



Sound recordist
Kate Carr uncovers
 the dynamics of
 transitional spaces
 from the metropolis to
 mountain passes

International

Geographic

“**Thailand** is my favourite place to record,” enthuses Kate Carr. “Sonically it’s so rich and I love that there’s nothing purist about it. You can hear a temple ceremony, then walk a hundred metres and there’s Thai pop blaring out of a tiny, tinny speaker on some scooter. It’s tropical so wildlife sounds are prevalent, and there’s huge street life with street food, street sounds, street music – I was totally into it.”

In 2014 Carr released *Overheard In Doi Saket*, her field recordings from a residency in a small Thai town. The album appeared on the Hungarian label 3Leaves as an SD card inside a tiny booklet. Online Carr has also made a soundmap of Doi Saket, where you can hear “Angry Geese That Live Near The Rice Field” or “Farewelling The Frogs On My Second Last Night”. She especially recalls an early morning temple ceremony: “They were walking with statues and collecting offerings from people who attended the temple, but also carrying speakers playing this prerecorded soundscape that they’d made themselves, with live performance included. This was my first long residency, and it was that amazingly rich, hybrid and cacophonous soundscape that got me on this path, to think about the way these different sonic niches mix together. And it’s the irreverence of sound: places that you think should be like this but then in comes this renegade sound to wreck it! I have a recording of trucks at an election, yelling election material. The style of the loudhailers, the speakers too, it’s a particular sonic quality, and I loved it.”

An overview of Kate Carr’s many projects can seem like a firework display at a raucous Thai festival. This spring she’s bringing the Iranian duo 9T Antiope to London’s Cafe Oto, where they will play opposite multi-instrumentalist Benjamin Finger. Both artists have released work on Carr’s Flaming Pines label. At

the same show she will present fresh field recordings from her current South London home, part of her ongoing sound piece *I Ended Up Moving To Brixton*. Carr relocated to London from Sydney, via Belfast, but has recently released material gathered in Iceland, South Africa (“Ibis Orgy Near The Airport, Johannesburg” from her album *Endings*), and a nuclear power plant two hours west of Paris. Last year she released *The Story Surrounds Us* on The Helen Scarsdale Agency label, a painstakingly structured album in which creaking Icelandic factory doors and wires traversing Mexican deserts meld with Carr’s own guitar atmospherics to melancholy effect.

Her other major 2017 release was titled *From A Wind Turbine To Vultures And Back* – a wintry journey through freezing mud, up a mountain in southern Spain and back down. Here she undertook a ‘sonic transect’ of the mountain, climbing in a straight line and, in her words, “pausing every hundred metres to sample or attempt to ‘play’ a very precise and small location. In this way this release attempts to stitch together a mountain pass in sound.” She explains she encountered the transect idea while studying biology: “The transect is a scientific practice of counting animals or insects along a line, and I thought it would be super interesting to apply it to sound. I like sonic niches, the way sounds change and the points of transition – even say in Brixton, between one shop playing music, then the train, then another shop across the road. A transect can be a good way of tracing where you hear more of this or that soundtrack as you walk along this particular line. I like to put the transects out on tape if I can, because the physical medium of the tape references this idea of the line.”

Since moving to London recently, she has been recording a sonic transect of the entire city, north to

south. “Sonically, London’s such an amazingly diverse place, if you jump off the train at different points. It’s not that I think by recording for half an hour you’re capturing the essence – there’s obviously a lot of randomness to it – but the difference between all those sites speaks I think to the diversity of London.”

Her field recording lies at the calm heart of her practice. It’s nuanced, frequently gentle and undramatic, adding colours or moods via multiple instruments. The result is unpredictable and undogmatic. “I’m definitely not a purist,” she agrees. “I don’t feel that I’m capturing something essential about a particular place, because usually I have made work about places that I’ve gone to quite briefly. What interests me is these fleeting impressions that we get of spaces as we pass through them. To be a tourist, to have the nexus that is the tourist point that opens the place to you, and the sounds of that. So it’s a psycho-geographic exploration of being an outsider in a place, these partial understandings and misunderstandings. And the way soundscape echoes the ways that we make and unmake these spaces. If we could fast-forward Brixton and everyone moving, we can see the way people are changing this space all the time, and this space in turn is changing the people who live in it. Every day we make the soundscape and unmake it.”

A recent feature on UK sound recordists in *The New York Times* was headed up by a photo of Carr pointing a large and bulbous microphone at the city she currently lives. She laughs, adding that she prefers to record with more discreet equipment, but the picture is provocative – what is she doing? In Carr’s case it’s apparent that she’s composing music, while standing on a noisy street. □ gleamingsilverribbon.com, flamingpines.com
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