



City Research Online

City, University of London Institutional Repository

Citation: Rennie, T. (2014). Socio-Sonic: An ethnographic methodology for electroacoustic composition. *Organised Sound*, 19(2), pp. 117-124. doi: 10.1017/s1355771814000053

This is the accepted version of the paper.

This version of the publication may differ from the final published version.

Permanent repository link: <https://openaccess.city.ac.uk/id/eprint/16284/>

Link to published version: <https://doi.org/10.1017/s1355771814000053>

Copyright: City Research Online aims to make research outputs of City, University of London available to a wider audience. Copyright and Moral Rights remain with the author(s) and/or copyright holders. URLs from City Research Online may be freely distributed and linked to.

Reuse: Copies of full items can be used for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge. Provided that the authors, title and full bibliographic details are credited, a hyperlink and/or URL is given for the original metadata page and the content is not changed in any way.

Socio-Sonic: An ethnographic methodology for electroacoustic composition

Tullis Rennie

Sonic Arts Research Centre, Queens University Belfast, BT7 1NN, Northern Ireland.

trennie01@qub.ac.uk

ABSTRACT

This paper outlines a way forward for an anthropologically inclined electroacoustic music. Considering the similarities in methodological approaches between the fields of ethnography and soundscape composition, this paper proposes to further the use of contextual information when making compositional decisions with sound materials derived from field recordings: a socio-sonic methodology. To begin the discussion, theoretical readings of sound in context are presented. Parallels are highlighted between the practices of ethnographic study and soundscape composition, illustrated with the work of Steve Feld and the World Soundscape Project. A brief consideration of the soundscape-acousmatic continuum with reference to works by Luc Ferrari, Denis Smalley and Hildegard Westerkamp is followed by a combined summation of ethnographic, soundscape and acousmatic approaches to outline a socio-sonic methodology for composition. Examples of work by Peter Cusack, Justin Bennett and Bob Ostertag are discussed alongside my own work *Manifest* – a fixed-media composition based on field recordings and interviews made at political protests in Barcelona. The potential is for a music considered equally for its sonic and socio-political properties.

1. SOUND IN CONTEXT

Electroacoustic composers, in their broadest terms, have regularly considered sounds simultaneously as contextualised and as sound-object, but most often in ways in which the final composition errs on the side of the abstract. Works that are "inspired by a visit to..." or "using sounds collected in place *x* or scenario *y*" rarely demonstrate an equal relevance to the inherent social context of the source sounds alongside their intrinsic sonic qualities. Compositional decisions are often made to a higher degree on

spectromorphological rather than socio-sonic grounds. This is unsurprising; the nature and rhetoric of the acousmatic music tradition is often to intentionally avoid source-bonding in the signification of sounds, or to play with ambiguity and the 'reveal' as an artistic construct. Meanwhile, the origins of soundscape composition were guided by principles founded on the representation (and preservation) of place rather than an ethnographic discussion of people, and as the practice has developed it has tended towards a discourse around the natural environment rather than socio-political engagement.

1.1. Outer and Inner Realities

To begin a discussion on socio-sonic engagement with sound materials, we first need to briefly consider listening to sound in or out of context. Following numerous interpretations and applications of Pierre Schaeffer's reduced listening (see Chion 1983; Emmerson 2007; Kane 2007; Demers 2009) and whilst not wishing to add to this well-articulated debate, the proposed methodology here could be seen as more or less the antithesis of Schaeffer's position. Whilst we are intending to deal simultaneously with real-world (mimetic) and abstract (aural) materials (Emmerson 1986: 24), the intention here is that *both* have a degree of reference to the greater context from where they originate - an idea developed by the same author as 'aural and mimetic interpenetration' (Emmerson 2007: 14). He explains this to be an 'interpenetration and mutual support of real and imaginary - or perhaps that should be outer and inner reality'. The contextual information gained in an ethnographic approach to recording (discussed below) would inform both the selection and combination of unprocessed field recordings (outer reality, mimetic discourse) as well as the processing of these recordings to create abstract materials (inner reality, aural discourse). This 'creates and develops non-referential (more exactly 'not necessarily referential') sound in ways that relate more or less directly to real world *behaviour* characteristics' (Emmerson 2007: 14). These behaviour characteristics should not necessarily be limited to the way sounds act spectromorphologically, but could also apply to how they behave socio-sonically, in their cultural context. Simon Waters foresees this change becoming ever more present in acousmatic music with 'an increased likelihood of hybrid forms which owe their existence to the collision of different musical worlds, different disciplines, different modes of thought and understanding' (Waters 2000: 56).

Considering the hybridity of methodologies and aesthetic styles in the development of electroacoustic composition, a more overt scenario seems possible – one to make the electroacoustic concert hall a more politically relevant and socially aware setting, using composition as a stimulus for discussion and debate. Here, we would consciously be using (potentially) emotionally, culturally or politically charged sounds, but instead of

approaching these sounds for purely or mainly artistic purposes, this music could present an alternative framework for representation and understanding in anthropological terms, whilst still sustaining music making and attention to the intrinsic qualities of sound on an equal footing. Applying a contemporary ethnographic methodological approach to field recording is the starting point.

1.2. Testimonial 1, Barcelona, May 2011

It is ten thirty on a balmy summer evening in Barcelona. Thousands of people are squeezed into Plaça Catalunya, nearly all of them sitting cross-legged on the paved slabs of the central square. This is a protest – the sixth day of a grassroots, politically motivated 'collective cultural awakening' named Los Indignados (the indignant). It is a broad-based protest for change demanding greater government transparency, economic justice, social investment, an increase in employment opportunities, better living standards and alterations to the government's austerity plans. The mood is calm and peaceful but the air is buzzing with a sense of anticipation, mixed with some real fear - a small printed note is passed to me during the evening which gives advice on how to act if the Police move in during the protest, and the telephone number of a lawyer in case of arrest. After gathering in what seemed a similar manner to an impromptu fiesta (complete with makeshift percussion, chanting and singing), a number of people address the crowd through rudimentary public address equipment - a megaphone combined with a small, insufficient microphone and amplifier. A co-authored manifesto is being agreed – a document that will be presented to the leaders of whichever political party is voted into power in the coming elections. The public wave their hands in the air silently to demonstrate agreement, and cross their arms to signify disagreement. This keeps the noise levels to a minimum. Whilst unable to vote in Spain, I am there to learn and to show my support.

1.3. Socio-sonic sensibilities

Whilst present at this demonstration, I recorded the sounds around me as best I could, trying to remain passive and objective in my listening to create a sound-document that

might in time act as materials for composition. However, I then began pro-actively engaging with the 'field' I was documenting. I asked people to describe what was happening whilst I was recording, making on-the-fly interviews. I learned far more, but I wondered: was this information also distorting my objective sound-view, or on the other hand, perhaps enhancing it? Rather than focussing on frequencies that excited my ears, more and more I became attracted to the contextualised sound and its socio-sonic properties.

Can we take the view that field recording and the gathering of sound materials could be considered as a form of ethnographic study, anthropological fieldwork, or journalistic note taking? What if these sounds arrive in the studio with a weighted context and are treated not only with a composerly conscience but to 'maintain a creative and analytical relationship to both materiality and sociality of sound' (Feld and Brenneis 2004: 462)? Could a resulting acousmatic work derived from these materials be similarly considered as an ethnographic document, an anthropological aid or a journalistic account?

1.4. Testimonial 2: Barcelona, March 2012

Ten months later. An unseasonably hot day in March. A new government has gained an overall majority after being elected on the basic promise of creating jobs. Within 6 months of their tenure, unemployment is at a record high and rising. A general strike has been called. Thousands of people are on the streets. The mood is edgy, tense in comparison with Los Indignados. People don't sit and listen, they stand or pace. People don't want to talk or discuss, they want to shout. The megaphones once used for leading a discussion are now being used to create as much noise as possible, by holding the separate cabled mouthpiece directly in front of the horn to create squealing feedback. Pockets of violence flare up. The police stand by and watch whilst a small core of trouble-makers throw paint at the stock exchange building and set large waste containers alight. As the burning plastic spews toxic fumes in the air, the city slowly seeps into chaotic scenes. When the union-organised march finally begins at

6pm, riot police open fire with rubber bullets on a crowd populated by families, young children and pensioners.

The testimonials above are a personal re-telling of two experiences I had whilst living in Catalunya. My eyewitness statements are at once a hard journalistic account whilst also a soft-focus reminiscence. Everything I have written is accurate, to the best of my knowledge and memory. I consider it factual information. However, I have made cuts and edits throughout the account: to include and exclude information, to give greater relevance to small details by pulling them into focus whilst making broad, sweeping generalisations to summarise events as a whole. I make crucial information bite-sized; summarised in a phrase or two, whilst small details receive a number of lines. In short, I have used artistic licence. Nonetheless, it is an account. It is my truth. It is what happened, if you ask me.

2. ETHNOGRAPHY IN SOUND

Ethnography is a methodology used for the study and description of cultures. It is empirical data gathering through fieldwork and a mainstay of anthropological studies. It is a holistic approach that includes participant observation, interviews, informal conversations, documentation and recordings as well as use of archive materials – all of which are considered together to produce findings, often presented in the form of a written report. David Fetterman tells us:

Ethnography is about telling a credible, rigorous, and authentic story [...] The story is told through the eyes of local people as they pursue their daily lives in their own communities. The ethnographer adopts a cultural lens to interpret observed behaviour, ensuring that the behaviours are placed in a culturally relevant and meaningful context. The ethnographer is both storyteller and scientist (Fetterman 2010: 1)

As this paper sets out to tackle some of the ethical considerations when creating art from re-appropriated sound sources, my own preoccupations when beginning to compose a piece from the sounds collected in Barcelona followed a similar line of

thought:

- How do I achieve validity, transparency and a sense of balanced representation when using these materials for artistic purposes?
- How much am I looking to document the event with this piece of music, or rather document my personal reading, my own experience of the event? Can these be separated?
- Did I adopt a 'native' perspective during my reception of the experience?
- How does my identity (here, my 'compositional voice') ring out in a piece that has so much emotional information from others already loaded into the raw sound materials?
- How do I balance the political 'hot potato' - reacting to something current - alongside the need or desire to create a long-lasting work - something more considered and objective?

John Levack Drever's article 'Soundscape composition: the convergence of ethnography and acousmatic music' describes how the methodologies for both ethnography and soundscape composition are similar, and how each discipline can learn from the other.

Both disciplines engage in embodied open-air research rather than arm-chair research, focusing on fieldwork primarily through sensuous experience. [...] Both are interdisciplinary contextual enquiries which take a greater holistic approach to the environment and its people (Drever 2002: 24)

Whilst soundscape composition may be considered an artistic endeavour and ethnography perhaps a more rigorous scientific undertaking, both involve a highly sensual and subjective form of data gathering based around observation, listening and

engaging. In his re-thinking of ethnographic practice, Dwight Conquergood imagines a shift in dynamic. His proposition for a new ethnography requires:

a shift from sight and vision to sound and voice, from text to performance, from monologue to dialogue, from authority to vulnerability (Conquergood 1991: 183)

Although the early recordings of Fred Gaisberg and Alan Lomax presented ethnomusicologists with a rich library of sound - for example the *Rounder Records* edition of over 100 CDs detailing Lomax's extensive fieldwork (e.g. Various, 1997) - ethnography in more general terms, perhaps surprisingly, has never utilised audio recording as a recurrent, standard research methodology. Anthropological work has often been bound by the notion of the written text as the dominant form to present findings. Conquergood notes the trepidation most anthropologists feel when straying from the written word:

What are the rhetorical problematics of performance as a complementary or alternative form of "publishing" research? [...] It is one thing to talk about performance as a model for cultural process, as a heuristic for understanding social life, as long as that performance-sensitive talk eventually gets "written-up" (Conquergood 1991: 190)

2.1. Steve Feld: Anthropology in sound

For one pioneer, the concept of anthropology in sound is nothing new, nor is the idea that composition from sound recordings can contribute to this field of study. In the early 1970s Colin Turnbull's anthropological works on sound and environment inspired a young Steve Feld, who recalls:

I came to imagine a life working in sound both as a musician-composer-engineer and as an anthropologist, a life where I could maintain a creative and analytical relationship to both materiality and sociality of sound. (Feld and Brenneis, 2004: 462)

Feld has dedicated most of his career so far to trying to answer the questions he originally formulated when studying for his master's degree:

The very first paper I wrote for [Turnbull] in 1972 [...] opened with two rhetorical sentences: "What about an anthropology of sound?", "What about ethnographies which are tape recordings?". It was already clear to me that recording was a critical mode of field method and of representation (Feld & Brenneis 2004: 463)

His extensive ethnographic study of the Kaluli people in the Bosavi rainforests of Papua New Guinea is one example of his unique research style, particularly in its presentation as edited field recordings. Feld employed a reflexive ethnographic approach that invited participants in his observations to directly interact and give feedback on the recordings, even editing and mixing.

I came to call this 'dialogic editing'... Recording wasn't just about gathering things but it was the invitation to a conversation about what was going on in the world as recorded, about what we were listening to, how we knew and questioned the world by listening to it, how we edited and arranged its meanings like a composition (Feld in Lane and Carlisle 2013: 206)

Nor did he shy away from his involvement in the creative shaping of what would become an academic document:

From the beginning I recorded and edited using the musique concrète techniques I learned as an undergraduate [...] For me art-making is something that could be central to anthropological thinking. But it has never happened. Field recording could be an important piece of making the connection (Lane & Carlisle 2013: 207-11)

2.2. R. Murray Schafer – The World Soundscape Project

Around the same time period of the early 1970s, R. Murray Schaefer was bringing together a group of researchers for whom the investigation of environmental sound and extensive field recording would also be a central mode of study. When Schaefer founded the World Soundscape Project (WSP) in Vancouver – a group that Feld would later become a part of – the focus was on a holistic approach to the sonic environment, and the emergence of the concept of acoustic ecology. Feld recalls:

Murray's crowd included a lot of composers and radio people, and increasingly I was interested in his idea that soundscape research be presented as musical composition. I became a kind of ethnographer sidekick to that crowd (Feld & Brenneis 2004: 466)

Tape editing and composition were commonly used techniques at the forefront of the WSP research into environmental sound. The documentation of a soundscape via editing and/or manipulation of the original recordings is now considered a norm, with Barry Truax, another founding member of the group, stating:

The composer's knowledge of the environment and psychological context of the soundscape material is allowed to influence the shape of the composition at every level, and ultimately the composition is inseparable from some or all of those aspects of reality (Truax 2008: 106)

Throughout the early work of both Feld and the WSP we can see that the perspectives of anthropological and acoustic-ecological sound documentation, and more crucially *compositions* resulting from these sounds - through editing and manipulation to create an audio "write-up" - were integral elements to the research methodologies of both Feld and Schafer, from their outsets in the early 1970s.

3. THE ACOUSMATIC–SOUNDSCAPE CONTINUM

3.1. Luc Ferrari – Flying in the face of the GRM

The sound experiments conducted by Luc Ferrari in Paris - also in the early 1970s - were of a very different aesthetic to the usual sound 'fetishisms' (Chion 1993: 53) of the *Groupe de Recherches Musicales* (GRM). Ferrari's *Presque Rien No. 1 ou le lever du jour au bord de la mer* (1970) documents a whole day in a Yugoslavian fishing village, recorded with static positioned microphones at a windowsill, edited into 20 minutes of continuous field recording – essentially exactly the same methodological approach as Steve Feld in the Bosavi rainforest.

Presque Rien n°2, ainsi continue la nuit dans ma tête multiple (1977) begins with a night-time soundscape before straying off into abstract dreams and imaginary,

composed spaces. Here, the microphones are roving, exploring a nocturnal soundscape of crickets and animal calls which are accompanied by a guiding narration from Ferrari and his companion Brunhild.

Ferrari's work was rooted in an acousmatic aesthetic rather than in the acoustic ecology or soundscape work of the WSP, but nevertheless, the *Presque Rien* series acts as a clear representation of place (No. 1), and a personally narrated discussion of people within an environment (No.2). Drever comments that the composer:

flew in the face of the GRM's Schaefferian phenomenological precepts of attention to the intrinsic qualities of recorded sound (i.e. the sound-object). Ferrari's work, on the other hand, focussed on what he referred to as the 'anecdotal' qualities of recorded sound (Drever 2002: 22)

Whilst Ferrari was never concerned with the pretence of creating any kind of soundscape, his work can nonetheless still be viewed as a crucial bridge between creative and documentary use of sound to archive cultural phenomena in a more holistic sense. These works can be seen as precursory steps towards later pieces that would, perhaps more consciously, blur the lines between the previously delineated camps of acousmatic phenomenology and acoustic ecology or soundscape.

3.2. Smalley & Westerkamp: The continuum continued

Acousmatic composers have of course repeatedly displayed documentary or narrative materials and tendencies in their works, although whether or not they considered this to be aligning with the soundscape aesthetic is another question. For example, Denis Smalley's classic *Valley Flow* (1992) takes its inspiration from the Canadian Rockies and was even produced at Simon Fraser University where the WSP was based. The piece consistently evokes the sonic gestures of a 'real' soundscape in its musical language.

The formal shaping and sounding content of *Valley Flow* were influenced by the dramatic vistas of the Bow Valley in the Canadian Rockies. The work is founded on a basic flowing gesture [...] The listener, gazing through the stereo window, can adopt changing vantage points; at one moment looking out to the distant horizon, at another looking down from a height, at another dwarfed by the bulk of land masses, and at yet another swamped by the magnified details of organic activity (Smalley 2004)

The Canadian electroacoustic scene could at times be said to have existed in suspension between narrative tendencies and modernist abstraction. Hildegard Westerkamp's *Kits Beach Soundwalk* (1989) eloquently treads this fine line; it is at once a narrated sound walk considering the environmental-sonic impact of the city on a natural beach-scape, whilst similarly attending to the pure-sonic (acousmatic) detail of the sounds found at the site. It has a very similar form to Ferrari's *Presque Rien No.2* in that roving microphones initially present a natural soundscape, before the listener is narrated (by the composer) slowly down an ever more abstract path. The two pieces also display similar results in terms of their balance of soundscape, narrated and abstract sound materials. However, whereas Ferrari might have been seen as maintaining his acousmatic stance, Westerkamp's starting point would undoubtedly be described as being soundscape and acoustic ecology.

The evolution of soundscape composition has often been made to follow an acousmatic path, as Drever tells us:

Despite roots in acoustic ecology and soundscape studies, today the practice and study of soundscape composition is often grouped with, or has grown out of acousmatic music schools. This can be clearly observed in the positioning of soundscape compositions juxtaposed with acousmatic music compositions in concert programmes, CD compilations and university syllabuses. Not only does this positioning inform how soundscape composition is listened to, but also how it is produced, sonically and philosophically (Drever 2002: 22)

Truax responds with the notion that given as soundscape music is so often listened to as electroacoustic music, the opposite, a listening of electroacoustic music as soundscape could further understanding of this convergence of the 'real world' and the abstract:

A nuanced interplay between the global and the local, between the abstract and the contextual, the shared and the specific, can be much more satisfying ... just as the soundscape can be listened to as if it were music, or at least organised sound, so too can electroacoustic music be listened to as if it were a soundscape, even if an imaginary one (Truax 2008: 108)

This short set of examples intends to demonstrate that the imaginary dividing line between soundscape and acousmatic, between narrative and abstracted has been crossed and blurred throughout the evolution of these genres, exemplified by classic

works from the repertoire.

4. AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL-ACOUSMATIC APPROACH

From these convergences in attitude to research in the 1970s we can see that the practices of ethnography, soundscape and acousmatic composition share a great number of similarities: Feld's collection of anthropological data through sound; Schafer's ecological concerns expressed in sound; Ferrari's presentation of soundscape as acousmatic music; the development of the soundscape-acousmatic continuum demonstrated in works by Westerkamp and Smalley; Truax composing soundscape to be listened to acousmatically - the similarities in both methodology and practice are numerous.

The written form often employed when presenting the findings and interpretation of ethnographic research is understood and accepted to be an almost wholly subjective and personal re-appropriation of fieldwork. It relies on generalisations making the data easier to consume and use. It is an exploration (even an invasion?) of intimate, personal space and cultural practices. Note-taking in the field is often from memory rather than in the moment, and is 'primarily through sensuous experience' (Drever 2002: 24).

It could be argued that by replacing the notebook with a sound recorder, the subjective element of the ethnographer's report could be reduced and that the reader (listener) receives more first-hand information from the voice of the interviewee and less of the ethnographer's personal filtering and translation. A reminder of Fetterman's definition is useful, when he states: 'The story is told through the eyes of local people as they pursue their daily lives in their own communities' (Fetterman 2010: 1). A story in sound, told through their own words in their own voices, seems a credible source. What then, about composing with these sounds? Could *interpreting* the holistic experience of fieldwork by composing, rather than simply presenting the notes (field recordings) in their raw form, be a sonic write-up? Again, Fetterman reminds us that the ethnographer's job when undertaking fieldwork is to translate and communicate *all*

that they experienced in the field, not only the words and voices of others. When he says 'the ethnographer adopts a cultural lens to interpret observed behaviour, ensuring that the behaviours are placed in a culturally relevant and meaningful context' is this not a composed element, a sensitive artistic representation of what occurred during the study? Is it not my retelling of the events in Barcelona story, but in sound?

This is not to delude ourselves in thinking that the presentation of ethnographically-inclined composed sound might be any more transparent than a written report. The power dynamic of ethnographer and participants is still present and inclined towards the author representing someone else's story, but it is not without merit to suggest that it could be equally representational.

These concurrent approaches across ethnographic practice, anthropological study, soundscape composition and acoustic ecology make clear that from social science to sound art, the presentation of composed findings continues to be common practice, whether in written academic texts or through representation of place in art. It seems that the only link yet to be made, is the reverse: art (composition in this instance) understood as a form of academic documentation. Furthermore, in current anthropology, the notion that both the ethnographic study and its findings or results should be continually reflexive and responsive towards the participants is a major stumbling block when nearly all findings are presented in text-form and in academic English. Can sound composition bridge the gap?

5. EXAMPLES OF A WAY FORWARD: RECENT & CURRENT WORKS

Peter Cusack's ongoing 'Favourite Sounds' project asks residents of a particular city what their favourite sound from that city is, and why. Cusack then sets out to record these sounds and presents the recordings both through an online map and published on CD. The recordings mainly document urban environments, but not necessarily following the acoustic ecology tradition of the WSP. This is demonstrated for example in *Favourite Sounds: Birmingham*, which focuses on the city's history of immigration.

Cusack invited participants not only to comment on the soundscapes around them, but also to recall sounds from their country of origin. These interviews also form a part of the online audio maps. When discussing his work, Cusack says:

there are often many issues not only environmental. I'm not choosing them for the sound, but because of the issue surrounding them. These projects use sound as a methodology for exploring the issues (Cusack in Lane & Carlisle 2013: 193)

Justin Bennett's 2011 work for stereo sound and text *Raw Materials* consists of a collection of unrelated field recordings, chosen at random from the artist's archive which are played back whilst a typed text appears on the video screen - a letter addressed to 'J'. The text, written by the composer, tells us "with the sounds come smells, stories, feelings". As the audience listens to each sound, the text continues:

I ask myself: where was it? When was it? What is happening? Who was with me?
How did I feel? Why did I record this? What does it make me feel now?

Throughout the rest of the piece he answers each question in an informal and personal way. This combination of sound as document of both the place and the person, site and social, which makes short practical descriptions whilst considering simultaneously the retrospective memory and current personal impact of the same sound on the composer himself, is an excellent example of a holistic, reflexive-ethnographic approach to sound, and its presentation in the form of art and performance.

Bennett adopts a conscious, reflexive ethnographer's approach to the sounds and to the final piece – he consistently approaches the recordings from an objective view, before realising that any view of his own recordings is always subject to his personal connection and feeling, whereby he assesses again subjectively and personally, and attempts to reconcile the two.

Bob Ostertag's sound work *Sooner or Later* (1991) showcases an early version of sampling, which is equally the documentation of an event through sound, and

exploration of the intrinsic qualities of that sound. The piece presents a tragic and harrowing event – the sound of a young boy in El Salvador lamenting the burying of his father. In the piece we hear the sounds of the boy's voice, a spade hitting the earth whilst someone digs a grave and a fly buzzing nearby. Ostertag explains:

For the most part, the recording is played back with little electronic alteration or "processing". Rather, the music is made by breaking the original recording into very small events... you might imagine the source sounds as physical objects viewed from different angles. I have placed you not only at different positions around the object, but have made windows of different sizes through which you look, and occasionally curved the glass into lenses of various types (Ostertag 1999)

Regardless of whether the listener understands the Spanish spoken by the boy, Ostertag's handling of the subject matter conveys the complex sentiment of the event through sound – both directly in field recording and artistically through composition.

5.1. *Manifest*

My own work *Manifest* (2013) is based on recordings and experiences I had during political demonstrations in Barcelona (see Testimonies 1 & 2 above). During the field recording process, similar to Cusack, I was more and more attracted to the sounds for their emotional, socio-political and cultural content and contexts. Furthermore, this socio-cultural data then became part of the information that I drew on when 'viewing' the material through the ethnographer's cultural lens in the studio, so that the resulting composition would tell 'a credible, rigorous, and authentic story' (Fetterman 2010: 1). This interpretation informed decisions taken throughout the subsequent composition process.

In the studio I take Ostertag's two-pronged approach. Firstly, I use many sounds with little or no processing. The intention is that these sounds, often interviews, demonstrate a fair representation of the event, both through the chosen words of the speakers and the overall emotional sonic qualities of those voices; in tone, pitch, rhythm and delivery. During the first half of the piece we hear the calm, measured

tones of people addressing the crowd through the megaphone, and the excited utterances of the assembled masses. Although an audience undeniably hears more detail if they understand the language, here I am listening primarily to the sound for the overall emotional qualities it would convey, regardless of the language barrier. I employ an acousmatic approach to language guided by an ethnographic sensibility: a socio-sonic methodology.

Secondly, I continue to explore the field recordings for their intrinsic detail. I work in a more classic acousmatic manner, led by the pure-sonic qualities of the sound-object and manipulating, transforming and sculpting the sound with a composer's instinct. When processing these sounds I cannot help but continue to be peripherally aware of their original contextual surroundings, in fact I actively pay them attention. I am simultaneously conscious of the 'outer reality' of the sounds whilst exploring their 'inner reality' – another application of a socio-sonic compositional methodology. For example the squealing feedback from the megaphones in the second protest becomes long, low menacing drones. My approach in the studio 'creates and develops non-referential sound in ways that relate more or less directly to real world *behaviour* characteristics' (Emmerson 2007: 14). This new drone exemplifies interpenetrated sound material that I feel adds to more clearly convey the sense of impending destruction and chaos that I felt permeated the events that day. The fed-back megaphones in the original field recording is sound which carries an intrinsic socio-political context of dissent - its socio-sonic behavioural characteristic - transformed according to this methodology to 'write-up' the contextual information. The new abstract drones 'mutually support' the raw field recordings to further represent the ethnographer's reading and representation of the scene.

When selecting other manipulated sounds to use in the final composition, I have followed a similar line of thought and chosen only those sounds that I felt aided and supported my subjective readings of the emotional, socio-political and cultural contents within the original field recordings. Like Bennett, I am constantly aware of my

own role within these sounds, my own judgements and memories affecting the response I have, but also, that I am adjusting to this. The resulting composition is at once an abstracted acousmatic treatment of the sound, whilst at the same time a real-life soundscape with edited field recordings. It contains the voices of people telling their own stories, supported and presented with my own compositional language, or voice. I would say it is an acousmatic documentary or a composed (musical) anthropological aid. The difference between this piece and other potentially similar-sounding aural-mimetic acousmatic works is the applied and reflexive ethnographer's approach, the socio-sonic methodology from fieldwork to final composition.

There is an argument to suggest that whilst the *methods* of creating either an ethnographic write-up or a sound composition may appear similar, the ethics of representation are somewhat different. Although my artistic conscience might be clear, there is little or no academic evidence to show my choices throughout. This must be the next step – after acknowledging that what we do is (inter)subjective, we should render transparent to the reader/listener the process of how we gathered the data, how it was analysed and composed with, for it to be viable academic research.

6. CONCLUSION

Within a generalised definition of electroacoustic music, two broad cultures emerged in the 1970s. One centred on the Schaefferian principles of exploring the intrinsic properties of sound, or acousmatic music. Another is the representation of place through sound, commonly employing a compositional approach of sound editing and manipulation, which we term soundscape composition. Whilst these two areas of study and output are quite distinct and hold great variety in each, soundscape composition is often still paired with and influenced by the acousmatic tradition. This is seen in its treatment of sound materials, and presentation of works in the acousmatic concert hall.

Meanwhile, ethnography - the practical study of people within cultures in holistic terms – has much in common with soundscape practice, as outlined by Drever. We can

therefore trace continuum from ethnography to soundscape composition and acousmatic music. Feld in many ways pioneered a similar approach to composition in presenting his anthropological findings as edited and manipulated recordings. He also sees a future when saying: 'art-making is something that could be and should be more central to anthropological thinking. Field recording could be an important piece of making the connection' (Feld in Lane & Carlisle 2013: 211).

By employing an ethnographic approach to field recordings - used equally as field notes and materials for composition - the sounds themselves may act as a guide for the reflexive generation of abstract musical materials, a technique applied in *Manifest*. This socio-sonic attitude to composition can lead us to consider other music resulting from the proposed methodology as useful and valid socio-political documents in sound.

BIBLIOGRAPHY & REFERENCES

Chion, M. 1983. Guide des objets sonores: Pierre Schaeffer et la recherche musicale. Paris, Éditions Buchet/Chastel.

Chion, M. 1993. The state of musique concrète. In F.-B. Mâche (ed.) Music, Society and Imagination. *Contemporary Music Review* 8(1): 51–5.

Conquergood, D. 1991. Rethinking ethnography: towards a critical cultural politics. *Communication Monographs* 56(June), 179–94.

Demers, J. 2009. Field Recording, Sound Art and Objecthood. *Organised Sound* 14(1), 39-45.

Drever, J.L. 2002. Soundscape composition: the convergence of ethnography and acousmatic music. *Organised Sound* 7(1), 21–7.

Emmerson, S. 1986. 'The Relationship of Language to Materials' in Emmerson, S (ed), *The Language of Electroacoustic Music*, Basingstoke, Macmillan, 17-39.

Emmerson, S. 2007. *Living Electronic Music*. Aldershot, Ashgate.

Feld, S. & Brenneis, D. 2004. Doing Anthropology in Sound, *American Ethnologist* 31, No. 4, 461-474.

Fetterman, David M. 2010. *Ethnography: Step-by-Step*, Los Angeles, SAGE Publications.

Kane, B. 2007. L'Objet Sonore Maintenant: Pierre Schaeffer, Sound Objects and the Phenomenological Reduction. *Organised Sound* 12(1): 15–24.

Lane, C. & Carlyle, A. 2013. *In The Field: The Art Of Field Recording*. Cornwall, Uniformbooks.

Ostertag, B. 1991. *Sooner Or Later*, ReR Music (ReCDec 37) [Liner notes].

Smalley, D. 2004. *Impacts Intérieurs*. Montreal: Empreintes Digitales, IMED 0409-CD. [Liner notes]

Truax, B. 2008. Soundscape Composition as Global Music: Electroacoustic music as soundscape. *Organised Sound* 13(2), 103-109.

Various (1997) *The Alan Lomax Collection Sampler* [CD] Burlington: Rounder Records. RounderCD1700.

Waters, S. 2000. Beyond the acousmatic: Hybrid tendencies in electroacoustic music, in Emmerson, S (ed) *Music, Electronic Media and Culture*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 56-83.