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Mimesis Stories: Composing New Nature Music for the *Shakuhachi*

Joseph Browning

Abstract

Nature is a widespread theme in much new music for the *shakuhachi*. This article explores the significance of such music within the contemporary *shakuhachi* scene, as the instrument travels internationally and so becomes rooted in landscapes outside Japan, taking on the voices of new creatures and natural phenomena. It tells the stories of five compositions and one arrangement by non-Japanese composers, first to credit composers' varied and personal responses to this common concern and, second, to discern broad, culturally syncretic traditions of nature mimesis and other, more abstract, ideas about the naturalness of sounds and creative processes (which I call musical naturalism). Setting these personal stories and longer histories side by side reveals that composition creates composers (as much as the other way around) and so hints at much broader terrain: the refashioning of human nature at the confluence between cosmopolitan cultural circulations and contemporary encounters with the more-than-human world.

Keywords

Shakuhachi; Composition; Nature; Mimesis; Organicism; Musical Naturalism

Shakuhachi Stories

As *shakuhachi* music moves, it multiplies, gathering new sounds and stories around itself. The twentieth and twenty-first centuries have seen an increase in the global distribution of this Japanese bamboo flute (Casano 2005; Keister 2004b) and a proliferation of new *shakuhachi* compositions by musicians inside and outside Japan. Although diverse, this new music often reimagines the narratives and sonic characteristics of the instrument's traditional repertoires, especially its oldest—the *honkyoku* (original pieces) associated with Zen Buddhism. Just as the *honkyoku* 'Tsuru no Sugomori', 'Shika no Tōne' and 'Daha' evoke, respectively, nesting cranes, deer calling across an autumn valley, and waves striking the seashore, many new pieces are animated by bird-like voices, sonic evocations of landscapes, and imitations of wind and water sounds. Such compositions—what I call 'new nature music' for the *shakuhachi*—are the focus of this article. Following a different track from existing scholarship on contemporary *shakuhachi* music,¹ I explore how and why animals, places, and natural phenomena have become part of this repertoire.

New 'nature pieces' by non-Japanese composers are an especially interesting feature of the transnational *shakuhachi* scene, as they simultaneously register the instrument's global mobility and root it in new landscapes outside Japan. My argument here ties this process of rooting to the complex practices of mimesis (after Taussig 1993)—imitations and evocations of natural sounds and phenomena—evident in these compositions. I see this mimesis as an intensely creative (not merely imitative) means for composers to make sense of their place within the *shakuhachi* tradition and cultivate affective relationships with the natural world. It does this, I suggest, by reinventing the mimetic impulse evident in *honkyoku* and combining it with other traditions of what I call *musical naturalism*: genealogies of thought concerning the organic character of sounds, materials and creative processes. Alongside these general arguments, I also aim to credit the distinctive, personal expressions of particular composers. As Meintjes writes, 'The power of specific art forms, as well as the differentiated ways that people express themselves within specific art forms, slips so easily out of analysts' hands' (2004: 177). My response is to tell the stories of five compositions, one arrangement, and their creators, so as to examine the entanglement of music and nature across multiple

¹ This includes surveys of twentieth century compositions, discussions of notation, and the reflections of composers and performers (e.g. Lependorf 1989; Franklin 1997; Regan 2006; Day 2009; and contributors to Benítez and Kondō 1993).

temporal scales: in the composition of single pieces, in individual composers' lives, in lineages of musical thought and, albeit somewhat speculatively, in much longer, ongoing tales of 'natureculture' that shape human creativity (Haraway 2003; Tsing 2012).

The stories I tell are not, then, simply about people and music. All six pieces somehow narrate or translate the more-than-human world. Where compositions are inspired by the non-biological (water, rocks, landscapes), I foreground how composers find meaning in the tangible, textured presences of natural phenomena and the forces that animate them, whether these are imagined in terms of spirits or abstract patterns. Where compositions respond to living things, I take my lead from van Dooren's argument that animals 'story' places, making their worlds meaningful through, amongst other things, sounding practices and affiliations with specific sites (2014: 1-18, 63-86). My sense is that composers' attention to the multi-faceted 'liveliness' of the natural world cuts across apparent distinctions between the biotic and abiotic (van Dooren, Kirskey and Münster 2016: 4-5) and I want to tell similarly 'lively stories' of people, animals and things (van Dooren 2014). The result is a multilayered retelling: my account echoes composers' echoes of more-than-human worlds. Aware of the representational risks of speaking for anyone—other people, species or things (Spivak 1988; Kirksey, Schuetze and Helmreich 2014: 3)—I aim, like the composers themselves, for sensitive and meaningful evocations, rather than 'true' copies.²

Each story is necessarily partial then, since it is hard enough to compress the genesis of a single piece into a manageable narrative, still less a biography or creative genealogy. My case studies foreground the *shakuhachi* as a central instrumental resource and 'player-composers'—people writing *shakuhachi* music who also play the instrument and so share many imaginative reference points due to substantial engagement with the *shakuhachi* tradition. Along the way, I describe how I encountered the six compositions in order to hint at the strange status of new music within the *shakuhachi* scene: a widespread and important presence, yet one characterised by a disjuncture between composers' rich backstories and listener experiences, often framed by a programme note at most. I leave for elsewhere discussion of ensemble pieces including *shakuhachi*, consideration of composers who have written for the instrument, but do not play it, and issues of reception. This still allows for considerable stylistic variety (encompassing several *shakuhachi* schools and genres from progressive rock to contemporary classical) amid composers' shared preoccupation with 'nature' as a significant compositional influence.

² On academic writing as mimesis, see Taussig 1993: ix.

Alcvin Ramos: ‘Seki Setsu’

I first heard Alcvin Ramos’ composition ‘Seki Setsu’ on one of his CDs. Drawn in by the delicacy of the opening phrases, I turned to the liner notes, which explained how in Shinto, ‘the *kami* (sacred spirits³) manifest themselves in certain natural places or objects, including mountains and rocks’ (Siberok 2005: n.p.), before giving Ramos’ account of the piece:

I live on the Sunshine Coast of British Columbia, one of the most beautiful places in the world. I wrote this piece on a snowy winter day as I looked out my meditation room at the dry rock garden in front of my house. The rocks sat silently still like meditating figures wrapped in white blankets. Looking at the rocks, I could see they emitted some kind of language and I wanted to express this music through the bamboo flute. (Ramos in Siberok 2005: n.p.)

Talking to Ramos, and later learning to play ‘Seki Setsu’ with him in online Skype lessons (a common means of transmission in the global *shakuhachi* scene), I began to understand the piece’s backstory in more detail. Having spent most of his life in the city or suburbs, Ramos was able, partly through his work performing, making and teaching *shakuhachi*, ‘to live my life in the country, so move closer to nature, closer to the sea’.⁴ Around the time of composing the piece, he describes being preoccupied with Japanese Buddhism, Taoism and Shinto, especially the importance of nature in these traditions. ‘Seki Setsu’—the title of which Ramos also writes as 石雪 (using the *kanji* for ‘rock’ and ‘snow’) and, in English, as ‘Meditation on Rocks and Snow’—was written remarkably quickly: ‘I didn’t think about it. ...I put on my recorder and played it. One time. And then I stopped and then I notated it’. The weather at the time was exceptional, ‘One of the few times it snowed on the Sunshine Coast’. Ramos’ rock garden is modelled on the famous *karesansui* (dry landscape) garden of Ryōanji temple in Kyoto, perhaps the most iconic Japanese garden (evident in its influence on composers such as Cage and Stockhausen).

3 Shinto is a diverse set of Japanese traditions, ritual practices and beliefs—only sometimes labelled a religion—oriented towards *kami* (gods or spirits).

4 Unless otherwise indicated, all quotes and background information based on my Skype interview and two lessons with Ramos in September 2012.

The connections between ‘Seki Setsu’ and Ramos’ garden experience extend into a variety of musical features. The stillness, coldness and quietness of the snow-covered scene find voice in extremely soft passages and unusually long phrases. Teaching the piece, Ramos was especially keen that I played the opening phrase very quietly. It starts on a soft, alternative fingering for the note *tsu*—a fingering commonly exploited in *Zensabo* (one of the two main *honkyoku* styles which Ramos has studied)—before rising to a long-held *re*, one of the tonal centres of the piece (Figure 1).⁵ The unusually soft and sustained opening reworks the *tsu-re* progression—an opening gesture in many well-known *honkyoku*—in such a way as to establish the atmosphere of the piece, and its relationship with the *honkyoku* tradition, almost immediately.

The piece is not, however, without loud, dynamic passages. It is punctuated by three *muraiki* (explosive, breathy or wind-like sounds), which Ramos equates both with the rocks in the garden and his experience whilst looking at them: ‘interspersed in the quietness there were these moments...of insight into life’. He draws a parallel with the ‘three peaks’ of the *honkyoku* ‘San’ya’ (Three Valleys), in which a thrice-repeated figure in the high register is sometimes said to represent three mountain summits. Other dramatic moments include several phrases in which the performer plays and sings simultaneously—another technique indebted to the *Zensabo* school, but also to Ramos’ experiences as a *didjeridoo* player—subtly suggesting, for Ramos, ‘monks’ singing’, and in keeping with his description of the

⁵ All re-notations are by the author. Most are simplified versions of the original scores, some of which were written in traditional *shakuhachi* notation. Curved lines after noteheads indicate glissandi. *Shakuhachi* fingering diagrams show the thumbhole (on the back of the instrument) slightly offset from the four fingerholes (on the front). Shaded circles indicate closed holes; empty circles indicate open holes. All musical examples are written for the standard size of *shakuhachi*, also known as a ‘1.8’ or *hassun*, the main open-hole fingerings of which produce the pentatonic set d’, f’, g’, a’, c’’. In the schools with which most of the composers discussed here are affiliated, the Japanese names for these notes are *ro* (d’), *tsu* (f’), *re* (g’), *chi* (a’) and either *ri*, *ha* or (in the upper octave) *hi* (c’’/c’’’). These notes, produced with an upright head position and open-hole fingerings, are referred to as *kari* notes. Other notes, including pitches outside this pentatonic set and alternative (e.g. timbrally contrasting) versions of the same pitches, are produced with some combination of a lowered head position (altering the angle and distance between the embouchure and the blowing edge of the *shakuhachi*) and partial shading of fingerholes; these are *meri* notes. (There are, however, exceptions to this brief summary.) The distinction between *meri* and *kari* notes is a central characteristic of *honkyoku*, although the differences are hard to summarise: *kari* notes are typically louder and brighter and often provide tonal centres, while *meri* notes are usually softer and breathier. Because of their complexity, I reference the details of this musical system only where they are pertinent to my argument: for example, mention of a traditional note name indicates that a traditional technique is being deployed or reworked.

rocks as ‘like meditating figures’. While ‘Seki Setsu’ relies on many generic rhythmic and tonal features of *honkyoku*, such as unmetred ‘breath phrases’, Ramos also consciously departed from these conventions in some places so that it is ‘in the spirit of *honkyoku*’ yet ‘totally a new piece’. These musical features set up multiple mimetic resonances between two versions of the Ryōanji garden, the narrative and spiritual associations of *honkyoku*, and the heightened experience of ‘rocks and snow’ that inspired Ramos to write the piece.

Jim Franklin: ‘Songs from the Lake, Number 4’

Twice now, in 2011 and 2012, I have seen Jim Franklin perform pieces from his ‘Songs from the Lake’ series on the opening evening of the annual Prague Shakuhachi Festival. The audience stood listening in the dark, scattered around a large courtyard, knowing the pieces’ names, but nothing else about them. Onstage, Franklin played his setup of *shakuhachi* and live electronics with a familiarity that belied the complex technical processes evident in the resonant, mobile textures of the music. All this made for a fascinating, if opaque, experience. Only later, talking to Franklin about his compositions, did I begin to understand how these pieces wove several long-standing interests into his work with the *shakuhachi*.⁶

Franklin’s early interest in ‘textural’ approaches to composition, influenced by Ligeti and Xenakis, resonated with a particular experience of nature. As a composition student in Germany in the 1980s, Franklin found himself living in a forest, ‘a more natural environment than I’d lived in for a very long time’. His daily jog regularly took him past nearby lakes where he ‘got fascinated by...reflections on the water surface’ and so by the possibility of ‘creating sonic textures that [were]...static or only slowly evolving but...rippled’. Franklin highlights one experience, still vivid after several decades, of seeing a frozen lake one bright winter’s day:

[I]t looked like the ice was moving, but it wasn’t. So I just stopped and had a look at what was going on and it turned out that there was a layer of air underneath the ice...and then there were ripples on the water underneath the ice...being illuminated...by the sun. ...[T]his image—of the lake with ripples on it, but not moving—has stayed with me.

⁶ Unless otherwise indicated, all quotes and background information based on interviews and lessons with Franklin in Wackernheim, Germany, in May 2013.

Franklin began to make short videos of water and over the years has collected around ‘a hundred different movies of...lakes, oceans, waves, creeks, streams, rivers’. These represent one source of inspiration for his compositions, not through programmatic relationships between particular videos and pieces, but as sources of more abstract ideas about ‘movement in stasis’.

Dissatisfied with his initial attempts to explore these ideas within orchestral works, Franklin began to work as a solo performer of electronic music. In the late 1980s, he also began working with the *shakuhachi*—studying first in his native Australia, then later in Japan—and soon combined the two interests. Although Franklin finds that analogue electronics better suit the ‘naturalness’ of the *shakuhachi*, over time practical considerations have led him to use a digital setup, albeit only employing processing that could be achieved with analogue electronics. ‘Songs from the Lake, Number 4’ (2011) combines *shakuhachi* with live electronics, controlled via an onstage laptop. When Franklin showed me the visual programming for the piece on his computer, I could see why he found it suitably ‘tangled’—countless boxes and criss-crossing lines indicated a complex system demanding the kind of skilled, multi-parametric interaction that Franklin values in both his electronics set-ups and the *shakuhachi* (see Franklin 2009).

Key to the ‘rippled’ musical textures of ‘Songs from the Lake, Number 4’ are the ways in which Franklin establishes relatively static harmonic fields centred on two five-note chords (Figure 2) then sets these in motion through electronic processing. To open the piece, Franklin plays through five ascending notes (d’, a’, c”-sharp, a”-flat, c”’-natural) on the *shakuhachi*, using delays to loop each tone. The varying dynamics and timbres of each tone create textural changes within an unchanging harmony, which is intensified by repeating the sequence several times at increasing tempi, such that the cycles overlap and blur together. Other sections use a ‘ring modulation’ technique, mixing the *shakuhachi* tone (converted to an audio signal by a microphone with preamplification) with one of the five modulating frequencies from the original chord, producing the sum and difference of the original signals. Single sounds become bell-like attacks and cross-fades between the five different modulating frequencies create rich textures with ‘a continually changing set of harmonic spectra...related to this [five-note] fundamental chord’.

The textures of water also play a formal role in the piece. While the performance is semi-improvised, the laptop programming is fixed and the piece is always ‘built up as a series of waves’. Each wave starts with solo *shakuhachi*, before ‘rising up’ then ‘dropping away’ as

processing is added then removed. In the climactic fourth ‘wave’ the *shakuhachi* is ‘totally swamped’, then re-emerges amid a small ‘wavelet’ as the piece ends (Figure 3). Franklin connects this form with timbral structures in *honkyoku*. Where *honkyoku* oscillate between the contrasting tone colours of *meri* and *kari* notes (see footnote 5), ‘Songs from the Lake, Number 4’ moves between the unprocessed ‘harmonic series-based tone colours of the flute’ and the contrasting harmonic spectra produced through ring modulation.

Another connection with *honkyoku* comes via the pairing of natural imagery and Zen-inflected ideas. Where, for example, the imagery of shifting cloud patterns associated with ‘Ukigumo’ (Floating Clouds) is sometimes connected to the Buddhist ideal of spiritual detachment from worldly concerns, Franklin describes the lake as a spiritual metaphor for ‘the base level of consciousness’ with ‘thought as...processes that ripple through...or on the surface of this lake’. This association further adds to the play of reflections between natural imagery, musical ideas and technical processes that mirror Franklin’s original experience of the still-yet-rippling lake.

Michael Doherty: ‘For Flowing Water’

‘For Flowing Water’ (2013) is one of numerous *shakuhachi* pieces that Michael Doherty, an American composer and *shakuhachi* player, shared with me after I encountered his work online. It was composed ‘in the field’, at a spot where he often plays *shakuhachi* on the banks of Bear Creek in Bear Creek Canyon near Colorado Springs, USA (an area threatened in recent years by Colorado’s record-breaking forest fires).⁷ Doherty recorded an improvisation outdoors, then revised and notated the piece later. It is written for ‘*shakuhachi*, pine cones, a rock, and a flowing mountain creek’. The *shakuhachi* part has clear connections with the *honkyoku* repertoire: unmetred phrases centred on a small number of pitches, similar tonal and timbral structures, pitch bends and finger-articulations. One significant reworking of *honkyoku* conventions concerns Doherty’s indications of the durations (in seconds) of both sustained notes and silences, since these are ‘as important as the sounds’. While *honkyoku* rely on a combination of learnt conventions and individual players’ breath control to determine durations in performance, Doherty not only composes these durations, but extends the silences to unusual proportions. At up to 81 seconds in length, some are much longer than

⁷ Unless otherwise indicated, all quotes and background information based on my Skype interview with Doherty in June 2012, and email correspondence during September 2013.

the silences in *honkyoku*, resulting in a kind of intensification of the aesthetic principle of *ma* (間), the ‘interval’ or ‘space’ between sounds, times and things (see below).

Beyond this reworking of *honkyoku* aesthetics, ‘For Flowing Water’ includes several elements that blur the boundaries between natural sound and mimesis of natural sound. The piece exists in two versions, one for stage performance, the other outdoors and site-specific. In the latter the sound of the creek provides a constant backdrop to the other sonic events. The stage version is played without these water sounds and Doherty comments that this results in a slower performance speed, since more silence is needed to ‘balance’ the piece. Both versions incorporate several *muraiki* (breathy effects), where Doherty was ‘thinking of the wind coming through the valley’. The creek itself is echoed towards the end of the piece (Figure 4) in a *shakuhachi* phrase marked ‘*ppp*’, where the player trills the lowest three fingerholes simultaneously to create ‘bubbling sounds’. Doherty explains that this phrase signals the importance of the sound of the creek to him and mentions the references in Zen literature to ‘sound producing a realization’.⁸ It also reworks the *koro-koro* technique, a distinctive double-trill on the lowest two fingerholes, often used in *honkyoku* to evoke the calls of cranes, but here repurposed to alternative mimetic effect. Immediately after this, several long phrases appear marked ‘pine cones’ where the performer rubs or plucks pine cones. At the end of this phrase the performer is instructed to ‘Throw a rock into the creek’, a relatively subtle sound on Doherty’s recording. In the stage version, Doherty explains, ‘this would be replaced by the performer pushing over a pile of river rocks’. The final phrase of the piece is a single sustained note, played on the *shakuhachi*. Through this delicate balance of silences and sounds, human-made and natural, Doherty crafts a piece which, as the title ‘For Flowing Water’ suggests, both comes from and speaks to a valued place.

Elizabeth Brown: ‘Loons’

As with Doherty, it was through searching online that I first heard music by composer, flautist and *shakuhachi* player, Elizabeth Brown. Speaking to Brown, I came to see how references to birdsong and landscapes run throughout many of her compositions, whether they incorporate *shakuhachi* or not. Here, I focus on ‘Loons’, one of her two ‘Isle Royale Pieces’ (2005). The area around Isle Royale—an island on Lake Superior, in the Great Lakes region of the United States—has been designated a National Park since the 1930s and it was during a residency

⁸ For another example of this idea in the *shakuhachi* literature, see Blasdel 2005: 42-43.

there that Brown composed these pieces.⁹ She contrasts her vivid experiences in Isle Royale with her everyday life as an ‘urban person’ living in New York City:

You’re given this incredibly isolated place to stay with no electricity, no running water, you’re really by yourself and you can hear wolves at night, it’s a totally different environment.... There was just so much range in the encounter with nature.... It was very stark and severe...and yet...we had time to explore all these little microcosms, and the birds were different, the sounds.... And after *shakuhachi*, birdsong is probably my biggest influence.

In this context Brown’s inspiration for ‘Loons’ arrived:

[O]n an ideal day, I get up and before I do anything...I compose and I just put down whatever is my first impression for the day.... [In Isle Royale] we would frequently have heard [loons] all night. And it would be this incredible quiet—it’s a quiet you don’t get in New York—with loons calling.and it’s just the loneliest, most beautiful sound you can imagine.

The loon call is apparent from the start of Brown’s piece: two ascending phrases, the second an echo of the first, raised up a fourth, with one interval stretched (Figure 5). These phrases closely resemble the ‘wail calls’ of the Common Loon—long-distance calls which typically ‘last two seconds and consist of several notes given in succession that usually rise in pitch’ (Elliott 2004: 71). Brown heard a resemblance between the way the loons ‘launch’ such sounds through space and the distinctive *ha-tsu-re* figure found in many *honkyoku*. As Brown revised the piece, this relationship took on new significance:

[T]he ‘Loons’ piece started as a solo, but then the loons are in pairs, they nest for life, so you frequently hear them calling back and forth and that’s what gave me the idea of making a duet...like ‘Shika no Tōne’...and to...overlap it that way.

⁹ Unless otherwise indicated, all quotes and background information based on my Skype interview with Brown in March 2012.

Whereas ‘Shika no Tōne’—the most famous *honkyoku* duet, said to depict the calling of male and female deer in an autumn forest—uses the conventional *ha-tsu-re* figure (b’-f’-g” on a standard *shakuhachi*), in ‘Loons’ Brown attaches the *ha-tsu* ornament to the unusual note *hi no chū-meri* (giving b’-f’-b”), the pair of tritones making the phrase ‘wilder and more questioning’ than ‘Shika no Tōne’ (Figure 6, see footnote 5 for context on note names).

Another famous programmatic *honkyoku* had a place in the composition of ‘Loons’. Brown recalls playing ‘Sōkaku Reibo’, the Kinko school version of the various ‘crane *honkyoku*’, in Isle Royale. One story attached to this piece describes the tenderness of the parent cranes in caring for their chicks; Brown saw a parallel with ‘loon lore’ in the northeastern United States and the strange behaviour that adult loons exhibit in order to lure predators away from their young:

I didn’t use the sounds they make when they’re pretending to be...injured...[but in] the quieter places in ‘Loons’ ...I was thinking about just the incredible vulnerability of baby loons... [I]t’s amazing they get out of there alive.

Such comments point to what van Dooren calls ‘storied-places in animal worlds’ (2014: 66-70). Brown also describes being ‘inspired by how sound moved across the water, and how the park’s animals used this acoustic phenomenon to call and respond’.¹⁰ Van Dooren argues that such ‘acoustically mapped worlds’ (he gives the example of dolphins’ use of echolocation) offer routes into thinking about animals’ distinctive experiences of places (2014: 68). In the ornamentation, antiphony and atmospherics of this five-minute piece, Brown simultaneously evokes the narratives of two ‘animal *honkyoku*’, ‘loon lore’, and the ways in which both she and the loons she heard make sense of places through sound.

Frances White: ‘Birdwing’

When Brown heard about my interest in new ‘nature music’ for the *shakuhachi*, she introduced me to her friend Frances White, a composer specialising in electronic music. White’s piece ‘Birdwing’, for solo *shakuhachi* and tape, was composed in 1996,

¹⁰ <http://www.nps.gov/grca/supportyourpark/selected-artists-south-rim-2010-2011.htm>; accessed 20 August 2012.

commissioned by the International Computer Music Association. White began studying the *shakuhachi* to prepare for composing this piece and, although many of her other compositions are ‘inspired by her love of nature’,¹¹ she finds ‘that the connection to nature with *shakuhachi* is just maybe stronger and more obvious and immediate than with a lot of other instruments’.¹² The encounter was formative: she has been playing *shakuhachi* since then and sees the instrument as a significant influence on her other compositions.

‘Birdwing’ grew from two experiences, described by White’s husband, the writer James Pritchett, in a prose poem that also serves as the piece’s programme note.¹³ The poem tells, first, of being at a lake ‘while everything is frozen and unmoving’ and seeing ‘the three little marks a sparrow’s wing left in the snow’. Second, it tells of going, at dusk every spring, to an open field and waiting for dark in order to hear the distinctive sounds made by displaying male American Woodcock: ‘Only when it is too dark to see will they appear. You can’t see them, but you can hear the songs their wings make as they fly, spiralling up and then dropping down’.¹⁴ White explains:

I think the delicacy of that experience [seeing the wing-marks in the snow], and the delicacy of the sound of the wings of the woodcocks, that’s part of why I ended up using...whistle tones, which are...a very hard-to-pin-down kind of a sound.

After initial experiments trying whistle tones on the *shakuhachi*, the large-scale form and musical material for ‘Birdwing’ grew out of a multi-stage process centred on two soundscape recordings. White applied to these a technique she now calls ‘tracing’:

I record some kind of an acoustic environment. ...[I]n this case I had a recording of the experience by the lake and a recording of [the] woodcock experience. ...[I]t’s a very, very intuitive process but what I do is I take this piece of recording...and I listen to it and just very intuitively I draw for myself—‘ok here’s an event, and the event kind of has this shape...’

11 <http://rosewhitemusic.com/about-frances-white/>; accessed 17 September 2012

12 Unless otherwise indicated, all quotes and background information based on my Skype interview with White in April 2012.

13 <http://www.rosewhitemusic.com/birdwing.html>; accessed 30 April 2012.

14 These ‘songs’ are produced as air rushes over the birds’ outermost primary feathers.

Drawing on her growing technical knowledge of the *shakuhachi*, White rendered the ‘tracing’ of the woodcock recording into a *shakuhachi* part by ‘mapping’ her drawing onto specific rhythms, pitches and timbres. Thus, for example, because whistle tones ‘sound best’ on d’ (the fundamental of a standard *shakuhachi*), this pitch became an important tonal centre for the piece. Parallel to this, White used computer software to produce the tape part from her ‘tracing’ of the recording by the lake. Material for this comprises processed *shakuhachi* sounds and processed environmental sounds, including some from the ‘frozen landscape’ recording on which the tracing was based. It also incorporates the sound of rainsticks (another mimetic device), processed and transposed to a lower tessitura—evoking, for White, the snow of the frozen landscape. The *shakuhachi* and tape parts combine these multilayered human and technical mimetic transformations to complete the piece (Figure 7).

Like Brown’s ‘Loons’, White’s piece grows from sensitivity towards the particular places and times of these birds’ sound-making activities. American Woodcock are philopatric (lit. ‘home-loving’), often returning repeatedly to particular singing and nesting grounds.¹⁵ Van Dooren sees such site fidelity as another way in which animals’ ‘storied-places’ are ‘invested with history and meaning’ (2014: 17). The delicate soundworld of ‘Birdwing’ also gestures, then, toward the fragility of these ‘flight ways’ (ibid.). Pritchett’s poem explains, ‘We know of a place where woodcocks live’, but ends, ‘One year we stood and waited, but they were not there. Neither seen nor heard, the birds flew only in our memories, their wings whistling’.

Cornelius Boots: ‘Free Bird’

Having been in touch with California-based composer, bass clarinettist and *shakuhachi* player Cornelius Boots for some time, I was fascinated to hear about his latest project—*Renegade Nature Music*—which transposes rock and heavy metal hits to the solo *shakuhachi*.

Arrangements include Iron Maiden’s ‘Run to the Hills’, Earth’s ‘Hung from the Moon’, Led Zeppelin’s ‘Over the Hills and Far Away’ and southern rock band Lynyrd Skynyrd’s well-known ‘Free Bird’. Boots makes a connection between the ‘overt nature titles’ of some *honkyoku* and his ‘arrangements or re-imaginings of nature music from other genres, such as

¹⁵ For extensive references, see <http://www.fs.fed.us/database/feis/animals/bird/scmi/all.html>; accessed 3 February 2016.

classic rock'.¹⁶

Just as there are stories associated with traditional *shakuhachi* pieces, Boots creates richly storied repertoires, often providing extensive commentaries for his compositions. Boots' 'Free Bird' was released as a single in 2013 and the accompanying notes give two contrasting accounts of its origins. In one, the arrangement was provoked by a tongue-in-cheek request at the end of one of Boots' solo concerts: the well-known 'rock joke' of requesting 'Free Bird' regardless of the band or genre actually chimed well with Boots' interests and he quickly made the arrangement. In the other account:

'Free Bird'...has now been rendered backwards in time as the 'nature music' piece that the bird who was freed intended it to be. The Buddhist flute is aurally mapping the consciousness of this Bird as it exits the physical world and transmigrates through the etheric and astral planes.¹⁷

The playful contrast between the two explanations—one mundane, the other what Boots laughingly described as 'trippy writing'—is instructive. Boots is serious about his *shakuhachi* arrangements of rock classics, their musical interest and emotional weight, yet recognises the incongruity of bringing these distant genres together: 'Free Bird' is an 'unlikely, inevitable and reverent tribute' to the original.¹⁸

This bridging between genres is achieved through various musical and imaginative means. Boots' arrangement opens with a version of the low, ballad-like guitar riff and vocal melody of Lynyrd Skynyrd's 'Free Bird'; moves higher into the *shakuhachi*'s range for the repeat of the verse and chorus, matching the intensifying atmosphere of the original; mirrors its famous ending, an extended and virtuosic guitar solo, in a lively version for *shakuhachi*; and closes with high trills and a leap into the third octave to end (Figure 8). Compressing Lynyrd Skynyrd's original (sometimes over fifteen minutes live) into just over three and a half minutes, it nevertheless preserves the underlying structure and even the original key (G major, moving to G minor for the up-tempo 'solo'). In these respects, Boots' 'Free Bird' is a faithful imitation, although, as he explains, the solo *shakuhachi* makes for a stark contrast with the 'big, bombastic, loud rock band encore' that is the original. Thus arranging it was an

16 <http://www.cdbaby.com/cd/corneliusboots2>; accessed 5 September 2013. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotes and background information based on my Skype interviews with Boots in May 2012 and July 2013.

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid.

exercise in ‘extracting the essence of the piece and seeing if it can still come across with a different timbre’. Yet, as his second explanation intimates, Boots also wants to suggest that Lynyrd Skynyrd’s ‘Free Bird’ ‘had a predecessor. ...as if they wrote it inspired by an actual [bird]’ or it was ‘sung by a bird’. The *shakuhachi*’s ‘natural’ timbre and its reputation as a mimetic instrument are central to this ventriloquism. Also key are the *koro-koro* (double trills) half-way through Boots’ arrangement, a clear reference to the role of that technique in imitating bird calls in traditional ‘crane *honkyoku*’. But Boots also connects the *koro-koro* in his version with Lynyrd Skynyrd’s live performances of ‘Free Bird’, where ‘they’re often doing little things with their slides and their delay pedals to imitate birds’. These layered mimetic relationships demonstrate how arrangements, as well as compositions, for the *shakuhachi* are also imbued with story-telling and enlivened by imaginative takes on music and nature.

Mimetic Traditions

As my account highlights, these six pieces all respond to a shared mimetic impulse, albeit in inventive and distinctive ways. The most overt mimesis involves the transformation of natural sounds, for example bird calls or wing sounds, into music. Composers also transform other sensory impressions, such as the sight of a moving lake, into sound. Both involve processes of mediation or translation: improvising in response to a natural scene or soundscape; turning live sounds and sights into recordings and vice versa; inscribing sounds into scores and then re-sounding them in performance; and so on. Each journey from landscape or animal to fully realised piece involves many multi-directional moves between ear, hand, eye, audio or video recording, instrument, computer and notation.

But the profusion of mimesis extends further. As well as imitating environmental phenomena, these pieces also imitate the sonic, technical and imaginative resources of *honkyoku*, which, crucially, include the mimesis of natural sounds. The sounds and stories associated with crane *honkyoku* such as ‘Sōkaku Reibo’ and ‘Tsuru no Sugomori’, for example, are important reference points in several of the compositions discussed above. So these new compositions effect a double mimesis: they *imitate the imitation of nature in honkyoku*. Like many others, the composers discussed here extend and transform—for mimesis is never simply repetition—a tradition of nature mimesis established in *honkyoku*. In some cases, the mimesis extends further, into the material world or to other musical precedents: Ramos’ ‘Seki Setsu’ is a musical evocation of his physical copy of a famous Japanese garden; Boots’ bird imitations echo the bird imitation both of *honkyoku* and of Lynyrd Skynyrd’s live performances. It is

easy to become disoriented by this ‘riot of mergers and copies posing as originals’ (Taussig 1993: 42), a feeling that should heighten our sense of the creativity involved in such multi-layered imitation. The search for a singular origin—asking, for example, whether the sounds that open Brown’s piece have their source in loon calls, in *honkyoku*, in the sounds of Japanese deer or cranes—gives way to a sense of the play of imagination amid myriad reflections. This helps explain composers’ ambivalence about describing their process as straightforwardly mimetic. Brown comments that, ‘I didn’t want to be imitative, but I guess the opening [of ‘Loons’] is kind of imitative’. Perhaps such ambivalence also stems from the fact that nature mimesis has a complex heritage. It is not unique to *honkyoku*, but prominent in wider Japanese sonic culture (Johnson 1999);¹⁹ examples abound within Western art music (see e.g. Doolittle 2008); and it is hardly absent from popular music either, as ‘Free Bird’ illustrates. It could be argued that nature mimesis offers unusually fertile ground for the cosmopolitan musical imagination, as a means for hybridising disparate natural sounds and musical traditions (see Feld 2012: 140).

‘Gardening and composing are the same thing’: Genealogies of Musical Naturalism

This tangle of mimesis is not the full story, however. These compositions also rely on distinctive analogies between, on the one hand, nature and, on the other, musical sound, agency and authorship. An important basis for my argument is Born’s comment on aesthetic concerns among IRCAM composers in the 1980s:

The repeated turn to biological analogies—those of growth, of the germination of a seed into a full-blown plant, of the unity of micro and macro forms—has an important precursor: that is they are redolent of the organicism that was the central metaphor of the tradition of German musical romanticism. (1995: 167)

We see some hint of this organicism in Franklin’s ‘Songs from the Lake, Number 4’, where parallels between the piece’s large-scale wave-like structure and its small-scale timbral oscillations recall organicist conjoining of the macro and micro. Beyond this, however, I suggest that the composers discussed above draw on multiple, interconnected varieties of

¹⁹ Although such ideas, especially their association with notions of Japanese ‘uniqueness’, have rightly received critique (Tokita and Hughes 2008: 26; Shepherd 1991; Edwards 2011: 94, 100), they remain pervasive (Browning 2016), a topic I discuss below.

what I call *musical naturalism*—ideas about the relationship between nature and music—that are connected to the romantic organicism discussed by Born, yet more diverse in their analogical relationships with nature.²⁰ My account of these naturalisms offers brief, Foucauldian ‘genealogies’ or ‘histories of the present’ meant to shed light on naturalised, contemporary ideas about musical composition by tracing the contingencies, complexities and circulations involved in their production, rather than describing singular origins or trajectories (see Born 2010: 223; Born 1995: 32; Foucault 1977: 30-1).

The first musical naturalism is described by Rodgers in her account of how nineteenth century scientific developments, especially in acoustics, shaped emergent ‘audio cultures’ in the early twentieth century. She argues that ‘The presence of electrical activity among diverse forms of life naturalized the apparent liveliness of electronic sounds’, helping to form associations between sonic characteristics (such as decay and growth) and ‘properties of organic matter, living organisms, or social life’ that remain commonplace in contemporary ‘audio-technical discourse’ (2011: 519, 509). Where Born identifies a rationalist and scientising incarnation of organicism in IRCAM (1995: 167), Rodgers evokes a more pluralist, ambivalent, even feminist, tradition in recent North American electronic music (2011: 512-4). The latter certainly seems more apt a description of White’s intuitive compositional approach and helps to make sense of her statement that ‘gardening and composing are the same thing’²¹—an indication of the careful cultivation involved in creating a lively electronic soundworld. Rodgers’ work also usefully contextualises Franklin’s decision that his ‘Songs from the Lake’ series would only involve direct processing of the *shakuhachi* and his comment that analogue electronics better suit the ‘naturalness’ of the *shakuhachi*. Such ideas chime with those of other composers for whom certain ways of working with sound—e.g. direct processing rather than synthesis or sampling, analogue over digital—are more ‘lively’ or ‘natural’ than others (ibid.: 512-3).

A second variety of naturalism figures in these pieces through a notion of Zen creativity often glossed as ‘naturalness’. The history of this idea is too complex to excavate here, but worth sketching briefly. It pivots on the fate of the Japanese term *shizen*, a word shaped at once by the long historical influence of Chinese Taoism and by the more recent encounter between Japanese nationalism and Euro-American thought during the Meiji period

20 The boundary status of new *shakuhachi* compositions—at the intersections between Japanese traditional, contemporary classical, electroacoustic and popular genres—is valuable in revealing conceptual terrain such as this, connecting insights across several sub-disciplines.

21 <http://rosewhitemusic.com/frances-white-a-profile/>; accessed 16 October 2013.

(1868-1912). *Shizen* emerged as the standard translation of the English word ‘nature’ (and other European equivalents), while also incorporating a distinctive emphasis on spontaneity (Thomas 2002: 169-171). This laid the groundwork for an intensified syncretism in twentieth century Zen. McMahan argues that Japanese author and translator Daisetz Suzuki (1870-1966), one of the most influential mediators of Western encounters with Zen, was a central figure in ‘the development of a modern relationship between Buddhism and creativity’ dependent on the ‘amalgamation of Zen with concepts of spontaneity and the unconscious from Romanticism, Transcendentalism, and psychoanalytic traditions’ (2008: 24, 122-34). ‘Naturalness’ as Zen creativity is given a specifically musical spin in the compositions discussed here. Ramos’ ‘Seki Setsu’ was the result of a spontaneous ‘one time’ performance, as was Doherty’s ‘For Flowing Water’, albeit with small changes made post-performance, and a sense of Zen-inspired ‘direct action’ inflects their accounts of musical creation. In White’s ‘tracing’ process and Brown’s efforts to put down her ‘first impressions’, immediacy and intuition are again key to translating the natural world into compositional material. Improvisation also plays an important part in the realisation of pieces, especially Franklin’s ‘Songs from the Lake’ and Boots’ ‘Free Bird’, such that spontaneous, in-the-moment creation continues even when the composition is otherwise finished.

The important influence of Suzuki on John Cage (ibid.: 141-2) and the broader influence of Zen on the ‘culture of spontaneity’ in post-war North American art (Belgrad 1998) leads us to a related strain of musical naturalism. Doherty describes Cage, and the wider experimentalist tradition, as a major influence on his work (although ‘For Flowing Water’ was not composed using chance operations—a strategy central to Cage’s work and ideas about nature; see Piekut 2013: 140). Doherty explains that the pine cones, creek and stones ‘are not instruments per se, but their sounds can be included in the music as the intentional performance meets the incidental elements. The soundscape is invited as part of the framework of the composition’. For Doherty, as for Cage, silence is part of this invitation; Rogalsky describes Cage’s *4’33”* as ‘an invitation to “nature” to populate a passage of time with unforeseen (unforheard) events’ (2010: 133; on the decision to premiere *4’33”* in a rural, rather than urban, setting, see Gann 2010: 27-8). In this experimentalist naturalism, silence makes space for nature to contribute its sounds to the composition.

Today, *ma* (often glossed as ‘silence’ or the ‘interval’ or ‘space’ between sounds, times and things) is one of the most ubiquitous aesthetic reference points in discourse on Japanese traditional music (Tokita and Hughes 2008: 25-26), including amongst composers writing for the *shakuhachi*. This ubiquity is not, however, a straightforward result of Japanese influence

on Western composers. As Novak explains, Cage's ideas about silence, already strongly influenced by Japanese aesthetics, 'were retranslated back to Japanese composers in the early 1960s, [such that] "silence" became a paradoxically marked term for Japanese postwar experimentalists' (2010a: 48). This history perhaps makes another loop here, since the importance attributed to silence in contemporary *honkyoku* performance has arguably been reinforced by the interactions between these Japanese experimentalists, such as Takemitsu Tōru, and prominent *shakuhachi* performers, such as Yokoyama Katsuya (1934-2010), who premiered Takemitsu's 'November Steps' (1967) and was a major figure in the internationalisation of the *shakuhachi*.

By inviting the sounds of pine cones, water and stones into his piece, Doherty, like Cage, emphasises 'the chance sonic encounter between human performer and the natural material of the instrument itself' (Ingram 2006: 573-4; also Piekut 2013). This concern with materiality ties into a fourth variety of naturalism, also evident in ideas about the role of the *shakuhachi* itself within the compositional process and its relationship with the player-composer's body. Here, composition mediates ideas about the 'naturalness' of the *shakuhachi* as a material object (see Keister 2004b: 110-11)—a 'simple' piece of bamboo derived from nature—and draws on traffic between Japanese notions of 'letting the object or material lead the art-making process' (Saito 2017: 195) and the Western artistic philosophy of 'truth to materials'. Describing his approach as 'animistic', Boots aims to discover what 'the instrument wants to do' while the *shakuhachi* also accesses his own 'database of influences'. Franklin's description of the 'tangled' relationship between body, *shakuhachi* and electronics (2009: 97-8) similarly highlights the productive organicism in the connection between performer and instrument. Relatedly, Franklin's interest in the 'inner life' of the *shakuhachi*'s sound (*ibid.*)—the moment-to-moment shaping of tones possible on the instrument—is a preoccupation he shares with many other players and one that emphasises sound's inherent vitality. These various ideas about the lively contributions of sounds, instruments and bodies to the compositional process point to a broad sense of what could be called *musical vitalism*.²²

Romantic organicism, electronic or other sonic liveliness, Zen spontaneity, experimentalist naturalism, musical vitalism—clearly, these naturalisms are not distinct categories, but rather entangled or (like the bamboo used to make *shakuhachi*) rhizomatic,

22 I use this term to gesture towards a topic, partially taken up in recent studies of musical materiality, liveliness and vibrancy such as Bates 2012, Fraser 2005, Piekut 2013 and Roda 2014, which nonetheless arguably remains understudied in terms of its scope and importance.

lacking a single origin and characterised by multiple cross-connections. No doubt other pieces and settings would reveal other senses in which compositional acts and sonic materials are ‘natural’. Composers are caught up in these genealogies in distinctive ways, seeking variously spontaneous and collaborative engagements with organic, natural or lively sounds and materials.

Decentring the Composer

I can’t always tell if an idea will work until I’ve practised it for a long time.... I can also have pages and pages of sketches that seem to be going nowhere and then at a certain point they all fall together... [I]t doesn’t seem to be anything I can control. (Elizabeth Brown)

Moving my argument one step further, Brown’s comments above gesture towards the capacity of both the *shakuhachi* and her developing musical material to unsettle her authorial position. Indeed, all the forms of musical naturalism discussed above raise questions about composers’ creative agency. We see this in the apparent tendency of musical materials to self-organise, the agential contributions of instruments and bodies, the force and spontaneity of the compositional impulse, and the lively input of both electronic and natural sounds. Such interferences in the compositional process together represent not a singular logic of substitution—one agency removed, another installed in its place—but rather a multi-faceted *decentring* of the role of the composer as sole creator of a work. They draw attention to a host of ‘others’—not only instruments, technologies, sounds and the natural world, but also impersonal creative dispositions shaped by intertwined lineages of musical thought—in extending, constraining and reshaping composers’ experiences and capacities (see Born 2005; Browning 2016).

Again, the mimetic impulse is central to this process. Taussig, drawing on Walter Benjamin, describes a ‘visceral bond connecting perceiver to perceived in the operation of mimesis’, which results in the ‘radical displacement’ of the self into the other (1993: 20). Here, moments of sensuous perception—of a bird call, a texture on water, a landscape—and imagination are transformed through the compositional process into more durable artefacts, crystallisations of these ephemeral and elusive displacements. Registering this dynamic, composers’ accounts often suggest some kind of listening, speaking or translating between the human and natural: Ramos attempts to express the ‘language’ of the rocks in his garden;

Franklin's piece is a 'Song *from* the Lake'; Doherty 'invites' the soundscape; Brown hears the 'lonely' call of loons; White talks of the *shakuhachi*'s 'animal voice'; Boots describes 'soaking in an environment...or putting my consciousness on another creature or being, real or imagined, ...and sort of interpreting that as a feeling...or...as a storyteller'.

These mediations do not simply affect isolated emergent compositions. Writing about Cage's compositional strategies, Piekut identifies a 'process of mutual co-constitution forged by the composer and his nonhuman collaborators' (2013: 136). Several composers described how composing specific pieces had transformed their broader musical language and prompted new ways of relating to musical instruments, technologies and nature. White took up the *shakuhachi* in order to compose 'Birdwing' and developed her 'tracing' technique in doing so; combining the *shakuhachi* and electronic music allowed Franklin to realise new musical textures; 'Free Bird' set the stage for Boots' other *Renegade Nature Music* arrangements; Brown's residency gave her an unusually 'stark' encounter with nature. For all six composers, their experiences with the *shakuhachi* have been formative, and music and nature are important parts of their lives. So, although these compositions testify to deeply affecting experiences, they are not simply the result of one-off romantic immersions in nature; they also co-produce complex biographies and cultural histories. Composition creates composers, just as much as the other way around.²³

Mimesis, Taussig explains, is 'the faculty to copy, imitate, make models, explore difference, yield into and become Other' (1993: xiii). Composers' rediscovery of the mimetic impulse in these new compositions is, I argue, a way of negotiating both cultural alterity and what Cronon calls 'the autonomy and otherness of the things and creatures around us' (1996: 24). For players outside Japan, playing *shakuhachi* music means engaging with cultural difference, often across considerable geographic and historical distances. For many, the instrument also provides a way of connecting with natures that often feel far removed, especially from twenty-first century, urban life. Mimesis allows composers to bring

23 There are parallels here with Keister's argument that involvement in Japanese traditional music 'shapes' the individual through socialisation into a school, lineage or other social structure (2004a). (Interestingly, Keister suggests that this socialisation process involves 'harmonizing with nature', since Japanese society (including musical transmission structures) is understood as part of the wider natural order (ibid.: 76-9).) Through studying Japanese traditional music, many player-composers have been shaped by some such socialisation process (although perhaps in modified form, as transmission methods adjust to new cultural contexts). This training feeds into their compositional activities, such that learning and writing *shakuhachi* music represent distinct but overlapping forces in the lives of composers.

themselves closer both to culturally remote musics and instruments and to the affecting qualities of the natural world. Composition (as process, artefact and biography) becomes charged with the spark of encounter and response; unfamiliar sounds, stories, and ideas chime with others more familiar, investing both with new meaning.

‘Green Orientalism’, Cosmopolitan Place-Making and Mimesis in Modernity

The idea of Japan as ‘practically synonymous with a heightened cultural sensitivity to “nature”’ colours much discourse on the *shakuhachi* with a kind of ‘green orientalism’ (Walker 2005: 15). Yet new compositions reinscribe the association between *shakuhachi* music and nature with a cosmopolitan, rather than uniquely Japanese, inflection: they transpose the *shakuhachi*’s mimetic sensitivity to other musical genres and other cultural settings, reshaping the musical geographies and imagined ecologies associated with the instrument. Loons and woodcocks join traditional cranes and deer; forests, lakes, gardens and National Parks in Europe and America stand alongside Japanese landscapes. Musical mimesis creates a complex distribution of spaces and things as fragments of ‘Japan’ and ‘the West’, and various real or imagined creatures, are combined and superimposed. Such complexity suggests that non-Japanese composers’ repurposing of the musical resources of *honkyoku* is more about the creation of cosmopolitan subjects and new cultural forms through mimetic appropriation, than about the straightforward exoticisation of Japan (see Novak 2010b: 41-2, 63). Consider Franklin’s description of his approach to composing for *shakuhachi*:

I’m deliberately attempting as a composer to look at what are the paradigms of the material of this instrument, which I would like to think...[I] have become an insider to, and see how they can enrich the compositional paradigms that I’ve grown up with.I think it’s kaleidoscopic. It’s as if you’ve got...a series of different mirrors or prisms which reflect into one another and sometimes you’re lucky and the aspects that get reflected by the mirrors...line up in an interesting way.

More broadly, for many *shakuhachi* players, nature mimesis—and a wider sense of creativity as organic process—is a common human practice that cuts across culture, at once a global and deep historical inheritance. Monty Levenson, a prominent American *shakuhachi*

maker, captures a characteristic of the instrument that is important to many, whether players, makers or composers:

The earliest *shakuhachi* maker may very well have been the first person to be enchanted by the haunting sound of wind blowing through a bamboo grove.... The urge to blow [the *shakuhachi*] is thus synonymous with an appreciation of the natural world and intimately tied with *the drive to recreate it*. All of these impulses exist today with a renewed urgency as our modern world spins out of control. (2005: 183; my emphasis)

This is what Taussig, paraphrasing Walter Benjamin, calls ‘the surfacing of “the primitive” within modernity as a direct result of modernity’ (1993: 20). For some, the *shakuhachi* affords a return to things that have been side-lined in contemporary life: silence; sensitive and affecting encounters with natural places and creatures. Ideas about the *shakuhachi*’s age-old mimetic capacities seem to play into an ‘association between copying and the “primitive” [that] is also fundamental to the historical construction of Western ideas of Japanese difference’ (Cox 2008: 4). But composers are ambivalent on this point, simultaneously valuing the *shakuhachi*’s primitivism and its sophistication. White, for example, emphasises the ‘complicated musical world of the *shakuhachi*’ as well as her sense of the instrument possessing an ‘animal voice’ that is ‘beyond music’. Such ambivalence signals composers’ sense of the *shakuhachi*’s otherness and its contemporary, global relevance.

Ethnomusicologists’ engagements with questions about music and the more-than-human world have, for important reasons, often focussed on indigenous contexts.²⁴ But new compositions for the *shakuhachi* suggest that such issues also matter in some corners of cosmopolitan musical life—for their role in mediating non-mainstream spiritualities, cultural differences and anxieties about the place of nature in the modern world. Through their experiments with the *shakuhachi* tradition, these pieces loosen the association between nature mimesis and notions of Japanese uniqueness or primitiveness, suggesting instead that sensitivity towards nature is important here and now. The experiences they spring from are often intimate, idiosyncratic, and ephemeral; the places are human-made as well as wild; the

²⁴ Prominent authors include Steven Feld, Theodore Levin, Anthony Seeger, Tina K. Ramnarine and Marina Roseman.

creatures are not always Haraway's familiar 'companion species' (2003), but occasional and memorable visitors, sometimes hovering on the border between perception and imagination. In their responsiveness to 'storied-places' (van Dooren 2014: 66) and creatures—the language of rocks, the patterns on a lake, the sounds of water and birds—they enact a nature *worth attending to* (van Dooren, Kirskey and Münster 2016: 16-17). Together, although far from overtly environmentalist or otherwise political, they sound out some of the many stories we tell about nature in modernity.

Again, these stories draw on complex genealogies, combining ideas from romanticism, transcendentalism and East Asian Buddhism to see nature as, amongst other things, a spiritual domain and remedy to the ills of modernity (McMahan 2008: 159-68). But they also point to a much longer story: the importance of music and sound in the mutual constitution of humans and environments over the *longue durée* of hominid evolution, a process 'at once sociocultural and biological' (Tomlinson 2015: 24). Much recent rethinking of the figure of the human—often oriented by Anna Tsing's notion that 'human nature is an interspecies relationship' (2012)—has highlighted this relational perspective. As van Dooren, Kirksey and Münster argue: 'There is no human-in-isolation, no form of human life that has not arisen in dialogue with a wider world' (2016: 14). Today, music of all kinds is implicated in this ongoing process of co-constitution, incrementally reshaping us and our relationships with others. If it seems too much to burden this or any other music with such narrative weight, it is because we mistakenly construe that process as confined to 'deep time', where it is actually *also* ongoing, moment-to-moment and pervasive.²⁵ Where musicians attend to the capacity of nature to affect us, this should sharpen our sense of the contemporary, cutting edge of this process. Seen this way, these six examples of new 'nature music' for the *shakuhachi* show how human emotional lives and expressive forms are co-constituted through our relationships with others, even in contemporary, cosmopolitan contexts. At once tiny fragments and rich condensations of these personal, historical and evolutionary relationships, their stories are certainly worth a listen.

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²⁵ Ideas about the *shakuhachi* reawakening the primitive drive to imitate nature in sound give a reflexive twist to the story, folding notions of deep time back into today's musical imaginary.

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Figure Captions

Figure 1 'Seki Setsu', first phrase. Simplified re-notation based on Ramos' score.

Figure 2 'Songs from the Lake, Number 4', five-note chords.

Figure 3 'Songs from the Lake, Number 4', annotated waveform (generated using Audacity).

Figure 4 'For Flowing Water', final phrases. Simplified re-notation based on Doherty's score.

Figure 5 'Loons' opening. Simplified re-notation based on Brown's score.

Figure 6 *Ha-tsu* ornaments in the opening of 'Loons' (above) and 'Shika no Tōne' (below).

Figure 7 'Birdwing' structure, approximation based on White's score.

Figure 8 'Free bird' structure, approximation based on Boots' recording.