

Field Recording and the Reenchantment of the World: an intercultural and interdisciplinary approach

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Abstract

Non-fictional field recording is a genre of music (sound art) which offers a glimpse of art beyond our late-capitalist age. The ongoing ecocide which we, in a state of abject detachment, are witnessing and abetting calls out for artists to reconnect and reengage with the non-human world that has been deemed valueless by our civilisation. Countering the disenchantment of nature wrought by scientism, human-centrism, and above all capitalism necessitates a dissolving of the barriers we set up between ourselves and our environment, a task which can be only accomplished via religion or art: an art – like field recording – which affords reconnecting its audience with the enchantment of the ignored world surrounding them.

In this paper, Toshiya Tsunoda's exemplary *Somashikiba* (2016) – recorded in locations forgotten by civilisation – will be examined via interpretive tools adapted from Ueda Shizuteru's Kyoto School aesthetics and Takahashi Mutsuo's poetics. Ueda's philosophy offers a way of understanding perception which eliminates the subject-object division. Takahashi's project of recovering the spirituality of place through poetry is a model of historically- and politically-engaged art. Looking, as these contemporary Japanese thinkers have done, to the pre-capitalist, pre-formalist past to rediscover (sound) art's function as a medium which reconfigures the listener's perception of reality, I will argue for the urgency of sound art such as Tsunoda's which aids in the reenchantment of the world to a future beyond capitalist, humanist 'civilisation'.

Keywords

field recording, Toshiya Tsunoda, nature, Japanese aesthetics, ecoaesthetics, Buddhist philosophy, Ueda Shizuteru, sound art, aesthetics of sound, Takahashi Mutsuo

*Centuries of hubris block our ears like wax plugs;
we cannot hear the message which reality is screaming at us.*
——Paul Kingsnorth and Dougald Hine (2017, 269)

I write this in the last days of summer 2020. This year, Siberia, California, and Australia have experienced extreme wildfires, Canada's largest ice sheet collapsed, storms and floods battered Japan and the British Isles, and, of course, the Sars-CoV-2 virus emerged, causing a global pandemic. Shocking though these events have been to many, various Cassandrae in the environmental movement – scientists, artists, activists, and even some politicians – have been warning of just such a spike in what might be called human-exacerbated natural disasters for decades. Late-capitalist civilisation has, on the whole, simply chosen to ignore them.

This is an exploratory paper about musical hermeneutics in the time of imminent civilisational collapse, written at what could be the start of the such a revolutionary event, or the 'dress rehearsal' – as Lenin called the failed 1905 Russian Revolution – to the inevitable collapse to come¹. In this time of heightened anxiety about our relationship to the so-called natural world – which might be defined as the world which we as collective humanity do not control, or might also be defined as what we as individuals do not control² – art can help us redefine what we mean by nature, redefine what nature is to us, and redefine our relationship with nature. John Cage's concept of 'nature' includes the actions of, and objects and situations created by, other people (Kondo 2013, 16). Perhaps, as Cage's idea suggests, the humanity (civilisation)/nature dichotomy itself is a false one, and it would be best to find ways of seeing, speaking of, and listening to nature in a way that bridges the subject/object relationship that people in the capitalist world are acculturated into viewing as, well, natural (*ie*, as common sense).

Though many of the issues I will discuss in the paper will be applicable to all sorts of environmentally-, socially-, and politically-engaged musics (and other arts), after looking at some of the wider issues concerning the aesthetics of 'nature' in Parts 1 and 2, and examining some of the Japanese thinkers who have explored ways of thinking about language (Ueda Shizuteru) and revitalising it (Takahashi Mutsuo) in Part 3, I will apply these ideas to field recording – a genre of music largely or entirely consisting of sounds recorded in nature and edited to a greater or lesser extent by the composer or sound artist. In doing so, I will argue that field recording – and specifically documentary-style, non-fictional field recording – is a genre of music (and/or sound art) which affords reconnecting the listener with the

environment that surrounds them and reawakening their sense of magic. It thus contributes to the reenchantment of the world, a conceptual project of reweaving humanity back into the web of life the urgency of which grows by the day.

I will specifically focus on Tsunoda Toshiya's double album *Somashikiba* (2016) in a detailed reading (listening) which comprises Part 4. Tsunoda's shift as an artist from seeking out 'spaces' which he found interesting to make his field recordings in, which was his method in his early work, to his work since 2013 which instead illuminates the unique characteristics of a 'place' (Tsunoda 2019, 5) is, I will argue, a step back from the ego/self/human and a step toward a more equal, ethical engagement with the world outside the self. In both his artistic development and in his recent work considered as itself, Tsunoda is an exemplar of the shift I want to highlight which will open up new possibilities for music in the post-late-capitalist world. These possibilities will form the conclusion of the paper.

1. Disenchantment

In the western world, the conceptual rift between humanity and nature – a feeling that humans are somehow apart from, different than, the rest of the natural world – gradually widened over a period of millennia, and was then exported to other parts of the world (with varying degrees of success) via imperialism and colonialism. Though in many non-western traditions humans are considered to be part of the great web of nature, monotheistic and latterly capitalist thought views humans as rational beings above or beyond it.

The sociological process by which western societies came to conceive of nature as an Object and itself as a Subject has been called rationalisation or disenchantment (*Entzauberung*). *Entzauberung* – a German word literally meaning 'de-magicking' or 'de-sacralising', but commonly translated as 'disenchantment' – was popularised as a term to describe the state of society under the relentless march of organised religion (especially Protestantism) and capitalism by sociologist Max Weber in a 1918 speech called 'Science as a Vocation' (Lyons 2014, 873). This process of disenchantment accompanies the shift from an animist view of the world – wherein all beings (sentient and non-sentient) have divinity – to an increasingly instrumental view of all non-human things, as process which passes through polytheism, ritualistic Catholicism, and iconoclastic Protestantism, to finally arrive at secularism and/or atheism.

The concept, if not the word, had been around for a while before Weber's initial use of it. Weber himself wrote of 'the elimination of magic' from the world in his earlier *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1930, 105). The idea itself perhaps comes from

the Romantic poet and thinker Freidrich Schiller's 1788 poem 'The Gods of Greece', which Sara Lyons describes as an 'elegy for the Greek gods and for the sense of harmonious relationship between the human and the natural that Greek polytheism supposedly fostered' (Lyons 2014, 879). In Schiller's poem, he laments the de-sacralisation of his society and culture, 'specifically referring to the demise of a pagan, or animistic, apprehension of nature' (Lyons 2014, 879)³.

Regardless of the debates over the accuracy of the disenchantment model in purely sociological or historical terms⁴, it is undeniable that the relentless machinery of contemporary capitalism does treat the world as a collection of resources to be found, used, and disposed of rather than as a sacred thing to be respected for itself. This disenchanted mindset infects all the members of capitalist society, to a greater or lesser extent. From a young age, we learn to view nature and the environment as a product for us to consume, and we eagerly consume it. This can be seen in the way nature is marketed (eg, 'eco-lodges' accessible only by airplanes, 'pristine' mineral water flown halfway across the world and sold in plastic bottles, *etc*), and is also evident in the inability of most people to appreciate nature apart from its economic value: 'Having a nice park in the neighbourhood will surely increase property value', they say, or 'Those elephants are worth more to your community in tourist dollars than you'd get from selling the ivory'. Going to a park, lazing on a beach, or rambling on a moor for a weekend's recreation – *ie*, the re-creation of the soul destroyed by five days of drudgery in the Satanic paper-pushing mills of late-stage capitalism – is afforded by the capitalist state so that you can go back to work on Monday in a fitter mental state than you left it on Friday night. Nature is viewed by capital as a resource to re-energise the workforce.

This detachment from nature, this objectification of it, is a product of our 'disenchantment', and it can't not affect how we view – appreciate – the natural world. Adorno detailed the late 18th-century shift in aesthetics – paralleling the general disenchantment occurring as the Industrial Revolution got underway – away from appreciating nature in favour of art created by humans, a move which Schiller, his paeons to animism notwithstanding, was a prime exponent of (1984, 91-4). Allen Carlson has written extensively on the subject of the aesthetic appreciation of nature in our own time, suggesting numerous models for the way in which this appreciation presently functions. His 'pluralist model' of nature appreciation is that nature is best appreciated as itself, in the scientific (ecological) knowledge of how it came to be and how it maintains its existence. He allows that mythology, symbolism, and art can also play a role, but a lesser one (Carlson 2002, 72). This view can be criticised for its reliance on science as the principle arbiter of value, and

indeed for the not uncontentious claim that the scientific ‘facts’ about nature constitute nature ‘itself’. In some ways it exemplifies the scientific objectification of the natural world of which is a symptom of – and, in a vicious cycle, a contributor to – its disenchantment.

On the other hand, Carlson’s work has a strong ethical dimension. Yuriko Saito identifies him as one of the key advocates for the aesthetic appreciation of what she calls ‘unscenic nature’ (1998, 101). He also has recently championed Zeng Fanren and Cheng Xiangzhan and the overall field he calls Chinese ecoaesthetics (Carlson 2017) for its focus on ‘developing one overarching position that incorporates several resources – human – world unity, ecological facts, aesthetic appreciation, ethical values, biodiversity, ecosystem health – that are important for addressing contemporary environmental issues’ (Carlson 2018, 407). Contemporary thinkers of Chinese ecoaesthetics have also been involved in productive exchange with Arnold Berleant and the aesthetics of engagement he pioneered, which ‘rejects the dualism inherent in traditional [*ie*, traditional western] accounts of aesthetic appreciation and epitomized in Kantian aesthetics ... [but instead] emphasizes the holistic, contextual character of aesthetic appreciation’ (Berleant 2013).

So, perhaps, the glimmer a solution is there in this work: a philosophical framework which rejects Kantian subject/object dualism, is ethical with regard to the environment, and engages with the history of western aesthetics while being deeply enmeshed in the millennia of Asian thought on the unity and/or interdependence of humanity and nature⁵. For all that, however, it still seems in need of a deeper engagement with the spiritual – perhaps something art (*eg*, field recording) is better able to provide than philosophy is.

2. Non-fictional Sound

Field recordings are a genre of sound art or music (the line between them is somewhere between ambiguous and nonexistent) which entirely consists of sounds recorded in ‘nature’, *ie*, in the field. Nature (the *field*, in this case) can have as broad a definition as you like, excluding only, one supposes, the recording done in a recording studio⁶. The idea of recording sounds of nature has been around for as long as recording, but only recently has the genre of field recording become more widely known and accepted. As one indicator of this increasing visibility, the BBC now has a programme devoted to field recordings called ‘Slow Radio’ (BBC 2020b) (though it is only available as a podcast and not actually broadcast), and its weekly New Music Show ends each episode with a short field recording (BBC 2020a).

The ‘Slow Radio’ show homepage on the BBC website classifies its genre as ‘factual’. This is an interesting claim, and worthy of further investigation. What does it mean

for a recording to be factual, or for it not to be? In common usage, factual (or non-fictional) is used to indicate works (whether they be televisual, audio, or textual) which depict events or situations which have occurred in reality. That is, a non-fictional crime documentary is one which – within a certain range of precision – accurately portrays events leading to a crime and its consequences, all of which actually happened in the world. Likewise, a non-fictional book – say a biography of a political leader – attempts to portray the events of a certain portion of that leader’s life as accurately as possible and in enough detail that the events are not distorted from the author’s understanding of the events as they occurred in reality. Fiction, on the other hand, is unconstrained by any need to conform to events, people, or situations that occur – or have occurred or even could possibility occur – in reality.

I hope that the preceding paragraph can be considered relatively unproblematic in its description of the general usage of the terms fictional (non-factual), non-fictional (factual). For philosophers and ecological psychologists – among other specialists, I’m sure – issues abound. The biggest one by far is the word ‘reality’, which I blithely used just above. The nature of reality is a debate literally as old as philosophy itself, stretching back to the pre-Socratics in the West and the Upanisads in the East, and almost certainly further back into prehistory in both of those traditions. In this paper, I am going to focus on the ontology of the Kyoto School (which traces its lineage back to the Indian tradition via 2nd-century CE Mahāyāna Buddhist philosopher Nāgārjuna and Dōgen, the 13th-century monk who brought Zen [*Chan* in Chinese] teachings to Japan) as well as James and Eleanor Gibson’s ecological psychology, which have been brought into musicology by Eric Clarke (2005).

Though there are many differences in their models, the common thread in both Kyoto School ontology and the ecological psychology model of perception is that reality is constructed for each person. Both acknowledge that image of reality we perceive in our minds are constructed out of sense-perception data, and that therefore – each of us having different minds, different sense receptors, and different locations in reality – we have different experiences of reality and in fact different realities. No single reality exists, though humans in relative proximity share aspects of their realities enough that daily business can be done – Kyoto School philosopher Ueda Shizuteru calls this ‘conventional reality’, which is one layer of his two-fold being in the world. The other layer is the ‘hollow expanse’, a locus of limitless possibility which in Mahāyāna tradition is termed *śūnyatā* in Sanskrit or *mu* in Japanese – it is usually translated as emptiness, void, or, least helpfully, nothingness. This emptiness of reality is born of the realisation that everything is dependent on everything else and independent existence of anything is impossible. It is a fundamental difference between

eastern and western ontologies (the western tradition places God or the Absolute as the ground of being as opposed to emptiness). Gibsonian ecological perception is neither an ontological nor aesthetic theory, but a way of understanding how images, sounds, and other environmental stimuli are received in actually-existing animals (including humans), how they afford different interpretations depending on the individual creature who receives them, and thus how each individual's perception of the world – *ie*, view of reality – is adapted to their unique physiology and ecological niche (Jamieson 2018b). This individualised picture of reality is called a 'virtual world'. Ueda's 'conventional reality' is an amalgam of that which is common among the Gibsonian 'virtual worlds' of individuals interacting in the world.

The sound artist is an individual, and as such, when a sound artist makes a field recording they are, necessarily, recording not 'reality' as uncomplicatedly such, but recording – very much as a photographer does – a subjective snapshot of their reality. The recording is affected by the artist's choice of location and time of day/week/season/year, by the direction in which the microphone or microphones are pointing, how many microphones there are, and the qualities and limitations of the microphones, the mixer, the media on which it is recorded, and the wires that connect all the parts of the operation. And in addition, there are class-based factors (*ie*, the cost and/or availability of specialist equipment and training) which affect the final result – a field recording made on an old cassette player, or the limited dynamic range of a smartphone microphone, is going to be qualitatively different (not worse, but identifiably different) than one made with top-of-the-line, high-fidelity gear. All of these factors affect the recording *before* the composer brings that recording into a studio (or open-source audio editing app) and starts manipulating – cutting, stretching, layering, filtering – it. A huge amount of 'reality' is thus filtered out, and what we hear when we listen to a field recording is the result of a great deal of conscious or unconscious choices by the artist.

So can we call a field recording factual or non-fictional? And does it matter if we can or can't? I still think, with all the caveats above implied, that we can, assuming that the work is not *too* manipulated. After all, we can call a biography non-fictional, and a biography need not even have any quotes, and therefore not necessarily any actual recorded words of the subject. A book like, for example, Eric Clarke's is about ecological perception of music without having a note of audible music in it, and I would hesitate to call that anything but non-fictional. So, in the sense that, within the bounds of the equipment available, the intention of the sound artist is to accurately portray their impression of the reality of a place in sound, we can call it non-fictional.

But then is not all field recording non-fictional and the distinction pointless? The

answer here must be ‘no’. Jennie Gottschalk, in her book *Experimental Music Since 1970*, makes the case for experimental music – music in which the sound world created is not fixed in advance by the/a composer (2016, 4) – being considered non-fictional, and so-called fully-notated music⁷ being fictional in the same sense as a novel is fictional writing: a soundworld more or less fully created by the composer. If the sound artist uses field recordings to create a soundworld which they do not intend to be a reasonably accurate representation of reality as they experience(d) it, this type of field recording could be called fictional (though the distinction between fictional and non-fictional becomes blurry here⁸). It becomes a *soundscape composition* which uses as its material sounds recorded in ‘nature’. The distinction is important, I think, as important as the parallel distinction in writing or filmmaking, and should be acknowledged by sound artists. Chris Watson, a giant in the field of field recording, does explicitly say that he uses his recordings as material for artistic manipulation, editing ‘his field recordings into a filmic narrative’; *ie*, a kind of fictionalisation. His album *In St Cuthbert's Time* aims to imaginatively recreate ‘a 7th Century Soundscape of Lindisfarne’ and ‘to reflect upon the daily and seasonal aspects of the evolving variety of ambient sounds that accompanied life and work during that period’; in doing so it collapses time and space, editing out anachronistic sounds. This project is, though rooted in ‘reality’ and inspired by history, clearly fictional.

True non-fictional field recording, as a genre independent of soundscape documentation or accurate rendering of background noise in nature documentaries and feature films, is relatively recent considering the basic tools like the tape recorder have been around since the end of the Second World War. Lindsay Vickery *et al.* claim that this is a result of modernism and its insistence on ‘abstraction’ (as exemplified in *musique concrète* and *musique acousmatique* which used field recordings as pure sounds disassociated from their real-world sources), which they call an ‘ideological impediment’ that had to be overcome in order to allow sounds to be presented in sound art as signifying only themselves (Vickery *et al.* 2016, 82). Abstraction is, of course, another kind of fictionalisation.

3. Hollow language and poetics of place

How might non-fictional field recording contribute to an opening up of a listener’s sense of reality and the dissolving of the subject/object dualism between self (human civilisation) and the world (nature)? In addressing this question, I will focus on the traditional aesthetics of thinkers in Japan, since the Japanese tradition – unusually, if not uniquely, among world cultures – has always emphasised the identity of humanity and nature and

avoided portraying scenes of conflict between them. As Yuriko Saito says, '[t]here are two ways in which the Japanese have traditionally identified with nature. One may be called emotional identification and the other is identification based upon the transience of both man and nature' (1985, 242). The former conception is derived from the indigenous Shintō (*ie*, animist) way of viewing the world⁹, while the latter is derived from one of the core tenets of all Buddhist traditions, the impermanence of all things, physical and conceptual (*anicca* in Pāli, *mujō* in Japanese). The syncretism in pre-modern Japanese society of these two quite different religious worldviews is in part responsible for the relative distinctiveness of traditional Japanese cultural activity.

That said, as music and sound has been under-theorised in traditional Japanese aesthetics (Jamieson 2018a), I will focus on poetry as a model here first. Poetry is among Japan's oldest recorded cultural artefacts, written down in the 8th-century collection called the *Man'yōshū*. Though there are examples of Buddhist-influenced poetry in the collection, its spiritual themes are largely connected with Shintō. Of particular interest here is the focus on specific places and the natural beauty of these places. Takahashi Mutsuo has pointed out that, in these early poems, the evocation of place is as simple and concrete as it looks – the words on the page are to be considered an incantation, a kind of magic which allows the writer to conjure up an image of an actually-existing location (Takahashi 2011, 123). In this early phase of Japanese poetry, the poet is a kind of magician-sage who uses words to commemorate, praise, and/or placate the *kami* (god[s]) of the place – *kami* which, per Shintō animism, are both everywhere and multiplying (*eg*, *kami* are the spirits of mountains and waterfalls, the land itself, but also fallen heroes and other once-living creatures).

As Buddhist beliefs became more integrated into courtly life over the centuries, the role of place in poetry changed from being a sign (a word which refers to a unique, concrete entity) to being a symbol (a word within a web of potential related ideas). Poets had continued to refer back to the *Man'yōshū* and other early texts and reuse the same place names, building up ever-more-complex webs of intertextual meaning in the process, since their aristocratic poetic education ensured that their readers would be familiar with the classics of preceding centuries. These poetic placenames – once they had become symbols of locations, seasons, emotions – were called *utamakura*, a word which can be read literally as 'poem pillow', but which Takahashi glosses as meaning 'the seat of truth is in the void' (2005, 156-7). By the time of the last great waka poet Shōtetsu, in the 15th-century, it was acknowledged that the placenames used in poetry had become so disassociated from their real-world referents that it was meaningless to consider them to be the same – the places only

existed in the poetic realm.

Writing at the end of the 12th century, Fujiwara Shunzei's treatise on poetry *Korai fūteishō* claimed that the heart of poetry – that is, the complete corpus of classical poems collected in the *Man'yōshū* and the Imperial anthologies – was the creator of reality. '[I]f we did not have what is called poetry, no one would know the color [of the autumn leaves] or the scent [of the spring blossoms].' (2007, 588) Shunzei makes the case that, as Michael F Marra put it, 'the perception of external reality [is] ... the active product of the poet's creative power' (2010, 65) and that neither the poet nor the reader should rely on their imperfect senses to grasp the world, but defer to the wisdom of centuries of poetic practice to shape their understanding of reality. This draws on an explicitly Tendai Buddhist view of conventional reality as ephemeral and true reality as empty, with poetry (or, of course, Buddhist practice; Shunzei was in this text attempting to position poetry as a Buddhist practice) providing the middle way between transience and void.

Marra also points out that poetry, in Shunzei's view, has a palimpsest-like effect on viewers of landscape: 'Each viewer became a poet when confronted by the "actual" scene, inasmuch as his perception was immediately modified by textual knowledge.' (2010, 66) So, in this case, the viewer of a natural scene does not view the scene unmediated – poetry (and, one would have to assume, all other forms of cultural knowledge and experience) would modify the perception immediately; in other words, the landscape is continually written-over by poetry and other cultural information (Jamieson 2020).

Contemporary philosopher Ueda Shizuteru posits a tripartite division of linguistic function: signs, symbols, and hollow words (2011, 765-84). The hollow words are those surprising, absurd, profound, shocking words which change the way one sees and understands reality, that overwrite the palimpsest of perceptual signals that our senses deliver to our brain. *Utamakura* – 'the seat of truth in the void' – are essentially poetic evocations of places which do not exist in conventional reality and yet are considered to be more truly 'real' than their homonymous physical locations, which are in a state of constant flux. Their use can be deadening – merely empty, formal wordplay – but a poet who understands can summon and/or placate the spirit of a place with their words can use these ancient ideas and placenames in a non-dualistic, syncretic manner to both evoke the emptiness and reawaken the ancient animist *kami*.

Field recordings are, like *utamakura*, evocations of particular places filtered through both the sensibility of the artist and the technical limitations of the equipment they were made on. The closer to non-fictional they are, the emptier of human subjectivity they are, the closer

they get to being an accurate picture of ‘reality’. But they are, like landscapes and soundscapes, like poems and paintings, imperfect, ephemeral products of this conventional world. By making intertextual use of common cultural knowledge – or interdisciplinary use of informative texts, poems, videos – field recordings can, like *utamakura*, be heard as hollow sounds, undermining expected perceptions of reality, revealing hidden sounds or depths to sounds we thought we knew – exposing the illusions of our minds. They can – like words – be richly symbolic, and also be simple signs of the place and time in which they were recorded. Like words, then, they are rich material for a discerning sound artist, and can likewise be interpreted in a rich variety of ways by listeners – including, of course, the sound artist themselves. And through this practice of hollow listening, a disenchanted space can be reenchanting as a place alive with spirits and wonder.

4. The non-fictionality of magic; or, the magic of reality

Toshiya Tsunoda is exemplary of non-fictional sound artists working in field recording. He is a true experimentalist whose minimally-edited works are masterpieces of non-fictional sound art. As detailed in the liner notes to his monumental 5-disc collection *Extracts from Field Recording Archive*, his techniques and ideas surrounding his practice have changed over his career from a seeking out (or creation) of interesting ‘spaces’ in which make his recordings to a realisation ‘that every place has its unique characteristic that enables the place’s existence wherever it is’ (Tsunoda 2019, 5). This shift, which he dates from 2013, led to an audible change in his output.¹⁰ His third solo release of this period is 2016’s *Somashikiba*, a double album consisting of sixteen field recordings made on the Miura Peninsula (about 55km due south of central Tokyo) in the autumns and winters between 2010 and 2015 (Tsunoda 2016).

As the liner notes¹¹ explain, *somashikiba* is an archaic word for a burial ground for cattle and horses used for working on farms. Once the site of rituals of internment for hard-working animal companions, their souls laid to rest under stone markers carved with Buddhist sūtras, now only one such site – at Sugaruya, a village on the current border between the cities of Miura and Yokosuka – has been left undisturbed. Even there, according to Tsunoda’s notes, most locals are not aware of its former function, and its markers, though still standing, are mostly weathered beyond readability. The first disc of *Somashikiba* has seven tracks recorded in locations within about 1km radius of Sugaruya’s somashikiba. The second disc has nine tracks, and they are recorded along the southern coast of Miura Peninsula, stretching out a kilometre or so east and west of a suspected somashikiba near the

small fishing village of Miyagawa. Whether the spot was or was not a somashikiba is perhaps unknowable (it appears Tsunoda has thoroughly researched the local archives for information and is yet unsure on the matter), though there are around 20 horse- and cattle-headed Kannon (statues of the Buddhist Avalokitaśvara Bodhisattva) at a spot which had been a field held in common at the border of six different villages in the pre-modern era.

This two-disc work affords being read/heard in multiple ways, as many as there are listeners, in all their subtle variances. The time structure of both discs basically alternates between relatively-static (odd-numbered) and relatively-dynamic (even) tracks, with the static ones generally under 5 minutes (excepting CD1 track 1 and CD2 track 5). CD1 is set in Sugaruya around the known somashikiba site, but never at it – Sugaruya’s somashikiba thus functions as a hollow centre ground from which the seven tracks emerge. Track 1.1¹² ‘Inside of a duct by the roadside’ (titles are generally descriptions of where the recording was made) is unique on the disc for being recorded in a space which modifies and distorts sounds from outside the space, such as insect or bird noises. As an outlier in this way (and in its length, it being the longest ‘static’, odd-numbered track), it perhaps can be heard as an introduction rather than part of the main work. Though perhaps a remnant of Tsunoda’s earlier ‘space’-focussed methods (some of the recordings – dates for which are not identified – date to 2010), to my ears the drops of water which can be heard resonating in the cylindrical space brought to mind *suikinkutsu*, a common feature of 18th-century Japanese garden design, in which drops of water fall into a buried ceramic jar in order to create a pleasing sound, which is sometimes amplified by bamboo listening tube. As such, as an introduction, Tr1.1 effectively brought me into magical double-layered world – it affords being heard as a sign of what it says in the title and as a symbol of an Edo-era temple garden.

Most of the subsequent 15 tracks however, sound at first contact, much more like conventional ‘field recordings’ (another function of Tr1.1, and it’s positioning as the first track, is surely to disrupt the listeners’ expectations of conventionality). Tr1.2, ‘From a slightly high place: Nakanohara’ begins with a revving motorcycle (or similar kind of engine noise) and, once that vehicle has raced away, we hear the sounds of rural farmland from, as the title implies, a bit of a distance. Throughout the even numbered tracks on CD1, the recurring motifs are distant hammering and banging sounds (*ie*, the sounds of modern agriculture), vehicles arriving and departing, dogs barking, voices (almost exclusively male, too far away from the microphone for their words to be made out), insects angrily buzzing around the microphones (Sugaruya, the original, 15th-century name of this area, literally means valley of the wasps [Tsunoda 2016]). These elements recur in different ways and

combinations throughout the disc, layered in a counterpoint that at times feels composed, but isn't – Tsunoda is not making any adjustments other than adjusting the gain (on occasion and only when necessary to avoid obscuring detail with excessively loud passages) and, of course, choosing starting and stopping points. Along with these recurring types of sound, all three even-numbered tracks feature birdsong almost continuously.

So far, so 'realistic', by which I mean, these recordings generally afford being heard as non-fictional recordings of the 'real' world, and everything in the liner notes supports that reading. The very short Tr1.3 and Tr1.5 (respectively 90 and 63 seconds long) are very much what their titles say they are: non-fictional representations of sounds in a stable and in a pigeon coop. But the long (Tr1.4 is 35'19") even-numbered tracks all have their moments of subtle shifting of perception, moments where I – as a listener – found the virtual world created in my mind by the track changing in a magical way, opening up to an intimation of Ueda's 'hollow expanse'. In Tr1.2, at 2'45", I noticed for the first time a deep drone gradually pushing itself into my consciousness which at first sounded like wind, which then transformed into an airplane passing overheard. In Tr1.4, at 4'40" and 5'55" there is a repeated 10-second sound which sounds like a foghorn, but surely can't be given the location. At 10'00", a mechanical sound like a mower came to my attention, but it might have started well before that – and then at 19'45" a sound which sounds much more like a mower starts up, causing me to retrospectively question just what was going on at the 10' mark. In Tr1.6, for 2'30" starting at 14'50", there are a series of distant voices which sound like they could be from a radio or tv set, or played through a mobile phone – but maybe they're just regular people talking whose speech is being distorted by their distance from Tsunoda's microphones.

In all these cases, the virtual worlds suggested by the tracks are ambiguous, shifting, changing, dreamlike – magical. By removing the visual element (aside from the provided maps and pictures in the liner notes), a field recording presented as non-fictional invites us to create a virtual world which we assume follows the rules of the conventionally real world we live in every day. Most people assume their 'virtual world' picture of reality is equal to actual reality: listening to these subtle auditory illusions and magical shifts is reminder that the mechanical ears which recorded these sounds might not have been recording the same 'virtual world' that you are (re-)creating. The relative unambiguity of Tr1.3 and Tr1.5 serve to highlight this contrast further and point up the subtle magic of Tr1.2, Tr1.4, and Tr1.6.

Tr1.7, a minute-long track which is the only one on both albums not to be recorded with standard omni-directional condenser microphones, functions as a coda and companion to the similarly unusual-sounding Tr1.1. Recorded at a horse-riding farm using a stethoscope

microphone, it, like Tr1.3, is another reminder of the horses whose resting place is the conceptual backbone of the album.

CD2 shifts location from the hollow (because unheard) area around the known somashikiba at Sugaruya to the hollow (because uncertain though actually heard) area around the cliff-top somashikiba at Hakkeibara. The liner notes, after first detailing the reasons supporting the somashikiba being located at Hakkeibara, goes on to discuss the deadly seas which Hakkeibara overlooks and the impoverishment of hundreds of widows and families caused by tuna-fishing disasters over the centuries. In this half of the work, we are dealing with the restless spirits – *kami* – not just of the land and the farm animals who worked it, but also those of the sea, the fishermen lost there, and their widows forced by fate into brothels or suicide.

Appositely, whereas it might be said that the human-made sounds of agricultural work, moving, and speaking were well integrated into the overall natural soundscape of insects, birds, and wind, and the sound of horses in Tr1.3 and Tr1.7 more sharply focussed on than any human-made noise in CD1, in CD2 the sounds of humans are more distinctly foregrounded. This is not to say that so-called natural sounds are pushed to the background – indeed, even in the long Tr2.2 (‘Miyagawa fishing port’) and the shorter Tr2.5 (‘Shipyard, Misaki Shipbuilding and Engineering Co. Ltd’) where the titles focus on human activities, the sound of waves lapping at the docks is ever-present and seems to be clearer and closer to the microphones (and thus the ear and listening self in the virtual world they afford) than the human-made sounds. The penultimate track, Tr2.8 ‘Celebratory dance for the lunar New Year’, is actually an ethnographic field recording of a song and dance performance by local women and girls at a Shintō shrine.

With the sole exception of Tr2.8 on CD2 (and the odd-numbered tracks on CD1), Tsunoda uses an unusual microphone set up for most of this work. The two omnidirectional condenser microphones are placed between 3-10 metres apart (Tsunoda 2016). The effect of this is most obvious when listening on headphones, since the soundscape in the left ear is significantly separated in space from the soundscape in the right ear. However, our aural perceptual faculties are not equipped to hear in this artificial way, so the virtual world we create when listening to these tracks is not, in fact, an accurate representation of the conventional world Tsunoda actually recorded. While each ear, in itself, is hearing a non-fictional recording of the conventional world, recorded at precisely the same time as the non-fictional recording of the conventional world heard in the other ear, the virtual world we hear

reduces the space between them, creating a very slightly fictionalised – or, perhaps, a magically real – world. As Tsunoda understates in the notes: ‘Acoustic naturalness in the spaces was sacrificed.’ (Tsunoda 2016)

Throughout much of the disc, to listeners who could never access a completely accurate non-fictional representation of the time and place where the recordings were made with which to compare Tsunoda’s recordings, it is not obvious that the virtual world is subtly shifted in space from the conventionally real one. There are some key moments, however, when Tsunoda brings this to our attention, seemingly deliberately. The first and clearest example of a moment like this is on Tr2.2 at 5’20”. Up to this point, there have been a lot of voices calling back and forth, engines starting and motoring away, and footsteps coming and going, all of them happening at sufficient distance from the microphones that both left and right microphones pick up the sound with enough naturalness that I, at least, did not notice any particular unnaturalness in the virtual world. However, at 5’20”, a person approaches the right microphone at a quick pace, their movement suggested less by their footsteps than in the rubbing of their loose-legged heavy work uniform as they walk. Walking by the right microphone the sound of these rubbing clothes gets louder, then softer as the move beyond it. Then they approach the left microphone in a similar manner – starting softly and then getting louder than softer as they continue on their way. This pattern of amplitude (appearing softly in the right ear, then louder, then softer overlapping with soft in the left ear, then louder, then soft to disappearance) is not natural. It reveals a hollowness, a void at the centre of my virtual world, a subtle jolt that what I had been interpreting as a sonic picture of reality is, in fact, bent or warped: there is something magical or unreal about it. Like the even-numbered tracks on CD1, it opens up a place for the listener to glimpse Ueda Shizuteru’s ‘hollow expanse’: the second layer of reality which is limitless emptiness. It affords listeners the chance to make an interpretive leap from this that our inbuilt otic microphones – however precise they are – are subject to limitations just as artificial microphones are. We can never grasp a full understanding of reality using our senses; the unique virtual worlds they create for us are not absolutely true. Whether or not Tsunoda intended this interpretation, it seems clear he intended to highlight this as, at least, a notable sonic moment, since he choose the starting point of this track to allow a number of examples of footsteps at a distance which don’t seem unnatural to precede this example (and thus act as a comparative foil), but he also ends the track just after presumably the same person (or at least another person wearing identical-sounding clothes) to walk back in the opposite direction (left to right) reproducing the exact same effect in reverse¹³.

Throughout this double CD, Tsunoda invites listeners to approach limits and borders. There are the artificial borders laid down by human civilisation: borders between the pre-modern villages where farm animals were buried, borders between medieval districts and modern cities where CD1 was recorded, and the key artificial border between the human animal and all the other animals¹⁴. There are also natural borders explored here, such as the one between land and sea, cliff edge and open sky where CD2 was recorded.

But the most important liminal place explored by Tsunoda is the border between life and death. Somashikiba are resting places for dead cattle and horses, presumably lovingly laid down with ritual words and headstones, their purposes now forgotten, the remaining stones largely unreadable, all the pre-modern somashikiba but one built over. In its preservation of the transient sounds of contemporary agricultural and dockside life, *Somashikiba* is clearly playing with the Buddhist idea of the ephemerality of things. The majority of the tracks of both albums begin with a strong motif – eg a revving engine, a buzzing wasp, whining cicadas, the churning waters of the sea, laughing human voices – that either quickly die away, or are masked by other sounds, pushed into the background by our own perceptual biases.

In rediscovering through sound art these once-sacred, liminal places that have been overlooked or overbuilt in the rush to modernisation, Tsunoda is engaged in a re-enchantment of the landscape. Like the travelling priest character (*waki*) in a *nō* drama, Tsunoda arrives at a place with an open mind and ear, and through listening to what the place itself has to say (the main character [*shite*] in *mugen nō* is a spirit who explains the place to the *waki*) and researching via the archives and local people (akin to the *ai-kyōgen*, the spoken part of *nō* which explains the *shite*'s cryptic symbolism in plain speech), he grants some measure of release via remembrance to the restless spirits (*kami*) of the place – be they plant, water, stone, animal, or human. It's not hard to imagine either the animals buried in now-neglected somashikiba or the fishermen drowned at sea manifesting as *kami* or spirits seeking spiritual acknowledgement, remembrance, and relief. Tsunoda gives them a voice, allowing them to manifest themselves and reengage with humanity once more.

The last track on the album, Tr2.9, is 106-seconds long, and simply called 'Somashikiba'. Finally, after all the circling around, the journey ends at one of the eponymous burial grounds, the concept of which has centred these two sonic pilgrimages. At first, we hear only white noise, which could be the sea, wind, traffic, or some combination of all three. There also a crackling noise in the higher levels of pitch, but I can't imagine what it

might be (it is, in fact, the only sound out of the entire 16 tracks which mystifies me – though that of course is a subjective reaction, and I might well be wrong about the sound sources of many of the ones which I think I have identified). After 25 seconds, a car roars by, playing music with a pronounced bass line – a hint of modern dance music contrasting with the traditional dance music heard on the previous track. More cars rush past. Our hollow centre, atop a cliff over Miyagawa fishing port, is also next to a busy road. At the 1’00” mark, the sound of a helicopter can be heard in the distance. Then, at 1’30”, with these layers of sound all still audible, a brief snippet of birdsong comes to the fore and makes itself heard for a magical few seconds. This last moment is a microcosm of the whole: close listening to the largely familiar, mundane sounds of everyday life opens the ears up to unexpected, fleeting glimpses of beauty, the ephemeral appearances of *kami*, the spirits of place. And then, it’s over.

5. Conclusion: Reenchantment

Michael Pisaro calls Tsunoda Toshiya’s field recordings ‘steady state recordings of silence’ (2009). John Cage might have called Tsunoda’s technique an example of letting ‘sounds be themselves rather than vehicles for man-made theories or expressions of human sentiments’ (1961, 10)¹⁵. These are ideas deeply rooted in Japanese aesthetics. The anonymous 11th-century treatise on landscape gardening called the *Sakuteiki* (Records of Garden Making) instructed garden designers to ‘follow the request’ of the principle stone of the garden, showing a Shintō (animistic) respect for the objects of nature within the garden (2001, 4); perhaps it would not be too strong to suggest a collaboration between a living, enchanted natural world and the human gardener working together to realise its potential with as minimal an intervention as possible¹⁶. As Saito notes, ‘[t]he Japanese aesthetic tradition is noted for its sensitivity to, respect for, and appreciation of the quintessential character of an object’ (2007, 85).

But in a world with sounds everywhere – potential collaborators everywhere – how does one choose where to make art? Charles Baudelaire’s vision of the artist as ‘ragpicker’ – ‘a man whose job it is to gather the day’s refuse in the capital. Everything that the big city has thrown away, everything it has lost, everything it has scorned, everything it has crushed underfoot he catalogues and collects’ (Benjamin 2006, 108) – if we read ‘capitalist civilisation’ for ‘the big city’, offers a clue to the sort of places and sounds that sound art (as opposed to commercial entertainment and nature sounds to accompany yoga sessions) might concern itself with. Saito suggests that there is ethical meaning that can be applied to art

which foregrounds the forgotten, the deposited of, the non-beautiful, an ethics which can be drawn from the Japanese aesthetic acceptance of objects as they are:

This respectful attitude toward materials expressed aesthetically also has pragmatic ramifications, particularly today as we struggle to find an alternative to our problematic attitude toward nature evidenced by our indifference to “unscenic” aspects of nature, such as invertebrates, weeds, and wetlands, leaving them vulnerable to destruction.... The willingness to cast aside our ordinary standards and expectations for aesthetic value and appreciate each object and material for its own sake can thus contribute to nurturing this sorely needed sensibility. (Saito 2007, 88)

And further, ‘[t]he ultimate reason for aesthetically appreciating the scenically challenged is the moral importance of overcoming our perception of nature as (visual) resources to be used for our enjoyment’ (Saito 1998, 103).

Non-fictional sound art, like Tsunoda’s, which ‘illuminates the unique characteristics of places’ forgotten by civilisation and those in the ‘big city’ – as opposed to creating (*ie*, fictionalising) subjectively-interesting sonic or musical ‘spaces’ – thus has a double ethical (even soteriological) function – a doubling that mirrors Ueda’s conception of two-fold being-in-the-world. This art awakens in its listeners an awareness of the preciousness and uniqueness of each place, especially of places which are not traditionally thought of as beautiful¹⁷. This encourages appreciation of and identification with the world as a whole, eroding the artificial boundaries set up by capitalist society in order to instrumentalise not just nature but also labour. The second, transcendent function is that it affords a glimpse beyond our collective virtual world of conventional reality into other possible non-fictional realities, and by implication, the hollow expanse of pure emptiness and unbounded possibility.

Some might object that a listener without a background in philosophy or spiritual practice – or an anti-capitalist worldview – could not hear in non-fictional field recordings an overcoming of the commonly-held perception of nature as (sonic) resources to be used for our enjoyment. Indeed, interpretations of any artwork are multifarious, and I have necessarily heard *Somashikiba* with ears conditioned by my past work in experimental music and Japanese philosophy. Though familiarity with non-Western or animist traditions which avoid subject/object dualisms with regard to nature would certainly be helpful in coming to this sort of interpretation, I would argue that an open-eared listener from any background could sense the magic and wonderment in the forgotten, unscenic places where Tsunoda sets his microphones. Tsunoda’s detailed audio presentations of his subjective conventional reality

affords the contingent manifestation of unexpected beauty and surprise, and thus helps rewire the listener's listening practice to be more attentive to the possibility of beauty in places and situations in which they had not been attentive before. They could reconfigure a listener's notion of what beauty itself is. That listener would be inclined to begin questioning the virtual image *Somashikiba* manifests and its relationship to 'reality'. Functioning in a similar way to a Brechtian alienation effect, this could lead to a rethinking of assumptions about human perceptual and mental faculties, capitalism's instrumentalist separation of humanity from nature, and the limits of scientific knowledge. It could trigger a realisation that what we each think of as reality is itself somewhat fictional (*ie*, subjective), and may then open the mind to the limitless possibility of the 'hollow expanse' – or, eschewing Ueda's Zen philosophical term, to the idea that our sensory perception is not a reliable guide to what exists in reality, and what we perceive as distinctions between 'objects' are boundaries imposed by our minds, by our languages, and by the cultural, social, and economic systems in which we are raised and live.

All of this realignment of values may or may not happen in a sudden *satori* moment – while some Buddhist traditions suggest enlightenment comes in a Damascene instant, others counsel multiple decades of regular spiritual practice. For those inclined towards the latter view, it is fortunate that Tsunoda and other non-fictional, 'ragpicker' field recording artists around the globe are producing new work all the time. Though it would be unrealistic to expect that *Somashikiba*, or any other single artwork, could upend someone's worldview all by itself, all it needs to be is intriguing, mysterious, wonderful enough to encourage them to seek out the next album, the next experience of sonic enchantment which expands their ears and mind ever so slightly, until eventually human/nature, self/other dichotomies dissolve and they are hearing *kami* at play everywhere. To paraphrase Caliban in *The Tempest*, the world 'is full of noises ... that give delight and hurt not' (III.ii.135-6). We only need practice to hear them, and listening to (or making) non-fictional field recording is one such practice.

As the capitalist age stutters to its end and potentially brings our civilisation down with it, we need more than ever art, and an aesthetics, which values the entirety of nature – however you define it – for itself. In short, by bringing out the magic, the spirits, the *kami* in places like Sugaruya and Hakkeibara, Tsunoda's art – and other non-fictional art which similarly affords the spontaneous manifestation of unlooked-for beauty and delight in the unscenic, forgotten parts of the world, demonstrating that all things are interconnected, all things are potentially beautiful, all things are valuable – contributes not only to the reenchantment of those specific places, but offers up a model which encourages each of us to

open ourselves up to the magic in forgotten, underappreciated, and unscenic places everywhere – contributing, in other words, to the reenchantment of the world at large¹⁸.

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² For an overview of the myriad philosophical positions on the issue of the definition of 'nature' and its relationship to the human, see Hailwood (2018).

³ It's worth noting that Thales, the first Ionian/pre-Socratic scientist-philosopher, was reported by Aristotle in *De anima* to have said that 'all things are full of gods' (DK11A22; Ross 1961, 205 – but cf Karatani [2017, 58-62] for an alternate reading of Thales' position), and both the ancient Greek and ancient Japanese words for nature (*physis* and *onozukara*, respectively) refer to *all* things which come into being – including gods (Tellenbach and Kimura 1989, 154-5).

⁴ See, for example Joshua Landy and Michael T. Saler's *Re-enchantment of the World: Secular Magic in a Rational Age* (2009).

⁵ A good starting point with regard to the wider Asian tradition of environmental philosophy is Callicott and Ames (1989).

⁶ Although a case could be made for considering the outtakes of recording sessions as field recordings of studio work.

⁷ Frank Denyer (2019) points out that no music can be fully notated, and that each musical tradition only notates what is unique about each particular piece, leaving the general conventions of the tradition (which is the vast proportion of the information needed to recreate the work in sound) unnotated because to notate these would be superfluous – that is what training and practice is for. One could also point to the inability of modern scholars to read extant musical scores from ancient Greece. We just can't know what the unspoken and unnotated conventions were, so it is impossible to recreate the actual sound of those scores.

⁸ This is not a problem unique to music; see for a literary example Karl Ove Knausgård's 6 volume 2009-11 work *Min Kamp* [My Struggle] which is ostensibly fictional but hews extremely closely to the author's personal life story.

⁹ Throughout this paper, I use the word Shintō to refer to the popular conception of it as an ancient indigenous tradition of nature worship, as opposed to the quasi-state religion of a modern capitalist country with the emperor as head priest (or, until 1945, a god). For more on the contemporary Shintō's position as a religion of nature, and the history leading up to this contemporary conception, see Rots (2017).

¹⁰ Michael Pisaro's 'Membrane – Window – Mirror' (2015) is an essential overview, analysis, and interpretation of Tsunoda's works and methods up to and including this key year of 2013.

¹¹ Liner notes and all the other paraphernalia which are included with the physical CD are, I contend, an inherent part of the artwork. As Tsunoda himself says, 'my recording work mostly needs some explanation in the liner notes. The listener's recognition of space or place will change if the sound is heard after reading it' (Montgomery 2011).

¹² CD 1, Track 1 will be henceforth abbreviated Tr1.1 (and all other tracks likewise)

¹³ I recognise, however, that I might be engaging in the all-too-human fault of ascribing order to randomness and my own taste as universal when I suggest that Tsunoda is choosing to emphasise this walking motif. However, the choice seems too composerly to be random, so I assume that Tsunoda is choosing the starting and end points with an ear to this sort of phenomenon which presumably occurred randomly during recording.

¹⁴ Though somewhat beyond the scope of this paper, there are also borders between sound art, field recording as ethnography, field recording as art music, and field recording as commercial relaxation aid which could be profitably explored using *Somashikiba* as an example.

¹⁵ Cage goes on to point out that allowing sounds to be themselves as a composer should in no way inhibit the listener from feeling emotion or otherwise reacting to them, so long as they are under no illusion that the emotions felt come anywhere but from themselves and are not found in the sounds – just as all virtual worlds, and indeed conventional reality, are also found only in the mind of the perceiver.

¹⁶ The connection between Tsunoda and landscape is intimate and long-lived; his formal training is as a painter.

¹⁷ The well-known example of this in European culture is Romantic art and thought transforming public perception of mountains from places of terrifying wildness to be avoided to sites of sublime beauty to be love

and explored. See, for example, MacFarlane 2009, 74-77.

¹⁸ I would like to extend my utmost gratitude to the editors of *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* for publishing this paper, and to the anonymous referees, without whom the paper would be far less focused and far less clear.