

Editorial: *Sound + Environment: Sense of Place*

By Rob Mackay

This special issue of *Interference* (Issue 7) *Sound + Environment: Sense of Place*, publishes expanded articles based on peer reviewed papers¹ selected for the *Sound + Environment 2017* conference² held at the University of Hull in June/July 2017. It is one of three journal issues publishing work from the conference. The other journals being *Sonic Ideas*³ (ISSN 2317-9694), published by CMMAS (Centro Mexicano para La Música et las Artes Sonoras), and *Soundscape*⁴, published by the World Forum for Acoustic Ecology.

Sound + Environment 2017 was a four-day conference bringing together artists and scientists to explore the ways that sound can deepen our understanding of environments. Through exploring scientific and artistic approaches together, we hoped to engage with sound in order to create complementary ways of investigating, understanding, and taking action. For example, recent developments in the field of ecoacoustics are proving fruitful in assessing ecosystem change. Sound is also increasingly used to monitor built structures and to inform urban design. We can use sound for scientific and artistic exploration, to inform and expand our knowledge of environments and our relationships to the world around us.

The aim of *Sound + Environment 2017* was to nurture meaningful collaborations which could generate new insights. The programme featured paper sessions and panels; workshops; public performances; installations, and interventions. It was hosted by the School of Arts in collaboration with the Institute of Estuarine and Coastal Studies, the Institute of Energy & Environment and the Institute of Culture, Place & Policy, at the University of Hull. We received over 240 submissions, and curated a programme of over 100 items, with over 150 conference delegates from 15 different countries. Full details of all abstracts, programme notes, and biographies are available in the conference proceedings⁵.

This *Interference* issue focuses on three complimentary articles exploring sense of place mediated through sound. Lauren Hayes' *Investigating autopoiesis in site-responsive sonic art*, reflects on her *Sounding Out Spaces* project through two case studies utilising hardware and software systems that Hayes has developed herself. The work explores the interactions between environment, composer, performer, machine, and audience in self-organising ecosystems created through autopoiesis. Contextualising her work with reference to the field of cybernetic theory, she creates musical

¹ Organising committee: Rob Mackay; Matt Barnard; Jez Riley French; Tariq Emam; Kathryn Queen. Reviews committee: Matt Barnard; Matthew Burtner; Joel Chadabe; Peter Cusack; John Drever; Almo Farina; Jez Riley French; Lauren Hayes; Cathy Lane; Eric Leonardson; Rob Mackay; Roger Malina; Annie Mahtani; Brona Martin; Stuart McLelland; David Monacchi; Stephan Moore; Katharine Norman; Linda O'Keeffe; Simon Oliver; Aki Pasoulas; Louise Roberts; Phil Rubini; Grant Smith; Pete Stollery; Matt Stone.

² <https://soundenvironment.net>

³ <http://sonicideas.org/>

⁴ <https://www.wfae.net/journal.html>

⁵ <https://soundenvironmentnet.files.wordpress.com/2018/06/sound-environment-2017-proceedings.pdf>

systems which emerge from the relationships between living things, machines, and the environment. The article details site-responsive works in the Sonoran Desert of Arizona and sub-arctic tundra in Finland.

Usue Ruiz Arana conducts a critical review and artistic response to the Tranquility Map of England (CPRE, 2007) in her article *The Wild in Silence*. The mapping itself relied heavily on sound as a defining factor. She questions the validity of the map and explores the apparent paradox between the fact that tranquillity is defined through human experience, yet what we value most in tranquil spaces is the absence of the human. She explores this notion through her creative practice research project *Silent Landscapes*, using the Northumberland National Park as its study area, explored through sound walks, culminating in a temporary installation.

In *What does Essex Sound Like? Capturing the changing sounds of an English county*, Sarah-Joy Maddeaux and Stuart Bowditch detail the process of creating an online audio map of Essex which includes both historic and present-day recordings as part of the project *You Are Hear: sound and a sense of place*, run by the Essex Sound and Video Archive at the Essex Record Office. The creation of online audio maps has been increasingly used over recent years in projects like Peter Cusack's *Favourite Sounds*, Stuart Fowke's *Cities and Memories*, Pete Stollery's sound archiving projects, and the British Library's *UK Soundmap*. This particular project is an interesting example of combining past and present sounds in one accessible interface, which is also open to users to add their own contributions, making it a constantly updated, and living sound map.

In addition to the three articles, Diana Chester has written a review of Thor Magnusson's book *Sonic Writing: technologies of material, symbolic & signal inscriptions*. Chester gives a comprehensive and balanced account of the book which makes an argument for the role that technological innovation has played in driving musical evolution. Magnusson takes us on a journey from medieval times through to the 21st century, and gives a historical perspective that goes beyond the Western world.

More about Sound + Environment 2017

Keynote speakers for the conference were Chris Watson⁶ and Dr Leah Barclay⁷.

Chris Watson was a founding member of the influential Sheffield based experimental music group Cabaret Voltaire during the late 1970's and early 1980's. Since then he has developed a particular and passionate interest in recording the wildlife sounds of animals, habitats and atmospheres from around the world. As a freelance composer and sound recordist Watson specialises in creating spatial sound installations which feature a strong sense and spirit of place. His television work includes many programmes in the David Attenborough 'Life' series including 'The Life of Birds' which won a BAFTA Award for 'Best Factual Sound' in 1996, and as the location sound recordist on the BBC's series 'Frozen Planet' which also won a BAFTA Award for 'Best Factual Sound' (2012).

Dr Leah Barclay is a multi-award winning Australian sound artist, composer and researcher working at the intersection of art, science and technology. She specialises in electroacoustic music, acoustic ecology and emerging fields of biology exploring environmental patterns and changes

⁶ <https://chriswatson.net/>

⁷ <https://leahbarclay.com/>

through sound. Her work has been commissioned, performed and exhibited to wide acclaim internationally by organisations including UNESCO, Ear to the Earth, Streaming Museum, Al Gore's Climate Reality and the IUCN. She runs several large-scale research projects, including UNESCO Biosphere Soundscapes. Leah is the president of the Australian Forum for Acoustic Ecology, the vice-president of the World Forum for Acoustic Ecology and serves on the board of a range of arts and environmental organisations. She is currently a postdoctoral research fellow at the Queensland Conservatorium Research Centre where she is leading a portfolio of research in acoustic ecology and climate change.

The conference saw the launch of *Trent Falls to Spurn Point*, a specially commissioned surround-sound installation from Chris Watson tracing the course of the Humber River. The installation was the culmination of 18 months of field recording along the length of the Humber estuary, including chemical works, nature reserves and docks. The project is a theatrical sound installation that takes the audience on a journey from the confluence of the rivers Ouse and Trent using sound, space and light as an evocation. The installation created a sonic arc of the Humber, sweeping above and below the surface, past a mix of remote wilderness and 21st century technology to Spurn Point where the sounds of the estuary mix and merge with the voices of the North Sea. The final presentation was an ambisonic 3D sound and light installation projected over a sphere of 20 loudspeakers in the University of Hull's Gulbenkian Theatre, with lighting design by Tim Skelly. Several BBC radio and television broadcasts⁸ preceded the installation.

Leah Barclay presented a Hull-specific version of her River Listening augmented reality audio walk via her Aurality app using the Echoes.xyz platform. River Listening is an augmented reality sound installation reimagining the world beneath the global rivers in sound. The installation can be experienced by walking along the river with a mobile device and triggering geo-located soundscapes. These geo-located sounds are layered with hydrophone (underwater) recordings and creative responses to the river that connect to the soundscapes of river systems across the world. This installation is part of an interdisciplinary project exploring the art and science of listening to rivers and the creative possibilities of aquatic bioacoustics. River Listening explores rivers as the lifeblood of communities and the potential for new approaches in the conservation of global river systems. To experience River Listening, the free app can be downloaded from the Appstore and any smartphone will act as a sonic compass guiding the listener along the river bank.

Leah Barclay also ran a hydrophone listening workshop for local school children as part of the conference's outreach activities, as well as presenting her original soundscape compositions using hydrophone recordings from the Great Barrier Reef.

A number of other sound installations and performances were featured in collaboration with Hull UK City of Culture and the PRS New Music Biennial, including the work of visiting artist-in-residence, Dave Burraston, who presented an installation and talk as part of his Rainwire project⁹, which aims to monitor rain fall through the application of novel longwire instruments to create acoustic rain gauges. Burraston was also mentored by Chris Watson as part of an NSW Regional Arts Fellowship.

⁸ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/uk-england-humber-40420309/humber-estuary-sounds-recorded-for-hull-university-s-city-of-culture-project>

⁹ <http://rainwire-project.blogspot.com/>

In the lead up to the conference, and as part of Hull's City of Culture programme, Peter Cusack curated *Favourite Sounds of Hull*¹⁰ as a continuation of his Favourite Sounds project. Since 1998, he has built a fascinating archive by inviting participants to identify their favourite sounds in London, Beijing, Prague, Berlin, Birmingham, Manchester and Southend-on-Sea. The result is a series of intriguing and often surprising results, revealing both the city of the ear, and the significant role that everyday sounds play in our lives. *Favourite Sounds of Hull* is a further step in a journey that encourages the local community as well as those who know and love Hull, to identify and share with the rest of the world, their favourite sounds of their city – a project devised especially for Hull, which ran from the autumn of 2016 and throughout the City of Culture year. Curated by Peter Cusack, and produced by Serious in association with the School of Arts of the University of Hull, the public were encouraged to submit their favourite sounds throughout the year and these were recorded and made available for all to hear at various live events during 2017.

During the weekend, we also collaborated with the PRS New Music Biennial, with installations presented in the City Centre, including an ambisonic sound Installation from artist Jason Singh exploring the voice of Hull; *Ring Out*: An event where kinetic sound sculptures by Ray Lee integrate with soundscapes of Hull city centre; and an installation inspired by Spurn Point from Gavin Bryars in Winestead Church.

Another inclusion in the programme which featured in the city centre was *Offshore: Artists explore the sea*. A major new exhibition produced and curated by Invisible Dust which contained a number of sound-related works. *Offshore* included new and existing works by internationally-renowned artists¹¹ whose engagement with our seas and oceans resonates with Hull's own very particular relationship to the sea. It was a first joint exhibition for Ferens Art Gallery and Hull Maritime Museum. *Offshore* was curated to uncover the crisis of the health of our oceans. Artists explored oceans role as a source of food and energy, coral bleaching, a dumping ground for waste and the reference point for many of our most haunting and significant myths. Through a range of media, poetry, writing, film and art these artists posed questions about our connection to and use of the sea. Invisible Dust developed relationships between some of the artists with marine biologists and ecologists from Oxford, Southampton and Hull Universities. Being informed and influenced by the science provided new stimulus to the artists' ideas.

A series of workshops and interventions were run on the University of Hull Campus and in town throughout the conference, as well as a rich and varied programme of paper sessions, installations,

¹⁰ <https://www.favouritesounds.org/?projectid=55>

¹¹ Artist new commissions: Saskia Olde Wolbers, Mariele Neudecker, Badgers of Bohemia, Kasia Molga, Martin Parr, Bik Van Der Pol, Phil Coy, John Wedgwood-Clarke and Rob Mackay, Jonathan Baldock and Ian J Brown, and new essay by author China Miéville.

Artist works: Tacita Dean, John Smith, Adam Chodzko, Alexander Duncan, Tania Kovats, David Malone, Verena Paravel and Lucien Castaing-Taylor, Emily Richardson, Shimabuku, Zineb Sedira, Lawrence Lek

and concerts (with sound works diffused over the HEARO¹² 30 loudspeaker sound system). The last day of the conference brought together all participants with a plenary session and panel session chaired by Jez Riley French with Leah Barclay, Chris Watson, Alice Eldridge and Dave Burraston. Eric Leonardson also ran a group session to discuss the future of UKISC (UK and Ireland Soundscape Community), an affiliate of the World Forum for Acoustic Ecology, which was well attended, indicating a renewed interest in the network.

A full programme and proceedings of the conference can be found on the *Sound + Environment 2017* website.

¹² <https://hearo.blog/>

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