained in Myerhoff & Ruby's (1982) introduction to *A Crack in the Mirror: Reflexive Perspectives in Anthropology*.

Once we take into account our role in our own productions [...] we may achieve a greater originality and responsibility than before, a deeper understanding at once of ourselves and of our subjects (Myerhoff & Ruby, 1982, pp.1-2).

Since the crisis in ethnography and cultural anthropology, fieldwork as a valid method itself has been brought to the brink of extinction and back. Only recently, through a switch from other to self, object to subject, outside to within, has anthropology begun to find its feet again through adjacent strands such as autoethnography and sensory ethnography (see Ellis, 2003; Howes, 2005; Muncey, 2010; Pink, 2009). Whether these are genuine moves forward, only time will tell. However, what the shifts do show is a study gaining a self-politic: an awareness, at

last, to deal with the multi-faceted, modern condition. I am using the historical example from ethnography then, as a means to agitate and disturb the practice's discourse, documentation and representational ways. I am holding a mirror, or more precisely, pointing a microphone to field recording in order to draw it towards an aesthetic and politically aware future: to show another possible route for field recording beyond soundscape composition.

All of this practice-based research has been based at, or in response to, one particular area along the North East coast of England called South Gare. The site itself will be contextualised within the opening of Phase One's practice reflection document titled "South Gare".

Original Contributions & Neologisms

My original contributions are listed beneath. By introducing them now I aim to give a transparent and clear articulation of how my research functions and defines itself as original. They include methodological and conceptual contributions to practice and knowledge, and are posited within neologisms that have aided the comprehension and articulation of my research. Each point is developed and debated thoroughly during its respective section of writing.

1. Inter-agential Practice

The most original contribution within this thesis is a body of practice I am calling “Inter-agential”. This is an umbrella term given to work that locates itself within the entanglement of human and non-human relations. It is practice-based research that amplifies and contests ethics, mediation and power dynamics. It does not seek to compose or archive environmental sound but instead foregrounds the critical and creative negotiation of agency within the dynamics of the practice itself: agency being defined as a “doing” or “activity” rather than an attribute (Barad, 2003).

The practice draws upon strands of contemporary anthropology including new materialism and in doing so, updates field recording’s historic cross-disciplinarity through the re-evaluation of sound as an interconnected material agent, rather than abstract compositional medium. An Inter-agential practice defines its originality against the ontological and aesthetic legacies derived from soundscape studies, discussed in full during Phase One. This original contribution is most evident throughout Phase’s Two and Three and is summarised on pp.145-147.

2. Contact Zones & Elsewhere Fields

These are original conceptual frameworks for my practice and aid broader understandings of what constitutes “the field”. They are how I have come to theorise

and comprehend the study of a specific site. Contact zones are derived from Mary Louise Pratt's (1992) understanding of colonial travel writing being based upon encounters of radical asymmetry (see p.7). Asymmetrical contact is the foundation for any field recording activity: I point the microphone. I choose its mode of representation. Contact Zones place emphasis on relational dynamics, in the field, and the distribution of agency within such encounters. Framed as such, the physical site of investigation is transformed into a participatory arena where Inter-agential concerns are performed and enacted.

Elsewhere Fields are part of the same system of contact and function in order to promote a non-essentialised relationship to place. They are concerned with movements into and away from the Contact Zone: driving to a site or re-presenting a work in a gallery. Elsewhere Fields acknowledge the experience of sound, listening and place is as connected to physical placement as much as it is displacement. Elsewhere Fields therefore induce a productive form of tension, between inside and out, and disrupt illustrative sounding tendencies to represent place from an immersed or holistic sense of *Gestalt* composition.

Contact Zones and Elsewhere Fields ensure the field is perceived as a plural movement rather than fixed identity. The field for this research is therefore a place of dual functionality, always straddling both contact immediacy and elsewhere contingency. These conceptual frameworks are explored in full during Phase Three's section "Contact in the Field".

3. Bio-critical Incidents

This term refers to an original retrospective method and perspective. It amplifies events and circumstances that are commonly silenced within the representation of a field recording. For example, recording with malfunctioning equipment, dealing with personal physical restrictions such as an ongoing back problem or simply

positioning and preparing equipment. Bio-critical Incidents demonstrate process. They are not interested in the recorded subject per se but the surrounding events and circumstances that make up a particular recording encounter. In this sense they can also be understood as “micro” Elsewhere Fields. Emphasising failure, Bio-critical Incidents inevitably encounter biography, loss and uncertainty, and harness such aspects as critical material for reflection and production. The term is referred to throughout and discussed primarily during Phase Three’s section “The Poetics of Letting Go”.

4. Trans-hearing

This term refers to an original method of auditory perspectival switches between humans and non-humans. For example it engages critical and imaginative identity swaps between myself and a bird. The method functions primarily in order to explore co-presence and does so through a non-anthropomorphic acknowledgement of the plural subjectivities that make up the field. Trans-hearing is not a method of animistic absorption or for the purposes of shifting human centred attributes onto animals. The methodology is a way of critically and creatively re-hearing myself, in the field, whilst acknowledging the encounter is always based on difference and a loss of rational knowledge. Trans-hearing is discussed primarily during Phase Two’s section “Towards an Inter-agential Practice”.

Structure & Contents

One of the most challenging aspects of producing this thesis is evidenced, from the onset, between the relationship of theory and practice. Throughout this study the two have not so much ran in parallel but more as an interweaving set of connections and disconnections: practice would lead theory and theory would lead practice; a constant feedback loop evolved which at times meant the two resembled one unified clump. How then, could I disentangle the two yet still show that intrinsic grafting, formally in the body of a thesis? Fundamentally, how should they both talk to and infuse one another on the page as they did during the research?

I have attempted to show this process and movement through a writing strategy that presents analytical text in the present tense and practice reflection documents in the past. To aid this approach I have organised the writing in “Phases” rather than as conventional “Chapter’s”. This serves as a way of animating a back and forth movement between practice and theory, along with acknowledging the distinct yet interleaved stages intrinsic to the entire body of the thesis. Furthermore, “Phase” is a deliberate terminological choice, one which I believe resonates more sympathetically towards investigations of the “sonic”.

I have thus identified and structured the thesis around three critical Phases, bookended by a “Thesis Introduction” and “Thesis Conclusion”. Each Phase consists of an opening body of critical writing that draws upon relevant literature and theoretical positions. Following on are reflective practice-based documents that relate, agitate and propel the inquiry. These sections are written with an anecdotal and narrative sensibility as they delve into the process and decision making behind all creative experiments. The two facets (theory and practice) of each Phase are then brought to a point of confluence through a final Phase conclusion. This process is repeated structurally over the three Phases of the thesis.

Phase One maps field recording's historical context and contemporary aesthetic legacies. The opening section, "Reaching the Limits of Field Recording & Soundscape Studies", pivots around one canonical reference point - soundscape studies - and begins by outlining its aims and methods. Following this, I draw soundscape studies into a critical debate surrounding both its methodologies in the field and contemporary aesthetic legacies once presented elsewhere, focusing in on particular CD and playback scenarios. During the Phase summary I outline three central points of focus for the research.

The second half of Phase One is presented under the title "Failing to Hear" and conveys the experimental nature of my research during the onset of study. It folds back onto my own practice those issues brought to the fore during the opening contextual writing. In many ways Phase One's practice reflection best highlights the oscillating relationship between theory and practice I have strived to retain within this thesis. Much of the practice embodies or contradicts the problems I acknowledge in the preceding survey of soundscape studies and contemporary field recording. This functions as a genuine display of research development found amongst the inevitable failures and contradictions at the start of a process-led project. Throughout, the section also hints towards the growing importance and acknowledgement of the personal and corporeal forces that began to inform my own methodological approach (Bio-critical Incidents).

Phase Two opens with another section of critical writing titled: "Re-approaching the Field". Here I take up the motivations and gaps exposed in Phase One's contextual survey and interrogate three key contemporary texts from sound art and anthropology. Extracting concepts from each, I outline the benefits and dangers for the conceptual treatment of sound within a new materialist framework.

During the following practice reflection, “Towards an Inter-agential Practice”, the reader will notice theory and practice contracting, this time towards one another. Here, both practice and criticism interrogate the politics of field recording practice and its relationship to non-human species and phenomena. Through post-humanist literature and a method I am calling “Trans-hearing”, the Phase reflects and exhibits a unique approach to the ethical and relational dynamics of the field encounter, and critically re-imagines the practice’s consequent modes of production.

Phase Three’s “Contact in the Field” begins with a more amalgamated blend of criticism and reflection. Here I reassess my relationship to South Gare, the physical site of study, in relation to sound, listening and site-orientated contexts and legacies. I explore notions of the “field” in relation to ethnographic discourse and establish a clear position in relation to what constitutes the field through the establishment of original “Contact” and “Elsewhere” territories.

“The Poetics of Letting Go” concludes Phase Three and endeavours to further mark a new representational territory for field recording practice. I draw upon certain key moments of the process (Bio-critical Incidents) and revisit two works from Phase One’s practice. I go on to outline an aesthetics of loss as imperative to the re-distribution of field recording’s possession-based culture. Following on from Phase Three is the “Thesis Conclusion”.

Field Recording & its Origins

Before opening with Phase One's interrogation of soundscape studies I need to work backwards in order to establish field recording's historical reference points. The final part of this thesis introduction therefore gives a brief but necessary introduction to those foundational lines. In particular it focuses upon science and arts early collusion, and pre-empts the initial paradigms that continue to push and pull at the practice today.

Prior to the fruition of soundscape studies, field recording as a distinct discipline had arisen in various guises: it is a methodology that brought with it a concatenation of approaches and cross-disciplinary representations. At the turn of the twentieth century comparative musicology, later known as ethnomusicology, sowed many antecedents for what is today understood as field recording. Primarily the study of folk music and oral traditions from non-western continents, organisations such as the Gramophone Company of London were pioneers in the field. Western recordists would travel to remote areas of the globe such as the southern regions of Tsarist Russia between 1902 and 1917, to record the sounds of musical cultures onto wax cylinders (Prentice, 2012). Then, field recording was a labour and time intensive task with horse drawn carts, cumbersome equipment and no electrical capability. Dutch musicologist Jaap Kunst built upon this study of recording traditional music in its social context. His term "ethnomusicology" became an accepted disciplinary title: one that continued to follow anthropological and ethnographic fieldwork traditions. Charles Seeger and Alan Lomax are pioneering examples from the 1940's and 50's. They both recorded the sound of blues musicians and Appalachian folk music in its social and environmental context: In the field. It is precisely ethnomusicology's strategy of recording, cataloguing and archiving, which paved the way for sound to be considered a viable social and cultural artefact.

During a similar time German born Ludwig Koch arrived as a Jewish refugee in England, 1936. Koch, then a celebrated musician, went on to become one of the world's leading experts in wildlife sound recording. His "sound-pictures", combinations of wildlife recordings, texts and imagery, were distributed nationally through publications in addition to a weekly BBC Radio broadcast throughout the 1930's and 40's. These recordings differed from ethnomusicology's focus on man-made music and instead placed nature, particularly birds, firmly at the fore. His work tapped into the enthusiastic vein of natural historians, wildlife experts and hobbyists (see Jeffery Boswell; Albert M. Brand; Jean Claude-Roche) across the UK, Europe and North America. Institutes such as the Cornell Lab of Ornithology (USA) and The Smithsonian Institute (USA) played major roles in facilitating, disseminating and developing the technology for recording outdoor environments (Bruyninckx, 2013, see pp.11-28).

Prior to Koch's arrival in England another German based field recording precedent had arisen. Occupying the artistic end of the spectrum experimental filmmaker Walter Ruttmann utilised optical film sound technology in his 12 minute radio piece: *Weekend* (1930). The work re-presented the sounds of everyday Berlin, minus the moving image, and is regarded as a precursor to electroacoustic composition and radiophonic art more broadly.

Even before Ruttmann, another urban project, not strictly a field recording activity, had transpired through Luigi Russolo's manifesto *The Art of Noises*. Originally published in 1913, the text promoted the abrasive, everyday day sounds of the city as material for composition and celebrated the energy, speed and noise at which urban life had developed. His performances and lectures challenged classical musical aesthetics by combining huge noise making machines (*Intonarumori*), often set apart from traditional orchestral settings (Cox & Warner, 2004, see pp.10-14). Both he and Ruttmann showed that just as field recording could be employed for social and scientific endeavour, so too it could be used for compositional and creative means:

particularly in relation to performance and radio.

Uniting these inter-related strands of research and artistic practice is the work and presence of John Cage who, as the founder of soundscape studies, R. Murray Schafer (1994, p.111) said: 'opened the doors of the concert hall to let the traffic noise mix with his own'. Cage's ubiquitous legacy is not part of this research per se, but his impact upon others must be acknowledged. Originally delivered as a lecture in 1937, Cage's seminal text "The Future of Music: Credo" states:

When we listen to it [sound], we find it fascinating. The sound of a truck at fifty miles per hour. Static between stations. Rain. We want to capture and control these sounds, to use them not as sound effects but as musical instruments (Cage, 2004, pp.25-26).

Cage's declaration is paralleled later by Schafer's own desire to control and treat sound as a material for compositional design. I will expand upon this point throughout Phase One, specifically through the performance critiques of writers Seth Kim-Cohen and Douglas Khan. For now, the premise that environmental sound could be valid material for composition had one other canonical reference in the years leading up to the formation of soundscape studies.

From the late 1940's onwards French musicologist and theorist Pierre Schaeffer's study of the sound object can also be traced to the impact of Cage (Kim-Cohen, 2009, see p.259-262). Schaeffer's work sought to resist all notions of sound as a cultural and context driven medium. Often aligned as the polar opposite to Schafer's project (LaBelle, 2006, see p.209), Pierre Schaeffer rooted his investigation via a phenomenological enquiry: one which 'begins as a critique of both 'realism [and] psychologism' (Kane, 2007, p.15). Schaeffer's study was known as "acousmatics", and drew its influence from the ancient Greek mathematician and musical theorist

Pythagoras, who is said to have delivered his lectures from behind a veiled curtain. For Schaeffer, separating sound and source paved a new way of listening, one 'without any aim other than that of hearing them (sounds) better, in order to be able to describe them (sounds) through an analysis of the content of our perceptions' (Schaeffer, 2004, p.78).

Acousmatics therefore aimed to proliferate musical and instrumental practice, devoting itself 'entirely and exclusively to *listening*, to discover the instinctive paths that lead from the purely sonorous to the purely musical' (Schaeffer, 2004, p.81). Hence, Schaeffer sought to draw attention to the object of sound in isolation, an entity in its own right divorced from the instrument; one that could be judged and measured through timbre, pitch and other sonorous characteristics.

Technological innovation, particularly the rise of the tape machine, brought Schaeffer's proposition to the fore⁴. The traditional instrument was no longer required and playback meant sound was already primed for detached listening. Interestingly, R. Murray Schafer (1994) employed the term 'schizophonia' (p.90) to summarise the role of technology in the modern world. Schafer suggested it (technology) had divorced humans from the sonic environment on a more epistemological level (see pp. 71-87). Pierre Schaeffer enthused that technology and playback curtailed our natural curiosity to listen to sounds complete with sources (Cox & Warner, 2004, See pp.76-81). In many ways Schaeffer's tape machine was the equivalent to Pythagoras' curtain, both apparatus sought to sever sight and sound in order to mediate sound to its essential properties.

The type of "reduced" listening Schaeffer proposed is often aligned with the philosophy of Edmund Husserl, one of the founders of phenomenology. Through a process known as "bracketing" Husserl, much like Schaeffer, strained to isolate and

⁴ Schaeffer used discs and turntables until founding the "Groupe de Recherche de Musique Concrète" (GRMC) in 1951. From this point onwards he began experimenting and composing with magnetic tape.

reduce experience to one essential enquiry. For Schaeffer this process was effectively achieved in performance and post-production: the alteration and manipulation of recorded sounds, speed, pitch, repetition and tempo enabled the collapse of traditional perceiver/perceived roles.

Hence the sonorous objects Schaeffer was listening to were neither the sounds of an instrument nor indeed the magnetic tape of a machine, but 'contained entirely in our perceptive consciousness' (Schaeffer, 2004, p.79). In other words, acousmatic listening sought to describe and analyse sound with all the rigour, as we will see shortly, of soundscape studies, yet it did so through an analysis of perception instead of place.

The result was a genre of experimental music known as "Musique Concrète". Pioneered by Schaeffer, and the likes of Pierre Henry and François Bayle, musique concrète extracted the sounds of an environment in order to present them as something in and of themselves.

It is at the apex of these pre and post war historical threads we find R. Murray Schafer and soundscape studies. Field recording's early foundations should not be misrepresented as a project that concerns itself with only nature or rural environments. Urban and mechanical contexts inform what constitutes contemporary practice equally, as do the potentials for contextual and media cross-pollination evidenced in historical relations to film, radio and performance.

Phase One

Reaching the Limits of Field Recording & Soundscape Studies

Introduction

During this opening section of writing I outline the historical aims and methodologies of soundscape studies. Following on, I critically trace its present day legacies primarily within the sections: “The Contemporary Listening Block”, “Silence & Silencing” and “Nostalgia, Vibrations & Aestheticised Dead Ends”. Through the likes of Francisco López and Chris Watson I debate the contemporary soundscape methods and aesthetics that I am defining my research against. The final section “Summary: Aims & Originality” moves towards a clear articulation of my own relationship to soundscape legacies and clarifies the practice and strategies I have gone on to build. I show environmental sound has been treated primarily as an aestheticised material for composition by Schafer and Schaeffer respectively. The consequence being a contemporary practice that paradoxically employs sound and its subjects, as objects for control and manipulation, whilst silencing the relational dynamics that make up the field encounter.

Soundscape Studies: History, Aims & Methods

Soundscape studies has undoubtedly been one of the most influential and acknowledged uses of field recording, both as a research methodology and artistic pursuit. Coined by Canadian researcher and composer R. Murray Schafer, today the term is distinguishable yet related to others such as acoustic ecology or acoustic design⁵. Broadly understood as an investigation of ‘the sonic environment’ (Schafer, 1994, p.274), the study arrived from Schafer’s earlier educational works such as *Ear Cleaning* (1967). This lecture-based format and publication on sound and music eventually led to the formation of the pioneering research group: “The World

⁵ Acoustic ecology being the relational study between humans and their environment as mediated through sound. Acoustic design being concerned with the engineering of environmental sound through technical analysis and compositional design.

Soundscape Project" (WSP)⁶. Established in 1971 at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, Canada, the WSP honed Schafer's broad aim by addressing the question: 'what is the relationship between man and the sounds of his environment and what happens when those sounds change?' (Schafer, 1994, p.4).

In 1969 and 1977 Schafer published *The New Soundscape* and *The Tuning of The World* respectively. Both texts were combined into the now seminal publication: *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World* (1994)⁷. The book cemented Schafer's research that strived to promote social awareness of sound in the environment and pioneered a new form of science (Laske, 1978, see p.394). Split into four primary sections the text provides a historical and social account of sound in everyday life. Over the course of the book Schafer moves towards a notion that the sounds of an environment can in fact be acoustically designed. Comparable to landscape, the soundscape is an environment that surrounds the individual at any one time (Rodaway, 1994, see p.86). However, Schafer believed this sonic milieu could be dissected, analysed and shaped like that of a musical composition. His quest therefore aimed to push acoustic responsibility, both moral and aesthetic, into everyday consciousness. The following quote echoes John Cage's earlier statement (see p.20 of this thesis) regarding a mutual desire to control and compose environmental sound: 'is the soundscape of the world an indeterminate composition over which we have no control or are we its composers and performers, responsible for giving it form and beauty?' (Schafer, 1994, p.5).

Addressing dual ideas of acoustic responsibility and compositional design, the WSP focused upon long-term studies of particular places, namely the *Vancouver Soundscape Project* (1973) and the *Five Village Soundscapes Project* (1977) across Europe. Their methods for interrogating each place always began directly in the field of

⁶ Along with R. Murray Schafer, original members of the group included the composers: Howard Broomfield, Bruce Davis, Peter Huse and Barry Truax.

⁷ It is this publication I cite from.

study: whether a village or a city street, Schafer placed great emphasis on the first hand accountability of reports being generated. Similar to the role of a traditional ethnographer⁸, a soundscape researcher or “earwitness” as Schafer (1994) called them, began by recording, itemising and cataloguing a place based on its dominant sounds (see p.8). Once these sounds were identified they would be filed under an extensive glossary of headings and terms that Schafer had established including: key note sounds⁹, signals¹⁰ and soundmarks.



Figure 1

WSP members, image available online: <http://www.sfu.ca/~truax/WSP1.jpg>

“Soundmark” is a particularly useful example to highlight. It is derived from the term “landmark”, and defined by Schafer (1994, p.274) as ‘a community sound which is unique or possesses qualities which make it specially regarded or noticed by people in that community’. An example of such would be the sound of church bells, a soundmark that Schafer (1994, p.54) suggests: ‘attracts and unifies the community in a social sense, just as it draws man and God together’. Religious overtones are present throughout Schafer’s vision of acoustic design, as is the tendency to strive for “attractive” sounds.

⁸ Qualitative research, which primarily explores the social and cultural meaning of place and people through writing.

⁹ Key Note: sounds heard frequently enough to form a background within which others sounds are perceived.

¹⁰ Sound Signals: any sound that demands particular attention.

Through a process of splitting and grouping sounds the WSP could prioritise those of historical and “aesthetic” importance. The idea that environmental sound could be worthy material for preservation was crucial in forming an acoustic consciousness, similar to that of traditional ecology: the study of living organisms and their environment. Consequently, soundscape studies endeavoured to proliferate an acoustic awareness beyond the individual and to open up the potential for a broader sonic sensibility: informing policy and environmental planning infrastructure. A chapter titled “The Acoustic Designer” from Schafer’s (1994) text is the culmination of his assimilationist approach. It also highlights Schafer’s own musically influenced agenda and the implied dual role of the soundscape practitioner: a custodian of sonic heritage and musical composer. ‘The acoustic designer may incline society to listen again to models of beautifully modulated and balanced soundscapes such as we have in great musical compositions’ (Schafer, 1994, p. 237).

Schafer (1994) strived for what he called a ‘hi-fi soundscape’ (p.43). “Hi-fi” means a greater signal to noise ratio. To him, low-level ambience or background noise within less populated, less industrialised areas, were favoured as they provided greater clarity for discrete and specific sounds to emerge, thus enabling a form of ‘long range hearing’ (Schafer, 1994, p.43). Contrary to these sought after environments were “Lo-fi” areas, where the signal to noise ratio, unlike hi-fi soundscapes, emphasised background ambience and therefore muddled the acoustic perception of specific foreground sounds.

Schafer (1994) claimed post-industrial soundscapes, those from modern, technologically advanced cities and towns had brought about what he called a “flatline” of the soundscape (see p.78). For him, these environments terminated any notion of sound as a culturally or aesthetically desirable material. The aggressive proliferation of an acoustic essentialism, again based on selections of beauty is problematically apparent in the following quote:

Which sounds do we want to preserve, encourage, multiply? When we know this, the boring or destructive sounds will become conspicuous enough and we will know why we must eliminate them (Schafer, 1994, p.205).

Criticisms

Both the success and failure of Schafer's work arrives out of the project's multiple legacies. Such inheritances, brought on from early twentieth century antecedents, are now embroiled in the knots of contemporary practice. Soundscape studies, we must remember, intended to have an assimilative, cross-disciplinary purpose. Schafer's methodology of splitting the soundscape into component parts and terminological categories was a means to establish transparent and defined parameters and with it, greater inter-disciplinary crossover. Soundscape studies also created a legacy for identifying and charting specific sounds for conservation purposes. To consider sound as a historical artefact, similar to a book, manuscript or painting was a potent cultural paradigm shift, one that is still permeating many sound archives globally today (see British Library; Library of Congress; Smithsonian Institute). This shift also brought with it a turn from field recording as an endeavour rooted in science or hobby, to one that could accommodate broader social, philosophical and artistic concerns.

However, much of the criticism directed towards Schafer's study lies exactly at the heart of its categorical methodology. Reducing the multifarious nature of sound into singular, aesthetically preferred units is problematic in terms of enforcing a widespread application through a subjective appreciation of beauty. Even WSP colleague Barry Truax aired his own particular reservations about this system of reduction, diplomatically stating:

Disintegrating a total surround impression into its component parameters appears to be a skill that must be learned; and while it is probably one that is necessary for acoustic design, a soundscape cannot be understood merely as a catalogue of such parameters (Truax, 1994, p.133).

Geographers J. Douglas Porteous & J. F Mastin's paper *Soundscape* (1985) warned of the methodological dangers and consequences in compartmentalising parts of the whole soundscape. Their text argued that by ordering and assigning sounds, the soundscape itself is reduced to that of an object. Geographer Paul Rodaway (1994) emphasised this point when claiming Schafer's idea of the soundscape is similar to a traditional 'aesthetic object, not unlike a painting or musical composition' (p.86).

Disciplines such as geography and anthropology are where many criticisms of Schafer's study have originated. Clarke, Inghan & Purvis': *Hearing Places, Making Spaces: Sonorous Geographies, Ephemeral Rhythms, and the Blackburn Warehouse Parties* (1999), is another text that questioned Schafer's problematic method of isolation. They claimed his methodology, of singling out specific sounds, works against the supposed aims of the study as it 'neglects the social and political significance of sounds and soundscapes, and the experience of sound in space' (Clarke, Inghan & Purvis, 1999, p.286.) As a result the WSP 'challenges the privilege afforded to vision, only to grant sound precisely the same privilege' (Clarke, Inghan & Purvis, 1999, p.287).

In this regard Schafer's alliance towards a rarified and aestheticised environmental design only succeeds in jeopardising the integrity of soundscape studies' central motivations. This accusation has also been levelled towards fellow WSP member Hildegard Westerkamp, albeit for different reasons. Her contribution to the text: *Site of Sound: of Architecture and the Ear* (1999) was criticised for her 'New Age-ish

invocations of non-western traditions [...] [ones that] risk seeming naïve' (McCarthy, 2006, p.124).

Contemporary anthropologist Tim Ingold has added to these criticisms. His chapter "Against Soundscape", from the book *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description* (2011), sets out four reasons why the term "soundscape" should be abandoned. Throughout, Ingold focuses on the indivisible nature of place and experience. He proposes the landscape cannot be perceived through one sensory organ alone. In fact, it is a culmination of all the senses, not just the ear, which makes the isolation of sound in place, an impossibility (Ingold, 2011, see pp.137-139). I will return to Ingold more during Phase Two's section "Re-approaching the Field".

Soundscape studies strived to position sound as a cultural artefact worthy of preservation. However, Schafer (1994) admits his own classification system being integrally linked to Pierre Schaeffer's decontextualising experiments into the sound object (see pp.133-134). His creative desire for the medium itself was therefore aesthetically more in line with an acousmatic approach, devoid of any heard socio-political context and built upon his own hierarchical ideas of beauty and form, tied into a musical penchant for nostalgic return. The influence of composition, also through the likes of Cage, bring about a tension at the artistic end of contemporary practice: as we move out of the field. Schafer (1994) himself foregrounds this by stating soundscape studies underlying effort was to unify 'those disciplines concerned with the science of sound and those concerned with the art of sound' (p.205). This interlocking drive exemplifies how related the two fields of soundscape studies and Pierre Schaeffer's study of the sound object actually are. One could even argue that Schafer and Schaeffer's mutual pursuit of sound as an objectified medium is compounded even at the methodological end: soundscape studies taxonomic method of splitting the soundscape into component parts, acousmatically "brackets"

the porosity of sound and place. The following sections aim to show the contemporary consequences of this historical bleed.

The Contemporary Listening Block

I am proposing Schafer's study of the soundscape has left a divided field recording legacy, perpetually caught between conservation and composition, both problematically fuelled by ideas of beautification and nostalgic design. Through an analysis of contemporary field recording practice I can unveil the ontological and aesthetic impacts of Schafer and soundscape studies.

Francisco López is critical to understanding the consequences of a (soundscape) study that sought to assimilate through a strategy of division. A trained entomologist, López has built a body of publications and performances from the environmental sounds of the Amazon rainforest, to the winds of the Patagonia desert and the buildings of New York. Once recorded López sets out to reduce each sound to pure sonic matter, distancing any contextual reference to place in his single-minded pursuit of "sound-in-itself". His publications often have no title and contain barely any contextual data¹¹. He epitomises the conflicting ideological and aesthetic ends of soundscape studies and its entangled relationship to Schaeffer's study of the sound object.

It would be easy to categorise López as the epitome of a practicing acousmatic sound artist, indeed many have (see Cox & Warner, 2004; Kelly, 2011; Kim-Cohen, 2009). His performances are carried out with the audience blindfolded and arranged in a circular seating plan. López himself controls proceedings from within the center of the set up. In doing so he embodies the ideological position that Schafer strived

¹¹ See: *Wind Patagonia* (2007) and *Lopez Island* (2007) for publications that do include referential data, all be it, in the case of *Wind Patagonia*, his sleeve notes ironically tells us to listen without information and reference, whilst at the same time overloading the reader with vast amounts of information on the project and his intentions.

toward: the creator and composer of an environmental orchestra. It is this centralised perspective that Ohlsen (1976 cited in Rodaway, 1994, p.87) referenced directly when he called Schafer's project an 'anthropocentric sonic environment'. W. Garner extended criticisms of Schafer's role and the WSP's pursuit of aestheticised design, asserting that if a landscape is comparable, as Schafer suggests, to the soundscape, it is impossible to have any human control over its grand design. Not even Schafer 'orchestrates tropical thunderstorms, or the noise of the monsoon rains, or the fury of Atlantic gales, or the grinding of arctic ice-flows' (Garner, 1981, p.70).

López clearly thinks otherwise. His sonic assaults manipulate and shape environmental sound into material that attempts to take the audience to aural extremes. His technical and procedural apparatus of control and isolation are practical manifestations of phenomenological bracketing: separating and governing the sonic landscape.

López himself champions an isolated audience-listening encounter over one that assimilates context and the surrounding social-political situation. His position is unflinchingly clear on the matter: 'I think these things (politics) shouldn't contaminate, shouldn't pollute the music. I'm very purist' (López to Cox, 2000).

Critic Seth Kim-Cohen's 2009 book, *In the Blink of an Ear: Toward a Non-Cochlear Sonic Art* puts López's performance set up through the critical mill. In a scathing attack Kim-Cohen (2009) suggests López's procedural control of the audience only jeopardises the freedom that his listening strives towards (see p.124). Critiquing a particular performance in Judson Church, New York, 2008, Kim-Cohen asserts blindfolding an audience amidst a current war on terror and only two miles from where the World Trade Centre attacks took place in 2001 is 'blissfully naïve' (p.124). Going further, he traces López's acousmatic-soundscape pursuit to Cage's legacy of

letting all sounds be material for composition (see pp.149-179), a relationship López himself has resisted¹².



Figure 2

Francisco López, performance setting

Image available online: http://www.michaelgallagher.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/FranciscoLopez_3.jpg

In defence of López, I believe Kim-Cohen's charge of naivety is misplaced given that his intentions are always acknowledged and transparent. In addition, López's sonic material intentionally resists the soundscape trend for nostalgic return but may do so at the cost of the political present. This is what concerns Kim-Cohen, that an acousmatic scenario supports a type of apolitical practice. Douglas Khan echoed similar thoughts about Cage over ten years prior in his paper titled: *John Cage: Silence and Silencing* (1997). Khan critiqued Cage's focus on "sound-in-itself" and his consequent apolitical inability to connect with the world at large. He suggests Cage's now canonised silence contains with it a silencing or muting of other voices, genders and social-political perspectives (Khan, 1997, see p.557)¹³.

¹² Available from: <<http://www.franciscolopez.net/cage.html>> [accessed 27.09.12]

¹³ 4'33" (1952) is the canonical work by Cage that instructs a performer to not play an instrument during the entire duration of the score. The "silent" piece undermined virtuoso musical scenarios whilst shifting the attention onto the listening audience as those who ultimately generate the production of work.

My own reservations around López concern his performance set up, not necessarily the content of the material he plays¹⁴. I want to build a politically aware practice within the aesthetics of a work, which includes its heard context, and presentational appearance. In performance López enforces sound through the enactment of his own authorial position of power: standing central and not wearing a blindfold. The audience are “manipulated things” to project upon; their own participatory listening is engendered through a form of hegemonic control.

The broader implication of closing down vision is not something I am interested in, neither as a listener in the field, nor as a listener within a venue. I do not want to divide the senses or impart an isolated privileging of listening. The blindfold is a form of silencing. If the ear wants more attention it should do so not at the expense of other organs, senses and media. Rodaway’s (1994, p.84) comment that ‘we can hear with more than our ears’ epitomises my point. To be clear, my research aims to build a politically aware practice within the visual presentation of a given work as much as it does through its sounding aspects. I want to tune a political awareness within field recording onto the maker as much as its subjects and reverse legacies of “sound-in-itself” composition: I intend to bend the ear back towards its own methods of production. If I was to critically re-stage López’s performance scenario, the audience would remove their blindfolds, turn around and begin to watch and listen to the amplified movements of López as he sits, listening and looking back at the audience.

Silence & Silencing

López reinforces his position of power in performance by obscuring his own presence. The audience face away and are blindfolded. He is neither seen nor heard in real time or in the material being played back into the space. Self-dissolution and author silence is a key trend within contemporary practice. The dominant aesthetic

¹⁴ I remind the reader that I am not denying sound’s material ability (acousmatics) but searching for new ways to re-frame its affective qualities towards more relational and self-critical aesthetic territories.

legacy is an unheard one as recordists perpetually attempt to silence his or hers own presence for the most “natural” or technically “cleanest” document of an environment or species. I, like many other recordists have had to dismiss my own audible impact and as a result, neglect the representation of subjective and physical presence within the presentation of work. This should be acknowledged as a practical legacy as much as anything else. I am associated with lo-fi acoustic detritus such as microphone handling, wind and interference noise: all are aspects that must be silenced as part of the general signal-to-noise ratio.

The chase to “capture” sound has led to a contemporary wall of self-silence. Through the proliferation of soundscape studies’ entangled methodological and design orientated aims, issues of self-recognition remain always a pre-occupation within contemporary environmental sound art. Whether for science or art, overt or implied, self-dissolution hovers over every moment the record button is pressed. The binding legacy is one of dis-embodiment, whereby recordists (including myself) have been effectively torn out of their own skin. The most negative consequence being that I can neither talk nor move. Sound is captured; I turn into translucent matter; everything is nullified; reciprocity is negated; the environment, along with its inhabitants and sounds are continually patronised and removed of agency through my own complicit silence.

The effect of recordist-erasure can be provocatively read as a form of colonial ethnographic abuse, whereby the rights and ethics of subjects are undermined through the hierarchical power figure of the non-identifiable, silent observer. Crucially I would ask: within an aesthetic legacy of silence what exactly are we not hearing? What is being censored and why? What power dynamics are being enacted, not only in silence but also through the very act of silencing?

To survey the artwork of prominent field recording publishers (And/Oar, Gruenrekorder, Impulsive Habitat, Mandorla, Touch), the visual field offers further evidence of self-erasure. Publications comprise of archetypal representations of landscape or abstract space: micro and macro, buildings, animals, forests and machines. However real or abstract it may appear, emphasis is firmly on place or space as the locus of experience: the recordist is nowhere to be seen or heard.



Figure 3 (left)

Chris Watson, *In St Cuthbert's Time*, Touch (2013), image available online:
<http://www.touchmusic.org.uk/images/585x/TO89.jpg>

Figure 4 (right)

Rodolphe Alexis, *Sempervirent*, Gruenrekorder (2013), image available online:
http://www.gruenrekorder.de/?page_id=7765

I should state here that I am not suggesting recordists have no subjective intentionality within a contemporary artistic framework. As the reader will observe through Steven Feld's explanations (see pp.37-39 of this thesis), setting and pointing a microphone are some of the most compelling examples of decision making. Furthermore, presence in the realm of field recording does not necessarily mean simply being heard: absence can also be acknowledged as the performative enactment of "being there". Cage serves as a useful reminder here in that silence can

confirm subjective corporeal presence. To be clear, the specific concern I have around self-erasure is: what has a history of author silence meant to the balance of power within the field and to the ways in which the practice is represented and discussed?

There are alternative contemporary practice-based examples that do overtly collapse the problem of self-suppression (see Carlyle, 2009; Cusack, 2012; DeLauraneti, 2008; Westerkamp, 1996). Schafer's own *Winter Diary* (1997) is another example of soundscape self-reflexivity as is Luc Ferrari's *Presque Rien N.2* (1977) from within soundscape studies own historical time frame.

Anthropologist Steven Feld is another who operates within a self-reflexive guise. Since the early 1970's Feld has developed an anthropology of sound through his early studies in film and ethnography at Indiana University. He began recording in 1975 during fieldwork in the Bosavi rainforest of Papua New Guinea. Over the following twenty-five years Feld continued to return and record the area's environmental sounds and its inhabitants, publishing text and sound-based works: *Sound and Sentiment* (1982) and *Voices of the Rainforest* (1991). His work, similar to Schafer's, gives importance to the treatment of sound as a relevant social and cultural artefact. However, Feld's motivation differs by swapping Schafer's aesthetic design for the experiential collaboration of a place and its inhabitants. As Feld (2001) calls it, his "acoustemological" practice ensures he and an environment are continually embroiled in the production of knowledge, not for the purposes of a beautified makeover.

Feld developed a dialogical method that included playing back recordings to local people whom he would then edit the sounds in collaboration with. He states field recording is an 'experimental practice, [...] a way of constructing an anthropology of sound, of joining methods of dialogical editing and theories of sound as knowledge production' (Feld, 2013, p.208). Feld's playback method shows anthropology's larger

awareness of its own exclusive history and penchant for authorial abuse. Such abuse being manifest through the historical erasure of ethnographic subjects and voices.



Figure 5

Steven Feld, image available online: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/mickeyhart/6197129356/>

Hildegard Westerkamp further unpacks the complexities of subjective representation within field recording practice. Known primarily for her soundwalking (see pp.44-45 of this thesis) her seminal work: *Kit's Beach Soundwalk*, recorded in 1989 and published in 1996, is a composition based on a series of field recordings made along the area in Vancouver, Canada. During the composition Westerkamp talks through the specifics of the day, including general atmospheric conditions such as wind and temperature. All of which seemingly root the listener to the specifics of time and place. However, as the piece develops Westerkamp discusses particular technological and studio based choices that can alter and transform such sounds. Filtering and boosting certain frequencies in seemingly real time, she underpins the subjective hand at play and the interchangeable contexts of "site" and "studio". Westerkamp appears fully at ease in blending both acousmatic and soundscape approaches in her drive toward a type of listening that accepts the confluence of inner and outer worlds. Her technique productively raises questions regarding

authenticity and positively reinforces the employment of the subjective self as a valid tool of inquiry amongst a said time, event and place.

Nostalgia, Vibrations & Aestheticised Dead Ends

Like Feld, Westerkamp's practice brings a welcome counterpoint to an aesthetics of authorship silence. Although not "heard" as much as Westerkamp, in terms of voice and body, Feld recognises that he, and his equipment, are part of that encounter: 'To me, the film camera or sound recorder, these kinds of apparatus, are equipment for contact with the world' (Feld, 2013, p.209). Welcome as they are, these two examples along with aforementioned others, remain on the whole a rarity amongst a background of silent authorship. Staying quiet for the sake of objective truth, be it for science, conservation or, for the "purity" of composition, is the dominant aesthetic legacy. It has led to a consequent lack of self-reflexive, critically engaged practices that are able to inter-textually critique and advance the field. The crucial result of which, I would suggest, resides in the barren formal and presentational options and avenues open to field recordists beyond playback and CD publications. Typically these avenues are saturated by an aesthetics of compositional beautification, something that must be read as a consequence of Schafer's nostalgic approach. They are also tied into a thematic cycle of re-inventing canonical histories; driven by the meta-narrative hierarchies and values that are bound into the act of collecting itself.

Chris Watson, one of the most renowned field recordists in the world, is an example of the nostalgic contemporary composer. His highly skilled use of technology creates multi-layered, filmic spaces for the ear when presented on a CD or "performed" live. Recent works include *El Tren Fantasma* (2011) and *In St Cuthbert's Time* (2013). Both draw upon the past in order to situate the present. *El Tren Fantasma* (2011) even gives an honorary mention to acousmatic pioneer Pierre Schaeffer within the sleeve notes. In doing so, Watson nods towards his acceptance of sound as a material object whilst

situating it within a historical context. He attempts to ground the abstracted sounds of a cross-country train journey through the publications archival images and its story that the journey - no longer in existence - functions more as a ghostly presence than any tangible reality. Although - like all of Watson's publications - I find it pleasing on the ear, his part soundscape studies, part musique concrète approach is a rather benign, endemic symptom of the type of dead ends we see field recording hitting at present. The piece composes sound and place rather than unpicking its critical agency. Furthermore, unlike Westerkamp, Watson's own presence is overwhelmingly absent: the focus is always on presenting sounds devoid of the hand that grips and points the microphone.

A recent online interview reaffirms Watson's musically influenced practice. Talking through a recording of an elephant he states the sound of its breathing is 'harmonically very rich, it's very musical' (Watson, 2014). The quote severs the animal/source from sound: reducing the latter to an object of anthropomorphised compositional merit. I do not doubt Watson's intentions are empathetic to nature. I do however question the way in which non-humans are being mediated and represented, both in practice and discourse and how similarly, sound is being objectified and removed of any political agency¹⁵. Furthermore, the particular project Watson is interviewed about consists of re-locating field recordings from animals in Africa back into a digital application funded and based in Brighton, UK. The article makes no mention of these neo-colonial undertones. Caleb Kelly's blog raises similar concerns when discussing Stephen Vitiello's work *The Sound of Red Earth* (2010). Kelly (2013) believes the politics of aesthetic representation are neglected within sound art, unlike if a work was to enter the "visual" gallery, complete with its furnished history of critique¹⁶.

¹⁵ This critique falls upon the roles of curatorial frameworks as much as it does the artists themselves.

¹⁶ I acknowledge the history and critical discourse already established within such settings, although based primarily on visual perception, may still contribute to a critical understanding of re-presenting environmental sound. Land Art is the parallel I draw upon throughout Phase One's practice to locate this discussion.

Watson has picked up the compositional baton from both Schafer and Schaeffer, and proliferates it throughout contemporary practice (see Besley 2012; Garin & Gobart 2011; Kirkegaard 2006; Watson 1998). Reducing field recording to these types of publications and outputs, in my opinion, supports the fatigued hierarchical legacy of aestheticised beauty that soundscape studies initiated. The works show contemporary practitioners as eco-tourist composers and support a damning image of the field recording artist as a non-reflexive oxymoron.

A paper by field recordist David Michael called “Toward a Dark Nature Recording” (2011) hints at many of the problems raised here, particularly highlighting the nostalgic and essentialised bias towards sound and nature within such publications and settings. Michael’s response appears to be contained in dialectical opposition by simply recording sounds that are not beautiful per se. His *Slaughterhouse* (2012) CD presents sounds from, as you would expect, a slaughterhouse. I would argue this is a somewhat counterproductive move that slides back into the tired oppositional debates of noise and silence, urban and rural. Just because a recording is based in a seemingly unpleasant environment it does not mean issues of exoticism and subject alterity are removed. Michael backs up his suggestion to record the seemingly “uglier” side of life through an example of Chris Watson’s recording of a zebra carcass being eaten by vultures published on *Outside The Circle of Fire* (1998). For the recording Watson attached microphones to the carcass itself in order to “capture” the most microscopic perspective possible.

With the increased development in technology and its affordable access, today field recordists are getting “closer” to sound than ever before. A growing number of artists are exploring discreet everyday sounds along with those which exist outside the human range of hearing (20-20,000 Hz). Jacob Kirkegaard is contemporary practitioner who demonstrates the increasing popularity for “capturing” hitherto unheard sonic phenomena. Amongst others including Toshiya Tsunoda, Christina

Kubisch, Bill Fontana and Jana Winderen, Kirkegaard blends science and art, amplifying the underlying acoustic events that are constantly affecting our relationship to the world.

His methods differ largely from Watson's zebra example by employing specialist microphones and techniques¹⁷. This equipment allows artists to investigate anything from the vibratory worlds of architecture, sea life, atmospherics, volcanoes and objects. Aesthetically, the works are typified by the sound of crackles, pops and drones; they articulate an overwhelming sense of texture and abstraction, which sits formally within the acousmatic end of the spectrum, devoid of heard context. Similar to conventional wildlife and nature recording legacies they also have a preponderance to eliminate any audible sign of human presence, particularly the author.

Ontologically speaking, I believe such artists offer a potentially new way of thinking through field recording; they raise further awareness towards the "more-than-human" worlds that exist¹⁸. Yet I am not convinced an acousmatic, abstract exploration of sound is the only way of representing such integral concerns. The question I pose to such works is: what does the composition of textural and transduced perspectives do to a practice already in suppression of the human at work? I discuss the implications of such in full during Phase Two's chapter "Re-approaching the Field", through a critical exploration of three key texts alongside broader contexts from new materialism.

Overall, the embroiled presentational legacy of acousmatic music has, by and large, benefited the artistic representation of field recordings. It has posited them as

¹⁷ Contact, accelerometer and electromagnet microphones are employed rather than conventional open air or acoustic microphones. Such apparatus record the vibration of sound as transduced through materials such as the earth or buildings.

¹⁸ "More-than-human" refers to work of human and experimental geographers such as John Dewsbury, Hayden Lorimer and Nigel Thrift. Such research is based on understanding how human and non-human relations are performed and produced rather than textually or semiotically understood.

something more than mimetic representations whilst blurring auditory borders of time, space and perception. Yet, I do believe it has also led the practice into a formal and presentational cul-de-sac. Regardless of whether a recording is derived from the human range of hearing or sub acoustic agents which shape natural phenomena and our everyday lives, what perturbs me is the lack of creative and critical aesthetic diversity alongside the limited ways in which an audience may encounter and participate in that supposed exchange. Today, playback and multi-channel performance settings are rife within the presentation of field recording based works. Electro-acoustic composition along with various computational techniques such as “granular synthesis”¹⁹ have only accelerated the reductive “hunt” for sound as a material for composition rather than a subject of inquiry. It is something that Barry Truax (2012), pioneer of the granular method, has himself recognised (see p.193).

Contemporaries who successfully break out of didactic compositional avenues include participatory and performative interventions from artists such as: Rui Chaves, Sally Anne Macintyre and Davide Tidone. In addition, networked technological practices, evidenced in the current trend to utilise online mapping and geolocation portals, advance the potential scope for creative dissemination (see London Sound Survey; Radio Aporee).

All of these practitioners build on and are indebted to a method known as “soundwalking”²⁰. The activity is by far the most widespread practice-based legacy of soundscape studies. Its cross-disciplinary reach extends to social science and human geography movements, which from the 1970’s onwards, moved to include auditory perception into the study of social space (Feld, 2005, see p.183). Its impact has been such that it is now part and parcel of creative sound practice and an

¹⁹ Granular Synthesis is a post-production computational sound manipulation technique developed and championed by WSP member Barry Truax. Available from: <<http://www.sfu.ca/~truax/gran.html>> [accessed 27.09.12].

²⁰ Available from: <<http://www.sfu.ca/~westerka/writings%20page/articles%20pages/soundwalking.html>> [accessed 27.09.12].

established genre in its own right (see Carlyle, 2007; McCartney, 1997-98; Westerkamp, 2010). Realised in groups or as a solitary endeavour, its 'primary objective is to listen and reflect on the sound environment found in a specific location' (McCartney & Paquette, 2012, p.4). Artist Max Neuhaus's *LISTEN* (1966-1976) is soundwalking's earliest art historical example²¹. Propelled by acoustic ecology and the work of the WSP, soundwalking situated itself outside the rarefied space(s) of musical performance and sought to engage sound and the politics of place.

Hildegard Westerkamp began soundwalking in the 1970's as part of the Vancouver Cooperative Radio. She states one of the central motivations in soundwalking is to 'rediscover and reactivate the senses' (Westerkamp, 2007, p.49). Westerkamp has developed a complex understanding of soundwalking and a pragmatic structure that leans towards a notion of listening as pedagogy. Her walks involve the organisation of routes, selection of leaders and the prescribing of actions, tests or sets of rules such as: no speaking permitted whilst walking.

Thanks to the availability of bi-aural (in ear) microphones, soundwalking has become a popular mode of exploration for many sound artists over the last two decades. One of the positive consequences is in the high proportion of female practitioners whom have developed and refined the practice in an otherwise male dominated history of art walking. The likes of Janet Cardiff, Viv Corringham, Andra McCartney, Christina Kubisch and Westerkamp have introduced a much-needed acceptance of the subjective self within soundscape work. More broadly the methodology has pushed the presentation of field recording into participatory events and pedagogical scenarios. As Phase One's practice reflection will illustrate, I was not interested in regurgitating soundwalking as a methodology per se. However, I

²¹ In 1966 Neuhaus invited a small group of friends to walk and listen through the streets - of a pre-determined route - in New York. He rubber-stamped the word "LISTEN" on each participant's hand.

certainly do acknowledge its vital incorporation of the embodied self along with its cross-disciplinary and presentational impact upon contemporary practice.

Summary: Aims & Originality

As I have demonstrated, soundscape studies, so often positioned in binary opposition to Pierre Schaeffer's acousmatic project (LaBelle, 2006, see p.209), did in fact embrace a similarly isolating and ideologically biased methodology: soundscape studies through its ecological persuasion, acousmatics through a more straightforward pursuit of formalism. I believe both ends unwittingly exchanged their potential scope of inquiry for a shared fixation on control and design. Both separated and objectified sound: one taxidermied it for preservation, the other blindfolded it into submission. What we are left with is a contemporary dead end: a fatigued and immobile medium, practice and discourse.

I have defined my own research against, rather than within, today's key aesthetic trends. In order to move beyond the current situation of author silence and the objectification of sound as a medium, I have identified three critical strategies and drivers for my research.

1. Reject a possession-based culture that objectifies its primary subjects (non-humans and sound) through ethical and aesthetic critique.
2. Re-hear the aesthetic silence of the recordist (me) by revealing production methods, personal embodied circumstances and technological embroilment. Furthermore, I will investigate the performative potential of silence through inter-textual, non-sounding works.
3. Re-imagine what constitutes the field and present new forms and ways of representing field recording beyond conventional playback and compositional settings.

Point one demands a new contemporary field perspective be implemented. Sound will be treated as a sensibility or subject, not an object of nostalgic or aestheticised persuasion. Updating the progressive work of Feld and Westerkamp, I will re-imagine the field encounter by drawing upon contemporary strands of anthropology (see Bennet, 2010; Hodder, 2012; Ingold, 2000). These voices arrive out of the self-critical ethnological crisis of the 1970's and 80's; each have since developed a rigorous acknowledgement of embodied, participatory and co-existing human, animal, social, material and political worlds. New materialist literature will be developed alongside sound art texts as a way of re-addressing sound's material qualities. In doing so, I aim to provide a relatable, yet alternative way of updating sound's artistic relationship to acousmatics. New materialism will therefore help to accept sound's vibrant materiality not in and of itself, but amongst a conglomeration of socio-political forces and flows.

Points two and three are the most original ways in which I will enliven field recording and focus upon practical outcomes and methodologies of the research. The self-silence that anchors field recording needs to be broken. Hearing production methods, technology and personal (often body-based) factors will attempt to reveal and bring to the fore incidents that either surround, or are commonly excluded, within the presentation of a typical field recording document. Furthermore, I will propel my practice into conversation with related, yet formally different art historical contexts such as Land Art (addressed in Phase One's practice reflection) and documentary practices (addressed in Phase Two's practice reflection). Encouraging field recording into broader aesthetic discussions will provide greater formal diversity and contexts for the presentation of works. Assimilating discourse from Land Art, I specifically aim reassess what constitutes "the field" and in doing so, build upon the historically innovative ways in which site-based practitioners have

re-imagined modes of documentation and production²². Similar to such artists and contexts my own practice will be based, articulated and defined by gesture, poetics and performed interventions of self and place.

This is where my research aims to reside: outside the conventional presentation of multi-channel, audio-based formats such as CD's and within a formally expansive, inter-operable art context; one that as a result, will be able to critically reflect back on itself and its own ethics, politics and relational dynamics. Now is the time to move beyond the limited soundscape-acousmatic legacies for presenting field recording. Whether focused upon ideas of preservation or design, their combined influence means sound will always be treated as material for composition at the expense of its self-silent authors and patronised non-human subjects. It is time to find a mixed and messy middle ground; time to collapse historically reductive binaries; time to critique, reflect and explore what field recording does and can do outside the realm of a speaker cone. As I will show next through Phase One's practice reflection, it was not always a position I was clear about.

²² This context will be outlined and explored in the next section "Failing to Hear".

Phase One Practice Reflection

Failing to Hear

Introduction

How can listening be bound to a specific place or body when sound is always on the move?

The following writing endeavours to reflect on key practice-based processes and outputs during Phase One of the research. As hinted at during the section “Structure & Contents”, this Phase is typified by an often-dissonant relationship between critical theory, process and practical outputs. As the previous section of writing gathered itself towards a clear articulation of motivations and aims, during the same time, I was putting much of the critical thinking into practical experimentation. These tests were not always “successful” and often contradict some of the theoretical explorations. I hope that by showing such discord, I can begin to thread a developmental arc towards Phases Two and Three. Moreover, the reader will notice during this Phase how personal, corporeal and circumstantial realities often motivated and complicated overall strategies for conceptual and aesthetic decision-making. I call these strategies “Bio-critical Incidents” and mention them throughout this section but discuss them in full during the practice reflection of Phase Three (see pp.175-177 of this thesis)²³.

“A Line Made by Listening” demonstrates the initial struggle to impose a method onto the site itself and assimilates Land Art histories and practitioners as an attempt to understand the relationship between site, documentation and the re-presentation of sound and listening.

Following on, “Peripheral Conversations” develops many of the conceptual struggles of the previous section through a new strategy of recording. “Severing all Ties” relays an anecdotal story of a practical Bio-critical Incident that ultimately

²³ Please refer to the opening section “Original Contributions & Neologisms” for a quick reference to Bio-critical Incidents (see pp.13-14 of this thesis).

proved crucial in finding a more appropriate concept and method for engaging with not only the site of study, but perhaps more importantly, myself.

The Phase draws to a conclusion through “30 Minutes of Listening”, a section related to a solo exhibition that began to forge a new route for making and presenting field recording based works. I also remind the reader to consider each section of practice reflection in parallel to the accompanying DVD contents. First however I will give a brief personal and contextual introduction the site of study: South Gare.

South Gare

All of this practice-based PhD has been conducted in response to one geographic area: a two point five mile stretch of man-made land named South Gare. Situated in Redcar, along the North East coast of Teeside, England, it was built between 1861-1884 from five million tones of blast furnace slag and eighteen thousand tonnes of cement²⁴. The “Gare” acts as an essential breakwater between the North Sea and the Tees Mouth Harbour - a vital passage, both historically and today for steel and other industries in the region. During 1861 a large shipping disaster occurred when up to sixty boats capsised or ran a-ground as they attempted to pass into the harbour entirely at the mercy of the North Sea. The event forced the production of what is now South Gare and hoped to safe guard the industrial and economic routes in and out of the area.

Today South Gare is labelled “A Designated Site of Special Scientific Interest”. Along with a rich fishing heritage, it is home to Sahaviriya Steel Industries (SSI) and a coastline thriving with natural habitat. The prosperous yet turbulent one hundred and fifty year old steel industry hangs by a thread whilst wildlife continues to

²⁴ Slag is a byproduct of steelmaking. It is a rock made from limestone or dolomite that has absorbed phosphate from iron ore being smelted.

flourish²⁵. The high lime content of the slag from which South Gare is built, has introduced a complex relationship between nature and industry, providing a base rich soil for much flora, fauna and wildflowers to bloom²⁶. The knock on effect has been a chain of predator-prey relationships evolving to the extent where South Gare is now the highest-ranking RSBP site in the region, with over 260 bird species listed.

From the onset my intentions were to develop a body of work in response to South Gare and in particular its complex industrial and ecological heritage. I planned to interview steelworkers and the general public as part of the initial research. However, as my practice and writing progressed it became apparent that I was seeking a critical and original understanding of field recording as a practice. It was not a project of social illustration or quasi-oral history. Put simply, the site became a place to test and reflect upon the historical legacies I was questioning: its function transformed from one of illustration, to a place of collaborative and self-reflexive activity.

As a result my relationship to South Gare expanded and contracted throughout the course of study as the historical tension of “site-specific” art met my own personal methodologies of listening and representing sound. The elasticated nature of place and listening is discussed throughout this Phase with South Gare’s final function clarified throughout Phase Three.

Beneath is a journal entry based on a chance visit to South Gare with family on Boxing Day, 2009. It details my initial engagement with the site - an area close to where I am originally from - and some of the pre-cursory themes that pricked my attention prior to commencing this study, two years later:

²⁵ Corus Steel was mothballed in 2010 at a loss of almost 2,000 jobs. Production of steel re-started under new owners Sahaviriya Steel Industries in April 2012.

²⁶ Lime makes soil less acidic which allows the release of plant nutrients that would otherwise be bound in the soil.

As we passed Corus steelworks (just six weeks before it was mothballed in 2010) huge plumes of smoke billowed into the sky along with exposed flames intermittently firing upwards. I remember noticing a golf course (Cleveland Links) opposite the vast network of industrialised activity. Sat within the car these two, somewhat muted activities appeared peculiar, almost comical side by side.

Soon after, we parked, left the car and headed towards the lighthouse. I remember hearing a gentle whirring sound that seemed to be emitting from a wind-monitoring device, a small fan-like instrument that was howling a soft tone. A vast network of offshore wind farms is mooted for the area; the readings from such devices are dictating the future course of action for harvesting an energy that dominates so many of the UK's coastlines.

I recall being beneath the lighthouse on the tip of the Gare, feeling the cold bite of the North Sea and struggling to hear anything beyond the white noise of wind and waves. Moving down towards the beach itself created a brief respite from the auditory onslaught. A distant dog's bark travelled in crystalline clarity across the snow-covered sand. I remember being drawn individually towards the sand dunes that intersect the easterly facing sea and the opposite, westerly side of South Gare, known as "Paddy's Hole". Here I was almost back in the cocooned comfort of the car, dipping in and out, transitioning between exposure and isolation, manipulating the auditory pace. I felt more autonomous with my listening. I remember staying in the low trough of a sand dune, feeling a pull towards a sense of quiet focus and introspection. I was hidden away, eavesdropping on an environment from the relative secrecy of sand dunes and marram grass.

Advancing through the dunes, weaving from peak to trough, I came across the Fishermen's Huts. Approaching them from the upper ridge of a dune I was struck immediately by the green triangular rooftops that seemed to emerge as one whole grid

like structure rather than any individual entity. Who was inside? What was their relationship to the steelworks, to the sea? I remember standing and engaging in a fantasy world of sound, placing my ear inside one of the huts to listen. I imagined the crackle of a lit fire, the shuffle of feet and the sound of a window frame rattling discreetly. The huts were mysterious: a space for my auditory imagination to roam. This was my abiding memory. The deep emerald green rooftops of the Fishermen Huts glinting in the bright blue sky. Enveloping them, the steelworks, simultaneously repulsive and awe-inspiring.

As we reassembled and walked back to the car I felt I had just visited a place of contradictions: an impossibly shared space. What I had not heard in the Fishermen Huts had ignited a silent dialogue within me; their quietude offered an invitation to return (Wright, Journal, 2010).



Figure 6

South Gare, fishermen's huts (2009), copyright the author

A Line Made by Listening

A line can be drawn around a piece of territory, and all the things inside the line described and remembered. What happens when the territory is so big it covers the world?' (Shepherd, 1997, p.27).

Basing my research in one particular area initially appeared to be a manageable way of retaining practical focus. I was also keen to hone this geographical specificity further, by establishing fixed listening points within South Gare, where consistent experimentation would be carried out. The rationale for adopting areas of listening was in order to generate a comparative body of work. I hoped designated points would create a sustained engagement with specific, geographical territories and as a result, similar to the work of the WSP, I would be better positioned to interrogate and understand the nuanced acoustical change over the duration of study. Alongside this conception I was also keen for the work to incorporate the changing seasons and physical conditions that would inevitably occur within the duration of the project. Perhaps more intuitively however, and based on my own physical circumstances, I had also built a resistance to walking from 2010. As mentioned during the opening "Background" section, a back injury had practically excluded me from participating in any sustained ambulatory technique or methodology. The reality of my situation meant I could no longer move or record in any type of physical pursuit of sound. As a result my motivation for listening and recording became based on ideas relating to stillness and habitation. At the time I was not fully aware of why or how I would practically acknowledge this shift, it was manifest more as an underlying tension that I brought into the research and with it, the realisation that walking was not always an option; be it physical, mental, political or artistic (Wright, 2014). Thus, I wanted to enforce a stationary methodology in part due to my own physical limitations, but also as a way of critically rethinking the entitled right to movement that a practice such as soundwalking is built upon.

In late 2011 I began the task of identifying areas in South Gare where I could be still and listen. These were based on acoustic proximity to the dominant geopolitical aspects on site: namely the steelworks and fishing areas. My initial intention was to be in conversation with these specific circumstances. Yet many of my early visits were typified by frustration and a growing realisation that I may have been reducing the possible scope of study. Time after time the process of cementing listening points became more and more fractious. I tried to list specific sounds within designated areas until I realised that most of what I was listening to occurred in every area I was testing. Sound's porous ability to spill between and beyond physical borders constantly undermined my attempts to structure it. Specific and located as I wanted to be, in listening, I could not help but be pulled somewhere else. The effect was dizzying; I was always listening to things over "there" (source); yet experiencing them in "here" (body). The rigid physicality of the search was constantly being torn apart when I began to listen, record and document such events. How could I include one (geographic or physical) area and dismiss another when all seemed so aurally entwined? Although I may have been physically anchored within a designated area, sound would not simply reside there with me. It would enter and exit through other proximal territories. Contrary to my original resistance to walking, I began to think listening itself was a form of walking: that even when stationary I was engaged in auditory ambulation through the transience of a sounding environment. I will return in depth to this complex and often contradictory analysis of place and perception during Phase Two's discussion of Tim Ingold's "Dwelling Perspective".

As the parallel concept of walking gradually leaked back into my research, I gravitated towards Land Art and Richard Long's practice in particular as a way of temporarily bridging the relationship. Part of the now ubiquitous term "site-specific art", Land Art or "Earthworks" as it is also known, reacted against traditional (western) notions of sculpture and 1950's minimalism, exploding both space and

form by 'giving itself up to its environmental context, being formally determined or directed by it' (Kwon, 2002, p.11). Amongst others, key artists of the time included Agnes Denes, Christo and Jean-Claude, Nancy Holt, Michael Heizer and Robert Smithson. Awakened by political and feminist uprisings of the mid to late 1960's, Land Art fundamentally re-situated the aesthetic side of artistic generation and its possible space of reception. It placed emphasis on the environment, which became both the material and situation for practice and mediation. Formally it challenged post-war notions of art as a sellable, market-based object and in doing so positioned itself towards themes of movement, process and heterogeneous use of materials (Kastner, 1998, see pp.11-17).

Pioneering artist and critic Robert Barry (1969 cited in Kwon, 2002) pointed out that in its most essentialist position Land Art is 'made to suit the place in which it was installed. They [artworks] cannot be moved without being destroyed' (p.12). As a consequence the de-materialised nature and physical reality of time and space meant exhibiting and presenting works were articulated primarily through documentary photography, text or materials specific to the provenance of the place such as soil or rocks. Acting as a conceptual and imaginary bridge to the original time and place, these dis-located modes of production began to show the paradoxical nature of Land Art or, as Kwon (2002) calls it, the 'un-hinging of site specificity' (p.33). In this respect Land Art works did, and do in fact return to the spaces they sought to critique as the realities of public engagement and the pressures from an art market press onto the unsustainable premise of genuinely site-specific art. Site specificity is a proposition further destabilised in today's networked global culture, where technology such as the Internet has displaced any notion that "site" can occupy one singular plane of existence and access (Miranda, 2013).

Land Art has been linked to environmental sound art previously by Alan Licht's text *Sound Art: Beyond Music, Between Categories* (2007) and Brandon LaBelle's, *Background Noise: Perspectives on Sound Art* (2006) states:

Acoustic ecology (soundscape studies) can be situated historically in relation to the development of Land art of the early 1970's. Extending the art object to an environmental context, Land art works sought the out of the way, the distant point on the map, so as to engage more natural elements and their intrinsic forces (LaBelle, 2006, p.198).

Long's work - *A Line Made by Walking* (1967) - offered an alternative way of thinking through ideas of stasis and movement. He was a twenty two year old student of Saint Martins School of Art in London the year he made his seminal work. One summer day in June 1967, he took a train southwest from Waterloo station with no particular destination in mind. Without any premeditation he departed the train, entered a nearby field and proceeded to walk back and forth amongst the grass until it revealed his own impact upon the area. Afterwards, Long took a photograph of his now canonical trace and in doing so, contributed towards an art historical shift from sculpture to walking, gallery to environment; object to process (Roelstraete, 2010, see pp.2-4).

Long's endeavour was a fixed, durational and repetitive task of walking back and forth. There was a localised, physical and demarcated focus to the line that set him apart from the more meandering psychogeographical drifts found amongst histories of urban walking (see Coverley, 2010). More importantly Long's practice reflected my own desire to shift field recording from an object centred pursuit of sound for composition, towards something more process-based. This switch is perhaps best understood through his emphasis on walking rather than sculpture. It allowed Long to document and re-present his work in photography, text and various materials

including stone, mud and even his own fingerprints. All of which was possible because of the freedom he allowed himself when rooting his practice in the method of his making. My own equivalent switch would be from sound to listening. I would suggest sound and more specifically field recordings themselves, are in fact the by-products of this fundamental (listening) act. Through Long, the very act of listening became for me, a source of formal emancipation; conceptually freeing ideas of sound as an aesthetic object and opening up the potential for more subjective, performative and multi-modal productions.

If Long's photographs, maps, stones or even fingerprints could be deemed an (artistic) artefact of walking, sound recordings must surely be one artefact of listening? What were listening's other potential artefacts? This question began to drive much of the research, but in the first instance, I was still grappling with the idea of hearing and marking my own place of residence within South Gare.

Long's idea of walking a line back and forth was, in many ways, the type of fixed durational application of what I set out to achieve in listening; one that could also accommodate a sense of movement and change. I decided to transpose a line physically onto South Gare as both a metaphor and reference to Long. I hoped it would also loosen the early structural tensions, yet retain a sense of specificity I felt the research, and my own physical circumstances, required. Rather than walk and record a straight line through South Gare I chose four places to sit and document. Editing the four areas of the line together, I hoped to create a sense of movement from these points of relative stasis. The overall intention was to display the juxtaposed natural and industrial acoustic space of South Gare from one end of the line (composition) to the other.

The recording became part of compilation of works published through the German environmental sound art label, Gruenrekorder²⁷. The outcome, titled *A Line Made by Listening* (2011), weaved a series of these recordings together along my own 1.7 kilometre line. Beginning with the sound of waterbirds feeding amongst the lapping of the North Sea, the final edit moved through the sound of sand dunes and marram grass, towards the faint howling of a wind-monitoring device; then continued to advance along the line, southwards, towards an area known as Bran Sands. The passing drone of transporter ship entering the Tees Mouth Harbour passes by, before the piece finally comes to rest at the edge of Sahaviriya Steel Industries.

Although this appropriated method finally enabled me to begin, I soon realised its imposition had other consequences. The intention of the work was to investigate the shared natural, and industrial acoustic space that makes up South Gare. Somewhat naively I had begun by searching for a way to divide these two things in order to study them. Ironically my physical resistance to soundwalking had compromised the work. I believe that now, simply walking the line (providing my back was in good physical condition) and recording in real time would have been more apt. At least my footsteps and bodily movements would also have been acknowledged alongside the integrated auditory worlds of South Gare.

Listening back to the work in retrospect, the final section did however begin to suggest a different approach. This sequence was made from a position close to the perimeter edge of the steelworks. Whilst there I began to notice the industrial hum audibly coalescing with the song of a Skylark. It re-enforced the point that these relations, so historically and ecologically entwined, were of course audibly integrated. It seemed clear that I needed to loosen my structural grip, I had to relax

²⁷ *A Line Made by Listening* was published as part of a compilation by German based, Gruenrekorder: *Somewhere on the Edge* (2011). Available from: <http://www.gruenrekorder.de/?page_id=7284> [accessed 18.06.13]

my methodology of marking and imposing and allow the area's own agency to be heard.

To some extent the work is a failure. Sound, whether in South Gare or anywhere else, does not occur within designated areas or straight lines. If I was to search for an alternative shape or form, then a sphere may have been the better option to articulate the omni-directionality of that process. But this too would be missing the point. Perhaps these structures were merely reducing the study, both aesthetically and conceptually?

In terms of the publication's reception, the work was praised for being 'particularly effective' (Allen, 2011). As my research evolved I would realise audience participation was something I wanted to practically engender within the aesthetics of a given work. Although a CD involves the active participation of a private audience, I believe the curation and packaging of work in such circumstances has led to a relatively closed "relational aesthetic"²⁸. As Phase One continued to develop the reader will notice the practical manifestation of such intuitions most acutely within the section "30 Minutes of Listening".

After producing *A Line Made by Listening* (2011) I decided to focus on journal and diary exploration for my next visits, to try and let South Gare be heard in all its complexity at any one time. If I was searching for a place to do that, the perimeter edge of the steelworks seemed as good a place as any.

Please listen to Track 1 on the accompanying DVD.

²⁸ Nicolas Bourriaud's (1998) term "relational aesthetics" was influenced by the changing social space of the Internet. Bourriaud emphasised the need for art to become part of a shared and participatory environment. This was achieved not only through site-based public interventions but also through the exploration of heterogeneous media as opposed to a private, singular appreciation of a specific medium.

Peripheral Conversations

Opposite the steelworks, towards the southern area known as Cabin Rocks a Skylark vocalised somewhere in the sky. Its constant song seemed to spiral up and down in columns of air beside where I stood. I remained listening in the absence of seeing, at some point recalling a past conversation with Suffolk bird expert Nigel Odin who had remarked “I bird watch with my ears”.

It wasn’t until I moved over towards the Bran Sands area, again, facing south in a direction towards the steelworks that the bird’s image became apparent. Perhaps it was due to the change in background, from the relative infinite sky over Cabin Rocks to one that appeared before plumes of smoke and giant metallic structures. The ubiquitous hum of industry provided an improvisatory bed for the skylark; I stood in the boughs of a sand dune listening to a superimposed duet, the two acoustic signatures hanging in the gentle breeze above (Wright, Journal, 2012).

For the best part of twelve months I situated myself along the perimeter edge of the steelworks in South Gare. It was there, as suggested, where I began to develop a more relational and participatory appreciation of listening and specificity. I did not touch a microphone during this period. Instead I sat, walked and kept an extensive listening diary as well as photographic records. Beneath is another journal entry.

Listening, particularly here in South Gare, is often full of contradictory and ironic situations. One such place is beneath the upper ridge of Bran Sands; where several Stonechats make their home. Approximately the size of a robin, these birds dart through the air, coming to balance precariously on the swaying reeds like a pole-vaulter caught in perpetual metronome.

Their somewhat gruff ‘chic chic’ is often compared to the sound of two stones being

struck – hence stonechat. W. H. Auden’s poem The Wanderer (1930) beautifully evoked the bird and its incessant nature, calling it ‘A bird stone-haunting, an unquiet bird’. One of the few insectivorous birds that stay the course of British winters, in South Gare their stone voices converse with steel. The two calls couldn’t be more different, one is precise and staccato, the other ubiquitous and amorphous. The two are so entwined it’s impossible for the naked ear to hear one without the other. Stone and steel, nature and industry, enveloped and enveloping (Wright, Journal, 2012).

As both journal entries suggest, it was an area where nature and industry seemed to coalesce most audibly. Although I kept extensive written and photographic documentation, I was still keen to understand the formal expansion I was aiming for through field recording. However, unlike *A Line Made by Listening* (2011), when I did eventually re-employ recording equipment, I was using it in a very different way. Technically I abandoned any type of directional microphone and instead opted for an omni-directional choice to include the whole environment rather than produce a specific focus. I recorded within the area I had listened and written in-situ, using the journal extracts as prompts for recording subjects, themes and relationships. In contrast to *A Line Made by Listening* (2011), I was resistant to use any specialist field recording techniques, microphones or methods that (in general) attempted to isolate specific sounds. I was not collecting sound material for composition or structuring purposes per se. Instead, my intention was to acknowledge the indivisibility of the situations on-site; the undeniably entangled relationships that had, in many ways, shaped my own way of listening. Rather than the prescribed areas I had strived towards initially then, I found myself occupying “overlaps”; not necessarily specific or framed areas to analyse but regions best described in my own mind as “thresholds” where the triangular relationship of nature, industry and myself could be explored.

The eventual work was published on CD through Canadian *Musicworks* magazine under the title: *Peripheral Conversations* (2012). The piece consisted of three recordings along this borderland zone, with each documenting the integrated sonic worlds of nature and industry from a relatively static yet broad acoustic perspective. Similar to *A Line Made by Listening* (2011), I found the lag between producing a sound publication and its public reception dis-connective and entirely isolating as a concept. This was not to say I strived to know somebody's experience of the work. Beyond (metaphorically) handing an audience member a set of headphones or sitting them in front of speakers, I wanted to begin incorporating a potential listener into the production of work itself. Again, this gradual shift becomes practically apparent for the first time during the work and section "30 Minutes of Listening" through the particular use of objects such as mirrors and text-based instructions as part of the exhibition.

Through comparative analysis of both audio works I began to understand the similarities and differences between the two. In the field, *Peripheral Conversations* (2012) was a work of more consideration than the first. As a result, during post-production, the work lacked any sense of decision making as next to no editorial processes were undertaken. The reverse had been the case during the first piece of research, *A Line Made by Listening* (2011). In the field, sound was simply gathered as aesthetic units for my appropriated structure; then meticulously composed, edited and stitched together to arrive at what I wanted to evoke for a given audience. The fundamental action that binds the two pieces of research is that I chose the microphone and its recording position; I was there; I pressed record.

However, the aesthetics of both works seemed to miss this undeniable fact: I had silenced myself. What was my position between nature and industry? How could I converse with the two? Where did I become and recede in the ebb and flow? What was its effect upon me? Could I really be inside this audible conversation yet remain

unheard? In response to the last question, to do so seemed contradictory, as if I was falling into the historical trap of being an objectifying ear, one that hears only that which is outside of itself and in doing so, observes at a distanced, object orientated end. I had embodied the exact side I wanted to move away from.

Why not announce myself in the next work? I could alleviate the impossible and potentially damaging facade of being absent whilst recording. I did not have to hold my breath in South Gare; I could move if I was uncomfortable; I did not have to worry if my hand was gripping the microphone too hard; I could even relax if my stomach grumbled mid way through recording. In entering and traversing the thresholds of listening I realised I had to hear both sides of the landscapes story, and indeed my own.



Figure 7

Peripheral Conversations (2012), one of the three recording locations in South Gare, copyright the author

Here I want to re-emphasise an issue I raised during the section titled: “Structure & Contents”. In the first twelve to eighteen months whilst making these experiments, I

was also researching and writing my contextual review. Discovering that my practice - at the time - was in fact embodying many of the criticisms I was debating came as a sobering revelation. Although I knew that I wanted to adopt a more embodied, participatory and formally expansive approach to field recording, I had not quite realised why, nor had I quite yet achieved this aim in practice. Clearly I was carrying a type of historic muscle memory from various field recording legacies, which kept me within its orthodoxies and expectations. With the parallel aid of the contextual review and the creation of these two works, I realised that I no longer wanted to record or amalgamate sound within legacies of soundscape composition, and that I wanted to explore formal options beyond CD publication and playback scenarios.

Throughout making *Peripheral Conversations* (2012), in addition to writing my contextual review, I was working towards a constellation of works that would be exhibited during a solo exhibition around the same time, in November 2012. Half way into the process of making works for the exhibition an incident occurred that has possibly been the single most defining practical factor throughout this research.

Please listen to "Track 2" on the accompanying DVD.

Severing all Ties: a Few Days of Fantastical Thought²⁹.

August 06th 2012 was a hot and humid day. I'd been out recording in an area along the North East coast of England called South Gare. As midday approached I headed to the car for a break; I packed up the equipment, loaded it into the boot and closed the door. This was when things began to take a turn for the worse. The boot didn't close. "Not a problem" I thought, "I'll just close it harder this time". And so I did. I slammed the boot door, and again it bounced back. Through what I can only deem physical instinct I slammed it again and again, and again, until a sinking feeling slowly released itself through my body. Clearly there was something trapped in the lock. I winced as I let the door exhale slowly upwards. A glimmer of copper wire was grafted into the lock amongst a mutilated scene of severed black cables. I felt as though somebody had placed a giant thumb on my head and was slowly pushing it, along with me, down into the ground. Loud explicit language followed, along with some fairly combustible bodily movements and pacing back and forth. It wasn't until the swollen clouds above finally burst that I forced an ironic grimace. As a torrent of rain released itself through the humid air I decided to call it a day.

Holding the severed cable later that evening I began thinking about what it would mean if I could no longer record sound? Soon after, perhaps because of the strange weather and my (all be it) brattish emotionally charged day, I was struck down with illness. During which, for some inexplicable reason, I began watching and reading everything I could on the financial collapse. I lay in bed attempting to understand credit swaps, share derivatives and subprime mortgages. In reality I ended up swearing at the scandalous behaviour of conservative governments, the Chicago school of economics and consumer culture more broadly. Tangentially I stumbled into reading articles on Peak Oil. This is the term for when global petroleum production spikes and the only way supply will go thereafter is downwards.

²⁹ Anecdotal essay re-produced in full from original publication. See: Wright, M.P. (2013) Severing all ties. In: Tipp, C. (ed) (2013) *An Antidote to Indifference*. London: Caught by the River, pp.16-17.

Without oil the industrial world as we know it will become completely de-stabilised. Oil is in everything we touch and depend upon, never mind fuel for transport and housing. I became interested in how people chose to deal with this situation. Business heads just ignore it and say more oil can be found via alternative methods. Others suggest we are heading towards catastrophe and that the only way to deal with it is to change our cultural ways, now; to start growing your own food, steering clear of consumerism and reading between the lines of government and media rhetoric. And so, it was in this fairly gloomy setting that ideas pertaining to finitude began to connect with field recording.

I began relating the Peak Oil situation directly to sound. What if sound was a finite resource? In the case of field recording, what if birdsong was petroleum's equivalent? Recordists would be responsible for an unprecedented silencing; they'd be brought to trial! I began to envisage a fictional world where these two references collided: birdsong as a finite resource and recordists as the great silencers of the natural world. Scientists would initially be at a loss as to why all the birds had gone quiet. The future would consist of laboratories with hundreds of thousands of recordings sealed in media that would inevitably decay. It was a race against time. In the same room would be agents, operatives of some kind who would slowly come to realise that birdsong was in fact finite, and that each time it was recorded, it moved a little closer to being silenced forever. The catastrophe would be known as: "Peak Sound: The Silencing of Global Birdsong".

The same agents would explain to tourists holding old ornithological books that field recording was to blame for the silence. That we should have seen the warning signs in the predatory language associated with it. Words such as: "capture" and "take", technology such as "shotgun" microphones. Interpol frantically collated wanted lists. Names of field recordists were investigated in an attempt to salvage any remaining birdsong. Recordists hurriedly emptied their hard drives into trash for fear of public

backlash. The agent's plan was to retrieve as much birdsong as possible, power up speakers in every continent and playback the sounds in a continuous attempt at reproduction. Automated machines would simply switch on and off: future generations would be unaware they were living in an entirely artificial soundscape.

As my health recovered these thoughts began to recede. Around the same time I returned to J. A. Baker's wonderful book *The Peregrine* (2011). The text is effectively a diary of the author's ten year observations of Peregrines, near his then home in Essex. Published originally in 1967, Baker's prose like writing undergoes a transformation throughout: from statistical accounts early on, to a voice that blends the bird's habits, patterns and behaviours with his own. In other words, a journey from human to animal. The final chapter profoundly brings both man and bird to a meeting point; at this moment Baker states:

The short grass is dry and brittle and sweet-smelling. It is spring grass, clean and sharp as salt water. I bury my face in it, breathe in it, breathe in the spring. A snipe flies up, and a golden plover. I lie still till they have gone. Then I move forward again, very softly, because the hawk is listening (Baker, 2011, p.168).

The last four words resonate again and again: "the hawk is listening". Surely this is the point to all of these fantastical thoughts? That you or I are not the only ones listening; that birds, along with other species and their habitat are reciprocating that auditory relationship; they are acutely listening to the sound of my clumsy feet and clanking equipment: "I" sound the impossibility of being a neutral presence. The encounter is symbiotic, mutually shared as if it were an exchange or conversation rather than the mere extraction of sonorous data. Has the pursuit of sound itself merely re-enforced an anthropocentric view? Is sound now on the brink of exotic taxidermy? Are there alternative, more expansive ways to consider and encounter

the field: methods based on participation and exchange, new forms, even a new language?

Baker's text is one of the most insightful field recording documents I've experienced. It is as much a document of listening, as it is a naturalist text. And yet not once did he record the sounds of his encounter. Another fantasy, more a provocation floods in... Imagine if all the sound archives in the world were released back into the field. A caterwaul scream of pain and reconciliation would envelope the globe. Perhaps then I could re-assess my vision of the future?

Almost six months on from where I began I'm not really sure I know what all this means. What I do know is that I still haven't bought that replacement microphone cable, and that I'm listening so much more. Please listen to "Track 3" on the accompanying DVD, a recording made immediately after the severed cable incident³⁰.



Figure 8

Severed cable (2012), copyright the author

³⁰ This is an extract from the full audio publication *Bio-critical Incidents* (2014), discussed during Phase Three's practice reflection document "There or Thereabouts".

30 Minutes of Listening

Severing my microphone cables occurred during the filming of a work titled *There are No Signs* (2012)³¹. As with *A Line Made by Listening* (2011) and *Peripheral Conversations* (2012), the work was being made and tested whilst writing the contextual review. It was also forming part of a solo exhibition I was working towards called *30 Minutes of Listening* (2012). The exhibition offered an opportunity to probe and understand my concurrent struggles with field recording as a dis-embodying and formally reductive mode of enquiry. Through it I endeavoured to re-calibrate those marginalised aspects of my listening, in the field, with sound, film, objects, text and photography. I wanted to explore the dis-locating relationship between sound, place and self whilst listening and recording; I aimed to show the process of “being there” as a multi-sensual one that had the potential to be both situationally and temporally expansive. As a result I hoped to learn more about the place, form and effects of listening. It was framed and presented as a controlled, quasi-experiment. In other words, each work, with the exception of *There Are No Signs* (2012), was based around the documentation of one, thirty-minute period of listening in South Gare on May the 12th 2012 at 05:30 hours. Beneath is the exhibition hand out with my own written statement:

How site-specific can listening ever be? Sound, by its very nature transgresses place. A second or third generation series of echoes and reflections, it rarely sits still. Listening is the constant attempt to trace sound's weave. Continual and generative, it is a process that searches for provenance, a place to dwell. This elasticated relationship pulls towards whilst simultaneously tearing away. To remain “specific” appears tinged with impossibility, full of friction and displacement.

How then, do we reside in listening if we cannot remain in sound? How can the process of listening be assembled to mean something - personally, politically and

³¹ This work, although part of the overall research is not included here for critical reflection or submitted as part of the final body of practice.

collectively? How can I re-present, shape, or tune an awareness to this specific place; to this conflicting process? Where do you and I, become and recede?

This is the first arrangement of those “specific” yet “dissonant” pieces. Assembled to re-imagine the possibilities of how we can interpret a place in relation to how it is heard. It is an attempt to find alternative markers and in many ways, remain unhinged. I hope it prompts more questions than answers (Wright, Exhibition Hand-out, 2012).

Please watch “Track 4” on the accompanying DVD.



Figure 9

30 Minutes of Listening (2012), front room installation view, image by Chiara Ambrosio

The front room of the Gallery consisted of three interrelated works. A panoramic 360-degree film projection (*Around*), a mirror with laser engraved text (*In*), and a sound recording installed sculpturally onto the floor with materials specific to the site. The projection attempted to re-present the process of listening on film. Through Michel Foucault (1991) I drew upon Jeremy Bentham’s original panopticon building as a logical visual reference to transpose onto the ear’s own inherently 360 degree,

surveillance like capability³². During initial tests I was contextually referencing the vertiginous and spiralling film works of Michael Snow (*La Région Centrale*, 1971), Richard Serra (*Railroad Turnbridge*, 1976) and Robert Smithson (*Spiral Jetty*, 1968). After experimenting with the idea of hand held movement or, something more mechanically autonomous and gravity free, I decided upon a fixed anchor point to rotate around. The work was not an illustration of listening, but an exploration of the tensions I had been going through. I wanted to show how sound's porous nature had constantly pulled me away from my body when trying to remain rooted in one place. Although my listening (in South Gare) took place within my own physical ear and body, it did so within the combined understanding and imagination that such sounds were not generated in the vacuum of myself, but from the relational contact and mechanical energy of humans and non-humans elsewhere. The following quote by Tim Ingold reflects these thoughts and articulates the dislocating effect of listening in place:

The sweep of sound continually endeavours to tear listeners away, causing them to surrender to its movement. It requires an effort to stay in place. And for this effort pulls against sound rather than harmonising with it (Ingold, 2011, p.139).

Initially, I envisaged the projection as silent in reference to the way in which recording had, until then, muted my own presence. Yet for the exhibition the sound recording, made in synch during the filming, was also installed. I wanted to understand the formal and conceptual shift with and through the medium's help, not by simply jettisoning it. Sound was therefore diffused through two exposed speaker cones, housed within corresponding pools of slag rocks; transported from South Gare and placed onto the gallery floor. I aimed to bring a sense of physicality into the

³² Philosopher Michel Foucault drew up the panopticon - an institutional building from the eighteenth century and designed to give 360-degree observational power to the user - as a metaphor for modern societies and their inclination to regulate and control.

work by using materials like slag, amongst which, the accompanying sound was given greater indexical specificity and tactile affect.



Figure 10

30 Minutes of Listening (2012), reverse front room installation view, image by Chiara Ambrosio

The displacement of materials, from site to gallery again resonated histories from Land Art, in particular the work of Robert Smithson. Although Smithson is widely acknowledged for his large-scale interventions (see *Spiral Jetty*, 1968; *Asphalt Rundown*, 1968), he was also a prominent writer and thinker. Dealing with issues of site-specificity and reception, Smithson - like others previously mentioned - worked over various media and forms. His particular relevance to my own practice resides in a series of works he called *Non-sites* (1968-1973). Extracting materials specific to a particular site of study, Smithson would then re-present pieces of slate, earth or soil for example, within the confines of the gallery walls. Such works were 'a three dimensional logical picture that is abstract, yet represents an actual site' (Smithson, 1996, p.364). *Non-sites* (1968-1973) distorted the very notion of site-specific art. Smithson's work acted as indexes towards another time and place; in doing so his artworks became as much imagined as they were physically real. Smithson (1969)

talks of the process as a dialectical one, where 'you are confronted not only with an abstraction but also with the physicality of here and now' (p.187). The process of displacement is, as I have already alluded to, a preoccupation that haunts field recording. As sounds are recorded they become displaced, even trapped within a hard-drive until later released through CD publication or playback.

For the exhibition I was primarily interested in how my own field recording based aesthetics could incorporate the audience as an active listening agent. I also wanted to dissect the process of my listening and acknowledge the movement from site to gallery. It is in this motion LaBelle (2006, p.211) states we:

hear just as much displacement as placement, just as much placelessness as place, for the extraction of sound from its environment partially wields its power by being boundless, uprooted and distinct.

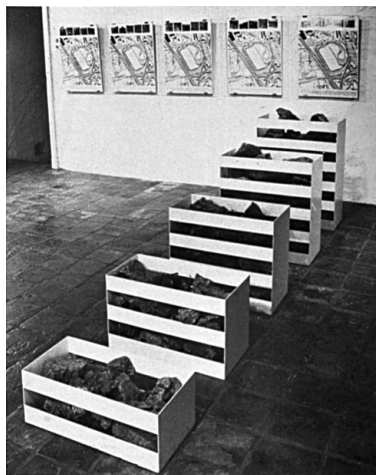


Figure 11 (left)

Robert Smithson, *Oberhausen Non-site* (1968)

Image available at: <http://newabstraction.net/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Smithson1.jpg>

Figure 12 (right)

30 Minutes of Listening (2012), speaker cone and rock detail

Image by Chiara Ambrosio

Please listen to “Track 5” on the accompanying DVD, a re-working of Robert Smithson’s text *A Provisional Theory of Non-Sites* (1969). The piece was recorded between a car in South Gare and the gallery space in London, as part of the making of *30 Minutes of Listening* (2012).

On the other side of the rocks and speakers, hanging upon a wall opposite the projected film, was the mirror piece titled: *In* (2012). This work had many purposes. The first being a simple circular border in which I attempted to textually locate, in retrospect, what I had heard during the original thirty minutes of listening. Using myself, much like the fixed rotational filming point, I listed events based upon my locational memory of hearing them. Words such as “hum” and “bang” were mixed with taxonomic identities of wildlife such as “Wren” or “kittiwake”. I wanted to place the descriptions onto mirror as a method of literally situating an audience member within the textual soundscape. I did not realise until the installation of works commenced that not only would the audience be reflected and positioned amongst floating text, but by proxy of the projection opposite, they would also become part of the rotating film behind. The audience were amalgamated into all three elements and given autonomy to view and hear both themselves and the room from a perspective of their choice.

The three pieces worked together as one distinct yet separate construct. However, I realised the film projection, along with its accompanying sound, was still embodying many of issues relating to my own absence that I was trying to address. Although I had deliberately left a red-dot glare from the camera in the work as a way of suggesting the technology involved, it was still far too subtle a gesture. The rotating tripod device emitted a continuous, drone-like noise when recording the film. Why then did I choose to filter this out if it was in fact present? What was I still hiding within the process of recording? I realised the accompanying sound would benefit from the audible acknowledgment of the technical apparatus at work, as well as my

own bodily presence during the making. This film was continually re-made over the full course of research and I will return to its progress and development at a later point, during Phase Three of this thesis.

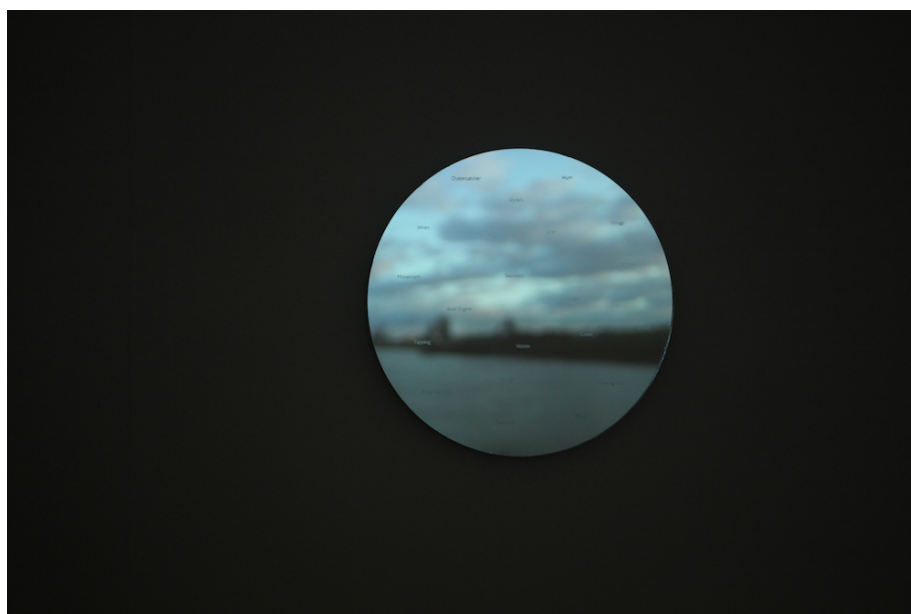


Figure 13

In (2012), detail from mirror, image by Chiara Ambrosio

The mirror work countered the earlier problem of dis-embodiment by literally putting me, and an audience into the work itself. But again a similar concern arose: where was I within the textual descriptions? There was no mention of the sound of my own presence. And how was I describing what I had heard? As objects and identities or events and relational goings on? It also occurred to me that for future attempts at filming it would be useful to experiment with the mirror in camera, as a tangible referenced object, physically employed into the making end of the process. Again, like much of the practice submitted, the work was developed across many years of the PhD, not just in one fixed time or form. I will return to the mirrors development later within Phase Three through a project called *Tasked to Hear* (2014).



Figure 14

Hear & There, (2012) installation view, image by Chiara Ambrosio

A split screen, looped film titled *Here & There* (2012) was installed in the back room of the gallery. The work again attempted to reference the specificity of South Gare through the use of slag, although this time I filmed myself striking two pieces together after the thirty-minute period of listening. Later I repeated the action with the same rocks in the gallery space and exhibited them (rocks) alongside the film. The action was an attempt to connect South Gare and the gallery space through an acoustic intervention. Both strikes had distinct reverberation differences, South Gare being very dry as it is essentially, an open space. IMT Gallery on the other hand is a walled space where sound is reflected and echoed back. Each sound recording was split into the corresponding right and left audio channels in order to highlight the discrepancy between the two acoustic spaces. The simple, gestural and embodied nature of the work recognised and bridged both the space of making and the space of re-presentation. Experienced in the gallery, the work produced and made space anew, rather than merely mimicking one or the other.

Off the back room were two circular c-type photographic prints taken after the thirty-minute period of listening. The images, titled *Above & Below* (2012), were

exactly that: photographs of the surface below and the sky above. Next to the prints was a pinned A4 sheet of text titled: *Instructions for 30 Minutes of Listening* (2012). The text acted as a recipe list that transcribed the processes involved in making the entire exhibition. These included events outside of the thirty minutes such as arriving to the site and returning the rocks at a later point. I wanted to dispel any sense of essential embeddedness for making these works by exhibiting such a transparent list. It was also intended to be a democratic sharing of my own listening process rather than the conventional presentation of a sound/CD object.

Throughout the space fragments of vinyl text were also installed at various heights to be passed by, possibly as unnoticed interventions. They listed bodily, cosmic, site-specific and imaginative data that occurred within the time frame of thirty minutes. For example, “140 tonnes of steel produced” on-site, “2,160 heartbeats” and “37 calories burnt”. All of these text works intended to examine the elasticated relationship between site, listening and the gallery. They attempted to operate between the two spaces and amplify events, which often go unheard during that process of displacement (Wright to Jackson, 2012). Whether in the past of driving to the site itself, the future of returning the rocks, to what happens bodily or, cosmologically: stretching and revealing all that was around and between my thirty minutes of listening in South Gare, the exhibition began to lift the lid on silence that surrounds the presentation of field recording based work.

Overall *30 Minutes of Listening* successfully moved towards the idea of inter-operable works, different in form yet all rooted through the production of one specific listening event. *Art Monthly* said: ‘Wright is attempting to create materiality out of the slimmest components – a kind of aural graphene that over time can change how we listen’ (Smyth, 2012, p.121). *This is Tomorrow* commented that ‘in an art world dominated by discourses about looking and visibility Wright’s work asks us to think

more carefully about sound: its history, its politics, and its particular materiality' (Greslé, 2012).

The leap from the previous two works seemed huge. The three works in the front room along with the text instructions were examples of what I wanted to produce instead of a CD or typical sound work, particularly in terms of considering the audience within the very aesthetics of the work itself. Having an expanded space for presentation beyond the CD or multi-channel soundscape "offer" undoubtedly provided an opportunity to experiment with other media. I was able to explore additional artefacts of listening and display my own multi-sensual process more openly than before. The expanded situation of the gallery space, simply allowed other things in, not just media and tactile objects, but the experience of displacement, obfuscation and loss that was bound into the process of listening and dwelling. Particularly through the split-screen film installation *Here & There* (2012), I began to think about what a field recording does when presented in another space: how do the two things (recording and space) meet, merge and produce something anew? It was that contact space of production I wanted to further focus upon: what listening does and can do in the present, rather than what it can merely identify in the past.

Please watch "Track 6" on the accompanying DVD.

Phase One Conclusion

For all the criticisms embroiled in Phase One's contextual review, clearly I began my practice-based experimentation with similar contextual legacies. I had not yet shaken off soundscape studies' historical influence: its isolating methodologies and compositional focus for presenting field recording based work. I understood, and wanted to analyse South Gare as a complex integrated world of nature and industry. Yet I inadvertently "bracketed" those relations through strategies of forced separation. Methodologically I tried to impose rigid structures and techniques. Although this focus arrived out of a resistance to walking, due to a de-mobilising back injury, it did in fact compromise and restrict the clarity of these early experiments. I believe this reductive start was further compounded by the future assumption that such recordings would only ever be experienced on a CD or traditional playback scenarios. By association, the material would need to be aesthetically viable in terms of its sonic quality and compositional merit: requirements I wanted to move away from. *A Line Made by Listening* (2011) was published as part of a digital compilation of works exploring geopolitical environments. *Peripheral Conversations* (2012) was published on CD and also went on to be installed as part of an international sound art festival at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Rome³³. Yet for all of this, both works confirmed to me that field recording needs greater diversity in terms of its presentation and formal experimentation³⁴.

As if to accentuate these initial failings I had also managed to silence myself: I fell into the historical mould of a self-silencing recordist. In retrospect this has been a humbling admission: that I began by doing everything I wanted to move away from. Through these difficult moments of revelation I came to understand practically why

³³ Helicotrema was a four day international sound art festival at the Museum of Contemporary Art Rome and broadcast on Rai 3 (IT) over April 18, 19, 20, 21 (2013).

³⁴ It is important to remind the reader that this issue is related to the curation of field recording and sound art more broadly. It is not simply the responsibility of artists.

and how I needed to change the direction of my practice. August 6th 2012, the day I severed my microphone cables, emphatically underscored this point to me. The incident had a profound effect upon the direction of my research. Simply put, it made me stop recording, and because of it, I began to understand the relational complexity of South Gare and my own embroiled position. Without the microphone “I” could be heard within the geopolitical situation of South Gare. It forced me to re-connect my body and self back into direct contact with the area as opposed to a technically mediated one. After this period of technical abstinence I returned to work with microphones and the process of recording in more embodied and critical ways. Accidentally severing microphone cables therefore aided the recovery of my contextual and methodological conundrum. It also gave validity to my own personal, physical and incidental processes and motivations, in the field, as valid methodological strategies in themselves.

30 Minutes of Listening (2012) was based upon one period of physical stasis, an approach that undoubtedly arrived out of my longstanding back problems. However, with my relationship to walking reaching a point of relative resolution, I was better equipped (conceptually) to accommodate sound’s inherent themes of movement and transience within such a fixed proposition. Coupled with the expanded setting of a gallery, I was able to disseminate my practice across many forms and means of articulation. I began to work towards the multi-sensual appreciation of listening that I wanted to build upon, and encountered a level of audience integration that sound on a CD simply had not given me.

Moving away from field recording’s preservational treatment of sound, towards something based in the present of listening, allowed for difference in form, context and genre. Contextually fusing Land Art aided this shift. It was precisely the innovative methods and ways in which such artists documented and re-produced

site, which helped my own reimagining of what a field recording can look, sound or feel like.

The exhibition instigated an expansion in my re-presentational options. Yet broader historical remnants still remained; formally things needed refining and further testing; subjectively I needed to push myself more into the work. I understood this however, not bluntly in terms of amplifying my actions alone, but also through the potential re-animation of absence in equally non-sounding ways. To simply stop recording was not the long-term answer, it was part of process that unveiled a raft of new questions. Where am I when I field record? How can field recording be in the present if it is always seeking to preserve the past? What exactly do recording technologies “capture”? How can I critically respond in practice to legacies of objectification and composition? How can I re-posit, re-embody and re-render myself back into my own skin? How can I re-imagine a new field perspective and what would the consequences be?

Phase Two

Re-approaching the Field

Introduction

As discussed during Phase One, field recording, whether for scientific or artistic purposes, relies upon the collection of sound - recording and amassing is paramount. Soundscape studies has been employed as a contextual pivot to view both ends of the (conservation-composition) field recording spectrum, often to the detriment of its own conflicting methodologies and outputs. In order to resolve these divergent legacies and those evidenced during Phase One of my own practice-based research, I needed to re-imagine a new perspective in the field. In doing so, I hoped the consequences would reflect a more self-reflexive and formally expansive cycle of practice.

Phase One revealed legacies of preservation, self-silence and objectification were not conducive for the type of research I wanted to build. Although *30 Minutes of Listening* (2012) initiated a move towards rectifying these elements, I found it necessary to further shape and refine such urges in theory. It made sense to re-construct a critical framework from contemporary anthropology – a discipline already bound into field recording’s historical bloodline. Assimilating the shared methodological and representational critiques of both contexts aimed to provide the relevant ontological shift I was striving for whilst simultaneously updating field recording’s interdisciplinary lineage.

In the following section of writing I reach a defined and original position for my research. The chapter outlines, compares and contrasts three specific authors and texts, all of which, to greater or lesser degrees, are connected to critical discourses on sound, listening and the environment. Anthropologist Tim Ingold’s concepts of “Dwelling” and “Taskscape” are first discussed from his book *The Perception of the Environment* (2000). Salomé Voegelin’s *Listening to Noise and Silence: Towards a Philosophy of Sound Art* (2010) follows with an exploration of subjective and

imaginary listening. Christoph Cox's paper "Beyond Representation and Signification: Toward a Sonic Materialism" (2011) reaches an apex of both sound studies and related concepts from new materialism. It is here, during the section "In Response to Cox & New Materialism", I identify the way in which my own practice-based research builds, and more importantly differs from all three texts.

To frame my argument I will begin by introducing each author's core ideas before comparing, critiquing and relating them through my own practice.

Ingold: Dwelling & the Task

Ingold's chapter "The Temporality of the Landscape" within his text *The Perception of the Environment* (2000) aims to collapse the divisions between archaeology and anthropology. It discusses how skills are honed and refined through tasks and practices within the landscape, and how such active participation generates our perception of the environment as a whole (Ingold, 2000, see pp.189-191).

Ingold (2000) introduces landscape as a concept as much as it is a physical reality. This is highlighted through its difference to land (see p.189). Land being physical, Ingold (2000) claims you can measure it as a weight but not necessarily experience it as a whole. Landscape on the other hand is something you experience in totality, all around you at any one time (see pp.190-191). It is therefore possible to 'ask of the landscape what it is like, but not how much there is' (Ingold, 2000, p.191). He concludes 'land is thus quantitative and homogeneous, the landscape is qualitative and heterogeneous' (Ingold, 2000, p.190).

Ingold's (2000) second consideration of landscape fundamentally rejects the division of 'inner and outer worlds' (p.191). These worlds are in effect nature and space. He claims nature is often perceived as 'out there', whereas 'you and I. We live in here'

(Ingold, 2000, p.191). For Ingold (2000) this reductive separation ultimately leads to a severance of mind and matter, process and form (see p.192). In other words, he is fighting against the separation of historical binaries in how an environment is perceived. Ingold goes on to suggest landscape cognition is more often than not acquired from the cartographic perspective of height and space. He believes this to be a distancing method of surveying from above rather than, as he prefers, within. Cartography and its apparatus of measurement ultimately render space as a collection of defined segments: not as Ingold (2000) would prefer, the production of a greater whole (see pp.192-193).

He underscores this statement through examples in landscape painting. *The Harvester* (1565) by Pieter Bruegel being one instance where he invites us, the reader, to place ourselves inside the landscape; to think of it not as a static image but a temporal living, breathing, sweating, sounding place; to consider the sounds of people working, rivers flowing, church bells tolling and hills and valleys swaying; all of which create an image through the production of its relational activities. Like Schafer, Ingold draws upon pre-industrial examples and indigenous traditions to support and facilitate his proposition.

Through the example of the painting we begin to leak into Ingold's "Dwelling Perspective" as he asserts in space 'meanings are attached to the world, with landscape they are gathered from it' (Ingold, 2000, p.192).

Drawing us closer towards his proposition he states:

A place owes its character to the experiences it affords to those who spend time there – to the sights, sounds and indeed the smells that constitute its specific ambience. And these in turn, depend on the kinds of activities in which its inhabitants engage. It is from this relational context of people's

engagement with the world, in the business of dwelling, that each place draws its unique significance (Ingold, 2000, p.192).

Ingold (2000) proposes human life is inextricably entangled in the continuum of time and the creation of the landscape itself. It is through time and our perspective of place that he suggests landscape begins to exhibit its own agency: it is not merely a cognitive ordering of space (see p.196) In order to go beyond this cartographic, Cartesian perspective 'which takes as its starting point the self-contained subject confronting a domain of isolatable objects' (Ingold, 2000, p.168), he calls for a "Dwelling Perspective". This is a perspective based upon tasks and practices within the landscape, not from a distanced position outside but from an embodied position within. Ingold (2000) claims it is in the practice of dwelling that landscape and the environment is both perceived and generated. The "Dwelling Perspective" is therefore his device for collapsing the divisions of nature and culture and in doing so, the disciplines of archeology and anthropology (see pp.195-196).

Ingold's concept firmly puts outdoor practices and activities at the forefront and claims dwelling is more than just occupation: it is an activity which produces and generates forms of meaning; whereby the 'landscape is constituted as an enduring record of – and testimony to – the lives and works of past generations who have dwelt within it' (p.189). Such relational activities persuade Ingold to use the substitute word "Taskscape" for "Landscape", the former being defined as 'any practical operation carried out by a skilled agent in an environment, as of his or her normal business of life' (Ingold, 2000, p.195).

In other words, 'tasks are the constitutive acts of dwelling' (Ingold, 2000, p.195). He goes on to employ the roles of native hunters and archaeologists as examples of valid forms of tasks: claiming the stories the two emit are different but altogether projects of 'fundamentally the same kind' (Ingold, 2000, p.190).

In Response to Ingold

It was Ingold's discussion around the effects of dwelling and tasks that chimed with my own problems in Phase One surrounding stasis and movement. Initially, a strategy of dwelling had arrived out of reservations concerning my physical mobility leading into the research. Movement was also dismissed as a conceptual method as it seemed only to compound my antagonistic relationship towards "chasing" sound. Yet the desire to stay still, whether physically restricted or methodologically imposed, made me acutely aware that listening, in place, is as much about dislocation as it is specificity: the two are always in flux, interchangeable; pulling in and out of one another's surroundings and affects.

Ingold (2000) is adamant that an embodied phenomenology, for the better, puts us within tasks: 'the notion that we can stand aside and observe the passage of time is founded upon the illusion of disembodiment' (p.196). Yet he constantly shows the consequence of such dwelling to be exactly that, disembodiment: 'to inhabit the open is to dwell within a weather-world in which every being is destined to combine wind, rain, sunshine and earth in the continuation of its own existence' (2011, p.115). Like his references to hunter-gatherer societies or pre-industrial craft, this statement undeniably fosters a sense of romantic transcendentalism. More importantly however, it hints towards the embedded potential for self-dissolution or perhaps more precisely, the dual (inside/outside) potential of "being", where the acknowledgment of reciprocal non-human agents constantly propels the physical self into dialogue with other bodies and phenomena (Ingold, 2000, see pp.197-198). Ingold's tasks therefore describe the inherent displacement bound into the act of listening and field recording as the body becomes 'ensounded' or 'enwinded' between the two poles of self and site (Ingold, 2011, p.139).

During Phase One I discussed such issues as a practical legacy from soundscape studies. I also experienced a similar struggle to remain specific to either my body or the geographic location of South Gare. Without being able to occupy either in totality, my own practice gradually began to search for ways to operate between “sites” and to explore the representation of place and self as interchangeable contexts. Ingold’s emphasis on the human, tasked into a process was certainly a powerful one that aided a much needed re-rendering of the “self”, back into the field. By its very nature, Ingold’s “Taskscape” also implied an auditory focus as ‘Landscape is what we see around us, whereas the taskscape is what we hear’ (Ingold, 2000, p.199). The term itself provided an alternative way of re-approaching the soundscape, even an etymological substitution of the word. It facilitated a productive motivational shift towards a practice based on relational participation as opposed to one focused upon (sound) objects for collection or composition.

I was also keen to align my practice within a potentially onerous term in order to anchor some of the more beautified historical legacies from soundscape studies. However, Ingold’s emphasis on “skill” within a particular task appeared problematic and potentially elitist if transposed onto my own practice. Specific to the needs of field recording, I was conscious that my overriding aim was to eventually establish a middle ground: one that acknowledges site and self rather than any holistic dissolution of both. Conceptually I came to understand South Gare as its own agential force through strands of new materialism, explained here during the section “Cox: Material Networks & Agencies”. In practice I went on to manifest South Gare’s capacity to “do”, through its ability to act upon and capture me (see practice reflection documents of Phases Two and Three).

Ingold’s desire to move away from perception based on a segregation of the senses echoed my own overall motivations to break soundscape studies’ legacies of division. At first I transposed Ingold’s “Dwelling Perspective” onto South Gare and

its people. It seemed reasonable to suggest that the tasks Ingold talked of were comparable to those carried out by the steelworkers and fishermen of South Gare. These “agents” had engaged in a daily routine within this environment; for decades they had honed skills and participated towards the changing physical and political landscape. Framed this way, the activity of listening would, I hoped, conceptually place me alongside the steelworkers and fishermen of South Gare. No longer at an objective distance, I could begin to dwell and therefore hear, from the desired participatory and embodied perspective.

However, there was a problem in applying such models onto the workers of South Gare or indeed myself. Ingold may encourage holistic unity through tasks and operations, yet applied onto the steelworkers, it is clear that different levels of power are always distributed within a task-based environment. Hierarchies of gender, wage and skill would suggest that within his optimistic proposal of a fully integrated world there are still power dynamics of inclusion and exclusion at play.

Field recording is undoubtedly built on asymmetrical power relations as I always point the microphone. Like Schafer, Ingold short-circuits this friction by situating his examples in the hand-woven fabric of a more “harmonious” past. As the practice reflection documents of both Phase’s Two and Three show, my own creative work began to locate itself within the very relational dynamics that bind and divide the practice. To be clear, the practice I have gone on to build insists on drawing relations together (e.g. human, animal) only in order to bring them into creative contact whereby difference, agency and ethics can be amplified and critiqued: it is not in order to participate in the illusion of a shared world³⁵.

³⁵ This point is developed and clarified throughout this section and particularly during “In Response to Cox & New Materialism”. It is also contextualised during the practice-based reflection document of Phase Two titled: “Mut(e)ual Consent”.

Voegelin: Subjective Creation

Salomé Voegelin's *Listening to Noise and Silence: Towards a Philosophy of Sound Art* (2010) is another text that focuses on relational experience, this time through a more subjective account of listening. More so than Ingold, she is directly involved in sound arts practice and discourse. Overall, the book sheds critical light on the phenomenology of sound, with the author positioning listening as a conceptual and philosophical practice: illustrating examples in art and everyday experience. Her emphasis is on affect, doubt and the imaginary as opposed to meaning and knowledge, the latter of which, she claims emanates from the distancing objectivity of vision (Voegelin, 2010, see p.xi). This also leads to a declaration against meta-narratives and universal truths, which a predominately ocular culture is accused of supporting. Sound on the other hand can avoid such canonical and collective versions of experience, as listening is not in anyway a rational endeavour (Voegelin, 2010, see pp.54-55).

Voegelin's relational world is entirely dependent upon her own contribution to it, whereby the listener (Voegelin) becomes an absolute fulcrum of experience. She suggests it is through subjective engagement and experimentation, in listening, that sound is experienced; for her listening 'produces, it invents, it generates' (Voegelin, 2010, p.13).

This places Voegelin firmly at the center of an environment; sound is not only experienced but actually constructed vis-à-vis an acousmatic perspective, whereby context is substituted for things in themselves.

The subject of sound is an empirical not transcendental subject [clarifying later] empirical subjects are formless, in that they have no visibility or power in that social order, and exist but as beings for themselves, outside of the social exchange (Voegelin, 2010, p.15).

Unlike Ingold, Voegelin suggests sound is not transcendent in any way, yet she does admit listening has the ability to go beyond the “real”. The consequence being found within a certain disconnect from sociality (see previous quote). Her diary anecdotes, interspersed throughout, are resolutely written in the present tense and generate a new way of apprehending, even reading sound as a continual or emergent experience that percolates in the body of the listener/reader. I view these passages as alternative field recording documents in their own right and believe they can add much towards articulating the practice in non-sounding ways³⁶.

Her insistence upon “now”, as opposed to Ingold’s examples of the past, asserts sound can only occur within the literal ear of the listener; never prior to: ‘However far its source, the sound sits in my ear. I cannot hear it if I am not immersed in its auditory object, which is not its source but sound itself’ (Voegelin, 2010, p.xii).

Throughout, Voegelin’s emphasis is on herself as the producer and creator of experience. One particular diary example titled “Waterloo Park 2008” reads:

To listen is not to simply know where I am on the visual map that hangs outside the park gates. It is to experience where I am in the park of my own listening [...] It produces the park as an invented space that is not universal but phantasmagoric: born out of the reality of experience. Listening here does not enhance the park but produces the park. (Voegelin, 2010, pp.13-14).

³⁶ Voegelin also writes similar passages on her blog. Available from: <<http://soundwords.tumblr.com>> [accessed 01.03.14].

Although the listening experience is rooted within her own body, like Ingold, Voegelin also acknowledges the ambulatory consequences bound into sound and the experience of listening. Her diary entries, located as they are within a phenomenological immediacy, always contain the imaginary capacity to unhinge physical specificity and shape an everyday acousmatic interaction.

Listening is not a receptive mode but a method of exploration, a mode of “walking” through the soundscape/sound work. What I hear is discovered not yet received, and this discovery is generative, a fantasy: always different and subjective and continually, presently, now (Voegelin, 2010, p.4).

Unlike Ingold (2011) who is swept along with sound and its environmental currents and flows (see pp.126-135), Voegelin’s movement occurs (as in the above quote) within her own imagination. Whether listening to soundscape compositions or real-time environments, she insists her listening, be it to Christian Marclay’s scratches (see pp.60-62) or Stini Arn’s incidental encounters (see pp.28-31), resists specific and complete understanding of what exactly she hears: ‘I fall into the sensorial rhythm of the work and abandon any attempt to summarise or judge it. It is there to be heard’ (Voegelin, 2010, p.61). This acousmatic “sound-in-itself” comment engenders doubtful and sceptical listening which Voegelin (2010) claims is no less critical in its sensate vitality (see p.39).

In Response to Voegelin

Much like Ingold's earlier painterly example of *The Harvester* (1565), Voegelin constructs her own landscapes from listening as a participatory form of habitation. Stressing sound cannot be experienced prior to the event; Voegelin (2010) insists it must be met in the 'doing' (p.96) or, as Ingold (2000) might say, the 'task' of listening (p.199). Although Voegelin's doing resides in the present as opposed to Ingold's tasks of the past, I believe their combined emphasis upon a contingently collaborative and relational process, may help field recording pave a route out of its objectifying and self-silencing habits.

Again, focusing on the phenomenological body as the site of listening, Voegelin provides the relevant framework to begin re-inserting the "I" into my own practice-based research. For my own particular circumstances her approach allows my "unquiet" body to be heard and incorporated into the research³⁷. More broadly, her text rids the field recordist of his or her own meta-burden of silence.

By insisting upon the contingent moment of listening, Voegelin also dismantles field recording's aestheticised historical foundations built on a yearning for the past. Place, to some extent, may still be the locus of experience for Voegelin, yet it is not through an essential construction in the name of truth. Instead an environment is a reciprocal meeting ground for uncertain and fictive wanderings. Voegelin's listening therefore goes against the conservationist and scientific bloodline which soundscape studies and contemporary environmental sound art is built upon.

However, if Ingold's external-outdoor exploration could be said to dissolve his own existence into a pre-industrialised, romantic past, Voegelin's internal-human centered approach may be argued to swing the other way; into an imaginary interior

³⁷ I say "unquiet" as although not heard, my back problems pressed heavily onto both my physical and conceptual approaches to sound, listening and place.

of the self. Both have consequently been accused of neglecting any form of social, collective or politically engaged argument. Howes & Pink (2010) contend Ingold's perspective gives priority to 'the individual and the subjective over the communal and social' (p.335). Scrimshaw (2013) accuses Voegelin's text of a similar effect, that 'while seeking to critically address ocularcentrism, [it may] considerably undermine and disempower the creative, critical and political potentials of sonic practice' (p.28). Each respective flight of fancy, based on expressions of (external/internal) movement, is said to have lost contact with social-political reality. Both (environmental/imaginary) effects have equally imposed themselves onto my own research and must be incorporated into a balanced understanding of a listening-centred practice³⁸.

Ingold's (2011) defense of his perceived apolitical stance is straightforward. His writing is always conducted broadly in transparent socio-political relation to humans and non-humans (see p.314). I would suggest such accusations are levelled against him due to a suspicion over the hazy pre-technological filters he constantly employs.

The most powerful way in which Voegelin manages to negate apolitical accusations is through her instance upon the "now". She also deploys silence and the radio as devices in which her phenomenal listening can become a social. The combination of "now" and the radio, imaginatively expands listening into a parallel or simultaneous sharing of time-space relations.

The radio generates an invisible social network that weaves and bounces on the silent airwaves towards a shared sense that can ever only be a passing moment of coincidence' (Voegelin, 2010, p.114).

³⁸ External/environmental dissolution was evidenced throughout the practice of Phase One and contextualised within field recording's historical tendency for self-dissolution. Internal/imaginary dissolution was exemplified in my attempts to remain physically still and was particularly relevant during the time when my back injury forced me to remain in one place over long durations. Through listening I could conjure another world to deal with the immobile realities of the "real".

Voegelin's social listening is not based on content but coincidental, unknown dialling and tuning, in and out of frequencies amongst presumed others, equally as doubtful as one another. Sociality occurs in the 'grasp of silence' [and with it] 'the responsibility in any exchange' (Voegelin, 2010, p.109).

The acceptance of socio-political life, through silence and separation, may at first appear a little tenuous, even problematic. Its contradiction being that sharing is achieved through a highly isolating network of physical disconnect and a co-opting of silence that may well exclude as much as it includes. However, I would argue Voegelin's social listening is equally valid for its nuanced understanding of the "sonic": that to share such a (listening) process is to acknowledge the collective distribution of subjective doubt. The point being that within a phenomenological framework, listening is allocated outside of the "I" through its uncertain recognition that someone or something, somewhere, out there, exists and is listening too.

Voegelin's acousmatic drifts may be contained within the site of herself, but they also show an implied acceptance or at least potential of an "elsewhere". I would argue this elsewhere exists between the imagined inaudible source and its fictional enactment in listening. This elsewhere means listening can never be a static, site-specific activity: it is contingent upon the simultaneous and dual relations of sound, place and auditory perception.

Cox: Material Networks & Agencies

Similar to Voegelin, philosopher Christoph Cox's paper "Beyond Representation and Signification: Toward a Sonic Materialism" (2011), draws sound art towards more critical territories. He aligns environmental practices such as field recording with philosophical materialism and provides a nuanced way to deal with issues of the sonic. Where I aim to differ from Cox is in the aesthetic end of his discussion. The practical examples he shows as a result of a new materialist enquiry (also discussed amongst Phase One's chapter "Nostalgia, Vibrations & Aestheticised Dead Ends") are fuelled by an aesthetics of drones, clicks and abstract transduction: an acousmatic compositional project. As the reader will see from the practice of Phase's Two and Three, I am offering an entirely and uniquely different aesthetic, yet one that is built upon similar foundations. I will integrate new materialism's broader contexts further into this section and begin by unpacking Cox's opening premise.

Like LaBelle (2006) and Kim-Cohen (2009), Cox (2011) historically situates the emergence of sound art to the late 1960's, a time when conceptual art and post-minimalism exploded through its interrogation of process, documentation and site. Whilst the visual components were theorised and pulled into the art historical cannon many of the sounding aspects have, according to Cox, been silenced due to the ephemerality of the medium and difficulty in accessing site-specific works (see p.145-146). He goes on to suggest sound art (today) is under-theorised due to the inadequate and misleading nature of visual and text-based philosophical frameworks such as semiotics and post-structuralism³⁹. Cox approves their rejection of essentialism in accommodating a heterogeneous contemporary world. Yet the underlying consequence of such visual theories is, he suggests, manifest through the ontological separation of culture and nature. Cox (2011) believes this leads to forms

³⁹ Semiotics being the study of signs and signification through language and meaning. Post-structuralism being (amongst other things) the study of "truth" and the belief that human nature will always bias, repress or proliferate a distorted version of objective veracity.

of 'chauvinistic anthropocentrism' (p.147). In other words, humans are treated exclusively above and apart from nature.

Once again we see a blurring of aims that seek to collapse divisions: Ingold through inner and outer, Voegelin through subjectivity and meta-histories, Cox through nature and culture. As stated throughout, my overall aim was to similarly collapse categories for the specifics of field recording: soundscape and acousmatics being the obvious one, human and non-human (as show in Phase Two's practice) being another. However, what I have also identified in the practice of this Phase, and go on to show more acutely during Phase Three, is the need to remain in recognition of such binaries within the comprehension of an integrated practice. In other words, dualities must remain in at lest gestural contact with one another, not awash in combined negation that may only serve to produce indifference and apolitical practices through relative (subjective/objective) swings of interiority and exteriority.

Although Cox never directly labels Kim-Cohen a chauvinist anthropocentric, he does transpose the division of language and nature, knowledge and affect, onto Kim-Cohen's (2009) book; accusing him of dismissing works that operate beyond human forms of meaning and exchange (see p.147). Instead Cox offers an alternative way of critically locating the "sonic" through a philosophical turn to materialism. His sonic materialism would therefore:

eliminate the dual planes of culture/nature, human/non-human, sign/world, text/matter, [...] toward a thoroughgoing materialism that would construe human symbolic life as a specific instance of the transformative process to be found throughout the natural world – from the chemical reactions of inorganic matter to the rarefied domain of textual interpretation (Cox, 2011, p.148).

Cox's philosophy implies a fundamental misjudgement on the part of Kim-Cohen (see pp.32-33 of this thesis): sound is already in the "dematerialised" state Kim-Cohen calls it toward. The consequence being that to reveal such hitherto unheard phenomena, to re-materialise sound, is to give voice to marginalised, abject and affective forces; both in terms of the medium itself and the non-human perspectives which field recording and sound art so readily engages in.

Kim-Cohen's (2009) argument therefore runs the risk of being undermined by his own denial of sound as a material vibration: excluding it as such may only disembody and wrangle the medium further into yet another discursive dead end. As stated, Cox wants to move discussions of sound and listening away from these binary cul-de-sacs. Rather than continue to apply visual frameworks to do so, he is interested in building a critical model that reconsiders philosophy for the specific needs and nuances of a sound and a listener-centered practice: to critically locate and discuss sound in specific yet inclusive ways that pave a route beyond semiotic and representational visual matrixes, towards an exploration of the materiality of sound. He wants to explore sound's:

texture and temporal flow, its palpable effect on, and affection by the materials through and against which it is transmitted. What these works [referenced below] reveal, I think, is that the sonic arts are not more *abstract* than the visual but rather more *concrete*, and that they require not a *formalist* analysis but a *materialist* one (Cox, 2011, pp.148-149).

Arriving out of the historical philosophy of Henri Bergson, Frederick Nietzsche and Baruch Spinoza, new materialism's modern day context can be traced to feminist and post-humanist discourse⁴⁰. New materialism too attempts to negate the binaries of mind and matter, nature and culture, "them and us". From the mid to late 1970's

⁴⁰ New materialism is discussed primarily in relation to the material politics and ecologies of sound. Post humanist literature is discussed throughout the practice reflection documents of this Phase in terms of the rights of field recording's non-human, animal subjects.

onwards, such investigations were tied into destabilising power structures of patriarchy, capitalism and gender; its fundamental cause emphasised otherwise marginal or underrepresented aspects (human and non-human) within a modern day bio-political world⁴¹. Similar to post-humanism, such philosophies propose humans are one of many bodies or material forces co-existing amongst a distributed network of subjectivities (see Barrett & Bolt, 2013; Bennet 2010; Blackman, 2012; Coole & Frost, 2010; Latour's "Actor Network Theory", 2005).

'New materialist discourse derives its urgency from the ethical, ecological and political imperatives that loom as a consequence of this [anthropocentric] view of the world' (Barret & Bolt, 2013, p.3). On the surface, field recording appears aligned with this statement. As shown through soundscape studies, its roots are deeply ecological and bring to debate issues of climate and environmental change. However, I am specifically employing new materialism in order to update field recording's traditional acousmatic treatment of sound in order to debunk the soundscape artistic legacy, which, paradoxically like a purely humanist approach, treats 'the world as a passive resource for use by active humans' (Barret & Bolt, 2013, p.5). In this new materialist framework, sound would be considered in terms of its agency and relational politics, not as a compositional medium or socially detached object.

Ingold's continual attempts to re-distribute agency throughout the landscape and phenomenal forces such as weather, can also be said to fall within such materialist enquires. His emphasis rests upon how matter inter-relates: that sensate, affectual and vibrant "things" need to be discussed as part of a network of connective human and non-human agents. His chapter "Materials Against Materiality" (2011) discusses a stone and suggests its material agency is not derived in-itself, but through its relational contact to an elsewhere time and place (see pp.19-32). Although his

⁴¹ From Michel Foucault's use of the term, "bio-politics" relates to the technological apparatus and forces that seek to control populations and societies: factors on the increase as surveillance technology and network communications continue to proliferate modern life.

elsewhere is yet again located in a pre-industrial past, my own research similarly aims to recognise the material and agential properties of sound as a vibratory phenomena only if kept in relational and aesthetic contextual contact.

In Response to Cox & New Materialism: Key Points for an Original Practice

I agree with Cox in that sound, as a critical material, should be posited within such materialist theories amongst a conglomeration of marginal and discreet everyday forces and forms such as plants, electricity, food or gas: from the molecular to cosmic, all entwine and affect human life. Sound's phenomenal and invisible presence intrinsically binds our relational orientation of the world. Like that of inert matter its very nature means it so often goes under the radar of personal or political apprehension. New materialism attempts to amplify and highlight such hitherto unheard "things" and can greatly aid a more critical and relevant interrogation of sound from the viewpoint of its own distinct characteristics.

Importantly, and in relation to previous phenomenological accusations of apolitical dissolution, either social or self, new materialism is integrally connected to political and collective forms of understanding and power distribution. It brings 'biopolitics, critical geopolitics, and political economy together with genealogies and phenomenologies of everyday life' (Coole & Frost, 2010, p.28). New materialism is a critical context where I believe field recording should locate itself in order to update its affective relationship to, and way of representing, sound.

However relevant the context may appear to be for sound, its interpretation, through art practice, is where I believe the critical test resides. Recalling the criticisms I have levelled against soundscape studies and its contemporary legacies - through its objectifying, anthropocentric culture of capture - field recording can be said to be treating non-humans as fetish objects for compositional consumption. Passivity is

passed onto subjects (species and environments) in the field, through a patronising relationship, brought about by the powerful self-silent recordist and exploited practically through the one-way draining of sound. It is conflated by an over reliance on multi-channel performance presentations and a predominate focus which aesthetically appeals to the acousmatic ear of abstraction and de-contextual listening.

Crucially, the way I am proposing to re-approach, understand and interrogate such disjunction is precisely in practice: through the creation of an original aesthetics based on a new materialist understanding of sound and the environment. It is unique in that my practice looks and sounds entirely different from the examples Cox offers. He points to works from the likes of Christina Kubisch and Toshiya Tsunoda, as artists who deal explicitly with the phenomenal subject of sound such as electromagnetics and architectural vibration. I do not agree that these are conclusive representations for a materialist practice of field recording. In fact, I would revive Kim-Cohen's (2009) formal criticisms of such examples and declare a specific warning to field recording: that if already preoccupied with the material affects of sound the practice must be able to, in its representational stages, re-connect back into the social, political world as we (humans) know it. As the practice of this Phase will show, I am not denying sound's vibrant materiality. I am however contesting that sound exists in and of itself. It is always part of mechanical and relation coming together, whether audible or inaudible, human or non-human, real or imagined. The point I am making returns to my concerns over the aesthetic accumulation of silence: what is going unheard within the historical representation of texture and acousmatic playback? How can such abstractions and contextual denials be re-heard and re-amplified once they return into the world in ways that differ from pro-typical sound alone settings?

Kim-Cohen's earlier criticisms should therefore be clearly understood within the aesthetic framing of sound, not so much through its philosophical leakages. To stress

again, I am arguing that new materialist theories and concepts aid the motivational end of the field encounter and my own comprehension of sound as an agential and relational material. The danger lays dormant at the representational end, whereby human social-political contexts are sacrificed once more for an abstracted “pure” reproduction of sound. Non-human subjects may well be heard through their respective drones or clicks, but the maker (human) is yet again erased. If field recording’s foundational motivations suit new materialism’s more-than-human focus, in practice it must provide a counterweight aesthetics; it must return as much to the subjective human self in order to expose and contest the productions and mediations of its own making. If it neglects to re-locate, re-hear and reveal this side, the practice risks developmental stasis and self-obliteration.

Jane Bennett’s introduction to *Vibrant Matter* (2010) shows the potential imbalance of new materialism by stating:

The otherwise important topic of [human] subjectivity thus gets short shrift so that I may focus on the task of developing a vocabulary and syntax for, and thus better discernment of, the active powers issuing from nonsubjects (p.ix).

Countering Bennett, Ingold’s (2011) chapter along with Barrett & Bolt’s book *Carnal Knowledge: Towards a New Materialism Through the Arts* (2013), stresses the importance of materialist concerns resides in connecting back into relational art and everyday practice: returning such affective content into the representational and social reality of the “now”. The vital challenge being that new materialism must ‘account for the material reality of our everyday social existence without losing sight of the discursive dimension of that reality’ (Hekman, 2010 cited in Barrett & Bolt, 2013, p.7).

To be clear, this is exactly where I believe field recording needs an update: the ways in which it comes back into the world. This is how my practice posits an original contribution to the field. It is how I intend to keep the human at work as integrated yet identifiably registered as possible. I am convinced a conceptually similar, yet formally different and more applicable route exists for environmental sound arts practice; this is what Phase's Two and Three endeavour to show.

What new materialism offers (specifically) to field recording then is a reassessment of a possession-based culture. It provides new, political and ethical ways of thinking and treating its core medium of sound alongside and within an ecologically inclined practice. It helps to eradicate historical swings to acousmatic compositional objects, only if sound is treated with the same recognised agency and diversity once represented elsewhere. Within this proposition a field recording does not articulate itself through isolating or identifying the "voice" of a bird or building per se, nor in its complete abstraction or musical appropriation through composition and playback. It does so through an antagonistic acknowledgement that the practice is an inherently asymmetrical one: its aesthetics are built out of such self-critical and Inter-agential grounding.

Summary

Moving out of Phase One I was searching for a way to re-insert myself back into the practice: to literally begin re-hearing myself. I needed to re-root my practice in the relational, generative and participatory domains of human dwelling and listening, which Ingold and Voegelin expressed in their respective ways. However, as Ingold's foray into the weather made clear, this was not as simple as first thought; the process of embodiment, specific to the sensorial perception of place, brought with it the ongoing potential for self dissolution. In many ways Voegelin's text can be read as an attempt to reel Ingold back from the clouds, yet her endeavour to do so may well become locked in an equally immersed and dissolved world, where the self and imagination, are never quite able come back into contact with sociality.

The "I" of new materialism provides not a sovereign subject but one caught up amongst the forces and flows of other things. Unlike Ingold however, new materialism, through its political and feminist focus, is resolutely connected to the "now". Cox's proposition of a sonic materialism goes some way to cement this philosophical alignment, but the real contribution I can bring to either his, Ingold's or Voegelin's work is through my own practice. Phase's Two and Three are not therefore built on materiality in the acousmatic, in-itself implication of the word, but more in the conceptual understanding that materiality (for the sonic) is an inherently socio-political realm. Listening as such becomes a act of revelation, one that unveils sound as invisible, yet material elastic that binds, stretches, amplifies and obfuscates my relationship to the world; bringing in its wake issues of ethics, agency and representation: aspects in urgent need of address within contemporary field recording practice. The key is to make the sound's vibrant materiality less about "matter" than it is "mattering".

As I will show next through Phase's Two and Three, the result of conceptualising sound within new materialist frameworks is felt through a self-reflexive and formally expansive practice, based upon its own politics of production and inter-relational concerns. It is an original body of work I am calling "Inter-agential" as it involves a unique and critical dissection of myself alongside the medium, species, and tools within which field recording resides. Once again, it is not a practice that strives towards the formal exploration of sound through aesthetic abstraction or "sound-in-itself" composition.

During the following practice reflection the reader will notice post-humanist literature being employed throughout. As new materialism hopes to re-assess sound's own phenomenal agency, post-humanism, predominately through discourse from animal studies, offers field recording a comparative way of examining the rights and ethical consequences of representing its non-human subjects.

Phase Two Practice Reflection

Towards an Inter-agential Practice

Introduction

How can human and non-human agency be negotiated in practice?

Accidentally severing my microphone cables (during Phase One) had given me no choice but to explore other methods of listening and formal strategies for dissemination. Of course I could have replaced the cable but this, I believed, would have been missing the point. *30 Minutes of Listening* (2012) had instigated a representational shift in my practice and I moved into Phase Two of the research keen to experience and mediate my listening in more critical ways. This shift however was not merely a formal one, motivated by technical circumstances. It was based on findings from Phase One; where I had begun to break down field recording's legacies, both personal and contextual. As I encountered concurrent research in contemporary anthropology, a consequent sense of renewed experimentation fell over my practice. Through the likes of Ingold, 2000; Bennet 2010; Hodder 2012; Rodaway 1994, and their mutual advocacy of shared sensory, relational and affectual experience, I was able to tear up the notional taxonomic soundscape rulebook. These references enabled imaginative and critical leaps of faith in methods alongside a unique contextual territory within which to frame my practice.

Phase Two's practice focused upon one central question: is field recording an inconsequential act? I dismantled this question over three primary projects: *A Proposed Vocabulary Exchange* (2013) responded by tracing hunting's linguistic legacy of predation onto the practice. This work also hinted, for the first time, towards a way of engaging with an aesthetics of "future" rather than "past".

Mut(e)ual Consent (2013) moved further into the representational rights of animals, re-imagining the most canonical example possible: the first ever recording of

birdsong. Interlacing texts from the likes of Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari and John Berger, I expand upon my strategy for a practice based around the acknowledgment of difference between humans and non-humans. Following on are discussions around the influence of archival practices upon field recording and the notion of “truth” within documentary practice in an age of technological change.

Finally, *Re-capturing* (2013) continues to employ new materialist concepts in order to show the “entangled” or, I as would like to stress, the intrinsically antagonistic nature of an Inter-agential practice. Taxidermy is discussed in parallel to field recording through the mutual application of an aesthetic based on the illusion of reality. The work specifically interrogates the embroiled and contested relationships between myself, sound and its tools of “capture”.

All three projects adopt what I have called “Trans-hearing”. This is a method of imagined perspectival switches between myself and non-human species and phenomena. I am adamant this is not a reductive anthropomorphic method. Jane Bennett herself has advocated a slight amount of anthropomorphism is necessary in order to engage with non-humans as it:

can uncover a whole world of resonances and semblances – sounds and sights that echo and bounce far more than would be possible were the universe to have hierarchical structure. We at first may see only a world in our own image, but what appears next is a swarm of “talented” and vibrant materialities” (Bennett, 2010, p.99).

For Bennett anthropomorphism has a positive function: if engaging with non-human subjects one has to be committed to adopting multiple (animal) identities or risk forever objectifying the subject. I claim that switching views (human-animal-technological) with the help of contemporary new materialist and post humanist

frameworks is not for transcendence or scientific knowledge. The two reasons I am advocating the (imaginary) investment in non-human subjectivities is firstly: hearing from the point of view of an animal allows for greater recognition of my own presence in the field: to acknowledge that “things” are listening to me. Secondly, the very term “hearing” has been deployed in order to stress the emphasis rests on affective comprehension rather than semantic knowledge or the hierarchies of quality implied by “listening”. Trans-hearing works at hypothetical and gestural levels. It does not take itself as a rational, knowledge driven method, nor one of sentimental association. To be clear, I have employed perspectival switches of the ear as a means to acknowledge the different subjectivities that make up field recording practice. Not by attributing human traits onto non-humans but through a recognition that such relations are built on imaginary and uncertain encounters⁴².

I should also mention here that this Phase began practically, as Miwon Kwon (2002, p.33) would say, to ‘unhinge’ myself away from the site of study. Initially, my relationship to South Gare was focused toward its specific geo-political landscape. However, as the research progressed, the inter-agency I was striving for had to evolve in terms of South Gare’s own representation; it had to become more than just an illustration of place; it needed to become part of the “doing” and to contact back into a body of work that could incorporate biography, modes of production, historical inter-textuality and self-criticism in order to define its originality. Phase Three comprehensively re-addresses my relationship to site- specificity and South Gare’s overall function within the full context of this research.

⁴² The work and section “Mut(e)ual Consent” elaborates on the method of Trans-hearing.

A Proposed Vocabulary Exchange

‘Always we try to put the wild in a cage; if not literal cages of iron, then cages of banality, of false parallels, of anthropomorphic sentimentality’ (Fowles, 1984, p.88).

During Phase One a language of predation had haunted my every linguistic move. Throughout conferences, texts, videos and other related research material, words such as “capture”, “take” and “pursuit” dominated. I found myself having a physical reaction every time I read or heard such words. I would wince and shuffle in my chair: “surely others could hear the same sense of predatory acquisition that I was squirming from?”

Hunting has, throughout history, been based upon the pursuit of a living organism. The reason for this, and relationship to it, can be entirely different from one culture to the next. So-called “hunter-gatherer” societies are said to base hunting on need and necessity and therefore, foster a reciprocal understanding of human-animal-landscape relations (Ingold, 2000, see p.42). As a result, hunting co-exists through mutual dependencies rather than a sport or leisure activity. The latter being founded upon legacies from 13th century monarchies in England and France, whereby to hunt asserted economic and class based hierarchies of power (Kete, 2002, see p.23). Being neither of the two, I was keen to avoid adopting any one position over another. Much like the preservation and acoustic design extremes, I was more interested in critically interlacing the historical binaries through practice. Hunting’s legacy upon field recording became prime material for such a critical enquiry. I discovered Gordon Hempton, one of the world’s renowned nature recordists, had trademarked the phrase “Sound tracker” for his own work. Tracking on his part is deemed ecological, yet it is impossible to remove hunting’s alliance within the use of such language. A long-standing and popular field recording radio programme called “Framework” also promotes itself as “The Art of Sound Hunting”. Even Ludwig

Koch, the grandfather of field recording himself published *Hunting by Ear* (1937). Whether for pleasure or necessity, hunting had quietly grafted its way upon the language and discourse of contemporary field recording practice.

A paper titled “Birdwatching Etiquette: The Need for a Developing Philosophy” (1976) offered an analogous way to think these issues through. Written by environmentalist Richard L. Glinski, the text evaluates the impact ornithology may have upon the very species and environments bird watchers observe. As the title suggests, the paper has more than a hint of austere, moral posturing. Glinski (1976) provides a possible code of conduct for ornithologists in the field. His focus rests upon the management of people and is deeply misanthropic (see p.657). His description of ornithologists is a frustrated observation of two types of watchers: one solitary “stalkers” and two, “disorganised” groups. The statement below also reflects the language of predation that haunts looking, as it does listening:

Various techniques are employed to locate a particular species, including well organized groups that are led by knowledgeable guides, solitary or paired birders that stalk quietly and slowly, and disorganized groups and individuals that stumble loudly and randomly about (Glinski, 1976, p.655).

It is worth stating here that I was not interested in occupying any altruistic ground upon which to base a “correct” field recording practice upon. For all its exclusive undercurrents the paper does contain some extremely pertinent points. Through specific examples Glinski (1976) continually draws attention to the apparent inconsequentiality of looking (see p.656). In particular he critiques the method of playing back bird vocalisations in order to draw species into sight. The technique was developed within bio-acoustic and wildlife sound recording circles throughout the early to mid twentieth century, as birdsong became a valid tool for the study of avian migration and behaviour (Bruyninckx, 2013, see pp.59-64). Still notoriously

difficult to prove⁴³, Glinski (1976) suggests the method might disrupt feeding, mating and nesting patterns (see p.656). He goes on to state 'Essentially, the effects of birdwatching are unknown; it has been assumed that to pursue birds with binoculars is inconsequential' (Glinski, 1976, p.656). The implication that looking has consequences, even in the natural world, brings with it the acknowledgment of agency and rights for non-human forces. Applying this directly onto field recording, I asked: is it enough to presume the practice is inconsequential?

This question opened critical and imaginative territories that I could begin to fold back into my practice. My part-diary, part-fictional text *Severing all Ties* (2013) had begun to reflect such issues, and now I was able to develop these concerns further. Regardless of motivation, if the goal of hunting was to terminate a pursued subject, what was being terminated during a so-called "sound-hunt"? If a language of predation is used to proliferate such activities, what does it say of how sound is being treated conceptually? What does it imply for the rights of non-human species and phenomena? How are all these facets (including sound) being represented if they are continually talked of as being "captured"? As no visible or audible harm is done to a species or place, field recording by default is deemed an inconsequential act. Perhaps because of this foundational assumption the criticality I was striving for throughout was lacking: field recording, through soundscape studies legacies of preservation, only ever appeared an ecologically positive act. I was certain this assumption needed to be unpicked in practice. If no "real" consequences of recording seem apparent, then perhaps the language and discourse may offer some insight?

Visual documentary practices are well versed in the paradoxical preservation-hunting conundrum. Susan Sontag's writing delved into the metaphorical disconnect between "shooting" and preserving time and space through photographic

⁴³ See: Silby, D. (2013) [Internet] Available from: <<http://www.sibleyguides.com/2011/04/the-proper-use-of-playback-in-birding/>> [Accessed 14th October 2013].

documentation. Her seminal text *On Photography* (1979) recognised the metaphorical and practical reality of predation caught up in the act of photography: 'there is something predatory in the act of taking a picture. To photograph people is to violate them [...] it turns people into objects that can be symbolically possessed' (Sontag, 1977, p14).

Roland Barthes *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (1981) also claimed photography produces a death whilst trying to preserve life (see pp.14-15). He suggests photographing or "shooting" the subject creates a existential loss, one that 'may correspond to the intrusion, in our modern society, of an asymbolic Death, outside of religion, outside of ritual, a kind of abrupt dive into literal Death (Barthes, 1981, p.14).

Visual artists have explored this dialogue too: Jean-François Lecourt *Shot into the Camera*, (1987) is a self referencing work whereby the artist literally shoots his own image in camera. Sylvia Ballhause, *Shooting Myself* (2008), Steven Pippin's *Point Blank* (2010) and Christian Marclay's *Crossfire* (2007) are other variations on the ironic relationship between preservation and predation.

I began asking questions through similar processes of "shooting" myself. How could I hear the consequences of my own actions? Admittedly this is where a huge amount of imagination was required. It was during this Phase where creative listening techniques began to develop (Trans-hearing). Examples such as: how could I listen to myself from the point of view of a bird? What if I was to hunt myself? How could I track my own impact upon an environment? Could I employ other operatives in the field to track me: a camouflaged recording unit that would monitor my every move?⁴⁴

⁴⁴ These questions show the reader how the focus of my research had to shift upon me, more so than the steelworkers or ecological meta-narrative of South Gare.

It seemed that reversing perspectives and swapping identities would help to address Phase One's problems. This Trans-hearing does not do so through anthropomorphic transformation. It is a methodology that I could begin to re-hear myself through the imagined inter-related subjectivities of others. I needed to turn field recording histories around; mirror things a little. Instead of collecting sound, I began to think more of collecting myself. In opposition to hunting a species or place I thought of place capturing me. Rather than employing technology as practical, inanimate tools, I imagined them as animate beings, complete with agency and will: how could I capture a microphone? How could a microphone capture me? Crucially I settled back upon the issue of language. How could I swap the dominant and predatory vocabulary, which is tied into the discourse of field recording? What would I base my substitutions on?

I was keen to move away from hunting's legacy of predation towards a language based on process and reciprocity: one that would collapse the hegemonic (hunter-hunted) relationship in the field and move instead towards the proposed (Inter-agential) practice based upon the amplification of relational agency and ethics. I was also attempting to drag my own practice away from the musical and compositional aesthetics of Schafer's soundscape project.

I began by examining the vocabulary of field recording from interview transcripts with contemporary recordists. Along with highlighting predatory and acquisition-based discourse, I focused upon words in which technology or technique were involved in mediating an experience of recording. Early experiments involved analysing and re-constructing pre-existing interviews. Through a process of (digital) cutting and pasting, I began to practically refine my substitutions. On the following page are examples taken from these early attempts. The first (Figure 15) is a re-assembled interview with field recordist Chris Watson from the book *Autumn Leaves*

(2007). The second (figure 16) is an imaginary interview that honed in on particular words and phrases I wanted to exchange.

Figure 15 perhaps best highlights the absurd process and challenge of swapping language within the scenario of a real interview. Reflecting on this I began to question whether the method was the most appropriate strategy. Was the aim to integrate a new vocabulary into real situations and practical conversation? Or, as the title began to emerge (*A Proposed Vocabulary Exchange*), was the project more a hypothetical proposition centered on specific words rather than full sentences?

Test.1 Chris Watson interview:

Actual Version:
I'm more selective about what I **record** and what I don't, so I choose what **sound** of the wind to record. I guess through my experience I've learned what **techniques** work and what don't [...] wind doesn't make any **sound** until it hits something and then that **sound** is created by that great force of air in motion, and how you **capture** that depends upon place and **equipment**.

Proposed Version:
I'm more selective about what I **reciprocate** and what I don't, so I choose what **affect** of the wind to relate. I guess through my experience I've learned what **situations** work and what don't. The wind doesn't make any **affect** until it hits something and then that event is created by that great force of air in motion, and how you **inhabit** that depends upon place and **myself**.

Figure 15

Early text experiments (a) (2012), copyright the author

Test.2 Hypothetical:

Actual Version:
When I was listening to the **sounds** of wolves I wanted to **capture** their whines and howls. I set my **microphone** and began to **record**. But when I listened back to the **recordings** I realised I had positioned my **equipment** in the wrong way, so all I **recorded** was the general **soundscape**. So, the following night I went back out to the same area. This time I positioned the **microphone** in the right place. I couldn't believe what I heard after that. Their howls were like **music**, coming out of the distant night, a lonely call that haunted me as I listened. I couldn't wait to use them in a **composition**.

Proposed Version:
When I was listening to the **affect** of wolves I wanted to **inhabit** their whines and howls. I set **myself** and began to **reciprocate**. But when I listened back ~~to~~ [in] relation I realised I had positioned my **body** in the wrong way, so all I **discovered** was the general **audialfield**. So the following night I went back out to the same area. This time I positioned **myself** in the right place. I couldn't believe what I heard after that. Their howls were like **events**, coming out of the distant night, some lonely call that haunted me as I listened. I couldn't wait to use them in a **confluence**.

Figure 16

Early text experiments (b) (2012), copyright the author

Through these early experiments I came to realise the work was a poetic gesture: something that in reality would not change language and discourse, but in practice could reveal a sense of criticality and therefore begin to animate the possible consequences of field recording. The vocabulary exchange was best articulated as a series of isolated swaps: a simple “from” and “to” would be all that framed each word substitution. Throughout months of testing and refining, and after discussing the slides during my presentation at the “Sound Diaries Symposium” (2013) at Oxford Brookes University, I settled on a series of word exchanges. I also broadened my remit of words beyond sound and field recording by incorporating dominant vocabulary from the wider reaches of nature documentary. I believed this would give the work further scope for development, engagement and presentation in the future. I experimented with showing the work as a digital slideshow but felt it needed more gravitas in its formal presentation. I considered the use of a 35mm slide projector, hoping a certain “authority” would be added with each “clunk” of the carousel’s rotation.

Not forgetting Phase One’s conclusion surrounding self-suppression, I wanted to be more physically involved in the aesthetic presentation of work. I was also aware the work had a contextual alignment with conceptual arts text-based oeuvre: the project fundamentally being a condensation of practice into text. However, I did not want it to be purely conceptual, it had to literally show my authorial hand along with accommodating additional physical objects.

I returned to my original method of digitally cutting and pasting words from interview transcripts but this time settled upon repeating the process manually with scissors and card. Filming myself cutting actual words and substituting them for others began to play with language in a physical and process-based manner. Employing a static bird’s-eye point of view for the camera also enabled key symbols, both audio and visual, to be further explored. Placing paperweights of birds upon

the main “from” and “to” page hinted at a context towards which the language was referencing. In addition, the inclusion of a faintly audible soundtrack from an off-screen television documentary on hunting and conservation not only referenced the subject area, but also began to describe the domestic space within which the process was taking place. It offered a more gestural way of countering the exoticised settings that field recording and nature documentary so often occupies. Instead the work was located starkly within the everyday humdrum of passing aeroplanes, natural light, television sets and a tea stained table.

A language of predation had offered the most solid evidence in revealing how sound, and its non-human subjects were being treated. Parallel discourse had also linked field recording to legacies of hunting and provided critical insight into what is metaphorically being terminated and excluded within the practice: field recording was paradoxically silencing the agency of its non-human subjects and sound as a politically relational phenomenon.

This insight re-affirmed the creative and critical role my practice had within the broader context of the PhD. Combining literature from sound art and contemporary anthropology had enabled me to rigorously inject imagination into my work. The title of the work, particularly the use of the word “proposition”, seemed most pertinent. As a device it provided a chance to engage field recording in a discussion over its future: not in its past. The word also unlocked the gestural and poetic potential for re-framing the ethics and agencies of the natural world, in addition to sound as a vibrant political material.

The work was screened as part of “Generative Constraints” in November 2013, a conference and exhibition that aimed to explore poetic and political practices that arrive out of the limits of constraint⁴⁵. Throughout Phase Two these gestures were to increase as my practice turned more and more towards ethical considerations: not in terms of moral or correct behaviour but as actual material for critical and artistic endeavour.

Please watch “Track 7” on the accompanying DVD.



Figure 17

A Proposed Vocabulary Exchange (2013), installation view, copyright the author

⁴⁵ Published online. See: (2013) [Internet] Available from: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FGCBDERzILE> [Accessed 20th December 2013].

Mut(e)ual Consent

You're a clumsy intruder and I can hear your every move. I'm acutely aware of your presence; every twig that snaps beneath your feet, every clunk you make and every breath you try to hold.

Your attempt to be invisible is a farce; you are not and never will be. You are loud, comical and frenzied. I have never given consent to any of what you do. I do not sing for you.

Why don't you just come out of hiding; maybe then we could share our differences?

(Wright, *Journal*, 2013)

The above extract is a creative writing entry based on the Trans-hearing method of switching perspectives. The final line is perhaps the clearest indication that I was exploring human-animal inter-subjectivity. I was not attempting to dissolve into a bird, or assign human centred attributes. I wanted to draw out levels of relational tension and difference within such close knit environments. I will never know what an animal feels or hears, as I often never know a sounds source or when exactly it impacts upon me. Like Voegelin's earlier example of the radio, the process of Trans-hearing takes an imaginative leap of faith along with the uncertain acknowledgment of other heard perspectives, transmitters and receivers.

Trans-hearing is aligned with art historian Steve Baker's (2000) description of animal-sceptical art: works that differ from animal-endorsing arts focus on advocacy, and instead investigate the complex cultural and mediated relations between animals and humans (see pp.7-25). We humans are reluctant to invest in animal perspectives for fear of accusations relating to transcendence or worse, simply patronising animals with human values that may not apply. The dilemma and

implicit ambiguity of assigning animal rights is bound into the compromised inevitability of shifting human centered traits onto animals, or as this research has suggested through new materialism, even onto sound itself. Indicative attributes applied follow examples such as reflexivity, autonomy, rational and relational thinking (Regan, 2007, see. p.28). These are the common (human) denominators, often misapplied in granting non-humans perceived rights and moral status. Regan (2007) also shows there is a fundamental paradox within the allocation of such values, as not all humans have rights: not all are rational or autonomous (p.28).

As previously stated, I did not want to impose an aesthetics for the needs of field recording that continued to eradicate my own human authorial hand. My practice should be read as an attempt to animate the complex uncertainty of these shared, in the field, relations. What much of Phase Two and Three gives form to was exactly this sense of unknowing demarcation. Regan's (2007) own point around animal rights is perhaps the most poignant parallel to draw here: agency and ethical status is realised through absence: not by larger cages, but empty ones (see p.29).

Originally published in 1980, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's chapter "Becoming-Animal", from their text *A Thousand Plateaus* (2005) is often cited within post human animal studies as a way of understanding this dilemma and the implicit ambiguity involved between humans and animals (see Rothfels 2002; Wolfe 2003). Their text on the whole may offer a parallel way of framing Phase Two's practice although it is one I will quickly side step for matters of clarity⁴⁶. Like my own understanding of human to non-human relations, Deleuze and Guattari's interpretation is not based upon identification in the categorical sense of the word, or imitation. Instead, they attempt to animate difference within shared relations:

⁴⁶ Like all contextual literature employed throughout this PhD, I have strived to keep it as relevant and practically in conversation with my core subjects as possible. Rather than appropriate or undermine philosophical texts that may well touch upon similar concerns, I have instead chose to harvest literature, (ethnography, new materialism and post humanism) which has relatable and specific historical connections to sound and field recording's key concerns.

Becoming is a rhizome, not a classificatory tree or genealogical tree. Becoming is certainly not imitating, or identifying with something; neither is it regressing-progressing; neither is it corresponding, establishing [...] becoming is a verb' (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005, p.239).

Their examples are found amongst vampires and werewolves as the chapter is set in the year 1730. This also prompts Deleuze & Guattari (2005) to state "Becoming-Animal" always involves a pack or collective (see p.239). "Becoming" is fixated upon process rather than end result; and the multiple dispersed identities found within the assemblages of human-animal networks. "Becoming-Animal" is not about transformation per se, but an ever expanding map of differences between the two (artist-animal) that are always moving in and out of one another, more as a continuous ebb and flow of transference that occurs only in an instant.

However relevant (even if written in a deliberately ambiguous and self-enclosed manner) the text may appear to be, I found it difficult to ignore the contradictory connotations of the word "becoming". Although it may productively imply a process, so too it heavily fosters the notion of transforming into, or perhaps worse, acquiring the animal. The following quote by John Berger reflects my resistance to the word within the specific parameters of a documentary practice: 'The notion "capture" is wrong. By taking the animal's appearance it was possible to become the animal. Becoming was the only way of possessing' (Berger, 1984, p.97).

Similar to Sontag (1977), for Berger (1984), "becoming" is a form of possession. For Deleuze & Guattari "becoming" is a way of undoing identity. For the purposes of this particular study and field recording's own unique history, neither "possession" nor "non-identity" was my overall aim. Field recording must dismiss a possession-based culture of accumulation whilst acknowledging its authors as equally recognisable co-participants of mediation.

Through *A Proposed Vocabulary Exchange* (2013) I had begun to develop an aesthetic engagement with the ethics of field recording. I wanted to continue by interrogating the veracity and fictive potential of the documents (audio and text) the practice depends upon. Furthermore, I sought to continue my engagement and disruption of field recording's historical legacies, specifically aiming to expand upon *A Proposed Vocabulary Exchange* (2013) with something more inter-textual and imaginative.

I turned my attention to Ludwig Koch, a pioneer of wildlife recording mentioned during the introductory section of the thesis "Field Recording & its Origins". Koch became famed for his recordings of birds and other natural habitat primarily from the mid 1930's onwards. Born into a Jewish family he fled from Germany to the U.K during Nazi occupation in February 1936. Upon his arrival Koch brought with him a personal heritage of classical music through his study of the violin. Similar to Schafer's own background, composition would always influence Koch's approach to the natural world. Whilst in the U.K his passion for wildlife transferred into a professional endeavour. He published various "Sound-Books", the first of a kind to combine recorded wildlife on disc along with text and imagery. *Songs of Wild Birds* (1936) and *More Songs of Wild Birds* (1937) brought wildlife recording into the commercial realm and practically invented what many now call "Sonic Postcards"⁴⁷. From 1940 onwards Koch produced an array of radio programmes for the BBC, all highlighting the sound of nature and animal language. During the same time he would engage in public talks and conferences, playing his recordings of birds and other wildlife primarily for identification and educational purposes. Although he went on to cover mechanical and urban sounds it was in nature that Koch found most of his success⁴⁸. Transmitting his recordings directly into homes through the burgeoning medium of radio helped to promote his work and public identity. Prior

⁴⁷ Audio version of a visual postcard. Available from: <<http://soundandmusic.org/projects/sonic-postcards>> accessed [12.09.13].

⁴⁸ Having spent time with Koch's personal archive at the British Library I was amazed to see the level of popularity he attained during the post second world war era. Comparisons to David Attenborough would not go amiss.

to Koch's death in 1974 he was still recording wildlife for the BBC. Even at the age of eighty he was in the field, recording at a nest of swallows in Somerset (Burton, 1974). Yet for all of Koch's impact and accolades perhaps one of his most notorious claims to fame resides in a recording he made in 1889. At the time, Koch's father had given the aspiring naturalist an Edison phonograph kit, complete with wax cylinders to record onto⁴⁹. He began by experimenting upon his own private menagerie of exotic pets, kept in the family home. It was at the tender age of eight that Koch made what is now believed to be the first ever recording of birdsong committed to any form of media carrier. Inscribed onto wax, the recording still resides in the BBC Sound Archives today⁵⁰. No doubt Koch's penchant for animals came from a place of childhood curiosity and a desire to understand. Moving into adulthood his status and reputation became fully integrated into the history of wildlife and environmental sound recording. But how is his original subject represented in the annals of history?

The bird in question was a captive Indian or Common Shama, native to South and South East Asia. Dis-placed, re-located and housed within a cage, it seems to have been part of the Victorian era's penchant for curiosity, collection and display. It hails from Muscicapidae lineage, a large family of small Passerine birds derived from the Common House Sparrow. Ironically these birds are not known for their singing, yet it is from this species that the world (apparently) has its historical first. Of course no bird can ever sign a consent form as in human-to-human circumstances, but should this exclude thinking about its representational rights? What does its biographical absence tell us about how the rights of non-human species and phenomena are ascribed? Again, is it enough to assume that recording the sound of a species (or environment) is inconsequential? And what of Koch's own "silence"? Not audible alongside the crackling birdsong, but nevertheless "captured" at the same time onto

⁴⁹ Invented by Thomas Edison in 1877, it was the first mechanical device to record and re-produce sound. Originally sound was recorded onto a piece of tinfoil before moving onto wax cylinders prior to earlier twentieth century innovations with discs and tape.

⁵⁰ Available from: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/archive/archive_pioneers/6505.shtml> accessed [12.09.13].

wax. What is really being preserved and heard? Is the status for any such (human to non-human) recording always “pending”, enacted through asymmetrical (mute) consent?

Isenberg (2002) suggests the motivations for such acts of preservation can only ever be derived from human values (see p.60). Conservationists may argue the bird’s voice now lives on forever; there is no more we, as humans, can do to mark its relevance in history. To this I would agree in principle, I cannot and do not want to over sentimentalise or shift away from my own identity as a human. However, in this particular case the species was not, and is still not, endangered in any way. The default assumption that recording nature (even when not endangered) is beneficial to science or ecology operates closely within a gift economy, whereby forms of exchange are not necessarily based on currency but instead, symbolic gifts and objects (Bruyninckx, 2013, see p.100). Bruyninckx’s claims fall squarely at the science and archival end of environmental sound practice, whereby donating a recording to an institute takes on the moral amplitude of giving blood.

Although gift economies aim to build social communities and eradicate market values of capitalism, power abuse cannot be wholly dismissed. Through a preservational gift economy capital gain is transferred over and onto equivalent modes of restriction and access. Institutional hierarchies of value particularly undermine the situation within science, archives and academia (see limited public access to journals for example), whereby knowledge is power, exchanged within a relatively closed circle: “access” becomes an equivalent currency to capital-based power. As with anything that pertains to exclusivity, what then is going unheard?

I would argue this question raises the necessary method of Trans-hearing. Imaginatively transferring the ear’s view, from mine to bird was again, not an anthropomorphic move but a way of re-hearing the silent presence of the listener-

observer: it unveils the absence of the human at work. The method helped to continue probing field recording's foundational assumptions surrounding preservation and the apparent inconsequentiality within which the practice is built upon. Thinking, discussing, animating and addressing these questions, became a deep well for critical and imaginative practical experimentation. Trans-hearing shows the practice is not an absolute process of immersion but one based on shared and acknowledged difference: "knowledge" is as known as it is unknown, inside as it is outside of my own comprehension.

The historic representation of animals within media and the arts has followed a trajectory similar to field recording's own. Starting out as representing scientific fact, early twentieth century natural history films and photography were, for the most part, devoid of creative re-presentation (Bouse, 2003, see p.217). However, advances in broadcast technology from the mid 1930's onwards brought wildlife onto mainstream television schedules, and as a result, meant the field had to become more open to creative interpretation as a way of facilitating viewers cinematic expectations (Bouse, 2003, see p.218). Moving further into the latter half of the century, with the advent of digital postproduction techniques, the very notion of representing so-called "truth" was clearly unstable ground.

It is interesting to note issues of authorship and veracity were called into question around the same time for wildlife and nature films as they were for ethnography's own self-critical period: during the 1970's and 1980's. The two fields, so deeply concerned with the representation of cultures and species, endured a simultaneous crisis over the very notion of objective truth. Again, James Clifford (1987) perhaps best showed the future path for both scholars and artists when stating these forms of representation were best thought of as 'true-fictions' (p.6).

“Truth” and the re-presentation of “reality” is common currency within field recording practice and discourse. Like nature documentaries, the plausibility of objective analysis, mimesis and identification, began to disintegrate as the development of technology forced the practice into blurred representational territories. Bernie Krause, an acoustic ecologist and one of the world’s renowned field recordists suggests ‘the prime goal for any recording is the creation of an illusion that creates an honest sense of place’ (Krause cited in Toop, 2004, p.70). In this comment, Krause is reminding us of the inherent perceptual slippage that occurs whilst in the act of recording: what is heard whilst recording is always different to what is auditioned when listening back to the same document. As Toop (2004) elaborates, a field recording is only a trace or shadow of an event or time; it is an illusion of sorts, ripe with fictive potential yet based utterly in conversation with a real time and place (see p.71).

A precedent for such true-fictions arrived during 1951 in the “Men from Montana” exhibition, held at the American Museum of Natural History. The exhibit focused upon Peruvian tribes and promoted its use of sound as a museum first (Eley, 2012). However, the sounds used were not, as marketed, from the hills and mountains of Peru but from amongst others, a Manhattan bathtub and the Bronx Zoo (Eley, 2012). Later released on CD as *The Sounds of a Tropical Rain Forest in America* (1952), the disc confirmed the appropriative potential of field recordings and supported not any one particular rainforest, but the illusion of such. Film, particularly the work of Foley artists must also be acknowledged here for its influence upon modern day field recording practice. As noted in the “Background” section of this thesis, a Foley artist reproduces all incidental sounds and sound effects for film and television. In other words, the footsteps we hear in a films are often the sound of a Foley artist walking in various trays of textures within a sound proof studio; far removed from the original event in terms of time and space. Today these skills are recognised by film-sound experts such as Michel Chion (1994), and have come under particular scrutiny

within nature and wildlife documentaries, where depictions of truth are more implied than mainstream cinema (Mendick & Malnick, 2011).

From day one of this research similar ethical considerations had over shadowed my every move. Within the context of a PhD, practical examples such as interview consent forms; plagiarism, health and safety were all part of the process. Being ethical has been applied consistently to both myself and those involved, either through direct contact or contextual proximity. During Phase One's overview of field recording and soundscape studies, it was clear to me that the practice needed to hold a mirror up to itself in order to contest some of its methodologies and foundational motivations. Of course many reflexive mirrors (lens or ears) exist, be they aesthetic, contextual or historical, but I came to believe an ethical one was perhaps the most useful to hold up against the practice. Again, this is not to say I wanted to ascertain a "truth" in any wide-ranging way, it was the opposite in fact. I did not want to implement an ethical mirror as standard or code of conduct for the practice to follow. I was not interested in ethics as a just or moral pursuit. All of these things do not exist in a realm where sound, through its illusion of presence, is perhaps the most deceptive medium one could encounter.

I strived to employ ethics in both critical and creative ways. I wanted to use such considerations primarily as artistic material. As field recording concerns itself with the sounds of species and environments, it seems odd for the practice to largely ignore the agency and rights of such non-human subjects and phenomena? How is sound being treated in the methods of capture; in the way it is stored; in the way it is composed; in the way it is discussed?

Building on the work of *A Proposed Vocabulary Exchange* (2013) I began to devise my own "true- fiction" in the form of a participant consent form for animals. It was based on the same standardised layout found within oral history's own institutional

guidelines. I began by applying the consent form to birds known for their virtuoso or lyrical song range. The nightingale was an initial experiment. However, the motivation seemed too broad and typical. What was its connection to my research? Could I be more disruptive and poignant with my choice? As soon as these questions began to evolve I returned to Koch's recording of the Indian or Common Shama bird. If I were craving some direct, critical disruption of field recording's canonical legacies, surely there would be none better to re-imagine than the first ever-recorded birdsong?

I re-approached the project with this historical first in mind. The form itself would feature an absent signature block from the participant (bird). In terms of Koch's (recordist) own signature I decided it would be more effective for my aims, not to mention the ethics of appropriation itself, if Koch's signature was also left blank, rather than forged. I did not want to over sentimentalise the bird or alienate Koch in anyway. Instead I aimed to propose that the status for any such (human to non-human) recording is locked in uncertain mute consent. I consider this document to be a re-activation of the silent aesthetic legacy I have mentioned throughout: author-recordist absence being re-presented through performative absence.

Mut(e)ual Consent (2013) was shown at various institutes and paper presentations including "Sound Diaries" Oxford Brookes University; "Revisiting the Quarry", Yorkshire Sculpture Park; "European Sound Studies Association", University of Copenhagen. I still have ambitions of finding its "right" presentational setting. Options I have considered include placing it as a rogue, unofficial entry within the British Library Sound Archive. Yet, I believe this might be construed as too confrontational. The potential of housing the form within an archival display cabinet, complete with humidity monitor may be another option? Here the document would take on an air of authority through the appropriated institutional aesthetics. Perhaps it could be pushed further? I could use a sample of the actual recording and play it

through a small speaker cone alongside the document and housed within the display: gesturing towards the captivity in which the original recording was made.

Building upon *A Proposed Vocabulary Exchange* (2013), the work cemented my desire to critically negotiate the ethics and agencies of human and non-human relations. I believe there is a rich and unique body of work to be uncovered in this area. Not in the enforcement of ethics per se but around the creative questioning of such structures, through aesthetic play and disruption. Sound compounds this contested relationship: I have chosen to work with perhaps the most fictitious and prone medium to re-contextualising and re-appropriation there is. Similar to the artistic use of sound, ethical aesthetics and structures can and should be questioned, distorted and re-imagined in order to provide greater critical rigour.

Adopting a method of Trans-hearing, I could manifest these threads in practice and address the dominant problems identified in Phase One. Specifically, this method provided two crucial aspects. One was that it allowed greater acknowledgment towards the rights of such non-human worlds; that whether a bird or stone, until those relationships are critically re-approached, field recording will continue to wallow in the paradoxical and silencing pursuit of “capturing”. Secondly, it became a creative methodology to re-hear myself and enable the process of re-rendering my physical audible and inaudible self, back into the work. Imaginatively adopting the perspective of an Indian Common Shama was not an act of animistic absorption or sentimental transcendence. This is the historical and inherent danger of such a method.

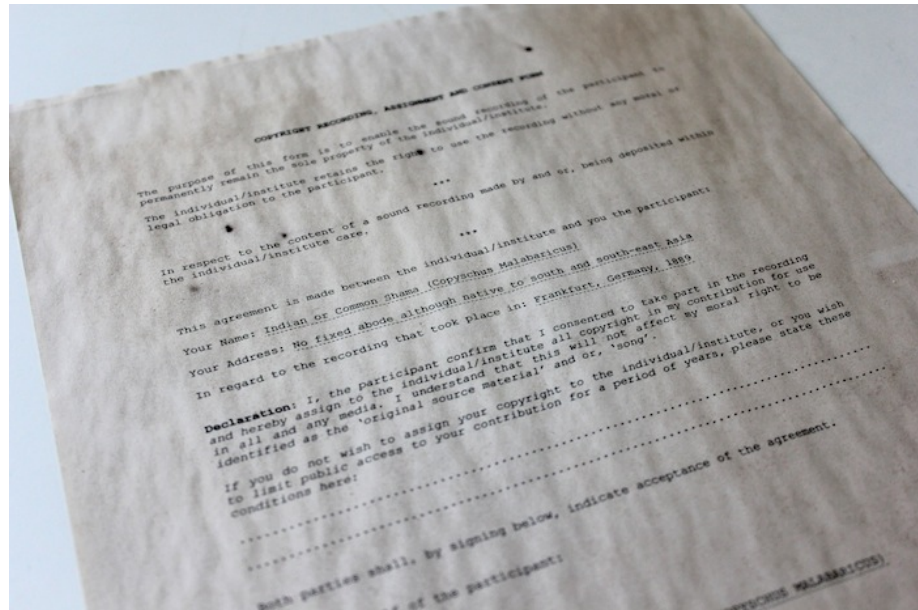


Figure 18

Mut(e)ual Consent (2013) (a), copyright the author

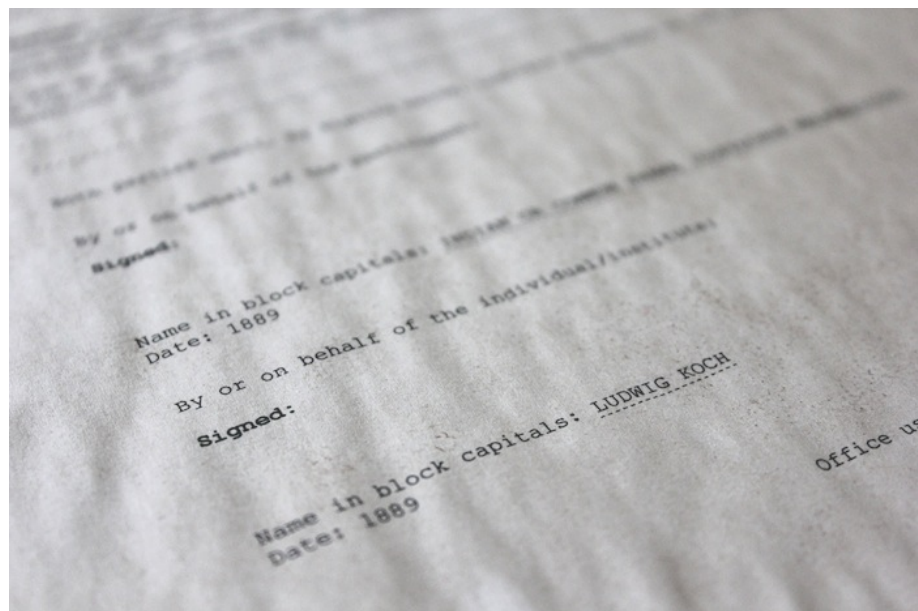


Figure 19

Mut(e)ual Consent (2013) (b), copyright the author

Re-capturing

‘Humans and things in their physical connectedness to each other entrap each other’
(Hodder, 2012, p.93)

Phase Two can be understood as an attempt to re-imagine the ethical considerations at work within field recording. A linguistic culture of pursuit and entrapment, derived from legacies found in hunting, had left the ethical consequences of practice wide open for creative and critical re-interpretation. Having disrupted the presumed inconsequentiality of field recording through re-imagining the language, rights and the perspectives of non-human participants, I was keen to explore relational binds further; this time between the technology employed and myself. Clearly I had built a resistance towards technology from the onset of the PhD. I associated it with a particular striving for fidelity, technique and form; none of which I was interested in. My back injury also made it practically difficult to continue carrying equipment on any so-called “professional” scale. When I severed my microphone cables in May 2012, it was in effect, just another incident in a line of technological mishaps. Whether it involved not pressing record, dropping a microphone or simply forgetting to pack the recorder, the subtle impact of these events did not go unnoticed⁵¹. Tempted as I was to adopt a Luddite’s approach, I still depended upon such apparatus in order to mediate a message. Embroiled in Phase Two’s process of Trans-hearing, I began to ask whether technology needed me? As in the case of *Mut(e)ual Consent* (2013), if I was striving to animate the agency and rights of non-human worlds, should I include inanimate objects (microphones) within such a discussion?

I turned my attention to those moments in which the apparent breakdown between technology and myself, served to highlight the inter-dependencies on which the

⁵¹ These moments are referred to a “Bio-critical Incidents” and are unpacked during Phase Three.

practice is built. How could I articulate that intrinsic bind, one in which the only “real” entity being captured appeared more and more to be myself? I came to understand this relational entrapment through contemporary anthropologist Ian Hodder’s book *Entangled: an Archaeology of the Relationships Between Humans and Things* (2012). I should mention the irony of this term did not go unnoticed whilst undertaking the research. As highlighted during the opening section “Structure & Contents”, practice and theory often occupied a tangled web of inter-relating ebbs and flows. Rather than being lost in such knots, as was the case during the compromised works produced in Phase One, I wanted to show a more defined sense of entanglement, particular to my own specific position and the non-human subjects in which my practice continually encountered.

It is also important to note Hodder’s “entanglement”, along with new materialism more broadly, is indebted to sociologist Bruno Latour’s 2005 “Actor Network Theory” (ANT). I do not wish to labour on Latour and therefore briefly state that specifically, ANT approached the production and process end of science and technology, focusing its scope upon human and non-human “actors” bound into laboratories, environmental agencies and institutes. Hodder’s (2012) critique of ANT, like my own reservations around sound, involves the treatment of materials in and of themselves. He also harbours relatable suspicions over the practical achievability of complete (nature / culture) binary dissolution (see p.93).

Hodder (2012, p.87) states ‘the defining aspect of [an] entanglement with things is that humans get caught in a double bind, depending on things that depend on humans’⁵². Elaborating further he adds: ‘in our dependence on them we become entrapped in their dependence on us’ (Hodder, 2012, p.87). Hodder’s examples are derived from everyday experiences such as waiting inside an aeroplane whilst its

⁵² For this research I am defining “things” as objects and materials that are not human. Technology being an obvious inanimate example in addition to animals and species, which although living, breathing agents, are for the sake of this argument, deemed within a “thing” (non-human) category.

structure is checked for health and safety reasons. As a passenger, he is caught within a dependency upon the plane's technological maintenance and its servicing by human forces. Watching on through the window Hodder is entrapped within this double bind. Like Ingold (2000) and Cox (2011) Hodder's (2012) motivation stems from his assertion that social, anthropological and archaeological studies are predominately carried out through an anthropocentric viewpoint (see p.89). Things, be it animals or objects, serve as functional tools, backdrops or mediators. As human to non-human relations are so fundamental to field recording, Hodder's text provided a rich critical context for the development of Phase Two's particular body of work, focusing in on technology within the production process of the practice.

Hodder (2012) shows his desire to keep the vitality of non-human materiality in conversation with humans by stating his concept of entanglement 'joins the many other that try to bridge the divide between materialism and social construction' (p.95). He incorporates (us) humans into the equation: 'things themselves need each other and they need us' (Hodder, 2012, p.90). However, this statement, that non-human things need us (humans), is one of the great sentimentalised views historically projected onto nature: that we somehow cultivate nature's unruliness and that it needs us for that very reason. A similar perspective floods field recording's baseline assumption that it can only be a force for aesthetic or ecological good. The practice has latched onto the belief that animals need us; atmospheres need capturing, birdsong needs identifying and forests need composing.

Timothy Morton's book *Ecology without Nature* (2007) deals aptly with similar concerns⁵³. He proposes an investigation of ecology without the concept and historical baggage of Nature. Morton's motivation is analogous to my own trajectory moving out of Phase One and into Two: from normative ecological re-telling through sound, to something that strived to remove the filters of historical illustration.

⁵³ Morton is dealt with in depth during Phase Three and the formation of original "Contact Zones" and "Elsewhere Fields".

Rejecting 'aesthetic enjoyments' (Morton, 2007, p.6), he wants to re-asses how we think through Nature in relation to art: that 'There is no such "thing" as Nature, if by Nature we mean something that is single, independent and lasting' (pp.19-20).

He cites political theories of Nature as flawed in their desire to change worldview (Morton, 2007, p.2). It is difficult not to implicate Schafer's soundscape project within such sentiments: the universal, meta-reach of its design-led focus being its ultimate sticking point. One of Morton's (2007) bones of contention with the history of Nature, is due in part to 'ecological writing [that] keeps insisting we are "embedded" in nature. Nature is a surrounding medium that sustains our being' (p.4).

Morton's argument against the concept of Nature parallels my own resistance towards acoustic ecology's understanding of sound, based on its nostalgia driven soundscape legacy. Morton's (2007) reasoning for going against Nature is, he claims, still very much ecological (see p.9). He tables art and aesthetics as to how Nature's historical meta-narrative can, and should, be challenged and disrupted. As stated this is where I believe field recording's own revolution can occur: through a presentational aesthetics that strives to remove the historical default of both sound and nature as compositional objects.

I identified two primary "things" that continually entangled my own practice. Technology, specifically the microphone being one and the medium, sound being the other. Although sound is not non-human, it is a crucial agent for field recording. As I have argued throughout, sound does not operate entirely in and of itself. Acoustically, sound waves originate from vibration, points of contact and friction. As I type these words my finger tips push onto the key pad to varying degrees of intensity, the mechanical energy is transferred into sound and expelled through the air as a result of that coming together. Sound cannot operate in a vacuum, it exists in a world dependent on other things, one of which being human activity. The

entanglement of field recording is built from this triangular web: between sound, technology and myself.

There are undoubtedly other matrixes of entanglement but these were the most specific set of factors that en-meshed my research from day one. The illustration beneath goes someway to show this, although its linearity is questioned further on.

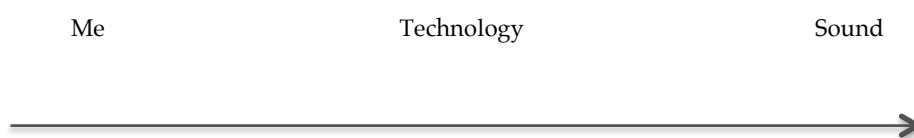


Figure 20

Diagram of entanglement (a) (2013), copyright the author

How then, could I animate and debate that entanglement in practice? I returned to hunting's relationship with field recording, this time to re-think one of its specific outcomes. Taxidermy became a way to think through the function of a field recording once taken and displayed, out of the field. Perhaps taxidermy could paradoxically complete the relationship I had set up between field recording and hunting? If the hunt was based in the field, once out it seemed appropriate that taxidermy be discussed in relation to a sound composition or publication.

Jane Desmond (2002) traces the ways in which animals have been hunted for taxidermic purposes; how they are treated, displayed and manipulated to varying degrees of realism. Basing her inquiry in western traditions and aesthetics, she draws attention to the irony of the practice: that in order to present a life-like representation, it requires the prior death of an animal (see. p.158). Citing Laughing Elk Studio, Desmond (2002) asserts the goal of taxidermy is to 'capture and preserve the vitality and living energy of the animal in its natural state' (p.160). The first part of this statement could be transposed directly onto soundscape studies and its

contemporary legacies: those motivated by field recording as a form of conservation. The second aspect relates more broadly to modes of dissemination out of the field, particularly the dualism, which continues to frame field recording today: reality versus abstraction (see Toop, 2004, pp.70-86). Desmond (2002) describes the process of taxidermic re-presentation in depth. Once killed, preferably with as little damage done to the body as possible, the animal is brought back to apparent life through props, scenery enhancement and manipulation. The figures are then displayed as specimen exhibits or as trophies and mementoes of the hunt itself (see pp.160-161).

Both examples of taxidermy come under scrutiny regarding issues of authenticity. As Desmond (2002) suggests, members of the National Taxidermic Association must agree to a code of conduct whereby degrees of physical alteration are monitored and consistently checked. This is particularly the case in trophy hunting practices, where the desire to inflate and over-emphasise beyond any comprehensibly “natural” or “real” state is often the case (see p.161). Field recording may not have any transparent codes of conduct in practice, but as I have shown, it too cannot escape issues relating to veracity and manipulation, particularly when concerned with the representational end of the spectrum; be it for publication, broadcast or performance.

It is worth repeating Bernie Krause’s earlier quote (see p.127 of this thesis) here alongside Melissa Milgrom’s work on taxidermy in her recent book *Still Life* (2010). Krause (2002) states field recording ‘is the creation of an illusion that creates an honest sense of place’ (p.70). Milgrom (2010) asserts ‘taxidermy is the paradoxical pursuit of creating the illusion of life’ (back cover). Both then, are apparently concerned with re-creating a sense of reality through their respective acts of killing and recording.

As with field recording, the co-ordinates for what constitutes “imitations of reality” in taxidermic practice became increasingly vague with the advancement of

technology and modes of mediation throughout the latter half of the twentieth century. Modern day animatronics and even bio-genetic's attempts at cloning may be said to mirror the contemporary technological drive towards hyper-representations of field recordings (see Francisco López) or, through the proliferation of ambisonic installations and specialised bi-naural playback media⁵⁴.

When sound is "captured", its consequent process of re-assemblage - out of the field - can be aligned towards these taxidermic poles. In other words, a "purist" (specimen) re-presentation or, one which, like the trophy example, is propped and manipulated by other means in order to heighten and shift a sense of reality into more affective territory. The quest for preserving ironically rests upon a silencing (as discussed during Phase One). Hence field recording's process of objectification begins at the very moment a microphone is positioned, simultaneously "capturing" the sound of sound's death, whilst rendering "I", the recordist a mute witness. Again, Susan Sontag's parallel critique of photography echoes many of these themes. 'The view of reality as an exotic prize to be tracked down and captured by the diligent hunter-with-a-camera has informed photography from the beginning' (Sontag, 1977, p.54).

Returning to the proposition of entanglement, how could the paradoxical life-death situation of taxidermy help to animate my own embroiled relationship with sound and technology? Perhaps taxidermying these two things would ironically create the illusion or sense of prior agency? Would this also tackle the broader question around the presumed inconsequentiality of the practice; that if sound and technology were taxidermied, perhaps it would allow for an original representation as to the ethics and agency of such "things"?

⁵⁴ See the works: *Audio Obscure*. (2011) Available from: <http://www.artangel.org.uk/projects/2011/audio_obscure> accessed [12.09.13] and *Inside the Circle of Fire: A Sheffield Soundmap*. (2013) Available from: <<http://www.museums-sheffield.org.uk/museums/millennium-gallery/exhibitions/current/inside-the-circle-of-fire-a-sheffield-sound-map>> accessed [01.12.13].

I began to formulate what would become the film and sculptural work, *Re-capturing* (2013). Initial experiments consisted of dismantling a microphone and its component parts. This process was recorded with the intention of presenting the sound alongside a re-assembled microphone. Keen to continue the process of re-embodiment a position within the work, I returned to a previous (notebook) idea of chasing a microphone up a tree. It became apparent that the only way to digest such an absurd proposition was to simply do so in practice. In making and re-presenting the work, I could also disrupt the earlier linearity (see figure 20) and set all those “things” in motion and inter-operation at any one time (see figure 21).

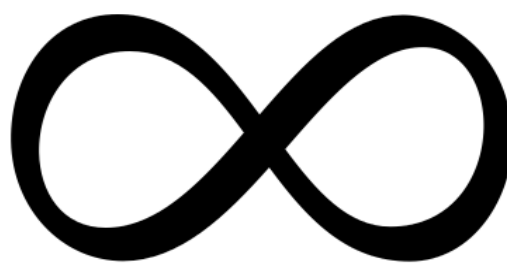


Figure 21

Updated diagram of entanglement (b) (2013), copyright the author

I set myself the real task of chasing a microphone over and across the various terrains of South Gare. I chose the brightest microphone cable I had (light purple) in order to imply an exotic subject, complete with a fluffy windshield that further enhanced a sense of animistic bait. Initially I intended the film to be silent in reference to the ways in which that “chase” ironically silences the agency of nature and sound.

The work was exhibited as part of “Noise & Whispers” a group show during November 2013. Its final presentation was set in conversation with a sculptural assemblage, exhibited alongside the film. This piece re-housed the same microphone, cable and windshield within a classic taxidermy glass bell jar. The particular

microphone was a single-point “shotgun” model and seemed a pertinent choice for its predatory connotations. Much like the previous split-screen film *Here & There* (2012), this dual articulation proved very successful throughout the exhibition with numerous comments and discussions around the relationship between the film and object. One telling piece of audience feedback surrounded the silent soundtrack that accompanied the film. It was overwhelmingly commented upon in positive ways, the suggestion being that the sound from the video had somehow been transferred and silenced into the glass bell jar along with the microphone. There is a soundtrack that can accompany the video if needed, and if presented as a film only project, but the work certainly has more potency as a silent conversational diptych.

Taxidermy became then, a comparative way to analyse the representation of field recordings. Moreover, the irony of the practice provided a device I could assimilate into the aesthetics of my own practical experimentation. By housing a microphone within a taxidermy bell jar it provided a way of discussing sound in relation to the ethics of its “capture”. Ironically, the act of killing and process of taxidermy ultimately suggested a prior agency and will on behalf of its now inanimate subject. Employing a microphone also re-imagined the technical apparatus bound into the act of recording. Placed within the bell jar, and through Hodder’s discussions of entanglement, it provided a way of creatively and critically re-engaging technology after the incident of severing my microphone cables. As an alternative conclusion to Schafer or Ingold’s utopian pre-industrial filters, it provided a subtle suggestion that although sound functions as invisible relational glue, the effect may be deemed a more sinister form of entrapment: that recordists are like fly’s caught in sound’s vibrating web.

Re-capturing (2013) is, I believe, one of the most original outputs from this whole body of research. It is located at the epicenter of an entanglement specific to myself and the broader context of field recording. Absurd in nature, the work offers the

potential for an original practice of field recording to emerge from within this specific set of inter-related concerns. Ultimately the work concludes that I had to capture myself to resolve the three central issues addressed in Phase One's "Summary: Aims & Originality". In order to do so I had to take the most experimental, critical and imaginative leaps of faith in practice I have ever made to date.

Mark Peter Wright's "Re-capturing" wryly depicts the field recordist as he pursues his desired phonographic specimen, his eventual success evident in the microphone proudly displayed, post-taxidermy, in an ethnographer's bell jar; while poking fun at phonography's affinity with butterfly collecting, the work also questions assumptions regarding the nature of what is collected (Thomas, 2013).

Please watch "Track 8" on the accompanying DVD.



Figure 22

Re-capturing (2013), film still (a), copyright the author



Figure 23

Re-capturing (2013), film still (b), copyright the author



Figure 24

Re-capturing (2013), installation view, *Noise & Whispers* exhibition, copyright the author

Phase Two Conclusion

Phase Two introduced itself through a batch of critical writing that leaned upon contemporary anthropology and sound studies. This literature allowed field recording's historical inter-disciplinarity to be updated and more importantly, began to re-situate the practices' ontological drivers. It was vital to draw upon related contemporary strands rather than philosophical avenues presented by the likes of Martin Heidegger or Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Although these phenomenological references do influence the writing of such literature, they did not necessarily forge the specific thread to ethnography and anthropology I was after. Employing literature from the likes of Hodder and Ingold was relevant then, as both are undoubtedly direct results of anthropology's self-reflexive turn of the mid 1970's-80's. This, after all, was the same type of self-critical moment I aimed to induce onto field recording throughout the research. Their respective theories and fields were a clear continuation and evolution from this introspective moment. It seemed rational then to locate my own framework within such discussions if I was going to build any solid type of relational update.

A new materialist perspective forces field recording into new ethical and representational preoccupations and as a result, greater political and self-aware territories. Updating relational binds, specific to the practice assists its core subjects (humans and non-humans). The author-recordist is forced to finally adopt an amplified presence through the revelation of subjective motivations, production methods and creative strategies. No longer a silent power, a sustainable self-reflexive practice can develop. It is important to re-affirm here that a re-assessment of silence within field recording practice is not rectified through its opposite: noise. As the works of both this and Phase Three show, silence and absence can become enacted or performed through the use of documents and ephemera. Interventions, hypothetical

gestures and irony may also not be audible, but their muteness functions in order to heighten a sense of performative presence: they disrupt acousmatic smoothing.

Like Cox's paper, an Inter-agential practice similarly seeks to debate, rather than merely mimic or illustrate the "sonic". However the practice I have developed resembles something entirely different to the examples Cox offers. It does so through a formally diverse body of work that always insists upon the acknowledged presence of humans within a non-human orientated practice. An Inter-agential focus does not abstract or extract the human, nor the animal, rather it retains both in equally contested ways. Its emphasis rests within shared political webs of construction and mediation: between human, animal, sound, technology, time and place. Crucially texts such as Hodder's short-circuit the dormant misanthropic danger of new materialism through the equal commitment of both human and non-human experience.

The aesthetic difference from those Cox posits is clear from the body of work presented throughout Phase Two and shortly, through Phase Three. It shows a practice relinquishing themes of sonorous abstraction and human dissolution and instead, exhibits something more inter-textual and enlivened towards its audible and inaudible subjects.

The following pages conclude Phase Two with a deliberately manifesto-esque attempt at condensing what I am calling an Inter-agential practice - both its perspective and aesthetics - into a clear articulation of points. The mention of "Contact Zones" and "Elsewhere Fields" will be unpacked over the entirety of Phase Three along with "Bio-critical Incidents."

Inter-agential Perspective

- Takes its motivation from the self-reflexive crisis in ethnography during the 1970 and 80's
- Draws conceptually upon new materialist theories in relation to the agential and political apprehension of sound but makes a clear break in aesthetics from what has gone before
- Cites contextual art history from Land Art (non-intrusive documents) and visual documentary practices
- Utilises discourse and literature from post humanism which examines the relation, mediation and representation of animals by humans
- Relates to non-humans (animals) through non-anthropomorphic perspectival transfers and identity swaps ("Trans-hearing")
- Promotes work that amplifies and contests ethics, mediation and power dynamics
- Insists the listener/recorder is an equal "site" for exploration in relation to a place
- Considers the "site" to be a collaborative, contested and participatory place of simultaneous production and representation ("Contact Zone")
- Accepts the immersivity of sonic experience as an acknowledgement of social difference and a non essentialised relationship to place

- Encourages ironic, absurd and fictional thinking in order to bring about a greater sense of aesthetic criticality
- Incorporates bodies and issues of accessibility / mobility
- Accepts technological agency as a creative form of disruption
- Accepts the globalisation of networks, institutes and funding bodies as something to engage with and debate
- Always understands and re-addresses itself in the context of the times
- Encourages absence and loss as a creative method
- Rejects a culture of accumulation
- Rejects a language and discourse based on predation

Inter-agential Aesthetics

- Employs sound as a sensibility rather than a medium, or object
- Encourages work across all media
- Incorporates issues of ethics as material for creative and critical production
- Seeks to mis-use technology in critical and creative ways
- Includes biographical and incidental realities often marginalised or silenced within the dissemination of work (“Bio-critical Incidents”)
- Activates silence through performative documents, objects and ephemera
- Is committed to producing anti-heroic and unsentimental aesthetics
- Uses actions, interventions and gestures rather than physically impacting upon a place
- Rejects multi-channel performance and conventional audience-performer roles
- Seeks to disrupt “site” across as many (physical/virtual) platforms as possible

Phase Three

Contact in the Field

Introduction

The third and final Phase of this thesis begins with a mix of critical and reflective writing that seeks to re-assess the status of the study site, South Gare. Due to the necessities of the research project, Phase Two focused upon my own physical, biographical and technological site. Consequently, South Gare's role and identity moved away from one of illustration towards something that resembled an enmeshed, critical and disruptive space of performance and collaboration.

Yet in reasserting the "self" have I reduced the physical landscape to mere backdrop: an un-identifiable, un-specific place devoid of any human representation other than myself? Arriving at Phase Three it seemed pertinent to return to issues of "site" and reconsider field recording's contextual relationship to Land Art; more specifically, to clarify the final function of South Gare within the full body of research.

Similarly, it becomes useful to re-address "the field" after the criticisms of Phase One and consequent practice of Phase Two. What constitutes environmental sound arts field? Again, drawing upon anthropological precedents, the following writing endeavours to approach such concerns by establishing original "Contact Zones" and "Elsewhere Fields". Like Smithson's (1968-73) 'site' and 'non-site', it seemed apparent that field recording is in need of its own nuanced appreciation of the field: one formed upon a sonic sensitivity along with an incorporation of the discipline's own unique historical and methodological requirements. Furthermore, I discuss the changing ways in which scholars and artists are engaging with site as a place of multiple interpretations: no longer a fixed, essential identity. I ask what a porous notion of "site" means for field recording art practice within times of 'complex connectivity' (Tomlinson, 1999, p.2)?⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Tomlinson's substitute for the term "globalisation". He focuses on the links between individuals and collectivities worldwide and the increasing dissemination of information, sociality and commerce across nations, facilitated by an increase in physical and electronic communications systems.

Following on from this I question the current trend of representational sound mapping Internet sites and challenge them to incorporate more creative and fictional presentations of both place and sound. As with the two previous Phases, the second half of Phase Three - "The Poetics of Letting Go" - discusses the methodological processes and contextual themes of three practice-based works.

Finding, Loosing & Crossing the Field

South Gare, the physical site of study, moved in and out of direct focus throughout the duration of my research. Phase One specifically tuned an ear towards the area's ecological and industrial politics. Field recording and audio-based publications represented an initial strategy to create a body of work that would be undeniably site-specific. Alongside this I was conducting interviews with former steelworkers, local historians and wildlife experts; part of an overall attempt to extract South Gare's intrinsic subjects and sounds.

Yet throughout Phase One I struggled to retain a sense of specificity due to the conceptual and practical issues found within the method (listening/recording) and medium (sound). In addition, biographical and corporeal circumstances (back injury) further complicated my initial sedentary relationship to site. Ultimately, these three aspects (listening, sound, biography) began to loosen the moorings of my research and carved a unique strategy that leant away from the presentation of a site per se, towards something more lateral, critical and self-reflexive. I abandoned my initial strategy for historical or ecological re-telling through sound. Approaching South Gare as such (a palette of sounds to merely extract and compose with) would have inevitably patronised the area into a passive role and produced an ineffectual body of work; one, which would only proliferate the criticisms I was airing.

Furthermore, I did not want to adopt a quasi-social scientist role in representing the workers or locals that frequented South Gare. For the sake of my research and its specific contextual aims surrounding author silence, “I” had to be placed in front of the microphone, not the steelworker’s or fishermen. As Hal Foster’s chapter “The Artist as Ethnographer” (1996) suggests, the critical test of such re-positioning rests precariously between a project of self-reflexivity turning into one of self-absorption (see p.180).

Through the likes of Ingold, Cox and new materialist theories, my own Inter-agential perspective allowed me to re-frame South Gare: to acknowledge myself amongst the landscape and its sounding agents. Such immaterial, inanimate, human and non-human forces were comprehended through their associated acts of coercion and disruption: they shaped and led my own interventions as much as I believed myself in control of them. This shift was implemented onto technology as part of that very same move and was incorporated in practice through ways that continued to expose my own co-presence as one of a contestable body, rather than a historically reticent author-observer. South Gare became an equally entangled set of concepts and practical outputs that merged both the site and myself into one rendered zone of production.

The movement from illustration to intervention emerged as Phase One spilled into Two. During the exhibition *30 Minutes of Listening* (2012), I was concerned with building routes away from the site, as much as toward. Occupying this dual space I was able to amplify lost or historically under heard aspects such as myself and my own productions. Culminating in Phase Two’s Inter-agential perspective, I tuned these elements further through a critical dissection of field recording’s ethics and aesthetics, aspects I was able to address because of my elasticated (non) hold on the site. South Gare became a “functional” site, one that:

is a process, an operation occurring between sites, a mapping of institutional and textual filiations and the bodies that move between them (the artist's above all). It is an informational site, a palimpsest of text, photographs and video recordings (Mayer, 2000, p.25).



Figure 25

What Happens Here? (2012), scanned photo collage, copyright the author

Mayer's (2000) 'functional' model is antithetical to the original goal of site-specific arts 'literal' site (see pp.23-35). Such differences are defined through the latter being a place of phenomenological immediacy, whereby sculptures and monuments are rendered into actual landscapes as irremovable artworks, dependent upon a 'real-time bodily experience' (Mayer, 2000, p.25). In conversation with Land Art, South Gare became a "functional" place of investigation, questioning the very notion of its site-specificity. In relation to field recording, South Gare is contextually understood as "the field"⁵⁶. It is necessary therefore, to comprehend and unpick the field's function in relation to site and sound. Is the field analogous to Mayer's (2000)

⁵⁶ For the remainder of this Phase I will remove the quotations around "the field" for the purposes of flow. However, they should still be held metaphorically in place.

‘functional or ‘literal ‘site? Should the field accommodate what comes before and after? Can it be conceptually defined?

As outlined during the opening “Critical Context” section, the field, for the purpose of environmental sound art is considered almost any territory both physical and immaterial: celestial, architectural, bodily, industrial, animal, human, aquatic and more. Prominent field recording artists Ernst Karel and Toshiya Tsunoda give alternative opinions on their connotations of the field. Tsunoda (2011) encourages use of the term for its implied inclusion of perceptual and psychological space as much as it does physical land. Karel however prefers the term “location” in relation to recording:

I tend to use the term “location recording” for what I do rather than “field recording” just because for me it generally is a way of exploring a specific place, the specifics of a place, and that term seems to me to connote that a little more strongly (Karel to Wright, 2013).

Karel’s preference for provenance links to site-specific arts original goal of ascertaining a more locatable sense of place. Contrary to this, Tsunoda’s field appears to associate itself towards Mayer’s (2000) ‘functional’ mode of inquiry. It resembles not one distinct place, but an assemblage of inter-locking territories (physical, mental, real, imagined) always in flux and transition.

The most apt historical link to the term “field” arrives within the reflexive precedents of anthropological “fieldwork”. James Clifford (1997, see pp.52-53) outlines a similar proximal ambiguity over the ethnographic field after watching a television report on the Los Angeles earthquake of 1994. In his example, the earth scientist reporting on the event claimed that he had been in the field whilst observing the disruption

brought about by the incident. In fact, the scientist was actually within a helicopter when surveying the area and was no more in the field than he was above it.

Although implied, the field, that is the primary site of investigation, does not necessarily require a physical connection to land. Clifford (1997) asserts the conventional ethnographic field is generally one of open space, considered outside domestic borders or the traditional laboratory (see p.53). He suggests surveying such, from the physically detached viewpoint of a helicopter, may become disrupted if vision is impaired by fog for example - the field in this instance becomes inaccessible. For the listener, fog may certainly change the physical properties of sound but it does not impede his or her access to the field per se: a physical impasse is less problematic than given sound's capability to be heard through and around visual blockages.

The field appears comprised of both physical bodies/geographies and less than physical sounds. It is precisely sound's ambulatory nature that problematise attempts to physically define the auditory field. As evidenced in my own practice of Phase One, it was impossible to map sound to any one specific geographic boundary (body-based or within the landscape). Barry Blesser and Linda-Ruth Salter's 2007 text *Spaces Speak, Are You Listening?* ironically describes a literal field as the best acoustic evidence of a borderless sonic zone, where without walls 'we hear the absence of enclosing boundaries' (Blesser & Salter, 2007, p.20). Lacking reflection we cannot audibly perceive distance and therefore cannot define our own relational position. Hence, without the aural effect of a mirror, the field (outdoors) oscillates between a search for sounding provenance and a more acute, corporeal territory of reception: one that 'no longer masks the sound of a listeners beating heart or flowing blood' (Blesser & Slater 2007, p.18). In other words, the field exists in the literal ear of the listener as much as it does at the source of a sound.

Clifford (1997, see p.54) further comments that the field projects a sense of inside and out; entering it, one crosses a boundary. The auditory field is built upon similar transgressive concerns. (see Chion, 1994; Connor, 2003; LaBelle, 2010; Ong, 1982; Rodaway, 1994). Affectually celebrated as such, sound becomes 'arousing and dangerous because it can so easily penetrate and permeate' (Connor, 2003). Sound's penchant for leakage highlights the medium's potential to negate power dynamics, hierarchies of space and time, supposed ocular hegemony, even gender or identity according to sound artist Drew Daniel (2010).

Phase's Two and Three have strived to clarify sound's porosity through the development of critical practices and strategies. Rather than treating sound as a complete process of homogenous immersion I have come to understand and argue that sound, and its experience through listening, amplifies positional dualities. Whether this concerns knowledge and affect, source and sound, external or internal, there is an implication of both rather than a singular conflation of one or the other. The sonic experience may well be all encompassing but not at the expense of complete border dissolution: thresholds are constantly being crossed, territories and relations marked anew.

As I have stressed throughout, a contemporary notion of the field has been built from the compositional legacy of sound's object potential, re-assembled through immersive playback settings and CD publications. I would argue it is vital that field recording understand the holistic nature of soundscape immersion, both in and out of the field, through a specialised appreciation of being inside and out.

An Inter-agential practice therefore accepts sound's porous tendencies as an affirmation of relational (site/body, human/non-human) difference and productive agential antagonism. The experience of listening is no more mine than it is someone (or something) else's: its very act, although contained within the listening subject,

should always accept and acknowledge the marginal or outside of itself. The risk of not doing so is that sound as medium, and listening as a practice, are in danger of being treated as an elitist sensory process.

Artist and writer Brandon LaBelle's motivation for thinking, writing and defining acoustic space comes from a similar desire for socio-political connection. His book *Acoustic Territories: Sound Culture and Everyday Life* (2010) specifically attempts to define the auditory field through a vertical demarcation of space. Writing up from the acoustics of the underground, to street level and into the sky itself is one of the few clear attempts to mark and delineate acoustic territory⁵⁷. The point of doing so, similar to my own desire, is to connect the transgressive and ambiguous qualities of sound to the social political realm of the "now": 'I've sought to impart meaning to the ambiguity inherent to acoustic space, as a productive form of tension' (Labelle, 2010, p.xxiv).

Timothy Morton, already touched upon during the practice reflection document of Phase Two titled "Re-capturing", also seeks to establish productive distinctions within porous worlds. His book *Ecology Without Nature* (2007) attempts to foreground practice as a way in which Nature and ecology's historical content can be better understood through a detailed analysis of form and aesthetics. Morton (2007) cites a combination of works from sound (Alvin Lucier) and Land Art (Andy Goldsworthy) as examples throughout (see pp.47-48). He acknowledges the need for subtle distinction; that we are not all awash in Nature per se. Similar to LaBelle's overall attempt at demarcating acoustic space, Morton unpicks and territorialises "ambience". His 'ambient poetics' (Morton, 2007, p.32) is an umbrella term that is made up from six defined elements: rendering, medial, timbral, aeolian, tone and the

⁵⁷ Reminding the reader of Phase One's earlier critique of R. Murray Schafer and his process of categorising and splitting sounds, I would re-state his method of identifying sounds as distinct entities should be read as a potentially productive move. The problem however, was that Schafer's vision of acoustic design aimed to distinguish lo-fi and hi-fi sounds through problematic beauty/design orientated outcomes: segregation became an abrupt and problematically ideological task.

re-mark. I will concentrate on the “re-mark” only as this is where I believe Morton’s position to be most relevant for the concerns of my own practice: imparting nuanced distinction and difference within the porous worlds of sound and place.

Speaking about the need to acknowledge a split between background and foreground ambience, Morton draws upon philosopher Jacques Derrida’s texts *Dissemination* (1983) and *The Truth in Painting* (1987), for guidance⁵⁸. Derrida’s “re-mark”, Morton (2007) explains, makes us aware of difference through insisting upon the in-between gesture or echo (see p.48). The re-mark is as much a boundary as it isn’t one. It is hidden in the margins and registered through its absence. In this sense a valid argument could be made that field recording’s self-silent authors are themselves functioning at the level of Derrida’s performative re-mark.

Morton’s (2007) example comes humorously from the cartoon character of “Woodstock” found within the “Charlie Brown” television series. Woodstock’s speech is represented through a non-linguistic set of lines and scratches. Morton claims that without the demarcation (re-mark) of the bubble, we would not be aware that Woodstock is speaking, regardless of whether we even understand what his symbols mean (see p.49). The re-mark functions as a performative discrepancy, one that allows immersive worlds to be unpicked, ever so slightly. ‘The illusive play of the re-mark establishes their difference out of undifferentiated ground’ (Morton, 2007, p.49). The point of doing so is to engender critical tensions. Morton goes on to embellish his Charlie Brown example through a new materialist appreciation of quantum physics and shows how the re-mark functions at “unnoticeable” levels of minutiae.

⁵⁸ Reminding the reader of the point made during Phase Two’s practice reflection document, “A Proposed Vocabulary Exchange”, like all the parallel literature employed throughout this PhD, I have strived to keep it as relevant and practically in conversation with my core subjects as possible, rather than tenuously appropriate or adapt philosophical texts that may well touch upon similar concerns. However, by necessity Jacques Derrida must come into the equation at this point by proxy of Morton.

Ambience itself is Morton's re-mark. I would extend this and perhaps more boldly suggest environmental sound is a re-mark. Sound makes us aware of difference through its performative absence and everyday acts of coercion and disruption. I have come to understand difference, power and ethics through the very way in which sound operates 'at a hair's breadth' (Morton, 2007, p.49). Its subtle absent impact shapes my way of life like Woodstock's bubble, in discreet yet necessary ways. Sound is constantly showing us borders, definitions of space and place (re-marks); the fact that it can cross those thresholds does not mean we are all awash in a homogenised quagmire.

Phase One's accusations towards Schafer's soundscape project, that splitting the soundscape was reductive, can and should therefore be read as a potentially productive endeavour. However, as noted, the study's real failing is due to its design oriented end goal: for Schafer the aim of distinction was merely a device to exclude along a pathway to acoustic beauty.

I now understand the "thresholds" I spoke of during Phase One's practice document, "Peripheral Conversations", as a search for subtle distinction; enabled by my residence within the audible and inaudible margins of South Gare and myself. Placing myself literally within the equivalent of Derrida's re-mark allowed me to explore tensions of power (industry, nature and myself) and mediation as a result, rather than any traditional soundscape idea of *Gestalt* composition. For my own purposes then, Morton's ambient poetics, through Derrida's re-mark, first and foremost offers a tool with which I can begin to impart difference onto the historically under critiqued listener-subject encounter. Its use also implies a practical ethics in terms of recognising the inter-agency and plural subjectivities always at play whilst listening within place: that I was not subsumed in a collapsed world of negation but both inside and outside a highly charged and performative place of knowing and unknowing.

It is worth re-asserting Phase Two's connection to new materialist theories here. As I stressed throughout the Phase, the likes of Christoph Cox and Jane Bennett can undeniably aid the conceptual framing of sound as a political agent amongst the forces and flows of human, non-human, organic and inorganic life. Works by artists such as Tsunoda and Karel operate within this sensibility and by doing so acknowledge inside/outside dichotomies through sounds otherwise inaccessible to human hearing. However, as stated, the danger of such investigations spill over and into the representational end of the spectrum, whereby a more-than-human focus conflates into a project of outright human erasure. This doubling of non-human perspectives and aesthetics runs the risk of sending field recording even further into un-critical cul-de-sacs.

Revisiting notions of inside and out, academic Irit Rogoff has called for a similar acknowledgment within the broader workings of "fieldwork", affirming the practitioner-researcher should occupy 'a dual positionality of being spatially located in an inside and paradigmatically on the outside, or vice versa' (Rogoff, 2009, p.111). Rogoff is clear in that this relational split allows the construction of new stagings, interpretations and translations of place. Quoting George E. Marcus she states: 'transformations are tied to things simultaneously happening elsewhere' (Marcus cited in Rogoff, 2009, p.113). Due to the pre-determined and acknowledged focus of a given artistic project, a practitioner can therefore occupy 'both inside and outside of the field of activity and its perception' (Rogoff, 2009, p.111).

Again, for the nuances of my own practice, sound may well be an immersive affect that geographically takes place in the cup of my ear. But I cannot deny that it originates elsewhere and furthermore, that it is landing and generating itself inside many ears (human and non-human). I am no more at the centre of a given field than I am parallel, adjacent, on its threshold or even outside. This indicates the social and elastic time-space nature of listening. It is not just "I" receiving sound but also the

bird, as it is not just a bird producing sound, “I” too sound. As I write this sat in a library, I can hear ventilation, keyboards tapping and discreet movement. Yet I do not entirely own that experience. The person two seats away from me is sharing that in a way I will never know. Subjectivity is recognised then, through its simultaneous presence and loss. The listener or recordist is not a fixed or singular fulcrum but part a shared network of human and non-human listening⁵⁹. Like Voegelin’s earlier example of the radio (see p.95 of this thesis), or Derrida’s re-mark, part of a shared listening experience arrives through silence and doubt: performativity of materials and the imagination combine to “re-mark” that process. Taken a step further, it is transformed and re-materialised through art and aesthetics, back into the social-political world.

Contact Zones & Elsewhere Fields

If I cannot physically cordon the sonic field, nor practically define when sound is moving within, through or outside of my body, like LaBelle and Morton I can sympathetically acknowledge its thresholds and transference points with ambiguous confidence. I am able to recognise the dual nature of the field though sound’s continuous ability to move from one place to another: to be in one ear and another. In defining the field, it therefore becomes essential to recognise and mark potential points of entry and exit, both into and away from the field. As Morton (2007) asserts ‘Aesthetic, and furthermore, metaphysical distinctions, involve discriminations between inside and outside’ (p.48).

Distinguishing the field requires a conceptual split between what I am calling “Contact Zones” and “Elsewhere Fields”. Again I should stress this split is a gestural

⁵⁹ Reminding the reader of Phase Two’s shift in perspective, field recording is inherently concerned with non-human subjects. What it needs is greater re-balance in terms of the aesthetical treatment of its authors. This has meant predominately emphasising the human due to the historical and contemporary dissolution of the recordist-author, yet the overall aim is to exhibit an equally entangled, yet defined middle ground.

one that attempts to function as discussed at the level of Derrida's re-mark. It is not a split in terms of classification or segregation, it is one that operates out of a sonic sensibility and as such, should be treated as ephemeral or irrational as either sound or listening.

"Contact" makes reference to Clifford's (1997) own discussion of anthropological museums as places where power, ethics and identity are actively contested through relational object display rather than illustrative products of meta-colonial histories (see p.188-219). However, the term is borrowed originally from scholar and writer Mary Louise Pratt. Her text *Imperial Eyes* (1992) coined the word as well as the now often cited "autoethnography". Her book hovers a critical lens over European travel writing from post-colonial Africa and South America and locates a sense of contact within linguistic encounters of national difference and text-based ephemera.

Contact, like my own Inter-agential practice and new materialism 'emphasizes how subjects are constituted in and by their relations to each other' (Pratt, 1992, p.7). Moreover, Contact Zones are comprehended in terms of 'copresence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices, often within radical asymmetrical relations of power' (Pratt, 1992, p.7). The latter half of this sentence is most relevant to field recording. As I have endeavoured to examine throughout this thesis, the practice needs to recognise human to non-human relationships by emphasising the creative and critical negotiation of ethics and rights. Like Pratt's contact zone, the field becomes a space that draws out these core tensions, through acts of coercion and disruption.

"Elsewhere" involves an ambiguous acknowledgement of both past and future events that intersect the Contact Zone. I am aware that implying these bookends may seem a little abrupt or even simplistic, but as I continue to claim, Elsewhere Fields are as much inside the Contact Zone as they are outside it. To distinguish the field

then, like Morton's ambience, I acknowledge the split is both arbitrary and useful through its relative imperceptibility.

Elsewhere Fields consist of crossing physical borders and thresholds. These can be anything from exiting the front door of my flat to boarding a train in Kings Cross station. These examples are not so much to do with a past, as they are an in-between transgression of territory. This transitional space also applies to a future elsewhere being made up of movements into other geographies and possible outcomes (gallery, online). Elsewhere Fields are where I claim an outside exists for practitioners: being "between" past, present and future⁶⁰. "Elsewhere" may allude to sounds having a source, however this is not a signal of "truthful" origin but an acknowledgement that sounds are always part of a mechanical process and relational journey of displacement and uncertainty. To be clear, Elsewhere Fields are not nostalgic points of return but metaphysical distinctions that allow a specialist appreciation of the dual potentiality of the field (see figure 26). Please listen to "Track 9" on the accompanying DVD, a recording excerpt from a car journey to South Gare⁶¹.

Clifford (1997, see p.58) states 'fieldwork usually entails leaving home, going elsewhere'. My Elsewhere Field began as soon as I stepped foot out of my front door in London, boarded the 73 bus to Kings Cross Station, got on the Grand Central train to Sunderland, departed at Eaglescliffe Station and drove to South Gare⁶². Those are the borders (re-marks) I acknowledge as crossing into the Contact Zone of South Gare. By recognising them as such, I do not drop into the middle of South Gare, unfettered and part of a dissolved world. I arrive as a relational yet identifiable and

⁶⁰ It is worth reminding the reader that such "Contact Zones" and "Elsewhere Fields" are proposed for the specific nuances of field recording as an art form where practitioners deliberately go to a place, no matter how close or distant, to record.

⁶¹ This is an extract from the full audio publication *Bio-critical Incidents* (2014), discussed during Phase Three's practice reflection document "There or Thereabouts".

⁶² A similar statement was made in practice through the text work: *Instructions for 30 Minutes of Listening* (2012) (see p.78 of this thesis).

contestable co-presence, an index of border crossings that, like sound, always begins and is going elsewhere.

Figure 41 shows the inter-related connections of both Contact Zones and Elsewhere Fields. It depicts South Gare as an identifiable residence of study, yet one that is always engaged with an elsewhere (dotted, overlapping lines). The arrows moving in and out of South Gare show “contact” and “elsewhere” as distinct yet connected, both in terms of a movement towards (past) and away (future). Acknowledging these points of transience allowed South Gare and my “elsewhere” to begin functioning together as distinct yet relatable spaces.

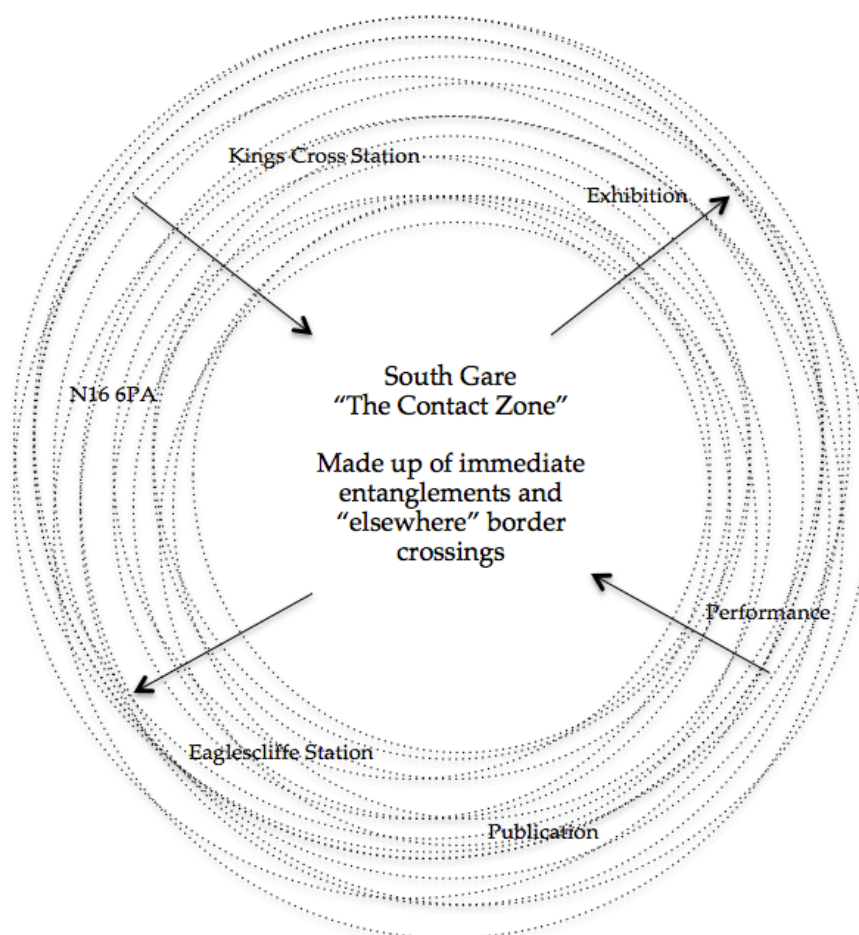


Figure 26

The Field (2014), copyright of the author

The Contact Zone is constructed from both within and outside of itself, not as one singular immersive wash, but a re-marked, recognised semblance of thresholds amongst a plurality of movement. It is kaleidoscopic in nature, made up of immediate entanglements (body, place, technology) and elsewhere happenings (time, space, representation). To be clear, I am stating the field constitutes both a contact dwelling and an elsewhere contingency: both are part of the same system, yet gesturally recognised as distinct territories.

Establishing two different yet relatable areas allows (physical/mental) territorial relations to be marked and crossed; it enables “I”, the recordist, to operate and be heard between fields, and produces place through multiple versions and iterations. The duality enacted whilst in the Contact Zone furthers Mayer’s (2000) ‘functional’ iteration of site, in that it transforms South Gare into a simultaneous place of production and presentation.

The Contact Zone (South Gare) is then, a twin place of encounter and production: an enlivened debatable space that constitutes both a gathering and presentation. Whilst in the Contact Zone, South Gare and I reach a hybrid point of coercion and co-dependence, activated through performed and collaborative exercises and scenarios. Without multiple subjective “contact” and “elsewhere” acknowledgement, the field, whether it involves South Gare, the Amazon, a city street, wire fence, building or beetle, will continue to be discussed merely in terms of a sonorous palette waiting to be occupied and drained.

Phase Two’s practice (and as the reader will observe shortly in Phase Three) converted South Gare and myself into this acknowledged contact zone of performance, contestation and collaborative production. Through intervention and acts of critical disentanglement, I began to emphasise the multiple subjectivities, poetics and politics that emerge from such an original interrogation of the field.

Global Networks & the Non-site of Sound

As discussed during Phase One's practice reflection, the desire to stay physically specific to "site" is a historically improbable one. Land Art being the most potent art historical example that shows the inherent struggle to remain rooted to place whilst the (elsewhere) reality of a limited viewing/hearing public brings back institutional pressures of participation and discourse. Those who do (see Michael Heizer, 1968; Richard Serra, 1981; James Turrell, 1972-ongoing) inevitably maintain proximity through the physical alteration of a place. My interest in Land Art has been related more towards the performance-based and poetic approaches to site along with the expansive accommodation of heterogeneous media and documentary methods, which if anything, strived to propel site-specificity into something more inclusive and accessible than a purely phenomenological "being there" approach (see Robert Kinmont 1969-09; Christian Phillip Müller 1993; Robert Smithson 1968-73).

During Phase One I likened the displacement of environmental sound (animals and atmospheres) onto the hard-drive of a digital recorder, as one similar to Smithson's own movement from site to non-site. Re-thinking this relationship it occurs to me that sound is always to some extent a non-site; its displacement is not achieved through sound's extraction; it is already functioning in the world as a non-site: part of both Contact Zones and Elsewhere Fields, it rarely, if ever stays still.

If sound is heard as a contingently unfolding non-site, it reaffirms that "I" the listener take on the role of physical "site" as much as South Gare: I am the equal residence of study entangled within the non-site of sound. The parallel I am drawing here between Land and environmental sound art being that: the very specific, phenomenological nature of listening, like the physical sites of Land Art, will always be torn elsewhere by the non-site demands of sound. The two (site/listener and non-site/sound) are always pulling into and extracting from one another. The historical

lesson to learn from Land Art is that environmental sound art must similarly expand its modes of documentation if it does not wish to continue supporting essentialist, meta or monologist positions.

Today, an unprecedented dismantling of site is occurring through the networked simultaneity of the Internet, due to which Miwon Kwon (2002) suggests it is 'inevitable that we will leave behind the nostalgic notion of site and identity as essentially bound to the physical actualities of a place' (p.164). With the technological fracturing of site so advanced, Maria Miranda (2013) calls the practice of place-based art "Unsitely". It is an aesthetics built on the fictional and multiple interpretations of Robert Smithson; honed specifically towards the simultaneous potential of a networked age. Pre-empting Miranda, Kwon (2002) asks us to think productively of site in terms of a 'wrong place' (p.163). She suggests that by destabilising notions of home, belonging and situatedness, the "wrong place" is actually a middle ground for subjective reconciliation: where a combination of self and a less familiar place expose the 'instability of the "right" place and by extension the instability of the self' (Kwon, 2002, p.164). Kwon (2002) resonates ideas from philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari: that place is read as an inter-textual and nomadic identity (see p.163).

Current sound mapping projects (see London Sound Survey; Radio Aporee) are, more than most field recording activities, embracing the nomadic mediumship of site within the age of the Internet. However, such platforms need to progress in tandem with both contemporary and historical discussions of place and site. Specifically they need to exploit the fictional as much as they purport to exhibit the real.

I for one am unconvinced that "we" live in entirely borderless, nomadic times. A global/networked sense of movement is not the case for every culture, gender and economic or physical circumstance. The discussion of place, people or even sound as migratory, may well be contained entirely within the "we" of a Western-European,

capitalist way of life whereby the choice to be borderless is derived more from an intrinsic sense of immersive entitlement and privileging of power. Put simply, for many, freedom of movement and travel is not a physical/cultural/economic option: if borders are crossed they may be done so through forced refuge rather than any desire for interconnectivity⁶³.

Perhaps then as “we” glide towards the seemingly networked and borderless potential of exchange, a return to irremovable site-specific art will occur? If we abandon the possibility of Mayer’s (2000) ‘literal’ site altogether and accept it can be accessed from the screen of every laptop in every continent, yes the reach is huge, but the point of access is incredibly isolating and detached from a physically social one. Furthermore, as I have implied above, Kwon (2002) notes such nomadic and mobile perspectives are brought about by their own privileging of power and hierarchy: those with the ability to access technology and travel will inevitably be the ones benefiting as such (see pp.165-166).

The point I am stressing here is that South Gare had to become a space that could function beyond the singular representation of place where sound is merely taken. The field must attempt to activate simultaneous elsewhere territories whilst producing an active arena for contact and contestation: becoming both a place of gatherings and space of production.

⁶³ Of course I understand that I am a white male based in London and whether I like it or not, caught up in western capitalism and neoliberal politics. Yet I can also acknowledge such difference of entitlement and circumstances through my own restrictions, both economically and physically. The point I am stressing throughout is not to conflate those tensions but to bring them out in practice.

Summary

South Gare is still most definitely a present and real site. However, its function for this research has not been a “true” subject for meta-historical revision and re-animation. It is a place that has been grafted, performed and produced into, and within the site of myself as part of both “contact” and “elsewhere” territories. All are enmeshed in the creation of a body of work specific, yet separate to its provenance.

Throughout I have highlighted the need for contemporary practitioners to become more present and as exposed to analysis as their so-called subjects. It has meant placing emphasis on “I” the maker, not to the dismissal of field recording’s core, non-human subjects, but in order to re-balance and re-establish an aesthetics based on intrinsic entanglement. With reference to field recording’s broader contexts and legacies, the self-silencing recordist must acknowledge an elsewhere in order to recognise his or hers own co-presence whilst in the Contact Zone. Consequently, a self-recognised and politically relational body of work can be made which amplifies issues relating to ethics, mediation and representation.

Although this research has strived for an overall collapse in binaries (human-animal, object-process) I do not believe it can be achieved under the dubious auspices of total and homogenised dissolution, based on the default assumption that sound is ubiquitous and that “we” are all part of. It certainly is an all encompassing phenomena and sensory experience, yet its experience and mediation is as much about presence as it is loss; inclusion and exclusion; solitude and sociality; knowing and not knowing, inside and out: the field has resounding definitions and thresholds.

As histories from Land Art insist, the notion of site-specificity continues to be both enticing and unsustainable for artists who must engage in a politically structured

world. For an individual practitioner like myself then, those built on economically unstable ground; this fundamental issue simply will not go away. Like ethnography's own historical crisis, in re-assessing the field, the consequences will not be found in the illusion of more "authentically real" projects built by "local" or "insider" practitioners, nor by simply "downing tools". The result waits in the making of critical, disruptive, self-recognised and participatory works that animate ethics and power dynamics whilst amplifying the simulative aspects of place, self and sound within a complex contemporary world.

Phase Three Practice Reflection

The Poetics of Letting Go

Introduction

How might field recording represent processes of production rather than objects of accumulation?

Moving out of Phase Two's enlivened and contested body of work, I entered the final Phase of research keen to reconnect the practice back to Phase One as much as continuing to advance forward into Three.

Having disrupted the apparent inconsequentiality of field recording through a body of work drenched in author-subject relations I was able to manifest a new aesthetic practice that animated the ethics, production and mediation in and of the field. Through the method of Trans-hearing I was able to begin capturing myself equally amongst South Gare's subjects and sounds.

Phase Three's practice further focused on the productions and processes of field recording. Moreover, I began to re-amplify the field itself as a space of dual functionality: of both gathering and presentation. This practical manifestation was understood through the previous Phase's proposition that "the field" of South Gare was one of "contact" and "elsewhere", whereby multiple listeners and time-space acknowledgment transformed the landscape into something more than a backdrop of sound sampling passivity.

The following Phase of practice reflection includes three practice-based works. *There or Thereabouts* (2014) discusses a film work that began in 2011. It shows the dilemma and struggle that runs throughout all of this research: the tension between physical specificity and transient sound. The work describes moments of failure as "Bio-critical Incidents" and accepts them as productive methodological influences in addition to valid practice-based material.

Tasked to Hear (2014) reflects on a year-long study of an area approximately the size of one metre square. Again, this work can be understood as a test in relation to specificity (site/body) and sound (non-site/source). It talks through the project's own Bio-critical Incidents and seeks to include and embrace many of them within the final image-sound-text based publication of work.

Finally *(Auto) Dialogical Feedback: Towards an Archive of Loss* (on-going) responds to the tensions of accumulation and archiving present throughout the whole thesis. The work entails re-broadcasting the sounds recorded over the course of the PhD back into South Gare before deleting them. Through contextual analysis I posit the work as an alternative archive of loss; one based upon anthropological precedents and built upon the active and participatory collaboration of sound and space.

There or Thereabouts

We may find ourselves like Humpty-Dumpty, shattered wrecks unable to recapture a smooth, seamless innocence [...] Once we take into account our role in our own productions, we may be led into new possibilities that compensate for this loss (Myerhoff & Ruby, 1982, p.2).

During Phase One I had made the panoramic 360-degree film titled *Around* (2012). The film conveyed a totalitarian depiction of the ear's view. Through a fixed rotational point it also highlighted the central dilemma of remaining physically still whilst being swept elsewhere by sound. However, in retrospect the film was left unresolved. My primary concern was still felt in the lack of embodied self-presence. A secondary preoccupation resided around the technology employed, specifically a "sounding" mechanical motor that was excluded for the aesthetic necessities of representation. Within the *30 Minutes of Listening* (2012) exhibition, a mirror, placed opposite to the projection had also sparked ideas relating to more in-camera experimentation. What if I was to bring the mirror into the film itself? Pragmatically it would draw attention to my own "being there". How could I achieve the same level of presence within the sounding and technological aspects of the work?

I retuned to South Gare, equipped with a mirror, cut approximately to the size of my torso. The initial strategy was to simply implant it into the landscape and with each sweep of the image, be reflected as I sat under the tripod.



Figure 27

There or Thereabouts (2014), technical set up, copyright the author

I was still occupying a sedentary role, fixed under the camera and part of its apparatus. However, rather than trying to position the microphone so as to eliminate the sound of the rotating mechanical device, I consciously made sure the microphone was as equally “hearing” the technology as much as the rest of the environment. Furthermore, I allowed myself to be heard if I needed to move, rather than any flawed and painful attempt at remaining physically “silent”. I sat, pressed record and remained; adjusting my position gradually until general levels of discomfort became unbearable. Afterwards I packed up the equipment and made my way to the car in order to view the footage. Upon reviewing the material I was underwhelmed by my relative immobility throughout. I needed to be more active in being present and also ensure any self-absence became more acknowledged and performed. I decided to move to a different location and film another version for comparison.

It was in the area known as “Cabin rocks” where I began to set up the same scenario. Feeling confident as the 6 am sun burned through the sky, I took the mirror from its protective case and began to position and secure it against one of the tripods.

Moving to the opposite tripod, where the camera and my own physical listening belonged, I noticed the wind began to pick up. In that very same instance of recognition, I looked down as my shirt flapped open: I knew immediately the mirror was going to be in trouble. I could only turn and look on as it fell from its “secure” position, face down, into the hard slag rocks that make up the Gare. I had been through so many of these incidents (cable severing, batteries failing, back injuries, not pressing record) that I was almost relieved when it happened. I laughed and sarcastically shouted to myself “it’s all part of the process”. Irony as it was meant, the point of all these incidents is that you cannot silence them: they are the unfortunate increments that allow a piece of research and practical experimentation to evolve.

Moreover, these incidents are the practical manifestations that make up part of the Contact Zone. I believe there is a valid and original methodology contained within such circumstantial occurrences. It is perhaps more a perspective than a strategy, but it is one that incorporates and recognises failure, technological inter-dependence and corporeal limitations. They amplify power dynamics and agency negotiation between a recordist and his or her environment and tools. Aesthetically they represent aspects otherwise marginalised or silenced in the production of a given sound work and in doing so, function as critically engaged artefacts of field recording. I came to understand and call these moments “Bio-critical Incidents” - circumstantial mishaps, which occur primarily within the contact zone.

“Bio-critical” has a two-fold meaning. One referring to a personal and long-standing back injury. The second relates to the self-reflexive and critical framework within which I have situated the practice. “Incidents” references the disruptive and circumstantial events that surround the process of making, particularly found in the methods and tools of mediation. All three aspects of Bio-critical Incidents became amplified towards the end of Phase One when I severed a microphone cable (see

Phase One's section: "Severing all Ties: A Few Days of Fantastical Thought"). A collection of audio examples has since published as part of a digital compilation for "World Listening Day" (2014), and highlight the potential sound practice that can emerge from harnessing Bio-critical Incidents.



Figure 28

There or Thereabouts (2014), smashed mirror, copyright the author

Returning to the incident of the shattered mirror, I found the largest piece, propped it up on a rock and decided to continue filming. Noticing how redundant the mirror was, with the tiny amount of my body able to be in reflection, I stood and shortly after began walking behind and in front of it, then far into the distance and back until I was standing still, looking directly into the camera as it panned. I had started to perform in camera and play with presence and absence in a more active and creative manner. I would walk across the microphone, stand and stare directly into the camera, disappear for two full rotations and then reappear sat down under the tripod. It was the type of critical yet poetic interrogation of my own production process I was striving towards: one that animated issues of subjective and

technological co-presence and began to utilise the field as an active place of performance.

Once I had finished experimenting I stayed with the broken mirror for over an hour: I felt the work had finally come together through its shattered remains. Before leaving I cleaned up all the remnants and recorded the sound of me doing so. The recording was included on the World Listening Day compilation and I would stress again that it represents the type of sound practice that can emerge from utilising Bio-critical Incidents. With the shards cleaned away, I knew I had to return one last time and implement these changes. After two years of experimentation it boiled down to ensuring the mirror was genuinely secure and more importantly, I would return with a refined methodological appreciation for the performance-based nature of the piece.



Figure 29

There or Thereabouts (2014), production still, copyright the author

Please listen to “Track 10” on the accompanying DVD, a recording excerpt the broken mirror being cleaned away.⁶⁴ Following this please listen to “Track 11”, the full edited work *Bio-critical Incidents* (2014), which contains audio examples of both Bio-critical Incidents and Elsewhere Fields.

⁶⁴ This is an extract from the full audio publication *Bio-critical Incidents* (2014), discussed during Phase Three’s practice reflection document “There or Thereabouts”.

Returning months later, new mirror in tow, I was finally able to complete the film. Although the early morning frost did bring a level of condensation to the reflection, which rendered me invisible for the first three attempts, as the sun broke, the mirror eventually began to warm and clear. I was extremely active in the production of the work; as if playing a game of hide and seek. I was continually acknowledged and erased with each sweep of the image and every sound of my recorded movement. Through in-camera performance and the amplification of human, animal and mechanical noise, the film functions as a playful yet critical re-hearing of aspects otherwise silenced in field recording practice.

The work differs greatly from the first panoramic effort presented as part of *30 Minutes of Listening* (2012) and is the result of almost twenty individual efforts. No other piece of practice, submitted here, has gone through such surgical dissection. It was only through the comprehension and tuning of Bio-critical Incidents that I came to trust the process and continue to pick at its aesthetic seams.

The film was installed over two days as part of the “European Sound Studies Association” conference in Copenhagen, 2014. Like *Re-capturing* (2013), *There or Thereabouts* (2014) demonstrates the embroiled aspects of field recording between self, place and technology. The 360-degree motion advanced the idea of entrapment but more so, that listening and recording is a collaborative act that reveals as much as it obfuscates: that site - be it South Gare or myself - is contingent and continually made, shared and re-made. Only by acknowledging the interplay of human, animal, environmental and technological agents, can field recording begin to represent such reflexivity and adopt positions over its own ethics and politics of mediation.

Please watch “Track 12” on the accompanying DVD.



Figure 30

There or Thereabouts (2014), film still (a), copyright the author



Figure 31

There or Thereabouts (2014), film still (b), copyright the author

Tasked to Hear

What if we had ‘cuckooing’ or ‘craking’? In this sense the name would be what the bird does; the bird would not be an object that makes sounds but a centre of activity in its environment (Whitehouse, 2013, pp.73-74).

As stated in the introduction to this Phase, the final works presented here are in fact extensions and progressions from projects initiated during Phase One. *There or Thereabouts* (2014) advanced *Around* (2012), and the following diary-based *Tasked to Hear* (2014) primarily built upon the mirror and text piece titled *In* (2012).

The conceptual premise of *In* (2012) was consistent with the idea of testing site-specificity in relation to sound and listening. It was part of the exhibition *30 Minutes of Listening* (2012), which examined exactly that: thirty minutes of sustained listening in one specific place. The two crucial aspects of criticism from the (mirror-text) work surrounded how I was describing (in text) what I was hearing. In addition, why omit references to my own presence amongst the textscape? In other words, had I built a sonic terrain based on identifying and writing sounds as objects? Furthermore, why had I completely erased my own subjective presence, interaction or interference within this time-space?

With this in mind I furthered the *30 Minutes of Listening* (2012) proposition by extending it over a year’s worth of indexical points. From March 2013 to February 2014; on the last Saturday of every month; at 12pm; in exactly the same spot; I returned to South Gare and listened. The area I visited each month was no larger than one metre squared. I wanted the geographical and time-based framework to be as strict as possible in order to draw out the overarching tensions between physical provenance and sounding transience. During each visit I registered linguistic, biographical, corporeal, scientific, photographic, time and place-based references. Audio recordings were also made along with written notes, which attempted to

describe, locate and feel what I heard. Technical data such as body temperature readings, decibel information, along with atmospheric statistics such as humidity, wind and external temperature were monitored. I also noted mental and physiological thoughts and feelings. The point was to mix qualitative and quantitative analysis: critical, poetic, objective and subjective factors alongside the natural and industrial sounding agents and my own audible and inaudible self. I wanted to question the validity of both personal and scientific analysis as ways of representing place and experience. The final action of each visit involved photographing the space directly above and below the listening location.

Much of the note taking, written in-situ, was later re-edited in retrospect. This method was deliberately obfuscated by leaving long gaps between the time of original listening, and the act of writing its memory. I placed emphasis on representing all that I heard and misheard - including myself - not as identities or objects but as unfolding events and relational goings on. This after all is how I had come to understand the process of listening, documenting and re-presenting to be. It is like trying to clench a fist around water - things will always spill outside of one's grasp. To register and document such will inevitably mean encountering a sense of displacement, loss and disruption: anything pertaining to specificity will loosen its anchorage.

If sound, and by association place, never quite stayed still, neither did my own static attempt at listening. If my body remained relatively fixed; time, space and sound alternated, pierced and led my auditory perspective. My attempt to listen, to trace sound's weave, became its own form of walking. My ear functioned like an ambulatory membrane, billowing between a fixed point and countless remote markers. It was through such sustained experiments and revelations I could optimistically conclude that I was, to some extent - like Ingold and Voegelin's

respective propositions - always on the move: if not physically then, perhaps in more performatively collaborative ways.

The two pertinent aspects of learning to arrive from both *Tasked to Hear* (2014) and my original back problem can be understood as such: One, that listening, if you are fortunate enough to have your hearing, contains many of the ambulatory and generative attributes a physical walk does. Secondly, that the incessant movement bound into sound's unsettled nature means that when representing a particular place, back injury or not, the historical tension and improbability of site-specificity is compounded further when the investigation is primarily a sonic one. The task of documenting such a process will always veer between degrees of physical-affective intimacy and the less proximate sources of sound.

Visiting the exact same place each month was of course a very fixed and specific endeavour. I was acutely aware of both Contact and Elsewhere territories whilst producing *Tasked to Hear* (2014) as many of the visits were done within the timeframe of one day. Departing from London during the early morning to arrive in South Gare for 12pm, before returning later that afternoon completed a round journey of approximately five hundred miles. I wanted to acknowledge the inside-outside status of the project as much as possible in order to counter the idea that my dwelling was somehow permanent and therefore, more authentic experience of place. In addition, I continued to resist any monologist perspective of field recording in every aspect of the project. This entailed one of the visits (July 2013) being conducted in the recognised company of my partner Helena.

The project's realisation was envisaged and produced as a physical book. I wanted to publish the twelve entries as a collective diary, yet retain a sense of expansiveness through adjacent strands of its production (audio download, art postcard, writing). The final publication (Corbel Stone Press, 2014) includes the twelve written entries

alongside the photographs taken above and below the point of listening. Physical and psychological observations, in addition, to the data sets of each visit are also listed with each entry. This data was visualised further into a table of aggregates for the postcard and front and back covers, and rotated on its axis. The aesthetic idea behind this was to subtly draw attention to how the body positions itself in relation to place. Furthermore, the data set, incomplete in some areas due to technological failures (Bio-critical Incidents), aimed to question whether tabature and graphs can reveal anything meaningful about the experience of place.

The point of the work was to examine specificity and displacement in the contact zone through listening and its consequent modes of representation. Diversifying the aesthetics of the diary seemed logical then within the explicit intentions of the work and its continual attempt at reproducing “site”. With the importance of Bio-critical Incidents still at the forefront of my thinking, I was keen that the data and technological aspects, presented in the publication, retained and reproduced the imperfections bound into the delivery of such a staggered project. Specks of lens dust, devices malfunctioning, physical pain and emotional resistance were amplified and included. This was the point of the practice I was building after all.

The audio document is similar in that it contains audible traces of myself amongst the environment and is both textually attached yet physically detached from publication. The sound was assembled from a composite of the twelve months and re-presented over twenty five minutes and fifty three seconds: the average time I spent listening in South Gare over the study’s total duration. The audio itself was made accessible through an external download code that also contained these instructions:

You are invited to transfer this sound file onto a media player; go to a familiar place, sit or stand and listen using headphones. Set the volume at a level that still allows you to hear your own environment, and your own movements (Wright, *Tasked to Hear*, 2014).



Figure 32

Tasked to Hear (2014) (a), copyright the author



Figure 33

Tasked to Hear (2014) (b), copyright the author

The accompanying suggestion drew upon the earlier set of instructions from the *30 Minutes of Listening* (2012) exhibition. The original idea behind them was to acknowledge Elsewhere Fields: documenting the initial car journey to South Gare along with other transient anterior and prospective events. More importantly, the instructions aided my proposition that listening is a shared process; that others can take these suggestions and go about “doing” their own version of the work. For *Tasked to Hear* (2014) I wanted to consider not just my own listening then, but also the public’s re-hearing of the work. It was vital to encourage a similar scenario for somebody who would encounter the work; that they take it (sound work) to a familiar place and listen to it amongst the sound of their own environment. The public’s place for listening in this scenario becomes their own Contact Zone: a mixed collaborative sharing of space, sound and subjectivities.

In conclusion *Tasked to Hear* (2014) is not an empathetic or nostalgic illustration of a place or its sounds but a collaborative and contested document that achieves a recognised collapse of (elsewhere) displacement and (contact) specificity. After three years of experimentation and refinement I believe it represents an original document of field recording and shows a possible route for interpreting and disseminating long-term studies of place.

The emphasis throughout is again one of entanglement at the point of “contact” along with the implicit awareness of “elsewhere” fields. Representing these distinct yet entwined thresholds had to be something that embraced the dual nature of physical stillness and sounding transience. It represents a contestable and disruptive process - a dissection of technological, human and non-human co-presences; underscored through a task that is as much about loss as it is capture.

The critical and poetic acceptance of themes such as loss must be worked into an aesthetics of field recording production in order to challenge its heroic traditions of

preservation and capture. An Inter-agential sensibility therefore embraces multiple ways of disseminating and unsettling a project and its primary or “contact” focus. As suggested during the section “Global Networks & the Non-site of Sound”, this extends to the Internet as another channel of distribution and access, one that disturbs traditional notions of site-specificity and creates an ‘unsitely’ aesthetics (Miranda, 2013).

In presenting this work I would argue I have not lost South Gare or its human inhabitants as a point of reference. Rather, I believe the work, along with all of Phase Two and Three allowed the landscape and its subjects to sound as part of an overall mix. The listening experience I described and recorded in various ways on *Tasked to Hear* is knotted in human and non-human contact. It demonstrates the emplacement and displacement bound into sitting still within an auditory world of flux. The very process of field recording is critically dissected and presented through its unsettling effects that straddle both Contact Zones and Elsewhere Fields.

Please listen to “Track 13” on the accompanying DVD and if possible do as invited (see p.184 of this thesis).

(Auto) Dialogical Feedback: Towards an Archive of Loss

‘Perhaps it is historians’ special way of shaking a fist at the image of their own mortality, but every generation must lament that its artifacts, its milieu, will largely be lost to history’ (Sterne, 2009, p.55).

The final piece of practice - *(Auto) Dialogical Feedback* (on-going) (ADF) - presented here is by no means a defining representation or culmination of what has gone before. Although it does contain a certain finality to it, perhaps more so than any other of the preceding practice, it is still very much an on going, process-led work. As with all this research it began “elsewhere”, outside the parameters of the PhD and part of an overall reassessment of my relationship to field recording.

Phase Two addressed conservation’s impact upon field recording through archival legacies of preservation, altruism and its paradoxical embroilment with death. Such critical thinking enabled me to reflect on and address how I accessed my own personal archive of recordings. Having spent years of dedicated time and energy in South Gare, it was only natural that I would have amassed a substantial amount of recordings⁶⁵. Yet the reality of how I accessed them was fairly simple: I did not. I barely ever thought to pull out a hard-drive and listen to its contents. Sound, and with it, contextual time and space sat silently within a virtual storage unit: here the purpose of a recording appeared to reside in collecting digital dust. Why do I continue to hold onto them? Simply because I can: thanks to the relatively infinite realm of digital space? To preserve memories or prepare for a future sonic apocalypse?

This is the type of unconscious, fear-driven grand narrative, which field recording practitioners are intrinsically caught within: that recording is a way of preserving or

⁶⁵ Although this is true, the amount of recordings made over the course of research significantly dropped after I severed a microphone cable in 2012.

“capturing” history, memory and place, and it needs to be done so that future generations can reassemble our past, in their present. Soundscape studies, as we have seen, only accelerated the motivational fight against ephemerality by actively seeking to record sounds that may one day disappear altogether⁶⁶.

Yet loss and erasure are part and parcel of that very same process of capture (see Bannon, 2006; Featherstone, 2000). Consequently, as sound studies and media historian Jonathan Sterne (2009) has suggested, it becomes more apt to reassess the role of forgetting. He reminds us that loss has always been part of a recording and archival processes evidenced through technological advancement and obsolescence, in addition to curatorial forms of exclusion and nationalist agendas (see pp.55-65).

With regards to the digital era, where files do not deteriorate over time like analogue carriers and instead simply disappear through hard drive failure and file corruption, loss is perhaps best understood as the common denominator; given the sheer volume of what is being produced and the overwhelming improbability of “capturing” it all. As Sterne (2009) points out, this is not an argument against archives but an acknowledgement that all histories, whether analogue or digital, are formed upon partial truths; of fragments both lost and found (see p.65). Preservation functions as a fantasy to cheat death in that ‘sound recording is an extension of ephemerality, not its undoing’ (Sterne, 2009, p.58). Furthermore, loss is the basis for most priority-driven decision-making at the level of an archive, with rarities and unstable carriers taking precedence over more available and “secure” formats. The question that arises, much like in Phase Two, surrounds what are we actually preserving through recording; presumably something more than just a signal? How much of myself is captured amongst my own recordings of South Gare?

⁶⁶ For soundscape studies, loss functioned not only as a motivation to preserve, but also through the hypocritical erasure of unattractive “lo-fi” sounds (see pp.27-28 of this thesis).

To practically answer such questions and themes I re-approached my archive of environmental recordings, initially reaching back to projects prior to the commencement of this PhD and latterly, engaging with recordings from South Gare itself. I wanted to transpose discussions from institutional archives onto individual practitioners like myself in order to establish a personal ethics of archiving and to productively re-engage with the sounds I had gathered along the way.

Like much of the work presented, *ADF* (on-going) endeavoured to critique the prevailing culture of “capture” which presides over contemporary field recording practice and discourse. This particular work builds upon sound anthropologist Steven Feld’s technique of dialogical editing, positively mentioned earlier during Phase One’s section “The Contemporary Listening Block: Collecting & Self-dissolution”. What struck me about Feld’s method of playback and collaborative editing is that it took place in-situ, in the field. Although difficult to find specific reference to whether or not Feld played back sounds to inhabitants over headphones or speakers (I imagine headphones), the possibility of dispersing them in open air, back into the place of their production seemed ripe with potential. Imagining this scenario in Feld’s case, the forest would become infused and doubled with the pre-recorded playback.

If Feld and his participants were collaborating within an anthropological method of inclusion, surely the pre-recorded playback and real time environments were also in dialogical conversation? This connection seemed to work positively towards my notion of the Contact Zone, whereby “the field” is transformed into a performed space of production and collaboration: a simultaneous place of gathering and space for representation.

As discussed throughout Phase Two's practice reflection, field recording never really "captures" anything other than a trace or shadow of the original source. The purported ephemerality of sound and non-visible impact of its capture has led to the practice being deemed inconsequential. Yet surely it is ecological, critical and creative to think about the consequences of my own digital footprint, however ambiguous a territory that may be? For myself, an individual practitioner-researcher and neither a national archive nor bio-acoustician, what was I doing with these recordings once "captured"? What is their purpose and function when displaced within my own digital cell? What are the consequences of these sounds going unheard?

I began my experiments by preparing a batch of recordings unrelated to South Gare and within close geographic proximity to where I lived. The methodology involved returning certain sound files back to where they were recorded⁶⁷. I played them back into the space, letting "then" and "now" mingle and infuse one another. It was during this moment of playback and reception when digital past and present began to merge. Dwelling in those worlds I reached a point of audial confluence: a contingent apex that for a brief moment generated and actively produced the site anew, both within the environment and myself. When the recording finished its playback, I moved the file into trash and pressed the "delete permanently" option.

Returning sounds to their place of origin is potentially the most traditionally site-specific work of all of the practice submitted. It is important to play them back in order to enhance the active and participatory function of the Contact Zone. I am also interested in the interventionist and event-based nature of this method: how playback may disrupt or be shared in a public space and enable an experience outside the conventional indoor multi-channel scenario. In this sense re-

⁶⁷ These initial experiments were achieved through the on board speaker of the digital recorder. They were conducted in the company of Dr Michael Gallagher who photographed the interventions and later audio recorded our conversations in situ.

broadcasting, from a personal archive could be opened up further by curating events where participants bring their own recordings for playback, deletion and discussion.



Figure 34

Author re-broadcasting sound back into original environment, image by Dr Michael Gallagher

The consequent erasure of material is the more problematic end of the work. Deletion is not something I take lightly. Having built a recording practice over many years it is painful to let sounds go. Yet there is closeness achieved in this final act that neither I, nor a public would be privy to, whilst recordings continue to sit mute within a hard-drive. Deletion ultimately attempts to reverse the one way extraction flow that field recording is immersed in. It ties into rejecting undertones of accumulation and possession: instead choosing to employ a method of sharing based on the death of sound. The final act of deletion is then, an affirmation of loss as a creative method: erasure becomes a poetic, symbolic device, yet one that is also a very real “action-gesture”.



Figure 35

Author re-broadcasting sound back into original environment, image by Dr Michael Gallagher

I would go further and state that if working within ideas of the “sonic” the thematic of impermanence is bound into the ephemerality of the medium itself. It seems useful then, like Sterne, to re-tune methodologies within environmental sound art towards themes of loss and displacement as much as capture and preservation.

ADF (on-going) leans on a tradition that artist and political activist Gustav Metzger called “auto-destructive art”. Metzger is seen as the forerunner of the movement in which he destroyed his own work and in doing so, challenged hierarchies of power whilst emphasising the “constructive” or “emergent” as part of that very same process (Jefferies, 2012). The point being that through a seemingly destructive act new meanings and representations came to the fore. For environmental sound art, Annea Lockwood’s *Piano Burning* (1968) is a more specific reference, which through its act of piano destruction, challenged musical and gender hierarchies. Broader precedents can be found in Hollis Frampton’s experimental film *Nostalgia* (1971). The work is made up of Frampton placing black and white photographs which he made earlier in his career onto a hot plate. The images melt and gradually disappear through their own smoking destruction. Frampton voiced over the film his thoughts and memories of each photograph. However, sound and image work on different time lines as we see a burning photograph yet hear a description based upon the following, unseen image. The disjunction collapses past and future into an active use of the present time-space. In this sense Frampton’s film functions like that of the Contact Zone.



Figure 36

Deleting the sound file after re-broadcast, image by Dr Michael Gallagher

More precise to the issue of sound preservation are works such as *Magnetism Party* (2005) by the activist-hacking collective Monochrom. In this instance the group held a party and invited audience members to bring their own recordings, tapes, phones, discs, hard drives and institutional access cards. At the venue members of the collective would run neodymium or bar magnets over materials and as a result wipe any data from the media carrier.

The most specific precedent for erasure within field recording is found in Christoph Korn and Lasse-Marc Riek's work *Series Invisible* (2007). Produced as a book with no audio component, the text-based project involved recording and later deleting the same sound files. Although Korn and Riek's introduction states recordings were made from random or subjective locations, the places documented (and later erased) are very much historically and conceptually premised. Within the book, they exist along two textual time frames: one as a historical reference, tied to specific time and place-based events: locations such as the grave of philosopher G.W.F. Hegel or the studio of Michel Foucault. We also read geographic territories through past histories of murder, concentration camps, Jewish cemeteries and Nazi bunkers. Alongside the historical framing of place are details (time, date, location) of the sounds recorded by Korn and Riek in the present day, in addition to information concerning a recording's subsequent deletion. The work questions personal and collective forms of historical memory, particularly surrounding Nazi occupation and the Holocaust of World War Two. Rather than pertaining to "capture" some essence of that history, as field recording so unequivocally does, they instead question the authenticity of sound as a valid or "true" historical document. Deleting the file, suggests sound cannot achieve a meaningful representation of history or memory. The book itself may even be completely fictional: for all intents and purposes Korn and Riek may never have made or deleted any of the material presented in text?

Such erasure contains with it the problematics of silencing histories or cultures. Provocatively read, *Series Invisible* (2007) could be interpreted as a denial of the Holocaust. Another, more sinister interpretation can be found in the present day, where just recently the UK conservative party deleted swathes of their own internet archives in an attempt to erase potentially inflammatory speeches made between 2000 and 2010 (BBC, 2013).

The point to understanding my own project in relation to such manipulations of history is to insist on the personal and non-institutional nature of it; that it is a methodology for creation that suits the medium I am working with, and that I am not the custodian nor speaker for a nation or its public material. As Bannon (2006) reminds us, forgetting (deleting) begins at the level of the personal, framed as such, it is not a 'limitation of the human, but is rather a necessary mental activity that helps us to filter the incoming sensory flood' (p.7). However, whether an institute or individual, Bannon (2006) also registers, as do I, that both remembering (persevering) and forgetting (deleting) is never neutral (see pp.8-9).



Figure 37

Author re-broadcasting and deleting sound in South Gare (2014), copyright the author

Phase Three Conclusion

The thought of erasing the recordings I have made over the course of this PhD could not have been further from my mind when I began this research. The whole endeavour seemed to be geared towards obtaining something solid and specific in practice through the fundamental method of recording and by association, building an archive of sound. Yet even before this PhD began, as I have stated, I was searching for more embodied, reciprocal and non-possession-based ways of engaging place and sound. Developing works over Phase's Two and Three initiated a deliberate move towards re-imagining South Gare's function as one of "contact". Consequently I was able to physically and mentally comprehend it, and the works produced, as confluences or relationships rather than single objects or entities.

There or Thereabouts (2014) built on work from Phase One and helped to conceptually frame a unique methodology based on the physical, technical and circumstantial incidents that have occurred throughout every Phase of practice. These Bio-critical Incidents strived to find an aesthetics based on the equal presence and absence of human and non-human factors within a sounding environment. Through *Tasked to Hear* (2014), I was able to comprehend many of the contradictory issues that surrounded the onset of this PhD. Prior to commencing the research a back injury had focused my attention onto small-scale studies of areas due to the practical fact that I could no longer chase sound. It certainly made me reassess and question the implied mobility in practices such as soundwalking along with field recording's overall pursuit to "capture". In many ways my forced sedentary situation unknowingly bled into the research through its initial attempt at achieving a more phenomenological and site-specific project. Yet as histories of Land Art and my own experiments began to show, between the realities of communication and the dislocating effect between sound sources and my listening body, South Gare had to become a site of displacement as much as it was physically specific.

ADF (on-going) further animated the discussion of human and non-human negotiation into an original territory, whereby “loss” substituted “capture” as the main driver for research. Appropriating Feld’s dialogical method onto the environment itself I was able to infuse (elsewhere) sounds back into a (contact) place of “origin”: a method that functioned to collapse time and space⁶⁸.

Perhaps the largest issue with *ADF* (ongoing) is that it, more than any other work presented, is an irremovable site-specific project. Like site-specific art history tells us then, it must straddle both “contact” and “elsewhere” territories and as such, comes to rely upon heterogeneous documentation as its primary vessel for wider representation.

Finally, as CD’s purported to be “perfect sound forever” and digital media strives for “lossless compression”, it feels personal, timely and specific to the “sonic” that I embrace a relevant counterpoint methodology through erasure. What I have ended up with is not a static traditional archive of both used and unused material, but an active and performed body of transference and loss.

⁶⁸ As stated previously the word “origin” is not to say returning sound to where it was recorded extracts any greater amount of truth or scientific knowledge.

Thesis Conclusion

Motivations & Originality

This thesis began by asking the question: how is agency distributed “in the field” and how can the practice of field recording critically manifest the relationship between humans and non-humans?

Through the mutual and historic influence of R. Murray Schafer and Pierre Schaeffer, I have demonstrated that contemporary environmental sound art practices are representing sound, and by association its non-human subjects, as something to be controlled and manipulated, based on fundamental legacies of composition, beauty and abstraction. Due to the entangled pursuit of sound for either collection or composition purposes, agency, both in and out of the field, has been overlooked as a subject for artistic practice.

The consequence is manifest through the paradoxical silencing of inter-relational politics, in the field, and a continuing contextual division between sound’s materiality and its socio-political content. As a result contemporary field recording practice has turned a blind ear towards works that demonstrate methodological and aesthetic self-reflexivity, in addition to works that instigate broader inter-textual critique around the ethics and politics of the very relations, subjectivities and apparatus that make up the field⁶⁹. The points below reinforce my original contributions and show how the aforementioned problems have both motivated and been interrogated throughout my practice-based research.

1. Contextual Update

Rather than continue to frame sound’s materiality through the historic composition-based context of acousmatics, I have instead built a contemporary update through discussions in new materialism. New materialism arrives out of Anthropology’s self-

⁶⁹ This statement, as discussed in Phase One, is focused on certain dominant trends.

reflexive turn, a context this research has drawn inspiration from throughout. Like acousmatics, it foregrounds the vibrant materiality of “things”. However, unlike acousmatics, it does not do so at the expense of socio-political context⁷⁰. Instead it stresses ethics, power distribution and environmental concerns, and does not treat such pre-occupations as objects for composition but subjects of inter-relational inquiry. Christoph Cox has outlined the need for a similar contextual pairing of new materialism and field recording. However, the examples he posits are, in my opinion, not conclusive representations for what an original field recording practice can sound or look like. Showing my creative works as something different to what Cox offers is how the originality of my practice is defined.

2. Original Practice

The most original contribution this research makes is located within the content of my Inter-agential practice. As mentioned, it locates itself within the similar concerns of contemporary artists such as Christina Kubisch or Toshiya Tsunoda: those concerned with the vibrant, non-representational effects of sound. Yet my research defines itself through an outwardly different set of aesthetic representations. The two central ways my practice differs from these contemporary strands are one: through the incorporation of heterogenous media. This is not a denial of sound as a medium but an acceptance of listening as a multi-sensual process. A comparison I drew upon throughout Phase One was Richard Long’s move from Sculpture to Walking. An Inter-agential practice makes its own move from Sound to Listening and therefore frees itself from formal categories, coming to rest upon process, as opposed to legacies regarding the singularity of form and abstraction. Image, sculpture and objects can all effectively perform sound if their root concerns the process of listening. This is how non-sounding works such as *Mut(e)ual Consent* (2013) and *(Auto) Dialogical Feedback* (on-going) function. The deployment of other media has therefore been achieved at the level of its performative presence. To be clear, the non-

⁷⁰ As acknowledged (see pp.103-104 of this thesis) this is not always the case. Like acousmatics, it carries the risk of socio-political denial.

sounding works I have produced have as much “sonic” self-reflexivity as any of the audible works submitted.

Like anthropology’s own self-critique, I am not rendering the medium of sound or discipline of field recording obsolete, but attempting to place it within a greater mix of discursive and formal critique. This leads onto the second way in which my practice defines itself: through the audible recognition of presence. Soundworks such as *Bio-critical Incidents* (2014) or the audio component of *Tasked to Hear* (2014) do not re-enforce the dominant, de-humanised examples Cox posits, of drones and textural abstraction. Instead they focus on a sounding environment through the disruptive interplay of myself and the non-human agents that make up a particular encounter. This is what drives the core content for the production of Inter-agential works: not the bird or vibration of sound in itself, but the dynamics of how I am mediating, performing and effecting that encounter.

My Inter-agential practice therefore locates itself within the asymmetrical politics that make up field recording. Rather than engage compositional narratives and works of ecological or historical re-telling, I have emphasised issues of production and subject-object relations integral to the discipline. Focusing on these areas must be understood as a way to bring about a politicisation of the practice. It is important to stress an Inter-agential practice does not attempt to answer the original question posed by providing a false sense of re-balance. Field recording will always be asymmetrical as long as I point the microphone and choose how to represent the sound of “others”. Thus, agency and relational asymmetry are key areas for critical unpicking and creative re-animation. The subjects have not been examined for the purposes of sentimental or misanthropic re-balance.

3. Original Methods

I have developed two original methodologies and framing devices as part of my Inter-agential practice. One is found under the neologism “Bio-critical Incidents” (BCI). This is a unique strategy for comprehending and amplifying the numerous points of “failure” bound up in the act of field recording; the performance of chasing sound; and the riddlesome task of documenting it. The first instance of such occurred when I severed a set of microphone cables whilst recording in South Gare. Another key BCI was the smashing of a mirror whilst making the film *There or Thereabouts* (2014).

Both examples show that field recording can be an act of critical reflection. Documenting and re-presenting these incidents demonstrates “process” need not be confined to discourse: it can be creative content for rigorous artistic production. BCI’s function to disrupt and agitate field recording’s historically aestheticised outputs. Noise, microphone handling, shattered mirrors, severed cables, back problems; these are the inaudible and marginalised aspects that I believe need to be re-inserted in complex and subtle ways.

The type of aesthetic self-reflexivity I have posited is not therefore simply recording the sound of my feet or breath for the sake of saying “I am there”. Rather, BCI’s are concerned with the immediate entanglements of place, self and sound: amplifying the productions of such has meant creating an anti-aesthetic, one that is not pleasant on the ear but necessary for a greater understanding of the processional and medial dynamics at work. *Tasked to Hear* (2014) serves again as a prime example whereby the methods of production - body temperature beeps and note taking scribbles - became the equally heard aspects of the environment.

The second original methodological contribution is contained with the neologism “Trans-hearing”. This method became a way of facilitating a shift in perspectives:

fostering a way of listening to myself listen. Hearing from the point of view of a bird was not implemented for animistic transcendence or anthropomorphic absorption. It was a device that enabled environments, animals and technology to begin capturing me. My own presence therefore became amplified through the imaginary ears of others, not in terms of ascertaining “knowledge” but through the acknowledgment that I am heard: recognising difference through semantic loss.

Displaying this in practice radically challenges the historical legacy that the landscape is merely an extra musical resource which awaits occupation and draining. It suggests field recording’s non-human subjects are reciprocal listening agents. The consequence being felt through the transformation of the historic altruistic recordist, into a contemporary contestable presence. I became the chief protagonist, located at the crux of my subjects: generating work through hypothetical, poetic and critical interventions.

4. Original Concept

The consequence of such contributions is not only reflected in the diverse body of work submitted, but also within the primary site of study. Throughout, South Gare’s function transformed from a compositional resource, to one that could activate and “do” through its ability to capture me. *Re-capturing* (2013) being the culmination of an entrapment process that strived to re-distribute agency back onto South and indeed the technology I was employing. The area became a Contact Zone: a highly charged place where relational dynamics were examined and produced.

Establishing Contact Zones and Elsewhere Fields became a way of conceptually framing “the field”. Primarily the two territories re-hear the very specific history of field recording’s environmentally dissolved authors. Both hint at a constant cycle of habitation and displacement, and disrupt a purely phenomenological longing to be “in” place. I am a transient occupant of both (sound and place): simultaneously in

everyday life, and most definably when setting out on a specific field trip. Sound is always showing me an elsewhere as much as the here and now.

Demarcation, like Brandon LaBelle's or Timothy Morton's must come out of sound's omni-directional attributes, not merely bolted on for classificatory needs. This is the fundamental error of the soundscape project; segregation was taken as an abrupt and serious ideological task; it may have productively impacted broader institutional awareness but unfortunately, it set the artistic end of the spectrum hurtling towards the pursuit of hierarchical and aestheticised beauty.

Contact Zones and Elsewhere Fields therefore posit antagonistic conceptual territories and productive points of tension. Being both in and out of sound, here and there in place, immediate and far in body. They strive to keep dualities in gestural contact, rather than ideological separation, so that (human-animal, sound-source, abstraction-context) difference can be recognised within immersive conditions.

Site-specificity & Loss

In addition to these core contributions, one of the most productive ways in which I have comprehended my overall relationship to South Gare, and the works I produced, was through histories and practices of Land Art. Robert Smithson and more broadly Land Arts perpetual move from site (South Gare) to non-site (Gallery), paralleled a similar sense of displacement I encountered whilst working within one "specific" area. Furthermore, I came to understand issues relating to my own physical immobility and sound's porosity as mirrored tensions between the phenomenology of place and body, and the non-site demands of sound and representation. Rather than claim one or the other I have learnt from Land Art that these issues simply will not go away. The focus for my practice then, had to accept

and harness Land Arts diverse and heterogeneous use of media and documentation if I was ever going to emancipate myself from soundscape-acousmatic binds.

James Clifford (2001) suggests turns to the “specific” transpire as much in response to the times as anything else (see p.61). Clifford’s own ethnographic revolution transpired out of the “Reaganomics” era⁷¹. Land Art and much of western European sound art legacies originated as part of a resistance towards the formalist pursuits of abstract expressionism and minimalist sculpture. The times of my own research were set out for the reader during the opening sections “Background” and “Critical Context”, and undeniably stemmed from the global economic crisis of 2008. The protracted fallout from which served to highlight the radical inequality and uneven distribution of power and wealth that exists in the world today. A more localised context of “the times” has been reflected through the physical periods of disruption and immobility caused by a persistent back problem. Both global and local factors, within this research, should therefore be understood through one another’s respective versions of collapse.

In thinking through “these” times of mass accumulation and the seemingly limitless potential of digital space, I have argued for the need to re-engage the personal, productive and political capacity of loss. Working within realms of the sonic environment, methods of uncertainty and erasure must be embraced as productive tools if field recording is to resist its historical penchant for accumulation. (*Auto*) *Dialogical Feedback* (on-going) addressed these issues and strived for a new way of sharing field recordings, based on a complex understanding of the entangled nature of preservation and decay.

⁷¹ A term used to describe republican President of the United States of America, Ronald Reagan’s economic policy of the 1980’s: a policy that promoted the “free-market” of capitalism and restrictions on public spending.

Consequences & Future

There are of course flip sides to the arguments and positions I have adopted throughout the course of research and it is useful to re-assert them with this conclusion.

I should stress this PhD has not strived to mothball soundscape composition on the naïve basis that its musical background condemns artistic works to apolitical outputs. Environmental sound composition can be, and is political. The specific test for field recording remains in finding a relevant alternative between the two historic poles of abstraction (acousmatics) and representation (soundscape studies). This is what I hoped to have achieved in practice through original yet balanced ways.

None of my contributions have been levelled in order to “correct” environmental sound art. New materialism has many pitfalls; the main one being that human subjectivity becomes further separated from its non-human subjects. This is the inherent danger for field recording; that its authors are dissolved deeper into a background of silence, which paradoxically re-enforces their own positions of power and hegemony. New materialism may well send the context of field recording further into abstract representations of sonic phenomena. Although this outcome has been discussed in terms of something my research works against, it is not to say such works are less critical. My research should therefore be read within the context of field recording as offering a set of alternative methods and representational potentials for the practice more broadly.

Furthermore, the insistence upon heterogeneous media has not been implemented in doubt of the vitality and relevance of sound as a stand-alone material for artistic production. Nor has it been posited within a framework that listening solves all problems. In fact I would strongly warn the field that emphasising listening might only send it down an essentialist pathway that grants the same privileges to the auditory, which it constantly charges the ocular with. Listening should be

encouraged, I believe, primarily for its formal emancipatory potential. An Inter-agential practice does not assert listening makes the world a better place, or environmental sound art a less contradictory or complex practice. Its function has been to articulate field recording's key processes in an attempt to provide greater critical reflection and practical diversity.

Finally, this research brings with it further consequences and future actions. I aim to continue exploring the ways in which human, animal and technological relationships are enacted and mediated. I believe these relations are critical territories for debate amidst the flux and flow of a contemporary world and its associated technologies. Post humanist discourse offers the potential to aid a greater understanding of environmental sound arts core, non-human subjects. This parallel context also extends into the critically imaginative ways in which technology can be productively misused⁷².

My practice has undeniably become more interventionist and action-based, coming to rely less upon recording and composing environmental sound, and instead searching for ways to activate its relational complexity and agential distribution. These actions have harnessed parody and performance as methodological tools, with material outputs residing both on and off site, across various media and modes of representation.

All of which has been shadowed by an underlying desire to move towards more inclusive, participatory ways of presenting environmental sound art. My research has necessarily taken the content of field recording as its core point of focus, but future departures will move towards how such material can be participated in and through group scenarios and public settings. *(Auto) Dialogical Feedback* (on-going) began to test the shared interventionist aspects of dissemination, in the field, and I hope to further explore the potential for public events and group performances as

⁷² I am currently exploring this in practice through an ongoing project titled *Out of Hand* (2014). The first public broadcast of which occurred during an exhibition of audio works at New York Public Library, 2014.

works themselves. I am also keen to cultivate on-line projects, not as channels for distribution, but in the making of creative participatory projects that do not map sound, but investigate its relational effects and medial processes.

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