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***Alarms, Bells, Buzz and Birds***  
***Soundscapes, Awareness, and Healing in Japan***

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Marty Miller

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ABSTRACT

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***Alarms, Bells, Buzz and Birds: Soundscapes, Awareness, and Healing in Japan***

by Marty Miller

***Abstract:***

Studies in the Visual Culture field reveal the impact of images in shaping perceptions of ourselves, yet also in relationship to what is labeled as 'other.' However, the use of sounds to create or assist in the creation of these experiences is a field that begs further investigation. Thus, this thesis holds of utmost importance the ability of sound to influence perception of ones surroundings, as well as to facilitate an awareness of body and mind. A motivation for the creation of this awareness is the need to connect with nature, with ourselves, and with each other.

While investigating ways in which sound can interact with visual sensory input to produce a state of awareness of one's surroundings, contemporary conceptions of nature, time, and space will be brought into question through an examination of philosophies, spiritual, and creative traditions of Japanese culture. Urban Tokyo, Japan serves as a functional setting for this paper due to a cultural heritage of creative and spiritual use of sound in the creation of an awareness of natural processes, seemingly outside the realm of human interference. However, the events of March 11, 2011 have also allowed for an in-depth analysis of how sound and color could be used to connect local inhabitants with the activities of the natural world around them. Through personally experiencing these incidents, a particular motivation arises to not only reconceptualize traditional categorizations between sound and vision, but also to seek new methods of applying a renewed awareness of natural-processes towards a therapeutic recovery. This is examined through the role of the arts, and opens the door to further creative action for the use of audio-visual stimuli to assist in the reconnection with the earth, and with ourselves.

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## **Introduction: Setting the Imaginary Stage**

I have spent large portions of the past decade living, working, and studying in East-Asia. This time has been, and continues to be formative in how I approach my creative practice, as well as shaping what is being sensed around me at any given time. The years leading up to enrolling in this Visual Culture program saw a personal engagement with musicianship as a percussionist in several music groups in South Korea, as well as an engagement in Zen meditation practice. These experiences have been valuable for their own sake as experiences which can be reflected upon. Though such encounters cannot be duplicated through rational self-reflexive internal discourse, they continue to influence my own experience and appreciation of visual culture theory.

The aspects informed by these creative and intercultural experiences, which relate themselves best to a modern-day Visual Culture curriculum as taught in Sweden, include an appreciation for aspects of creative expression or seemingly routine events which bring us into an awareness of the world of phenomena often referred to as 'nature'. When encountering a term such as this, it is often best to think less rather than more regarding its precise definition. Through playing music in an improvisational manner that draws on elements from the visual, olfactory, and auditory worlds in its creation, I've become more aware of those sensory aspects beyond the merely visual. These sensory stimuli produce an awareness in the experiencer of a life being lived as well as an interconnectedness with aspects of our natural world. This has allowed a perspective to form which notices the current bias towards visuality in popular culture and has left a desire to investigate other senses which equally impact our experience, yet are often not acknowledged as necessarily doing so.

An adult life lived abroad in Europe, South America, North America, or Asia has also been a great influence on the methodology used in the writing of this thesis, as well as its structure and aims. Through living in Tokyo during and after the earthquake of March of 2011, I became very interested in the ways that ordinary sensory experience was connected to aspects of nature, whether it be through sirens warning of impending aftershocks, or street signals which reminded me of birds in flight. Sensorily-speaking, the role of the non-visual, particularly auditory elements, in producing this awareness in myself and others navigating the streets, gardens and alleys of central Tokyo became central to feeling emotionally and physically connected to the moment. As such, this thesis sets out to examine the role of these primary auditory elements as they produce a state of presence or even panic, awareness or delusion. It will attempt to show how these aspects can help infuse not only an

appreciation of the power of nature in effecting moment-to-moment experience, but rather a feeling of connection with processes beyond human control in the world's largest metropolis. Along the way, connections of these sensations to the visual will be made, along with implications for identity creation, therapeutic effects, and their openness to creative use by empathetic individuals to 'see' or touch their world through an expanded sensory awareness.

### *Part 1: A problem and relevant research*

We often focus on the visual at the expense of other aspects of our sensory experience. If we want to see more clearly, we have to learn to pay attention to our other senses, in order to touch what is around us more fully within a state of present awareness. However, using sound as a means to 'touch' the present moment has also been developed by meditation teachers, musicians, and sound theorists. Despite their background, they all, in a sense, state that perhaps touching in this way can put us in contact with non-human-manufactured elements, even if coming through a manufactured/designed experience. By looking towards what is considered an aspect of 'nature' in common discourse; an animal, a season, a body of water, we can become aware of the discord between an experience of time and these natural aspects in contemporary urban culture, and an ephemeral experience of our surroundings.

There has been a fair amount of writing in the past thirty years about the role of sounds in society. The classic interdisciplinary work, *The Soundscape*<sup>1</sup>, by R. Murray Schafer serves as a good basis for an examination between elements such as bird-song, and human-made equivalents. It is also a useful bridge between questions concerning spirituality and visual scientific observations. Important books concerning the role of presence and interconnectedness between different sonic elements (and other sensory elements as well) are *The Production of Presence*<sup>2</sup>, by Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, and *The Heart of Understanding*<sup>3</sup> by Thich Nath Hanh. Some research exists about soundscapes in Japan in printed form, yet none that I know of concerning the role of birds, buzz, alarms, or bells in this context.

Regarding sonic landscapes (henceforth referred to as soundscapes) in Japan, published material has proved to be marginally difficult to access. Much readily available material focuses on wildlife and

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1 R. M. Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our sonic environment and the tuning of the world*. Destiny Books, Rochester, 1977.

2 H. U. Gumbrecht, *Production of Presence: What meaning cannot convey*. Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2004.

3 T. N. Hanh, *The Heart of Understanding: Commentaries on the prajnaparamita heart sutra*. Berkeley, Parallax Press, Berkeley, 1988.

natural soundscapes such as the articles concerning drift ice, seas and subtropical forests in the quarterly publication, *Soundscapes*<sup>4</sup>. That being said an issue concerning soundscapes in Japan did touch on the concept of 'acoustic ecology.' There have also been some smaller publications from at least one Japanese masters student pertaining to the uses of water and sound in one Japanese village. Sadly, this information is not available in English, nor is the student who wrote it for interview. However, current, relevant research from Jacob Kreutfeldt of Copenhagen University exists in his work, *Acoustic Territorialities*<sup>5</sup>. In it, he writes applying Schafer's work to the effects of sounds in a Japanese context. Kreutfeldt draws connections between Schafer's ideas of keynote sounds and the creation of spacial and social identity. He also applies this to Deleuzian thought when talking about the territoriality involved in this relationship. The uses of sound for therapeutic purposes has been widely written about, however finding relevant information on a Japanese context has proved elusive. Brian Massumi, through his book *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*, examines the role of sensory experience through the body and dwells more on the role of synesthesia in bringing about an intersensory approach to reality<sup>6</sup>. This work takes a phenomenological approach to examining sensory experience and attempts to show how perception can become codified through the patterning of what he calls 'biograms<sup>7</sup>.' While this work involves potentially relevant theories, for the sake of simplicity, this paper will forgo an in-depth discussion on the phenomenological implications of intersensory and synesthetic experience in favor of the application of these in a contemporary society and creative practice.

In addition, there have been some references made to the role of sound in inducing presence, but not also in its connection with nature in a Japanese context. There have been more extensive academic undertakings pertaining to the interaction of visual elements such as color as well as photography and other images. With regard to the role of nature influencing culture in a Japanese context, Watsuji Tetsuro has produced a considerable amount of writing concerning the processes of nature, and the developing of a culture which relates to these aspects. From a phenomenological perspective, these writings are also very useful, and can at times serve as a backdrop to the awareness of nature as a determiner of human behavior and identity. For example, his book, *Climate and Culture*<sup>8</sup> could serve as a useful text with which to analyze potential creative responses to the earthquake,

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4 K. Torigoe, 'Insights taken from three visited soundscapes in Japan', *Soundscape*, vol. 06, no. 02, 2005, pp. 8-12.

5 J. Kreutfeldt, (2009), *Akustisk Territorialitet: Rumlige perspektiver i analysen af urbane lydmiljøer*: R. Murray Schafer, J.-F. Augoyard, G. Deleuze & F. Guattari, PhD thesis, Københavns Universitet, Det Humanistiske Fakultet.

6 B. Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*. Duke University Press. Durham, 2002, p. 186.

7 Massumi, p. 187

8 W. Tetsuro, *Climate and Culture: A Philosophical Study*. Greenwood Press, New York, 1988.

tsunami, and nuclear meltdown in March of 2011. Concerning identity creation, cultural stereotypes, and the role of stock images, the book by Paul Frosh, *The Image Factory*<sup>9</sup> has undoubtedly been useful in providing a theoretical backbone, or also showing the lack thereof when concerning visual data, and will be used in this paper. This book could also be used in an analysis of the artwork soon to come in Japan in response to the aforementioned tragedies.

These works show their relevance on several fronts - culturally, experientially - and adjust the focus towards a more inclusive definition of visual experience. By examining sounds that occur in daily life, and the way that we interact with them, we might be able to find that the visual is intimately linked to the auditory so much so that traditional conceptual distinctions pertaining to their individuality demand revision. Through this, we might discover that the term 'sensory culture' is a more obtuse, yet presently a more accurate term to use to describe an experience of visual culture. By looking at connections between a world of nature as something outside of human control, we can begin to humble ourselves a bit in how we view this interaction and interrelatedness between difference aspects of our sensory experience. Perhaps, only when being humbled, or in joy or delight, can we really get out of our own way enough to really notice what is going on around and within us to a heightened degree.

## *Part 2: Questions*

When looking at the perceived dominance of the visual in contemporary society, what can be said of sound in its relationship to the visual and of sensory experience on the whole? Along these lines, what role do the sounds play in our urban spaces in connection to the production of awareness of nature, conceptions of time and space, and aspects of identity? Specifically, what are the roles of sound themes like bells and alarms, birds, and buzz in contemporary Japan and what influence can these have on an awareness of nature through, but not limited to creative expression? How do these sounds make themselves known in a post-tsunami context, and what possible impacts could they have on a society recovering from an environmental disaster and on artwork that forms as a result?

These questions relate themselves to how we humans maneuver ourselves within a constant interaction with sounds, visuals, and other sensory stimuli. I posit that not directly focusing on the

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<sup>9</sup> P. Frosh, *The Image Factory*, Berg Publishing, New York, 2003.



visual sense, as something experienced through the eye orifices themselves, can reveal a renewed sense of presence and place within our surroundings. I also suggest that finding links between auditory experiences, as a sense of touch in itself, can help us to regain an awareness of the interconnectivity between our own experience, and that of a plant, or a bird, or a wave. Realizing this may enable a non-dual perspective of experiencing different, yet equally valid parts of a greater whole. In this sense, there is a connection between an argument against a dualistic experience of sensory perception, and the hegemony of the visual in society. They are connected because a non-dual perspective also implies the lack of concrete distinctions between the two. If having a dualistic impression between seeing and hearing, it is easier to value one over the other, and to focus on one sense at what seems to be the expense of the other. However, an internal, innate inkling, suggests their mutual dependency can also be applied to sense perceptions, and alludes to an experience which allows for an infinitude of multiple facets depicting a singular reality. This inkling refers to that which cannot be adequately expressed, yet from personal experience serves as a motivation for the questioning involved in creative and intellectual work.

### *Part 3: Methods, structure, and theories*

The structure of this project revolves around several different theoretical standpoints, yet will refer largely to the the work of two authors, around which other arguments will be made. First, the work of Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht in *The Production of Presence: What Meaning Cannot Convey* is used concerning the role of experience, presence, culture and meaning-making through interpretive discourse<sup>10</sup>. Although simultaneously finding an equal amount of resonance and indigestion with this work, it was chosen as it appears to be largely credible within mainstream western academia and that it does attempt to state the case for a non-interpretive, or presence-based interaction with subject material within the humanities. In particular, thoughts concerning presence culture, meaning culture, taboos, and implications for experience in and outside of academia will be looked at in more detail. The other main source which will be used is a work by Murry R. Schafer entitled *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*.<sup>11</sup> Apart from a focus on the sonic qualities of experience, this book is relevant to the questions asked in this paper as it takes an interdisciplinary approach

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10 Gumbrecht, p. 4

11 Schafer, p. 58

towards understanding the historical and current use of sound in our everyday lives and how it affects our experiences and identity. In the process, Schafer introduces concepts of 'keynote sounds', and the connections between the auditory and the visual<sup>12</sup>. His discussion of these ideas also evolve into the therapeutic aspects of intersensory recognition and includes recommendations for implementing such methods which can concretely impact personal and shared experiences of our surroundings.

While the methodology employed in this paper when gathering and synthesizing information will be influenced by ethnography, the work itself will not ultimately be ethnographic in nature. Inspired by the writings on sensory ethnography by Sarah Pink, I have collected sound samples on location in Japan. Pink stresses the importance of acknowledging the senses as a form of 'touch' when encountering a cross cultural situation. As the case studies take place in a cross-cultural setting where concepts of 'self' and 'other' can appear heightened, her book, *Doing Sensory Ethnography* pertains to this train of thought and provides a social-science standpoint towards the pending discussion<sup>13</sup>. In addition, in respect for the importance of first-hand experience when discussing any of the theories above, I have attempted to simultaneously acknowledge the perceived existence of, yet step outside the role of creator, ethnographer, or researcher when being in the contexts this paper discusses. Although Pink does not explicitly attempt to do this, her writing serves as a useful dock to leave behind as our (empirical) ship sails in the writing of this paper. This leaving of the docks is done to stress the engaged nature inherent in putting into practice the experience of what is being observed and analyzed.

This putting into practice of an engaged sensory touching in a creative context will be shown through the work of John Daido Looi, a Zen Monk and photographer, who stressed the importance of leaving the conceptual in order to find the reality that is being touched in an encounter. In his work, this is not only actualized through the creative process, but in other aspects seemingly more mundane. However, in his book *The Zen of Creativity* he stresses the importance of an engaged attention which leaves no room for the dualism of experiencer and experienced or touch and toucher or meaning and presence described by Pink and Gumbrecht. However, in solidarity with Gumbrecht, he begs the task of expressing the conceptually inexpressible<sup>14</sup>. By looking at things as they are and working with what is given, a central aspect of creative practice can be uncovered, which attempts to see the possibilities for change and thriving through working with sensory experience, as an accidental blessing.

Lastly, in responding to structural and methodological needs, this paper will start from a self-

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12 Schafer, p. 58

13 S. Pink *Doing Sensory Ethnography*. Sage Publishing, London, 2009, p. 7.

14 J. D. Looi (2005). *Zen and the art of creativity: Cultivating your artistic life*. Ballantine Books, New York, 2005, p. 73.

reflexive point of view. This is the case, as I was present in Japan during the earthquake and tsunami of March, 2011, and found an increased awareness of the role of nature, and my sensory experience as a result. As such, an attempt will be made to look at this phenomenon from the theories regarding presence and 'interbeing', a soon-to-be-described reality devoid of a concrete division between self and other or sight and hearing and described by Thich Nath Hanh<sup>15</sup>. This will prove beneficial in support of Loori's writings, yet will still encompass the role of sensory touch as described by Pink.

As previously stated, going through this experience in Japan has led me to wonder how my experience could be designed as part of my everyday life to help induce this awareness. Thus, the theories connecting design to experience expounded on by Schievelbusch will prove useful to this discussion. Of particular relevance will be Schievelbusch's research into the seemingly symbiotic connections between the design of the train car and riding experience in early train travel, and the experience of its passengers. Not only does design help influence human behavior which subsequently influences design, but his book *The Railway Journey* also touches on how this design can also alter the experiencer's perceptions of time and space<sup>16</sup>. As will be shown, this is applicable to the pending cases through a respect for the conscious or unconscious manipulation, with both positive and negative connotations, of experience through the use of sound design in Japan. As I have briefly explained, my interests in sound, sound-making, and auditory connection to visuals and natural processes have left an indelible impression and respect for how the ephemeral nature of experience can impact creativity through a state of presence. As such, writings by Gumbrecht, Schaefer, and Nath Hanh will be useful.

In addition, at several points throughout this text, references to sound samples are given. They are primarily in the sections which talk about the use of bird song in contemporary Japanese society and are from the exact contexts which are being discussed. You, the reader, are strongly encouraged to pause for a minute (about the length of each sample) to engage in an auditory experience. While doing so, please just listen, and be aware of the ways that sound is impacting your experience compared to the preceding minutes focusing on the text. It is hoped that this will allow for a subtle shift in the thought process needed to read this paper, while also showing a sonic photograph of the cases in question, and will additionally allow for a realization of the body's breath, and the touch of the sounds on your sensory experience.

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15 Hanh, p. 10

16 Wolfgang, Schievelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization & Perception of Time & Space*. University of California Press, Berkeley, 1986, p. 37.

*Part 4: Case Studies: Why Japan, Why Sound, Why birds or elements of Nature?*

Throughout, case studies involving Alarms, Bells, Buzz, and Birds will be used to examine the different ways that a soundscape can be influenced by, or related to elements of natural processes. As they relate to parts of the world seemingly disconnected from human control, these processes themselves include the chirping of birds, the flow of water, and shaking earth. As they tend to occur often, the first two processes could be thought of as being somewhat ordinary and non-distinctive. However, the third has recently joined the ranks of the ordinary in certain areas of Japan. These areas, Tokyo now included, incorporate all of these aspects into the daily lives for many residents.

Another reason why Japan has been chosen for the setting of this work is that stereotypically, the culture that has developed there has been seen in the west, or at least presented to the west and other distant parts of the globe, as being somewhat more sensitive to occurrences of nature. This is reflected in arts that range from oft cited tea ceremonies to linguistics, to fine arts and music. The urge to investigate the relative truth of this stereotype of incorporation/yielding towards natural elements has been another motivation for having Japan as the context of this work. As such, there can be an examination of stock sounds and the creation of identity, which opens a door back to an inquiry that is infused with an overtly visual experience.

The last reason for choosing Japan as a context for delving into the connection between soundscapes and nature, is of a more personal nature. My life has recently led me to live and work in Tokyo and the surrounding areas, and I was in a small Japanese garden in central Tokyo during the earthquake and Tsunami of March, 2011. Partially due to my experiences of playing improvisational jazz and ambient music, as well as doing field recording work, I was more sensitive than usual to the auditory influences around me. These sounds were not separated from the visuals and other tactile senses felt during that time. However, in the days and weeks that followed the disaster, I became acutely aware of the role of sounds, as well as 'lack' of sound in addition to light in determining my experience of what was transpiring around me. As such, I also became curious how sounds were used in society and creatively by other musicians and artists to show the importance for therapeutic aspects of sound and the creation of a state of presence/mindfulness. In short, sounds and a predication for experience offered a glimmer of a window within which was offered the possibility to better understand my own experience, and those around me during this time.

## Chapter 1: Setting the Conceptual Stage

### *Part 1: Jumping off point concerning Culture, Nature, and Sounds*

The terms 'culture' and 'nature' are both integral to the study of how sounds interact with us in society. However, before delving too deeply into the jungle of possibilities which emerge when attempting to answer these questions, these terms must be looked at more carefully. It is the hope that doing so will allow for insights to be more readily gleaned from the empirical material's interaction with the experiencer. To start, looking at how 'nature' is generally defined in popular culture, we can look at the definition offered up by the *Oxford English dictionary* which defines it as the process of the products of the world and other features of the earth, as opposed to humans or human creations<sup>17</sup>. This definition is problematic in that it assumes a dualism between humans and their environment, and implies that humans did not come from the earth, but are alien on its shores and in possession of its faculties. Luckily, from this writer's experience, this concept speaks for a subduing if not dying paradigm for human's relationship with themselves and their surroundings in western culture. The dictionary goes on to define 'culture' as the collective human intellectual and artistic achievements as well as the defining social traits and behaviors within which they were created<sup>18</sup>. This definition also seems to isolate human experience and human creation from the influences which impacted them. However, there seems to be little respect in these definitions for the fact that without the work of many other non-human factors, there would be no intellectual or social or artistic achievement to begin with. Thus, by implying the lack of a symbiotic relationship between the parties, where humans are only defined by what non-human elements they are constituted of, in short, 'culture' and 'nature' can both be realized as illusory concepts.

While the term 'culture' generally refers to something that is enigmatic, fleeting, or subjective, the term 'nature' can generally offer more concrete examples. Many people reared within a western cosmological context would refer to nature as including the biological world within and around which they make their lives, including rocks, birds, and so on. While the term 'nature' can also be used in this context to pertain to a motivation for actions within a specific cultural setting, the former term is one

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17 *Oxford english dictionary: The world's most trusted dictionaries*. (2012). Retrieved from <http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/nature?q=nature>

18 *Oxford english dictionary: The world's most trusted distionaries*. (2012). Retrieved from <http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/culture?q=culture>

which lends itself more easily to the analysis of this study. Another way of experiencing nature is, if viewing oneself as a primarily biological entity, as inseparable from the rocks and birds of one's environment. The macrocosmic element of 'nature' can be approached through noticing the interconnectedness between different entities. One way to do this is by noticing how one natural elements, such as the tautness of our skin, changes over time. Another is to see how the clothes on our bodies are interconnected with countless other people, animals, plants, and processes of nature<sup>19</sup>. For example, considering my shirt, I can envision and directly touch biological fibers grown and refined in another part of the world, physically touch the same material that was sewn by small hands in a Bangladeshi sweatshop, or even feel the sun that caused the cotton as well as the food which fed the worker, to grow. If one of these did not exist, my shirt would not be here. So is it also with my body. In the Vietnamese Buddhist tradition, this is called 'interbeing' and implies that a human and her/his environment are so interdependent, that they are not at all unlike a bee and a flower<sup>20</sup>. Due to their mutually-dependant relationship, they are actually different parts of one organization. They 'inter-are'. In opening up to the magnitude of interdependency between sentient beings, and other aspects of our world, we can not only appreciate the role of our bodies in a mutually environment, but also experience this connection more fully.

Interbeing, if confined to a conceptual realm, has little impact on our lives. However, if applied, it can form a foundation for experience. This same feeling is also true for our senses. However, the prevalent aspects of many forms of human interaction with our world tend to forget this interdependency. Thus, it is like forgetting that our body parts are connected to one whole. So, as our planet, as proposed in Gaia theory, is seen as a single organism, so are our senses as sensory appendages of an indivisible consciousness acting as part of our natural environment<sup>21</sup>. An example of one object in a sense, being through another was discovered in the late 1980's which involved the relationship between the oxidation of ocean algae and the creation of cloud formations which alter weather formations which then feedback on amount of algae creation<sup>22</sup>. When looked at through the lens of interbeing, when seeing a cloud, at least near certain coasts of the world, you can also see the algae, if not also the factors causing environmental shifts spawning the algae's growth. If seen as a body, the earth then could be said to be regulating it's own temperature to an optimal degree for life to sustain itself as it currently exists. It is through this interconnectedness in biological action that visual

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19 Hanh, p. 9

20 Hanh, p. 3

21 J. Lovelock (2003, December 18-25). The living earth. *Nature*, 426, 769-770.

22 Lovelock, p. 769

culture can imply a sensory culture in which the traditional divisions between the senses seem more arbitrary in their use of influencing how external stimuli are experienced. As a sensory culture, our experience can be looked at as an experience of touch culture, with our senses serving as equal means to interact with our surroundings<sup>23</sup>. By viewing planetary life as an overarching state of being in itself, we can see an analogy to viewing touch as a state of experience in a similar manner.

Touch culture can then be defined as a singular sensory experience with which we interact with our surroundings. However this singular experience of sensory touch could have multiple faces, all reflecting different aspects of this experience though different bodily orifices and sensations. Even though the term is an idea in itself, touch culture may best be made applicable to the lives of those who study it, by it being lived and experienced outside the realm of theory and idea. In this way, it is a useful conceptual vessel, which while allowing freedom from traditional methods on sensory conceptualization, must also never lose it's branding as a concept in itself and must eventually be disembarked from when approaching the phenomena it points to.

In similar spirit, the terms culture and nature cannot be experienced if being named. This is a core component to many mystical traditions around the world, and is no less so in the use of Zen in Japan, and western countries. For example, in writings on Zen in Japan and China, recognizing the essence of something, whether it be a rock, your shirt, a bird, or your self depends on a not-knowing, which requires an openness antithetical to the knowing-closeness which results from labeling or naming an object in the environment<sup>24</sup>. Perhaps naturally, conceptual thought is therefore viewed as taking us away from the reality of experience in the present moment, though like touch culture, it can sometimes provide a useful function.

In these spiritual and philosophical traditions, sound is often used a way to bring one into a state of presence, or being completely within and part of the moment<sup>25</sup>. While other aspects of sensory experience, such as olfactory, and visual, have been used to bring one into a state of immediate, unknowing being, sound has often been used towards this end in creative and spiritual practices, as well as activities in our daily lives which could be considered more mundane.

Examples of people being brought into this present moment can be found in various ways throughout contemporary society in Japan and the rest of the world<sup>26</sup>. While the auditory aspect of

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23 A. Watts, *The joyous cosmology: Adventures in the chemistry of consciousness*. Holy Books, retrieved 19, April, 2012. [http://www.holybooks.com/wp-content/uploads/joyous\\_cosmology.pdf](http://www.holybooks.com/wp-content/uploads/joyous_cosmology.pdf).

24 A. Watts, *The philosophies of Asia*. (pp. 1-97). Tuttle Publishing, North Clarendon, 1999, p. 20.

25 Looi, p. 171

26 Watts, (1999), p. 61

sensory experience is not the only way to induce this experience, it serves as a worthwhile method of study. Sound, culture, and nature, are dependent on our bodies for their synchronizing and actualization beyond concept. Without feeling the rush of air, or booming sound, or sight of a falling tree, how could we know that it exists? Thus, while sound can bring one out of a state of preoccupation with the conceptual past or future, it also exists in the present moment. Our temporally-bound bodies allow this interpretation and appreciation, and our thinking minds create a concept of time that was, and that will be. This experience also seeks a kinship with the visual (in its current dominance in contemporary culture) through seeking an expansion of our awareness as an all-inclusive touching of our sensory culture<sup>27</sup>. Just as we tend to forget the interconnectedness between shirt, maker, sun, and wearer, we also tend to forget the interconnectedness between what the senses offer at any given moment<sup>28</sup>. Doing so may allow us to feel more deeply, and bring forth a greater, active participation in our world.

The case for studying sound here includes within it a motivation for making us more fully aware of our natural sensory responses to our surroundings. As sounds are generally more fleeting than visuals, they have a way of waking us up to the present moment, and inducing a state of awareness of what is happening in our bodies, and in the visual sphere as well. Nature, as it is concerned in this paper, will be looked at from the typical view of any biological construct apart from the human body. However, it will also be viewed in a way that takes note of ephemeral processes of birth, decay, rebirth, and so on. Looking at nature in this way can show how we integrate thematic, or reoccurring aspects of sound culture, with the biological world, or one revealing ephemeral processes.

Just as the interconnectedness of natural-processes and culture can be revealed, so can sensory aspects of sound and visuality. While looking through a lens similar to that described above, on a macro or microcosmic level, it can be easy to attach to the perception that visuality is unique, housed in our brains and eye sockets, and separated from other aspects of sensory experience. However, this is where sight departs from vision. Studies into the aural blindness effects of synesthesia have revealed that seeing is not necessary done with the eyes, but what could be interpreted as an act of awareness from the brain itself<sup>29</sup>. This correlates well with the written aspects of many spiritual practitioners, including Looori, who state that seeing is not done with the eyes, but rather within other physical sensations. The absence of this awareness happens when we think conceptually that we know

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27 Schafer, p. 11

28 Hanh, p. 21

29 Marks, L. E. (2000). *Varieties of Anomalous Experience: Examining the scientific evidence*. (pp. 121-149). Washington D.C: American Psychological Association, p. 122.



something<sup>30</sup>. His well known book of photographs and photographic theory and practice, 'Seeing with the Ear, Hearing with the Eye' and 'The Zen of Creativity' is an attempt to not only show the creative visual results of such a practice, but to teach that practice itself. This practice is similar to that espoused by Schafer in his efforts to promote 'ear cleaning' exercises into our daily routine<sup>31</sup>. This cleaning involves several methods helping people to pay better attention to the sonic limits of sounds in their environment, as well as the spaces between expected sounds<sup>32</sup>. This is similar to east-Asian meditation practices involving the use of bells and gongs, and like them, promotes an experiential awareness of sounds. In recognition of similar motivations in these academic and spiritual traditions, one can see the potential therapeutic effects on individuals who participate in these presence-producing practices, and on society itself. In postulating that the eye is an organ of 'touch' just as much as the ear and hands, Schafer joins a host of other writers and critics who experience reality in this way. This word, "reality", itself Gumbrecht addresses as a contemporary taboo in Western academia, perhaps just as examining the auditory in a paper concerning 'visual culture' might very well do<sup>33</sup>. If desired, this topic can be debated ad nauseam to the joy of philosophers or those with, for lack of a better term, a thinking habit, if not a full-blown addiction. However, that is not the main point of this paper, as Gumbrecht and Schafer surmise, taboos exist to limit or frighten only in as much as they are inherently respected as permanent and absolute.

### *Part 2: Senses as Touch: Listening vs. Hearing and the role of presence/experience*

When looking at what can be touched through staying aware of the sensory inputs around us, it is important to look first at how senses themselves are different aspects of touch, and then at the role that experience itself plays in touching what is around us at any given moment. Doing so will hopefully show how sounds, colors, and other stimuli normally of an ephemeral nature can provide the counterbalance to what Gumbrecht calls the creation of meaning, as opposed to a production of presence. The latter, he states, as being "non-interpretative" compared the former's emphasis on "hermeneutic concepts" when speaking of the essential, yet problematic need for a non-interpretative

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30 Loori, p. 115

31 Schafer, p. 208

32 Schafer, p. 213

33 Gumbrecht, p. 61

strain of discourse in the humanities<sup>34</sup>. This argument starts along the path towards revealing the existence of a state of being which concepts cannot touch<sup>35</sup>.

In the next few paragraphs, I hope to introduce this as a concept which, upon when fulfilling its purpose most effectively, short-circuits the discursive thought process. By doing so, I also hope to show how respect for and attention to experiential learning itself can be a catalyst for the creation of such a lived experience. In addition, taboo concepts such as 'reality' will serve not as a goal, but as an intrinsic motivation, which when acted upon, allows for all of the subsequent thoughts which will occur. In all, any claim to understand an experience, and to have it expressed adequately through words will hopefully be shown as ill-conceived and essentially illusory. Thus, this author would like to go on record stating that he does not, cannot, and never will 'understand' or master, through any actions he claims as his own, the essence of a truly lived auditory-touch experience. For as any experience primarily acting through interpretive thought cannot touch the essence of what presence through sound, color, and other sensory inputs give, it is hoped that all 30,000 of these words will be taken with an adequate grain of salt, msg, splenda, or whatever flavor-enhancer the reader prefers.

### *Part 2A: Listening as aspect of all-inclusive touch*

In listening to aspects of the non-human-manufactured world, we soon find that there are rhythms which seem entirely random to our ears. While the essential randomness of these processes could be debated further, what is presently important are how the sounds have a life unto them which is not controlled by any human endeavor, or at least includes parts of the human-made world into it's becoming of a soundscape of nature. When encountering this randomness of sound, the ears of the listener can also become aware of sounds that are emitted within the soundscape which could not necessarily be considered aspects of the original sound being listened to, yet also do not seem entirely separate. Thus, the sounds which are experienced could be felt as being equally valid aspects of a soundscape, while the act of listening in itself, as opposed to a disengaged hearing, is tantamount to touch. In fact, the sounds could also be felt as having an interdependency for their impact on human ears. This also has implications regarding silence, as a taboo and mythological concept.

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34 Gumbrecht, p. 52

35 Gumbrecht, p. 105

### *Part 3: Role of experience/presence: why important*

Many writers and theoreticians have pontificated-upon, interpreted-through, and yes, even put into practice their ideas of how experience can be designed in a way to influence or comment on human behavior, and how this experience shapes their perceptions. A seemingly diverse group of writers has tackled this subject in one way or another. This group includes the likes of Thakara, Shivelbush, and John Cage. However, writings by Metcalf, Loori, Nath Hanh, and Watts stress the innate disability of words to adequately describe an intuitive experience. While this will be talked about at length later on, the short article by Metcalf in the book *The Culture of Craft* shows this well. In it, he states the experience of first year art students in choosing their preferred medium to major in after trying all available materials. When asked to explain why they had decided on their major of sculpture, painting, and so on, most were unable to do so, instead citing an intuitive knowing which they gained through the physical experience of working with the material. Of course, this implies a sensory touching, yet also the inability for words to adequately touch the experience which they had had. Looking at the shaping of this experience can involve delving into many aspects of sensory experience<sup>36</sup>.

When looking at sensory experience as a form of 'touch', this can once again imply the sensitive nature to which we humans interact with the natural, as well as human-made stimuli in our context. To begin this investigation, we are given many relevant examples pertaining to aspects of visual, tactile and auditory stimuli. As the latter will often offer connections to the first two, examining the work of John Cage is an important place to begin. As it is likely many people involved in the world of the Humanities have heard of his groundbreaking piece 4:33, hopefully a general introduction to it will suffice. In short (VERY short), his piece uses the expectations of the audience for a piano to be played, yet, as the pianist remains poised, ever alert to follow the bars and turn the pages as planned, a perceptual and experiential switch is flipped for those present. In the four minutes and thirty-three seconds that follow, their role as only a hearing, and somewhat passive audience, metamorphoses into an intensified experience of active, engaged listening<sup>37</sup>. In this state, akin to a state of presence, the audience becomes the performer along with the pianist and the hypothetical air conditioner above them. Cage integrated music and environment with several pieces. In all occasions, all sounds emitted in the

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36 B. Metcalf, 'Craft and art, culture and biology', in P. Dormer (Ed.), *The Culture of Craft: Status and Future*. Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1997, p. 81.

37 Schafer, p. 5

soundscape become part of the piece, uniting the previous dualisms of sound and noise, as well as the social distinctions which are often carried along with the sources of the sounds produced inside and outside the music hall<sup>38</sup>. Even more intimate sonic sources, included voluntary sounds, like the nervous scraping of shoes on the carpet, or even involuntary bodily flatulence are equal in the work. One could argue that the emotional states brought on by this, whether amazement, horror, or rage spark their own intensified sounds, if only for the fast-beating heart of the experiencer and if lucky enough, a significant other within earshot of this bodily function.

Through this work, it is possible to gain insights into silence, or rather the myth of silence, in the face of constant sound. Interestingly enough, recognizing this seems to fly in the face of a taboo of silence typically found in western society which Schafer comments on<sup>39</sup>. He suggests that in western society, people need sound to remind them that they are not alone, and by doing so, denies what is perceived to be the impending silence accorded with a conception of death<sup>40</sup>. Certainly, socially, this is true. A common gripe that people in Japan have about westerners, and American's in particular is that they feel compelled to speak during a silent pause, thus ruining the non-verbal interaction which was happening. After living in Japan, I have noticed this urge in myself all the more, and when holding it in check, have henceforth noticed sounds and sensations of my company and the surrounding environment which before had gone unnoticed and unappreciated.

It is interesting how this acknowledgment of a false silence, or rather, space between reactive words allows us to hear and touch. This also plays into the expectations we carry into our work and casual lives. Not attaching to ceaseless thoughts, but seeing how they are just a stream of continual movement, coming and going, allows us not to grasp at them and simultaneously experience them<sup>41</sup>. Like looking at water gives the feeling of being always the same, yet always moving, so does silence come into our lives in such a similar realization of how not only our minds work, but also the sound-emitting elements of our bodily and social soundscapes in the forming of orthographic language connections to natural elements, and the linguistic and physical gardens we design around them<sup>42</sup>.

#### *Part 4: Looking for Keynote sounds or Sound themes to enable this experience*

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38 Schafer, p. 111

39 Schafer, p. 256

40 Schafer, p. 256

41 Schafer, p. 18

42 Schafer, p. 155

In navigating contemporary society, it helps to pay attention to the sensory inputs which help form our sensory experience of walking its streets, eating its food, or riding its buses. When doing so, with an intention of being present with the experience as it is happening, we can slowly become aware of certain themes for different aspects of sensory experience. In his book, Schafer refers to oft repeated sounds in music and society as keynote sounds<sup>43</sup>. In his opinion, these sounds might not always be heard in a society, but they are ever present nonetheless. Often of an ambient nature and not unlike light and color, these sounds could also subtly affect the mental and emotional state of those populating those areas. For example, in a small fishing community next to the ocean, a keynote sound might be that made by water lapping up against the shores or along inland canals<sup>44</sup>. In contrast, for the people in lower Manhattan, a keynote sound might be the ever-present hum of electricity coming from lights, conductors, or other apparatuses. These sounds often form an unrelenting and stable backdrop to people's lives, and combined with other sound themes, a personal conception of their environment relevant to the topic at hand, which layers on top of the keynote sound. If missing, the lack of a keynote sound might alter a person's experience within that context in subtle yet profound ways. In contrast, a sound theme would be one such as the reoccurring sound of water, perhaps several times throughout one's day or week. This does not necessarily provide a consistent background to one's daily experience as is often the case in coastal fishing communities in Japan. A sound theme then, would not necessarily be as ubiquitous or ever-present as a keynote sound, yet would still be audible, and potentially more easily noticed.

With this concept in mind, it is useful to see what contemporary life in several parts of Japan would reveal regarding either a keynote sound, or sound themes. In addition, it is helpful to see what corresponds visually to these themes. However, this process of noticing the repeated sounds poses challenges. First of all, how does one experience and record data at the same time? This predicament is central to how we live day to day within our bodies, our homes, on our streets, and so on. Becoming mindful or aware of what auditory and visual themes are happening at any given moment relies largely on the experiencer's ability to remain present within the experience. While the experience is happening, it is possible to hear, see, smell, and touch, but not to simultaneously think about it. Thus, through recording for later review, or through sheer patience to remain stationary, opportunities are given to review more fully what was heard in that particular time and place.

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43 Schafer, p. 9

44 Schafer, p. 59

## Chapter 2: Sounds and awakening in Japan: bells, birds, alarms, and the audio-visual buzz

### *Part 1: Fuke Zen and cultural issues*

There is a history of sounds being used to facilitate an experience of awakening. In East-Asia, the Buddhist philosophical and religious tradition has long stressed the importance of awareness to colors, sounds, bodily sensations, and the movements of the mind. In this tradition, paying attention to these attributes puts one in accord with reality; what is happening at any given moment. Through this, practitioners could experience a way of being that did not include an ego-identified self, which they saw as the primary cause for a separation from reality and causing delusion, or a dualistic perception. As this tradition made its way from India, to China, to the Korean peninsula, and on to Japan, it found a fertile nesting place with which it could be integrated into the culture on the whole<sup>45</sup>.

Waking people up came to take two primary roads, one gradual and the other immediate or sudden. The sudden schools of thought came to include sects of Buddhism such as Rinsai and Fuke, which used a variety of methods to bring their practitioners into a state of presence<sup>46</sup>. Some of these methods revolved around the response to sensory stimuli, such as the auditory. Due to its very temporal nature, sound was considered a useful tool in this process. As the same sound cannot be continuously felt in the way as the seemingly static lines or color of a painting, it means that to experience it, one must be present with it, outside the normal confines of intellectual thought. This makes the analytical process revolving sound themes and keynote sounds in this paper, not so much an intellectual inquiry, but rather the setting of a stage for an experience. While sounds could be heard and thought about simultaneously, if listening, in a state of calm alertness, there could be no space for thoughts to arise. As such, sounds became a way for Buddhist practitioners, or those who were merely exposed to the sounds to realize the moment, free from identification with their thinking minds<sup>47</sup>.

One Buddhist sect in particular has used the soundscapes found in any location towards the goal of enlightening its practitioners and others. The Fuke sect, which appeared in Japan the better part of a millennium ago, believes blowing meditation to be the most fruitful way to realize enlightenment. Monks of this order traditionally have worn baskets over their heads, in an effort to

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45 Loori, p. 4

46 Loori, p. 116

47 Loori, p. 117

listen more intently on the sounds of their surroundings. They then wander aimlessly, channeling the sounds that they experience into the rhythm and tones of their breath, which they continuously blow into a bamboo flute called a Shakohachi. The motivation for this practice is to play the single note that will enlighten themselves and the world simultaneously. To do so, they must be aware of and reactive to their environment in a highly sensitive and disciplined way<sup>48</sup>. It is this which serves as a metaphor for how people can relate with their surroundings within a state of present being coupled with a compassionate intention.

This compassionate intention can make itself felt in various examples of how sound and visuals are used in response to the earthquake and tsunami of March, 2011. The first to be examined regards the use of sounds in contemporary Japanese society, and will be looked at using the concept of keynote sounds and sound themes. Contemporary Japanese cities are not unlike many other urban areas of the world. They consist of many sounds which are repeated in so many different contexts that they in effect, could become inaudible, or 'white noise' to those who've become victims of their own mental chatter<sup>49</sup>. While the search for a keynote sound may be elusive, after spending eight months in the Tokyo area, certain themes did start to reveal themselves in the process of paying attention to auditory stimuli. Two such themes which have revealed themselves in Japan include the alarm and the bell. These two themes have similar, and often interchangeable sounds. However, the methodology for determining which belongs into which conceptual category depends rather on the response of the listener to each sound.

## *Part 2: Bells*

The bell has a particular place in ancient and modern-day societies found worldwide. Hints of its role in society can be gleaned through visual examination, as well as through the manner in which it is employed to interact with human ears. The quality of the sound is yet another matter in itself. The bell traditionally has a curved appearance containing an large opening underneath through which its sound escapes. The nature of this sound is of a multi-directional quality, which allows the sound to be perceived more or less evenly regardless of longitudinal direction in relation to the bell. The nature of this sound, in contrast to the direct, piercing sound of the siren or horn, is reminiscent of a certain

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48 Loori, p. 116

49 Schafer, p. 98

feminine quality<sup>50</sup>. The shape of the bell can also evoke femininity in the curvature of its shape. In encompassing a striker within its midst, it needs this tool to fulfill its purpose. Unlike the western cosmological idea of a god breathing life into the object to fulfill its function, the bell is already sound itself, waiting for itself to sound.

The sound of a bell does not necessarily indicate trouble of an unpredictable nature, but rather an inwardness of experience. This is implied in part by its usage in spiritual or religious traditions around the world. Helped by its own sonic qualities, it is used to call people together, rather than to disperse them in terror. However, in regards to mindfulness and presence, these two attributes could evoke a similar state of being.

In tactile terms, the visuality of the bell with its curved circumference, or its Asian counterpart, the gong, can elude to the all-inclusivity of its sonic qualities, as well as its social role. In bringing people together for spiritual services, the bell reveals its purpose for including all who enter to heed its call. However, this inclusivity has aspects which relate to a mindful quality, as well as concerning the radical acceptance of all other sounds. This acceptance of other sounds can spring forth through the actual state of mindfulness which the bell traditionally implies in many Asian societies.

The predictable nature of these sounds can also have a calming affect on the listener. Through receiving a specific and predictable sonic signpost, the listener can be reminded of a particular event, and often of something that is held dear. This can also be similar to the use of alarms, in how it signals a heightened state of temporal awareness. However, as bells are usually used in a predictable fashion, they bring the listener to a state of awareness within an unsurprised, yet still conscious state of mind. This experience of encountering a return to the present moment, can be akin to aspects of spirituality indicated by Fuke Zen practice and others around the world.

As already mentioned, bells themselves are often equated with this role of producing an awareness of the present moment, whether it be noon or otherwise, in temples and churches. This can be seen with the various calls to prayer, meditation, or contemplation that exist within various spiritual traditions. However, examples pertaining to modern-day secular society fit as well. These bells represent the newer churches, whether to the Yen or otherwise, and can be found throughout contemporary Japanese society. However, the role of mindfulness, and awareness of the thoughts, feelings, and sensations being experienced in the present moment is directly related to sound in its fleeting beauty. Perhaps it would be relevant to mention that this is not exactly the type of experience

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50 Schafer, p. 177



which is being talked about by Gumbrecht. In his book, he hints at the value of materiality for housing an awareness of presence of being. However, he also seems to suggest that there is a role for abstraction of thought in producing this feeling through his coined phrase 'being in the world'<sup>51</sup>. Regardless of the intentions of this concept, as there is a world which can be in and thus implying the possibility of being out of (and assuredly separated from), it still implies a dualistic notion of self in relation to world. In doing so, he thus handicaps the achieving of his stated desires to reestablish our contact with things of the world outside the subject/object paradigm. He is trying hard to get at an essence of being which he later refers to in his analysis of appreciating Noh (a classical form of Japanese theater), yet this is not possible as long as there is room for a separate experiencer to analyze these appreciations. Therefore, a better expression would be 'being the world'. This allows for an impersonal awareness and an experience of simultaneously being part of all your surroundings, as a dog's bark is part of the dog, and a bee is part of a flower; an awareness of the world yet also as the world itself. While traditionally the ultimate heresy in the west, this is the experiential stage that's been set for millennia in eastern mysticism. This is coined with the old Vedic expression, 'tat twam asi', or 'thou art that'<sup>52</sup>.

Thus, as in the west as Schafer claims, people need sound in order to reaffirm their existence, it is the spaces between the expected sounds in the east which often form the moments of intense presence. Thus, a temple bell or gong, could be presence-inducing through the original striking of wood on iron, but also through the intensified awareness existing as the tone fades into obscurity with the senses left hanging in the charged space left behind. This space, still full of sound, reveals the expectations of a mind plagued by sonic over-saturation and henceforth shows the necessity to wake up to what is occurring naturally, sonically, at any given moment<sup>53</sup>. As an awareness grows of the expectations for sounds to arise, the senses are left in a position like that of the audience member at a performance of 4:33. It leads one to imagine the ecstasy and horror of realizing the bell-like potential of what exists in the space created<sup>54</sup>.

Regarding awareness (also often called 'presence' in writings on mindfulness and/or Buddhist philosophy) and how it is incorporated into everyday life from moment to moment, analytical thought is often dismissed as an obstacle for experiencing presence as implied by this expression. Presence in this context is akin to the taboo-ridden term 'reality' itself. Forgetting the fundamental immateriality of

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51 Gumbrecht, p. 66

52 J. Campbell, *Myths to live by*. Compass Books, Middlesex, 1972, p. 74.

53 Loori, p. 153

54 Schafer, p. 257

thoughts, and thus following them to the exclusion of what is being experienced or observed in the mind and through the body, is the definition of suffering, or a recession from reality<sup>55</sup>. In applying what is consistently proclaimed about the relationship between conceptual thought and sensory perception to the auditory, the listener cannot simultaneously think about the sounds being heard, and also hear them<sup>56</sup>. Thus, the listener must choose to be consciously aware of what is happening in each moment as the sound is present and sounding. East-Asian meditative traditions are not the only culturally-specific sphere to recognize the importance of cultivating this type of mindful awareness. However, they have a long history of using sounds in the production of an awareness of what is happening in this moment. The production of mindfulness and the bell can be found as a theme in writings by Thich Nath Hanh, and others. An underlying theme in many including Nath Hanh, Watts, Loori, and Schafer himself connects bells with sacred noise<sup>57</sup>.

At this point, it is useful to pause for a moment and return to Cage and Gumbrecht and to briefly see if the above example fits in with their experience of presence. Indeed, he and Gumbrecht were both influenced by the awareness inherent in Zen practice. While Gumbrecht remains attentive to the place of meaning-creating discourse in a well-rounded appreciation of this presence, he also wisely notes the kitchiness of western intellectual fascination with zen practice<sup>58</sup>. However, in stating his desire to promote a type of presence that does not seek to 'possess' or to 'hold on(to)', he comes closer to the mental states necessary to simply be with an experience as it unfolds. In his account of experiencing Noh, he states “But if you overcome the first impulse that is likely to come up in a Western spectator, if you resist the wish to leave the theater after the first half hour or so, if you have enough patience to let the slowness of emerging and vanishing of form and unformed presence grow on you, then after three or four hours, Noh can make you realize how your rapport to the things of this world has changed. Perhaps you even begin to feel the composure that allows you to let things come, and perhaps you cease to ask what these things mean-because they seem just present and meaningful. Perhaps you even observe how, while you ever so slowly begin to let things emerge, you become a part to them<sup>59</sup>.” This experience is the same as that of being present with sound. When listening in this way, there is no duality between you and the sound itself. After this passage, Gumbrecht is also wisely reluctant to comment in depth on how the presence evoked from Zen practice influences his life,

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55 Watts, (1999), p. 73

56 J. Blofeld, *The Zen Teachings of Huang-Po: On the Transmission of Mind*. Grove Press, New York, 1994, p. 33.

57 Schafer, p. 183

58 Gumbrecht, p. 149

59 Gumbrecht, p. 150

teaching practice, and intellectual activity. By showing this hesitancy, he protects the integral core of this practice of presence. In attempting to describe the roles of sounds, visuals, or other sensory stimuli through conceptual thought, he would violate the very experiential truths that refraining from such thought reveal. Of course, from the sheer length of this paper, one could also question any potential experience on the usefulness of silence which this author himself has had!

Cage, in his personal experience on the myth of external silence, and from exposing the fiction of walls that divide performer from performance, and music from sound, helps to enable this same experience which Gumbrecht in the end of his text protects through his refraining to comment in much further detail about his experience of presence<sup>60</sup>. Both of these people, in addition to Loori, reveal the ways in which a mind unaccustomed to respecting such an awareness comes to grips with integrating this as an applied practice to their chosen professions. This is something that Thich Nath Hanh and other practitioners who have strong support for this experience within their cultural backgrounds and present-day communities must deal with, yet not in such a justifiably obvious manner. As such, their experience of actualizing this state of being can help to deepen a potential resolve - for those of us living within different cultural conventions - to use sound and/or academia to produce such an experience.

### *Part 2A: Bells in contemporary Japanese society: Reminders*

The presence of the bell in contemporary Japanese society is ubiquitous - from the sounding of actual bells or gongs, to sounds produced by other mechanisms which fulfill a similar purpose. When considering the role bells play in this society, we can separate the actual bell object at times from the function that its sounds play. Thus then, not only do the gongs or bells of temples serve as consistent reminders of a temporal occurrence, but in a similar light, so do other objects - a wood block in a temple, or the playing of an Erik Satie piece in a public space at a predictable time each day. This effect of this music itself and its background ambiance of bird calls in promoting quietude or relaxation amongst young children fresh out of school seems to be in accordance with the intentions of its creator<sup>61</sup>. [*Please listen to track 1 of the cd.*]

Regardless of their form, bells help to form the emotional stability of those in a society. They

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60 Gumbrecht, p. 149

61 J. Cage, *Silence: Lectures and writings by John Cage*. Hanover, Wesleyan University Press, Hanover, 1973, p. 76.

are usually predictable, thus occurring at predetermined times of day. This happens in both urban and rural areas of Japan. For example, the striking of a large temple bell each afternoon can be heard in urban and rural temples alike. In addition, the sounding of prerecorded chimes at the arrival of an on-time train, which the vast majority of Japanese trains are, can fulfill this same function. Even at elementary and middle schools, a predictable piece of classical music is played at the same time each morning and afternoon, marking the beginning and end of yet another school day.

### *Part 3: Alarms*

Alarms can be found in many locations around Tokyo. Ranging from police sirens to fire alarms, it first seems rather unlikely that anyone could become accustomed to these sounds to such a degree that they become like the 'white noise' keynote sounds. Indeed, this seems to defeat their purpose for existing. However, when paying attention to them more closely, we can see their existence in many more ways than were initially noticeable. One example of an alarm which may not be necessarily noticeable in comparison with a fire alarm can be heard when walking in a traditional garden in Tokyo or elsewhere in Japan. If doing so, you might hear a simple knock of the water instrument called the *shishi-odoshi*, or 'scare deer' as translated into English<sup>62</sup>. This instrument uses flowing water to help make its sound. By slowly filling up with water, it can then tip over, releasing that water, henceforth making a small knocking sound on a stone underneath. As its name implies, this instrument's original purpose was to scare deer. However, while possibly alarming and scary to deer, it can be considered relaxing and awakening to human ears, and thus have bell-like qualities. This sound has similar aesthetic qualities to that produced by the *shakohachi* flute. Both originate in proximity to the arts of Zen experience. However, let us pretend that we are deer for a moment, and allow the alarm to fulfill its intended scary purpose, or to possibly produce a different effect.

### *Part 3A: Alarms, Cell phones, Earthquakes, and shared spaces: A Decreasingly Rude Awakening*

Other than fire alarms, there seem to be a deficit for alarms in the way that we would normally expect

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<sup>62</sup> *Shishi Odoshi (Detail)*, retrieved 19, April, 2012, <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CzGeaBjZjpg&feature=related>>

in Tokyo. For example, there are not many cell phone sounds. When traveling by train or other public transportation in the city, the vehicles and stations themselves are adorned with advertisements proclaiming the importance of turning off cell phone ringers, and setting them onto vibrate out of consideration for the shared silence of the ride. These advertisements often include a pictorial element in addition to text. Visual representations often show dissatisfied people glaring at a noisy phone, thus emphasizing the role of politeness and socially-correct behavior. Other illustrations show a gyrating phone behind the ubiquitous red circle with a slash through it, symbolizing in color and form what 'no' means. Compared to the red circle, the symbolism in the first representation carries with it more cultural-specific undertones in how it seems to induce shame on the offender. However both representations can communicate the point to an outsider, who, while linguistically-illiterate, can still follow the visual and auditory cues of the advertisements as well as the actions of others.

In actuality, in public spaces, hearing the ringing of cell phones has recently come to signal a different event. All throughout the country and territorial waters of Japan, sensors have been placed to monitor their local environment for movement caused by earthquakes. If felt, these sensors, in conjunction with others throughout the region rely information towards the central administration tasked with earthquake monitoring. There, the information is compiled in a way which can determine the exact epicenter of the quake, and to estimate the arrival of the tremor in any potentially affected area. The agency works in conjunction with many major cell phone companies to broadcast a specific ringing sound in the phones of many users. This ringing sound is used for only this purpose, and is set to override any polite phones set to vibrate only. Unless located near the epicenter of the quake, the hearers of this particular sound can then expect the vibrations to begin within anywhere from a few seconds to half a minute and must prepare accordingly.

Although seeming somewhat ironic that overriding the politeness of vibration, or manner mode on some phone models can help one to prepare for the terrible impoliteness of having the ground beneath one's feet shake violently, the alarm, or siren fulfills its intended purpose. Its purpose, not unlike a bell sound, is to notify, or broadcast in this case, that danger is imminent. In this, it also notifies or wakes up the potential listener in a similar manner to a bell. However, the latter often carries with it anxieties or other emotions not necessarily conducive to attentive presence. Even so, this should not necessarily distinguish the possibility for presence creation as being inherently different between the two sound themes. Both alarms and bells can have the ability to touch the listener in a way that, regardless of expectation, puts the listener in a heightened space of awareness. This is

especially true as in connection with low frequency sonic vibrations. The crack and rumble of thunder, cathedral organs, the cacophony of machinery, or quakes can all serve to produce an awareness of self in relation to non-self, or the divine<sup>63</sup>. In this sense, these alarms, in their wakeful properties are aspects of sacred noise just like the bells in Zen temples across Japan. In addition, as an attentiveness can be held and acted within even the most stress-inducing situations (from personal experience, strict Zen communities included), the result of such a sonic input in inducing a state of presence is largely dependent on the reaction and motivation for wakefulness of the listener and their ability to utilize the sound to put them in greater contact with their surroundings. Thus, presence, in its resistance to ultimate conceptual bracketing or definition, exists as an inherently non-dual experience.

Encountering such a sensory trigger, can henceforth allow for an awareness of ways that the auditory and visual sensations co-exist within the object itself. According to Schafer, the physical shape of the alarm, siren, or horn tends to project certain authoritarian aspects onto those who come into sensory contact with it<sup>64</sup>. For example, the shape of the siren tends to be longer and concave at one end, projecting an intensified stream of sound out of it's larger opening. As such, it allows listeners in one direction to hear it's call more clearly. As one end is closed and the other open, it also resembles the interior and exterior qualities of an open mouth. However, the mouth shape it copies also implies that something is being said from one person to another. Also, as this sound is highly directed in one direction, it can be assumed that this siren is yelling something in the direction of the listener. This yelling can therefore have authoritative undertones in that it signals the importance of what is being said. The listener is being talked 'at' by the alarm, and not necessarily 'to'. Conversely, as Schafer points out, the inviting, curved, shape of the bell seems to have no edges, and thus is as all-inclusive in shape as it is omnidirectional in its sonic message<sup>65</sup>.

This aggression can also be related to the ringer on cell phones. While cell phone ringers can normally be seen by society as an act of aggression towards the ears and quietude of others sharing the space, the aggression of a single-pointed and highly audible stream of sound in proclaiming the advancement of oncoming tremors could be seen as a compassionate and welcome act of aggression. Although the tiny, yet wide open mouth of the speaker is remotely reminiscent to the traditional siren, the uniqueness with which it sounds fulfills its desired objective. By remaining a welcome taboo in popular society, the alarm in this manner wards off impending disharmony by fulfilling its role as a

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63 Schafer, p. 115

64 Schafer, p. 175

65 Schafer, p. 177

harmonious working of auditory society faced with the natural unpredictable occurrence of the earth's trembling<sup>66</sup>. If focusing on the alarms ability to wake the listener into a state of awareness of such natural occurrences, this awakening could be seen as less rude than essential. However, let us pretend that the earthquake alarms, and the tremors themselves have come and gone. If we can remain on the train platform for just awhile longer, we will hear another sound which reminds the urban dweller of the biological world, and its natural processes. The sound of birds. Through natural or human-manipulated means - or a combination of both - bird songs, in consistent, high frequency doses can have a drone effect. By producing a consistent keynote sound. birdsong serves as an auditory backdrop to people's experiences such as in and around Yoyogi park in central Tokyo. *[Please listen to track 2 on the cd.]* However, in other areas of the city, a more ubiquitous potential keynote sound goes largely unnoticed.

#### *Part 4: The scape as audio-visual and the Electronic Buzz*

Another aspect of the contemporary soundscape in urban centers of Japan deals with the fact that Japan stems from the fact that such a large amount of electricity is required to run its society. Indeed, after spending a short time in an area of central Tokyo, one can become aware of a distinct hum of electricity. Conceptually-speaking, compared to bells and alarms which are better labeled as sound themes, this electronic buzz seems the most suited to Schafer's idea of a keynote sound. The production of this electricity was recently brought into controversy after the meltdown of several reactors in the Fukushima Nuclear power complex following the earthquake-triggered tsunami last March. This buzz is usually at a stable, yet only partially audible hum. However, it went through significant fluctuations in the weeks and months following the Fukushima disasters, as mandatory power-saving measures were implemented throughout Tokyo. As a result, buzz-emitting lights that used to remain light all night, if not during the day as well, were kept in darkness. This had significant effects on the soundscapes as well as the visual scapes of life for urban dwellers. Thus, the act of navigating areas traditionally associated with nightlife became quite a different sensory experience. This was true of my own experience walking the streets of once-bustling night-life areas as concerns over radiation exposure grew in the days following the explosions at the Fukushima power-plant.

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66 Schafer, p. 178

This new experience left people walking the still-crowded streets in relative darkness and, when apart from the crowds, in a perceptually quieter environment. One could argue that the cause of this quietness was due not as much to a less perceptual buzz than usual than to the more subdued and emotionally-heavy actions of the city residents. However, it could also be noted that the two could quite possibly be linked, if not in a causal relationship, than at least by one that has a common source, namely the change in normal audio-visual, and energy-use habits. The link between the auditory and the visual goes further here than the mere lack of electric current. A connection can also be made in the visual responses to this situation. Through this, a story unfolds which begins with the actions of the Tokyo Electric and Power Company (TEPCO), which has long held a monopoly on the production and distribution of electricity throughout the country.

*Part 4A : Creativity and Audio-visual empowerment: the Ponpon video-sound*

My personal experience can corroborate that the days following the explosions at the Fukushima power plant were tense to say the least. As there was a general lack of concrete information being released as to the amount of radioactivity in the air, this not-knowing had the potential to become increasingly stressful. In order to address concerns over its handling of the power-plant, TEPCO sponsored the continual showing of an advertisement on major television stations. This advertisement played a video of animated characters dancing to a popular childrens' song.

The song employed a very simple, catchy melody and an upbeat tempo. The mood of the song could be implied as cheerful, and its accompanying lyrics echoed this. What was not represented explicitly-visually in this video was that this video was sponsored by TEPCO. While the motives for doing this could be seen as intending to keep people's spirits up, due to the sheer frequency that it was shown, it also became somewhat analogous with the stress of the days immediately following the explosion. As the video was played in a near continuous fashion, it, along with continuous news coverage, became part of the experience for those viewing television in mid-March.

Despite of, and in a round-about way fulfilling the motivations of its sponsors, the advertisement spawned a popular parody. A Japanese pop star and production company took advantage of the ubiquitous nature of this song, and its obvious intention to soothe people's minds or emotions. As such, a video, labeled PonPon or PonPonPon was released parodying the initial song in melody and



rhythm<sup>67</sup>. Visually, the pop star was dressed up in similar playful and brightly-colored garb as the animated cartoon characters. Thus, through jest, she was able to respect the emotional intensity of the situation, while not being overtly serious or cynical in her song or video's intentions. This video enabled a more accurate interpretation of the general emotional state at the time. This emotional state, while at once reflecting deep concern and trauma, also showed a need to be light, not serious, while accepting of the gravity of the situation. As such, this reveals a very pertinent point regarding the need for people to accept what has occurred, yet not to wallow in the depths of despair. It could be said that this creative response also reflects the motivations for artists in other locations dealing with natural disasters, such as in New Orleans following the aftermath of hurricane Katrina.

*Part 5: In relation to elements of 'nature' and/or Bird-songs*

After spending several months in the Tokyo area, Mt. Fuji area, and rural Fukushima areas, other auditory themes started to reveal themselves. These themes revolved around the sounds of sirens, bells, knocks, chirps, rustlings, and continuous flows. These sounds could be grouped into certain categories which also represented themselves visually. An important case study in this regard is the sound of bird chirps which repeat itself in several situations in urban Tokyo. For example, it can be heard while crossing the street, getting on the train, waiting for a train, shopping in a department store, or strolling in the park. Many times, these sounds are artificially created. Sometimes, they are allowed to resemble their original state. If so, they are directly sampled from one or more birds chirping and are combined with other sounds like water flowing, or acoustic instrumental music, often using stringed instruments. For example, these bird sounds can be found in large scale department stores in Tokyo, or on train platforms when no train is present. These sounds often rely on relative silence, or a lack of other overbearing sounds to be heard.

Correlations between contemporary human society and that of elements of the bird world can be found in the way we humans have designed the experiences within which we live and interact. Schafer has thankfully made initial groupings of the kinds of calls birds make. He puts their calls into the general categories of pleasure, distress, territorial-defense, alarm, flight, flock, nest, and feeding, and goes on to mention how equivalents of these categories can also be found among human social sound-

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<sup>67</sup> *PonPonPon*, YouTube, 2011, retrieved 19, April, 2012, <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pb3IdLdIc6s>>

making<sup>68</sup>. Examples of certain categories easily reveal themselves in the human world, such as the use of car horns as territorial expressions, but also as alarm calls or distress calls. It is into this category that the shrill cries of cell phones before an earthquake fall.

*Part 5A: Example : Birds on the train platform: Sampled, therapeutic bells*

In the example of the sounds on the train platform, this silence is indicative of places where people are stationary, yet in transition. With no option to immediately be elsewhere than where they are, this is an opportunity for people to be with themselves. The sounds are therefore of a relaxing nature. It is now known that relaxing sounds have the ability to alter people's reactions in potentially stressful situations. For example, Delta airlines discovered several years ago that playing slow, instrumental classical music at a low volume when passengers boarded the airplane decreased the amount of time that it took for people to get ready for departure, as well as reducing complaints<sup>69</sup>. Personally, I have also noticed this when flying with Delta on the way to Japan to conduct this research. In these cases, passengers, myself included seem much more quiet and patient when stowing luggage and getting settled in their seat. For example, there is much less nervous chatter as people greet their temporary neighbors for the first time. However, it is not obvious how aware the passengers are of the low-volume music, or what direct affect it is having on their experience. Just like the passengers ready for take off, the people standing at the platform waiting for the next train are subject to a similar soundscape. *[Please listen to track 3 of the cd.]*

*Part 5B: Example : Birds in crossing the street: Kinder Alarms*

The sound of birds can be used in a slightly different context - to assist pedestrians crossing the street. In this context, the sounds of the birds chirping start slowly, as the shape of a walking man lights up as neon bluish-green. They then slowly increase in speed as the green man flickers, signaling a shortening amount of time for pedestrians to reach their destination. The sounds are site-specific due to

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68 Schafer, p. 33

69 D. Campbell & A. Doman, *Healing at the speed of sound: How what we hear transforms our brains and our lives from music to silence and everything in between*. Hudson Street Press, New York, 2011, p. 41.

their shrill nature, and are synchronized with the rhythm of the flickering green figure. They are not necessarily annoying enough to cause pedestrians to cover their ears, but just shrill enough to be easily heard among those who depend on them. As such, they are somewhat like an alarm. Indeed, the concave, open-ended shape from which these high-pitched chirps emanate, falls into line with the traditional shape of the horn<sup>70</sup>. However, the purpose of the sounds in an alarming role is not to produce a state of panic or flight, but rather a state of preparation with the intentions of the street-crossers still clear. Interestingly, in comparison to beeps, clicks, or ticks used in other parts of the world to signal a temporal response by street-crossers, they could still potentially be more pleasant to react to. *[Please listen to track 4 of the cd.]*

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70 Schafer, p. 178

### Chapter 3: Other Contemporary Uses: Natural Processes, Space and time, Color, Identity, Therapy

#### *Part I: Concerning the Earth and Natural Processes*

There are a multitude of ways in which the use of bird-songs and sound themes can be examined. The following include several which imply the importance of looking at these sounds from an interdisciplinary, as well as an inter-sensory perspective. As already mentioned, the use of bird-songs, alarms, and bells in contemporary Japanese society are useful in becoming aware of natural processes like earthquakes, bird-songs, and water flows. However, two other points are also important when analyzing this situation. The first is on the importance of Tokyo itself as an urban context, while the second pertains to the therapeutic aspects of the sensory awareness itself.

In looking at urban Tokyo in relations to this connection with one's natural-process surroundings, the work on early trains by Shivelbush comes to mind. In his, book Shivelbush states how contemporary or ordinary experiences of time and space were drastically changed by the use of modern-day technology. At that time, the train carriage itself served as a way to isolate passengers from their tactile feelings of the bumpy earth, which they had felt more easily when traveling by stagecoach. He states that with this new smooth ride came an increased sense of social discomfort, which people tried to compensate for by reading newspapers or other distractions. One can draw an analogy between those reports of disconnection and experience of modern-day life in Tokyo. As trains whip people here and there, and electricity is usually a 24 hour-a-day phenomenon, peoples connection to the earth via natural-process like sunrise/sunset, and the feeling of walking on soil is suspended. While this examination can be thoroughly debated and intricacies drawn out further, the fact is that a disconnection can be felt between the earth and it's natural cycles as experienced with the use of modern technology in an urban space, and with such perceived conveniences<sup>71</sup>.

Bird-songs, alarms, and bells have a way of bringing the listener into greater contact with the non-human-manufactured world around them, however they do so in different ways. They do so through the use of the sampling of sounds, as well as through using the natural-processes themselves in the creation of that sound, or in direct response to a natural-process itself. In doing so, time and space

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71 Schievelbusch, p. 77

are also distorted when the listener contacts the sounds.

In relation to the examples of Buzz, Alarms, Bells, and Bird-songs, all can be connected to an awareness of natural processes or occurrences. As already mentioned, cell phones can bring attention to the unpredictable nature of the earth's tectonic plates. In addition, bells can be used in a predetermined or predictable way to bring awareness to time. While it is in itself as artificial a construct as the term 'nature', if aligned with an occurrence such as the setting sun, this could also be used to bring awareness to something happening outside of the realm of human influence. The electronic buzz though, as a sound in itself, is primarily unnatural due to its consistent tone, devoid of noticeable dips or oscillations. As such, any description of the unnatural often carries with it a feeling of unwantedness in the mind of the experiencer, with the result being in this case a classification as noise instead of sound<sup>72</sup>. However, by serving, even unnaturally, as white background noise, largely unnoticeable to those listening for it, it brings itself into a functional alignment with other background sounds produced by a natural-process, such as the consistent roar of waves on the surf heard indirectly throughout a beach-side area or the electronic buzz in one of Tokyo's nightlife districts. By doing this, it becomes silent, as it may not always be consciously heard, and as such cannot be unwanted, thus leaving such classification up the mind of its discoverer.

### *Part 2: Acoustic space vs. visual space, and the sonic community*

Sounds have the ability to help wake us up from a perception of space and time that we have grown accustomed to in our society. When looking around, we can see even how our contemporary society has been designed around the visual aspect of touch or perception. Schafer notes how aspects ranging from the construction of visual space, through walls, barriers, neighboring tables in restaurants etc, tends to identify one with their personal, embodied space. However, out of direct sight-touch does not necessarily mean out of auditory-touch. To compensate for this auditory intrusion, we must often try not to notice the ways in which the sounds around us, often an intimidating cacophony of experience, are touching us. In doing so, we end up closing ourselves off from many auditory inputs and their beneficial aspects. While it may be useful to close ourselves off in this way, if attempting to listen to what our partner is saying several feet away, this has consequences in the lack of attention or focus

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72 Schafer, p. 182

with which we hear and relate to their words.

This brings in the need to examine Gumbrecht yet again, and his emphasis on presence, embodied through the act of focused attention. He talks of the need for the quality of meaning, in hearing what the others words imply while also laying the groundwork to take the concept of being out of the box and open to a potential broadening which could include intersensory awareness or a heightened awareness of one of touch culture's faces, such as sound<sup>73</sup>. Without focused attention in part made possible by the quality of our minds, unaffected by auditory pollution, the motivation for speaking is underscored to say the least. However, as we will soon discover, through the use of mindfulness techniques of which sound can be a medium, there are indeed no intrusive sounds, and indeed no such thing as silence. Through the work of John Cage and examples concerning the act of active listening, or paying attention, we can learn to use sounds (and other sensory stimuli such as color) as a way to open up to our world, and stepping out of an illusory box instead of shutting ourselves off our world inside of it. It is possible that when doing so, we can realize that we are having a continuous interactive conversation with our surroundings from moment to moment, of which our partner across the way is only a part.

#### *Part 2A: Sonic space and isolation/community*

In relation to space, the soundscape itself is usually limited to what can be audibly perceived. If being far enough away from a sound-emitting entity or object, the sound will of course be delayed at best, if not entirely inaudible. The border from where the audible becomes inaudible depends not only on its distance from the ear but also the nature of the sound wave itself. If emitting a constant tone, such as an electronic buzz, distance can be more easily measured as the consistency of the tone can be more or less trusted. Thus, the border for where the sound can be heard to alert ears, determines one's privacy and sense of being in relation to another entity. If a somewhat consistent sound is being shared by multiple parties, it thus helps to produce a sense of relationship between not only the sound-emitting object and the ears, but also between all of the bodies with ears sharing in that sound. Thus, the inclination to share or not share in this auditory space shines a light on social roles and their corresponding actions that these sounds inevitably exasperate or call attention to, such as the

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73 Gumbrecht, p. 67

inclination to embrace or dismiss the listening of the samples accompanying this paper by those in roles of a grader, casual reader, or the writer himself.

Generally-speaking, the rise in popularity of the personal music player and noise-canceling headphones can speak to a desire for people to be in a solitary soundscape. This is not unlike the examples again of Shivelbusch's analysis of the early train-riders journey, or the contemporary first-class airplane ride, where passengers are offered the use of noise-canceling headphones and eye-mask<sup>74</sup>. This assumption of isolation equaling comfort may have some pedagogical truth, yet may also mask a potential insecurity felt by those encountering a shared space where time and space are undergoing shifts. In the Japanese setting, this is true as much as elsewhere, yet also contains an awareness of a culture, already focused on preserving a sense of personal space physically, as well as sonically<sup>75</sup>. The motivation for this may be due to a need to avoid sonic confrontation in its verbal or more abstract qualities as much as physical confrontation. From the urban Japanese setting, the use of alarms, whether through people loudly announcing through speakers, a sale on sneakers, to passersby, or the use of cell phone ringers to declare an imminent earthquake, are largely impersonal, declaring, yet not conducive of communication. This impersonal aspect reflects a potential connection between intense auditory stimulation and the need for people to isolate themselves sonically in headphones<sup>76</sup>. While social critics may argue over the isolationist tendencies caused or reflected by personal headphones, the very fact that such devices - whether of the noise-canceling or music-playing variety - exist logically attest to the fact that people desire a sonic experience which helps to create, or correspond with a desired experience, rather than the one which they are given. In giving examples for how to become sonically present, Schafer's suggestion of a sound walk, an 'ear-cleaning' technique used to notice the connection of spacial properties of sounds through their perceptible borders, also brings an awareness of sonic space and potential empowerment to design one's own experience based on personal sonic preferences<sup>77</sup>. In addition to Schafer, even Gumbrecht himself wonders what could be gained by a stepping back out of the "technological and epistemological noise of our general mobilization" and into quietude<sup>78</sup>.

If sounds are used to bring people together within a mutually-shared soundscape, the results are quite different interpersonally. Examples in contemporary Japanese society can be seen at baseball

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74 Shivelbusch, p. 48

75 Gumbrecht, p. 78

76 Schafer, p. 208

77 Schafer, p. 212

78 Gumbrecht, p. 141

games, where the interaction between an announcers calling of the next batter's name, triggers the singing of a song for that player, which thousands of home-fans mutually share in. The relationship between these two sounds, the call of the name from the loudspeakers, and the response in song, are akin to many other sonic relationships, even if the response is in clapping instead of song. A slightly different relationship between a call and response of a mutually-shared soundscape can be the use of drum circles or the playing of a recorded song in public. This relationship can be found in the parks and other open public spaces in central Tokyo. Whether being a chance for people to congregate and listen as the song is played, or to join in the sound-making themselves, an aspect of communality is displayed and preserved through a shared space. For example, when entering Yoyogi park (the largest park in central Tokyo) on a Sunday afternoon, one can hear a rumbling cacophony of distant slaps, cracks, and bass-notes sounding from a, as yet unseen, drum circle. Whether considered a siren's song of warning, or a sonic beacon is up to each individual listener. However, if finding oneself in the latter camp, one can be witness to the use of such sounds within an audible space to produce a sense of community through a shared appreciation, and often creation of the rhythm itself. Examples of this can be seen in settings as diverse as church revivals, trance electronic performances, or music therapy sessions<sup>79</sup>.

Interestingly, Yoyogi Park is a haven for large groups of ravens, crows, sparrows and gulls. Their cacophony of calls, chirps and squawks, can serve as an auditory link to the train-stations and street crossings contained their sampled and/or manipulated auditory counterparts, which exist nearly within earshot. Whether through happenstance or intentional manipulation, this context for any contemporary flaneur or casual park-goer can provide a certain continuity between locations that mass-transit often leaves out, visually, or in other means as it zips people from one location to another in the city, country, or world. However, what this mix of bird calls do achieve, whether listening solely in Yoyogi park, or in wandering or a daily commute, is to create a background buzz to life in the city. As the sounds can be found in multiple locations, they are not dissimilar in their role to that the electronic buzz plays throughout town. The sounds of the birds, at least at the train stations, provide an easily recognizable auditory reference point for the listener in conjunction to the sounds usually-agreed-upon visual counterpart. To experiment, when at the station and closing one's eyes, the mind can create a series of visualizations based on the sounds of the birds.

For this writer, the visualizations often included staring up at a deep green canopy of bark and

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79 Campbell D, & Doman, A. p. 127



leaves, with birds fluttering back and forth and the branches swaying to the rhythm of an unseen wind. However, these virtual visualizations could in effect, be complimented by the visuals right in front of the listener. As the physical bird can itself be found singing in many of the same locations as the sampled song, such as in the station, or nearby as in the case of Yoyogi park, there is a visual theme to compliment the auditory buzz.

When hearing the bird-songs in so many locations, the sounds over time can not easily be noticed. For example, when asking several people in the park, or on the station platform, or at street intersections, some people show no prior awareness of the sounds, while others retained an 'oh yea' quality to their reply, saying that they knew about the sounds but no longer noticed them, having heard them so frequently. At first listen, the chaotic rhythm of the birds may seem to different from the consistent rhythms of the electronic buzz, or footsteps on pavement, the breaking of waves, or the beating of one's own heart. However, while not a scientific study by any means, the experience of these listeners suggests that an awareness can be made, then forgotten about, then returned to again within a framework that a consistent rhythm provides. Through a continuity of experience from location to location, these auditory and visual examples point to the importance of looking at space and even time in a new light concerning the auditory.

### *Part 3: Auditory time and Visual Time*

Within the discussion of Auditory space and visual space, there also opens a door to mention the role of time. Time is often a culturally-specific concept, thus bestowing certain attitudes for how the world itself is viewed and experienced by people in their respective cultures. However, differences do exist, especially as it pertains to the readers of this paper, presumably of a western cultural background, versus conceptions of time in traditional Japanese thought and experience. Delving into the depths of these apparent differences is a thesis, if not an entire book. However, in the interest of simplicity, showing the respect for impermanence of phenomena is of value when discussing the effects of sound on personal experience.

The Greek concepts of kronos and kairos time, or private verses public or shared time can be used to examine this issue, especially regarding the experience of the former as being in increasingly short supply for many people in the Western culture of my personal upbringing. As a whole industry of

energy drinks and kronos time-saving devices can attest, this experience of the pathological need for speed implies the lack of a state which would allow for a certain experience to happen that is seen as being outside the bounds of traditional kronos-based experience. This sense of lack brings one to wonder what side-effects chasing after these experiences causes in our awareness and appreciation of what is occurring now sonically.

This latter idea carries with it an emphasis on temporality which influences the practice of Fuke Zen Buddhism<sup>80</sup>. As a key tenet of Buddhist thought, a respect for this transience is not isolated to this cultural sphere alone, but is relevant to any tradition which respects, and to a certain degree yields to any processes outside the perceived world of human influence. As Watts states in *The Book on the Taboo Against Knowing Who you Are*, “The world is forever falling apart and there is no way of fixing it, and the more swiftly you grasp at this airy nothingness, the more swiftly it collapses in your hands.” So as it is with 'the world' in this description, so is it with our experience of sound and wondering how sound lends itself to graspability. Through sound-creating devices, we can possess the source, yet not the fleeting moment within which it exists. Along with other temporally-bound sensory experiences such as the colors of a sunset, or the first faint waft of spring, time cannot be grasped, or controlled, and for all practical purposes of experiencing reality, does not exist. As Buddhist thought often expounds, the past is dead, the future is an illusion, so what is left? Where is left for your mind to rest in this moment?

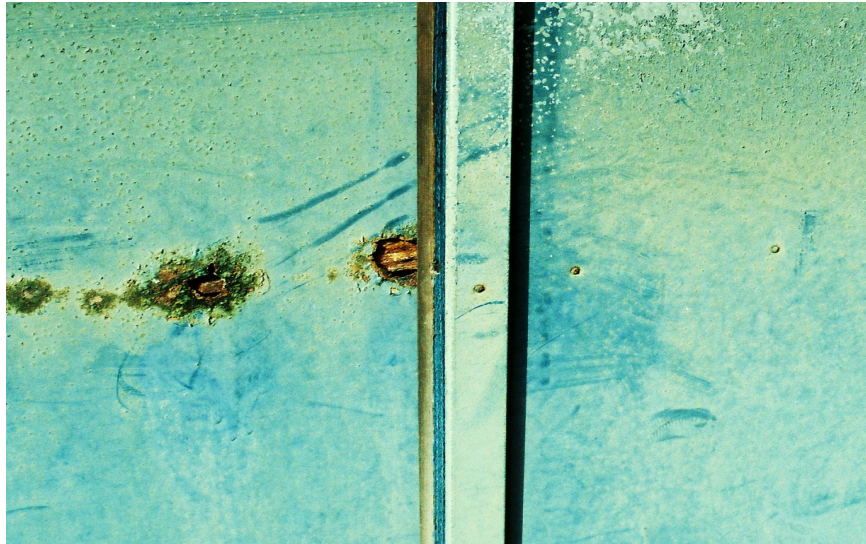
#### *Part 4: Connection with Visual Touch: color (color of lights and frequency of sounds)*

At this point, there seems to be a slight opening within which other senses can be examined as they relate to the aspects of time and temporality which have been discussed,. Having been personally trained as a painter, the perception of color is of particular personal interest, especially as it relates to sounds in a temporally-bound context in daily life. Thus, the temporal nature of color as it is used in the contexts described beforehand containing bells, alarms, and buzz can be a useful sense to note as it may show correlations with the use of sound in these settings. In the train stations, parks, and street crossings, there is one color of note that seems to exist sometimes in direct connection to, and at other times existing simultaneously with the sounds of birds. This faded cooling color exists part way

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80 Looi, p. 171

between the blue and green portions of the color wheel, and somewhat resembles a muted aqua.



*[photograph taken by the author]*

At train stations, this color often adorns railings, walls, forms the borders of signs, as well as rooftops of several station buildings where the bird-songs can be heard. In this latter location, rooftops and other surfaces where it is painted on metal which is exposed to the elements, the color is often in a state of decay or transition between its blue-green tone, and several hues of yellow, brown, deep purple, and black. This happens as the metal underneath is exposed to moisture or other elements, which then impacts the quality of the paint on top. As the metal rusts or changes its chemical consistency, so does it effect the visual properties of the paint which covers it. This fading of color initially seems disconnected to the sounds of birds. However, if looking more deeply into this process of transformation, the color could be said to exist in a temporal state akin to that of the sounds at the station, especially concerning those sounds which also change in length, depth, pitch, or overall intensity when wet, or with age. Together through following similar processes of transformative decay furthered by natural processes, these aspects represent the interbeing of color and sound in forming an intersensory experience of touch culture.

When crossing the street, this blue-green color also appears, however in a slightly different temporal manner. It appears in a circle forming the outline of a walking humanoid and filling in the space around him/her. This circle is not unlike those found in the western world in that it usually appears along with a circle containing a similar red light. However, when crossing the street, the color

blinks in a rhythmic pattern which phases in and out of sync with the rhythmic pattern of the bird-chirps. While there is rhythmic phasing between these two sensory stimuli, they synchronize themselves before ending abruptly. This signals the start of a blinking red light and the absence of the chirps, and tells pedestrians, blind and seeing alike that only ten seconds remain to finish their crossing. In this aspect, the relationship between color and sound is kronos in nature as it signals the need to adapt one's behavior towards awareness of the public need for time management<sup>81</sup>.

This blue-green (usually labeled blue in Japan) also lends itself to yet another example of how bird-chirps are used in daily life. However, this example is not necessarily confined to the geographic boundaries of Japan, but rather is loosely inspired by cultural boundaries. It concerns the computer program, Stillness Buddy, a computer-based tool to help users be mindful of the present moment. It responds to predetermined timetables programmed by the user by freezing the computer screen and showing a small box surrounded by a blue-green color which fills in the space around the box, just as the color does in the street crossing signals in central Tokyo. This program has a variety of different versions, each choosing one type of meditation, saying, teachings, or quote and gives the experiencer between 1 and 3 minutes to take a step back from their work, and focus on something else, such as their breath, their body, sounds, smells, or other sensory stimuli. After trying the program versions pertaining mindfulness mediation and to a famous book on Taoism (consequently the root the Zen teaching), I found that I was allowed to become much more aware of the quality of my breath in the moment, and to note how it changed, along with the quality of my thoughts in real time. This training, along with the quality and overall frequency of the color tone itself had a calming effect on me, not unlike the proposed purpose of bells.

### *Part 5: Stock Sounds, Music-making, and Identity*

As the examples pertaining to bird songs as bells, alarms, or even a background buzz show, sounds produced by non human-made elements, or elements of nature have made their way into daily experiences in Japan and elsewhere. This elsewhere can include direct forms of artistic creation, such as with music-making. In addition to a few musical acts which focus on live play and improvisation, it is not uncommon for electronic musicians and producers to include sounds of birds, water, or other

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81 J. Thakara, *In the Bubble: Designing in a complex world*. MIT Press, Cambridge, 2005, p. 48.

sounds of nature into a musical score. Sometimes, these sounds come in a form that seemingly copies the sounds of nature themselves. Whether this is intentional or unconscious is not the most important question to consider. The fact that they can potentially influence the experience of the listener as she/he interacts with the music, shows their usefulness. For example, when listening to the piece titled 'Beauty' by Japanese electronic music producer 'Koss', there is a section which slowly crescendos in the middle of the song to reveal sound of similar pitch, tone, and rhythmic intensity and variation to that of a group of birds calling in union<sup>82</sup>. As it has been created and implemented into a potential soundscape, these sounds are similar to the chirps heard when crossing the street in central Tokyo. However, the function of the sounds cannot be easily categorized into one of bell or alarm. In this sense, the sound is site-specific, and depends much on many interrelated factors concerning physical attributes of the context within which it is found, as well as the emotional qualities of the listener. It also relies on a potential interrelatedness between listener and context which interbeing suggests, as well as the patience-enabled presence which Gumbrecht describes through Noh theater.

Without speaking to Koss directly, it is not possible to know whether this was an intentional aspect of the composition, or even if it was a manipulated sound sample of actual birds instead of sounds made from other sources. This not-knowing could have multiple effects on the listener. One effect could be that the listener spends her/his energy trying to decipher the answer to this question, thus spawning a stream of thoughts which takes their attention away from the tonal qualities of the music, as well as the emotional or physical experience which they are going through in that moment. However, another possible reaction could be allowing the ambiguity itself. Through giving up trying to figure out the source of the sound, the listener can be put in touch with the aforementioned qualities. This same effect could be produced in the reactions of those hearing samples in other aspects of daily life, such as the bird chips in central Tokyo. Whether working on a conscious or unconscious level, the effect of the sounds, just as on the Delta flights could be the same.

As these contexts for the use of sampling show, there are a variety of ways in which it can be applied to music and contexts that could generally be seen as un-musical. This topic of something as musical versus unmusical is interesting enough to warrant a slew of theses, and which has been touched earlier in this paper within reference to Schafer's written work and compositions by John Cage, as well as the realization of the myth of silence. However, in speaking of Koss's piece, the effect that it has in that portion of the piece, at least for this listener, is to instill in the listener a deep appreciation

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<sup>82</sup> Koss (Kuniyuki Takahashi) – Beauty (Ancient Rain), YouTube, 2011, retrieved 15, February, 2012, <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=99dSvepncWw>>

for a rhythm found within the natural environment itself. In doing so, the sounds have the ability to give a conscious/unconscious insight into other rhythms found naturally in our day to day lives. Whether it be the heart beating in our chests, to the inhalation/exhalation of our own breath, hearing these rhythms can help us become aware of the other rhythms which continuously surround us in the creation of our lived experience<sup>83</sup>.

#### *Part 5A: An Applied Example: 'The Music Box'*

The use of sampled sounds in response to the temporal qualities of the reality we experience throughout our lives often catches us off guard and can potentially serve as a catalyst for sensory and creative awakening to serve these needs. When the earthquake and tsunami hit on 3/11, 2011, such an opportunity presented itself and sparked a simple investigation into creative responses in response to another recent environmental disaster which occurred in my home country, the U.S.A several years prior. In the months and years following the destruction caused by hurricane Katrina, several creative projects have emerged which allow for a both a creative response to the disaster, yet which also reveal potential therapeutic aspects for the people involved in it's creation and those whom experience it. While not necessarily labeled as art or music 'therapy', the projects hold this aim as an inevitable result of the work.

Constructed using bits and pieces of an old cottage which had been destroyed and dubbed a 'shantytown sound laboratory' by its creators, The Music Box carries with it the visual and sonic reminders of the destruction in the neighborhood, and city on the whole following the floods and winds from the storm. As music, from the Delta Blues to modern-day New Orleans Jazz, has served to help define New Orleans identity throughout the past several hundred years, the project plays a small role in the symbolic and physical recovery of this identity through it's simultaneous use as a stage and studio for performing. However, even more importantly, the series of small buildings which constitute the site also serve as a series of instruments in themselves. For example, as shown on the website Dithyrambalina, instruments have been designed to fit into the spaces provided by the buildings using local materials. These instruments and the sounds they produce range from the gurgling of a water organ, to a percussion set using industrial fans, to a room in which the floorboards and walls are played

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83 Schafer, p. 226

in a tonal percussive manner reminiscent of a series of a muted marimba. The site also contains instruments which interact more directly with the natural processes in the body, and with the weather. For example, there is a heartbeat triggered drum machine, which uses the body's natural rhythm's to create exterior rhythm's for others to hear. Along with a host of symbolic importance regarding the heartbeat and identity, this project reflects the mutually-dependent interbeing of body and sound. Thus, it has the potential to help all those who hear it to become more aware of their bodies, as well as the moment, shown by each beat as it passes<sup>84</sup>.

Lastly, the site contains an electronic oscillator which responds to the shifting weather patterns above the project. Showing the impermanence of weather itself, the constant E-drone chord which is produced is manipulated in a generative fashion. It never repeats itself and inter-is with the wind. Conforming with Pink's suggestions of inter-sensory importance when responding to exterior stimuli, this project would seem to be lacking without its visual aspects; bits and pieces of debris sown together in a patchwork style. In addition, the instruments were often constructed through the use of found materials. The tactile nature of the instruments is often unique, and reinforcing through yet another sense, the site-specificity of this work<sup>85</sup>. This shows a need to not only remember the disaster, but to create a space for healing and wonder through sound. The work corresponds to the identity of those having survived the disaster, and those who will be born in years to come. In this case, sounds, in their impermanence and interactive qualities, can promote healing in a conscious way. Similar to the use of bird songs in Tokyo, the overall work reveals an attempt to put people into contact with the sonic qualities around them and the possibilities for their use in recovery from disaster. As of yet, there seems to be no similar projects scheduled for construction in Japan. Yet, this might be for the best, as the wounds in Japan are still very fresh. In Tokyo, collective silence, as witnessed through the nationwide moment of reflection one year after the disaster seems to be therapeutic, as is the breaking of this silence through protests, creative and otherwise as people look for ways to simultaneously grapple with what has occurred, yet provide a path of healing and affirmation of nature and creativity.

### *Part 6: Sound Sampling and the essential Schizophrenia*

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84 *Dithyrambalina: Musical architecture in new orleans*. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.dithyrambalina.com/field-recording/>

85 *Dithyrambalina: Musical architecture in new orleans*. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.dithyrambalina.com/field-recording/>

When hearing how bird songs, water sounds, or other sounds from daily life are integrated into the ring-tones, music, house-turned-installation, or social utilities of the sounds that surround us, a noticeable theme can be applied to many of these contexts, that is of sampling. Sampling, in its purest definition, is when one sound is recorded or gathered from one context, and then used in the creation of another context. Often, with regards to music, this happens when a sound is collected and then used as either a foundational component, such as in early rap, drum and bass, or hip-hop music, or as an add-on, giving flavor to an existing rhythm or melody. However, it can also be the case where a sample is created on the fly, such as within a live improvised dj set, and then re-mixed back into the song/mix at a later state, providing a sense of continuity through its mimicking of what has just been heard. In either case, the role of the sample is often to provide the listener with a reference point to an aspect of their auditory experience, as well as referencing part of their lives outside of the venue where the music is being heard. Much like a telephone or soundtrack accompanying visual images, this is a way of transgressing traditional auditory boundaries between time and space. When a sample from one point in time is used in the present moment, it often serves as a thematic link between past experiences and present. Depending on the theme it references, it can potentially alter the listener's experience in ways deemed therapeutic.

When looking at the role these samples play in the experience of the listener, there seem to be multiple avenues for analysis. For example, while the sampled sound seems to exist in a separated state, and then used in a context within which it potentially gains new meaning, it is not unlike a stock sound or image, leaving itself open to redefinition in a new context. Much is made of this topic in Paul Frosh's book 'The Image Factory' which focuses on the role of stock photography and the malleable role that the images have in the creation of meaning, and consequently identity<sup>86</sup>. Sound samples do indeed play an active, albeit arguably more subversive role than their visual counterparts in the stock industry at large. While not necessarily hitting the experiencer in the face in the way that images do, their power has been known to advertisers during ancient and modern times. Whether getting a ricecake vendor's signature call or the new Toyota jingle out of your head, personal experience proves the staying quality of these sounds to be much greater than the faces of the people selling them.

Personal experience of supplying sound samples for the stock sound industry as well as for personal musical projects has left an impression as to the impersonality required of the sounds by the industry, as well as the power to digitally manipulate and alter these sounds to serve a particular

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86 Frosh, p. 25



purpose, whether it be to produce a dance-worthy beat or to allow for an impression to be given of what a particular place or object is believed to sound like. In this case, connections between the sampling of sounds and the production of identity through the reinforced use of stereotypical sounds is important to be aware of<sup>87</sup>. For example, with a relatively quick search for samples under the heading 'Japan' on several stock sound websites, such as Soundboard<sup>88</sup> and Soundsnap<sup>89</sup>, one could adopt the idea that Japan is a relatively quiet place, with many people walking, temple gongs ringing, pachinko parlors buzzing, and a relatively high percentage of birds chirping given the amount of clips posted. Whether or not this is necessarily representative of Japanese sonic life is left to those who have spent time there. This truth often becomes secondary to the qualities which it can invoke in the end listener to suit the needs of its manipulation<sup>90</sup>. These sounds in themselves carry relatively few meanings apart from certain culturally-specific sounds such as the pachinko (electronic gambling machine with silver balls and bells) rattles, et cetera. However, given their use within other auditory, or better yet, visual contexts, meaning can be implied if not overtly stated, and generated in the internal dialogue of the sensory experiencer.

However, the interdependence of the needs of the experiencer and the needs of the sound recorders, catalogers, and presenters cannot be discounted. For, all of these actors exist in a state of interbeing, where one's needs determine the given results and often what is experienced by the other. As it relates to sampling, from looking at this relationship from interbeing and a more macrocosmic perspective, there seem to be fewer and fewer ways in which sound-emitting occurrences and the sounds themselves can ever truly be divorced from each other. In addition, the use of stock sounds themselves along with stock visuals such as in the pompom video response to 3/11 suggest a sensory co-dependance based on the needs of the sonic consumer to have a more multifaceted sensory experience.

At this point, it is important to return to the discussion on samples and their seeming separation from the source which created them. Schafer agrees with this in an outspoken way, and wonders what a society would be like which allows for sounds to be created and used in contexts which are not divorced from a state where they occur 'naturally', seemingly outside of human interference<sup>91</sup>. Indeed, it is possible to connect this analogy to those of the common street-goer or subway rider in Tokyo.

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87 Frosh, p. 106

88 *Soundboard*. (n.d.). Retrieved from [http://www.soundboard.com/sb/nature\\_sounds\\_japan.aspx](http://www.soundboard.com/sb/nature_sounds_japan.aspx)

89 *Soundsnap*. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.soundsnap.com/search/audio/japan/score>

90 Frosh, p. 85

91 Schafer, p. 241

Isolated within the world which their personal music players provide, it can be said that they are living an experience seemingly isolated or divorced from what is happening auditorily around them.

However, Schafer fails to comment on the paradox of this experience, being that yes, while living a seemingly isolated auditory experience, this experience is being had together, in consort with many others. Thus, while being alone together, there may be some as yet undefined auditory similarities between the sensory experiencers of those in their own sonic environments. Perhaps, there are similarities in the soundscape which transcend all of these personally chosen sounds entering the ear canal. Maybe the touch of the speakers on the ear itself lends the listener a certain emotional reaction when the eardrum itself is touched by the sounds entering it. This embodied reaction, upon further investigation, could prove fruitful.

In shifting gears ever so slightly, another positive aspect can be found to an auditory life lived in a seemingly schizophrenic state. Before beginning such discussion, starting out with a description of what the schizophrenic state implies is of use. Most sources, including Schafer and the Oxford English dictionary seem to suggest a breaking or dislocation of object from experience, or concerning mental faculties in the breakdown between actions, thought, and external stimuli. However, in relevance to the discussion to come, Fredric Jameson, in his paper, *The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* offers a description through Lacan as “a breakdown in the signifying chain, that is, the interlocking syntagmatic series of signifiers which constitutes an utterance or a meaning<sup>92</sup>.” Through its chosen terminology about signifiers and meaning, this relates to Gumbrecht's discussion of need, along with a respect for the presence-based experience of phenomena, an awareness of the creation of meaning through the use of interpretation, which often includes deciphering signifying symbols.

Sampled sounds can be hypothesized that they are to reconnect the listener to an aspect of their lived experience which had subsequently been overlooked or forgotten. Some writings by Joseph Campbell, the late Mythologist, whose writings on the universal similarities of mythology as seen through a metaphoric lens, could give an example of how sounds, being used in these contexts, could provide the listener with an ultimately therapeutic and necessary experience. When laying out similarities between mystical experiences worldwide, Campbell essentially defines the experiencer as existing within a schizophrenic state. He defines this state as a descent into the murky waters of the unconscious, yet aware self, from which all of the world as it is commonly experienced springs forth.

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92 Jameson, F. (n.d.). *Postmodernism, or the cultural logic of late capitalism*. Retrieved from [http://classweb.gmu.edu/sandrew3/misc/nlr142jameson\\_postmodernism.pdf](http://classweb.gmu.edu/sandrew3/misc/nlr142jameson_postmodernism.pdf)

However, he shows that this state exists in primarily two forms, essential or paranoid schizophrenia<sup>93</sup>.

As Campbell categorizes it, these two forms of schizophrenia are similar in many ways, however first and foremost in that there is indeed a separation between what is experienced on the sensory level, and what is experienced in the inner world of the experiencer. However, this separation influences the experiencers actions in very different ways. The person in the grip of paranoid schizophrenia is drowning in the waters of the unconscious, projecting fantasies out into the world. They have lacked the instruction or natural ability to handle the experience to which they've been thrown, or voluntarily entered into, and most importantly, have lost any connection to the social norms and customs of their home culture. While a rift between outer and inner experience exists in both the essential and the paranoid states, the latter lacks a reference point from where they've started from. Without such a road-map, they often loose touch with semblance of reality as it exists to others, and exist in what's normally deemed a state of clinical schizophrenia, akin to Jameson's description<sup>94</sup>

However, as Campbell goes on to describe, the essential schizophrenic person is in the same place, yet having a very different experience. This person has most likely been led into these waters through the help of a teacher, or even through their own longing to reclaim something, to make contact again some part of themselves which has been left behind or forgotten. In many cultures, the person having this experience could be a yogi or a shaman<sup>95</sup>. However, in many self-proclaimed 'modern' societies, there is often less of a cultural space or societal role allowed for those having these experiences. Yet, this does not imply that essential schizophrenic people are not among us, working to reclaim an experience which popular society in economically advantaged modern societies has shunned or forgotten. This could also imply what Gumbrecht terms a 'presence culture' over that of a 'meaning culture', where experience is not divorced from meaning in abstracted intellectual discourse. Gumbrecht, perhaps justifiably so, seems to see this as a state of being to be found in medieval western society, yet not so in the present. However, as Campbell notes in another work in his book *The Power of Myth*, this is not necessarily so in other parts of the world, particularly the present day cultures of East and South-East Asia, where he claims that there was never a fall from grace, and that mythologically-speaking, humans still exist within the garden of Eden in an unconscious life lived within the modern-day world<sup>96</sup>. While the environment can still be exploited in such places, there is

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93 Campbell, (1972), p. 209

94 Jameson, F. (n.d.). *Postmodernism, or the cultural logic of late capitalism*. Retrieved from [http://classweb.gmu.edu/sandrew3/misc/nlr142jameson\\_postmodernism.pdf](http://classweb.gmu.edu/sandrew3/misc/nlr142jameson_postmodernism.pdf)

95 Campbell, *Myths to Live by*, p. 231

96 Campbell, J. *The Power of Myth*. Anchor Books, New York, 1991, p. 28.

still not a schism between humans and their world as is found in Oxford's definition of 'nature'. This also implies a lack of necessary division between a presence-based culture, which Gumbrecht largely finds in the past, and a meaning-based culture which he equates to more contemporary societies<sup>97</sup>.

The sampled sounds of bird-songs, or the alarms or bells of mindfulness related to natural processes could be seen in the light of a society which seeks to reclaim part of what it means to exist within and as a part of our ecosystem and planet on the whole, drawing closer to Gumbrecht's 'presence culture'<sup>98</sup>. It is no longer news that the past few centuries, through a multitude of factors, including present-day societies with an unquestioning bias towards social Darwinism or a view of nature that reveals an inherent isolation from what is not considered human, that we have produced many modern societies which in effect take more than they give in regards to the ecosystem around them, creating a way of life that is unsustainable compared to our shared resources and personal needs for survival. However, this enactment of instrumental reason has its side effects. In attempting to go faster than is healthy or within the stress limits of the human sense organs to perceive or note a perpetually changing environment, we have lost touch with the changes happening without effort around us like the sight or tactile touch of a rising sun's warmth on our skin, or the subtle pull of a full moon on our internal bodily fluids, the subtle smell of a season's change, or the sound of the first songbirds of spring.

So if not guessed at already, the sounds primarily connected with bird-songs yet not excluding others connected with natural-processes could be seen as a collective effort to connect with a lost experience of a life lived within an awareness of the processes shaping our natural environment. This could be a society's unconscious urge to produce a state of essential schizophrenia, or to enhance one already underway. The example of the decreased electric buzz in Tokyo after the earthquake could be seen as a natural-process, an earthquake, altering an urban sound theme, to produce an awareness in the casual listener for what is being missed. For, when suddenly losing one's ambient background noise, we become aware of a change, a loss, or a transition, this experience could also be used to wake us up to the need to reconnect to the disconnect with our environment which has already happened. Interestingly, this reconnection happens though a auditory disconnection, and allows the awakening, through sonic means, of a desire to reclaim perhaps a keynote sound of life, one which cannot be described adequately through words, yet only breathed and lived as the Fuke monastic plays her/his flute with the same breath easing in an out of her/his body with the rhythm of a wave breaking on the shore.

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97 Gumbrecht, p. 78

98 Gumbrecht, p. 79

## Chapter 4: Where this is going: An Opening for further creative response

Throughout this paper, sound themes in various forms have been introduced and investigated as to their usefulness in helping the listener to engage with her/his experience. In the process, they have shown themselves to be relevant to how we perceive space and time as we navigate seemingly mundane, as well as extraordinary experiences. This examination of space and time and inquiry into how sounds reflect the natural processes or rhythms of life allows that there is much more affecting our bodies and minds than we are normally aware of. In recognizing this possibility, we can start to become aware of the therapeutic aspects of these sounds, and the power for positive change that is implied through their meticulous application in our daily lives.

The themes of birds, buzz, bells, and alarms often interact with in each other in context, medium, as well visually. At times they reflect spiritual or political motivations, but nevertheless we can observe how our senses are intertwined in the creation of what we call 'reality.' In confronting this reality, we can see that there is only 'being', a constant state of interaction which reveals the temporal nature of our sense. These interactions mentioned through examining sound, are just one small example of the myriad ways that our senses can be combined. However, it is also hoped that this examination not be taken too seriously and instead instill a respect for what is not known, for which any creation of meaning only serves to isolate what can be heard or seen from a grander unnamed presence which shapes our world. For, when we learn to talk less, and take our discursive thoughts less seriously as ways within which to navigate our world, perhaps we will discover not only new sounds and their connection to colors, nature, and our bodies, but also that the 'I' that exists within this tiny cranium might not necessary play the role we always assumed it did. Given this possibility, the need also arises for creative expression to express this expanded state of perception.

This need for finding ways of creative expression for the topics discussed in this paper is of utmost importance, as it serves to prove an actualization, or even the possibility of an actualization for what the above research implies. As such, a connection to creative work, my own, and the work of others, has served as a motivation for the writing of this paper. Throughout the choosing and implementation of this topic, a driving motivation has been how to take the burgeoning field of visual culture out of a definable box and to make it applicable to the lives of people outside largely academic circles. As a visual artist and drummer by training, looking for ways to connect these concepts, and

concrete observations about the use of sound in everyday experience to creative practice has been exciting yet challenging as well. Looking into the work that speaks to the conscious use of sound in its expression soon reveals at least several ways in which this can be done such as through the use of music, artwork labeled as sound-art, or primarily visual work using sound as an inspiration or impetus for creative activity.

As the sounds or lack thereof which have been reflected on in this paper continue to come and go, they serve as a reminder of the impermanence of the visual, the tactile, and our own thoughts as well. With such a realization or respect, we can begin to acknowledge the intricate ways in which our senses are interconnected and exist in a state of interbeing with our identity and our lives as we think we know them. It is hoped that this paper be taken at best as mere opinion and a gentle nudge towards the reluctance to define Visual Culture prematurely at the expense of what could be.

## Concluding Remarks

Perhaps you, the reader could ask what relevance and value an awareness of sound and its relationship with the visual has in communicating experience. Assuming that you feel inhibited to play music with a random graduate student whose paper you are reading, it is a good bet that you enjoy a fika or light snack every now and again. Thus, if you and I both sit down in the morning and have coffee, we probably share the feeling of the warmth of the cup, similar but different tastes depending on what beans we have or memories of the beans, and we even share the experience of having our thoughts running. The experience happens with the amount of awareness the drinker has. Are we aware of the hot cup in hand, or when the taste disappears from our palate? Finding such a moment is akin to listening for the end of the ringing mindfulness bell. The end is not the point. That you are staying there, with the experience with suspended judgment of what is occurring is all there really is. The total incomprehensibility of life is entered through the door of the seemingly mundane. In fact, the imagery of the doorway or a process is also not reality, but, as all concepts, at best a useful tool to be discarded upon arrival or seen in its empty essence in the moment. This is the lived experience of the monk blowing the shakuhachi, the chanting shaman, and to anyone tasked with communicating through sound what is touched through the senses and also felt with the heart. This is the sound happening right now, as eyes read these words. It's the quality of the ever-shifting light around your seat. It's the feeling of your breath, constricted or relaxed. It is the sounds happening right now coexisting with, and dependent on the awareness of all these other stimuli. This is the same substance available to the experiencer who has left logic or conceptual thought at her feet in the light of its obstruction of the present moment.

This paper leads toward a further examination of the connectedness between the color and sounds of the surrounding world, its role in the creative process and subsequent effects on the quality of experience. My personal work awaits such a challenge and like any good medicine, will initially engage in small doses. As someone equally prone to thoughtlessness and speechlessness at the colors of an autumn leaf, or a synthesized keyboard solo in real time, I wholeheartedly welcome this task. Using sounds as the means to enter a state of awareness, this endeavor feels all the more challenged yet all the more blessed as a result.

## Appendix

As an appendix to this paper, my own creative work will be looked at in regards to the issues of sound raised in this paper. I will also show ways in which the work can develop or evolve to suit the questions and insights which this paper has revealed. My work so far has included sound as a medium through musical activity, as well as color and shape through the use of paintings and photography.

Perhaps the most immediately relevant creative work which I have done involves co-creating and performing as a musician in an improvisational music and dance group in South Korea. The group called itself 'The Immediate Orchestra' (Baro Umak Dhan in Korean), and focused its efforts at understanding the relationship between sound and visuals, as well as improvisational creative activity and the surrounding environment<sup>99</sup>. The primary way in which the orchestra looked at visual-auditory relationships was by creatively responding to the sounds or movements of other members through one's chosen medium. As the percussionist and one of the drummers, I responded to the visual stimulus of the dancers movements, and was also responsible for listening to the sounds being created by the other musicians. To do so left little room for thought. At times when thought did creep into my head, my drumming immediately became out of time, and my eyes stopped being in sync with the dancers movements. This experiential learning through creative activity brought about the realizations in this thesis pertaining to the nearly diatomic relationship between presence and meaning-seeking thought.

However, like the dancers and other musicians, I was equally influenced by the colors and movement of the lights surrounding the stage or performance area. I personally found that the often shifting hues of the lights played a role in the mood of the music and dance as it progressed. However, as the lighting designer was also being influenced by the music, dance, and surrounding environment itself, it is difficult to know exactly which creative action influences which response. This leads one to look more deeply at the interconnectivity of the senses in creative action, as well as their therapeutic effects. Often, 'The Immediate Orchestra' would perform guerrilla shows in public locations without prior warning or advertisement. Whether in the middle of a crowded shopping area, market, park, or street, there were often surprising and interesting interactions with the community. Often, small children could not resist their excitement and rush into the performance area to interact with the dancers. At other times, people would wander, unaware through the performance area, only then to be

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<sup>99</sup> *Music*, Marty Miller: Music-Photography-Artwork. retrieved 1, May, 2012, <<http://gahjah.wordpress.com/overview-of-my-recent-work/music/>>



startled at the fact that something different was occurring around them. This left the boundaries between performer and audience member very malleable, and left all of us in the setting prone to the whims of the sensory environment within which we acted. As Korean society comprises of a complex hierarchical system of social relationships based on age and a neo-confucianist ideal of scripted behavior, actions that occurred out of sync with expectation were either met with incomprehension, denial, or as most often the case, gratitude. On many occasions, people, particularly women would come up after a guerrilla show and comment on how this type of action was needed in their community, and how it gave them a sense of wonder and excitement. This feedback helped inspire a desire to see how being woken up, in this case through a creative 'bell', could connect people with their surroundings thus potentially performing a therapeutic function for everyone involved. The interconnectivity of all these relationships concerning the inputting and outputting of visual or sonic information furthered my desire to write about and actualize the concept of interbeing in this thesis and in my creative work.

This project, which lasted over three years in total also brought with it a heightened respect for the role that the non-human-manufactured, or natural world has on our moment to moment experience. Having to be as aware as possible when performing, left me with a sense of how the touch of the wind or rumble of thunder could affect what I and the other musicians and dancers did. This left me with a respect for the ways in which my body and mind are continuously being affected by natural-processes, and human-created sensory stimuli on a moment to moment basis. Even though I am not necessarily aware of these effects, this creative experience, as well as time spent in Zen meditation have helped increase a respect for the often unconscious ways in which we humans respond to our sensory environment. For audio, visual, and audio-visual examples of the orchestra's work, along with thoughts and input from the members themselves, please visit the website <http://gahjah.wordpress.com/overview-of-my-recent-work/music/>.

Besides 'The Immediate Orchestra', I have primarily been working in paint and photography. Both of these two-dimensional mediums lend themselves very much to an immediate expressiveness to my actions as a musician. The best photographs and paintings I have done in the past several years are those created in a manner of acute attentiveness to an energy which cannot easily be given a name.

Photography itself serves as a way to communicate a particular moment (or in the case of double exposures, two moments) eternally. However, the key for me has been how to continue the communication of a temporally-bound occurrence rather than to preserve it. The former term carries with it a sense of wonder, which if successfully done, can produce a sense of mysteriousness at our

surroundings. Although occurring from a photo instead of the object itself, this feeling of wonder can be the same. For me, this is very difficult to do, though when feedback occurs in the viewer that it does happen, there exists a sense of great fulfillment. A recent series of photos titled 'What is it...Really?'<sup>100</sup> exists primarily of double exposures with varying aperture settings attempts to get to the experience of substance which lies behind name or label. While not using sound, they attempt to bring their viewer into a state, with little interpretation or naming of phenomena, where they are more open to the sensory input surrounding them.

Painting has served as a way to respond to auditory stimuli in my everyday environment. Like photography and music, it can be performed equally in the moment, yet often lends itself to a seemingly individualistic practice. However, as the experiences in The Immediate Orchestra teach, this is an illusion. In painting, I, as interbeing suggests, am made up of non-painter parts, and am instead a conglomeration of other stimuli which have happened up until, and through the moment when brush interacts with canvas<sup>101</sup>. A group of paintings done while living next to the beach in the city of Sarasota, Florida look into how visual and auditory stimuli work to influence the finished piece. However, one such piece titled, 'Inner Seas' serves this point particularly well. It was created without prior planning or sketching beforehand, and was affected by many hours spent sitting on the beach or floating in the water. As a result, the reliable, comforting rhythmic pattern of the fifteen centimeter waves interacting with the shore and on a floating body were represented in the curves and swells as they cradle a central shape. Sky blue, aqua-marine, and magenta serve to communicate not only the colors often represented in the beach context, but also to calm the mind, as the sounds and touch of the waves do<sup>102</sup>. The predictability of the water's tactile (in a traditional sense of touch) and sonic rhythms was of personal comfort and attraction to me then. As already stated, the painting process itself thankfully left no time or space for concept or reflection. However, in retrospect and through the feedback of viewers, this comfort was communicated via the visuality of form and color of the work.

Some of these experiences occurred before while others occurred during the process of writing this thesis. During the process of researching and writing this paper, my interests have deepened much more in regards to expressing the interconnectedness of the senses, creating in a way which reflects the processes of nature on the body and mind, and exploring therapeutic aspects of the creative process and

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100 *What is it...really?*, Marty Miller: Music-Photography-Artwork. retrieved 1, May, 2012, <<http://gahjah.wordpress.com/>>

101 Hanh, p. 4

102 Marty Miller: Music-Photography-Artwork. Retrieved 17, May, 2012, [http://gahjah.files.wordpress.com/2012/01/img\\_4786.jpg/](http://gahjah.files.wordpress.com/2012/01/img_4786.jpg/)>

the work itself. Along with this increased sensitivity has come a desire to incorporate these yearnings into the artwork which I hope to create from this day forward. This is not only a desire, but indeed a responsibility to use the concepts and relationships discussed in this work in an applied fashion, where it can be released visually and sonically into the world. As such, hereafter, I intend to work both visually and with sound.

My immediate work will involve the documentation of the colors and sounds which are impacting my daily experience. I will then start experimenting using paint, photography, and photo collage to combine these sounds and colors which evokes an awareness of these elements in daily life. While painting the sound of spring might not be easy, it still serves as an example of what can be dreamed, and what can be dreamed can be communicated and experienced through creative acts. I also intend to become involved in projects concerning sound, and already working on a generative music piece which includes rhythms from the soundscape around my home in Sweden. Using the programming of this piece, I foresee a project which will use sounds to trigger other sounds, or sounds and colors to show the inherent rhythms of a context. These rhythms can themselves evolve based on the user interaction with the recording devices. Lastly, I intend to keep learning hand percussion and piano, as these instruments help to connect me with my surroundings in the same way as the visual mediums described above. The writing process for this paper, and for the Visual Culture program overall, have given a sense of depth and focused unknowing into my creative efforts, and it is up to constant, gentle pressure to birth the work from the idea. In this, I hope to get out of the way as much possible, and in time, let the process work in light of the aforementioned motivations.

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### ***Audio-Visual Material***

#### *Audio Material*

(All sounds gathered by the author in Tokyo, Japan in February, 2012)

#### *CD Track Listing*

Track 1: Eric Satie schoolyard with birds

Track 2: Bird-chirps Train Platform

Track 3: Street-crossing Chirps

Track 4: Yoyogi Park Intersection Bird Buzz

#### *Visual Material*

(Photograph taken by Author in Tokyo, Japan on June 8, 2011)