

Print Run

New music books and publications

Hauntology, Nostalgia, And New Music Martin Iddon

Cambridge University Press Pbk 61 pp

Why hauntology again? Every year seems to spawn another response to Mark Fisher's *Ghosts Of My Life* (2014), while its reference points and arguments can seem increasingly historic. We might even look back on the idea of a cancelled future with nostalgia as we catapult towards one that is so much more alarming.

Martin Iddon, Professor of Music and Aesthetics at the University of Leeds, is the latest to bring out an extended essay whose central premise is that popular music of the 1980s and new experimental music of the 1970s/1980s moved along parallel lines: cannibalising the music-making of the preceding decades to offer recombinations of the already known, from the time of the 'neverwhen', when music mattered.

The author includes films, as Mark Fisher does, to illustrate this trend further and sets his thesis in the social political context of the postwar world (the end of British colonisation of Africa in the 1960s; the collapse of the Soviet Union, the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, and later events in the 21st century – wars that are reruns of wars that have already happened).

Divided into four sections, Iddon reveals how 1980s mainstream music began to resemble the cover of some pre-existing track when, in fact, the recordings were original: "They more or less might be perfectly – impossibly perfectly – rendered re-masterings of recordings from the past," he writes, itself a hauntological statement, as this, too, is a well-rehearsed argument. But for the writer there's solace in this continuous loop: "In an increasingly incomprehensible world, they're comforting: the things I remember are still there, still very much present."

In the section on new music, the author distinguishes between the European composers, concerned with pitch, duration and timbre, and the North Americans who prioritised structure and method. The touchstones to both were John Cage and Karlheinz Stockhausen, whose splitting of musical sound into constituent elements to be juggled, rearranged and repeated was carried forward into the years that followed, the two approaches gradually fusing in the millennium.

The final chapter introduces the practice of Irish composer Jennifer Walshe, who created a video documentary on an Irish musical avant garde tradition (starting with the Guinness dadaists) that never existed. "What would the history of new music look like if *Licht* had been written by an outsider artist from Roscommon and not Stockhausen? Why shouldn't it have been?" she asks.

Iddon's densely worked prose style

means this essay is aimed at fellow academics rather than a general readership, but there are not many new observations to be found here. A more fascinating approach for this reader would have been an examination and perhaps reassessing of some of the viewpoints of hauntology from where we stand in the 21st century. How is our relationship to our own memories changing? Did we actually experience that mediated stadium gig, with its screens and backing tracks? Were the singers really singing? Were we really there? Or was this a social media post that we're simply recalling? In the age of simulation, what is the human soul, and can you hear it? Where is it to be found? Perhaps in the moment when four musicians take to the stage and interact with each other, like in the good old days?

Deborah Nash

The Trembling City: The Sonic And Atmospheric Violence Of Vibrational Warfare Gascia Ouzonian

MIT Press Pbk 226 pp

When the Israeli Defence Forces began bombarding the Gaza Strip after 7 October 2023, it was one of the most densely populated areas in the world – "only 141 square miles, with 1.8 million residents in 2014", as sound studies scholar Gascia Ouzonian notes – and filled with a corresponding noise level, of traffic, street noise, children's voices. Years later, satellite photos show a landscape as barren as the Moon. How does it sound? And how do we conceive of the sound of such erasure of an urban culture and people, within critical frameworks that, as Ouzonian claims, "analyse present, sensible sounds"?

Ouzonian, who teaches music at the University of Oxford, is concerned in her second monograph with the philosophical and methodological questions that arise from the central role of urban conflict in modern history. While silence was valued in modernist music as a negative space that expanded listening, urbanism has tended to treat city noise as a sign of "healthy" culture "characterised by sonic diversity".

Ouzonian inverts these frameworks, drawing attention to the silences caused by violence and displacement and, at the other end of the spectrum, the obliterating volume of aerial bombing. They act as "vibrational warfare" against the target populations that have been central to the operation of modern states but are in many ways invisible, shunted to the margins of society or herded into tent cities and concentration camps.

The book's six chapters focus on case studies from Gaza to the Armenian genocide and its denial by modern Turkey. They read accounts of war and urban violence, or art about the same, with an eye to their sonic aspects, which often emerge in grim and counterintuitive ways. Thus, in the chapter on Beirut, the focus slides from the racket

induced by Lebanon's political and economic chaos, kept at a continual boil by Israel, to the traces of IDF violations of Lebanese airspace studied in Lawrence Abu Hamdan's *Air Pressure* project.

The audible results can be slight, but as Hamdan's graphic map shows, they can be more violent than classic sonic weapons, "[m]ethods of control and containment... enacted at the level of air pressure". Meanwhile, the strongest chapter, on the Warsaw Ghetto, illustrates how the spatial separation of Nazi policy was felt at the level of everyday life. While the sounds of SS patrols – knocking, then shooting – reverberated throughout an area, a carousel could be heard just outside the ghetto, where gentle citizens had fun within earshot of the killing. Ouzonian calls such acts of critical attention, including attending to the inaudible and forgotten, "counterlistening".

Ouzonian's study has definite limits. Although justified to some degree by its bleak subject matter, the relentless harsh tone can be grating. Especially when the style leans on the kind of repetition and jargon that often crowds out genuine thought in self-consciously radical academic work on race and decolonisation. Ouzonian also depends on having some straw men to knock down. Is it really the case that contemporary sound studies takes a "positivist" and "scientific" approach that privileges the audible and present? Given how many texts you come across that privilege the fluid and ungraspable nature of sound, it's arguably the opposite these days. But while in places tenuous and tendentious, *The Trembling City* offers fresh and counterintuitive resources for thinking sound amid contemporary political horror.

Dan Barrow

"They're So Nice..."

Russell Lee Fine

Corbett Vs Dempsey Hbk 112 pp

There's a narrative about jazz in the 1980s, and it's not so nice. Major record labels abandoned the musicians playing it, save for a few young neo cons in pricy suits. Back catalogues went out of print. Real estate prices went up and independent venues, such as those on New York's loft scene, closed down. The story's not wrong, exactly, but if you lived through the time, it was not the only one to be told. The 1980s that I remember included attending concerts by senior figures including Stan Getz, Ella Fitzgerald and Ornette Coleman, and hearing great new work by Arthur Blythe, David Murray and The Art Ensemble Of Chicago.

Russell Lee Fine not only has similar memories of that time but the photographic evidence to back them up. From the 1990s to the present, he has worked as a television and film cinematographer and director, but in the 1980s he was a college radio DJ and aspiring art photographer. Bringing his camera with him while attending concerts at



Images from Russell Lee Fine's "They're So Nice...": Lester Bowie (top), Eugene Chadbourne

Brown University and later in New York City, at the time he perceived the snaps he took of musicians on and off stage to be quite separate from his avowed practice as a street photographer. He used some of those images to produce promotional posters for a concert series and subsequently accepted a few assignments from *Musician* magazine, but many of the photos he took in the 1980s were not developed for decades.

"*They're So Nice...*" reproduces 99 black and white plates taken between 1980–90, as well as three posters advertising concerts by Jerome Cooper, The Leo Smith Sextet, and Marion Brown & Steve McCall. Its name comes from a line that was drolly intoned at the beginning of The Art Ensemble Of Chicago tune "Nice Guys". The AEC, along with other members of what one might call the era's established avant garde, are well represented.

Fine might have been snapping to indulge fannish impulses, but he had a gift for capturing mythic moments. This is enhanced by the book's generous use of black negative space, which makes The Art Ensemble's trumpeter Lester Bowie appear to be blowing beyond a source of light into the void; the white face paint and finery worn by AEC saxophonist Joseph Jarman shines off the page.

Sometimes the action overmatches the medium; images of Peter Kowald and Marion Brown project more intensity than detail. But two photos of Eugene Chadbourne, one with his head in a bird cage and another of him applying a rake to his guitar, lucidly portray

both the determination and the comedy he enacted in performance. Cecil Taylor's extended hands, intent gaze and entranced expression embody the power of his music in a pair of photos taken at the pianist's home.

Fine had a particular gift for capturing the essence of drummers. The sharp angles and erect posture of Max Roach, seen playing a single cymbal in front of some Greek revival columns in Newport, Rhode Island, evoke both his percussive style and his authority. Images of Jerome Cooper playing drums and wooden flute in front of a statue convey his ability to cast a mystic presence independent from his surroundings. Shots of Chick Corea and McCoy Tyner sharing smiles, as well as a fan rolling on a New Orleans street, show that Fine had the hops to grab the best gift any photographer can receive, which is being in the right place at the right time.

Bill Meyer

Bridge To An Unseen Shore: New Age Music As Visionary Art
Jacob Smith

University Of California Press Pbk 275 pp

In the mid-1970s, a new kind of music emerged with roots in the counterculture marked by an insurgent spirit quite apart from the mainstream music industry. The new sound represented a stark contrast to both the pomp and excess of prog rock and the dancefloor-friendly hedonism of disco. It utilised new kinds of lo-fi home recording techniques, was disseminated largely on the new wallet-

friendly format of the cassette tape, and was defiantly DIY, creating its own independent record labels and distribution networks. For some, it was a source of fear and trepidation – possibly even satanic. I am, of course, talking about new age. But if the analogy drawn by author Jacob Smith to the early days of punk sounds contrarian at first, it becomes more convincing the further you read.

In *Bridge To An Unseen Shore*, Smith writes a history of new age music, less as a genre, than as a scene rooted in a specific time and place, starting from the Kohoutek Celebration of Consciousness at the Bill Graham Civic Auditorium in San Francisco in January 1974. Celebrating the imminent arrival of the eponymous comet first observed by Luboš Kohoutek the previous year, the two day fair featured talks and presentations from the likes of kundalini yoga practitioner Yogi Bhañan, float tank pioneer John Lilly and psychedelics researcher Baba Ram Dass (formerly known as Richard Alpert), but it also played host to musical performances by Steven Halpern, lasos and Francesco Lupica, whose celestial sounds would come to define the emerging style.

At the Kohoutek Celebration of Consciousness, as with subsequent new age fairs which became such a crucial part of the independent distribution networks sustaining the music and the movement as a whole, topics like meditation, mindfulness and macrobiotics sat comfortably alongside shimmering synth pads, "crystalline" Fender