



Antye Greie - Interviewed by
Cathy Lane for "In The Field"
<http://www.amazon.co.uk/In-The-Field-Art-Recording/dp/0956855962>

CL. How did your interest in field recording start?

AG. I come from a singer-songwriter background. In the late 80s I was singing and playing guitar in pop bands but before I was even twenty I was unsatisfied with the sonic possibilities within a band. I didn't want to use guitars and drums in my music and that's how I started to use samplers. The first thing I got was a Kurzweil 1200 and a portable Commodore SX 64, one of the first computers used for music sequencing to my knowledge. In 1993 I spent a year in London studying electronic media by myself. Back then one could only study classical music, and I can't read music, or jazz or pop which I had no interest in. The only way to do it was to do it. That was before the internet, google and youtube tutorials. So I started and I realised I really liked making

sounds, composing and writing. This was at the time of the first Bjork record which was very empowering to me. I bought my first Akai sampler and this is how sampling and recorded material became the basis of my work.

I have always used many different field recordings in my work - I was recording myself and my environment in the very first Laub records, many sounds are derived from my immediate Berlin territory. Later I had an Atari which I toured with - so heavy - and the Akai sampler. Then thanks to Steve Jobs & co the laptop arrived and then there was no stopping me. I had a little sound editor and a max/msp patch and I made my first AGF record entirely alone in my flat recording everything possible on the fly. I recorded the environment that I was in straight into the music. I used field recordings as one element of many in my composition. Until then I always used EVERYTHING until I met Eliane Radigue in 2002.

I was with The Lappetites and we were curated to play Eliane's Elemental piece on our laptops. We spent rehearsals at the GRM studios in Paris trying to get the elements right and I in particular had to get 'the earth' together. It took 5 days to sculpt that one sound perfectly so it would not 'rattle' or distort and be non-expressive. That was the first time I

was made to work that minimally and I liked it and through that I learned how to be more subtle and also to write more durational pieces.

I think Eliane has influenced me a lot in my work here and now in Hailuoto especially with regard to some of the choir pieces we make with the sound choir which are very quiet and delicate. She has had an immense impact on me and has taught me to listen so much more deeply and work with that.

Basically I grew up in the provincial GDR, the first 19 years of my life were behind walls. I was raised with The Beatles, luckily Lennon found Yoko so I knew there was something else, but I could only get hold of pop music. If someone had played John Cage to me at school, my entire life would've been so different, really different, I find that amazing.

That's why one of my agendas now is to work with kids, and make field recordings with them and get them to acknowledge sounds so now I go to the kindergarten and work with three year olds and we imitate sounds and we do field recordings and use little sound editors. I have never thought that they weren't ready for it or couldn't handle it, or they would think it's stupid, for them it's like painting, it's just very interesting. I feel very encouraged by this and the fact that I see more sound studies and interest in sound worldwide - John Cage is now really famous and everybody is aware of his work.

CL. So even in 1993 when you went to London to try and learn more there weren't any options available. How did you go about trying to learn?

AG. I don't know why I chose London, I came from East Germany and I was in shock and confused when the wall came down. I didn't know what to do with my life but it was clear that I had to travel, because that was something that I couldn't do before. I didn't speak English, I studied Russian in school, and I remember watching the BBC and not understanding one single word. I learnt English by myself and I also learnt to play the piano. I had my Commodore 64 and books. I woke up at 7am and I spent two hours learning English, then two hours on the piano, then two hours composing and I started writing songs and some of those songs from that time actually ended up being included on the first Laub record *Kopflastig*, this led us being signed with the Berlin indie label Kitty Yo which got us some international attention. After about a year living at Dalston Junction, I planted a little seed right there and made a magic spell, saying 'In 10 years I want an amazing place of sound and listening right here' and see what happened - Cafe Oto. haha, I am joking. Back then it was jungle music time in Dalston and it looked VERY different. I went back to Berlin because it became so interesting there in the 90s, after the wall came down, and I suddenly realised I should be using the German language. I have always been a vocalist and used words, songs and poetry, but at that time it was unusual to use German especially in electronic music. So I went back to Berlin and this is how my journey as a professional musician started.

CL. What were you using to record on, could you record outside or were you mainly recording interior sounds?

AG. I was really into gear and I had multi-track recorders and an 8 track TASCAM, microphones and a DAT but I recorded everywhere especially after I got a laptop. I once recorded a whole song on a balcony in Tunisia and you can hear everything in the environment around on that recording. Again I used the environment that I was in and I didn't care if there were things in it that weren't supposed to be there, especially in the first few AGF records, I felt like they gave the records a unique vibe which could never be recorded in the studio or intentionally composed.

CL. Your background is more in experimental pop but you were always using elements of field recording. Was there a time when the environmental recordings became the most important thing?

AG. My use of field recording was mainly for sampling and I composed with those samples. They were my memories and my property and that meant a lot to me, like a bass drum made out of the pop of my lips recorded in Belgrade or the hi-hat sounds made of snow I was crushing or a closing tube door I had recorded in Berlin. These sounds made the songs more meaningful to me at least. Often they were connected to a specific song, so if the song was about cigarettes I made a relationship to cigarettes in the sampling. I sampled a lot of original sounds but when the laptop came along I had a lot more memory to work with and then I started to use longer recordings in my work. For example in a recent piece of work with Gudrun Gut we used a three minute recording of concrete running out of a pipe and the entire song is built on top of it. Or on the record Sool I produced for Ellen Allien, there is an entire tube ride as the basis for one piece.

I started recording nature much more after meeting Vladislav Delay. He's Finnish and he brought me to Kainuu, an extremely remote area in Finland and that's where I discovered silence and minimal sound. Now when I walk here, on my island, one car passes you an hour, and I think 'DAMN is that car loud and stinky?' It's scary! In Berlin, there are thousands of cars passing all the time, the noise level is insane in cities. I also had a child and that made me feel closer to nature. So then having a child, living in Berlin, travelling, performing concerts, more and more summers in Finland helped me to realise that I didn't like living in Berlin with a child. You can't let them go, you always have to control them. Here I open the door, my kid runs out and I can hear her voice, she's safe and she plays, it's great. But moving here was also about the internet, I realised I could have great connection through digital technologies but also live in nature.

CL. I get the impression that your sound practice has expanded since you came to live on Hailuoto and that you have become more involved in field recording. Can you tell me a little about what you have been doing here?

AG. When I came to Hailuoto my first idea was to stop flying off to play concerts in auditoriums, but to play concerts in the wild and either record it or play live and stream it. I transmitted my first wilderness recordings during a residency with Fon Festival in Cumbria, UK using radios and FM transmitters. After that I took a residency in Kilpisjärvi in northern Finland with the Finnish Bioart Society. I was up there in this rough Northern landscape and I wanted to play with the wind, feeding the signal into my software, playing it back and merging the real wind with the processed wind and maybe my voice. Of course it's very hard to record wind, it was too difficult - so this is how I came up with listening to it and then imitating the wind. Now I'm working on this with the sound choir in Hailuoto and the children in the school and actually with my audiences in general. With the sound choir we imitate wind, rain and waves. Waves are really complicated, they have this long moment of 'wooooooosh', then they collapse and they sparkle a little. We also imitate mosquitoes, traffic, seasons and animals. The members of the choir are local inhabitants of Hailuoto - normal people, not sound artists, there are a few teachers, children and we are called 'Kaiku' which is Finnish for 'echo'. We imitate our environment, I imagine by imitating something, you learn to listen and respect it.

Our first sessions were in our local sports hall, but the air conditioning in the room was so loud it killed my recordings. Now we rent hunters' huts owned by the moose hunters' association, in the middle of the woods. Super silent. Once, I think it was March 2012, it

was very cold, but all fifteen adults stood there in the woods listening to the wind then we went inside, imitated it and recorded it and the fire which warmed the place is the only additional sound. Since then I have 'sung the wind' in all my AGF concerts. In one performance in Hamburg, a windy city, in December 2011, the audience of 200 caused a real storm!

We have also tried imitating the language of the animals, but the adults weren't so interested, maybe it is too primitive or they think that only kids make animal sounds like 'kikiriki' and 'moo'. But in fact imitating the language of animals is really difficult and interesting. Of course children are much more sincere about it. I think mankind has to learn a few things about the language of animals, we have distanced ourselves from them so much in order to justify all the crime we do to them in my opinion.

When I was in Kilpisjärvi, Lapland in the land of the stateless Sami tribe, for my Wilderness Performance studies, I got to know Leena Valkeapää. She is the wife of a Sami reindeer herder and an environmental artist. She wrote [HYPERLINK "http://www.adlibris.com/fi/product.aspx?isbn=9525870545"](http://www.adlibris.com/fi/product.aspx?isbn=9525870545) Luonnossa a fantastic book (Finnish only) about wind, humans, fire and reindeer. It's a lot about the reindeer herders being out there with the reindeer on their own, listening and yoiking.

Yoik is another voice practice which for me is related to field recording. It is considered one of the longest living music traditions in Europe. A friend gave me a record by Wimme Saari, a famous yoiker, and on the record he even imitates his coffee machine... I love that record! Yoiking has influenced our choir very much. I feel that our use of our voices is generally far too limited, people are so afraid to use their voices in an inappropriate way. I barely have man in my choir, they think we are witches or something. I really like the fact that the Sami men sit there in the 21st century, with their iPhones doing everything that we do, except that they still herd reindeer and yoik. Why is everyone in our civilisation so scared of using their voice in a way which is so soothing and natural? I think it has to do with space the we have lost.

Is the yoiking totally non-verbal and improvised?

AG. Yes. But there are great yoikers who have written poetry, Nils-Aslak Valkeapää has made work merging yoiking with field recordings, synthesizers and recites poems in Sami language. He opened the Winter Olympics in Norway by entering the arena with reindeers yoiking. So yes, that residency in the North influenced me a lot particularly on this idea of imitation of the field. I stepped away from the performance aspect and concentrate in making high quality recordings of it. While I'm trying to work out the best way to do that I am investing my time locally. We intend to expand our practice also into the human environment and urban places, such as airports or shopping malls. Listening to the field, imitating and recording it. The results can be heard online on our Soundcloud*.

https://soundcloud.com/kaiku_hailuoto

I am not sure why anybody wants to listen to this but I have a hunch that it is an important practice.

CL. Apart from this idea of streamed wilderness performances and the vocal 'field recording' sound group, you've also been working with local people making field

recordings in different ways including the project here in Hailuoto, the Sound Room. Can you say a little more about that?

AG. The Sound Room is located in Marjaniemi which has a harbour and is a summer destination in Hailuoto. It is on the third floor of an old wooden building that was originally built for pilots so the room is a central part of the local history of fishing, the sea and the weather. The mayor originally offered it to me as an office. The installation 'tilt/line' that I have curated there this year is by Carsten Stabenow. It is a permanent field 'recording', because it's a real-time sonification of the environment. There's a sensor microphone on the roof which picks up changes in the environment, wind, weather traffic and it activates the long strings stretched across the room and brings the outside inside as sound. Carsten has used the room as a resonator, just like a big piano. We have had a surprising number of visitors over the summer including children, people in tour buses, artists, researchers and people have understood the installation in terms of the relationship of the sound that they can hear inside. It's very subtle and quiet, it urges you to listen.

CL. Are you going to do anything in the Sound Room yourself?

AG. I have been using it with the choir and other people have wanted to do things there - one woman who lives on a farm on the island and plays classical and folk violin wanted to play the room with her bow, she made stunningly beautiful sounds which I recorded and published and have every right to be listened in Cafe Oto / Dalston Junction I believe. A dancer has improvised to the sounds that the installation made when it was raining. I have an idea for next year but I want to keep evolving the project.

I have also been working with the school in Hailuoto as part of the 'The City Rings' initiative. We collaborated with a school in London and another in Portugal. Hailuoto is the most northern destinations on the map in the 'Sounds of Europe' project. We recorded our environment with the children and exchange sounds with other schools in Europe and composed with them. The kids here recorded the goats and the rivers. The London recordings were very loud and different and ours were really quiet. It was a requirement that everybody could take a recorder home, and the kids got to be a lot more aware of sound. We have so many field recordings of Hailuoto now that I am thinking of making a sound map. I really like the fact that I am working locally within an international context.

We have also been connecting with other remote places in Lithuania, Estonia, Italy, UK and other islands and held a conference in May 2012 discussing and formulating ideas about how experimental and digital arts can benefit remote areas.

CL What is your favourite field at the moment?

AG. Everything is interesting sonically. I'm most interested in people's personal connection to sound, in the emotion of field recordings. For example in the recording that I sent you this morning of my daughter sleeping in New York - it says so much that I can't describe - you can hear this little one year old breathing and then I take the microphone away from her to the city. It's a pure field recording, conceptual but very emotional.

CL. Is that something you've done a lot in your recordings, to say something about your situation at the time?

AG. All my work is very personal, I don't even care if it's called music or sound art - it's probably because I'm not a trained musician - I don't care about borders. Field

recordings will always be a colour in my palette that I will paint with. I have made many records using my poetry and my writing. As a vocalist if you sing your own words it feels quite exposing, now I want to make something with vocals that is more abstract. I did that before with my first solo record Head Slash Bauch where I just read manuals, code or academic texts. I'm always evolving as a human and as an artist and more things come with that, I don't label it, it's just my work. I also do visuals, I curate. I run an iPad orchestra, write for film scores and run workshops and other stuff. I am releasing a new solo record right now on Richard Chartier's Line label in America, it's very subtle and only uses voice - its an extension of my stuff with the choir, but just me.

AGF website: www.poemproducer.com