

From Source to Delta

A conversation with Annea Lockwood, April 16, 2020

The conversation floated freely, back and forth, between the rich and diverse repertoire of Lockwood, highlighting and connecting fundamental aspects of her works.

All the quotes in the following essay are from the interview, unless indicated otherwise. Thanks to Madison Heying for the insightful edits.

— Maayan Tsadka

For Lockwood, listening and experimentation is a way of being, and the root of every musical creation: from the idea and inspiration for a piece, through the compositional process, the work of/with performers, the performance itself, to the state-of-mind while listening to the piece.

It might sound redundant saying that listening requires listening, but Lockwood's works generate and demand an "other" kind of listening, one which invites you to let go of previous expectations, immerse and devote yourself to the experience of discovery and exploration.

As Lockwood articulates it: "attempted identification of sounds is a visceral survival process...in an attempt to identify a sound — you listen more closely."

This beautiful observation resonates with what Elias Canetti wrote in *Crowds and Power*: "The knowledge of the animals by which he was surrounded, which threatened him and which he hunted, was man's oldest knowledge. He learnt to know animals by the rhythm of their movement. The earliest writing he learnt to read was that of their tracks; it was a kind of rhythmic notation imprinted on the soft ground and, as he read it, he connected it with the sound of its formation."

For Lockwood, this request for embracing the unknown and sharpening our primal hearing senses is addressed to herself as a composer, as well as to the performers and to the audience, to a degree in which she says: "When a performance ceases to be an exploration—move on."¹ Which is to say that there is an important, undefinable element in the piece that is not related to notes or instruments or ideas, rather to the actual elusive presence of the spirit of exploration itself that forms another layer of the piece.

¹ This was said in the context of deciding to stop performing with the glass concerts.

What is a living sound? This idea manifests clearly in her pieces, which expose and amplify the inherent structures and the beauty within the sounds themselves, diving deep into the complexity of a single sound, whether it be recorded or instrumental. Among those pieces are of course *The Glass Concert*, but also *Earwalking Woman* and the recent *Becoming Air* for solo trumpet, in which “you start giving up control of the sound that is coming out...and let it happen.” Such a process reveals the inner rhythms, harmonic spectrums, durations and other sonic behaviours, which are not being controlled, or dictated by an external structure, rather allowing the sounds to unfold with their own internal patterns. Organizing those sounds takes a similar approach: Lockwood sees composition as a process of discovery, rarely with a pre-determined structure.

In some pieces, such as *In Our Name* or *I Give You Back*, the “living sound” approach is interjected with what might seem as a complete opposite—a deep emotional and personal expression. The sound’s acoustic properties on the one hand, and a human inner expression on the other. When considering sound as an expression of emotions—where both sound and emotion are in their purest and uncontrolled form—this seeming contradiction actually makes sense. The two come from the same source and are interconnected. Both are a manifestation of energy and movement, and affect one another. When combining the two, Lockwood often injects the sonic-acoustic entity into an emotional framework, such as in *Duende*, where the performer—Thomas Buckner—is asked to “let his voice take control over him and move him into a different state of being”.

Another prominent idea in Lockwood’s work is the power of sound to evoke memories. She explores memories on several levels: personal memories, collective memories, and ancient forgotten memories. Amplifying the sonic expression of a neurological internal process—memory—is another example of Lockwood’s fascination with the inextricable connection between emotions and sound. In the piece *Spirit Catchers*, Lockwood is asking people to hold a personal object while describing their memories of it. She listens to “the process of memory as it comes through the voice.” The sonic properties of this process slowly unfold: the pace, duration, rhythm, intonation, melodic contours. Not only are the memories themselves being captured, but the sound qualities of the process of remembering are embedded within them. Some of the works which incorporate personal, verbal stories as well as the environmental field recordings try to evoke some sort of a collective memory, by the virtue of sound and words which allows for the resonance of similar or common experiences. This could be the sound of a river, or a personal story. Other pieces seek even beyond the human temporal perception, tapping into the realm of atavistic memory. Pieces such as *Tiger Balm*, *Duende* and *Thousand Year Dreaming* represent Lockwood’s evocation of ancestral memory. The pieces make use of ancient musical instruments such as gongs, mouth harps, didgeridoos, conch shells and the

human voice, at times combined with natural sounds and field recordings, perceived through the consciousness for the emotional-mystical and ritualistic function of music. In *Amazonia Dreaming* the scope is broadened to include echoes of a soundscape as part of an atavistic process.

According to Lockwood: “Thinking about sound and the body and how sound affects our bodies...looking into that took me into psychoacoustics in one direction but also into rituals in which music is used and trance is induced, wondering how the music affects the body transition.” Still wondering if such a thing can be done, she says “It is like a material which is so delicate, when you touch it it disappears.”

Ideas about the power of sound and its presence in our universe have a cyclical nature, and are also present in the practice of field recording, partly in being a current manifestation of the human desire to imitate and reflect the sonic world around us. On an even larger scale, the notion of the *music of the spheres* is also being reincarnated thanks to technological developments, and is very much present in her piece *Wild Energy*.

The aesthetic of field recording practice is extended to her instrumental pieces as well. The pieces, just like the process of recording itself, demands patience and acceptance of the unknown, attentive and sensitive listening and awareness to the moment. The composed pieces often result in non-linear forms with no sense of directionality or development in a traditional way.

In Lockwood’s work the act of field recording is in a way a preservation of sound, carefully attuned to capturing the sonic properties embedded within it, while being conscious of the memories it carries and might generate. Perhaps her lifelong journey begins in the ear canals, flowing with boundless curiosity for sound and a fascination for rivers and other living creatures to the delta.

Link to the video conversation: <https://youtu.be/si5eVIDq-8M>