The Map and the Territory: Documenting David Dunn's *Sky Drift*

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In 1977, a large group of musicians performed David Dunn's *Sky Drift* while moving slowly across a Southern California desert, documenting the concert with four stationary microphones. A year later, Dunn presented the work in New York as a 'performance/documentation', playing back the audio recording for a seated audience. This article explores issues of 'liveness' in recorded sound, 'transparency', 'aura' and 'the work itself' in order to examine the consequences of this act: what does it mean for a recording of an outdoor performance to be shared at an indoor concert event? Can such a complex and interactive experience – with widely dispersed musicians and mobile audience members – be successfully converted into a fixed document? What does a recording capture and what must it exclude? Because *Sky Drift* constantly shifts the physical relationships between musicians and audience across a vast outdoor landscape, each listener's experience represents an equally valid sonic perspective on the piece. As a result, it is unclear how a satisfying recording might be made or what it might even mean to 'hear the music' at all. When relocated – away from its original outdoor context – *Sky Drift* is deprived of much of its potential to communicate meaning.

1. INTRODUCTION

At first, there is only the sound of a slight breeze pushing against the microphone diaphragm, a low rumble, followed by the quiet and tentative shuffling of feet. After a few moments, a synthesised drone begins, and it is soon joined by voices, flutes, clarinets and brass. The texture is dense, the sound almost claustrophobic, pressing against the playback speakers. The stereo image spreads the instruments and voices across a wide spectrum, with overlapping sounds emerging from the left, centre and right. The music develops at a glacial pace: the electronic drone and the voices remain prominent, while the gestures played by the wind instruments gradually fade until they disappear altogether. The voices begin to drop out one by one, and finally all that remains is the persistent electronic drone.

These are the recorded sounds of *Sky Drift*, a composition by David Dunn for ten vocalists, sixteen instrumentalists and four channels of synthesised tones.[1] In January 1979, Dunn presented this recording at the Kitchen, an experimental art and music venue in New York City. The piece had originally been performed and recorded just over a year earlier, in December 1977, at an outdoor event at Little Blair Valley in Southern California's Anza-Borrego Desert State Park. Dunn labelled this re-presentation of the work in New York City 'an environmental performance/documentation'. First, the Kitchen audience listened to 40 minutes of taped post-concert interviews with many of the *Sky Drift* musicians. (Dunn used open-ended questions to invite the participants to reflect on their experiences of playing the piece.) This long introduction was followed by the complete 30 minute recording of the outdoor *Sky Drift* performance. In addition to the audio playback, images were projected onto the walls: photographs of singers and wind players performing out in the midst of a wide-open desert landscape. Despite Dunn's careful curation, the performance/documentation at The Kitchen was neither a critical nor a popular success. According to a *New York Times* review (discussed at greater length below), the audience 'walked out in droves' (Rockwell 1979).

Anthropologist and early cyberneticist Gregory Bateson taught his students that 'the map is not the territory, and the name is not the thing named' (Bateson 1979: 30). In presenting a concert version of an audio recording of an outdoor performance, David Dunn – who frequently cites Bateson as a major influence in his own writings – issued the Kitchen audience an unusual challenge: how can a listener be expected to conjure up 'the territory' of the original performance when presented with 'the map' of the recording? What can a listener come to understand about the 1977 Little Blair Valley event via a two-channel audio recording? In other words, how can a complex and interactive experience like an outdoor performance be distilled into some kind of re-playable documentation? Or, perhaps more broadly: what can a recording capture and what must it exclude? *Sky Drift* proves to be a slippery example, an interesting case, a kind of music that somehow refuses to allow a convincing reproduction of itself.

2. THE 'MUSIC ITSELF'

A few months after the 1979 Kitchen event, Lingua Press released a *Sky Drift* book, which further revealed the extent of Dunn's careful approach to documenting

[1]This recording was released on a CD of Dunn's environmental works (1996).

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the Little Blair Valley performance (Dunn 1979). In addition to images of the event and transcripts of the twenty-seven participant-interviews, Dunn included several pages of his own explanatory writing about the project, along with a full-colour graphic score.

The composer also boldly chose to reprint two press reviews from the Kitchen event, placing them prominently on the book's inside back cover. The two reviewers, Peter Kivy and John Rockwell, both panned the performance/documentation in no uncertain terms. Kivy, writing for the *Soho Weekly News*, criticised the lengthy interview segment that began the event:

> Had Dunn modestly and unpretentiously presented his composition for what it was, a not very shocking or surprising experiment in improvised sonorities, it might have had at least the limited musical effect of which it was capable. […] One could not help leaving slightly angry, and convinced a great deal of hoopla had been generated for the purpose of covering up a poverty of musical imagination. (Kivy 1979)

Rockwell, writing for the *New York Times*, also disapproved of Dunn's choice to combine the interviews and the music: '[It] had the effect of expanding an already-complex musical work into concept art, in which the ramifications of the piece […] became almost more important than the music itself' (Rockwell 1979). Rockwell's attempt to separate out the 'music itself' from the rest of the event begins to expose the problematic nature of this kind of performance/documentation: what exactly *is* the 'music itself' of *Sky Drift*? Is it an outdoor performance? An audio recording? Does it include photographs? Interviews? A book?

Dunn attempts an answer in his written programme notes for *Sky Drift*, suggesting that all of these approaches to documentation are, in fact, part of the piece: 'The interviews have served to unify the composition's parts by describing the diversity of the participants' experiences. Thus the composition is now inclusive of not only a complex sonic event but also information about the conditions necessary for its existence (e.g., psychological states of the performers)' (Dunn 1979: 4). Yet Peter Kivy's review explicitly disagrees, denying Dunn's suggestion on its face: 'Dunn conceives of his show, apparently, not as two things but as one. […] But whatever his intentions, *Sky Drift* remains two things, not one: the interviews no more become part of the music than does the Opera Quiz become part of *Rigoletto*' (Kivy 1979). So is who is right: Dunn or Kivy? Is *Sky Drift* ultimately composed of one thing or many? And who gets to decide what is meant by the 'work itself'? The conventions that apply to our traditional understanding of music – that a recording of a performance is somehow fundamentally similar to the original performance, that the map shares some essential relationship to the territory – are particularly challenged by a concert that features the playback of a recording of another concert.

Though Rockwell invokes convention by also separating the interviews and documentation from the 'music itself', he ultimately takes a more nuanced view than Kivy regarding the distinction between map and territory. In his conclusion he writes:

> The trouble was that although the ramifications [of the interviews] were interesting enough, the documentation wasn't, and neither was the music. No doubt it might have been heard live, with the instrumentalists wandering ever further from the choral group and electronic sound sources, 'performing in response to information from the environment'. But the tape-recording failed to capture any of that sense of space, and the actual sounds – evocative but basically unchanging sustained textures that sounded like the Ligeti used in the film 2001 – weren't very evocative of the desert. (Rockwell 1979)

Rockwell's acknowledgement of a potential gap between the experience of the recording and the experience of the original event ('No doubt it might have been heard live...') is of crucial importance. Conceiving of *Sky Drift* as a dense and multifaceted work – made up of more than simply 'music itself' – allows us to productively explore the gap between the recording and the performance in greater detail.

3. 'HEARING THE MUSIC'

Before taking a closer look at the *Sky Drift* recording, it is necessary to understand some of the circumstances of the original performance. The score features a diagram of the piece's choreography: all the musicians begin in a tight circle at the centre of the performance area, and then, over the course of the 30 minute performance, the instrumentalists gradually drift outwards, making audible the space and distances between them. By the close of the piece, they play across vast stretches of emptiness, forming a circle more than 800 metres wide.

By the end of the Little Blair Valley event in 1977, the recording equipment – located at the centre of this wide circle – was unable to pick up the sounds of these distant instruments; on the finished recording, the wind and brass sounds gradually fade over 20 minutes before vanishing completely. The instrumentalists performing in the piece could not hear each other as they gradually moved further and further from the centre. Listening across these physical distances invokes a kind of ontological challenge, reminding us that the 'music itself' is never just one thing. If each performer of *Sky Drift* had a unique listening experience over the course of the performance, which of them can say that they heard 'the music'? What might it mean to capture 'the music' in a recording if it differs so much from each listening perspective?

Jack Logan, who played trumpet in the *Sky Drift* performance, discussed the relationship between

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performing the piece and then later listening back to the recording during his post-event interview with Dunn:

> As you listen to it – as we both listen to it back on the tape, it was so vastly different than any of my perceptions about the piece, because where I was, during the course of the piece, it was very quiet. But if you listen to the tape, what you hear is this massive sound. You know, with a traditional piece, even a traditional Stravinsky piece or anything like that, you have a very good idea of what sounded like if you were playing in it or participating in it. It's not that way here. (Dunn 1979: 69)

Logan echoes the anxieties of Rockwell – underlining the phenomenological distance between the non-transparent recording and the live performance – but then pushes the issue further by questioning whether 'hearing' the piece at all is even possible: 'I think the piece is too complex to make any concrete observations about. And also, since we've neither heard it – I mean, since we really haven't heard it yet and never will, it's also difficult to make observations about something that isn't' (Dunn 1979: 69).

Logan contrasts Dunn's work with Stravinsky to demonstrate an epistemological dilemma, suggesting that while we can know what certain pieces of music 'sounded like', for other pieces we 'never will'. When he offers that perhaps *Sky Drift* is 'too complex' to observe, he is really pointing towards the infinite possible variations of listener-perspective. Of course, differing acoustical considerations cause variations for every listener; Stravinsky's music, performed in a concert hall, does indeed sound slightly different to each listener at each location, though all leave the performance feeling that they have 'heard the music'. During a performance of Dunn's *Sky Drift*, on the other hand, each listener might conceivably hear a unique version of the piece, one that differs almost completely from anyone else's experience. By incorporating musicians moving across a vast outdoor landscape – with no fixed position for the audience – the composer has assured no single listener can claim an authoritative listening perspective.

What, then, is the nature of the relationship between the sounds of the live performance and a recording of the performance from a single perspective? Later in the same interview, Jack Logan complicates his earlier position, assigning ultimate authority to the *Sky Drift* recording:

> **Logan**: I suppose that if I hadn't heard the tape, it would've been far more unknowable than it is now … in the sense that I would not have heard it literally. No one would have.
>
> **Dunn**: Do you feel that you *have* heard it?
>
> **Logan**: No … I feel like I've heard *more* of it. I may not have – well, sure I feel like I've heard it. Yeah, I do. There's a completion that exists because of that tape. There's a fulfilment that seems to have occurred. (Dunn 1979: 72)

Again, Logan's introspective comments offer a lot to be unpacked. Despite his earlier assertion that the multiplicity of perspectives offered by *Sky Drift* make it impossible to hear, he eventually relents, claiming that the tape offers a way to hear the piece 'literally', that the tape functions as an authoritative master that offers 'completion' and 'fulfilment'. Other *Sky Drift* participants echo Logan's revised sentiment in their interviews with Dunn, defining the recording as crucial to understanding the piece – that the recording is, in the end, what *allows* you to 'hear the music'. They demonstrate the powerful faith that some listeners are willing to place in documentation, treating the tape as an 'essential' representation – even over the experiences of their own ears or memories.

4. 'TRANSPARENCY' IN RECORDED SOUND

It is tempting to segregate all listening experiences into two categories, with 'live' sound and 'recorded' sound representing spiritual opposites.[2] And yet since both live-ness and recorded-ness involve a body engaging with sound, the fundamental similarities between the two remain stronger than their differences. Instead of an impenetrable division between 'real' sounds and 'fake' sounds – with the 'territory' of live performance in stark opposition to the 'map' of a recording – all sounds exist as equally authentic to the human body that hears them.

Is there any way, then, to carefully tease out the differences in the experiences of a recording and a live performance?[3] Gene Wahl, the recording engineer for the *Sky Drift* performance, makes an attempt during his post-concert interview with Dunn:

> The tape itself is a different thing than the performance. The response it elicits from people, I think, is different than the response that would've been elicited had they been there. Like, I know in myself, listening to the tape, it elicits a different response than the actual performance did while I was there. I'm not saying that the tape is a bad thing. I guess, the crucial point in my mind is that, in this day and age of technology, I think we should be aware of the limits of technology. (Dunn 1979: 48)

In a 2007 article that explores these very limits, philosopher Joshua Glasgow carefully stakes out a position he calls 'hi-fi aesthetics' or the 'transparency thesis'. He writes: 'Recordings have the potential to transmit to us the sounds that we would have heard had we been there to hear the original performance' (Glasgow 2007: 173); in other words, it is possible for the map to be phenomenologically inseparable from the territory. Glasgow makes it

[2]For well-known scholarly examples of this categorisation, see Benjamin's 'aura' or Schafer's 'schizophonia' (Benjamin 1968; Schafer 1977).

[3]We have already seen Rockwell's guarded qualification in his review of Dunn's performance/documentation: 'No doubt it might have been heard live […] but the tape-recording failed to capture any of that sense of space' (Rockwell 1979).

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clear that while not *every* recording is transparent, the *potential exists* – at least in the abstract – for recordings to '"purely" or "faithfully" document the performance they record, presenting for the home-bound listener a completely unvarnished sonic window onto the original performance' (Glasgow 2007: 164).

In his acknowledgement that 'some recordings are more transparent than others', Glasgow suggests the existence of a *spectrum* of transparency, with more transparent recordings on one side and less transparent recordings on the other side. It may thus be productive to adopt one additional metaphor: we can talk about the 'distance' between a recording and a live event, with some recorded sounds remaining very 'close' to the sounds of a live experience while others move 'far away' from live experiences. A truly transparent recording would be so 'close' to the original sound as to be indistinguishable in every way. Even if we accept Glasgow's transparency thesis – that *some* pieces of music *can* be documented 'faithfully' – there are elements of Dunn's *Sky Drift* that strongly resist the kind of transparency that Glasgow proposes.

5. RECORDING OUTDOOR MUSIC

One of the special characteristics of outdoor performance is the way in which it engages with physical space, fostering a multiplicity of listener-perspectives as both musicians and audience move around. The changing locations and perspectives create a shifting soundscape that remains constantly in flux. Crucially, each listener is able to make choices about his/her own experience, drifting at will towards or away from particular sounds and establishing a personalised aural pathway through the work. The particularly broad agency afforded to a listener to position one's body in a venue with no walls and no fixed seats is of a fundamentally different nature from the agency afforded to a listener in a standard forward-facing fixed-perspective concert setting. Since the sounds of an outdoor performance differ so greatly from location to location – to a much greater degree than any pair of seats in a concert hall – any microphone thus captures only a thin fragment of the sonic totality, recording from only one of an infinite number of valid perspectives.[4] In this way, the physical setup of the piece – its very listening situation – vastly complicates the issue of transparent documentation.

There are two obvious strategies for recording spatially complex outdoor performances, each problematic in a different way. First, an audio recording can be made with stationary microphones that document the performance from a single fixed perspective. This method ignores the potential motion of a listener's body, instead capturing the experience of a stationary listener. A second approach might instead use either a moving microphone or a series of carefully edited crossfades between a large number of widely spaced microphones to more closely duplicate the experience of a gradually shifting perspective, creating the illusion of 'moving' through the work. Of course, moving microphones and careful crossfades – no matter how cleverly conceived and executed – can only capture one *possible* pathway through the work; both approaches ignore the concept of agency, of an audience member's ability to actively affect the sound by changing his/her listening position during the performance.

Composers and musicians have long struggled with the challenges of reducing the multivalent experiences of outdoor music into a convenient re-playable format. The creation and distribution of recordings allow these pieces to be effectively commodified and distributed to a much larger audience than just those able to attend the outdoor performance. While David Dunn chose the first recording strategy – stationary microphones recording a fixed perspective – for *Sky Drift*, other composers have adopted the more complex crossfading approach in order to create the illusion of moving one's ears from place to place. In 1976, Deutsche Grammophon released Karlheinz Stockhausen's *Sternklang*, an outdoor piece for 21 musicians premiered in a park in Berlin. The musicians are divided into five groups distributed around the performance area, and the audience is invited to circulate freely during the work's three-hour duration (Stockhausen 1976).

Stockhausen's approach to creating a recording of the piece was to reinvent it entirely, converting it into a kind of sonic-collage-for-home-listening instead of trying to capture the full experience of an outdoor performance. In the recording studio, he captured each of the five groups in isolation. Then he mixed a stereo version of the piece that slowly crossfades between the groups, using dynamic balance and other mixing techniques to place some groups 'nearer' to the ear while the other groups appear 'farther away' to the ear. The crossfades imitate the effect of a gradual movement from location to location around the park. While the illusion of movement in the finished recording is effective, we are pulled along by Stockhausen's navigational choices instead of being able to make our own.

John Luther Adams adopted a related strategy for his 2013 recording of *Inuksuit*, an hour-long outdoor work scored for a large group of percussionists (Adams 2013). Like Stockhausen, Adams (along with Doug Perkins, the producer) chose to use many microphones and clever mixing to virtually shift the listening perspective throughout the course of the recording. But the *Inuksuit* audio has two additional features that distinguish it from *Sternklang*: first, it was mixed and released in a 5.1 surround-sound version, which more fully immerses a listener in sound. Additionally, the *Inuksuit* recording was made not in a recording studio, but on location in a Vermont forest. The sounds of the forest, including

[4]Recall Jack Logan's discussion of what it means to 'hear the music' of Stravinsky in a concert hall, as compared with Dunn outdoors.

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singing birds and a babbling stream, are integrated with the sounds of the percussionists, creating a kind of continuous dialogue between music and environment. While the recording is neither a direct duplicate of an *Inuksuit* performance nor a substitute for hearing the work in person, this creative approach to documenting an outdoor performance does much to reduce the metaphorical 'distance' between the recording and the live experience.

To return briefly to 'hi-fi aesthetics', Joshua Glasgow offers a number of eloquent arguments to defend his position that the existence of a transparent recording is indeed plausible. Glasgow rejects the claim that transparency is inevitably affected by the recording perspective or that any fidelity to an original performance is automatically compromised by the fact of the microphones existing in a particular configuration. He writes:

> Far from undermining the possibility of transparency, this claim seems to detail one of its necessary conditions, namely, that the listener assume a specified spatial location. […] Consider that just as one must listen to recordings from a certain perspective, so must the live audience, and we do not really think the person sitting in the balcony gets a less real sound than the person sitting in the front row. (Glasgow 2007: 170)

Glasgow's over-reaching assumption – that each audience member *must* listen from a 'certain perspective', presumably fixed for the duration of the performance – is directly challenged by outdoor works of Dunn, Stockhausen and Adams that encourage listeners to circulate and change perspectives. Furthermore, if we accept Glasgow's argument that a 'specified spatial location' is a needed for transparency, then a performance such as *Sky Drift*, which embraces a diversity of spatial perspectives, can never achieve a fully transparent or 'hi-fi' documentation. In comparison to the sounds of 26 musicians spread out across a half-mile stretch of desert, a fixed recording offers up a vastly reduced number of listener-perspectives. We can certainly imagine a creative listener circumnavigating her living room while playing Dunn's *Sky Drift* recording at home, adjusting the distances and positions of her ears in relation to the two speakers to vary slightly the balances between the instruments. But it is clear that this kind of experience, in its severely limited possibilities, is destined to remain forever 'distant' from the experience of circumnavigating Little Blair Valley during a performance of the piece outdoors.

6. INNER AND OUTER RELATIONSHIPS

In 1964, the American visual artist Robert Irwin exhibited a strange series of paintings consisting only of tiny pink and green dots arranged into meticulous rows on a white canvas. When viewed from a certain distance and in certain light, these works have an uncanny visual energy; they give off a mysterious optical vibration. Irwin famously objected to the photographic reproductions of these paintings, and would not allow the 'dot paintings' (as they came to be called) to be shared in magazines or gallery catalogues. This unusual objection came after Irwin's lengthy philosophical reflection on the inherently dual nature of visual art. In a statement printed in *Artforum* in 1965, he distinguished between the 'identity' of a painting and its 'physical existence', arguing that while identity could be transferred by photographic documentation, physical existence is invariably tied to a real-life object or place (Irwin 2011: 21–2).

Irwin later refined his preferred terms for this duality, replacing identity with 'image' and physical existence with 'presence'. Biographer Lawrence Weschler writes, 'Irwin felt that [documentation of a painting] would capture none of what the painting was about and everything that it was not about. That is, a photograph could convey image but not presence' (Weschler and Irwin 1982: ix). As Irwin's paintings became more and more minimal in the mid-1960s, the balance between image and presence in his works slowly shifted. Eventually, subtle abstractions like the dot paintings contained just the merest suggestion of 'image'; instead, the works' 'presence', their physicality, took centre stage. Since, according to Irwin, presence is non-transferable, the paintings require a first-hand experience. In this way, the dot paintings are fully undocumentable; you must see them in person to 'see' anything at all.[5]

Irwin's concepts of image and presence find a musical analogue in Barry Truax's 1994 article 'The Inner and Outer Complexity of Music'. Here Truax proposes the terms 'inner' and 'outer' to describe two ways of thinking about the relationships that exist within (and around) a piece of music. Inner relationships are descriptions of the music's rhythms, melodies, harmonies and timbres. These are the standard tools of musical analysis, the kinds of details likely to be found in a traditional musical score. On the other hand, outer relationships deal with the interactions between a work and the world outside the work. The inner relationships of music comprise what is traditionally thought of as the 'work itself', while the outer relationships are often dismissed as 'extra-musical', relegated to extraneous *context* rather than essential *text*.

In their respective fields and with their own idiosyncratic terminologies, Truax and Irwin argue for a non-binary understanding of art and music, a deeper appreciation of both text *and* context. They offer a method of searching for meaning beyond the 'work

[5]Taking a similar stance, artist Michael Heizer refused to allow photographs or documentation of his site-specific 1970 work *Double Negative* into a 2012 exhibition at Los Angeles's Museum of Contemporary Art. Christopher Knight writes: 'Heizer – perhaps being overly cautious – worries that documentation in a museum gallery misrepresents sculpture that can be known only through physical experience' (Knight 2012).

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itself', suggesting that it can be found not just within the relations of a work's internal parts but also outside, in the work's relationship to the external world around it. Truax asserts that a piece of music's ultimate value can be found in a proper balance between its inner and outer complexities, writing: 'The ideal situation, in my mind, is to have a continual flow of influence back and forth between the internal and external levels of the musical process, where each informs and enhances our understanding of the other' (Truax 1994: 179). Robert Irwin, by contrast, takes an extreme opposite position, intentionally *unbalancing* the inner and outer relationships to achieve his aesthetic goals. His artworks draw attention to presence by reducing image as much as possible. By eliminating complexities *within* the work, external complexities – the changing lighting conditions, the spatial relationships between the art and one's own body, and other subtle details of the specific moment – reveal themselves to an observant viewer.

Sky Drift is similarly unbalanced, focusing on outer complexities at the expense of inner complexities. According to David Dunn's introductory notes, the piece is 'a sonic exploration of the physical characteristics of the performance site resulting in an intensification of perceptual focus toward these physical characteristics' (Dunn 1979: 4). In other words, the meaning of the piece is found not only in the sounds made by the musicians but also in the way those sounds effectively redirect one's perception towards the acoustic and spatial effects of Little Blair Valley.[6] Unfortunately, the audio recording of *Sky Drift* succeeds in capturing the 'inner' relationships of the piece, the pitches and harmonies – the 'notes on the page' – and fails to properly capture the 'outer' relationships between the piece and its performance context. Those focused only on *Sky Drift*'s inner relationships (recall Kivy's snide comment about its 'poverty of musical imagination') arguably miss the intent of the work altogether. Just as Robert Irwin declared his dot paintings unsuited for reproduction, unbalanced music – music that engages with 'outer' at the expense of 'inner' – is similarly unsuited for recording. Without the 'being there', the ability to fuse text and context into a complex whole, the music is stripped of much of its potential to communicate meaning.

7. 'PERFECTIONISM' AND 'IMPERFECTIONISM'

Robert Irwin's philosophies find a parallel in Walter Benjamin's 1936 paper 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' – a seminal text that attempts to explicate the differences between a recording and a live experience (Benjamin 1968). Both Irwin and Benjamin are concerned with the implications of reproduction, with the unbridgeable gap between an original and a copy, with what is sacrificed or lost during the process of duplication. Like Irwin, Benjamin writes about the fragile importance of presence: 'The situations into which the product of mechanical reproduction can be brought may not touch the actual work of art, yet the *quality of its presence* is always depreciated' (Benjamin 1968: 221).

Andy Hamilton begins his 2003 article 'The Art of Recording and the Aesthetics of Perfection' with a helpful gloss on Benjamin's famous use of the term 'aura' – defining it as 'that numinous quality of presence which characterises the unique, authentic artwork' (Hamilton 2003: 346). His article then goes on to describe a few of the ways in which the hard-to-pin-down concept of aura has been applied to examples of recorded music. Some writers, including Benjamin, have claimed that the aura of a live performance is not captured on a recording, that reproducibility eliminates the work's uniqueness and thus its aura. Others, such as Richard Taruskin, argue to the contrary: as standalone works of art, well-conceived recordings acquire a *new kind* of aura.

Hamilton reminds us that 'the unclarity of the concept of aura contributes to these conflicting interpretations' (Hamilton 2003: 346). He then goes on to argue – contra Benjamin – that aura is not truly impacted by the act of recording; instead the aura is made meaningful by an act of post-recording interpretation. In this spirit, Hamilton offers two opposing aesthetic conceptions of recording, calling these approaches 'perfectionist' and 'imperfectionist'. A perfectionist aesthetic, like Taruskin's, recognises the *recording itself* as a complete work of art. Rather than conceiving of recordings as an always-flawed representation or a mere shadow of a live event, perfectionism celebrates the unique possibilities of recorded sound. Perfectionist recordings often adopt a 'phonographic' approach, with artists editing and remixing in order to create an error-free performance or to artificially imbue the recording with a sense of liveness or 'being there'.[7]

By contrast, an imperfectionist attitude towards recording, like Benjamin's (or Robert Irwin's), remains sceptical of the ability of recording to capture meaning. An imperfectionist considers the inherent distance between any source material and its reproduction an impossible divide, and thus prefers instead a more documentary-style approach to recording. Imperfectionism embraces the resulting 'flaws' in the finished product, finding aesthetic value in these errors, a kind of nod to the honesty of the process of documentation.

[6]Dunn's insistence that the interviews, photographs and book are also part of *Sky Drift* ('the composition is now inclusive of not only a complex sonic event but also information about the conditions necessary for its existence') also points towards his focus on 'outer' relationships.

[7]For an in-depth discussion on perfectionist techniques in the celebrated recordings of pianist Glenn Gould and their relationship to perfectionism in popular music, see Hamilton 2003: 354–7 and 361–2.

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Hamilton summarises the differences between the two approaches by pointing out that 'perfectionism tends to supports an auratic conception of art, while imperfectionism questions it' (Hamilton 2003: 347). In support of an auratic conception of art, the perfectionist viewpoint asserts that aura is experienced everywhere, at any time, by anyone with perceptual faculties. In other words, any person who views a photographic reproduction of a painting or listens to a recording has access to the unique aura of *that* photograph or *that* recording. This experience may be – and likely is – a very different experience from viewing the original painting in person or listening to an unrepeatable live concert, but it is an experience that is no less *real*. Our hypothetical listener who cranks up Dunn's *Sky Drift* on her home stereo system may not be co-present with the musicians bouncing their sounds around the desert, but she is certainly co-present with the very real sounds bouncing around her living room. The larger question, of course, is whether or not the living room experience (or Kitchen experience) still communicates anything of Dunn's intentions: does the meaning of the artwork remain intact after undergoing the process of reproduction?

Hamilton goes on to apply the concepts of perfectionism and imperfectionism to issues of transparency, using the term 'transparency' in much the same way as Glasgow. At first blush, it may seem obvious that transparency is best achieved by an imperfectionist approach to recording; after all, what could be more transparent than setting up a few microphones, letting the tape roll, and then distributing the final results as a permanent record of 'what really happened'? Hamilton offers a deeper analysis, however, asserting that a perfectionist recording – highly manipulated and edited – can paradoxically achieve a greater sense of 'being there' than a hands-off documentary recording. He writes: 'The purist [i.e. transparent] recording is not the one without intervention, but the one where intervention is directed towards creating a realistic auditory image' (Hamilton 2003: 351).

Put another way, the more effort the cartographer puts into getting the details of the map just right, the more effectively it can match up with the territory that is being represented. As we have seen, both John Luther Adams and Karlheinz Stockhausen adopted this approach, using perfectionist strategies to document and distribute their outdoor works. Both incorporated mixing, layering and other studio effects into their recordings in order to create a listening experience that resembles a live outdoor performance in many significant ways. By contrast, the imperfectionist *Sky Drift* recording ultimately conveys very little of the Anza-Borrego desert to its listeners.

8. CONCLUSION

In a remarkable exchange during a post-performance interview with David Dunn, *Sky Drift* vocalist Phil Keeney describes the importance of an audience's 'being there':

> The thing I don't like is the presentation of it afterwards, you know? Like, to me, the usefulness is doing it. And that was it, just doing it, like a ritual. You don't constantly reprocess a ritual, it's done for the purpose of doing, and whatever happens – whatever validity it has – is at that point. But it totally loses what happened at the point to, let's say, hear a tape or see a documentation of it six months later or a year later. To me, it was at the point of doing it is when it was valid – when any information was coming across – and that was all I could ask from it, you know? I wouldn't mess with it past that. (Dunn 1979: 28)

Keeney questions the ultimate purpose of recording *Sky Drift* in any form, instead asserting that the 'usefulness is doing it', that attending the event in person is the only way to understand it at all. Keeney's sceptical comment causes David Dunn, the interviewer, to offer a defence of his decision to record the performance: 'A documentation or a reproduction of something is never the thing itself; so in a case like this – like, the act of recording your impressions, or the act of having recorded the piece, or photographic documentation – anything that way is, in one sense, more about what *didn't* happen than what *did* happen' (Dunn 1979: 28).

Dunn recognises not only the vast distance between the documentation and the event, but also suggests that it may be possible to approach a recording as a kind of reverse-documentation, to listen *around* what the recording reveals, to learn something of the territory by noting what is left off the map. As the interview continues, Dunn continues further down this line of thinking, testing out the idea of a recording-as-reverse-documentation: 'Well, the thing that I see documentation serving to express – is just that notion of the inexpressibility of the situation' (Dunn 1979: 29). In response, Phil Keeney questions Dunn's entire premise:

> Yeah, maybe if documentation was looked on like that – which I don't think it is for the most part, you know. People take it, like, verbatim as if they come to see a documentation as if to experience the happening. And it gets valued that way, critically valued that way, and the artistic world valued that way, I think. This is what I think is happening, you know: that people, when they do see documentations of such personal things and activities – such as your piece that was in the desert – what they're basing their judgement and values on after seeing the documentation, to me, has nothing to do with what happened that day. And if they knew – that if people went into that documentation with that in mind – what they're seeing was what *didn't* happen, or what they heard was what *didn't* happen – then that would most certainly justify the piece – if people knew that. I don't think, in a lot of times – a lot of cases, it's treated that way. (Dunn 1979: 29)

Keeney's speculation was certainly validated by the critical response to the 1979 Kitchen performance/documentation. There, Dunn's *Sky Drift* recording was

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treated with the presumption of transparency – that what was heard in documentation was, to borrow a metaphor from Glasgow, a 'window' into the sound of the performance – and Rockwell and Kivy judged the work accordingly. As their scathing reviews prove, not every listener adopts such a radically imperfectionist stance as the one Dunn proposes, choosing to interpret a recording as a kind of anti-record, focusing on what is *not* heard or *not* represented. Even sensitive and experienced listeners like John Rockwell, who readily acknowledge that the map and the territory are not coterminous, at least expect that there is more connection than disconnection between the two. In a recent interview with this author, David Dunn was asked to reflect on his earlier suggestion that documentation is somehow capable of expressing its own inexpressibility. His response was succinct and clear: 'I was wrong and Phil was right!' (Dunn 2015)

The question of precisely how any performance/documentation is ultimately interpreted by critics and by audiences at large gets to the heart of some of the difficulties associated with the recording of this kind of outdoor music. With so many possible listening perspectives, it becomes impossible to present any single authoritative version of 'the work'. Yet instead of following the agnostic example of Robert Irwin and refusing to distribute any documentation of his music, Dunn has spent his professional career engaging directly with these issues from a variety of angles. His decision to create, perform and share the extravagant documentation for *Sky Drift* has left a series of philosophical quandaries in its wake; a site-specific and moment-specific work with so many inherently undocumentable elements is also paradoxically a work that the vast majority of people will only ever experience as documentation. In the end, it is *Sky Drift*'s 'unbalance' – its focus on presence and 'being there' at the expense of recordable sound – that continues to make it such a vexing and compelling example. When asked about his continuing fascination with the relationship between documentation and performance, Dunn replied: 'I think it is inherently problematic and therefore interesting. I don't think there's a resolution that's really possible, instead it's just different ways of focusing on the problematic nature of that relationship' (Dunn 2015).

We have encountered a number of approaches that counteract the difficulty of documenting a performance of outdoor music, from perfectionist to imperfectionist and from the transparent to the very opaque. As Dunn points out, none of these are 'resolutions' in any real sense. If there is a silver lining to be discovered in the *Sky Drift* recording, which conveys so little of the depth and space of its original performance site, we might attempt to locate it somewhere inside its very flatness and space-less-ness. Despite Dunn's current recanting of his youthful stance, perhaps there is something positive to be said for a recording that so effectively asserts its independence from a live performance – a recording that reminds us in no uncertain terms what it is and what it is not. In contrast with a rich and detailed listening experience, perhaps the opaque recording paradoxically succeeds in pointing us towards what is missing, laying bare the audible distance between the map and the territory.

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