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Survey on Location and context based media

#1 [winter2006]

conducted by Mark McLaren

interview
with Yannick Dauby

YANNICK DAUBY is a sound artist from France who has collaborated with Christophe Havard, Michael Northam, Thomas Koner, Alio Die, Wan-Shuen Tsai, the electronic group Pizmo (with Julien Ottavi and Jerome Joy), and the installation group °sone (with Christophe Havard and Hughes Germaine). Yannick has had works released by Mille Plateaux, and/OAR Alluvial Recordings, edition ellipsis, s'agita recordings, BOXmedia, Bremsstrahlung Recordings, Drone Records, Aina Offensive, Aqua/Amplexus, Taalem, Tiramazu, and Les Silence des Sirenes. In 2000, Yannick received an award from the Luigo Russolo Foundation for his work entitled Noophonie. His Master Thesis degree "Shared Soundscapes" problematize the notions of acoustic ecology....

Mark McLaren (MM): How do you feel working with field recording or captured audio differs from the traditional genres of electro-acoustic, concrete or lowercase musics?

Yannick Dauby (YD): Maybe we should begin by defining what is field recording and captured audio. by field recording, we usually understand some activities of recording some sound aspect of the reality. this idea about recording the reality is partly naive : what is recorded is a specific subjective way of listening an environment through a non-neutral technology rather than the reality itself. by captured audio, there is the idea that any kind of audio signal may be memorized, fixed. this is maybe more precise, but include any kind of sound practice based on sound recorders, even musical activities inside a studio for example...

So, maybe we could use the word "phonography" which can refer, by analogy, to the photography. "phonography" would have two kind of meanings : one purely technical ("writing sounds"), the other more based on an artistic process, including aesthetic considerations.

So, finally to answer your question, i would say that i absolutely don't consider that gathering sounds from an environment and to work with them produce another genre, style (such as the concrete, lowercase and so on...) of music. it is something more fluid : a way to be physically involved into some specific location, to be able to focus on the auditory perception of our surroundings, and finally to work both with the semantic (the meaning of sounds) and aesthetic (schaeffer's sound objects) aspects.

While beginning my first sound experiments in my house with tape recorders and especially feedback, I immediately thought to work in real-time with sounds from outside my windows, just to find out what it is to have some kind of technological filter between the world and my hearing. i would say that working with sonic elements from the environments leads to work with perception rather than with the music.



YD: These three tracks are the first part of "Low Valley". I produced this release (thanks to Stephen Fenton, from Editions...) without any conscious intention, nor aesthetic a-priori. But at the end it is a good representation of three kind of sound activities i have : composing with recorded sounds (track 1,2,3), field recording (track 4), improvising with found object (track 5).The three first tracks were composed using sounds coming from field recordings, manipulation of physical materials or even sound synthesis. The origin of these sounds had no importance. The only guide for composing them was what kind of effect they produced when listened. Some analogies between the morphologies of the sounds coming from an insect chorus or the buzzing of high-tension wires, pushed me to make theses elements meet. Sometimes, i was trying to provoke unpredictable accidents just by testing various process, and some other times i was trying to isolate elements, to reduce a recording into an undefined texture. From step to step, each sound was brought to another one, not necessarily in a linear way, leading to the final composition.

MM: All the low valley tracks appear to use a very fast fluttering effect, similar maybe to granular synthesis, to mirror and process frequent particle sounds such as rain or fire or insect noise . Can you explain why you have chosen to use this effect.

YD: I won't say that I chose an effect. I would rather speak about a convergence of some field recordings I collected and of some sounds I found by playing with electro-acoustic devices. I find this particle aspect interesting when listened on loudspeakers. Comparing to playing with dried thistle or listening to cicadas in-field, when you record them close-miked and/or replay them louder, out of context, you almost have the feeling that it is the membrane of the loud-speaker itself that is the sound generator, and not a loudspeaker reproducing a sound...

MM: A lot of the material has a very textural feeling, which seems to be generated by brittle EQing and some processing to create a very present forthright sound. It is also very intermittent and gestural. Explain how you integrated this foreground texture with the more subtle background drones and transitional sounds.

YD: There, you enter in the description of the very specific activity of composing. But I am not able to clearly explain and express how and why I make choices. Unpredictability and unconscious processes are sometimes is more influential than intentions...But probably, i would say for that question, that I am influenced by the spatial configurations that we perceive through acoustic phenomena. When composing with recorded sounds, I am (voluntary !) constrained by the CD and loudspeakers ensemble. In the opposite of field-recording and improvising, I am able, by editing, to give to a sound a place in time, very precisely. What i often try to have is the possibility to build different acoustic spaces into the room where i work (without moving these two loudspeakers !). I am trying to produce layers of sound elements (or sometimes quasi-silences) that will render spatial combinations by contrast or complementary.

MM: In this survey for the binaural media site we are interviewing people with different approaches but there seems to be an overall continuum and sense of community that might be represented under the Phonography list or, if you go to the New media scene, under the Locative Media hat... How do you regard the possibility of collaborative projects in this area of interest?



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YD: It may seem surprising that so many people lose their time for recordings of passing cars, crowds, rivers or even exotic soundscapes. And it may even seem more surprising that these people intend to release these sounds.

Of course, it is not so much surprising: phonography is a way of memorizing sound events. All these publications constitute a great audio library, a kind of scattered and collective memory of our sound world. Audio technologies not only allow to replay our sonic experiences, they allow to share them. Considering this, a community such as phonography.org is a logical consequence of field recording practices. And collaborative projects are a logical extension of the textual exchanges of mailing-lists and the publication of CDs compilations.

MM: Tell us about "Phonographic Migrations", your series of remote projects based on exchanges of field recordings, and the concept of shared soundscapes.... With its notions of transduction, transfer and cooperation based process.

YD: First important point: "Phonographic migrations" is *not mine*. Many people are involved in these projects, and participants can at any point organize another project, invent a new form.

It began with a few people who I was hoping to work with. A small label, Tiramizu, asked me for a release. I decided to propose a way of collaborating with my distant friends Dale Lloyd, Koura, Murmer, Marc Namblard, Michael Northam and Sawako. The easiest way was of course to use the internet. Without any interest in www pages, we built a small hidden working place: just a free webhosting space, with its capacity limits (100 Mo). The aim was to work together, remotely, sharing our field recordings, constructing a kind of collective soundscape. At the deadline, we simply burned the content of the server, used the file names and order for the tracks. This work was entitled "Presque Museifu", a hybrid french-japanese translation of "almost anarchic" (japanese and french were the language of some participants, but we used english to communicate...).

Dale Lloyd is currently producing the second part of this Phonographic Migrations series: a long-duration process during which each participant replays field recordings done by others, into a specific location, and then records the result (the mix and interactions between recorded soundscape and the new acoustic one), and provides it to the community. It is a long chain of inclusions of soundscapes through phonography, that will be also published in CD by And/OAR.

Derek Holzer and Sarah, the main actors of Phonographic Migration now, have organized, and are still working, on network-based projects related to collaborative phonography and soundscape composition. The SoundscapeFM was an internet and hertzian radio broadcast of randomly mixed field recordings of numerous participants contacted on the web. The webstream is currently off, but the website still provides the different files: www.soundscape-fm.net/

I find the idea of "sharing" stimulating: I would interpret it as the action of dividing a whole into several fragments (to share a piece of cake into parts...) to give access to others (to share some files on the internet...) or to have a common experience (to share someone's happiness). Considering this, you can guess that audio technologies, especially when using their digital and network-related



forms, can easily provide a lot of interesting listening situation when sharing a soundscape... this "shared soundscape" idea was for me a way to avoid the so common interpretations of actual sound works : sampling, mix, ambient, improvisation, etc... All these terms are quite distracting from what is the essential point (in my humble opinion) : actively listening and participating to our sound environment.

In our topic, a 'transfert' could be the direct link of a sound environment into another one : web streaming the signal of a microphone pointed from my window towards the pc speakers of one internet visitor, for example. What i understand with 'transduction' is the idea of transforming a physical value into another one. A microphone transform an air pressure value into electric voltage value. The transducer is an interface into these electric and acoustic worlds and acts as a filter according to its physical specificities. Transduction is also the term used by Simondon for describing the way some practices or knowledge propagates into different social contexts.

About cooperation based process there is so much to say, and so much that has been said...

I would just add that i am not interested in cooperation as a new art-form. I am interested into cooperation for the chaotic elements, indeterminacy that is produced when you can't totally expect someone's else reaction. And also, i have the feeling that cooperation is necessary for avoiding this artistic ivory tower syndrome that you can experience when in front of a computer screen...

I would say that all these arguments are gathered in the game-aspect of the protocols and processes in the Phonographic Migration series. For example, I am currently trying to have some reflections about sound interactions between human and non-human animals, and especially focusing on non-human animal sound recording. I am especially looking for any kind of personal testimony about why and how do people record animals, about special relationships to animal sounds (recorded or not), the use of these recorded sounds, the experiences of musical improvisation involving animals, and so on. If anyone would like to discuss, share an experience or opinion, I'd like to hear from them.