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Poetry Editorial: Audioecopoetics

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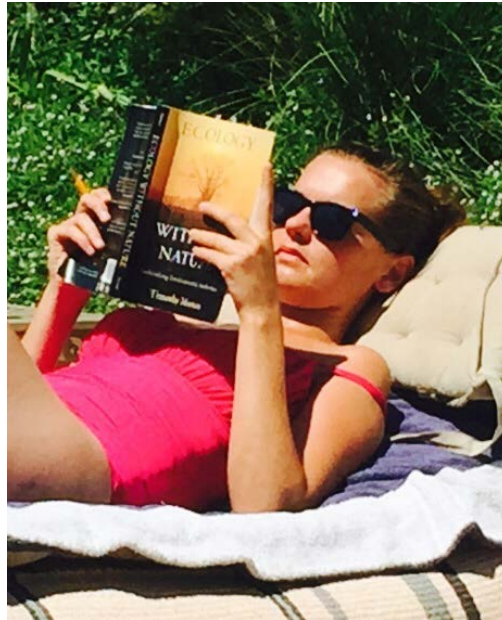
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Audioecopoetics



I've been on holiday.

With Timothy Morton.

Ok, ok... so I haven't been on holiday with Timothy Morton. I've been on holiday with *Ecology Without Nature* (2007) and *The Ecological Thought* (2010), and, as a result, I now have ambient poetics on the brain. Except, I think I had ambient poetics on the brain long before I read Morton's account of it, and I don't think I'm the only one.

The first of this issue's ambient eco-poets is **Ian Mikyska**. The detailed instructions that introduce 'through a wheat field; to a pond' emphasise the multiplicity of this work's sounding. There is a palpable blurring of what falls within the remit (and control) of this work – of what is there and what is not there (across its wavering degrees of reality) – as it is performed and recorded by humans, instruments, and audio equipment in a Southern Bohemian wheat field, and of what falls within the remit of this work as it is performed and experienced by humans and their audio equipment in their multiple audience environments elsewhere. 'through a wheat field; to a pond' is a perfect example of what Timothy Morton has dubbed "ambient poetics": "the attempt to forge art and concepts that lie 'in between' traditional

ideas of inside and outside” (2007:78). This piece inhabits multiple places at once, and so do we. This is not atypical of the work in this issue. Audioecopoetics has proven to be a particularly well-suited genre within which to explore this kind of ecological thinking: “the thinking of connectedness” (2010:7).

Where Mikyska’s ‘through a wheat field; to a pond’ is a radical merging or playfully enmeshed piece, **Shin Yu Pai**’s ‘Heirloom’ separates things out for us. The sound of the orchard and the sound of the human voice are overlaid; but which is foreground and which is background? What are the politics of rendering nonhuman sounds as the background to our own? And how do Shin Yu’s audiopoetics contrast with the material (and arguably more ambient) poetics of her writing with apples? This question of the relationship between score and utterance recurs throughout these poetries. **Alistair Noon**’s work positions us within a plural and distributed textual environment where the environment of the body, the environments that this body inhabits/activates/creates, the digital environment of its recording and the physical textual environment of its “scription” (Cobbing & Upton, 1998) are all part of its sounding. In this poetry we are posthuman, but then again, we always were. **Hanna Tuulikki**’s beautifully arranged, hand-written scores return us to the concrete word shapes of Mary Ellen Solt, and to questions regarding the relationship between the visual arrangement of these letters and the sounding of the voices that utter them: How do these utterances relate to the shapes of the bodies that formed them? How near/far from the birds are these sounds now?

Tuulikki is a Finnish-English artist writing and performing in Gaelic. Intra-lingualism is another feature of much of the work in this issue. These poets are thinking through how it is that apples, dogs, birds and rivers might sound, in amongst other people and places, so that it becomes a question not of whose language it is, but an always already between-language. **Jonathan Skinner** adopts the arc of the thrush’s song to alter the arrangement of his speech, providing both thrush (as original?) and human song (as tribute or pastiche?): his poem, like many others, is in dialogue with the other-than human. **Elizabeth-Jane Burnett**’s intra-lingual vocabling gradually replaces human words with birdsong. What are the politics of this replacement? This is a version of the foreground/background question asked of Shin Yu Pai’s ‘Heirloom’: who takes centre stage? This is a question that **Julie Andreyev’s work** also addresses in her investigative performance-making with canine co-artist, Tom. Who leads, who speaks and how? Ethics are always a part of it.

Welsh poet **Rhys Trimble** examines how it is that water translates onto the page in his particular brand of between-language. As a static gathering of black letters – water arranged in so many parts on the page – how does our reading release them? And before we are completely swept away by the excitement of vimeo links and audio downloads, **Michael Sloane**’s ‘Stone’ reminds us that the printed text can make a noise all of its own: each word’s a singular vibration. **Steven Hitchins**’ ‘The White City’ demonstrates that we are all vibrating. We cannot help but speak with the places (and people) with/in which we interact. Hitchins’ work exposes the geology of place embedded in every human (and non-human) voice and how this geology extends and expands in dialogue with other audio-locations/locutions.

Angela Rawlings' and **Marta Guðrún Jóhannesdóttir's** 'ANDSCAPE' builds on this revelation, suggesting that the sounding of a place is embedded in its name.

Listening, not just to the sounds that we make with and through the sounds of the non-human, the living and the non-(or the not yet-)living entities around us, but also to how these sounds are produced – their journeys into making – reveals a lot about the relationships at work within these poetics. Works such as these allow us to see how a study of aesthetic production, of the activity of representation, can be used to shed light on the complex intra-actions of animals, vegetables and minerals as they come together to form place, ecology and environment. If we listen hard enough, if we read closely enough, we begin to feel the points at which these things combine. We begin to feel the places where one thing becomes something else. And so we begin to hear the way our world forms.

But don't take my word for it – have a listen for yourself. Or, as **Madelaine Longman**, writes: "Behind your breathing, listen. This may be important."

It is.

Works Cited

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