

An Aesthetics of Pressure

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Questions of the immaterial and the evanescent within architecture open up understandings of space to the dynamics of sensorial experience. Jean-Paul Thibaud elaborates on the sensorial dimensions of space, suggesting that the ambience of place functions as an energetic flux bringing forward the temporal details of spatiality. 'Each ambience involves a specific mood expressed in the material presence of things and embodied in the way of being of city dwellers. Thus, ambience is both subjective and objective: it involves the lived experience of people as well as the built environment of the place.'¹ In this regard, elements of light, sound, smell, and texture, along with weather, social energy, and the fluctuations of mood, significantly add dynamic presence to the concrete structures of space and the experiences of urban life. By giving more attention to these seemingly immaterial elements, the built environment may be underscored as relational and event-oriented, thereby infusing material form with multiple perspectives and configurations.

The works of artist John Wynne express a deep involvement in such ambient environments and energetic constructs. The untitled installation from which this recording was made creates an expansive sonic composition that connects an array of elements. Based primarily on the introduction of a player piano (Pianola) into the main gallery space at Beaconsfield in London, the installation attempts to elaborate upon the existing acoustical character of the gallery and its relation to the external environment. During the Soundtrap residency in which the work took shape, the artist made a series of spatial and acoustical investigations, mapping the particular resonance and sonic coloration of the room, and studying the acoustic interweave occurring between inside and outside. Noises from the busy railroad tracks a few feet from the back of the gallery became a particularly important sonority for the installation.

In addition to the Pianola, the work consists of 300 discarded loudspeakers found on the streets and at recycling depots in London and Berlin, a 32-channel sonic playback of composed sounds, and a vacuum cleaner (powering the Pianola), all of which come to form a sculptural and sonic effect that extends from one perceptual coordinate to another. As a result of the artist's acoustic investigations and observations of the gallery space, a series of synthetic sounds were composed and which emanate from and move through the array of loudspeakers. These are complemented by a piano roll of *Gipsy Love*, a Franz Lehár operetta (from 1909), which plays automatically, though, as a result of Wynne's modification of the Pianola, at a much reduced tempo and sounding only notes that correspond to the natural acoustics of the gallery. Such a gathering of sonic elements seems to seek out points of not only conjunction, but also dislocation and displacement: the work creates a soft balance between order and chaos, organization and its rupture.

Integrating composed sounds along with the sounds of the Pianola, and in correspondence with the acoustical play of the space and the exterior environment, the installation is a sort of live organic composition of varying input and output. The work begins

to form a productive unsteadiness between these differing forces, each of which threaten to take over and yet remain folded within an extended perceptual field.

Wynne's project finds resonance with the ideas of Kisho Kurokawa and his theories of Metabolism. For Kurokawa the separations of inside and outside often promoted by architecture create too sharp a distinction and undermine the greater metabolism at the core of spatial design. In contrast, he seeks to insert intermediary spaces 'unobstructed by any dualistic division between inside and outside, a space free from the divisions of walls.'ⁱⁱ Kurokawa's energetic and metabolistic models of architecture thus come to recognize the built as a gathering of forces into momentary stability; even our bodies, in their exertions, heat fields, and performances lend to the flows of energy surrounding and defining buildings. A field of pressures can be appreciated to bend, sculpt and impress upon built form, as an ongoing orchestration.

The pressures of the exterior, such as weather conditions, or the sounds of street life, are then features that, while requiring partial control, impart a dramatic feeling for emplacement. They are not so much external to spatial configuration and experience, but rather flow through the very forms of buildings. Shifts in light, flux of weather conditions, and the sonorous undulations that flow over and around different environments, for example, all come to animate the built.

The constellation of elements at play in Wynne's installation engage the temporal and the environmental, composing them into an unsteady musicality: the delicate unfurling of sounds as they arise from different points in the room find both support and rupture from the trains passing by outside; the bulky mass of loudspeakers, with their plastic and wood surfaces and dusty odour, command attention while attempting to integrate with the Pianola's sculptural melodies. Such unsteadiness I take as a point of departure for outlining an *aesthetics of pressure* in which the proximate and the distant are put into conversation. How does this play of inside and outside, hard edged materiality and the softness of effect, locate us as sensing subjects? What forms of geographic or topographic relations unfold from within this field of amplifications and compositions, as an augmented weave of natural and synthetic, immediate and connective?

Animate and energetic, such work sonically exceeds the material and ocular limits of spatiality in support of an enlarged rendering. The project captures the inherent promiscuity of sound to cross over between inside and outside environments, ultimately creating a sense of immediacy and also intrusion. Wynne subtly underscores how sound and listening may create points of unexpected contact, sudden awareness, and charmed resonance, to undo the lines between what we imagine as public and private. His installation delivers a considered noise that puts disparate elements into ambient conversation. In this way, his project may give pleasure to the logic of the built environment by highlighting multiplicity, heterogeneity and sharing.

ⁱ Jean-Paul Thibaud, 'The three dynamics of urban ambiances' in *Site of Sound: of architecture and the ear, Vol II*, editors Brandon LaBelle and Claudia Martinho (Berlin/Los Angeles: Errant Bodies Press, 2010).

ⁱⁱ Kisho Kurokawa, *The Philosophy of Symbiosis* (London: Academy Editions, 1994).