
EDITORIAL

Two earlier issues of *Organised Sound* ('New Technology, Non-Western Instruments and Composition', issue 10/1, 2005 and 'Global Local', issue 13/3, 2008) have previously considered the use and significance of cultural issues within the creative arena of sound-based art. Both of these publications provided ample starting points for this current issue on the 'Sound of Cultures', which sought to develop and carry forth these initial lines of enquiry, whilst reaching a more upfront position or viewpoint on the ethics, care and respect demanded by intercultural activity. Recently inspired by a general increase of works utilising non-Western instruments, sounds and influences from all corners of the globe, it was felt that the time was ripe to revisit some of these ideas first introduced in these earlier *Organised Sound* issues, whilst searching for new perspectives, theories and challenges faced by practitioners and theorists alike currently active in the field.

Also inspiring the call for articles on this theme was a genuine intrigue and curiosity around cross-cultural engagement involving sonic arts practices. The use of technology and sound within geographically foreign contexts and collaborations can lead to practice-altering exchanges or artistic growth simply via an engagement with new and previously encountered culture. Allowing one's practice to be informed by new ways of working, new sound material and/or interdisciplinary traditions are aspects that came across strongly in a number of the featured articles. Reflecting upon this process of acculturation, assimilation and absorption of cultural ideas, concepts and sound material has undoubtedly provided ample terrain for many of the participating sound artists, composers and theorists within the issue.

Contributors were encouraged to consider the use of recorded sound as a starting point for creative work and how the means and methods for accessing sounds and inspiration from all parts of the world bring these aural and often so-called exotic experiences closer to us than ever before. Contemplating the accelerated advancement of portable recording technology, file sharing, networking and the Internet, and the 'easy' access they all provide in capturing and subsequently utilising foreign sound material, has ultimately caused a theoretical gulf or lag in our understanding of implications, repercussions and outcomes of entering this field. We have ethical considerations to ponder and we must play a game of literary catch-up if we are to continue cross-cultural

collaborations and intercultural liaisons. Since a growing body of repertoire already exists within the sonic arts exploring (and sometimes exploiting) exotic and culturally referential sound, we are now in need of documentation and theoretical discourse to ruminate upon and question the actions of the sound artist in this often-troublesome domain. This collection of articles sets us on a good path, inching us closer to a set of ideals, moral obligations and examples of good practice for future endeavours involving cultural sound integration to build upon. We may now be in a position to anticipate certain challenges and obstacles thrown up in the process and take advantage of an informed perspective on confounding cultural clashes, likely causes of offence and common anxieties over potential accusations of cultural appropriation.

A substantial percentage of the articles found within the issue recount the trials and tribulations of the geographically displaced artist weighing in on the challenges, concerns and discoveries while working in a foreign country with cultural and site-specific sound. Both adapting to and adopting new sound materials from a new home or temporary dwelling have fuelled much thought, practice and artistic pursuit for many contributors in the pages that follow. For many authors here, taking on new sound materials from cultural experiences or established traditions has demanded a rethink of sonic referencing (how listening and making sense of sound would be different for insiders and outsiders to a given culture) while the sounds in themselves have demanded a level of extracurricular education regarding the history, context and origins of the culturally specific material. The later of these demands is something not to be underestimated or ignored – there is an onus on the artist/practitioner to understand and acclimatise oneself as fully as possible to the new culture or tradition being borrowed from. Without this, there are dangers and moral implications always lingering around the corner. When working in another's territory (literally or metaphorically) respect and consideration are the highest currency going in terms of achieving particular artistic goals or simply gaining a greater insight or negating naivety.

All this contemplation appears very current and future focused, but something essential to reflect on at this point are the works and theories from the past. Engagement with cultural sound is by no means a new development and it is important to acknowledge the historical foundations from which this new work

and theory has sprung. The repertoire of the past along with the cultural climates these works emerged from are areas worthy of contemplation and are only lightly touched upon in the issue as a whole. The initial call for articles reflected an eagerness to extend the invitation to contributions based on the manifestation of culture in other ways. This applied to impressions, hints or suggestions that implied inspiration drawn from a foreign 'otherness'. Understanding how such influences manifest themselves within sonic works aims to reveal new fusions, hybrids and methods of composing. Articles discussing culture in a broader sense were also welcomed which dissected internal developments within regions, genres, institutions and schools of thought. In general, the issue does begin to reflect the greater awareness of subcultural contributions to the wider understanding of electroacoustic music and how this is fundamental to the continuation and evolution of sonic practices. Modes of synthesis, programming, installation, audiovisual practices and performance are all often defined and contextualised through cultural practice – the specific nature of each regularly grace whole issues of *Organised Sound*. However, theories pertaining to cultural theory, orientalism and otherness are still severely under-documented in relation to these individual sonic arts practices. As a result, these practical areas still rely on theories of cultural borrowing and cultural theory from more established art forms (e.g. commercial music, instrumental music or even visual arts) so much so that it appears as if sound-based art in general is still too young to have its own exclusive framework or code of ethics to assist in projects that plunder from the global sound palette. It is this remaining thought that leads me to believe there is still plenty left to discover in this small and emerging niche discourse. Sounds that once were recognised as unique and custom to only one place, person or culture are now ubiquitous and obtainable through a multitude of methods. As this issue on the *Sound of Culture* communicates, it is our technology and creative impulses that are now hot on the tails of this flux.

The first article within the issue is a position paper from Steven Naylor, who articulates a general overview of the electroacoustic music composer engaging with foreign sound material through their art. Talking from his own experience of creating music with appropriated sound material – for example, traditional Thai classical music (*Bitter Orchids*) and utterances of female greeters in Tokyo's departmental stores (*Irrashaimase*) – Naylor is able to converse on the common perils and pitfalls of cultural sound borrowing. This essential reading for any composer looking beyond their local or proximate surroundings for new sound material or inspiration sets the scene for many of the following articles discussing individual practice.

One's arrival in a new country or culture, far from home, functions much as a gateway or catalyst for practitioners and theorists to acknowledge their new surroundings and sonic environments. Tullis Rennie's contribution to the issue documents just this, as he finds himself amidst a number of political protests during his time as a visitor to Barcelona. Sound recordings made at the site of this activism and political unrest captures the rally and dissent of a community demanding change and action from the government. Sound materials of this nature are both culturally and politically charged, branded through spoken word, the Spanish language, local accents and meaning of the text. Rennie's development of terminology ('socio-sonic') along with a review of ethnographic and soundscape theories sets up a much-needed discussion on the overlap between these two approaches.

Ozgun Iscen's article, 'In-Between Soundscapes of Vancouver' continues Rennie's thread by covering ground relevant to cultural sound use and its manifestation within soundscape concepts. Iscen focuses on the 'fresh ear' of the less-habituated newcomer to Vancouver through sensory ethnographic fieldwork. Conducting studies involving sound walks and sound diaries, Iscen comes closer to understanding the complex relationships between listener, sounds and environment through an examination of 'in-betweenness' as a mechanism of living through diverse cultural regimes and overcoming a lack of soundscape competence'.

Co-authors Jingyin He, Ajay Kapur and Dale Carnegie collaboratively present an overview of current practices used to extend traditional Asian instruments involving technology. Their article centres on positive outcomes from hybridising Asian instruments with technologies such as robotics and sensor-adapted instrument use. For younger generations unacquainted with traditional Asian instruments or cultural practices, the use of technology in this context may function as an access point to learn about instrument origins, performance practices and traditional music heritage. Discussions on the preservation of traditional Asian music culture through the use of technology initiates food for thought on the future of non-Western musical instruments in general and how this outlook might be potentially applicable on a global scale.

My own contribution (Manuella Blackburn) to the issue details the establishment of a new online sound archive of Indian classical musical instruments during a year-long project working alongside UK-based Indian Arts development trust Milapfest. Documenting the process of sound collection for a resource to be used by young learners, concertgoers and composers enabled reflection upon the acts of sound recording, curation and composition all arising within the project's lifetime. The article wades into the somewhat controversial issue of borrowing affordance – whether one's cultural

background somehow dictates what sounds one can and cannot use, and scrutinises the mechanics of the signalling process encountered when integrating cultural sound material of a recognisable nature into electroacoustic works. Following on from the previous article, my own contribution deals with cultural sound preservation from an archival stance, observing how creative work with non-Western instruments may inspire interest into their cultural origins and into performance practices of the past.

Another contributor adopting culturally significant sound material into creative practice is Norbert Herber, who recounts unique collaborative installations involving sounds and concepts of traditional Japanese indigo dying, originating from Tokushima Prefecture. Not only culturally significant, but also historically so, Herber's collation of sound materials for this project paints a vivid picture of the cultural tradition exclusive to this textile art form. Documenting the process of contributing to a split-site installation situated in Indiana, USA, and Tokushima, Japan, demonstrates the role of sound in establishing palpable connections with foreign places and different cultures. Through his recollection and pondering of cultural sound use, we are introduced to the nuances of an aged tradition and how a seemingly distanced and little known practice can infiltrate into the realm of sound art and beyond.

Andrew Blackburn and Jean Penny co-author an article on new Malaysian performance contexts as intercultural exploration detailing an investigation funded by the Malaysian government. During the creation of new musical works combining Malaysian and Western instruments, questions are raised regarding the definition for interculturality and what might be understood by the 'imaginary space' in between the two said cultures. Perspectives from the composer, sound technologist and instrumentalist articulate the intentions of each party involved in the music-making and underline how cultural considerations remain at the forefront of such experimental work. We are reminded in the article of the determination of new cross-cultural creations of this sort to go beyond a mere collection of exotic sound materials, seeking to be more than a facility to adopt various performative techniques.

As a bookend to the articles exploring creative practice with cultural sound use, James Andean's position paper takes an opportunity to raise the often-neglected issue of ethics in relation to recorded sound use. Framing much of the discussion within the context of intercultural dialogue, Andean embarks on a comprehensive questioning of sound ownership and the composer's responsibility. The potential for offence is also viewed and tackled as a byproduct of inappropriate sound use. The article finishes with the

proposal of a web of ethical and cultural relations where meaning and identity are inextricably connected within a state of flux. While no key, formula or resolution is provided for untangling or navigating the web, the advice shared is an encouragement to understand as much of this web as is possible as opposed to simply observing as a passive bystander.

Colin Black provides the last on-theme article for the issue and proposes the independency of radio art as its own medium with idiosyncratic international standpoints and trans-discipline properties. The article focuses on international activity where radio played an integral role in establishing emerging experimental music as such creative pursuits made their way into the public domain. The article lays out key milestones in radio art's history that have ultimately led to the development of electroacoustic music.

The last contribution to the issue is Gary Kendall's off-theme article on the 'Feeling Blend' as an extension of Fauconnier and Turner's blend theory. Kendall presents the internal workings of this concept along with the five simultaneous layers involved in mental activity. In his article, Kendall reaches an understanding of how feeling and emotion contribute to meaning when listening to electroacoustic music. Drawing upon key repertoire pieces, he closely considers core issues for blend theory: for example, what constitutes a mental space and what triggers a blend are two such areas which form the basis of this thorough exploration.

As a closing remark to the issue, all contributions have come face-to-face to the theme of 'The Sounds of Cultures' in new and exciting ways. They form valuable and long-awaited literature within an emerging, niche discourse belonging to the wider understanding of sonic arts and electroacoustic music. Confronting concepts of cultural sound use, ethics, borrowing and appropriation within new works and theories is not an easy task and the articulation of one's perspective has always tended to be on the sensitive, conservative side as a means of avoiding instances of offence, criticism or political incorrectness. What is clear in these articles is the development of a bolder, more confident approach in tackling these notoriously touchy areas, often branded as no-go areas. The voices in this issue shed a layer of sensitivity to show the reality of engaging with an often-controversial artistic pursuit. The summary of what is found here is a general sympathy to the common challenges, accompanied with insight into current and future intercultural projects involving sound and technology.

Manuella Blackburn
blackbm@hope.ac.uk