Chapter 7

Field Recording as Writing: John Berger, Peter Gizzi and Juliana Spahr

Redell Olsen

> What secret is at stake when one truly listens, that is, when one tries to capture or surprise the sonority rather than the message? What secret is yielded – hence also made public – when we listen to a voice, an instrument, or a sound just for itself?
>
> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Listening*[1]

I. Berger's 'Field'

The implicit problem and the potential of Jean-Luc Nancy's call to 'capture or surprise' the 'sound just for itself' resonate together in Berger's 1971 essay 'Field'. The apparently fixed boundaries between auditor and field, between past and present apprehensions, become disturbed. Berger's essay stages the perceptual agency of encounter, the event *of* environment not as backdrop but as participatory exploration. What Berger records in writing is the field as *itself* in proprioceptive fusion with the listener and, by extension, the reader. Listening, seeing, reading and writing are presented as near-simultaneous manifestations of this reciprocal meeting between context and perceiver.

Berger's essay shares obvious affinities with the work of a number of sound artists for whom the specific locality is an integral element of the recording.[2] This environmental encounter opens correspondences with the concerns of two contemporary poets whose work engages with both literal and conceptual 'fields' in terms of the physical, social, cultural, political and linguistic environments that we inhabit. Peter Gizzi and Juliana Spahr have, in different ways, approached the field recording as writing through a series of explorative associations of subjectivity and attention involving an attunement of the senses through listening, seeing and remembering.

The resulting poems proliferate the temporality of the field recording beyond a single duration in a continuous present.

Berger's essay opens with a conception of environment that finds expression in relation to a domestic and even subjective landscape of memory. His experience of the field is as much about a return to a series of past sensory impressions as it is to a locatable present encounter. There is a 'shelf of a field', the walls are 'papered with blue sky', and there is also a 'curtain of printed trees'.[3] This field is the space of earliest identity formation and it is at once visual, linguistic and sonic: a lullaby of landscape where 'repeated lines of words and music are the paths' (p. 31). However, as the essay progresses he moves towards an understanding of landscape that suggests both an exterior and interior terrain and resists definition as any one contained moment: 'The visible extension of the field in space displaces awareness of your own lived time' (p. 35).

In the 1970s the relationship between field recording and landscape was highlighted by R. Murray Schafer's term 'soundmark'. The word, coined by Schafer, 'is derived from landmark and refers to a community sound which is unique or possesses qualities which make it specifically regarded or noticed by the people in that community'.[4] Schafer also asserts a series of 'keynote sounds' for any environment which are 'those created by its geography and climate: water, wind, forests, plains, birds, insects and animals' (p. 10). Although the examples given here point to forests and plains, Schafer's terms often enact a blurring of the relationship between pastoral and urban landscapes, for example in relation to the event mapping of two blocks of a city (p. 131) or the sonography of fog horns, church bells, telephones and motorcycles (p. 137). The soundscape of a community is as definably marked as the topology of its geographical features, which its inhabitants respond to as part of their ongoing relationship to that landscape as if it were a language (p. 10). According to Schafer, if one wishes to make a sound recording of this 'language', the best approach is to figure it as a map of a space that is encountered from a select and heightened vantage point: 'The best way to appreciate a field situation is to get above it. The medieval cartographer did this by climbing the highest hill . . .' (p. 131). This is not dissimilar to Berger's desire for: 'A field on a hillside, seen either from above like a tabletop, or from below when the incline of the hill appears to tilt the field towards you – like music on a music stand (Berger, pp. 32–3).

Schafer cites a range of 'classifications' possible in the field of listening that are expansive in their remit: acoustic, psychoacoustic, semiotic, aesthetic effects (Schafer, p. 133). At the same time, Schafer

admits the difficulty of splitting a soundscape into such categories. It is the potential for the descriptive markers of the auditory classification that are most consistently developed by him to establish a mode of sonography that he admits is necessarily formulaic. It is a method that relies on the 'observer' to catalogue and quantify sonic events in relation to observations such as the estimated distance of the sound from the observer, the estimated intensity of the original sound and so forth, and to translate these notations into graphic forms of notation. He is aware of the limitations of this approach: 'If soundscape study is to develop as an interdiscipline, it will have to discover the missing interfaces and unite hitherto isolated studies in a bold new synergy' (p. 134). While this seems potentially generative of new forms of interdisciplinary sonography, Schafer is dismissive of the possibility that a soundwalk could be apprehended in any other form than the sonic: 'The first rule must always be: if you can't hear it, be suspicious' (p. 132). The purpose of Schafer's approach to notation seems to be 'to offer a few hints which the ear can then follow up in its own way' but he also remarks that 'no silent projection of a landscape can ever be adequate' (p. 132). This warning, as well as Schafer's quantative approach to notation, suggests that there is little point in pursuing the possibilities of a writing, particularly of a poetic writing of the field recording as a possible methodology as part of his mapping process.

By contrast, Pauline Oliveros's practices and pedagogies of 'deep listening' encourage a participatory relationship that oscillates between what she terms 'focal' and 'global' modes of attention to sound, modes of attention that do not seem to be exclusive to any medium or genre of recording and could also include writing as one of their many approaches.[5] From a related perspective, Hildegard Westerkamp's account of her practice of 'disruptive listening' presents recording as a mode of practice that is not media specific: 'Soundwalks, just like listening itself, need to be DONE. Out of that doing comes an entirely new experiential knowledge'.[6] Here, walking and listening are activities that might manifest their integral relationship in a number of potential media and are not carried out from a point of hierarchical detachment.

However, this new experiential knowledge might not always be comfortable. In Westerkamp's 2015 keynote address at the International Symposium on Electronic Art, she described the experience of attending a yoga retreat that was in close proximity to a construction site, the noise of which could be heard in the room where the yogis were practising. For Westerkamp, this elicited an important

question that can be related not just to what the practice of field recording should include or exclude but also to the importance of maintaining attention, not in spite of but rather because of the proximity to these apparently disruptive and uncomfortable sonic events:

> No doubt we all have had to grapple with discomfort when exposed to disturbing soundscapes or unsettling inner chatter. At such times, do we decide whether we open our listening *further* to the reality of that discomfort and try to affect changes – which is what I would call the disruptive nature of listening – or do we try to ignore it and psychologically shut it out – which is when the sound itself is in danger of disrupting our lives, stressing us, precisely because we are trying to shut out something that our ears and bodies are still receiving, still perceiving. (n.p.)

The 'disruptive nature of listening', then, is a mode of attention to sound and to the act of listening that involves a renegotiation of the usual filtering devices that we (mostly) unconsciously rely on in our daily lives. This is not the same as saying that our listening is disrupted (although it may well be) but that we are engaged in a *practice* of 'disruptive listening' during which time unwanted sounds become productive additions to our listening rather than impediments to the hearing or to the recording. By extension, a writing that might emerge from such a mode of disruptive listening could involve an attention to what Nancy refers to as the 'sound just for itself', or even what Barthes elsewhere refers to as the 'grain of the voice' ('le grain de la voix').[7]

The 'sound itself' in all its material and bodily possibilities is an important concern for Westerkamp, who acknowledges that part of the power of the 'disruptive nature of listening' is to embrace the experience of the disturbing aspects of the soundscape as an attempt to listen 'further to the reality' that surrounds us. The aim is not to shut out these aspects, which would result in a counterproductive mode of exclusion, but rather to engage in than the *practice* of disruptive listening.

For the writer of field recordings, the place and temporality of record need not be unitary and fixed. For Berger, the immediate field of attention is expanded from the proximate perceptual field to associative fields that are opened still further by the introduction of the possibility of 'contingencies overlapping' during the unforeseen period of attention produced in his account by an enforced wait at a level crossing. This is a space and time that allows him to register the birds in the sky, which might otherwise have gone unnoticed.

Despite this expansion and overlap of contexts there is simultaneously, according to Berger, an 'exact fit' between the area of the field and the time of the event in which perceptual, temporal and topographic boundaries converge (p. 32).

More literally, Berger designates the features of his ideal field: a 'grass field' with a 'minimum of order' (p. 32), a 'continental field' which apparently aligns 'the field' with the French tradition of painting *en plein air*, an innovation that brought the artist out of the studio and into immediate contact with his environment. Berger, however, resists any such easy analogy with painting as one doomed to create a 'cultural context' that 'can only refer back' to an experience rather than precede it (p. 33). As this suggests, Berger's focus is angled towards the conditions of the perceptual event in futurity rather than towards the production of an art object that responds to and is therefore dependent on the traditions of a particular genre. From Berger's point of view, this would serve to cast the expectations of the field on the part of writer and reader back towards existing modes of form and reception.

Berger's essay resolutely invokes a European field but it interestingly anticipates and shares a number of affinities with Rosalind Krauss's influential 1979 essay 'Sculpture in the Expanded Field', in which she theorises American Land Art of the 1970s. As Krauss states, '. . . sculpture is no longer the privileged middle term between two things that it isn't. Sculpture is rather not only one term on the periphery of a field in which there are other, differently structured possibilities'.[8] Within these terms field recording is a related 'differently structured' possibility that has entered the field of art practices. As Eve Meltzer points out, Krauss 'embraced the view that the meaning of all objects including artworks is not substantial but relational in nature, determined not only by characteristics that are essential to them, but rather derived of their interplay with other objects in a field structured by differences'.[9] For Berger, this interplay between distinct phenomena is inherent in the attention to the noise and movement of the blackbirds in relation to the adjacent railway: 'Blackbirds hide in the grass and rise up from it. Their coming and going remains quite unaffected by the trains' (Berger, p. 32).

As the essay cuts across and through a number of different fields, Berger draws attention to the possibility that there are other structures of consciousness at work within and across the so-called ideal field. The field of preverbal memory, for example, provokes a different encounter than that of his imposed span of attention at the level crossing. Similarly, the field described does not have the same

features as either the *ideal* field detailed or of the photographic image of the field that serves as an illustration to the essay. Furthermore, the examples that Berger gives are themselves placed in relation to one another. Like Krauss, who 'stare[s] at the pit in the earth and think[s] that we both do and don't know what sculpture is' (Krauss, p. 33), Berger's sudden perceptual awareness that he is included in the noticing of the event in the field is a transformative moment in which boundaries of art shift and are redefined away from traditional modes of visual practice. For Berger, this recognition orientates him in a different direction from the histories of painting and theatre and towards the writing of the experience of the field as event. In many ways, this move is a redefinition of the field of landscape painting into the expanded field of writing.

However, Berger's conceptions of 'field' are very different from either those of Krauss or, from a literary perspective, Charles Olson's ideas of FIELD COMPOSITION as set out in his 'Projective Verse' manifesto.[10] The understanding of 'field' for both Krauss and Olson relates to the experience of open prairies, plains and even the deserts of an American rather than a French or British landscape in which the fields are often bounded by hedges or fences in ways that create an entirely different sense of scale that emerges from a very different social and economic history. Berger hopes for a grass field that 'must be an area with boundaries which are visible – though not necessarily regular; it cannot be an unbounded segment of nature' (p. 32) and it must not be 'hedged on all sides' so as not to restrict the number of 'exits or entrances' (p. 33). By contrast, space is conceived by Olson in terms that are quite at odds from those of Berger's 'field'. Even before the 'Projective Verse' manifesto of 1950, Olson had announced: 'I take SPACE to be the central fact to man born in America, from Folsom Cave to now. I spell it large because it comes large here. Large without mercy'.[11]

In this regard the conceptual parameters and the partially bounded field of Berger's 'ideal' suggest more striking similarities with Fluxus event making and some of the playful strategies of writers featured in the Situationist International than an Olsonian field poetics. In 1958 Gilles Ivain described how it was important for people to 'drift' out of their usual environments in order to free themselves from their habitual social and political constraints.[12] And in 1959 Guy Debord asserted that: '. . . the minimum programme of unitary urbanism is to extend our present field of play to every kind of building we can wish for. The complexity of the field we had in mind would be roughly equivalent to that of an ancient city'.[13] This determination is echoed, with more of a

focus on the individual, by Berger's writing of his transformative perceptual encounter with the field. However, the Situationists and, to a certain extent, the Fluxus artists were predominantly concerned with the *détournement* of the encounter in relation to social, urban and, in the case of the Fluxus, artistic environments. Perhaps a more apposite point of comparison is the score 'Open Field' by Pauline Oliveros from 1980 (the year after Krauss's essay and nine years after Berger's 'Field'), in which Oliveros makes evident the same hazing of the distinctions between art and life that were contemporaneously of interest to Berger and Krauss:

> **Open Field**
>
> When a sight sound, movement, or place attracts your attention during your daily life, consider that moment an 'art experience'. Find a way to record an impression of this momentary 'art experience' using any appropriate means or media. Share these experiences with each other and make them available to others.[14]

The fragility of the speech marks within the score around the phrase 'art experience' suggests a blurring of boundaries between art and life but ultimately upholds the distinction by its parenthetical nature. Nevertheless, her approach to the recording of that experience in 'any appropriate means or media' extends the possibility of considering an approach to field recording as writing. The score falls somewhat short of Berger's assertion that: 'The field that you are standing before appears to have the same proportions as your own life' (p. 35). However, the directive to 'find a way to record an impression' has the effect of removing the need for a musician or sound artist even to make use of sonic forms in their practice. All forms of recording are appropriate and this includes written forms. What is stressed is the production and replication – that is how to make them (these recordings in whatever media) available to others. The productive recording of experience and its dissemination is foregrounded in a way that draws attention to the collective enterprise and potential for exchange in the mode of field recording.

For Berger, the field is both a material and an abstract entity. His writing tenders an evocation of a landscape that is at once linguistically and sonically produced. It is at once out of time and a constitutive feature of the space and time of the event: of the here and now. The entanglement of association is productive for Berger as part of a sonic event. For example, 'the noise of the hen', although it remains

unseen, produces 'an event' (p. 31). Such sonic events also have the potential to exist simultaneously in different time frames and different life stages: 'Remember what it was like to be sung to sleep' (p. 31).

The apprehension of this temporal aspect of the field is also one of activity and of production. In his distinction between work and text, Roland Barthes referred to the text as a 'methodological field'.[15] By contrast, the work is necessarily fragmentary as it is only ever 'the imaginary tail' of the text, a text that 'is experienced only in an activity, in a production'[16] and presumably also in its reception.[17] In this sense the work is only the residue of the activity that took place in the 'methodological field', but a residue that may traverse many different works, disciplinary fields, times and places.

2. Gizzi's 'Field Recordings'

The poems in Peter Gizzi's *Archeophonics* engage in a series of physical and metaphorical explorations into the archaeology of sounds, both of public language and private utterance, and many of them explore the soundings of emotional and cultural memory in relation to the self of the poet and of poetry. In 'Field Recordings' the 'methodological field' of this textual mode of field recording is evident as both a conceptual and directive parameter.

Field Recordings

For today's tourist, orientation is impossible
RIMBAUD

LANGUOR

The old language
is the old language,
with its lance and greaves,
broken shields
and hammered vowels;
a stairway ascending
into a mirror – see it
climb the old helix,
beneath a scarred
and chipped northerly sky,
rotunda blue.

Sing genetic cloud forms
mirroring syntax
in reflection, and what
would you have?

Paving stones, rhetoric,
the coping of bridges,
leanings, what
is taken from *res*?
To reconstruct? To re-
cognize the categories
have failed? That
the index was a lyre.

The lists have grown
lonely, far from home,
houses of worship,
roofs, toy stores, names,
historical furniture,
descriptions of architecture,
patina in a fanfare city.

I have eaten the air
of that city.[18]

As in Berger's essay, the boundaries between the conceptual, associative and actual field are periodically fused, disconnected and reconnected in a rhythmical exploration of our habitual practices of encounter and attention in relation to memory and the natural world. However, for the writer set on recording the field, one of the most obvious fields in which to 'observe the event' (p. 34) is language itself.

Gizzi's epigraph is taken from John Ashbery's 2011 translation of Arthur Rimbaud's *Illuminations* (1886), 'For today's tourist, orientation is impossible'.[19] The significance of this as a coordinate is important: Rimbaud is not quoted in the original by Gizzi but at least one remove via the translation by another contemporary poet of an older generation. This invokes the field of a particular grain of voice: that of French nineteenth-century poetic experimentation as filtered through the American New York School of poetry. In other words, it is through the history of the field in terms of ownership and use that Gizzi is demarcating the field of his poem, this linguistic and poetic language no more natural, arbitrary or without history than a hedge in a field.

In 'Field Recordings', as this epigraph suggests, Gizzi is taking a sounding of the line of history and metamorphosis that connects the American poetic idiom with that of Rimbaud. If the poet is here a tourist, then he is a tourist in the field of language. His methodological field or activity is to align himself in relation to the various possible ways of listening to and through the various fields of language-making that constitute the landscape around him. His approach to the writing of record (and of recording) aligns with aspects that Roland Barthes emphasised when he described the importance of the act of listening as 'taking soundings'.[20] Barthes's assertion of 'soundings' places the act of listening alongside that of any other mode of recording that materialises the substance of sound – either graphically or sonically in creative action. Gizzi is sounding the field of language and of poetic tradition in ways that take in listening as a mode of being attentive to the immediate and the historical context of poetic language, but also as a field that can be redefined according to the lyric 'orientation' of the poet and the awkwardness of 'self'-expression that this tradition encodes by way of its very history as a lyric practice. Barthes's description of a 'modern' listening that might include 'the implicit, the indirect, the supplementary, the delayed' and 'all forms of polysemy'[21] captures a similar tension to that which the field recorder, in whatever media, encounters:

> . . . such listening is supposed to develop in an inter-subjective space where 'I am listening' also means 'listen to me'; what it seizes upon-in order to transform and restore to the endless interplay of transference-is a general 'signifying' no longer conceivable without the determination of the unconscious.[22]

How to be open to the possibility of Barthes's inter-subjective space and avoid the confessional lyric pitfall where 'I am listening' *only means* 'listen to me' is an anxiety that afflicts work made and read in the poetic lyric tradition, as much as it does that of the post-Cagean sound artist and her audience. Gillian White affirms shame and embarrassment as one of lyric poetry's pervasive contemporary features precisely in response to such anxieties.[23] Schafer's warning to those intent on the sonic mapping of environments – 'if you can't hear it, be suspicious'[24] – parallels the anxiety of the lyric poet in relation to song: if you can't hear it (as song) be suspicious, and if you can, be careful that you are expressing more than 'listen to me'.

Gizzi successfully addresses these thorny issues by writing a poem that is somewhat distanced – even suspicious – of its own materials, its own field of poetic language. The poem is not content with the 'sound just for itself' of language but attentive to the histories and contexts of production that have led to the specific shape of the experience in language.

Gizzi's first title in the 'Field Recordings' sequence is LANGUOR, a word that clearly resonates with just such linguistic disquiet. The potential homographic slip from 'languor' to language plays on the ambiguity of this unfamiliar word. In addition, this particular page setting, with LANGUOR in block capitals beneath the title of the sequence, is also reminiscent of Frank O'Hara's visual 'sounding' of Mike Goldberg's SARDINES in 'Why I am Not a Painter'.[25] In that poem a visual fragment of language perhaps derived from the packaging on a sardine tin is all but obliterated in Goldberg's painting, only to surface as the highlighted capitals SARDINES in O'Hara's poem, where it stands as both word and image of itself. The block capitals draw attention to the materiality of the word and also to its other contextual fields of origin and reference on the packaging of a tin and in a painting.

Gizzi's poem is also a sounding of the disorienting relationship to the experience of grief and of mourning, states in which feelings are both intuitively and culturally shaped. The long traditions associated with the ritualised sounding of a poetics of grief are inhabited with a certain sense of their necessary and ongoing reality and relevance but also as forms of expression as citation which themselves give rise to the very particular sounds of grief in poetry and in everyday life and death.

'Languor' is a word that was has etymological origins in French and Latin. It was first used in English c.1300 and evokes both mourning and lament. This means that it brings with it the expectation of specific sounds that might be engendered from specific forms and genres of poetic discourse, such as the elegy and the ode, but also specific sounds of the language of the body in grief: crying, wailing. Other sonic expectations are carried with it in a series of self-cancelling, or at least overlapping semantic fields, which are often tense in their contradictions. The word connotes weariness, lethargy, drowsiness and lack of energy but also pleasurable relaxation. Each of these states would seem to encourage listening to different forms of quietness. Languor can also be suggestive of longing, illness and even disease. The cry of loss, the sigh of desire for the one that is absent, and also the moan of the body in pain and physical suffering are all sounded in it.

Conversely, it can also be used of the attitude of a person who is of a nonchalant or dispassionate nature; this is a stance that is associated with another mode of quiet, even of sulking. Moreover, the word does not necessarily have to refer to a person. It can also be used in reference to an abstract or immaterial thing that shows slackness, dullness and stagnation. Finally, it is also a condition of the atmosphere and the weather: languor is a heaviness of the air, an oppressive stillness that draws attention to the absence of life and motion.[26]

In short, this title introduces a field of historical and material properties that the poet is sounding out in his poem: as the poem becomes a listening and recording device, in and through the languor/language of poetic utterance. In this context, the irony with which the opening lines, 'The old language / is the old language,' resound, alerts us to the oscillating quality of the overlapping fields of reference, which are never resolved into a single plane of meaning. The medievalism of 'lance and greaves, / broken shields' highlights the sense that it is the language which has the power to hurt with its 'lance' but also is afflicted and in mourning. The 'greaves' suggest the damage to the definition of the lyric subject and indeed the language of the poem. The 'hammered vowels' evoke the making of poetry and the making of the weapons of war – whether this is war between selves, countries or even between poetic traditions is left openly indeterminate. This sonic emphasis also relates to the way in which singers are trained to place stress on their root vowels. In Gizzi's poem the hammered vowels ascend 'into a mirror', apparently to confront the possibility of self-reflection but perhaps also as a reference to John Ashbery's 'Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror' (1975). It is a meeting with the self as constructed lyric 'I'.

The shape of the 'old helix' suggests at once a spiral staircase, the spiral of grief, the ascent of a scale in music, the double helix of DNA or even the coiled outer shape of the ear ready to listen to the song of 'genetic cloud forms'. These, like the 'chipped Northerly sky', are potentially not natural at all but second-order representations borrowed from other fields: biological, architectural, artistic, digital and computational. The question 'what / is taken from *res*?' shimmers with both the Latin word *res* – the particularity of a thing or matter – and the more contemporary acronym for an English-based renewable energy company which trades under the acronym res and specialises in wind technologies. This double sounding seems an appropriate one, given the final lines of the poem: 'I have eaten the air / of that city'. What, where and how to identify the *res* of existence is raised as a possible question – one that is linked to the sounding of the very

material of language. This, in turn, is analogous to the workings of invisible wind-generated renewable energies. All of these are sounded in relation to the invisible technology of the poem: 'That / the index was a lyre'. Here, poetic language is both the index (instrument) of the expression of thought and feeling in poetry. It is also the liar, in the sense that it is the very *res* that is shimmering and scintillates across meaning, across pre-existing fields of reference. Its indices do not allow for the authentic expression of grief, of longing, of spirituality – only its traversal through already existing sonic fields of poetic diction. The languor of the poet belongs also to a poetic language that is heavy with atmosphere, like Keats's negative capability, full of the potential to be transformed into a poetics of energy. 'A poem is energy' Charles Olson wrote 'transferred from where the poet got it . . . by way of the poem itself to, all the way over to, the reader'[27] and this implies a singular channel of energy. What a transfer of sound as energy might be like as it is found already reverberating across existing multiple linguistic and cultural contexts is what resonates throughout Gizzi's 'Field Recordings', where the sound is always figured as more than 'just for itself' alone, cast as it is in relation to what poetic, cultural and social conditions are sounded through and by it.

3. Spahr's Park as Field Recording

> When one fled past, a maniac maid,
> And her name was Hope, she said.

Juliana Spahr borrows this epigraph from Shelley's 'The Mask of Anarchy', which was originally written in 1819 after the notorious Peterloo Massacre in Manchester, for her collection *That Winter the Wolf Came* (2015).[28] Spahr's poem was written in response to the Occupy Oakland movement of 2012–13. The effect of the epigraph is to partially and playfully frame her poems as the writing of the 'maniac maid' called 'Hope'. The poems explore the mania and the hope of the conditions of their production, with Spahr as a participant and recorder of the demonstrations and particular fields of protest of the Occupy movement.

'Transitory, Momentary' records the occupation of a park that is doomed to 'headquarter an oil company' (p. 13). The poem alludes to the fragility and destruction of the environment at the hands of global corporations. The syntax of the poem is constructed as a series of 'low wavering lines' (p. 11). Contextual references

emerge apparently disparately at first, and as the poem progresses in successive and circular return, to form closer and closer conceptual *fields* that overlap and extend the physical dimensions of the actual park under threat. Observations on Brent geese, the price of crude oil, a song overheard in a bar in Oakland and the occupation of the field by protestors (who include the poet and her son), move from stark juxtaposition towards the gradual evocation of a heightened sense of an interlinked entanglement between things, persons and ideas across fields. The syntactic patterning of the poem and its lyric sounding runs counter to the apparent bleak futility of the epigraph, a momentary record of the fleeting sense of hope that the engagement in the political protest and its poetics might bring. Spahr's sounding through juxtaposition can be read as a necessary recontextualisation of ideological (and often suppressed) noise into a poetics of writing as field recording.

As if in an extension of Cage's famous *4′33″*, it is not only that all environmental sounds might be heard as music but that all such 'soundings' might be part of the lyric poem. As Berger writes, in 'that field' of actual and remembered perceptual association: 'I could listen to all sounds, all music' (p. 31). Spahr's writing records the synchronicity of sensing as conceptual, associative and physical in relation to both the immediate environment and also its unseen personal and ideological markers: even and perhaps especially the price of crude oil. All sounds are music but the resonance of the immediate environment is not the only field of listening to be accessed in multiple soundings through multiple temporal and associative frames. As in Westerkamp's analysis of the potentially productive effect of the noisy yoga studio on its participants, the process leaves open the possibility that this may not be an especially comfortable encounter.

In Spahr's 'Transitory, Momentary', these temporal and associative frames have very material implications. As if in a rewriting of Olsonian poetics, the central fact of this SPACE, its ownership and future use are contested by the mother and child among the community of protestors. The specificity of the actual field, its current and past use, and the importance of its geographical and spatial features as a potential future resource for others to appropriate are all too clearly articulated in the description of the removal of the protestors by the police: 'They know what they are doing. It is their third time clearing the park and they will clear it many more times and then they will win and a building will be built there where there once was the park' (Spahr, pp. 11–12).

Although the context is very different, there are a number of connections to be made here to that part of Berger's essay in which he

records how he is 'obliged to wait' at the level crossing: 'It is as though these minutes fill a certain area of time which exactly fits the spatial area of the field. Time and space conjoin' (p. 32). The caesura in the title of Spahr's poem 'Transitory, Momentary' enacts a similar spatial and temporal suspension as Berger's imposed wait. It is this momentary suspension that opens up the possibility of other modes of attention to the contemporary and therefore other modes of recording practice that have the potential to come about through an uninvited suspension in direction, this even though Spahr's experience is somewhat at odds with Berger's own more leisurely wait before a very different and apparently uncontested field.

In her poem 'Brent Crude' (the subsequent poem in this collection) the time and space of the poem are marked by the relationship of the time of writing to the price of Brent Crude Oil. Brent is at once a geographical marker (a river), the name of a goose and also the name of a global oil corporation. In 'Transitory Momentary', observations of the behaviour of the Brent geese as they migrate from Europe to Canada are introduced alongside observations on the oil company's naming of their Scottish oil fields after the names of water birds: 'in alphabetical order: Auk, Brent Cormorant, Dunlin, Eider, Fulmar and so on' (p. 13). Nature and the natural world are threatened physically and co-opted metaphorically: 'Brent is also an acronym for the Jurassic Brent formation that makes up the Brent oilfield, for Broom, Rannoch, Etive, Ness, and Tarbet' (p. 13). Spahr's poem suggests a relationship between the co-option of the language of birds and of landscape by the oil industry, in ways that seem familiar, romantic, natural even, and traditional poetic discourse in relation to nature. Her poem draws attention to the way in which the lexicon of the so-called natural world is actually an index for the very forces that threaten to destroy it. On the other hand, the 'new gasses' do not yet have a name and this makes it more difficult for the protesters to record the events of the field with any certainty. The dispersed indeterminacy of Spahr's poem is the chosen mode of record that attempts to recover this event: the physical, political and ineffable tracings of exploitation of what Olson so confidently termed SPACE. The poem presents the reader with a visual and sonic recording of this field:

> While a formation of police clear the far side of the park of the debris of its occupation, another formation of police on the other side shoot the new gasses, the ones we do no yet know by name, into another part of the park where people are clustered. This camera has sound and every few seconds there is a pop. It is unevenly steady. The song is just about

> two people who are not near each other, who have probably chosen not to be near each other any more. (pp. 13–14)

This field recording in writing is attentive to the territorial claims on the field. And this emerges as a series of very particular sounds in relation to the force being used by the police to clear the field. Placed in relation to these sounds of the occupation (the 'pops' that unbalance the camera), the writing of sound and song are repeatedly invoked, often as if these were only details of slight significance and signification: 'I want to give you this song sung in a bar in Oakland one night during the ongoing oil wars' (p. 12) writes Spahr. The apparently off-hand comment belies the significance of the phrase as an assertion of a geographical, political and temporal marker, one that both distinguishes the poem that we are reading from the song in her memory and merges with it. Overheard by chance, this poem is also that song. It is a song of loss that can be applied to many different local and universal contexts:

> In this song, as is true of many songs, it is unclear why the singer has lost something, maybe someone. In this time, the time of the oil wars, there are many reasons that singers give for being so lost. Often they feel lost because of love. Sometimes they are lost because of drugs. Sometimes they have lost their country and in their heart it feels as if they have lost something big. And then sometimes they are lost just because they are in Bakersfield. Really though they are lost because in this time song holds loss. And this time is a time of loss. (Spahr, p. 12)

If there is loss, then there is also an accrual and a redistribution of these found soundings. The spatial and 'methodological field' of Spahr's poem incorporates a number of paratactical devices as the basis for its structures. In an apparent act of reappropriation, 'Transitory, Momentary' shares some metaphorical similarities with the stuff at the centre of this contested field. The complex blending of the poem, which takes place at the level of the whole rather than at the level of the sentence, bears comparison with the blended nature of oil itself: 'It contains approximately 0.37% of sulphur, classifying it as sweet crude, yet not as sweet as West Texas Intermediate' (p. 13), writes Spahr in a line that could be reads a comment on the poem's own apparent sweetness, with its ostensible references to birds, the pastoral, childhood and lost love.

Like Gizzi's 'Field Recordings', Spahr's 'Transitory, Momentary' establishes a metaphorical relation between song, poetry and poetics.

The fact that this is a song overheard in a bar appears to divert the poem's affinities from the classical lyric tradition but in its persistence it continues to draw attention to the connection rather than delegitimise it. Spahr articulates the poetics of the poem through an implied similarity to the bar singer's song of loss, which turns around a series of refrains. In Spahr's poem these refrains mark a return to various fields of connected exploration: oil, song/poetics and political action. However, it is the affect of the song that gives rise to one of the most important markers of Spahr's poem: that of feeling in relation to the political action, which is itself, 'transitory, momentary'. It is the epiphanic nature of song which captures the poet's own intense reaction to the singer songwriter's song. It is recognition of this intensity of feeling for song that renews the poet's belief in art:

> It is just an observation, a small observation that sometimes art can hold the oil wars and all that they mean and might yet mean within. Just as sometimes there are seven stanzas in a song. And just as sometimes there is a refrain between each stanza. And just as often this sort of song tells a certain story, one about having something and then losing it. (p. 11)

The sound of the song is in direct contrast to the powerful recording of the near-silent action performed by the protestors:

> All pass bricks, one by one, down the line so as to make a pile. They are silent for the most part, silent enough that it is possible to hear the bricks make a clink as they fall. The pile gets bigger and bigger. It is waist high. Then chest high. Some get out of the line and climb on the pile, hold both their hands in the air because they know now is transitory, momentary triumph and it should be felt. (p. 14)

4. Shimmering Fields

It is this felt listening towards the recording in writing which is so important to Berger, Spahr and Gizzi, and that marks a shape for the space of attention for their poetics of the field recording. Each engages in a mode of associative poetic song. In the case of Spahr and Gizzi the effect is to make us suspicious of the complicity of language in the making of such a sweet record, an effect found in Spahr's poem through her suspicion of this transfer of affect from the name of the bird to an oilrig. As Gizzi puts it, it is important to understand 'That / the index was a lyre', a clause which enacts an ongoing sense of

commitment but also suspicion towards the field of language that begins to attune us to the necessary – if anxious and disruptive soundings – of a poetics of environmental listening as writing. Writing the recording proposes this listening as near simultaneous to the writing of the record in careful attention to the variable surfaces of linguistic use, buried relational contexts and lost songs, as Barthes puts it: 'the very dispersion, the shimmering of signifiers, ceaselessly restored to a listening which ceaselessly produces new ones from them without ever arresting their meaning . . .'.[29]

What these works demonstrate is a writing of the field recording that is itself a mode of attention, an attentively angled methodology of textual practice that reverberates with a poetics of sonority – not 'sound just for itself' but an environmental, political and social encounter between the writer and the world around them.

Notes

1. Jean-Luc Nancy, *Listening*, trans. Charlotte Mendall (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007). 'Un des aspects de ma question sera donc: de quel secret s'agit-il lorsqu'on écoute proprement, c'est-à-dire lorsqu'on s'efforce de capter ou de surprendre la sonorité plutôt que le message? Quel secret se livre – donc aussi se rend public – lorsque nous écoutons pour eux-mêmes une voix, un instrument ou un bruit?' Jean-Luc Nancy, *A l'écoute* (Paris: Galilée, 2002), p. 17.
2. In this mode, Bernie Krause's environmental soundscapes have in recent years offered an increasingly terrifying record of the shrinking field of animal habitats. His field recordings confront the listener directly with the evidence of the destruction of the natural environment (see Bernie Krause, *Winds across the Tundra*, CD (Wild Sanctuary Communications, 2002)).
3. John Berger, 'Field', p. 31. All references to 'Field' are to the essay as reprinted in this book, with page numbers given in the text.
4. R. Murray Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World* (New York: Knopf, 1977), p. 10.
5. Pauline Oliveros, *Deep Listening: A Composer's Sound Practice* (New York: iUniverse, 2005), p. 13.
6. Hildegard Westerkamp, 'The Disruptive Nature of Listening', Keynote Address International Symposium on Electronic Art, Vancouver, BC, 18 August 2015. Available at http://www.sfu.ca/~westerka/writings%20page/articles%20pages/disruptive.html (last accessed 21 September 2016).
7. Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text* [1978], trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1993), p. 179.

8. Rosalind Krauss, 'Sculpture in the Expanded Field', *October* 8 (Spring 1979): 30–44, p. 38.
9. Eve Meltzer, *Systems We Have Loved: Conceptual Art, Affect, and the Antihumanist Turn* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2013), p. 120.
10. Charles Olson, 'Projective Verse', manifesto [1950], in *Collected Prose*, ed. Donald Allen and Benjamin Friedlander (Oakland: University of California Press, 1997), pp. 239–49.
11. Charles Olson, 'Call Me Ishmael' [1947], in *Collected Prose*, p. 17.
12. 'The main thing people would do would be *to drift around all the time*. Changing landscapes from one hour to the next would end with complete removal from one's habitual surroundings'. Gilles Ivain, 'Formula for a New City' in *Leaving the 20th Century: The Incomplete Work of the Situationist International*, ed. Christopher Gray (London: Rebel Press, 1988), p. 17.
13. Guy Debord, 'Traffic', in Gray (ed.), *Leaving the 20th Century*, p. 19.
14. Oliveros, *Deep Listening*, p. 46.
15. 'Le Texte, lui est un champ méthodologique'. Roland Barthes, 'De l'œuvre au texte', in Barthes, *L'Obvie et l'obtus: Essais crtiques III* (Paris: Seuil, 1982), p. 73; English translation: 'From Work to Text' in *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Russell Howard (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), p. 57.
16. Barthes, 'From Work to Text', p. 58.
17. '. . . c'est l'œuvre qui est le queue imaginaire du Texte. Ou encore: le Texte ne s'éprouve que dans un travail, une production'. Barthes, 'De l'œuvre au texte', p. 73.
18. Peter Gizzi, *Archeophonics* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2016), pp. 15–16.
19. Arthur Rimbaud, *Illuminations* [1886], trans. John Ashbery (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2011).
20. 'Mais aussi, l'écoute, c'est ce qui sonde'. Roland Barthes, 'Ecoute' in *L'Obvie et l'obtus*, p. 222. English translation: 'Listening' in *The Responsibility of Forms: Critical Essays on Music, Art, and Representation*, trans. Richard Howard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), p. 250.
21. Barthes, 'Listening', p. 258.
22. Ibid., p. 246.
23. Gillian White, *Lyric Shame: The 'Lyric' Subject of Contemporary American Poetry* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2014).
24. Schafer, 'The Soundscape', p. 132.
25. Frank O'Hara, *The Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara*, ed. Donald Allen (University of California Press, 1995), p. 261.
26. 'Langour', *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
27. Olson, 'Projective Verse', p. 240.
28. Juliana Spahr, *That Winter the Wolf Came* (Berkeley: Commune Editions, 2015). All subsequent references to this collection are given in the text.

29. Barthes, 'Listening', p. 259. Barthes, 'Ecoute', p. 229. 'En troisième lieu, ce qui est écouté ici et la (principalement dans le champ de l'art, dont la fonction est souvent utopiste), ce n'est pas la venue d'un signifié, objet d'une reconnaissance ou d'un déchiffrement, c'est la dispersion même, le miroitement des signifiants, sans cesse remis dans la course d'une écoute qui en produit sans cesse des nouveaux, sans jamais arrêter le sens: ce phénomène de miroitement s'appelle la significance (distinct de la signification) . . .'.