Outside In: A Review of "Core Sample"

Tags:
mobile history locative media narrative live immersion mapping nature instrument mixed reality performance body recording exhibition field recording site-specific sound walk data

Jo-Anne Green

Teri Rueb's **Core Sample**, like many *Land Art* works, is dependent on weather conditions, has limited access, and demands physical exertion. Two subways and a ferry boat later, we arrived at Spectacle Island - one of the eleven islands in Boston Harbor Islands national park - and headed for the Visitor's Center. Outfitted with a GPS enabled PDA and a set of Seinnheiser headphones, I stepped into the bright sunlight and waited - as per instructions - for the signal to activate the device. After about 4 or 5 minutes, the headphones came to life, and I began my walk.

My body was immediately infused with a gorgeous soundscape, at times musical, soon a collage of field recordings, some processed, others not. A stone's throw away, Logan International Airport catapulted planes into the sky every two minutes; an occasional recorded plane caused me to scan the skyline, unsure whether what I was hearing was live.

As I climbed the path towards the southern drumlin, I was audibly aware of the gravel beneath my feet; the live sounds were overlaid

Tags   freq alpha

livestage ~ music ~ sound ~ performance ~ calls + opps ~ installation ~ audio/visual ~ radio ~ festival ~ instrument ~ networked ~ audio ~ interactive ~ experimental ~ electronic ~ workshop ~ participatory ~ video ~ writings ~ event ~ mobile ~ concert ~ exhibition ~ live ~ collaboration ~ electroacoustic ~ reblog ~ nature ~ environment ~ distributed ~ field recording ~ net_music_weekly ~ soundscape ~ improvisation ~ software ~ history ~ locative media ~ space ~ noise ~ public ~ recording ~ voice ~ immersion ~ lecture ~ acoustic ~ generative ~ sonification ~ conference ~ body ~ tool ~ sound sculpture ~ art + science ~ light ~ VJ/DJ ~ net art ~ site-specific ~ diy ~ remix ~ perception ~ film ~ visualization ~ mapping ~ laptop ~ listening ~ wearable ~ city ~ urban ~ multimedia ~ algorithmic ~ game ~ architecture ~ data ~
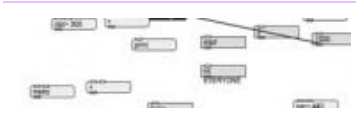
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Networked_Music_Review (NMR) is a research blog that focuses on emerging networked musical explorations.
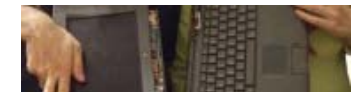
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NMR Commissions

NMR commissioned the following artists to create new sound art works. More…

"PuréeData" by Ted Hayes

"You're Not My Father" by Paul Slocum

"More of the Same" by LoVid

with Rueb's processed and natural sounds, which sometimes blended seamlessly with the real time sounds of bees, wind and pebbles rolled by waves. The occasional cow mooing or stone striking a tin can jolted me back into the fictional space.

Part "fact", part "fiction", **Core Sample** masterfully brings history and memory into the present through the voices of former inhabitants. Their brief stories are supplemented by signs posted along the paths; one learns that Spectacle Island was a horse and cow rendering plant, a city trash incinerator, and home to as many as thirteen families until the 1950s. When the Big Dig project began in 1992, some of the excavated dirt and clay was used to resurface it; 28,000 trees and shrubs were planted, and the island opened to the public in 2006. Trash dump turned ecological experiment, humans now use waterless toilets and carry their trash back to the city.

A core sample is a cylindrical section of a naturally occurring medium consistent enough to hold a layered structure. German composer *Frank Halbig* used ice core data – collected by the *European Project for Ice Coring in Antarctica* – to create ANTARKTIKA: a climatic time-travel, a concert for string quartet, live electronics and video. Rueb collected the data for **Core Sample** herself, and created a piece that is densely layered and historically rich, with ample room for the imagination to roam.

"The island's path system follows elevation contours that are loosely mapped to the vertical layers of a metaphoric core sample. Sounds correspond to the island's layered history from recent reclamation to industrial, archaeological and geological pasts. Layers

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Net_Music_Weekly

n-Polytope: Behaviors in Light and Sound after Iannis Xenakis [Gijón]

[Chris Salter working at his installation in the Exhibitions Gallery of the Art Centre. Photo:LABoral/Sergio Redruello] n-Polytope: Behaviors in Light and Sound after Iannis Xenakis … Read more

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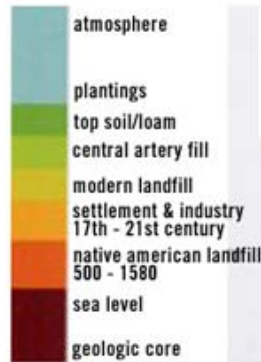
blur to suggest the permeable boundaries of past, present, and future." From *Art on the Harbor Islands, ICA* brochure.

Walking beneath the searing sun, I thought about the conversation Helen and I had had about Mixed Realities on the ferry; and the many technologies, art projects, and conversations emerging around augmented reality, hybrid reality, immersion, place, and space. These concerns are not new; in surveying the history of western art one can trace the ways in which artists have represented the spiritual, philosophical, social, political, and scientific realities of their times. New scientific discoveries and technologies made it increasingly possible to grasp, capture and reproduce reality.

The emergence of installation art in the 1970s enabled artists to modify the way we experience particular physical spaces, both in galleries and in public space. Digital technologies (VR, Cave) now offer audiences the opportunity to "immerse" themselves in synthetically rendered environments as well.

Also beginning in the 1970s, Land Art or Earth Art accomplished

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similar results through an entirely different approach. Utilizing natural materials such as rocks, sticks, soil and plants they were left to erode and change under natural conditions. Visitors often have to travel long distances to reach the sites, and their experiences of the works are tempered by unpredictable conditions. The physical body is integral to the experience; exposed to the sun, rain, wind and cold, visitors are asked to commit themselves to experiences completely opposite to those of climate-controlled museums.

In **Core Sample**, Rueb has utilized locative media to choreograph an immersive experience in nature though, in some respects, Spectacle Island is as *natural* as the city of Boston itself (apparently, it only ceased to be a trash dump because the bulldozer that was used to move the trash around itself became buried). By immersing us in sound, it is not Rueb's intent that we forget where we are; rather, the opposite. Despite the constant drone of motor boats and planes, **Core Sample** brings nature more sharply into focus; it asks us to listen to the sounds that most of us don't ordinarily hear, and incorporates the sounds we'd rather not.

On the lowest path around the northern drumlin, where recorded and live waves performed a duet, I became increasingly aware of my body. Middle-aged and plagued by chronic knee and back pain, continuing the walk became extremely challenging. I thought about giving up, but that would have been like leaving the theater before the final act. As I persevered through the pain, I was acutely aware of the antagonism between my mind and body.

Core Sample asks the body to be its instrument; it is our

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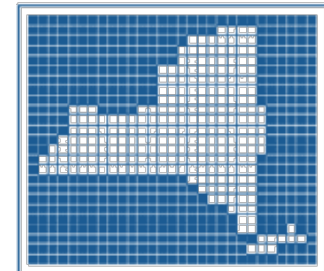
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individual choices - where to walk, how long to pause, whether to retrace ones steps rather than select a new path - that determines how we perform it. Each performance is unique.

Core Sample is a magical blend of opposites - internal / external, past / present, natural / man-made, live / pre-recorded. It succeeds because it recognizes, accepts, integrates and transcends them.

Though the exhibition ends today, I hope Spectacle Island will offer **Core Sample** to visitors when ferry service resumes in spring 2008. If it does, I urge you to experience it yourself.

Leaving Boston

Massachusetts Cultural Council

Turbulence Works

Ascent of the south drumlin

The south drumlin

Gazebo at the peak of the south drumlin

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