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Assembled Landscapes: The Sites and Sounds of Some Recent *Shakuhachi* Recordings

Joseph Browning

Abstract

This article examines the folding together of music and landscape in some recent albums featuring the *shakuhachi*, a Japanese bamboo flute that today animates a large and active musical scene inside and outside Japan. Through analysis of the texts, images, and sounds on these albums, I explore the re-imagining of the *shakuhachi*'s musical geography as the instrument reaches new players and places in Europe, Australia and North America. I focus on recordings that incorporate environmental sounds alongside the *shakuhachi* in order to examine ideas about the perceived authenticity of particular sounds, performance spaces and recording aesthetics, and demonstrate the increasing flexibility with which the instrument's connection with natural landscapes is imagined and performed. I also discuss several ways in which these recordings unsettle our analytical models for thinking about the relationship between music and landscape. First, the diversity of recording locations within and across albums produces a complex spatiality. They document performers' connections with particular sites, yet complicate any notion that the *shakuhachi* is related to a single place or nation, and testify to a distinctly contemporary sense of place, inseparable from intensifying global mobility. Second, the centrality of mediation in these artistic projects places technology at the heart of the production of the natural and makes the naturalness of the *shakuhachi* audible in new ways. Third, the use of

environmental sounds provokes questions about agency and the boundaries between human and non-human sound-making, such that the musician shifts from being sole creator of a performance to also curating various other voices. By treating these albums as assemblages – weaving together the material, social, technological, and natural – I reveal the lively and complex character of otherwise everyday musical objects.

Keywords

Assemblage, global scene, landscape, mediation, recordings, *shakuhachi*.

Assembled Landscapes: The Sites and Sounds of Some Recent *Shakuhachi* Recordings

Recordings are not simply inert objects of social scientific or historical inquiry. They are energetic and conversational creatures, alive to us in time and in space. They think us as we think them.¹

Recordings represent an important means by which the global *shakuhachi* scene is performed and heard. The instrument of a sect of Zen Buddhist monks from the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, this Japanese bamboo flute has, since the 1960s, become important to a growing number of players outside Japan, notably in Australia, Europe, and North America.² As we shall see, it is the history of these *komus[macron]o* (monks of emptiness), and their musical repertory, known as *honkyoku* (original pieces), that animates much of the activity in the West. While music lessons, festivals, concerts, and the internet all play an important role in the social life of this geographically dispersed scene,³ albums of *shakuhachi* music arguably provide the most everyday and accessible opportunity for many enthusiasts to hear *shakuhachi* players other than themselves.⁴ If such recordings are crucial to how the scene performs and listens to itself—its histories, trends, performers, and musics—then my concern in this article is the reflexive dynamic by which certain albums of *shakuhachi* music root the instrument in various locations, both inside and outside Japan, and then circulate this rootedness throughout the wider scene.⁵

¹ Martin Stokes, *The Republic of Love: Cultural Intimacy in Turkish Popular Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 8.

² See Steve Casano, “From Fuke Shuu to Uduboo: The Transnational Flow of the Shakuhachi to the West,” *The World of Music* 47 (2005): 17–33 and Jay Keister, “The Shakuhachi as Spiritual Tool: A Japanese Buddhist Instrument in the West,” *Asian Music* 35 no. 2 (2004): 99–131.

³ See Casano, “From Fuke Shuu to Uduboo.”

⁴ On “affiliative” recordings in another context, see Angela Impey, “Keeping in Touch via Cassette: Tracing Dinka Personal Songs from Cattle Camp to Transnational Audio Letter,” *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 25 no. 2 (2013): 197–210.

⁵ My use of the term “scene” reflects an interest in “music’s capacity to construct ‘affective alliances’ . . . propagating musically imagined communities that are irreducible to prior categories of social identity.” See Georgina Born, “Music and the Materialization of Identities,” *Journal of Material Culture* 16 (2011):

Many of these locations—real, recorded, or imaginary—evoke ideas about the *shakuhachi*'s relationship with landscapes and nature. As Alison Tokita and David W. Hughes argue, the notion of a connection between Japanese music and natural sound is problematic and so often repeated as to have become a cliché.⁶ This is the legacy of *nihonjinron* (theories on the Japanese), an ideological movement that makes claims for the uniqueness and homogeneity of Japanese culture and that has found voice in music scholarship in, for example, accounts of the unique Japanese sensitivity to natural sound.⁷ The *shakuhachi* scene in the West is less troubled by, and perhaps even unsettles, this ideology as it takes ideas about music and nature into new cultural contexts. In current discourse on the *shakuhachi*, the connection with nature extends in several directions: to the physical instrument, a simple bamboo tube without mechanical parts; to its history as an instrument played by itinerant monks who travelled the Japanese countryside; to references to natural phenomena in the titles of some *honkyoku*; and to the iconic status of natural metaphors in describing the instrument's sound. My aim is to highlight the continuing generative power of that discourse within the global *shakuhachi* scene by focusing on albums in which the instrument's association with landscapes seems especially at stake. I argue that these recordings do not simply replicate earlier discourses about the *shakuhachi* and nature, but rather represent new and highly audible ways of enacting this connection. They also posit landscapes of considerable complexity, which I theorize through the notion of assemblage: a folding together of places and recordings that involves combinations of, and associations between, many diverse

381. Born is citing Will Straw, "Systems of Articulation, Logics of Change: Communities and Scenes in Popular Music," *Cultural Studies* 5, no. 3 (1991): 368–388.

⁶ Alison Tokita and David W. Hughes, "Context and Change in Japanese Music," in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Japanese Music*, eds. Alison Tokita and David W. Hughes (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 26.

⁷ See Gregory Shepherd, "'Nihonjinron': Challenge to Academia," *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* 22 (1991): 187–192 and James Edwards, "'Silence by My Noise': An Ecocritical Aesthetic of Noise in Japanese Traditional Sound Culture and the Sound Art of Akita Masami," *Green Letters* 15 (2011): 94 and 100.

entities. With these ideas in mind, I show how recordings mediate certain agendas and tensions underlying the emergence of a global *shakuhachi* imaginary, while also considering the significance of the relationship between recordings and musical geographies beyond this particular context.

My analysis moves through this loose corpus of recordings in much the same way as someone might engage with a single album: first glancing at the artwork and title, perhaps reading the liner notes, and then repeatedly listening to the recording, hearing different things each time. I give most attention to albums that evoke landscapes by incorporating environmental sounds alongside the *shakuhachi*, drawing on interviews with several of the artists behind these recordings. In this I join the recent scholarly turn towards the study of recordings,⁸ especially work within ethnomusicology that traces the multiplicity of recordings as social objects. In her analysis of Paul Simon's *Graceland* (1986), Louise Meintjes treats this controversial album as "a complex polysemic sign vehicle," subject to "multiple readings" dependent on listeners' social positioning.⁹ In her ethnography of a South African recording studio, Meintjes goes further, revealing how studio practices connect aesthetic and political domains. In addition to drawing on her insights into processes of mediation, the ways I look, read, and listen through these *shakuhachi* recordings echo the way Meintjes' analysis is structured around repeated "cuts," "takes," and "mixes" to present several different perspectives on a single musical practice or setting.¹⁰ Similarly, in recent work on popular music in Turkey, Martin Stokes attends to the "play of imagination" in analyzing songs, performances, and recordings, and draws attention, as

⁸ Encapsulated in Nicholas Cook, Eric Clarke, Daniel Leech-Wilkinson, and John Rink, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Recorded Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

⁹ Louise Meintjes, "Paul Simon's *Graceland*, South Africa, and the Mediation of Musical Meaning," *Ethnomusicology*, 34 no. 1 (1990): 37-38.

¹⁰ Louise Meintjes, *Sound of Africa! Making Music Zulu in a South African Studio* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 8 and 14.

in the epigraph above, to their liveliness as social and cultural assemblages.¹¹ Where Meintjes and Stokes focus on well-known performers, my choice of examples ranges more widely, from albums by major artists through to lesser-known independent and unreleased recordings, reflecting my interest in the varied ways of engaging with the *shakuhachi*: professional and amateur, personal and public. Although not exhaustive, the chosen albums do convey the range of ideas, sites, and sounds at play in these recordings, and the spectrum of approaches that can be found within the scene.

A history of shakuhachi recordings

A brief historical overview of Western involvement in the recording of the *shakuhachi* helps situate the albums discussed below. Japan's substantially increased relationship with the West following the Meiji Restoration of 1868, along with the invention and commercialization of phonographic recording towards the end of the nineteenth century, helped set the stage for the earliest recordings of Japanese traditional music. In a pattern repeated with other musics around the world, these were made by Europeans and Americans working for Western recording companies. The *shakuhachi* features on wax cylinder recordings made in 1903 by Fred Gaisberg (employed by Gramophone and Typewriter Ltd.), and between 1901 and 1913 by Erwin Walter, Otto Abraham, and Erich M. von Hornbostel (all employed by the Berlin Phonogramm-

¹¹ Stokes, *The Republic of Love*, 6, 8. Alongside music, Stokes discusses liner notes (131-134 and 175), cover imagery (78-79, 131, and 137), technical details (80 and 126-127), and reviewers' responses (83-84 and 111-112), all of which I take up here.

Archiv).¹² A substantial number of *shakuhachi* albums were produced in Japan subsequently (though there is little scholarly work on these). Among the first recordings to reach listeners further afield were Yamaguchi Gor[macron]o's *A Bell Ringing in the Empty Sky* (Nonesuch Records H-72025, 1969; reissued as CD 130364-2, 2007) and Miyata K[macron]ohachiro's *Shakuhachi: The Japanese Flute* (Nonesuch Records H-72076, 1977; reissued as CD 7559-72076-2, 1991).¹³ British *shakuhachi* player Clive Bell writes that "It's probably hard to overstate the impact of Yamaguchi's original LP in the West"¹⁴ and, along with recordings by other major figures,¹⁵ it helped spur many of the first generation of non-Japanese who travelled to Japan to study the *shakuhachi*. Many of these players subsequently released recordings of their own, marking an important expansion in Western engagement from consumption to production of *shakuhachi* recordings. Albums made in the 1980s and 1990s by prominent Western *shakuhachi* players such as Christopher Yohmei Blasdel, Michael Chikuzen Gould, Riley Lee, John Kaizan Neptune, and Ronnie Nyogetsu Seldin¹⁶ were among the key artifacts around which an emerging global *shakuhachi* scene could crystallize, providing a sense that the *shakuhachi* was being played and heard worldwide for the first time. This recent history has

¹² See Gerald Groemer, "Review," *Asian Folklore Studies*, 62 no. 2 (2003): 329–331; Gerald Groemer, "Review," *Ethnomusicology* 49, no. 1 (2005): 161–168; J. Scott Miller, "Meiji Music in Berlin," *Monumenta Nipponica* 59, no. 3 (2004): 391–394; and Jay Keister, "Review," *Asian Music* 37, no. 1 (2006): 149–153. Both recordings have been reissued as CDs. See *Zensh[macron]u Nihon Fukikomi Kotohajime: 1903-nen Gaizubaagu Rek[macron]odinguzu* [The Beginnings of Japanese Sound Recording, a Complete Edition: The 1903 Recordings of Fred Gaisberg] (EMI TOCF 59061-71, 2001) and *Walzenaufnahmen Japanischer Musik* [Wax Cylinder Recordings of Japanese Music 1901-1913] (Berliner Phonogramm-Archiv BphA-WA1, 2003).

¹³ Perhaps the earliest recording available in the West was an LP of anonymous artists called *Japanese Masterpieces for the Shakuhachi* (Lyricord LLST 7176, 1967; reissued as CD LYRCD 7176, 1990), but this seems to have had relatively little impact.

¹⁴ Clive Bell, review of *A Bell Ringing in the Empty Sky*, <http://www.clivebell.co.uk/write.htm> (accessed 5 December 2012).

¹⁵ Aoki Reibo II, Miyata K[macron]ohachiro, Watazumi Doso, Yamamoto Hozan, and Yokoyama Katsuya, among others.

¹⁶ Many of whom have Japanese professional names, conferred by a teacher as recognition of their training and accomplishments. See Keister, "The Shakuhachi as Spiritual Tool," 104, 113. I include such names here only if they are commonly used by the artist in question.

produced large numbers of *shakuhachi* recordings, ranging across geographies and genres, including classical *honkyoku*, *sankyoku* (ensemble music featuring *koto*, *shamisen*, voice, and *shakuhachi*), *min'yō* (folksong), jazz, new compositions, and film and popular musics. Alongside other factors, such as overseas teaching and performances by leading Japanese performers,¹⁷ such recordings have helped create the large, active and internally diverse scene that exists today. Many well-known Western performers have produced substantial collections of albums, and digital recording technologies and internet platforms also allow others to produce recordings and make them available online with relative ease. Japanese recordings reach the West much more readily, though, as Groemer has noted, the markets remain somewhat disconnected.¹⁸

Depicting/viewing landscapes in album imagery

Anyone amassing a collection of *shakuhachi* recordings might notice album covers based around several recurring themes. Photos of performers, the *shakuhachi* itself, and Buddhist iconography are all common, as are depictions of nature and landscapes. Some, like the photo titled *Japan; On the Inland Sea, a boat adrift in the reeds*, which can be found on the reissue of *A Bell Ringing in the Empty Sky*,¹⁹ show romantic Japanese landscapes shrouded in mist. Others depict similar scenes through classical Japanese styles of painting.²⁰ Some albums feature pictures of mountains, often Mount Fuji—one of the most iconic examples of Japanese

¹⁷ Casano, “From Fuke Shuu to Uduboo,” 23-30.

¹⁸ Groemer, “Review,” 162.

¹⁹ Burt Glinn, (Magnum Photos, 1961).

²⁰ E.g., Katoh Hidekazu and Richard Stagg, *Masters of the Shakuhachi* (ARC EUCD1868, 2004).

landscapes.²¹ Others use imagery of bamboo,²² Japanese gardens,²³ and cranes (the latter occurs frequently when an album includes a *honkyoku* imitative of these birds).²⁴

Certain albums situate the performer firmly within these natural landscapes.²⁵ Some of the best known examples—which arguably set a precedent for subsequent albums—are found in a series of LPs by Watazumi Doso, the covers of which show this iconic performer playing by a boulder-strewn river and carrying a *shakuhachi* through a forest.²⁶ Similar imagery is revisited in more recent releases, such as a 2012 album, recorded in Spain, on which Japanese performer Chiku Za is seen seated on a large rock in the middle of a stream, playing the *shakuhachi*.²⁷ Mountains and gardens also appear as sites of performance: Adrian Freedman’s *Music on the Edge of Silence* includes a photo of the performer playing in front of Mount Fuji; Jim Franklin’s *Zen Garden Meditations* shows the performer in the grounds of the garden in which the album was recorded;²⁸ and similarly, Josh Smith appears playing the *shakuhachi* in a Japanese garden on his *Sound of the White Phoenix*.²⁹

Together these album covers begin to demonstrate the association between *shakuhachi* recordings and landscapes that I want to explore. Ranging from cultivated gardens to vast

²¹ E.g., Clive Bell, *Shakuhachi* (ARC EUCD 1135, 1994); Adrian Freedman, *Music on the Edge of Silence* (Eternal Heart Music, 2007); Riley Lee, *Mountain Valley* (New World Productions NWCD715, 1994); Richard Stagg, *Shakuhachi* (ARC EUCD 1103, 1995).

²² E.g., Freedman, *Music on the Edge of Silence*; John Neptune, *Words Can’t Go There* (Oasis NHCD-203, 1991).

²³ E.g., Torsten Olafson, *Standing Waves: Zen Shakuhachi Meditation* (Fonix Musik, 2002); Miyata, *Shakuhachi*; Brian Ritchie, *Ryoanji* (Thylacine, 2006).

²⁴ E.g., Riley Lee and Andrew MacGregor, *Nesting of the Cranes* (New World Productions NWCD 713, 1994); Stan Richardson, *Moon on the Water* (Sounds True M927D, 2005); Yokoyama Katsuya, *L’art du Shakuhachi* (Ocora C560114, 1997); and Sakai Sy[macron]od[macron]o, *Five Metamorphoses of Nesting Cranes* (ALM Records Ebisu-12, 2006).

²⁵ As noted in Keister, “The Shakuhachi as Spiritual Tool,” 121.

²⁶ Watazumi Doso, *Mysterious Sound of Bamboo Flute 1* (Crown SW-5006, 1968); Watazumi, *Mysterious Sound of Bamboo Flute 2* (Crown SW-5007, 1968); and Watazumi, *Rinbo Yondai* (Philips PH-7520, 1974).

²⁷ Chiku Za, *Take to Iki* (JVZ-01, 2012).

²⁸ James Ashley Franklin, *Zen Garden Meditations* (Benediktushof Edition, 2011).

²⁹ Josh Smith, *Sound of the White Phoenix* (2008).

mountains, and resulting from decisions by both artists and record labels, these packaged landscapes are not so much deliberate attempts to signify, as they are participants within a shared constellation of imagery considered appropriate to the *shakuhachi*. Framed by the edges of the CD or LP, each album presents a view, characterized by the subtle ease with which it opens a window onto somewhere else.

Narrating/reading landscapes in liner notes

As the listener journeys deeper into the album, words also articulate the association between the *shakuhachi* and landscapes. Alongside performer biographies and descriptions of the instrument's history, liner notes often include explanations of the natural imagery behind certain *honkyoku*. Many of the more unusual albums discussed below add comments on the sites and circumstances of their recording, and albums produced more conventionally also use texts to gather thematic associations around the instrument. Michael Doherty, for instance, writes that his album *Shakuhachi no Oto*:

focuses on the theme of mountains as sources of immense power—teeming with life and at the same time immense crucibles of silence. *Shakuhachi no Oto* contains traditional sounds from both sacred and folk traditions that relate to mountains in terms of their spiritual strength, their natural ecology and settings, as well as folklore and folk traditions in their midst.³⁰

Doherty's album introduces several related and important points. Most fundamentally, his thematic framing grounds the music in a place of personal significance, locating the album physically, conceptually, and autobiographically. Doherty explained to me that living in or near

³⁰ Michael Doherty, liner notes to *Shakuhachi no Oto* (2012), <http://cdbaby.com/cd/michaelandrewdoherty1> (accessed 25 June 2012).

mountains has been important both personally and for how he thinks about the *shakuhachi*, and that the recording was made in his home in the Rocky Mountains. The mountain theme also felt appropriate because it connected his home with the mountainous landscape of Japan, whilst at the same time expressing “an essential humanness that can take place anywhere.”³¹ These ideas are at work through several creative and technical choices in the album. First, in the selection of pieces that echo the mountain theme, such as *San Ya* (Three Valleys) and several *min'y[macron]o* (folksongs) with titles that incorporate the word *yama* (mountain) (including *Yamanaka Bushi* and *Sotoyama Bushi*), and more indirectly in pieces with “nature titles” such as *Ukigumo* (Floating Clouds). Second, in Doherty’s programmatic sequencing of the pieces to represent a mountain journey: starting in the village in the morning, ascending into the mountains during the day, and ending at night. Third, in his use of minimal reverb to emulate the “really raw, stark sound” he experienced whilst playing the *shakuhachi* in the pine forest near his home:

I started playing and the sound was just this dense wet sound, the moss around me was wet, the sound was kind of . . . absorbed by the forest, I felt. And I thought . . . this is where the *shakuhachi* is supposed to be, . . . in nature and in the environment, in this quiet. . . . so part of that I wanted to put into the recording.³²

Like *Shakuhachi no Oto*, David Bowdler’s *On the Mountain* (self-release, 2006/7) incorporates several pieces with nature titles such as *Sagariha* (Hanging Leaves), *Shika no T[macron]one* (Distant Cry of Deer), and *Ukigumo* (Floating Clouds). The recording also suggests a programmatic narrative by combining *shakuhachi* performances with spoken readings from the poetry of the Zen monk, poet and calligrapher Ry[macron]okan Taigu (1758–1831).³³ In

³¹ Michael Doherty, Skype interview with the author, 30 June 2012.

³² Ibid.

³³ Similarly, two recordings, *Bamboo Dreams* and *Haiku Shaku Garden* (self-release, n.d.), combine *shakuhachi* performances by Martha Fabrique with readings of *haiku* by American poet Michael Moore, again drawing on ideas about the instrument’s connection with nature (Martha Fabrique, Skype interview with the author, 25 March 2013).

its use of recorded spoken texts, Bowdler's album stands partway between the written texts that frame some albums and the recorded environmental sounds that are heard on others.

Sounding/hearing landscapes in recordings

The evocation of landscapes is most audible in albums that incorporate environmental sounds alongside the *shakuhachi*, and these recordings are the focus of the remainder of this article (see discography). Just as a single album affords multiple listening experiences, so I present several analytical perspectives on a body of recordings. My first "listening" is descriptive, identifying the sounds present on the recordings and the sites in which they were recorded. The second explores how these sonic landscapes mobilize particular ideas about the *shakuhachi*'s history and musical geography. Finally, my third "listening" examines how the recordings are constructed through processes of assemblage and mediation.

First listening: sounds and sites

Albums such as Kurahashi Yoshio's *Honkyoku* (INEDIT W 260134, 2008) are firmly rooted in landscapes inside Japan. It features several tracks recorded in temples associated with the *komus[macron]o*. The album also includes a performance of the *honkyoku Takiuchi*

(Cascading Waterfall) recorded at Asahidaki waterfall on Japan's Izu peninsula,³⁴ a landscape made audible by the constant accompaniment of the sound of falling water. An album by American-born *shakuhachi* player John Kaizan Neptune also marks its location within Japan: *Words Can't Go There* (Oasis NHCD-203, 1991) was recorded in Neptune's "dome house" in the Japanese countryside. The liner notes relate that "we opened up the windows a bit to let in some delightful cricket sounds to give the real flavor of a late-night fall recording of *shakuhachi* in Kamogawa"; these sounds combine with the "natural and full" resonance of this large wooden structure to create the album's distinctive acoustic.³⁵

If Neptune's album signals one consequence of the global movement of people and music—namely Western players resident in Japan—then other recordings reveal another aspect of this dynamic: the return of Western players from Japan to their home country. Vlastislav Matou[hacek]sek's *Taki ochi* (ARTA F1 0119, 2003) includes three versions of the piece *Takiochi*, recorded in the cloister of a monastery in the Czech Republic, alongside a soundscape recording made—like Kurahashi's *Honkyoku*—at the Asahidaki waterfall. The locations are miles apart sonically—the reverberation of the cloister contrasting with the layers of waterfall, insect, and bird sounds—and highlight Matou[hacek]sek's connections with both Japan and his home country. The incorporation of several recording locations, straddling inside and outside Japan, is also a feature of Stan Richardson's *Moon on the Water* (Sounds True M927D, 2005): the running water heard in performances of *Esashi Oiwake* and *Komoro Uta*³⁶ was recorded in

³⁴ Asahidaki is near the site of the now vanished *komus[macron]o* temple Ry[macron]ugenji and is the waterfall thought to have inspired several *honkyoku* with variants on the name *Takiochi* (*Cascading Waterfall*).

³⁵ Neptune, liner notes to *Words Can't Go There*, n.p.

³⁶ Richardson's album notes correctly identify *Komoro Uta* as a song (*uta*) from the town of Komoro in central Japan. (His notes also describe the song as a lullaby (*komori uta*), perhaps confusing Komoro with *komori*.) The song's accepted title is *Komoro Mago Uta* (Packhorse Song of Komoro), and indeed it was traditionally sung while leading a string of packhorses.

Japan (including, in part, at the Asahidaki waterfall), while two versions of the piece *Tsuru no Sugomori* (Nesting Cranes) use Richardson's personal field recordings of cranes made in the USA.³⁷

Other albums traverse the distance to Japan in different ways. Jim Franklin's *Butsuga* (Celestial Harmonies 13177-2, 1999) was recorded in the Japanese garden in Cowra, Australia, a garden built to commemorate the site of a WWII prisoner of war camp. Bird, water, and bell sounds are prominent, as well as the resonance of several structures within the garden.³⁸ Another of Franklin's albums, *Zen Garden Meditations* (Benediktushof Edition, 2011), was recorded in the garden of the Benediktushof meditation center near Wuerzburg in Germany, and again environmental sounds, especially birdsong, are a constant presence.

Yet other albums are rooted in distinctive landscapes with no particular connection to Japan. Phil James' *First Places: Solo Shakuhachi Flute* (Sparkling Beatnik SBR0030, 2002), recorded in Missouri, USA, features the echo of a cave (complete with dripping water) on two tracks and the hum of frogs on another. The *honkyoku*-inspired improvisations on Andrew Jilin's *Silence and Sound* (self-release, 2011) are accompanied by the sounds of waves, birds, thunder, and rain,³⁹ and were recorded in several locations in Russia and Sicily.⁴⁰ The liner notes to Jeffrey Lependorf's *New Bamboo: Silo Solos* (Sachimay Interventions, 2005) describe how "birds flew through the silo [the recording location], insects appeared, and a variety of other natural sounds entered the space The natural echo of the silo creates a rich acoustic landscape around the naturally haunting sound of the *shakuhachi*."⁴¹ Riley Lee is one of the

³⁷ Stan Richardson, Skype interview with the author, 23 March 2013.

³⁸ Franklin, liner notes to *Butsuga* (1999), n.p.

³⁹ Andrew Jilin, *Silence and Sound* (2011), <http://cdbaby.com/cd/andrewjilin12> (accessed 12 May 2012).

⁴⁰ Andrew Jilin, Skype interview with the author, 16 August 2012.

⁴¹ Liner notes to Jeffrey Lependorf, *New Bamboo: Silo Solos* (Sachimay Interventions, 2005), <http://cdbaby.com/cd/jeffreylependorf> (accessed 27 October 2012).

most prolific experimenters with recording sites, especially favoring highly reverberant acoustics. Most relevant here are his recordings made in an empty underground reservoir and, with Andrew MacGregor, in a large cave, both in Australia.⁴²

Finally, brief mention should be made of what could be described as the counter-representation of other *shakuhachi* albums, achieved through the choice of quite different recording sites. Two albums exemplify this position, both—incidentally—recorded in the dome of the former U.S. listening station at Teufelsberg, Berlin: Thorsten Knaub’s *Listening Station: Music for Abandoned Structures and Shakuhachi* (self-release, 2011) and Michael McInerney’s *From The Devil’s Mountain: Listening For Lost Voices* (self-release, 2012). Both albums consist largely of improvisations played within and shaped by the dome’s powerful reverb. In a review of McInerney’s CD, Clive Bell describes its sonic world as “thick with resonances—the swirling audio echoes are paralleled by the hovering memories of Cold War history and obsolete modes of government surveillance.”⁴³ In Knaub’s album too, the distinctly technological sound world stands in contrast to the natural aesthetic of most *shakuhachi* recordings.

Collectively then, these recordings engage many sites, both inside and outside Japan. Interestingly, there is no straightforward history that accompanies this geography, no clear chronological progression from recordings which situate the *shakuhachi* inside Japan to albums which locate it elsewhere. The late arrival of Knaub and McInerney’s albums might be seen as a move away from the preceding “natural” aesthetic. Such reflections already direct us towards questions about how these recordings mobilize particular ideas about *shakuhachi* music.

⁴² Lee and MacGregor, *Nesting of the Cranes* and Riley Lee, *Water Music* (Tall Poppies Records TP033, 1995). See also Riley Lee, *Breath-sight: Yearning for the Bell, Volume One* (Tall Poppies TP015, 1992); and Riley Lee, *Autumn Field: Yearning for the Bell, Volume Four* (Tall Poppies TP138, 1999).

⁴³ Clive Bell, review of *From The Devil’s Mountain*, on the European Shakuhachi Society Forum, <http://www.shakuhachiforum.eu/t867-CD-Review-Michael-McInerney.htm> (accessed 11 March 2013).

Second listening: meaningful landscapes

In their evocation of landscapes many of the albums discussed in the previous section inherit and reproduce a discourse that ascribes authenticity to the performance of the *shakuhachi* in natural spaces, drawing on ideas about the instrument's sound, construction, and history. Although many of these ideas have some historical validity, they have been amplified in the contemporary imaginary, especially amongst *shakuhachi* players in the West. One example of this is the increased preference Jay Keister notes among many Western *shakuhachi* enthusiasts for "rawer," less refined instruments, reflecting what he calls "a physical, acoustical manifestation of the privileging of the spirituality of 'natural sound' over music."⁴⁴ This is not to suggest that such ideas are held uniformly or uncritically, but they remain pervasive, naturalized, and important for many players with whom I have spoken during ethnographic research.

The important point here is that recent albums not only reproduce but transform these ideas: what was already at play in the words and imagery of older albums came to be heard in recordings throughout the 1990s and 2000s. The incorporation of environmental sounds makes the naturalness of *shakuhachi* performance audible in new ways. As Franklin explained to me, "you make the connection: natural instrument, natural sound, natural sound environment. That's certainly something which is a part of the general perception of the instrument and something which I . . . have taken on board."⁴⁵ Most fundamentally, this is a question of the performance being situated, or what Franklin describes as "embedded," within a particular site and soundscape. Just as we hear recorded instrumental performances as embodied, so we hear these

⁴⁴ Keister, "The Shakuhachi as Spiritual Tool," 111. For a similar argument about Western conceptions of the instrument's relation to Buddhism, see *ibid.*, 100.

⁴⁵ Jim Franklin, Skype interview with the author, 5 March 2013.

performances as emplaced, with environmental sounds implying larger imagined landscapes; varied bird, insect, and water sounds representing more or less rich habitats; and different kinds of reverberation suggesting different natural or man-made structures.⁴⁶ Franklin's description of recording the piece *Yamagoe* (Crossing the Mountain) on top of the symbolic mountain in the center of the Cowra garden—notice the purposeful connection between the piece's title and the site of its recording—provides a rich account of how this particular location shaped his experience as a performer:

[*Yamagoe*] was recorded with a view through the entire garden and also hearing . . . faint environmental sound from the whole garden, [such as] breezes in the trees. Luckily people weren't being very loud at the time. There was a sense always in the external recordings of there being other elements of sound that I was listening to. Now exactly what I was listening for is really very difficult to say, but it was a sense of awareness that I wasn't alone as a sound source in the space, which is what actually happens in a studio . . . which is designed to be more or less dead, or a concert hall with a particular reverberation. . . . In the garden I was playing into and with . . . this whole sense of an environment: visual, because I was looking at it, as well as aural, because I was hearing what was there.⁴⁷

The recordings gather other associations around the imagined naturalness of the instrument and its sound, amplifying ideas that are already well-established in writing on the *shakuhachi*. Blasdel writes that “Instruments like the *shakuhachi* provide us with a living, vital connection with natural tones. Performance techniques such as *muraiki* [explosive, breathy playing] or *tamane* [flutter-tonguing] . . . have their origins in natural sounds: wind and bird

⁴⁶ The sensitivity towards relationships between instrumental performances and co-present, sometimes multi-layered, natural sounds evident in these albums recalls Steven Feld's well-known work on the significance of waterfall, bird and insect sounds among the Kaluli of Papua New Guinea and their theorization of sonic relationships via the “spatial-acoustic metaphor” of *dulugu ganalan* (lift-up-over sounding). See, for example, Steven Feld, “Aesthetics as Iconicity of Style (Uptown Title); Or, (Downtown Title) ‘Lift-Up-Over Sounding’: Getting into the Kaluli Groove,” in *Music Grooves: Essays and Dialogues*, eds. Charles Keil and Steven Feld (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 114-118. For another example of sensitivity towards waterfall sounds, see Henry Stobart “Devils, Daydreams and Desire: Siren Traditions and Musical Creation in the Central-Southern Andes,” in *Music of the Sirens*, eds. Linda Phyllis Austern and Inna Naroditskaya (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 105–139.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

cries.”⁴⁸ Such ideas are indexed in album imagery of cranes and bamboo stalks, but recordings incorporating environmental sounds encourage listeners more directly to connect the timbres and pitches of instrumental and natural sounds. As Franklin suggests, the precise effects of environmental sounds on the performer are hard to determine. Nonetheless the recordings imply some connection, perhaps subtly echoing Blasdel’s idea that “a performer cannot execute such techniques if these sounds have not been thoroughly experienced in nature.”⁴⁹

Alongside ideas about the instrument’s connection with nature, these recordings mediate a set of related discourses on authentic *shakuhachi* performance. First, environmental sounds situate the recordings outside the recording studio and, through co-presence with the *shakuhachi*, subtly encourage listeners to hear the performances as having a quality of “liveness.” As Neptune puts it: “the sterile environment of the average recording studio does not seem suited for music that is as spiritual as *honkyoku*.”⁵⁰ Liveness is often highlighted in liner notes by mentioning the dates and times of the recordings; references to single, “unedited,” and “unenhanced” takes also signal minimal intervention in the original performance.⁵¹ Technological fidelity further privileges liveness over mediation, as in Neptune’s note that “the mikes were separated about the same amount as the ears on your head to give an amazingly true reproduction. No artificial echo, delay, or equalization was used.”⁵² Yet other albums, such as those by Matou[hacek]sek and Jilin, derive what we might call “itinerant liveness” from the

⁴⁸ Christopher Yohmei Blasdel, “Learning to Play,” in *The Shakuhachi: A Manual for Learning*, by Christopher Yohmei Blasdel and Y[macron]uk[macron]o Kamisang[macron]o (Tokyo: Ongaku no Tomo Sha, 1988), 66. See also Zachary Wallmark, “Sacred Abjection in Zen Shakuhachi,” *Ethnomusicology Review*, 17 (2012): 3; published online at <http://ethnomusicologyreview.ucla.edu/journal/volume/17/piece/585>.

⁴⁹ Blasdel, “Learning to Play,” 66.

⁵⁰ Neptune, liner notes to *Words Can’t Go There*, n.p.

⁵¹ Liner notes to Lee and MacGregor, *Nesting of the Cranes*, n.p.; liner notes to Lee, *Breath-sight*, n.p. and liner notes to Lependorf, *New Bamboo*, n.p.

⁵² Neptune, liner notes to *Words Can’t Go There*, n.p.

spontaneity with which the recordings were made, a feature audible in the unpolished production aesthetic. Matou[hacek]sek explains how he was “irresistibly” drawn back to the Asahidaki waterfall, placed a microphone at the bottom, climbed up the hillside, waded into a pool, and played the *shakuhachi*, wondering how the recording would sound.⁵³

Second, environmental sounds highlight the way the natural and the spiritual intertwine in discourse on the *shakuhachi*.⁵⁴ Matou[hacek]sek writes of the “spiritual charge” when “one of the cicadas even seemed for a moment to be trying to join in with the . . . flutes or compete with them.”⁵⁵ The imagery and liner notes of Franklin’s *Butsuga* (literally “Buddha-image”) point to Japanese temple gardens as sites where the natural and the spiritual intertwine,⁵⁶ but the idea is further brought to life on some tracks by the iconic sounds of such spaces: bells, flowing water, and the *clack* of an ornamental water-driven device known as a *shishi-odoshi* (deer-startler). Following Beverley Diamond’s comments about the mystical connotations often tied to heavy reverberation,⁵⁷ the natural echo of the enormous cavern on Lee and MacGregor’s album might also be heard as freighted with spiritual associations.⁵⁸

Third, several albums share a concern for history and memorialization. Thus Matou[hacek]sek writes, “The idea that something as incomprehensible and ethereal as a musical composition [*Takiochi*] could be the only ‘material’ remnant of a famous temple [the now

⁵³ Matou[hacek]sek, liner notes to *Taki ochi*, n.p.

⁵⁴ The spiritual dimension of the *shakuhachi* tradition is a well-worn theme in the scholarly literature. See Andreas Gutzwiller, “Shakuhachi: Aspects of History, Practice, and Teaching,” Ph.D. diss. (Wesleyan University, 1974); Riley Kelly Lee, “Yearning for the Bell: A Study of Transmission in the Shakuhachi Honkyoku Tradition,” Ph.D. diss. (University of Sydney, 1993); and, for a more critical perspective, Keister, “The Shakuhachi as Spiritual Tool.”

⁵⁵ Matou[hacek]sek, liner notes to *Taki ochi*, n.p.

⁵⁶ “The whole of the natural world, with its harmony and balance, can be seen as an image of Buddha” (Franklin, liner notes to *Butsuga*, n.p.).

⁵⁷ Beverley Diamond, “Media as Social Action: Native American Musicians in the Studio,” in *Wired for Sound: Engineering and Technologies in Sonic Cultures*, eds. Paul D. Greene and Thomas Porcello (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2005), 132.

⁵⁸ Lee and MacGregor, *Nesting of the Cranes*.

vanished Ry[macron]ugenji] was truly fascinating to me.”⁵⁹ British player Justin Senry[macron]u Williams explained that his choice to record outside partly reflected a desire to experiment and retain greater creative control than might be possible in a studio, but also: “I did want natural sound. . . . I’m not too fond of . . . modern artificial sounds in my recordings. . . . [T]he way that I was recording in the forest, you could hear the forest and you could hear me. . . . [T]hese sounds could be the same in the Edo period.”⁶⁰ Such comments glance back to the heyday of the *shakuhachi* in Japan,⁶¹ but other albums engage more recent histories. Franklin’s *Butsuga*, for instance, was recorded in a Japanese garden built to commemorate a prisoner of war camp, and his recording of *Tamuke*, often thought of as a funerary piece, is “a memorial for those who died in the attempt to escape from the . . . camp.”⁶² And, as I have already suggested, McInerney’s album echoes the Cold War history of the Berlin listening station.

Finally, the landscapes these recordings evoke are, in most cases, settings for solo *shakuhachi* performances. While the *shakuhachi* participates in several ensemble genres, its oldest repertoire, *honkyoku*, is predominantly solo and sometimes imagined as solitary music, played alone and without an audience.⁶³ Thus Andrew Killick cites the *shakuhachi* repertoire among the very few genres directed to what he calls “holicipation,” where “the solitary music-maker personally experiences the whole of the musical event.”⁶⁴ The recordings discussed here partake of these ideas—for example in album imagery showing landscapes inhabited by solitary

⁵⁹ Matou[hacek]sek, liner notes to *Taki ochi*, n.p.

⁶⁰ Justin Senry[macron]u Williams, interview with the author, London, February 26, 2013. Unreleased recording.

⁶¹ For a thorough discussion of the contested discourse on the *shakuhachi*’s history, see Gunnar Linder, “Deconstructing Tradition in Japanese Music: A Study of Shakuhachi, Historical Authenticity and Transmission of Tradition,” Ph.D. diss. (Stockholm University, 2012).

⁶² Franklin, liner notes to *Butsuga*, n.p.

⁶³ For example, in Gutzwiller, “Shakuhachi: Aspects of History, Practice, and Teaching,” 140.

⁶⁴ Andrew Killick, “Holicipation: Prolegomenon to an Ethnography of Solitary Music-Making,” *Ethnomusicology Forum*, 15 no. 2 (2006): 273.

players—but also rework them by including environmental sounds which throw into relief the musical sounds of the *shakuhachi*, now solitary, but not simply alone.

In sum, the use of environmental sound makes audible ideas about the natural and solitary sound of the *shakuhachi*, as well as the authenticity, sacredness, and histories of certain sites of musical performance—while also allowing artists to provide a distinctive take on much-recorded traditional pieces.

Third listening: assembled landscapes

For the remainder of this essay I listen for a variety of more unstable and contested projects and processes that coalesce around the notion of assemblage. At its most abstract, the idea of assemblage means treating recordings not just as carriers of socially constructed meaning, but also as combinations of heterogeneous entities that are material, discursive, technical, and natural. My approach here draws on reworkings of actor-network theory within sociology and cultural geography,⁶⁵ Georgina Born's productive deployment of ideas on assemblage and agency within the study of music,⁶⁶ and debates around the ethical implications of sound

⁶⁵ Within sociology, see John Law and John Hassard, eds., *Actor Network Theory and After* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999); and John Law and Annemarie Mol, *Complexities: Social Studies of Knowledge Practices* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002). Within cultural geography, see Sarah Whatmore, *Hybrid Geographies* (London: SAGE, 2001) and Steve Hinchliffe, *Geographies of Nature: Societies, Environments, Ecologies* (London: Sage Publications, 2007).

⁶⁶ Georgina Born, "On Musical Mediation: Ontology, Technology and Creativity," *Twentieth-Century Music* 2 no. 1 (2005): 8 and Georgina Born, "Afterword. Recording: From Reproduction to Representation to Remediation," in Cook, Clarke, Leech-Wilkinson and Rink, eds. *The Cambridge Companion to Recorded Music*, 286–304.

reproduction.⁶⁷ But before considering how these recordings combine different spaces, times, and agencies, we must recognize a more fundamental dynamic of assemblage: en route from creation to consumption these albums are both produced by, and productive of, a variety of landscapes. It is easy to overlook this uncanny property of such everyday objects, but landscapes are both their sound-sources and the imagined spaces they generate and commodify for symbolic circulation. Such conjoining of the cultural and material, the natural and technological, anticipates many of the themes explored below.

Though many of these albums are centered on single sites—or at least invested in a broader sense of emplacement—they also perform more complex geographies. So “in place of . . . geometric habits that reiterate the world as a single grid-like surface,” I take up here what Sarah Whatmore describes as “hybrid mappings [that] are necessarily topological, emphasizing the multiplicity of space-times generated in/by the movements and rhythms of heterogeneous association.”⁶⁸ While the soundscape of Asahidaki stands at the center of Matou[hacek]sek’s *Taki ochi*, the album also features recordings made in a Czech monastery of pieces associated with the Fudaiji and vanished Ry[macron]ugenji temples. In Richardson’s *Moon on the Water*, single

⁶⁷ R. Murray Schafer’s well-known term, *schizophonia*, used to describe “the split between an original sound and its electroacoustical transmission or reproduction”, is an important departure point for these debates. See R. Murray Schafer, *The Tuning of the World* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1977). In one important contribution, Steven Feld considers how the separation between recorded sounds and their sources relates to the escalating differentiation between producers and consumers, creation and commodification, and the West and its others, within the world music industry. See Steven Feld, “From Schizophonia to Schismogenesis: On the Discourses and Commodification Practices of ‘World Music’ and ‘World Beat’,” in *Music Grooves: Essays and Dialogues*, eds. Charles Keil and Steven Feld (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 257–89. Elsewhere, Sterne criticizes the privileging of face-to-face communication and the presumption of a coherent, self-present human experience prior to the advent of sound recording that Schafer’s term implies. See Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 19–21. Stanyek and Piekut likewise question the term’s utility, since “all sounds are severed from their sources—that’s what makes sound sound,” and instead suggest a substitute term, *rhizophonia*, to describe “sound’s extensivity and the impossibility of a perfect identity between sound and source.” See Jason Stanyek and Benjamin Piekut, “Deadness: Technologies of the Intermundane,” *The Drama Review* 54 no. 1 (2010): 19.

⁶⁸ Whatmore, *Hybrid Geographies*, 6.

tracks combine sounds from several locations, including a recording studio and multiple outdoor locations in the USA and Japan. Recorded at single locations, Franklin's *Butsuga* and *Zen Garden Meditations* were made in gardens that are both culturally marked and materially constructed as Japanese. Yet they occupy sites outside of Japan and are populated by voices which announce themselves as the birdsongs of Australia and Germany respectively. In different ways, these recordings fold Japanese places into and around sites in Europe, North America, and Australia, "unsettling the coordinates of distance and proximity; local and global; inside and outside."⁶⁹ Yet other recordings, whether of Chiku Za in Spain, Neptune in Japan, or Jilin in Russia, rely on the mobility of Japanese and Western performers, instruments and repertoires (physically and via digital pathways). They point to the global flows underlying seemingly static recording sites.⁷⁰

As Whatmore argues, such observations should not create a flattened sense that all places are equal, but rather heighten our attention to various projects of (de)territorialization.⁷¹ *Shakuhachi* players outside Japan are, to different degrees, faced with the need to sustain the instrument's connection with Japan whilst reconciling the *shakuhachi* with their own cultural context. This is apparent in Doherty's *Shakuhachi no Oto*, where mountains figure as both a link to Japan and a symbol that some things—like music and nature—can transcend cultural boundaries. For Franklin, "It's consciously . . . a process of transculturation. . . . an ongoing migration process of the *shakuhachi*." He finds parallels with what he calls the "between space" or "meeting space" of the garden in which *Butsuga* was recorded:

Ken Nakajima, the architect of the garden, actually made a point of trying to incorporate elements of the Australian landscape, Australian fauna . . . [and] flora . . . into the design of the garden. . . . So it's as if there's this enclosed space, but it's

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 14.

⁷¹ Ibid., 6.

only a partial enclosure, it's not an impervious barrier, the way you often find in Japanese gardens. . . . [T]he [Cowra] garden sort of flows over its own boundaries into the archetypical Australian . . . landscape which surrounds it. . . . I wanted the music . . . , particularly of *Butsuga*, to be something like that as well. So hence having a couple of *honkyoku* on [the album], but then [newly composed] material that relates to, but isn't, *honkyoku*. . . . something that reflects on its roots, but also looks elsewhere.⁷²

Even recordings such as Kurahashi's *Honkyoku*, which seem unambiguously rooted within Japan, signal an awareness of the wider reach of the *shakuhachi* tradition. The album liner notes—in French and English, but not Japanese—state that “the *shakuhachi* is unquestionably the most popular Japanese musical instrument in the West”⁷³ and that a quality of *mu* (“the spiritual nothingness of Zen thought”) makes *shakuhachi* music “universal.”⁷⁴ Clearly, similar concerns for both the instrument's national history and global future are at work here too.

As objects circulating within global markets, through the complex cartography of some recording sites, and as a body, collectively spanning multiple localities, these albums render the *shakuhachi* tradition global in scope and highly mobile. At the same time, they testify to strong personal connections with particular places and countries. This spinning together of multiple geographies—Japanese, non-Japanese, local, and global—indicates the ongoing, sometimes ambivalent, and often thoughtful efforts to create a worldwide *shakuhachi* scene and the tensions inherent in such a project.⁷⁵ Thus, while the case of the *shakuhachi* of course brings no resolution

⁷² Franklin, Skype interview with the author, 5 March 2013.

⁷³ Kurahashi Yoshio, liner notes to *Honkyoku*, 16. Arguably, the *taiko* (drum) is currently most popular in the West, specifically in ensemble drumming known as *kumi daiko*. Nonetheless, the global popularity of both *shakuhachi* and *taiko* considerably outstrips that of any other Japanese instrument.

⁷⁴ Bruno Desch[umflex]enes, liner notes to Kurahashi, *Honkyoku*, 19.

⁷⁵ It is worth noting here a related dynamic of assemblage relevant beyond these recordings: the mixing of different genres of *shakuhachi* music, and different styles within a single genre, on a single album. As with many albums discussed here, it is especially common to find *honkyoku* mixed with *min'yō* (although in versions for solo *shakuhachi*, not, as in traditional contexts, accompanying singing) and (often *honkyoku*-inspired) contemporary compositions. Older albums typically focused on single styles and genres, reflecting the largely separate histories and social spheres of *min'yō* and *honkyoku*, with performers rarely crossing between different styles, let alone genres. The tendency today for Western

to the complex debate over world music and commodification,⁷⁶ it does turn our attention to the role of recordings in building global scenes in which participatory music-making is valued, a dynamic often overshadowed by a focus on global markets of world music consumption.

The production of these multifarious spaces entails other processes of assemblage, each with increasingly broad ramifications. The first of these returns us to the issue of liveness. Some recordings, including several tracks on *Butsuga* and the “duets” and “trio” on *Silo Solos*, overlay several full takes simultaneously. Others more intensively splice together fragments of multiple performances, as the notes to *Zen Garden Meditations* explain:

A Zen Garden is a place for meditation; it is, however, surrounded by the sounds of the modern world. Multiple recordings . . . were thus made of each piece . . . then edited to create a version which combined the segments without extraneous noises . . . into a single, acceptable recording.⁷⁷

This example points to what Born calls “the profoundly *illusionistic* nature of recorded text . . . as though the seamless sonic and musical events represented were simply ‘found’ in ‘nature’.”⁷⁸ Indeed, as Meintjes suggests, wherever liveness is at stake, even in unedited recordings, it is “constructed through technological intervention . . . and mediated symbolically through discourses about the natural and the artistic.”⁷⁹

Meintjes’ analysis highlights the crucial role of technology in assembling the spaces and times of these albums. Of course all recordings are technological objects, with various other devices implicated in their production, circulation, and consumption, but such mediation is of special interest here because of the ideas about naturalness surrounding *shakuhachi* recordings.

players to study several genres, possibly several styles, and the use of the *shakuhachi* in non-traditional genres such as jazz, also testifies to the changing social contexts of *shakuhachi* transmission and the increased mobility of players and music.

⁷⁶ For an overview in the spirit of my argument here, see Anahid Kassabian, *Ubiquitous Listening: Affect, Attention, and Distributed Subjectivity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 94-99.

⁷⁷ Franklin, liner notes to *Zen Garden Meditations*, n.p.

⁷⁸ Born, “Afterword,” 294. Emphasis in original.

⁷⁹ Meintjes, *Sound of Africa!*, 112.

As Meintjes argues, such “discursive tension . . . fundamentally organizes and evaluates . . . the exploitation of available technological processes, the degree and kind of attention given to technical details . . . and the sounds on tape.”⁸⁰ This attention to detail is evident in Williams’ account of recording outdoors in Japan:

I was recording from about 30 meters away . . . from where I was playing, so that the sound was really embedded in there. You know you can really hear the sound reflecting off all the trees . . . making up a kind of reverb . . . and the birds and so on. . . . Not just like tape [the environmental sound] and record *shakuhachi* in the studio and put it on [top]. . . . [T]he *shakuhachi*’s actually *in* the space and . . . if you record well you can really get the three-dimensional space. . . . I was aiming for the same sound that you hear with your ears and I’d created my own mount for the mics which gave a very, very natural sound, very similar to what we hear.⁸¹

Artists are not unaware of the ambiguous role that technology plays in constructing these sonic landscapes, its capacity to simulate spaces that seem natural and present. Franklin explains that “in a sense it’s a contradiction in terms. . . . Putting it in its simplest form, the *Zen Garden Meditations* CD would not have been possible without a very sophisticated level of technology to support the editing process.”⁸² He describes operating within a spectrum of available options, sometimes choosing to make the technology more “visible.”⁸³ So whilst artists assign different discursive prominence to the natural and technological in their albums, it is the productive relationship between the two that allows them to construct these sonic landscapes. Accordingly

Born regards

the recording studio not as a means of capturing a pale imitation of an original musical event, nor of rendering a lesser kind of aesthetic object, but as an instrument for realising novel, previously unachievable, aesthetic potentials on the basis of recorded music’s distinctive phenomenal forms.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ Ibid., 130.

⁸¹ Williams, interview with the author, 26 February 2013.

⁸² Franklin, Skype interview with the author, 5 March 2013.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Born, “Afterword,” 294-295.

Born's analysis is especially valuable for understanding the role of technology in extending artists' creative agency. She describes recording practices as "the locus of intimate and creative human relations with technologies, a hybrid musical-technical labour that adds yet more strata of technical mediation to, without replacing, the musical-technical labours of instrumentalists" and suggests that actor-network theory might help us to treat recording practices "in terms of a network of interrelations and interdependencies between human and non-human 'actors', both of which contribute agency while also setting limits to the creative outcome."⁸⁵

Importantly, the albums discussed in this article demand an extension of Born's theorization in line with Whatmore's response to the "technical inflection" of much actor-network theory.⁸⁶ Whatmore's concern for "the affects of a multitude of other 'message-bearers' that make their presence felt in the fabric of social life"⁸⁷ directs our attention to the moving water, calling birds, buzzing insects, and resonant spaces heard on these albums. Complex environmental sounds enliven these recordings, suggesting landscapes that are not merely stages for human action or responsive to man-made sounds, but rather home to independently vocal agents. They too "transform, translate, distort, and modify the meaning or the elements they are supposed to carry,"⁸⁸ and without them the recordings would sound very different. So, while liveness and mediation are established themes in ethnomusicology, these recordings direct attention towards an as yet unexplored dimension of the issue, namely the slippage from "liveness" to "liveliness" or "aliveness" that comes with the use of environmental sounds. By

⁸⁵ Ibid., 298. "Agency" here does not imply consciousness or intention, but any entity's capacity to shape and constrain a process. For some complexities of the agency-consciousness argument, see Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: Towards a New Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).

⁸⁶ Whatmore, *Hybrid Geographies*, 36-37.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 3.

⁸⁸ Bruno Latour in Born, "Afterword," 298.

implicating a range of non-human performing subjects, some *shakuhachi* recordings gesture towards what Tina K. Ramnarine, writing about the combination of recorded environmental and human sound in the music of S[acute]ami composer Nils-Aslak Valkeapää, calls “nature performed by human and nonhuman agents in creative, improvisatory and emergent processes.”⁸⁹ Importantly though, the centrality of human agency remains: the musicians have the final say about which sounds are in or out. Their role has, I suggest, extended from that of sole creator to also curating other agencies by both controlling them and letting them speak out.

Conclusion

If the multi-sensory business of engaging with a recording is necessarily open-ended, then I have attempted a similarly open analysis of one body of recordings, attending especially to the new aesthetic and social territories they articulate. These albums explore a pervasive discourse about the connection between the *shakuhachi* and the natural world, making it audible in new ways. Yet they are also built of composite times and spaces, weaving the social and the material together, and implicating a network of human and non-human agencies in their production. Attending to these processes of assemblage reveals a flexible dynamic of emplacement as the *shakuhachi* travels outside Japan.

This recalls the idea that opened my article, namely that these recordings are themselves social agents, involved in the production of a global musical scene and in connecting musical

⁸⁹ Tina K. Ramnarine, “Acoustemology, Indigeneity, and Joik in Valkeapää’s Symphonic Activism: Views from Europe’s Arctic Fringes for Environmental Ethnomusicology,” *Ethnomusicology* 53 no. 2 (2009): 189-90. Ramnarine is drawing on Bronislaw Szerszynski, Wallace Heim, and Claire Waterton, *Nature Performed: Environment, Culture and Performance* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 4.

instruments, landscapes, technological devices, people, and various other creatures. As Born, drawing on the work of Alfred Gell, explains, “objects that result from creative agency condense or embody social relations, and . . . they do so by spinning forms of connectedness across time and space.”⁹⁰ At once everyday and “alive,”⁹¹ these albums share with other musical objects and practices the capacity to mediate a multitude of agencies and combine them in remarkable ways. Where the relationship between the social and the natural and between sounds and sites is at stake, the resulting assemblages are often more strangely plural than any individual element might suggest.

Discography

In addition to the standard citation in the text, this discography lists for ease of reference the loose body of recordings discussed in the section titled *Sounding/hearing landscapes in recordings*.

Andrew Jilin, *Silence and Sound* (2011), <http://cdbaby.com/cd/andrewjilin12>; accessed May 12, 2012.

James Ashley Franklin, *Butsuga* (Celestial Harmonies 13177-2, 1999).

James Ashley Franklin, *Zen Garden Meditations* (Benediktushof Edition, 2011).

⁹⁰ Born, “On Musical Mediation,” 16. See also Gell, *Art and Agency*.

⁹¹ Stokes, *The Republic of Love*, 8. See the article epigraph above.

Jeffrey Lependorf, *New Bamboo: Silo Solos* (Sachimay Interventions, 2005),

<http://cdbaby.com/cd/jeffreylependorf>; accessed October 27, 2012.

John Kaizan Neptune, *Words Can't Go There* (Oasis NHCD-203, 1991).

Justin Senry[macron]u Williams, unreleased recording (n.d.).

Kurahashi Yoshio, *Honkyoku: Zen music for shakuhachi* (INEDIT W 260134, 2008).

Michael McInerney, *From the Devil's Mountain: Listening For Lost Voices* (2012).

Phil James, *First Places: Solo Shakuhachi Flute* (Sparkling Beatnik SBR0030, 2002).

Riley Lee, *Water Music* (Tall Poppies Records TP033, 1995).

Riley Lee and Andrew MacGregor, *Nesting of the Cranes* (New World Productions NWCD 713, 1994).

Stan Richardson, *Moon on the Water* (Sounds True M927D, 2005).

Thorsten Knaub, *Listening Station: Music for Abandoned Structures and Shakuhachi* (2011).

Vlastislav Matou[hacek]sek, *Taki ochi* (ARTA F1 0119, 2003).