

the increased globalization of capital, perhaps an understanding of the relations between creativity and industry, the relations that Scully so expertly describes, may form the core of new models of folk music theory. 🍁

The Place Where You Go to Listen: In Search of an Ecology of Music. John Luther Adams. 2009. Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press. xvi, 180pp, black and white illustrations, colour illustrations, bibliography, discography. Paper.

BY DAVID PAQUETTE AND ANDRA MCCARTNEY

The Place Where You Go to Listen is a sound and light installation created by John Luther Adams for the *Museum of the North*, located at the University of Alaska. The title is a translation of *Naalagaviik*, the Iñupiaq designation of a coastal place where, according to a local legend, a woman used to sit and listen to the invisible voices of nature. Adams' installation offers a multisensory, real-time composition based on the sonification of a number of data streams including seismic and electromagnetic activity, time of day, seasonal changes and moon cycles. According to Adams, sonification is not a simple sonic transposition, but rather it is "the process of mapping data with *some other meaning* into sound" (113). While it is not commonly found among practitioners of acoustic ecology, this compositional approach can also be heard in the work of certain composers such

as Andrea Polli and Don Sinclair. The book offers a detailed discussion of the creative processes and ideas that led to the production of *The Place*, as well as Adams' thinking on music and the arts, nature, ecology, and his own compositional practice.

The foreword, written by *New Yorker's* music critic Alex Ross, introduces the installation from the point of view of an audience member. Ross visited *The Place* in 2008, two years after its opening, and spent two days exploring its ever-changing sonic and light ambiances. His brief analysis of Adams' work brilliantly summarizes the philosophical leitmotifs of the book:

On the one hand, [*The Place*] lacks a will of its own; it is at the mercy of its data streams, the humors of the earth. On the other hand, it is a deeply personal work, whose material reflects Adams' long-standing preoccupations with multiple systems of tuning, his fascination with slow motion formal processes, his love of foggy masses of sound in which many events unfold at independent tempos (x).

Adams proceeds, in the first section of the book, to present the most important tools and concepts that guide his compositional practice. From the use of noise as raw musical material to the shifting compositional process provoked by real-time manipulation, he sets up the technological and artistic context in which *The Place* could appear. Of particular importance is the relationship between the place of the installation and the larger environment

that it transposes. Unlike the disconnected act of writing a score, creating *The Place* required an intimate understanding of place as well as a thorough and extended exploration of the sonic possibilities offered by the combination of all streams. Adams' struggles to achieve a balance between his own artistic presence and that of the sampled environment, and to unite scientific and artistic models into a harmonious whole inspire important questions about the political and ecological role of the artist in the 21st century:

We live in a time of great exploration and discovery. But unlike those of previous eras, the most important explorations of our time are not new places. The most important discoveries are not new phenomena. The great learning of our time is of the endlessly complex and subtle interrelationships between places and organisms, between everything in nature from the subatomic to the cosmic (10).

The most substantial section of the book is comprised of entries from Adams' journal, which offer close observation of the day-to-day challenges, and creative decisions he had to take, as well as reflections on a variety of themes such as ecology, technology, and music. The detailed descriptions of his artistic meanderings over the course of almost three years provide an insider's perspective. From mathematical problems when dealing with real-time seismic data to hours of tuning equal temperaments for the Day and Night Choirs, to glazing windows

and working on lighting spectrums, Adams' notes are always thorough. The collaborative requirements of the project and the particular role of the architectural place in the compositional process are also discussed. Faithful to its subtitle *In Search of an Ecology of Music*, the book is scattered with philosophical and reflexive thoughts that both influence, and are influenced by, Adams' artistic approach to *The Place*. Of particular interest are his discussions of the relationship between music, science and ecology:

Our world needs as many diverse biological and cultural ecosystems as it can get. In nature the edges of habitats are among the richest of places. Estuaries, tidal pools, the margins of forests are often where life is most profuse. The fringes of music and culture are equally vibrant and productive places. And composers today are discovering a profusion of rich new musical habitats (45).

The entries also include references to a number of day-to-day tasks and trips, as well as political and meteorological discussions. At times these add to the holistic image produced by the book, but sometimes they seem to interrupt its flow, as the reader is left to guess at their significance and relationship to the creative work.

The third and shortest part of the book, "Hearing Where We Are," includes final thoughts by Adams on the project itself and the larger artistic and theoretical scheme in which it is situated, focusing notably on notions of

listening, resonance and synesthesia. The book concludes with “An Ecosystem of Sound and Light,” in which we find a more formal description of the installation and its various parameters. Again, the large amount of information (in text format, but also raw seismic data, graphs, scores, technical mappings and colour pictures) helps the reader to recognize the complexity of the work and the central role of the artist in the design of the sonification process.

The Place Where You Go to Listen is a well-written and inspiring book that not only describes the installation and its design in a detailed and stimulating way, but also includes Adams’ mature thinking on his practice and role in the larger artistic, geographical and ecological context of creation. Evident throughout is the author’s musical, philosophical and visceral engagement with Alaska. While the detailed descriptions of the installation and the technical and compositional processes employed by Adams will be of interest to academics, musicians and artists, the book still remains quite accessible, thanks to the informal tone of the journal entries. However, it is important to note that it primarily represents the single perspective of the author/composer, rather than a comparative, theoretical or historical analysis. The fact that there is no accompanying CD or DVD seems logical in the spirit of Adams’ synesthetic and emplaced creative work; the thorough procedure by which he develops tight relationships between lighting and sounds, between noises and real-time natural cycles, and between multi-speaker diffusion and

the architecture of the space, would merely be expunged by the strict limitations of these media. By thinking of the evolving perspective of the composer, the book skilfully provides a thorough discussion of *The Place*, and while the act of reading is silent, it leaves our mind filled with imaginary noises and colours of the imperceptible traces of nature. 🍀