

Reading into Soundscapes: Between *Ma* and Concretization

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Résumé de l'article

Cet article examine le rôle actif que joue l'auditeur/participant dans le processus qui consiste à donner forme à une oeuvre sonore. Je prête attention tant aux facteurs et à la dynamique interne des oeuvres qu'aux facteurs externes, et leur surdétermination selon les contextes variables de leur réception. Deux oeuvres sont analysées : *Mano Dharma, electronic* une installation audio-visuelle réalisée par Takeshi Kosugi en 1967 (exposée à la galerie IKON de Birmingham en 2015) et *Between*, une performance immersive qui se déploie au moyen d'une déambulation sonore en forêt réalisée par des étudiants de l'Université de Warwick en juin 2015. Ma façon d'aborder ces oeuvres fait appel à une sorte de pulsion sémiotique qui s'impose dans le désir de s'engager dans un processus de création de sens. Cela conduit vers une stratégie interprétative adaptée à ces oeuvres que je nomme "reading-into".

Je définis "reading-into" à la fois comme une stratégie phénoménologique délibérée et une exigence involontaire de la pulsion sémiotique qui conduit aux interrogations suivantes : quelles sont les possibilités et les limites du "reading-into" par l'auditeur/participant? De quelles façons le "reading-into" s'inscrit-il dans les théories de la réception esthétique? Quels facteurs propres à une oeuvre et propres au contexte de sa réception déterminent le "reading-into"? De quelle manière les aspects d'une oeuvre qui résistent à la lecture et à la sémiotisation déterminent-ils notre rapport à elle?

Reading into Soundscapes : Between *Ma* and Concretization

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This essay looks into two very different artistic works, Takeshi Kosugi's 1967 sound installation *Mano Dharma, electronic* and *Between*, an immersive performance piece that uses audio-walk as its main strategy, created by Theatre Studies finalists Rachel Tanner and Jamie Wright at the University of Warwick in June 2015. I will explore the role of the listener/participant in the process of shaping these works and the factors both internal and external to the works' dynamic structures, determined by ever shifting contextual parameters of reception. In *Between* the soundscape offers a fragmented narrative to be pieced together, so that the listener/participant can be immersed in its world, while the soundscape in *Mano Dharma, electronic* subverts mimetic relationships between sign and referent and deliberately refuses any kind of narrative structure. I am interested in the mechanism and modes of *reading-into* sound works, regardless of whether or not a narrative of some sort has been established within the work. This relies on the assumption of what I call a *semiotic impulse*, which might be voluntary or involuntary on the part of the recipient, something that imposes itself as an urge to engage in the meaning making process.

In her book *Listening to Noise and Silence : Towards the Philosophy of Sound*, Salomé Voegelin suggests that the listener places her subjectivity "momentarily in the locational modality of hearing and propels the hearing into the place of his voice to bounce around the spatio-temporal locale of his own making" (123). I propose the notion of *reading-into* to describe the listener/participant's need to find their place within the work from which to draft their own spatio-temporal parameters.

Here, *reading-into* is viewed variably as both a deliberate strategy and a somewhat involuntary form of imposition of the *semiotic impulse*

to ask : Is the listener/participant completing and negotiating what is already inherent in the structure of the work? Or is the agency of the listener/participant more liberal and unpredictable? Even though the notions of an ideal audience and author's intentionality are not necessarily what guides the reception process, the work sets its own parameters of engagement within which the reader completes the reception process. This opens possibilities for different readings of the same work, allowing it to be shaped not only by the individual psyche of the recipient, but even more so by the collective context of its enunciation. Hence, what are the possibilities and limits of the listener/participant's *reading-into*? How does *reading-into* relate to existing theoretical frameworks concerning aesthetic reception? What are the elements within the work itself and from the outside that shape the process of *reading-into*? How do *unreadable* elements of the work that appear to escape semiotization shape our modes of engagement?¹

To grapple with these questions, I deliberately choose these two sound pieces that inhabit very different formal realms and respond to different cultural and political landscapes, yet which I have nonetheless experienced as being very close to one another. In other words, I stepped into the vastly different worlds of these sound works from the same external contextual landscape, which in the case of *Between* I was invited to bring in, and in the case of *Mano Dharma, electronic*, it followed me even when I wanted to leave it behind me.

Points of Interference

Strolling on the Blindly Place in Birmingham on a lazy Sunday afternoon, I venture, as I often do, into the IKON gallery. On display is the exhibit named *Spacings* by one of Japan's major avant-garde artists, Takeshi Kosugi. Closely associated with the Fluxus movement and the Merce Cunningham Dance Company for which he served as musical director, Kosugi's experimentations in music have included collective improvisation and performance events exploring the relationship between sound and environment. His *Mano-Dharma, electronic* piece takes the center position in the IKON gallery exhibit, and features a static image of ocean waves projected onto the gallery walls accompanied by soundscape that does not mimetically resemble the sound of the sea. Yet the relationship between sound and image feels very plausible, even though there is no illusion of the sound coming from the image, rather it moves into it or even bounces against it. The soundscape is emitted by electronic wave transmission devices and receivers hanging by strings from the ceiling. The waves of the ocean that we see but do not hear, and the sounds produced by different kinds of waves coming through the transmitters, connect the image with its soundscape – making the phenomenon of “the wave” the central subject of the installation.

The sound is produced by means of *interference* between various

kinds of waves, including those that themselves do not generate sounds such as electric waves, radio frequency waves and wind movement. Kosugi draws sound from them by installing an electronic system within the space that makes these different elements/waves interfere with one another. Moreover, this *interference* is further amplified through the use of a standing floor fan. The air moving the strings on which transmitters and receivers hang further shapes the soundscape, which creates the sense of sound and image working together, merging, being inextricably part of one another in the making of waves. Tsutomu Mizusawa, the curator of Kosugi's 2002 exhibit *Waves* featured in the Museum of Modern Art in Kamakura, which also included the piece *Mano-dharma, electronic*, describes its form as follows :

The fundamental framework is defined with just several basic elements : high frequency transmitters, radios, and a fan. While minute settings are necessary, the numerous objects and materials hung from the ceiling by pieces of string are all everyday in nature. The high-frequency waves coming from the miniature transmitters, which are beyond the range of human hearing, affect each other to produce interference waves (heterodynes), and these are then turned into sound by miniature radios that are also hung from the ceiling. Because oscillating fans cause the mutual spatial relationships between the transmitters to change constantly, this automatic performance continues to undergo infinite transformations, just like waves in nature never form the exact same shape again. Paradoxically, the quality of the sounds that are thus produced makes us inevitably sense nature itself. (31)

As I come closer to the installation, I walk into that soundscape and for a brief moment the experience is almost immersive. My 10-year-old daughter, who accompanies me on this gallery visit, is even quicker to suspend her disbelief, as she jumps to point out, "I feel as if I could swim in here!", and starts moving her arms as though in the water – air-swimming, or rather sound-swimming. Then I notice that entering Kosugi's installation creates another level of *interference* as we stand in the fan's direction, forcing the airwaves to travel different routes, moving the transmitters gently, shifting the direction of sounds that are being produced. Our bodies interfere further as we move between the receivers and transmitters hanging from the ceiling, accidentally brushing against them or making their delicate cords move slightly as our bodies make their own discrete waves. The installation, hence, sounds differently on its own – when the fan and the air circulation alone are moving the transmission devices and receivers – and with us, audience/listeners, inside it.

Bernard Tschumi describes the presence of bodies within a structure in the context of architecture as both fulfilling the work and sabotaging it :

[...] there is the violence that all individuals inflict on spaces by their very presence, by their intrusion into the controlled order of architecture. Entering a building may be a delicate act, but it violates the balance of a precisely ordered geometry [...] Bodies carve all sorts of new and unexpected spaces

through fluid or erratic motions. (123)

In *Mano-dharma, electronic*, we have both intruded on the controlled spatial structure of wires, transmitters, and the image of waves, and violated the sound architecture of the work with our bodies and motions. Moreover, we feel invited to do so. Our presence has made the waves shift, change their direction, alter their strength – our *interference* has shaped the soundscape in a different and unique way. We have, along with other visitors to the exhibit before and after, engaged in a kind of collective improvisation spread across time (which Kosugi has been exploring, albeit in other forms of performing music), making *interference* its main strategy. If we were to follow the line of exploration that focuses on all the various kinds of wave *interference* in *Mano-dharma, electronic*, we could also take the neuroscience route to consider our brainwaves, my daughter's and mine, within this particular soundscape, as our electronic pulses communicate with others. We could perhaps contemplate further how the electronic transcript of our brainwaves, while within the installation, communicate with the transcripts of other waves that are involved in its making. What sort of sound/music would these transcriptions reveal? Although outside the scope of this paper, and even if left untranscribed, these *interferences* of different kinds of waves constitute the ever changing life of *Mano-dharma, electronic*. Here, the artist consciously and conceptually opens the space of the artwork for *interferences* not only within the work itself, but also from the outside – counting on the dynamic intrusion of an indefinite number of bodies.

One of the key concepts in Kosugi's sound art is *Ma* from Japanese *Noh* theatre, with its deep roots in Shinto religion. *Ma* is a spatial and temporal concept, a kind of negative space, describable as emptiness, blankness, and distance. In *Noh* theatre *Ma* is present on various levels – as an empty space before and after the performance, and during the performance as silences between words and sounds, spaces between the familiar and the distanced, between linear time and compressed or stretched performance time.² Kosugi situates his work under the umbrella of this concept, drawing a connection between *Ma* and different concepts of time: “The sense of *Ma* in traditional Japanese music, the sense of timing is different than in Western music. In my imagination the time seems to stretch and contract. It's not just linear” (Kosugi 2). The emptiness, the silence, the blankness of *Ma* comes, in fact, from *Noh* theatre's appreciation for the in-betweenness that Kosugi describes, in relation to his art, as the pause between one sound and another. Indeed, *Ma* appears through spatial and temporal configurations of objects and sounds and the intervals between them. The exhibit's title *Spacings* further foregrounds the process of placing and the relational component of the featured work. The notion of *spacing*, prearranged and occurring through improvisation, emerges through both intervals and *interferences*. The concept of *Ma* allows for an opening of space that foregrounds silence, emptiness, stillness – the possibility of uncharted

in-betweeness that shapes the experience of the work. In that sense *Ma* refers both to the notion of artistic utterance and to the process of its reception whereby the audience adds yet another layer of *interference*, disrupting existing intervals, establishing new points of in-betweeness in its own shaping of the work's meaning. For the curator Mizusava, the *reading-into* these "radical waves", as he calls them, is spiritual and philosophical :

The boundless, intense, and free-spirited anarchism of sound that is thus presented, with its unrestrained omnidirectionality, bringing cosmic radiation to mind, cannot help but give us courage to journey forth into an expanse of time and space that transcends life and death. (31)

My daughter's engagement with the *waves* was an immersive *reading-into* – at first mimetic as she did her sound-swimming, then more abstract, dancing slowly between the delicate cords of hanging transmitters, interfering and shaping the sounds through her choreography. As I stepped into the sound installation, moving slowly through it, involuntary questions kept popping into my head : How do the waves sound when you are packed onto a boat with almost no belongings and with way too many passengers, all of them as desperate as you to escape? What do you hear when the journey is at its most perilous, when the cramped boat is in the middle of the sea and there is no possibility of any contact – neither with those left behind, nor with the world awaiting on the other shore?

Kosugi first made this sound installation in 1967, and even though the form itself links into the avant-garde's iconoclastic spirit of the 1960s, his 'radical waves', in their rejection of a narrative structure, are certainly not intended to emit overtly political reflections and associations. Curator Mizusava experienced this piece in 2002 within a different cultural context than mine and his *reading-into* seems to have been more abstract and spiritual in nature. My daughter's playful, visceral reaction to the work offers perhaps a more intuitive and innocent *reading-into* as she completed the meaning with her dance. However, the associative process that the work has triggered for me has not been accidental, even if it was somewhat farfetched. The exact date of our gallery visit was September 6th, 2015, four days after the image of a three-year old Syrian boy who drowned in his family's attempt to reach Greece from Turkey went viral. It was ten days after the bodies of seventy-one Syrians were found in an abandoned lorry in Austria. And it was less than two weeks after our car journey through Europe, en route from Serbia to the United Kingdom, when waiting in Calais to board the train through the Eurotunnel, we saw them. They were mostly men from Africa and the Middle East, jumping over the fence and onto the road where the long line of parked trucks waited to cross from France to England. They were moving quickly between the trucks, looking behind their shoulders, perhaps assessing the risks, figuring

which one of the lorries might take them across and how to get on it. On a lookout, they were weighing their options – their bodies spelling out *action*, *urgency* and *fear*. Earlier, while visiting Belgrade, Serbia, we saw more of them, not just men but entire families mostly from Syria, some from Afghanistan. Most of them having found shelter in the park near the railway station in the center of the city. Small tents had mushroomed, the fountain used for washing, children running around, adults waiting, perhaps planning their next move – towards Croatia or Hungary, where the authorities had just erected the infamous razor-wire fence on the border with Serbia to stop the flow of refugees. It was just over a fortnight before our gallery visit that my daughter asked to do something to help these people whose homes were destroyed, as she had put it. So we got her a big bag of chocolates and biscuits, which she took to the park by the railway station and distributed to the children.

These personal glimpses of the political realities through the media and brief direct encounters with the refugee crisis were all part of the larger contextual landscape from which I experienced the work on display in the IKON gallery that September afternoon. Out of this context emerged my experience, which in actuality became a kind of reading between the lines, or rather sounds, of Kosugi's *Mano-dharma, electronic*. Yet, it was not the reading of something that was implied in the work without being actualized, rather it was an imposition of the larger contextual narrative into a structure that deliberately refused to be organized according to the logic of narrative. In Tschusimi's sense, it was a violent intrusion on my part into the space of Kosugi's sound installation, reducing a vast potentiality of this abstract work to a concrete, narrative, and largely political connotation. Given that the terms of engagement the work offers are not thematically related to exile (unless the terms are understood metaphorically or allegorically, which is not the sense I have shared here), my *reading-into* could be described as purely subjective. So, why is this subjective *reading-into* even worth considering?

Arguably, a very specific contextualization framing my experience of Kosugi's installation is not an entirely arbitrary imposition of interpretation. This process is rather triggered by the work itself, not through its possible thematic allusions (if there are any at all), but rather through its formal strategies and the invitation, in the layout of the work, to co-create its soundscape. Thus, what facilitates my *reading-into* the sound installation is not merely its most mimetic element – *i.e.*, the image of the waves. Images of oceans, beaches and waves do not make me think of refugees, makeshift boats and drowned toddlers, not even in the overpowering context of the refugee crises in the summer of 2015. What triggers the association process is the entire set-up of the work – the transmitters, the receivers, the strings from which they are hanging, the sounds they are making, the ways in which they move, the image projected on the wall. It is the relationship between all these

elements and my own body/self within the installation. In other words, it is Kosugi's artistic strategy of *interference* that enables the associative process which places, somewhat awkwardly, his 1967 sound installation into the topical context of exile. The form, rather than any content the work might imply, the collective political experience at the moment of encounter with the work, and the subjective associative process, condition the *reading-into*, whereby the very specific political theme of exile enters Kosugi's avant-garde exploration. In this process, the author's intentionality, as well as the notion of an ideal audience, have once again been proven irrelevant. It is rather the formal, aesthetic space of *interference* within the work that enables the subjective and contextual dimensions to shape the meaning in accordance with the topical theme of exile, providing me also with a justification of such an interpretation.

Reading the Jungle in Between

Unlike *Mano Dharma, electronic*, which is in the first place abstract and experimental, *Between*, created by Rachel Tanner and Jamie Wright as part of their practice-as-research finalist dissertation at Warwick University, responds directly to the particular socio-political issues of contemporary exile, formulating in a unique way a critique of the UK asylum and detention policies. Tanner and Wright utilize devices of sound to shape the narrative landscapes of their piece and involve the listener/participant in both the internal structures and political dimensions of *Between*. The performance took place in the Tocil Wood – a thousand year old woodland, a place out of place, in the heart of the modern Warwick University campus. The choice of site is interesting because, at first glance, the bucolic woods is a space with the least semiotic potential to elucidate political connotations. In the language of Japanese *Noh* theatre, the uncharted space of the woodland offers a kind of openness akin to the notion of *Ma*, which Kosugi's work also shares, albeit in a very different form. It also opens a possibility to read the notion of *Ma* through the concept of liminality and vice versa. The uncharted space here becomes liminal in Victor Turner's sense of the term that not only describes a spatio-temporal period, but also includes one's experience of liminality and a possibility for agency. At the beginning of the path leading to the woods, the listener/participant is given a set of headphones where a narrator with a female voice further guides the participant through the woods and an unforeseen exilic narrative, the performance of which will be in part shaped by the walking participants.

The walk opens with a mimetic soundscape – the chirping of birds and sounds of footsteps on wet soil. Then the guide's voice whispers, "Come with me, follow my footsteps". As we walk along, sounds of nature are interspersed with sounds of children playing, splashing in a pond, a woman singing, people whispering, then later, voices of panic, panting, running through the woods, all framed through the voice of the guide/narrator :

You chose not to see things that are in front of your eyes [...] turn around and look behind you, you can no longer see the road from here [...] our countries are not safe for us, no homes there for us, no stability [...] We may be foreign to you, but you are foreign to us too [...] we are asking you to listen, to see, to understand [...] look how much is hidden from the view [...] People here come from many different places, for many different reasons, we have no place to go, hostilities are growing, restrictions rising... (<https://betweentheatre.wordpress.com>)

The soundscape gradually weaves an associative web wherein the uncharted empty woodland acquires specific references and connotations, while the experience of sound-walking quickly turns from a visceral into a political one. As different elements of the soundscape alternate and are occasionally interspersed with silences, so does the site alternate between seemingly unspoiled nature and a kind of installation, within which fragments of the world conjured through the audio narrative emerge. There are abandoned toys in the pond where we heard the laughter of children, remains of cardboard and plastic that were once part of makeshift homes, an unwashed pot abandoned by the stream, someone's scarf caught in the branches, a broken mobile phone on the ground. The *interference* of objects and soundscape establish a narrative of exile, a sense of statelessness and uncertainty shaping the piece into a performative site-specific installation. The objects become pieces of evidence and clues to the unfolding story seeping through the headphones. The *interference* of objects, audio narrative, and the presence of the listener/participant alters the sense of time, as is the case with Kosugi's work too. However, while in Kosugi's work the soundscape plays with compressing and extending the sense of time, here it plays with the listener's sense of past and present. Inevitably, the walk itself unfolds in the here and now of the performance where the guide's intimate, direct address to the listener/participant situates the narrative within the present moment. Yet, the past becomes strangely mixed into the present through the objects scattered along the walk as fragments of an abandoned site – signs of life that has moved elsewhere. The question then arises, are the sounds we hear – the laughter of children, chatter of adults, chirping of the birds, even the guide's voice – situated in the present or do we hear a ghost-soundscape? Is our guide an exilic version of Beatrice, who guided the poet Dante Alighieri (also an exile) through the Limbo that, in this context, reads almost too easily as a space of exilic liminality embodied in refugee camps, perilous border crossings, detention centers, and the infamous "Jungle" in Calais? As such, this exilic liminality further invokes a liminal signifying space that in the words of Homi Bhabha "is *internally* marked by the discourse of minorities, the heterogeneous histories of contending peoples, antagonistic authorities and tense location of cultural difference" (212).

The play with past and present along the tripartite line of *soundscape* – *listener* – *space* creates a sense of disorientation which often

takes place in the well-known immersive audio-walks and installations of Jennet Cardiff, George Bures Miller, and Brice Jeannin.³ Nevertheless, while their audio-walks and sound installations produce somewhat formless immersive spaces through sound, *Between* destabilizes a particular space by similar means while making it overtly political. Within a seemingly neutral landscape the soundscape expands the site, incorporating allusions to current issues concerning immigration, citizenship, and abjection. The landscape loses its neutrality and even its everyday meaning as an extension of a relatively safe campus space, but in the process it becomes a liminal territory – an exilic limbo – through which we have been led by a fictional narrator who knows it well and knows it differently than we do. This is a narrator who makes this familiar setting strange for us. The soundscape imposes another space into the idyllic woodland setting, one that could as well be an allusion to a space that has been called the Jungle, set in the bushes between the beaches of Calais and the highway where thousands of illegal migrants hide during the day in makeshift tents in desperate hope to get aboard trucks and cross the Channel Tunnel at night. Hence, the notion of nature as escape becomes turned on its head; the woods are no longer a site of pastoral idyll, a swift escape from a concrete urban landscape of a university campus, but another kind of escape – one which refugees, asylum seekers, immigrants and other ‘abjects’ know best.

Like other sound art works and especially those presented as an audio-walk, *Between* invokes Michel de Certeau’s distinction between space and place. In his seminal work *The Practice of Everyday Life*, he defines place (*lieu*) as ‘the order (of whatever kind) in accord with which elements are distributed in relationships of co-existence. [...] A place is thus an instantaneous configuration of positions. It implies an indication of stability’ (117). In contrast to the stability of place, ‘space is composed of intersections of mobile elements. It is in a sense actuated by the elements of movement deployed within it. [...] In short, *space is a practical place*’ (117). Through this audio-walk, a fluid temporal space is created in the here and now of walking and listening. The soundscape and the listener/ participant are essential in the process of shaping the place into space, an essentially theatrical and performative intervention through which the woodland environment acquires profound political connotations. Even though the fictional guide conjured through the soundscape prescribes the itinerary, it is the body of the walker/listener from which it all starts and comes into being as a phenomenological experience. Within the process of walking various elements of the piece come together – the sound, movement, imagery, the natural environment and performative interventions within it, and perhaps above all the participant’s associative thinking. The process of associative thinking, triggered by the performance scenario as an audio-walk, links up with other spaces, performing a unique cartographical act where the internal world of an artistic piece fully connects and realizes its connotations,

political and other. In her book *Listening to Noise and Silence*, Salomé Voegelin formulates her position on the listener/participant of a sound-art piece in a way that is applicable to the experience of *Between*: “Indeed this geography cannot result in maps but is a constant mapping: building and taking apart, a mobile practice of individual existence as motility” (136). In the case of *Between*, however, the soundscape becomes a means of spatial practice while also constituting a device which renders the familiar landscape strange by strategies very different from Brecht (although the political spirit is very much Brechtian). In the end, the performance in Tocil woods does not allow for interpretative phantasy, but rather calls for a political *concretization*.

As cultural signifiers of specific material realities, the scattered objects remain vague. However, they give away identifiable traces of daily routines. These signs of activity, such as cooking, washing and playing, are easily decodable as they denote recognizable acts related to dwelling across vastly different spaces and experiences of habitation. Moreover the scattered objects suggest that the site was left in haste. We have been constantly reminded of the sense of fear and insecurity endured by the inhabitants of this imaginary exilic site. The guide takes us through this world and navigates it effortlessly, however her radius of movement is limited. She is not allowed out of the woods and must leave us where the woods meet the road, for she too is “illegal, alien, non-citizen”. This establishes a kind of discrepancy between identification and otherness, alerting the listener/participant to a significant difference between herself and the fictional guide. The recognition of this discrepancy reverberates further and becomes translated into a difference between those situated in a relatively safe academic environment, within which *Between* takes place, and those inhabiting a Jungle somewhere near a border on their perilous journey, those whose plight the performance wishes to foreground. In this vein, Doreen Massey has explored how time and space get shaped in relation to the perception and conceptualization of identity. She points out a radical difference between the experiences of time and space for different inhabitants; for some movement takes place in relation to “nice hotel rooms” or a home to return to, while for others it means a “flight and uncertainty of non-belonging” (Voegelin 138):

[...] different social groups and different individuals are placed in very distinct ways in relation to these flows and interconnections. [...] Some are more in charge of it than others, some initiate flows and movements, others don't; some are more on the receiving end than others; some are effectively imprisoned by it. (Massey)

Massey's notion of place is generative, pointing to its internal differences and conflicts and to various participants – from those who have the authority of spatial agency to marginalized inhabitants – in the continuous process of place shaping and space mapping. Doug Sounder's analysis of factors involved in the making of the Jungle be-

hind the Calais beach illustrates Massey's notion of space as process and as dwelling, with the internal differences and conflicts brought to the surface. According to Saunders, the reasons the Jungle became so populated as to be perceived as a point of a massive immigration crisis in Europe are directly connected to several players and authorities and their sense of spatial agency. This includes the decision to close the legal refugee-processing center along the coast in Sangatte (which triggered the first refugee crisis in the settlement in the mid-2000s), the refusal to create a unified European asylum policy (first proposed by the UK in 2004 and most recently by Germany – both times largely ignored)⁴, as well as many European countries ceasing to issue seasonal work visas to Africans, “thus turning a short-term, legal migration pathway into a permanent, illegal pathway”. Saunders continues :

The people I've met beneath the bushes in Calais are a troubling group of mixed (and sometimes deliberately vague) nationality, from Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. Some are quiet, long-suffering victims of some great indignity – perhaps enduring a conflict at home, perhaps during their long, expensive journey. Some are bold and calculated opportunists. Some are doing everything they can to help their family back home. Some are career criminals on the run or mentally troubled people prone to violence – the other Jungle dwellers are quick to acknowledge this. None of them should be there – and none would, if there was an unambiguous legal path to settlement. (<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/globe-debate/the-dark-forces-at-work-in-the-jungle-of-calais/article25851989/>)

The world conjured through this audio-walk, however, is and is not the Jungle. Its liminal space is a non-place of exile within which various similar sites have been echoed. The story about the people who hid in the woods and were subsequently forced to leave and hide elsewhere is, our guide whispers in our ears, deliberately allusive. We do not know where they come from; different national backgrounds are mentioned, but none overtly specified – they are everyman/woman of exile. Reading the place shaped through this audio-walk as the migrant/refugee site near the Calais' beach, infamously known as the Jungle, is my *reading-into Between*, albeit a reading not as farfetched as finding echoes of the 2015 refugee crisis in Kosugi's 1967 sound installation.

Even though *Between* invites and encourages a *reading-into* that identifies the fictional world of the sound-art based performance with the actual liminal exilic site, my reception process shares some traits with what took place at Kosugi's *Spacings* exhibition. In both cases the notion of *interference* is central to the process of *reading-into*. In the case of *Mano Dharma, electronic* the work comes into existence to some degree even if nobody is present to interfere with it. The inner construction of the work is aided throughout by the fan, which moves the strings and transmitters in such a way that sound gets produced even if there is nobody to witness the process or engage with it. In other words, *interference* is built into the inner structure of this sound installation, and even

though the presence of a listener/participant alters the soundscape, not to mention the visual dimensions of the work, *Mano Dharma, electronic* has a life of its own, so to speak. The presence of the listener/participant changes, enriches, and disturbs the solitary life of *Mano Dharma, electronic*, with the result that *interference* transforms from a mechanical into a communicational act. *Between*, however, comes into being only through the presence of the listener/participant – through her acts of walking and listening. The work has no solitary existence of its own, no points of *interference* between various elements inherent within its inner structure. The interventions into the uncharted space of the woodland, embodied by the scattered objects that within the performance process read clearly as fragments of an exilic existence, without the soundscape and the participant/listener such interventions could stand for any class of phenomena. These signs, however, acquire their meaning only in the process of walking as the recoded narrative unfolds. Hence, the listener/participant is the central element of the performance – her presence enables the process of *interference* to take place, and it is by virtue of this *interference* that *Between* comes into being. The *interference* that the listener/participant brings into *Between* and *Mano Dharma, electronic* is embodied, as it is initially a physical interaction with the soundscape and imagery of these works that unfolds in time and space. This *interference*, which also lies at the core of the process of *reading-into*, first happens as an immediate, sensory, visceral relation to the work that shapes its structure to either bring it to life or alter its solitary mechanical existence. We could say that this embodied experience of *interference* both precedes and provokes the *semiotic impulse* of the listener/participant. Along these lines, *reading-into* could also be understood as an embodied practice that necessitates non-narrative, visceral, inner spaces of the works' *ma*, in as much as it brings the external context into the semiotization process.

Concretization of *Ma*/*Ma* of Concretization

In both pieces, no matter how seemingly disparate, the process of listening/participation is similar. The concept of *Ma*, shaped through the effects of *interference* among various elements constituting the sound installation and the audio-walk, enables moments of silence, points of emptiness, and *interferences* of different time structures within which the viewer/participant makes her own temporary imprint. We could say that both works have a dimension of *Ma* that establishes points of openness within which my accidental, farfetched *reading-into* of *Mano Dharma, electronic*, as well as the much more appropriate *concretization* of *Between*, took place. There is an analogy between *Ma* in the Japanese *Noh* theatre and concepts from literary theory, particularly Roman Ingarden's *points of indeterminacy*, as well as the theory of Czech Structuralism, particularly Felix Vodičko's notion of *concretization*, which Patrice Pavis has further elaborated in the context of theatre semiotics.

Concretization maintains that text/performance is not a fixed entity that can be understood in a particular way once and for all. Rather it exists only upon completion of a reading/reception process, which is also always historically situated. Moreover, Japanese *Noh* theatre was Vsevolod Meyerhold's inspiration when he proposed in 1907 the concept of *the theatre of the straight line*, in opposition to the closed *triangle model* (writer-director-actor) that excludes the audience from the creative process. *Theatre of the straight line* adds the role of the audience as the fourth co-creator. Both *concretization* and *theatre of the straight line* signal that the meaning of an artistic work is completed only through the process of its reception. We can identify an analogous model in *Between* and *Mano Dharma, electronic* that could be described as soundscape-listener-space/time. Here, though, the listener is placed in the middle to indicate his/her centrality in the process – not someone who comes at the end to complete the meaning and fill in the gaps, but someone who is always in the middle of the process of meaning making as the embodied element through which the process of *concretization* takes place.

In the semiotic sense, Japanese *Ma* also foregrounds the role of reception in the creative process by making space for the recipient's experience to shape the work. Likewise, at the heart of all these concepts is the process of *interference* through which the work fulfills its meaning. However, there is a point where Japanese *Ma* and semio-structuralist *concretization* differ. Even though both give prominence to the reception process, the latter foregrounds the narrative while the former emphasizes experience, presence, *interference* of the recipient in a more abstract, visceral and perhaps even spiritual sense. So, what took place in my reception of *Mano-dharma, electronic* and *Between* is an additional kind of *interference*, that of two reception concepts *Ma* and *concretization*. The openness, the emptiness of the semiotic space – the *Ma* of *Mano-dharma, electronic*, but also the silences and the uncharted woodland environment of *Between* – allows for this process of *concretization* to occur in both pieces. In a sense, *Ma* could be understood as a non-semiotic space that allows for the reception process to unfold performatively, in the here and now of the encounter with the work trying to resist the semiotic impulse. However, the notion of *concretization* works in the opposite direction, with the *semiotic impulse* of the recipient as its main force. These two concepts foregrounding the reception process – albeit in different ways and inhabiting different ends of the semiotic spectrum – are not, as this brief case study shows, mutually exclusive. We might say that *Ma* is shaped/enabled by the structural relations and arrangements within the work itself (which in the case of *Between* includes the listener/participant as the central actor within the inner structure, while in the case of *Mano Dharma, electronic* the recipient only temporarily becomes part of the inner structure), with *concretization* foregrounding the contextual dimension which the recipient brings into the process from the outside.

As Voegelin points out, “The listener encounters the work in space and time, which pretend to be always-already-there before the encounter, while the sonic work, due to its temporality and effusiveness, questions such *a priori* situations and invites their playful production instead” (124). In both *Mano Dharma, electronic* and *Between, interference* caused by the listener/participant that disrupts the linear time/space dynamic, makes the listener/participant the focal actor/agent of the work through which the soundscape fully realizes itself. In this sense, Voegelin is right to assert : “The place sounding is not here and its time is not now, it is a time-space all of its own, produced somewhere between the site, the computer room, and my auditory imagination” (135). This realization of the work through the listener/participant – whether she has been invited to perform this process, or imposes her performance onto it – can be unpredictable, so much so as to risk imposing an intrusion of narrative, though a process of semio-structuralist *concretization*, on an abstract work, and to find *Ma* in a narrative-based audio-walk through which to search for her own *concretization* of its politics. In the acts of the listener/participant, additional spatio-temporal dimensions of the works emerge, making it possible for an avant-garde piece from 1967, a student project from 2015, and the topical refugee crisis to interfere in ways that are both political and visceral, oscillating between mystical *Ma* and semiotic *concretization*.

Notes

1. There have been various examples of artistic tendencies that have deliberately sought to resist semiotization, such as abstract art, some forms of performance art, Allan Kaprow’s notion of ‘nonsemiotic theatre,’ to mention a few. However, the tendency to resist semiotization is paradoxical in its nature as it could be argued that everything is readable on some level. For more on this paradox see my article ‘Semiotics of Nonsemiotic Theatre’, *Semiotica*, Vol. 168 (2008), 93-109.
2. See Kunio Komparu, *The Noh Theatre : Principles and Perspectives* (1983).
3. Cardiff’s audio-walks such as *The Missing Voice (Case Study B)* is a case in point. Its narrative, which mixes the forms of a guided tour with detective fiction, leads the listener from the Whitechapel gallery through the sites of East London, yet the discrepancy between the soundscape and the unfolding reality of the walk has a disorienting effect. Jeannin’s work transports places in time with deliberate disregard for historical accuracy, as in his 2008 sound installation *Shapes for Statics* which was featured at the Royal Saltworks of Arc-at-Sanans in France.
4. This policy would involve asylum seekers being distributed to agreed-upon places, with countries sharing the settlement burden according to economic and demographic need, in addition to deportation and the return of non-qualified applicants. This way the immigration issues would have been shared across European national authorities, enabling a faster and more efficient handling of cases.

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Abstract

This essay explores the role of the listener/participant in the process of shaping sound works. I consider factors both internal to the works' structures and inner dynamics, as well as external to them, and how they are determined by ever shifting parameters of context within which they are received. The analysis revolves around two very different artistic works : Takeshi Kosugi's audio-visual installation *Mano Dharma, electronic* (1967), exhibited at the IKON Gallery in Birmingham in September 2015, and *Between*, an immersive performance piece that uses the audio-walk as its main strategy, created by Theatre Studies students at the University of Warwick in June 2015. My approach to these works relies on the assumption of a *semiotic impulse* which imposes itself as the urge to engage the process of meaning making, followed by the strategy I propose as ideally suited to the interpretation of these works, a process I call *reading-into*.

Reading-into is proposed variably as both a deliberate phenomenological strategy and a form of involuntary imposition of the *semiotic impulse* to ask the following questions : What are the possibilities and limits of the listener/participant's *reading-into* ? How does *reading-into* relate to existing theoretical frameworks concerning aesthetic reception? What are the elements within and without the work itself that shape the process of *reading-into* ? How do unreadable elements of the work which resist semiotization shape our modes of engagement?

Keywords : Performance; Sound Art; Concretization; Semiotic Impulse; *Ma*.

Résumé

Cet article examine le rôle actif que joue l'auditeur/participant dans le processus qui consiste à donner forme à une œuvre sonore. Je prête attention tant aux facteurs et à la dynamique interne des œuvres qu'aux facteurs externes, et leur surdétermination selon les contextes variables de leur réception. Deux œuvres sont analysées : *Mano Dharma, electronic* une installation audio-visuelle réalisée par Takeshi Kosugi

en 1967 (exposée à la galerie IKON de Birmingham en 2015) et *Between*, une performance immersive qui se déploie au moyen d'une déambulation sonore en forêt réalisée par des étudiants de l'Université de Warwick en juin 2015. Ma façon d'aborder ces œuvres fait appel à une sorte de pulsion sémiotique qui s'impose dans le désir de s'engager dans un processus de création de sens. Cela conduit vers une stratégie interprétative adaptée à ces œuvres que je nomme "*reading-into*".

Je définis "*reading-into*" à la fois comme une stratégie phénoménologique délibérée et une exigence involontaire de la pulsion sémiotique qui conduit aux interrogations suivantes : quelles sont les possibilités et les limites du "*reading-into*" par l'auditeur/participant? De quelles façons le "*reading-into*" s'inscrit-il dans les théories de la réception esthétique? Quels facteurs propres à une œuvre et propres au contexte de sa réception déterminent le "*reading-into*"? De quelle manière les aspects d'une œuvre qui résistent à la lecture et à la sémiotisation déterminent-ils notre rapport à elle?

Mots-clés : performance; art sonore; concrétisation; impulsion sémiotique; *Ma*.

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