
Book reviews

Andrew Hugill, *The Digital Musician*. Routledge, New York, 2008. ISBN 0-415-96216-1
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When is a book not just a book? When the book in question is *The Digital Musician* by Professor Andrew Hugill. As a standalone text it is as fine an example of an approachable academic book aimed at technologically literate students as one could want. However, Hugill's text, in keeping with his subject – the digitally networked, culturally savvy musician – reaches beyond the mere printed page through the inclusion of copious and wide-ranging listening examples, recommended further reading and creative projects. As many of these are embedded at key points in the text, rather than at the end of each chapter in a bibliography, the book reads more like an extended website with a multitude of hyperlinks extending in a number of cultural, technological and historical directions. In addition, there is also a digital resource located at <http://www.digitalmusician.org> that allows the reader to follow up in detail references mentioned in the book itself, as well as linking to Hugill's MusiMoo – an online interactive educational environment. So this book ticks all of the educational boxes replete with a wealth of resources to satisfy both the student and educator alike. But is it any good beyond this novel organisation and hyperlink-heavy online site? Well, the answer is a resounding yes.

It is the author's fascination with music in the digital (or post-digital) age rather than the micro-genres of digital music per se that makes this book so interesting. *The Digital Musician* is by no means a 'how to' book. The author himself clearly states that this was never his intention. Rather the book tackles the often ignored questions of 'why?' and 'what?' These questions are not only applicable to students of technology and composition, but are those that any sound artist or musician who creates anything worthwhile is continually asking himself or herself. As such, Hugill's book is a manifesto against myopic musicians. It is a call for its readers to wake up and to interact with culture in a creative and meaningful way. This credo is evident in many of the author's examples that come from literature, art, and music of many diverse cultures, as well as in the plethora of excellent projects included at the end of the book. Hugill's approach is exemplified in the

very opening of the book, which comprises a brief discussion of the cover – Paul Gauguin's masterpiece *Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?* of 1897. Hugill extrapolates from this the core themes of his book – the assimilation of diverse cultural influences, what it means to be a musician in the digital age, and how these technologies have changed how we create, distribute and indeed listen to the music we now make. Such analogies and references illustrate how the author's own ideas are informed and embedded within these rhizomatic cultural associations.

The book is essentially in three parts. The first provides a technical overview of the properties of sound, methods of sound synthesis, sound processing, recording and how we actually listen to sound. All of these subjects are illustrated with well-chosen musical examples, making what otherwise could have been another dry technical account more relevant and immediate to the reader. Perhaps the best example of this is Chapter 4, which is concerned with the organisation of sound. Here, Hugill not only discusses acoustics and the behaviour of sound in space through filters and FFTs, but also sound diffusion, surround sound, time and duration in composition, sound transformations through time, spectromorphology, Xenakis' UPIC system and glitch music. Each of these elements could be a chapter in its own right. However, one of the major strengths of this book is the author's lateral thinking and his almost virtuosic ability to draw together a wealth of technical and aesthetic ideas in order to illustrate his points.

The second section, and perhaps the most interesting, is an extended discussion of what it actually means to be a digital musician. This section includes not only a critique of the 'performer' and notions of 'musicianship' through such concepts as networked performance, what it means to be 'live' and interactivity, but also a discussion of how the digital musician is situated culturally. This last section could potentially be a theoretical quagmire. However, Hugill deftly manages to distil the essential arguments behind modernism, postmodernism, structuralism and deconstruction as well as semiotics into a mere twenty-four pages. Forget your 'Idiots Guide

to...’ and other such texts – read this chapter and then follow the recommended reading.

The final part of the book presents a series of extended interviews and performance projects suitable for individual classes and extended workshops. The list of those interviewed is impressive and includes such figures as Martyn Ware, Atau Tanaka, Sophy Smith and Kaffe Matthews. The interviewees have, for the most part, been generous with their answers, and as such they represent an interesting cross-section of views and techniques of contemporary ‘experimental electronic music’ practitioners. Although the author briefly discusses the differences between such terminologies as sound-art, sonic art and sound design in Chapter 4, in the interview in the final part he poses the intriguing question ‘is any of your sound-based work not “music” as such?’ Perhaps I am being too greedy given the breadth that the book already covers, but I would have welcomed an extended discussion of whether the author himself considers the digital musician to be making something other than music and, if they are doing so, what this is. This is, however, only a minor quibble. *The Digital Musician* is a highly stimulating book that asks of its readers as many questions as it attempts to answer. As such it is strongly recommended.

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Angus Carlyle (ed.) *Autumn Leaves: Sound and the environment in artistic practice*. Paris Double Entendre, 2007. ISBN 09548074-3-X

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Autumn Leaves brings together a collection of 37 essays by a number of authors whose connection is their interest in various aspects of environmental sound art theory and practice. The book is a celebration of the richness of sound in space – ‘of the complexity of sound’s movements to and fro and of the wonders of our ears and minds’ (p. 5). It is highly eclectic in scope, the articles of varying intensity but consistently concise, making quite easy but intriguing and often provocative reading, and encapsulating the principal issues concerning proponents of soundscape studies and acoustic ecology today. Several of the articles invite further exploration of their subject matter elsewhere, thus the book operates in large part as a springboard from which to investigate each viewpoint more extensively. The book includes several pointers to a variety of online resources: related or supplementary material is presented on the publisher’s own site (untranslated interviews and further articles by the featured authors), and a collaborative

project, also entitled *Autumn Leaves*, can be found at <http://www.gruenrekorder.de>, which offers three complementary (and complimentary) downloadable CDs by artists variously connected with the book and sound practice generally.

The sheer diversity of subject matter explored must have represented something of a challenge in structuring the book, which is decidedly non-linear in its organisation. Picking out particular themes and emphases that run throughout, as I have attempted to do in the following, should give the flavour of its contents, though it seems rather to belie their richness.

Documentation of the sonic environment and listening practice provides content for several of the chapters and ranges from the detailing of particular places/situations – for example, hospital wards (Tim Wainwright and John Wynne) and New York in a winter cold spell (Aki Onda) – to the collection and archiving of sound recordings representing larger environments: John Levack Drever discusses the soundscape of Dartmoor in Devon and the cultural responses to sounds (and changing soundscapes) in rural communities, while Cathy Lane offers a Hebridean sound map that lists the sounds and, in particular, lost sounds of that environment. Chapters dealing with 50 Finnish soundscapes and 50 Japanese soundscapes demonstrate the extension of this archival practice to the national scale. More unusual listening contexts are covered by Dan Holdsworth, who constructs an experiential image of the anechoic chamber through the quotes of others, and Tom Rice, who discusses ear training peculiar to doctors involving stethoscopes and alternative routes into understanding the workings of the body through sound. And Angus Carlyle presents an intense description of a soundworld experienced at the point of waking – ambiguous and with heightened sensation which is allied strongly with triggered and spontaneous thought.

Discussions of listening practice extend, inevitably, to acoustic ecology concerns and the importance of increasing public awareness of the sonic environment. This is addressed through descriptions of soundwalk development (Hildegard Westerkamp), sound categorisation exercises, and investigations of listeners’ reception of or response to sonic spaces. Tashi Petter and Rachael White present an assortment of individuals’ ‘favourite sounds’ in the environment (presumably gleaned from impromptu interviews with members of the public), while Mira Choi proposes the development of a kind of graphic gauge representing the subjective quality or value (that is, nice or nasty) of sound irrespective of its inherent loudness or ‘noisiness’.

Acoustic awareness-raising is related in turn to the exploration of the soundscape through sound art/sculpture and environmental intervention – sound art as ear cleaning. Jem Finer describes his *Score for a Hole in the Ground* – a horn in a forest which