Biophilic Soundscape Design in the Second Order of Nature

By Jordan Lacey

Introduction

Exploring links between disciplinary approaches is fundamental to acoustic ecology, which since its inception has been discussed in interdisciplinary modes. In this paper I will attempt to illustrate links between soundscape studies, biophilia and biophilic design, the eco-philosophy of Henri Lefebvre and Deleuze and Guattari's concept of striated and smooth space. Exploration of links between these conceptualizations forms part of my research at SIAL Sound Studios at RMIT University, and expresses an attempt to re-imagine the urban environment and the role acoustic ecologists have to play in this re-imagining. It is the conceptual point at which these actual and potential listening paths intersect that creative opportunities for soundscape design can be imagined.

Biophilia and Acoustic Ecology

With the exception of Hildegard Westerkamp (2000) there is little mention of biophilia in the literature of the acoustic ecology community. Similarly biophilic practitioners are scarcely aware of the central importance of sound in fostering connections between self and place, limiting its sonic descriptions to the therapeutic affects of the sounds of water (Mador 2008, 49) and the sense of wonder elicited by the sounds of animals (Beatley 2011, 38). However, these two modes of consciousness share comparative aims, particularly a shared concern for the deteriorating conditions of human experience as humanity's disconnection from nature exacerbates, and the importance of design in restoring this connection; additionally, both disciplines have written extensively about the positive health and restorative effects of the natural. I propose that the acoustic ecology movement can draw strength by forging philosophical connections with biophilic design approaches, and biophilic design can benefit from acoustic ecology's understanding of the effects of sound on humanity, by integrating soundscape design into its larger objective of biophilic design.

Criticisms of Biophilia and Acoustic Ecology

The biophilia hypothesis and acoustic ecology movement also share a common nemesis, and that is the unyielding attack of supposedly more rigorous disciplines that reduce these philosophical approaches to aesthetic movements. In biophilia the belief that nature has restorative affects has been dismissed as a value judgment that could just as easily be applied to synthetic qualities (Joye and DeBlock 2011, 200). In acoustic ecology the concern that soundscapes are degenerating into lo-fi, dehumanized environments have been redefined as phenomenological concerns rather than ecological concerns (Redstrom n.d., 1). Regardless, both movements have strong scientific credentials to support their theses; biophilia proposes bio-cultural genetic evolution as a scientific basis for biophilic attitudes toward nature (Wilson 1984, 12) to account for the link between humanity and nature[1], while acoustic ecology has been embraced by engineers and scientists, whose studies are influencing government authorities. *The Positive Soundscape Project* (Davies et al. 2009), the work of urban acoustic designer Jian Kang (2007) and the work of environmental planner Lex Brown (2004) are recent examples. However, it is the shared call for the rediscovery of human imagination, and the ability to demonstrate philosophical relevance through design, which provides biophilia and acoustic ecology the legitimacy that is of interest in the context of this essay.

The Second Order of Nature & Biophilic Cities

Lefebvre[2] has been described as the ignored philosopher (Aronowitz 2007, 133). The environmental movement has certainly ignored him, yet he has many compelling arguments regarding nature and humanity's relationship with nature. In the words of Lefebvre (1991):

> If we are to believe the word 'nature', with its ancient metaphysical and theological credentials, what is essential occurs in the depths. To say 'natural' is to say spontaneous. But today nature is drawing away from us, to say the very least. It is becoming impossible to escape the notion that nature is being murdered by 'anti-nature' – by abstraction, by signs and images, by discourse, as also by labour and its products. Along with god, nature is dying. 'Humanity' is killing both of them – and perhaps committing suicide into the bargain (70).

And

> The finiteness of nature and of the Earth … has the power to challenge blind (ideological) belief in the infinite power of abstraction, of human thinking and technology, and of political power and the space which that power generates and decrees (330).

When Lefebvre discusses the second order of nature he recognizes that the urban environment has been constructed from the raw materials of the natural world. When he argues for the re-imagining of space as second nature he is searching for a means to challenge Capitalism's domination of space (which reifies exchange-value only), as a means to facilitate the emergence of the space of nature

1 It should be noted that the biophilia hypothesis has sustained much criticism regarding its scientific claim that biophilic tendencies are a genetic predisposition. See Simaika and Samways (2009, p. 904) and Joye and DeBlock (2009, p. 190).

2 Henri Lefebvre's most famous work, *The Production of Space,* describes new approaches to Marxism based on Capitalism's domination of space. As such he is considered a socio-political theorist; however, this approach includes interesting philosophical discussions related to nature. Henri Lefebvre has been described as an eco-philosopher (Aronowitz 2007, p. 133) and it is in this context that Lefebvre is discussed in this paper.

in the urban environment as characterized by its abundance, depth and spontaneity.

Lefebvre's concerns regarding urban space and nature partially resonate with the contemporary American biophilic practitioner, Timothy Beatley, the author of *Biophilic Cities*. Beatley (2011) writes:

> (a) biophilic city is a city abundant with nature, a city that looks for opportunities to repair and restore and creatively insert nature wherever it can. It is an outdoor city, a physically active city, in which residents spend time enjoying the biological magic and wonder around them. In biophilic cities, residents care about nature and work on its behalf locally and globally (2).

The creative insertion of nature into the urban environment of which residents enjoy its magic and wonder, certainly resonates with Lefebvre's desire to re-imagine the social space of cities as spaces that encourage human creativity and liberate human activity from the quotidian, abstract and functional representations of space informed by modern-day capitalism. However, Lefebvre's account of the second order of nature is not just concerned with the stuff of nature but the *affect* of nature, apropos, its infinite creativity:

> "'the 'beings' it [nature] creates are works; and each has 'something' unique about it... 'Things' are born, grow and ripen, then whither and die. The reality behind these words is infinite" (Lefebvre 2007, 70).

And in regard to re-imagining this affect in the second order of nature, Lefebvre,

> … calls for the immediate production or creation of something other than nature: a second, different or new nature, so to speak. This means the production of space, urban space, both as a product and as a work, in the sense in which art created works. If this project fails, the failure will be total, and the consequences of that are impossible to foresee (109).

Thus while both Lefebvre and Beatley argue for the emergence of nature in urban environments, Lefebvre desires the *affect* of nature, whereas Beatley desires the merging of cities with the natural world. Acoustic ecologists are able to employ approaches to soundscape design that can actuate both Lefebvre's and Beatley's ideas. The integration of urban soundscape systems and electroacoustic soundscape composition[3] in urban spaces can create the *affects* of nature, while acoustic ecologists are able to imbue urban environments with the sounds of nature through the reintroduction of the stuff of nature.

Restoring Imagination – Schafer and Wilson

The eco-philosophy of Lefebvre, Biophilia and Acoustic Ecology are three disparate intellectual explorations of the relationship between the natural world and humanity. Yet all are concerned with the evaporation of imagination, and the potential effects of this on human health and indeed human survival. Lefebvre's approach to these concerns is outlined above, in regard to his statements of nature as creative abundance (which I take to be synonymous with nature's capacity to stimulate human imagination). Edward Wilson credited with the invention of the terms biodiversity and biophilia equates "ultimate survival … [with the] … survival of the human spirit" (Wilson 1984, 40). Additionally, he states:

> I offer this [engagement with nature] as a formula of re-enchantment to invigorate poetry and myth: mysterious and little known organisms live within walking distance of where you sit. Splendour awaits in minute proportions (139).

And Murray Schafer (1977), inventor of the term soundscape and acoustic design writes:

> From the arts, particularly music, we will learn how man creates ideal soundscapes for that other life, the life of the imagination and psychic reflection (4).

What can the concerns of three intellectuals from different domains tell us about the human condition? That the true risk of humanity's separation from nature is the loss of our imaginative capacities, and that in fact these imaginative capacities are fundamental to our survival; *the re-emergence of the imagination is synonymous with the re-emergence of our relationship with nature*. Humanity cannot survive surrounded exclusively by its own creations. David Orr (1993), a contributor to the *Biophilia Hypothesis*, most dramatically captures these concerns:

> The human mind is a product of the Pleistocene age, shaped by wildness that has all but disappeared. If we complete the destruction of nature, we will have succeeded in cutting ourselves off from the source of sanity itself. Hermetically sealed amidst our creations and bereft of those of the Creation, the world then will reflect only the demented image of the mind imprisoned within itself. Can the mind doting on itself and its creations be sane? (437).

The Striated Soundscape: *The Voice of the Machine*

Biophilia emphasizes that humanity spent most of its history immersed in the matrix of nature. Wilson (1984) explains:

> ... human history did not begin eight or ten thousand years ago with the invention of agriculture and villages. It began hundreds of thousands or millions of years ago with the origin of the genus Homo ... In short, the brain evolved in a biocentric world, not a machine-regulated world. It would be therefore quite extraordinary to find that all learning rules related to that world have been erased in a few thousand years.... (32).

This statement is equally true for humanity's relationship with soundscapes. Barry Truax in his book, *Acoustic Communication*, describes the modern soundscape as devoid of information, in particular due to the broadband sounds of machines, which have a dominating and homogenizing effect on urban soundscapes. The result is the establishment of the alienated listener, who is unable to communicate with, or enter into a meaningful relationship with the soundscape. Truax (2001) explains,

> The soundscape that was information rich (is now) information poor, and the mediated relationship that was interactive and integrative becomes habitually withdrawn, alienated, and even pathological. In the most extreme case, meaninglessness itself becomes the person's long-term auditory image of the environment, and since relationships are mediated both ways by sound, a lack of meaning in the environment is reflected back to the individual's own self-image, which must suffer (97).

This observation becomes more pertinent when reviewing the work of ethnographers Edmund Carpenter (1959), and Steven Feld (1996) both of whom so eloquently describe the rich acoustemo-

3 Foreman's (2011) recent article in *Soundscape* elegantly describes the ability of soundscape composition to evoke imaginative states: "… soundscape studies […] enables us to constantly see and hear anew; to uncover dreams and the imagination into our lived environments. Soundscape composition allows us to approach an aural environment as a palimpsest […]. "(9).

logical[4] characteristics of language, music and culture that emerge in pre-modern relationships with the soundscape. Additionally, historians such as Bruce Smith (1999), reconstructing human-centered Elizabethan soundscapes, and the improvisational musician Hodgkinson (1996), who explores links between Eastern Siberian shamanic music and soundscapes, further emphasize the importance of healthy relationships between listeners and soundscapes.

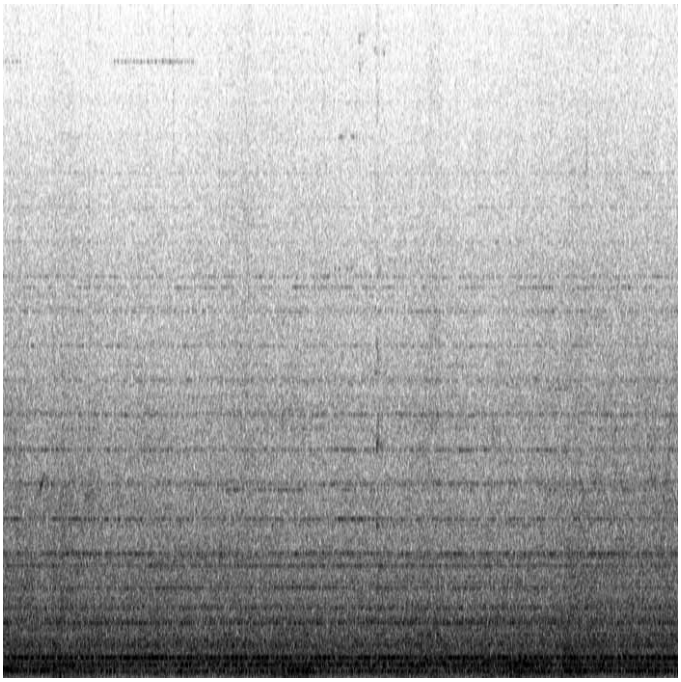

Figure 1: The Striated Soundscape

To conceptualize the lo-fi, broadband characteristics of the contemporary soundscape, I have applied the concept of striated space as developed by Deleuze and Guattari (1987). When viewed in sonogram form the sounds of the machine are horizontal, parallel lines that fill the lower portion of the frequency spectrum (See figure 1). Thus sounds of this character can be called the *striated soundscape*[5].

Striated space is dominated, homogenized space:

> Homogeneous space … is the form of striated space … It is striated by the distribution of matter into *parallel layers, the lamellar and laminar movement of flows*. These parallel verticals have formed an independent dimension capable of spreading everywhere, of formalising all the other dimensions, of striating all of space in all of its directions, so as to render it homogenous (408) (my italics).

(Though described as verticals in this quote, striations such as laminar flows can be equally conceptualized as horizontal.) Compare this to the description of smooth space:

> A field, a heterogeneous smooth space, is wedded to a very particular type of multiplicity: non-metric, acentered, rhizomatic multiplicities which occupy space without "counting" it and can "only be explored by legwork." They do not meet the visual condition of being observable from a point in space external to them; examples are the *system of sounds*, or even of colours, in opposition to Euclidean space. (409) (my italics).

This description of smooth space is compellingly resonant with McLuhan and Carpenter's (1960) comment in their paper on Acoustic Space: "the essential feature of sound […] is not its location but that it *be*, that it fill space" (67); as related to Schafer's maxim (1985) "We are always at the edge of visual space, looking in with the eye. But we are always at the centre of auditory space, listening out with the ear." (112). Smooth space is the space of open experience where humanity enters into imaginative relationships with space, sonorous or otherwise. Striated space is controlled space in that human experience is regulated, directed and homogenized, which is true also of the listening experience. There are clear links between these passages and biophilia, which describes how humanity's co-existence with nature is gradually yielding to civilization (to striated space):

> The world began to yield, first to the agriculturalists and then to technicians, merchants, and circumnavigators [think striated space]. Humanity accelerated toward the machine antipode, heedless of the natural desire of the mind to keep the opposite well. (Wilson 1984, 13)

The implication for soundscape design is that conceptualizing the striated soundscape allows for the summoning of creative solutions to re-impart smooth space, apropos, to reintroduce the *affects* of nature. To locate and identify the striated soundscape is the first step in breaking its homogeneity. Accounting for the political ramifications of Deleuze and Guattari's approach, the striated soundscape can be conceptualized as the voice of the machine, of progress and of modernity. The striated soundscape has dominated the voice of smooth space, which is the voice of dialogue, spontaneity and imagination; thus, the alienated listener has emerged in the contemporary soundscape. However, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) explain that "we must remind ourselves that the two spaces in fact exist only in mixture: smooth space is constantly being translated, transversed into a striated space; striated space is constantly being reversed, returned to a smooth space." (524). Presently, striated space is globally dominant; however, these conditions may allow for the reimparting of smooth space. This reimparting of smooth space can be imagined as the emergence of the second order of nature and the design of biophilic cities – and here lies acoustic ecology's niche in this process: biophilic soundscape design.

Biophilic Soundscape Design

The techniques of biophilic soundscape design would be vast, heterogeneous and guided by the creativity of practitioners. There is no totalizing answer to the issue of the deterioration of the soundscape. Rather the answer lies with the listener's willingness to enter into a dialogue with the voice of the machine, slowly and patiently refining this voice to augment the second order of nature; working towards a dialogue between listener and soundscape that recognizes the acoustemological creation of culture, as catalyzed by dialogical soundscape-listener relationships.

Acoustic ecologists could work hand in hand with architects and designers to begin reshaping the city to make emergent the natural world we have left behind: the sounds of animals and insects; greenery and wood dancing in the wind; water movement over rocks and silt; the textured footfalls of ever-changing ground cover, all contributing to the heterogeneous soundscapes of the second order of nature. Murray Schafer's soniferous garden foresaw such changes, though these need not only be confined to spaces of quiet. Biophilic sounds also have their place within the structures of striated space, where the voice of nature can begin to convolve with the voice of the machine, perhaps altering it, as machines have forever altered ancient and forgotten soundscapes.

4 For a description of acoustemology see Feld (1996) p. 91.

5 For an extensive description of the striated soundscape, and the field work from which this concept emerged see Lacey, J. and Harvey, L. 2011, 'Sound Cartography Approaches to Urban Soundscape Research: CitySounds and Sites-of-Respite in the CBD of Melbourne' In Caquard, S., Vaughan, L. and Cartwright, W. (eds.), *Mapping Environmental issues in the City: Arts and Cartography Cross Perspectives*, Springer, Berlin, pp. 246–265.

Acoustic ecologists have a unique role to play in reintroducing the affects of natural soundscapes through electroacoustic means. Westerkamp has both composed and written extensively on soundscape composition and its ability to evoke imaginative responses through transformations of existent soundscapes[6]. This is fitting for a second order of nature, which would not try to recreate nature but try to re-imagine it, and its affects on humanity. As such, perhaps an integration of soundscape composition with urban soundscape systems into urban environments is desirable[7] [8]. Such systems can engage the existing soundscape by transforming the voice of the striated soundscape through loudspeaker and/or microphone placement. In my own research I have used the image to sound platform Metasynth© to do exactly this by re-imagining striations through spectral analysis and transforming striations with designed cyclical modulations, which are replayed alongside originating striating agents, transforming their voice to a more nature affected one. Further to this, the striating agents of the forest – insects, particularly cicadas – could point the way to re-imagining the striated soundscape. They demonstrate heterogeneity with constant variation in the width of frequency bands and intensity of amplitude, whilst simultaneously immersing the listener in synchronous chorusing – imagine machines singing in a more harmonious and integrated pattern. It is all a question of creativity for the acoustic ecologist: can we teach our machines to sing together and sing with us, rather than speaking the commanding voice of progress, of subservience?

Postscript: *Rediscovering the Voice of Echo in the Second Order of Nature*

The call for the re-emergence of the imagination is familiar to all the philosophers and thinkers referred to in this paper; for imagination to thrive, a relationship with nature and its role as the ultimate Other is necessary. Therefore, it seems fitting to finish this essay with a myth, for myth *is* imagination, timeless, resonating in our urban ears as it did in our ancestor's ears thousands of years before us. The myth of Narcissus and Echo elucidates the alienation of modern humanity from nature. So compelling is this myth one wonders if the struggle between striated space and smooth space, between the civilized and the natural, between dominated space and open space has been a constant theme for humanity – only now the theme is global.

Echo is a nymph. As an anthropomorphic representation of nature she can be considered the voice of nature – the soundscape. She is destined to utter only the final word spoken by the one who has her attention. Echo discovers Narcissus (representative of humanity) and loves him. Yet Narcissus rejects Echo. For this rejection of nature he is cursed. His curse is to fall in love with his own reflection, and soon after Narcissus looks into a still pool of water. Although unable to gain any nourishment from his beloved, Narcissus cannot bear to part from his reflection. Unable to be embraced, nourished or loved, Narcissus dies of a broken heart. Had he reached out to Echo, who cries by his side upon his death, he would have been embraced and found love.

Modern man is like Narcissus, enamoured with the objects created by his own mind, he too is in love with his own reflection. Can our own creations sustain us, or will humanity, like Narcissus, be doomed by the emptiness of the visual reflection of our own image? Should we be wiser than Narcissus and open our ears and search for Echo – the echo of our own voice in the soundscape? Not just an acoustic echo of reflection liberated from the masking agents of the striated soundscape, but the echo within our own being desiring a sustaining and nourishing relationship with the natural world. Can such a voice be found in the emerging philosophy of biophilia, and the second order of nature? If so, no one is better placed to listen to, and re-imagine the emerging voice of Echo in the second order of nature than the acoustic ecologist.

6 See Westerkamp, H. 2002, 'Linking Soundscape Composition and Acoustic Ecology', *Organised Sound: An International Journal of Music and Technology, vol. 7,* no. 1, pp. 51–56. Amongst Westerkamp's numerous compositions, *Into India* and *Transformations* are particularly evocative examples of re-imagining urban soundscapes.

7 See *The New Sonic Garden* < http://www.architetturasonora.com/AS/04-profile/sonic-garden-lab> accessed 12/9/2011, and the *RMIT Urban Soundscape Group report* <http://sound.sial.rmit.edu.au/Index/Projects+UrbanSoundscapeProject.php> and *Hellstrom et al (2008)* for contemporary examples of the emergence of urban soundscape systems.

8 Hellstrom, whose research is aligned more to the 'urban, structural approach formulated by CRESSON rather than the more unspecified 'ecological' view of the WFAE' (Hellstrom 2003, 21) has conducted considerable research in Urban Soundscape Design. See Hellstrom, B. 2003, *Noise Design: Architectural Modeling and the Aesthetics of Urban Acoustic Space*, Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm, Sweden and, Hellstrom, B., Nilsson, M., Becker, P., and Lunden, P. (2008) Acoustic Design Artifacts and Methods for Urban Soundscapes, in *15th International Congress of Sound and Vibration,* 6–10 July 2008, Daejeon, Korea.

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Revisiting the Vancouver Soundscape Tape Collection: Motives, Intentions, & Practice

By Vincent Andrisani

This article features accompanying sound files, available online at: **http://www.akouse.gr/soundscape_journal_Vol11/andrisani.html**

During the early 1970s, a team of researchers at Simon Fraser University began documenting soundscapes throughout Vancouver. These recordings eventually became a significant part of *The Vancouver Soundscape* (World Soundscape Project, 1978), which was at the time, the most comprehensive sonic analysis of an urban environment anywhere in the world. Just over twenty years later, during the mid 1990s, the project was revisited for the first time, where the motive of the endeavor remained similar to that of the 1970s: the documentation of "typical" Vancouver sound signals, soundmarks, and soundscapes.

Beginning in the summer of 2010, and following the lead of both the original group and 1990s recordist Robert MacNevin, I too had the opportunity to contribute to the legacy of The Vancouver Soundscape as the project's most recent recordist. Inevitably, this endeavour once again lent itself to a longitudinal analysis, marking the third revisit to the tape collection, separated by more-or-less twenty-year increments. Yet, unlike the others that preceeded me, I had the opportunity and the fortune of assessing the first two attempts, and in turn of developing an approach that simaltaneously upheld the motives and intentions of the initial group, while addressing my own research interests as well. In what follows, I will explore some of the decisions behind the recording process conducted during the summer and autumn of 2010.

Before proceeding, it is worthwhile to mention that all of the recordings have been captured with a Marantz solid-state recorder, using an Audio-Technica stereo condenser microphone. Not only have these recordings been archived according to time and date, but corresponding log sheets have also been completed in order to communicate both the SPL measurements, and the specific acoustic attributes of the recordings (i.e. particular sounds, and the times at which they occur). Photographs are used as visual representations to supplement the audio, and as such, I have captured several at each recording site. And finally, embedded within the metadata of each photograph are GPS coordinates, which will allow future recordists to trace my exact location at the time of recording.