

Book Reviews

The Great Animal Orchestra: finding the origins of music in the world's wild places, by Krause, B.

London: Profile Books, 2012, ISBN: 978-1-78125-000-6

Described by Norman Lebrecht as “David Attenborough without the pictures and accompanying orchestra” Bernie Krause, a musician and naturalist, has spent over forty years recording and archiving the sounds found in non-human environments, what he terms “wild soundscapes”. In his latest book, *The Great Animal Orchestra: finding the origins of music in the world's wild places*, he provides the reader with descriptions of some of the planet's more intriguing bioacoustic soundscapes and how they may have contributed to the origins and evolution of both music and human speech. Dividing sounds into three categories, 1.) biophany, those sounds made by animals and plants; 2.) geophany, natural sounds such as those made by wind and rain; and 3.) anthrophany, the human-induced noises that more often than not disrupts the ecosystems that experience them, Krause makes an important contribution to the growing body of work on work on auditory spaces, primarily discussed in the more experimental fields of acoustic ecology and sonic geography, with Boyd and Duffy (2012), and Gallagher and Prior (2013) being two recent contributors to those sub-disciplines.

Part autobiography, part travelogue, and part treatise on the rapidly dwindling acoustic tapestries of natural soundscapes found across the globe (as a consequence of ever greater encroachment by humans) the book is divided into nine chapters. Krause begins by describing how he, in some ways, drifted into natural sound recording having spent many years working in the film and music industries. After illustrating the science behind acoustics and the meaning of such terms as *soundscape* and *niche hypothesis* he begins the second chapter with an inspiring story of a trip he made to Lake Wallowa in Oregon in 1971, where a Nez Perce elder, Angus Wilson, gives him a revelatory early-morning lesson on the origins of music. Instructed to remain silent, he sits and waits by a stream near a reed bed before being pummelled by what he describes as an oscillation akin to being sonically blasted by a combination of church organ and pan flute. Wilson then demonstrates how the phenomenon occurred; the reed bed had gradually been weathered by the seasons, resulting in the varying heights and holes in the reed stems combining to produce the unique sound Krause and his mentor experience. The book is replete with stories of this kind and reads all the better for it. Later chapters discuss how he devised the terms *biophany* and *geophany*, again from his experiences on commission to record sounds from biomes around the world. Writing on how the largely “self-referential” western music tradition (one can think of Ferneyhough's *Carceri d'invenzione IIb* or Górecki's *Symphony No. 3* here) solipsistically neglects the sources of its own inspiration, he suggests we continue to remain more obsessed with human responses to perceived natural sounds than the natural sounds themselves. Krause also shows how human noise drowns out (and ultimately destroys) pre-existing biophanies and geophanies across the world, in what he terms a “fog of noise”, in many ways echoing Chief Seattle's 1854 speech *No Quiet Place*. Much of the book challenges what the author sees as a perceived human monopoly on musicianship, with numerous examples given of different animals vocalising across a wide range of sonic bandwidths in much the same way as differing musical instruments occupy a human orchestral arrangement.

One of the most striking suggestions he makes in the book is his claim that one can measure the general health of a habitat by the level of sound complexity present there, essentially diminishing biodiversity leads to diminishing complexity of a habitat's acoustic signature. It is a strong argument and he backs it up with an example where he records an old-growth forest, before and after selective logging has taken place. While the forest appears relatively unchanged visually, the soundscape tells a very different story. The bioacoustic signature was devastated once logging took place and the full extent of the damage brought on by this more “environmentally sensitive” form of logging could only be measured aurally, highlighted by the

absence of most of the species of bird and insect that had been present prior to logging. While the author ends the book on an optimistic note, I'm not sure this reviewer shares his hopeful outlook, given the accelerated destruction brought on by continued human (over)development and our wilful deafness to the circadian rhythms of the dwindling biophanias and geophanias around us.

References

- Boyd, C. and Duffy, M. (2012) *Sonic Geographies of Shifting Bodies*. Interference: A Journal of Audio Culture, 1 (2): 1-7 [Online].
- Chief Seattle (1854/1993) *No Quiet Place*. Hastings: Pickpocket Books.
- Corbin, A. (1998) *Village Bells: Sound and Meaning in the Nineteenth Century French Countryside*. London: Columbia University Press.
- Gallagher, M. and Prior, J. (2013) *Sonic geographies: Exploring phonographic methods*. Progress in Human Geography, Published online before print, April 29, 2013, DOI: 10.1177/0309132513481014.
- Johansson, O. (ed.) (2009) *Sound, Society and the Geography of Popular Music*. Farnham: Ashgate.
- LaBelle, B. (2010) *Acoustic Territories: Sound Culture and Everyday Life*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Murray Schafer, R. (1977) *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*. Vancouver: Destiny Books.
- Thompson, E. (2004) *The Soundscape of Modernity: Architectural Acoustics and the Culture of Listening in America, 1900-1933*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Dr. Breffní Lennon, Independent Researcher

Cultures of Energy: power, practice, technologies, edited by Strauss, S., Rupp, S. and Loue, T., Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2013 ISBN: 978-1-61132-166-1

The human use of energy is inherently understood and experienced through cultural frameworks, yet the degree of engagement with this topic on the part of the social sciences has been minimal and uneven at best. So argue the editors of a new collection of essays titled *Cultures of Energy: power, practices, technologies*. This volume examines how energy flows through the various forms of natural and social circuitry (from production, to distribution and consumption) with specific ethnographic case studies found throughout of *energyscapes* at the local, national and transnational scales. In terms of geography, probably the most significant English-language fora for engagement in the socio-spatial dimensions of energy, on this side of the Atlantic at least, are found in the United Kingdom with the Royal Geographic Society's Energy Geographies Working Group, and the ESRC funded Geographies of Energy Transition series led by key academics in geography departments from the universities of Manchester, Leicester, Birmingham and Oxford. This book's main focus rests predominantly on North American experiences, and grounds itself rather strictly within anthropology. However, this in no way diminishes its contribution to geographic debates on the subject, but rather enhances it.

The book is divided into five thematic parts, comprising sixteen chapters in total and rounded off with an Afterward by Laura Nader. Each section is helpfully concluded with an The first two chapters attempt to theorise how energy and culture are mutually organised at two key scales of enquiry: the individual/household level and the wider socio-spatial arena. The incongruities found in modern institutional arrangements and the unsustainable levels of energy consumption are also highlighted. One intriguing concept the reader is introduced to is that of money as a *fictive energy* that mystifies or indeed conceals the hidden relationships that conspire to distance consumers from the various sources of energy consumed. This fiction helps create a fundamental problem of energy; that is the unequal to access to *power*, in all its meanings, that individuals and groups at different societal scales experience. My own research into wind farms reflects this analysis, given the presence of wind turbines on the landscape (a constant reminder of where electricity comes from) and the negative reactions some local people have to them. The second part of the book, comprising chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6, further develop several indicative

themes on technology, meaning and what they term the *cosmologies of energy*. Recognition of the fact that the values and costs of energy are never evenly distributed within communities or indeed wider societies is also highlighted. Part three of the book (chapters 7, 8 and 9) go on to discuss the social and cultural changes brought on by changing energy infrastructures, most notably those connected to electricity generation. Chapters 10, 11, 12 and 13, which constitute the fourth section of the book, explore the conflicts and power dynamics at the centre of a number of controversial energy procurement practices including fracking and biofuels and review how the NIMBY (not-in-my-backyard) phenomenon may be applied in a more positive way in order to produce more sustainable local energy infrastructures. The final thematic section of the book (chapters 14, 15 and 16) focuses on oil and the dynamic power contestations associated with this specific resource. Laura Nader concludes the collection with a call for anthropologists to heed the writings of Edmund Leach and Nasim Taleb, whose influential concept of *black swans* suggests we will continue to experience unpredictability when trying to predict where contemporary energy cultures are going.

Cultures of Energy is an important contribution to current debates on energy and the role it plays in shaping contemporary societies. Of notable interest to this reviewer, given the corresponding themes found in my own doctoral research, was the approach taken by a number of contributors in highlighting the correlation between (meta)physical flows of energy and the mobilities that occur within the social, economic and political relationships at the heart of our advanced energy systems. It also has considerable cross-disciplinary appeal and should be required reading for anyone with an interest in the socio-environmental dimensions to contemporary energy frameworks – particularly to those involved in energy geographies, but also those engineers and planners appointed to build and regulate these frameworks.

Dr. Breffní Lennon, Independent Researcher

Biographical Note:

Breffní Lennon holds a BA (Hons) from the University of Wales Lampeter, a research MA in Cultural Geography from Royal Holloway, University of London and a PhD in renewable energy policy from University College Cork. His research interests engage the following: the interface between (supra)national planning/policy elites and local planning/policy arenas; renewable energy policy and innovation in response to anthropogenic climate change; landscape theory and mobility; representations of nature, wildness and culture; and urban/rural discourses more generally. He provides commentary in his blog [European Energy Geographies](#)

Contact details

brefnilennon@gmail.com