



ísland | fjórar - *the crystal detector*

Jez riley French
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STOKLENIK



some idea of
a similar nature
elsewhere

ísland | fjórar - *the crystal detector*

Jez riley French (sound / photography)

Pheobe riley Law (texts for scores)

one | resonances

These works, part of the ísland | fjórar series, drawing on listening experiences during several trips to Iceland, reflect our ongoing fascination with the interplay of different elements of sound, image and text.

Sounds that, as a species, we tend to filter out or ignore, and those above or below our hearing range, using extended techniques, durational listening and self-built devices play a key element in my work (JrF). These are then combined with documentation of momentary interactions of specific locations and photographic images, along with text pieces by Pheobe.

We both often work intuitively. Research comes into the process, but not always at the same point and quite often after the initial connections. As such much of our collaborative work begins with the momentary experience of being in specific places / situations, and, importantly, ourselves responding.

The traces (recordings) include those of harbours, salt water air, geothermal activity, wind blowing across a Palagonite tuff outcrop emerging from the glacial ice of Snæfellsjökull, a marsh close to the north coast, long-wave radio antenna support cables, centuries old air being released from glacial ice as it calves into lakes due to climate change and from minerals exposed to very slight increases in acidity levels that can currently be found in local rainwater and polluted streams, church railings resonating, and the sound of the earth spinning on its axis.

Recorded with JrF c-series contact microphones, d-series hydrophones, adapted geophones, ultrasonic detectors and conventional microphones.

Listening back we are not transported to Iceland. Instead we listen to the interaction of sounding elements within a new situated time frame, complete with other elements of our individual daily lives coming in and out of focus as they will. Of course, for some, a sense of *elsewhere* is why they might want to listen, but in, carefully, encouraging a different approach, it is not meant as a restriction, but an invitation to allow these sounds to be part of an on-going compositional process that each listener is also part of as these resonances interact with their new locale.

These works are a collaborative

nb. Because of the restrictions on travel to Slovenia, we have adjusted this version of *the crystal detector*, for both possible installation and for headphones, as a situated listening experience.



What can a sound composition based on unprocessed field recordings of one place mean or achieve when transposed to another? How can we avoid sound tourism or objectification? Thinking about this over the course of many years often involves a tension between such considerations and remaining open to creative, intuitive responses.

We of course perceive each environment as different from the next. Every country has certain elements that might identify it, but to focus only on the surface layers of sound, the surface representation of place, our species overlooks the fact that every moment is an intricate, new, never repeating event. Therefore, the process of attempting to map a sonic identity of place not only involves some inevitable objectification but also a narrowing of experience, and of the myriad realities beyond the human. An hour-long recording, for example, of a glacier in Iceland does not represent Iceland, nor does it represent *glacier*, or even one specific section of one specific glacier. Instead, it is, simply, a recording of one hour, from one position, by one individual from one species, with all of their sensibilities and subsequent interactions with the resulting material. It does not, cannot represent the other species present, partly because we cannot know how they are affected by our presence. The technologies we use in environments might give us the illusion of precision or definition but we often fail to remember that they are affecting objects, active filters. What we arrive with changes each place, and what comes back with us is, at most, a thin trace of unrepeatable interactions. Likewise as we construct work from this material and share it with others, through yet more technologies, we add other layers, other filters around our perceptions. We can choose to ignore these aspects, to pretend they are not in-between place and present, creating distortions within our listening and understanding of *place*, but doing so is not the only option. There is so much more to understand if we recognise these conceptual and technological borders, allow them to remind us that our interactions often remain fixed to our illusions of dominance and control.

Over time I became more interested in durational listening, and in *stepping back* from the pressures to follow certain conventional processes within the areas of score-based work, soundscape, electroacoustic and acousmatic music. I struggled with aspects of the male ego in sound cultures, finding myself questioning each advance in *career* or notions of *skill*. Perhaps this came from a desire for quietude, not only sonically but in terms of my personal life. I felt more and more that the process of how one works with material, whilst offering a fascinating range of possibilities, means that we can often forget that what is already there has its own ever-changing completeness. That is an easy concept to understand but what follows has been a long, and continuing, exploration of the roles of imposition and perception in shaping how we listen to place, situation, time and self. There are always myriad compositional interactions within any location and how we respond, how we even register these moments is key to this process.

This conversation with my own approach to listening, and to music / sound / sound art in wider contexts often isn't easy, but it is part of how I have needed to work for a number of years now. In installations I do enjoy working with speakers and the space itself. For me the room and the locale is part of the work. I have a great deal of respect for certain composers and artists who can work with *located sound* / *field recording* in other ways, and I think there is, or should be, space for work that is not fixed documentation, that avoids or investigates the objectification of place, and invites each listener to *step back* from their expectations also.

Quite often my installation works have consisted of single (or sets of) unprocessed, durational recordings, reflecting that the *work* is in the initial and subsequent, open listening itself. The first act of *composition* is in the pressing of *record*, an intuitive response that can only occur when doing so does not interrupt the situated experience. For the audience such pieces can only work when there is something similar in their choice to let go of their expectations also, and this, I accept, is not always easy either. With pieces in the island | fjórar series that combine recordings, paying attention to symbiotic developing relationships between each element, the process sits between composition and open listening, and depends on active collaboration.

Whilst somewhat angular on the tongue, the term *located sound*, rather than relying only on *field recording*, hints at explorations that are less concerned with the attempt to define or fix place through documentation. In this sense one can also question the word *nature*, with its root as a word of division, seeking to place our species in one position and all others at another. More recently there has perhaps been some effort towards a re-balancing but there is still a reliance on a sense of separation. If we listen to the sound of dissolving mineral deposits, we are in the presence of *natural* resonances. If we listen to an antenna cable being sounded by the wind, or the myriad acoustic traces of activity (human and otherwise) in a small harbour, we are in the presence of *natural* resonances. If you listen to a digital file containing such sounds, composed, filtered through aesthetic choices and sensibilities, technology and your own phenomenology, combined with the sounds in your locale, you are part of and surrounded by *natural* resonances. Perhaps in continuing with the commonly held definition of nature our species is also attempting an escape from the need to consider our position within multiple perceptual and experiential realities. An escape not from responsibility, though that is an obvious issue, but from other forms of urgency and experience. It becomes easier to rely on distractions, on conventions, or for cultural pockets to feel like stable communities. It becomes easier to navigate issues even within our own societies at a mediated pace that suits our current abilities, our dependence on structures.



I have had an interest in listening beneath surfaces (physical, perceptual) for a long time now, including to those sounds that are still often, rather ironically, referred to as the *un-heard*. Of course they are heard, sensed by other species, at different levels, and experienced in other ways even by us. We are in constant, resonant interaction as multi-species societies, as performative objects. Even as we try to understand more about the realities of our position, the illusion of knowledge that we construct obscures much that we need to learn, much that we need to accept. We seem determined to rely on at least some of the same faulty systems of acquisition.

So, what of *field recording* and its potential to connect us to place (physical, social and ecological)? As someone connected to expansive forms of listening, extended techniques and, inevitably technologies with all of their complicated histories, the progress in recent years has been remarkable, and increasingly democratic. However, as I have hinted at in this text, it is also important to question the ways access and archives have been constructed to exclude via imposition, biases (patriarchy, colonialism etc), therefore the histories created are still heavily distorted and include reoccurring borders. To think about these aspects of sound culture is not a negative. It is an opening up of possibilities, of the positive growth of understanding contained within the importance of equalities and equities.

There is a desire for community, for communication, for invitation, yet there is also a sense of exhaustion with the process of increasingly transactional readings of how to be artist, researcher, audience. Indeed how to be any part of being human on a sounding planet. So, listening becomes an intuitive response to sensory material, to resonances, interactions and qualities other than those imprinted by the process of recording for the sake of documentation. The listening is elemental.

...there is the ecstatic, separated, as it must be, from religion, from definition, from words, from theory

Scores in this series are open, or indeterminate. They have no set way to be performed or realised, no set duration and can be used as prompts for moments spent listening or for sound / music performance.

Listen: Take a score with you - listen - find relationships between the image and what you hear - use duration as a compositional frame - use the image and it's accompanying text to hint at a way to listen to the locale you are in - or simply as a focus to switch between modes of listening.

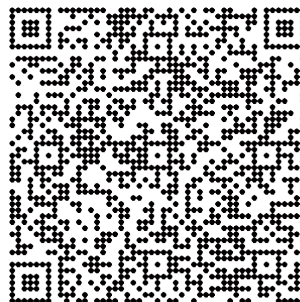
Play: Take a score, solo or as an ensemble - decide how the image and the text will inform your approach to a performance - images can be read as conventional scores, with each element representing tone, volume, space (stillness) or duration within the frame as a whole - play.

Form: For us sound, music is both auditory and visual in a creative sense. Listening to images or the musicality of non-narrative text, or the visuality of resonances combined. This interest in the exchanges possible between forms of expression became the starting point for an interest in nonconventional scores; photographic, text-based, performative, video-scores, and 'scores for listening'.

Two: This series of scores, a few of which are included in this publication, based on listening to locales and surfaces in Iceland, are collaborations between myself (photographs, composition) and Pheobe (texts from her series 'the crystal detector').

Pheobe; I enjoy words as performative objects and not always as the carriers of a fixed narrative. In reacting and responding to the sounds and the photographic images I have re-formed found texts, with the intention that they be as much a part of 'place' as any other element.

link to our realisation of 'score for listening #100'





score for listening # 100

expectation

the
plant,
including
the
berries,
are
receivers
of
construc
tion
resembl
es that
of the
crystal
detector



score for listening # 114

a
notation
for place

generally
the
distance from

the soil is
partly
because
elsewhere
fruit ports
affect of the
compass of
passing



the large
extent
of
plain is
exposed

to

harbour
good
communica
tion

credits

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