

WFAE 2011 PAPER SESSION (15):

“Soundscapes as personal and social constructs.”

Friday, 7/10/2011—10:15-11:15 -- Ionian Academy, Corfu

Session Chair: Heikki Uimonen¹

Title of Presentation: “*Questioning the authentic – Soundscape as a social construct*”

Abstract

The paper focuses the term soundscape in a broad sense, and discusses the different approaches taken in several works of sonic art. Soundscape perspectives are on an upswing across the world, often in combination with an increased awareness of the everyday sonic environment, and with a basis in the rapid availability of enabling technologies for recording and distribution. This awareness takes many forms, from expressed desires for preservation of habitats, often with an explorative angle of approach, to the embracement of modern, human-developed soundscapes and what they have to offer. The focus on sound as a tool for representing different types of physical phenomena also points to an increased interest in the qualities of constructed environments.

In order to grasp essential qualities of a number of new sonic artworks, the paper argues that an understanding of soundscapes as social constructs might be fruitful, as an extension of Schafer’s discussion of sound as a regulating factor in the relationship between individual and community.

AUTHOR

Joran Rudi, Researcher, NOTAM (Norwegian center for technology in music and the arts.)

Joran Rudi began his musical career in one of the influential Norwegian rock bands that emerged in the end of the 70's. His studies in music theory and composition were conducted at New York University, and Rudi has since developed a portfolio of works for electronic instruments and/or fixed media, as well as for dance, film, performance art, installation and multimedia. Rudi is the founding director of NOTAM - Norwegian center for technology in music and the arts, and stepped back to a researcher position in 2009, following 17 years with administrative, academic and artistic responsibilities for the institution.

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Heikki Uimonen is the adjunct professor in acoustic communication at the School of Social Sciences and Humanities, University of Tampere. He has published articles, monographs and co-edited publications on soundscape, especially how electroacoustic media such as radio and compact cassettes have affected to sonic environment (including personal and collective uses of music). Uimonen is a founding member and acting chairperson of the Finnish Society for Acoustic Ecology. He is currently finishing his work as Postdoctoral Research Fellow on project Soundscapes and Cultural Sustainability at the Academy of Finland and moving on to another one, called Musiquitous (mobile, ubiquitous music).

Title of Presentation: *“Re-Contextualizing Soundscapes: Actualities in musical research about creativity, identity and social contexts.”*

Abstract:

This paper seeks to understand how the soundscape research, today, can be molded in three different contexts. The first context deals with the creative process in music, where the soundscape concepts encompasses the problem of abstractions, and the sound relations created among a past musical experience and a living thru environmental experience. The second approach focuses on the soundscape as a chronicler of the changes brought by industrialization in a particular context, its shifting on the meanings of sounds, providing a re-assimilation of its symbolic values , reinventing the sound events. And, as a third context, addressing the soundscape as an theoretical model for analyzing a ritualistic and social event, and how it recreates the soundscape in different contexts, establishing a dialogue between the place of origin and the place of the event, re-contextualizing, thus, this ritual.

This work builds on the experiences of three doctoral research at the University of Aveiro, Portugal. The issue of creativity is approached by Rafael de Oliveira, who conducts research on the use of the soundscape in works of mixed electroacoustic music, a work that makes use of acoustic instruments in interaction with a pre-recorded electroacoustic part. Alexsander Duarte investigates the music in the mid-south region of Brazil, known as Caipira area, considering the change in the soundscape and how this is reflected in music today. Patricia Lima research on the musical context of religious communities, that make use of a psychoactive tea called Ayahuasca, born in the Amazon region of Brazil, which has now expanded its community to Portugal.

As a result, it is expected to encourage reflection on the restructuring process of critical thinking with reference to the concept of soundscape and its methodology. To this end, we believe that the research on soundscape can assume different roles, but converging in seeking to understand how the act of listening can promote new meanings and new symbolic readings of the sound contexts.

AUTHOR

- Rafael de Oliveira, PhD Student - Department of Communication and Art, INET-MD, University of Aveiro.
- Alexsander Duarte - PhD Student - Department of Communication and Art, INET-MD, University of Aveiro
- Patrícia Lima - PhD Student - Department of Communication and Art, INET-MD, University of Aveiro

Rafael de Oliveira: Brazilian composer, graduated in Music Composition at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul. Since 2001 he conducts research in electroacoustic music composition, instrumental music and soundscapes at the CME (Center for Electronic Music) at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul. Currently lives in Portugal where he is developing a PhD project at CIME (Center for the Investigation in Electronic Music), at the University of Aveiro, about the use of environmental sounds and its referential possibilities in works of electroacoustic music with live instruments.

Alexsander Duarte is a Brazilian musician, born in São Paulo. He graduated in Music Education at the Federal University of Ouro Preto, Minas Gerais. In 2006 he released his first

solo album and have won several awards with his music. Interested in the world of the Caipira region in Brazil, he recently began a PhD research to investigate its musical identity, the practices and how it relates to the soundscapes. This project is conducted at INET-MD (Institute of Ethnomusicology - Center for the Music and Dance), University of Aveiro, Portugal.

Patrícia Paula Lima graduated with Honors Degree in Historical Sciences at the Federal University of Ouro Preto, Brazil. She worked with environmental education and with cultural and ecological patrimony and arts. Currently she is conducting a PhD research, at INET-MD (Institute of Ethnomusicology - Center for the Music and Dance) in the University of Aveiro, having as the main subject the musical practice in Ayahuasca religious rituals and its soundscapes.

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Title of Presentation: “*The Soundscape and Sound Art of Burning Man.*”

Abstract

The Burning Man Festival, an annual art festival in the Nevada Black Rock Desert of the Western US, has been going strong for over 20 years, and has grown immensely since its humble beginnings in 1986. In the last few years, the event has reached a population of well over 50,000 people, featuring hundreds of performances, and thousands of works of art in all mediums and on all scales imaginable. A party in the desert for some, a way of life for others, the festival and the temporary city that supports it is a remarkable human enterprise, thriving on communal effort and participation, a gifting economy, radical self-reliance, and radical self-expression. The incredibly unique soundscape of Black Rock City, Burning Man's ephemeral home, with its multitude of sonic art works, musical performances and immersive environments, is one of the most unique and interesting sonic experiences on the earth for the week that it exists.

This study looks at the evolution of this unique soundscape through the course of the event, from its beginning as an uninhabited desert, to the gradual construction of the city by the inhabitants, to the height of its celebratory completion as the tenth largest city in the state of Nevada, its ultimate destruction with the burning of the central art structures, and the leave-no-trace cleanup process that follows. Throughout the event, we witness a ritualistic ebb and flow of sound as the citizens of the city celebrate radical self-expression in remarkable ways: hot days of construction and exploration, the city-wide celebration of sunset, the festive all-night dancing, the exhausted and restful morning, the exuberant burning of the man, and the contemplative and quiet burning of the temple. Our study analyzes the soundscape across the vast space of the event, looking at its daily and week-long evolution, through field recordings, discussions with participants, and personal observations. The paper is derived from observations over the previous eight years of the event, as well as a sound journal based on Burning Man 2011.

AUTHORS

- Stephan Moore, Doctoral Candidate, Brown University
- Scott Smallwood, Assistant Professor, University of Alberta

Stephan Moore's creative work manifests as electronic studio compositions, improvised solo performances, sound installation works, scores and sound designs for collaborative performance pieces, and sound control systems for unusual circumstances. In recent years, he has been most closely involved with the annual Floating Points Festival at Issue Project Room in Brooklyn, the Merce Cunningham Dance Company, choreographer Yanira Castro, theater group The Nerve Tank, and the band Evidence with Scott Smallwood. He is currently studying at Brown University's MEME program.

Scott Smallwood is a sound artist, composer, and sound performer who creates works inspired by discovered textures and forms, through a practice of listening, field recording, and sonic improvisation. He also designs experimental electronic instruments and software, as well as sound installations and site-specific performance scenarios. He performs as one-half of the laptop/electronic duo Evidence (with Stephan Moore), and currently lives in Edmonton, Alberta, where he teaches Composition, Improvisation, and Electroacoustic music at the University of Alberta.

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Title of Presentation: *“The subjective experience of soundscapes: A pilot survey on the city of Rome.”*

Abstract:

This project is focused on the study of the perception of the urban soundscapes in terms of socio-cultural dimensions and psycho-physiological experience. This approach aims to identify development indicators of coexistence and sustainability in modern cities within the wider context of globalization.

It is a comparative study on three different kind of urban areas in the city of Rome: a pedestrian area with a small local market where people meet and build local community, a crossroad with high levels of traffic and shops where people only pass-through for shopping and an outdoor coffe bar usually full of people that have business meetings.

The study was carried out in collaboration with the Chair of Clinical Psycho-physiology at the Faculty of Medicine and Psychology of “Sapienza” University of Rome. The soundscapes of these places were recorded in the morning of infra-weekly days and analyzed through the statistical techniques of factor and cluster analysis, according to the Murray Schafer’s referential taxonomy of sounds.

From each soundscape an excerpt of few minutes was taken and used for sessions of reactivated listening. A sample of roman citizens with a range of ages between 25 and 50 years old listened to the excerpts of the three osoundscapes individually and evaluated their features and the subjective experience with them. To this end three instruments were used: an Italian adaptation of the scheme of interview used by the “Positive Soundscape Project”, the Scale of postural perceived tension elaborated at the Chair of Clinical Psycho-physiology at the Faculty of Medicine and Psychology of “Sapienza” University, and an Italian adaptation of the questionnaire

elaborated by the School of Architecture of the University of Sheffield for the Urban Environmental Sustainability Survey. These data were analyzed through descriptive statistics and multivariate methods (factor and cluster analysis).

The data analysis provided several results: the sonic dimensions which characterize and differentiate the three places in relation to their socio-cultural features and that can be used to compare different kinds of urban places; the dimensions which characterize the personal evaluation of the different soundscapes in relation to their socio-cultural features and the patterns of different approach to the sonic dimensions of life which influence the evaluations of subjective experience of the sample of citizens with these soundscapes; the psycho-physiological dimensions which influence the evaluation of urban soundscapes.

AUTHOR

Mario D'Andreta, Psychologist and musician.

Mario D'Andreta is an Italian psychologist and musician. He works as a trainer and organizational consultant for public and private enterprises and conducts independent research in the field of soundscape studies. His interests lie in the urban soundscape perception and his attention is currently focused on the relationship between soundscape representations and the issues of social development and coexistence in the globalized society. As a musician, he performed in different bands and solo projects, in several festivals and musical events and produced several CDs of soundscape compositions and experimental music.

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