

Confluence of Relations: An Auto-Ethnographic Account of Field Recording in the Anthropocene Age

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Abstract : In the age of the Anthropocene, all ecosystems, no matter how remote, is influenced by the relations between humans and technology. These influences are evidenced by current extinction rates, changes in species diversity, and species adaptation to pollution. Field recording is a tool through which we are able to document the extent to which life forms associated with the place are entangled with human-technology relationships. This paper documents the convergence of interaction between technologies, species, and landscape via an auto-ethnographic account of a field recording taken from a cell phone tower in Bali, Indonesia. In the recording, we hear a confluence of relations where critter and technology meet. The electrical hum of the tower merges with frogs and the amaranthine throb of crickets, in such a way that it is hard to tell where technology begins and the voice of creatures ends. The outcomes of this venture resulted in a framework for evaluating the sensorial relations within field recording. The framework calls for the soundscape to be understood as a multilayered ontology through which there is a convergence of multispecies relationships, or entanglements, across time and geographic location. These entanglements are not necessarily obvious. Sometimes quiet, sometimes elusive, sometimes only audible through the mediated conduit of digital technology. The paper argues that to be aware of these entanglements is to open ourselves to a type of beauty that is firmly rooted in the present paradigm of extinction and loss. By virtue of this understanding, we are bestowed with an opportunity to embrace the grave reality of the current sixth mass extinction and move forwards with what activist Joanna Macy calls the compassionate action.

Keywords : anthropocene, human-technology relationships, multispecies ethnography, field recording

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