

CONTOUR EDITIONS Presents a new trio of works by Andy Graydon:



Title: *Unterwegs*
Artist: Andy Graydon
Cat#: ce.cd_0004
Edition: 150
Format: CDR / Taiyo Yuden
Material: Printed utilizing archival pigment ink on Strathmore paper
Release date: May 2013
United States: \$13 - price includes shipping and handling
International: \$20 - price includes shipping and handling
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Title: *Erased Cage*
Artist: Andy Graydon
Cat#: ce.onl_0009
Format: MP3 Download
Release date: May 2013
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Title: *Untitled (contour)*
Artist: Andy Graydon
Cat#: ce.scr_0007
Format: Online Screening
Release date: May 2013
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OUT NOW: *Unterwegs*, *Erased Cage*, and *Untitled (contour)*

Contour Editions is pleased to present a trio of new works by Andy Graydon: *Unterwegs*, *Erased Cage*, and *Untitled (contour)*. These publications are the latest development of the label's effort to present works that explore the various possibilities of sound, while also dealing with studio experimentation, material processes, and a diversity of techniques in creating and engaging with sound. The label's objective is to reach listeners and spectators on a personal level by opening independent distribution of sound and visual artist's work to local communities across the global cultural landscape, regardless of geographical situation.

Contour Editions is also very excited to embark for the first time on an approach in which sound is not only a listening practice but also touches us with its absence, and as something that connects us to a visual experience. In this case the artist's response to sound conceptualizes these three different approaches that expand on the vocabulary of listening, experiencing, and thinking about sound. The artist focuses the listener's energy into a focused space of near-total sonic absence, and therefore into the mental apprehension of archetypes and into a visualization of sound in conversation with environment. To explore in detail Graydon's work Contour Editions has invited Gil Sansón to conduct an interview with Andy Graydon in which the two will discuss his ideas and practice, motivations, processes, material approaches, and most importantly these three new works.

To find out more about Andy Graydon please visit the label's artist section at www.contoureditions.com

Andy Graydon in conversation with Gil Sansón Interview for Contour Editions, May 2013

Gil Sansón: Andy, to what extent is the specific context for each sound important, and perhaps more important, how does the information provided by knowing the location of each sound affect the work, structurally or otherwise?

Andy Graydon: I think you might be asking about the denser-than-usual levels of attribution of sound sources included in the notes to "Unterwegs". For this, I think that looking at the contrast between two of the works being released together on Contour, "Unterwegs" versus "Erased Cage", will shed some light. "Unterwegs" is intended to be a listening record, to be approached with the expectations of a musical listening, broadly defined. Toward that goal, I think that the sound material and its formal functioning should carry most of the weight aesthetically. In other words a deep contextual knowledge might very well inform and deepen a reading of the work, or in fact might complicate, undermine, and productively thwart it, but it is not essential to a satisfying encounter with the work. Or another way to put this might be to say that I think with this work, the sound itself must cue an attentive listener to the contextual regions -- cues to the types of listening required, the sound/musical precedents, the genres even -- that would help make the work come off successfully.

For instance I thought a long time about how it was going to work to start the record with a 20 minute piece ("Airframe") that is less than half of normal listening volume, that weaves in and out between presence and absence, while never being fully absent. It was a statement I wanted to make, to place almost half the record in this "opener" kind of mode, in which your very state of listening was being teased. Then I wanted to create a short suggestion of activity, with "Quarter Rest". Before coming to what one might think would be the big pay-off, only to land us in a more full (in terms of volume) but quite static (in terms of narrative or movement) space with "Year Long Waiting Room". I wanted to situate the listener to be very poised and ready for action by the time they arrive at "Year Long Waiting Room" but to then present something that actually required the kind of listening that had been set up with the first piece. By that point I hope one is asking "now what exactly am I listening to, or for, here? The focus has receded again, but in a way entirely different from the way it receded in the first piece, "Airframe". So these are very formal questions aimed at focusing the work of listening through the sound itself. If the record is able to produce a space of specific listening along those lines, then I think it worked.

The grounding question for me throughout the project was: how can we attend properly to a world of such unceasing variety? "Unterwegs" is German for "en route" or "underway". The world is quite fleeting, and making recordings of it only underscores that fleeting in-passing-ness of all things and experiences. I feel that one is always encountering something on its way to its next phase, in some proto-form of its next formation. It is the listening that solidifies an event, the attention that draws form around it fully. So as with most of my sound works I was aware that what I wanted to make was more akin to a lens than an object-in-itself, a way to focus on these simultaneous layers of roiling activity and stillness.

"Airframe" is culled from field recordings of travels over the period of about six years. Listening to these recordings was the origin of my interest in the "in passing" flow I mentioned. Then I thought about works that provided truly compelling engagements with the time of music, in my experience. That led me to use quotations, or fragments, from Tony Conrad ("Ten Years Alive on the Infinite Plane" says it all), and from Kenneth Kirschner. Having these touchstones on the surface of the sound was not important to me, but having them down in the engine room, as it were, that was extremely important. And that led finally to a kind of self-quotation, in which I used a long portion of a field recording I made from one of my own installations that appears in both "Year Long Waiting Room" and "Airframe". The recording, flickering down at the bottom edges of volume, is of an exhibition of "Erased Cage" in Vienna in 2011.

"Erased Cage" is just frames of silence, in durations defined by the other artists participating in the exhibition. Each artist recorded for me their own performance of John Cage's 4'33", in any length they wished (as per a version of Cage's score). Then I "erased", or deleted, the moving in Logic, leaving only the duration they chose. I wanted a series of frames of time to be moving across the field of the exhibition, so you could for instance track a viewing of the show, or an experience of the room, to the four minutes and nine seconds of Christian Jankowski's performance of 4'33". I wanted to be true to Cage's instruction to attend to the environment itself, but at the same time show that it had been "authored" already, framed up for contemplation. In the case of "Erased Cage", the context is virtually all there is: one has to see the timer counting down with the attribution to even know there is a work playing, then after straining to hear something where there is no sound per se, hopefully the Cageian mode kicks in and one is listening in a different way to the visual arts environment that is already surrounding them.

So the recording of "Erased Cage" that I did in Vienna was essentially a recording of the Kunsthalle, with people shuffling around and noises coming and going. It's absurd in a way to even say that it is a recording of "Erased Cage". But I loved that absurd dimension, that attempt to grab it from the ceaseless flow I was mentioning. It creates a kind of negative image, or shadow of "Erased Cage" which is itself a work of sound-in-the-negative. It produces a positive image of that process of listening, perhaps. I managed to make sound out of the silent piece after all, and it was that sound material that found its way into "Year Long Waiting Room". Knowing that chain of associations behind the sound material provides another facet to the sound, and insight into how the work works. But in introducing the sound from "Erased Cage" I was very aware that the sound would have to produce acousmatic effects on its own, it would not work to just have it shuffled in for the sake of noting it in the liner notes. The sound itself, regardless of its link back to "Erased Cage", needed to move a listener into that area of productive tension between quiet contemplative focus and the roiling and flowing of the world and its constant ongoing-ness.

How's that for a long way around to the barn?

GS: Indeed, I was thinking about the wide difference between these two parts of the triptych, "Unterwegs" and "Erased Cage". Context seems all there is for "Erased Cage", while "Unterwegs" will most likely be an experience in which the specific contexts of listening to the work will add new relations between what's structurally contextual, which may not be perceived as such upon listening, and the layering of contexts: one that is somewhat fixed, the recording, and the ever-changing sameness of activity in our daily lives. In my experience, the link between these two can be faint and that can lead to a not-too-engaged listening experience, so perhaps the best listening experience is a fruitful combination of three contexts: the context (or set of contexts) already present in the recording, the context of the listening experience, and the context that links the other two.

I'm curious about the origin of "Unterwegs". Is there a concrete philosophical mindset that generates the work, or are those philosophical thoughts already enmeshed with purely aesthetic issues?

AG: I knew I wanted to make a record in two main parts. My thought was to present two ideas of poise, focus, maybe of repose, that emerge from complexity and multiplicity. A complexity of inputs and outputs, of flows and movements. I saw this multiplicity coming from two directions: first from the surroundings, from the lived aural environment; the flowing and mixing and constant changing of daily life, travel, and conscious awareness. This resulted in "Airframe", which is made of small "scenes" that keep shifting but always quietly, near the threshold of attention, such that you have to come close and be still in order to take it in. Stilling oneself before an ever-changing form was my goal with that piece. The second direction of this multiplicity was the environment of influence, of ideas and the idea-experiences of culture and knowledge. This became "Year Long Waiting Room". I wanted to create a very self-consciously derivative work that culled from the surfaces of other works in a way that was comparable to the way I was pulling from the surfaces of acoustic environments in "Airframe". At the end of the day I ended up with three main coordinates in that system: Ken Kirschner's work, Tony Conrad's, and my own "Erased Cage" which we just discussed. My own recordings of "Erased Cage" became the connection point between these two ideas, and so I used them in both pieces.

Incidentally, I should mention that the cover for "Unterwegs" is also a second-order derivative work. It is the detail from a paper sculptural work of mine called "Stadtpartitur" (2010). This detail of it shows part of a text score by Tony Conrad, partially erased and manipulated to leave only the drawn arrows, which point either nowhere or everywhere. I have a history of referencing Conrad's work in my own, and perhaps this serves to reinforce the balance of the directly experiential and conceptual in my work. With "Unterwegs", the arrows neatly summed up my feeling of the multiple inputs and outputs, leading to something like a charged still-point, that the record is striving for.

GS: I can tell the influence of Conrad in your work, particularly regarding the visual and moving image part of it can tell -- an emphasis on the perceptual or you like. When you state that "Erased Cage" was used to help shape "Unterwegs", I suppose you mean as a guide for event placement, as in using the time length of each contribution to mark entrances or transitions?

AG: No, but that's a great idea! It would have been interesting to have thought along those lines. No I was mostly thinking of the bare nothing empty exhibition hall in Vienna where I recorded the "Erased Cage" installation. This sound material weaves in and out of both of the long works on "Unterwegs".

The element that was important, which I think you are picking up on, was that somehow these other inputs, these authored frames of silence, were also roaming around in there. I could no longer tell where they were beginning and ending, but there were all these other "voices" in the silence, and that enlivened silence, that tensioned, even crowded stillness is something I am interested in. Again the idea is fascinating to me that any given field is full, overfull, of inputs and outputs, leading to an ecological thinking about any recording or composition, any creative act really.

GS: I totally get the input/output dynamic you point to. Transparency seems to be a main concern of yours as well. Concepts like field and fold easily come to mind too. Does this kind of philosophical inquiry translated into art have any resonance when you are working, or are these notions already part of your aesthetic DNA, so to speak?

AG: It's interesting that you mention transparency. I think that's right on the mark in terms of the kind of aesthetic experience I am trying to render, but also in terms of what you're calling the philosophical inquiry. I think that placing the record at two different listening volumes was a part of this: there is a sound cue to the permeability of the work to outside influence, literally to sound from the outside. But also I wanted there to be a dynamic and open question about where the work sits between figure and ground, concept and material, *this* and *that*.

In terms of how the thinking part of the work and the listening/experiencing part are joined, well I think there are two vantages onto that: for me the maker, and for you the listener. When I'm making the work I might begin with a thinking-through of these philosophical, sometimes abstract positions and how they are shaping my interest in doing the work and guiding my decisions. But I am constantly oscillating between that and an intuitive listening, which then provides a whole range of affects, thoughts, and reflexive responses that in turn shape my thinking about the work in progress. With this record, for instance, I started by listening to a library of my own recordings, and all these ideas and feelings about travel and, well, transparency (again, nicely observed) were coming up. This led me to start listening to the other key artists I mentioned (Conrad and Kirschner, but also this unique cassette by Andrew Larkas). These works for me represented positive or full, and negative or empty (as in space, not as in value judgement) engagements with this kind of transparency. Ken had given me a whole catalog of unused rough-draft sounds that he had produced for a collaborative project we had done the year before (called "Frame, Fault, and Fold", an online release with Impulsive Habitat), and I immediately thought of returning to those and mining them for actual sounds to use. This then connected up so well with the philosophical territory I was exploring with projects like "Erased Cage" and other installation works that I knew I should pursue it in a listening record.

But then over to the position of the listener. Because from beginning to end I think of "Unterwegs" as a listening record. The oscillations I mention that I go through in the making of the work, I want these to be integrated for the listener, for these various thoughts and ponderings and thinking-through-sounds to be synthesized in the sound work. That's not to say that it's supposed to be a totalizing work, but that the form of the work should create a system of responses, from cerebral close readings to conceptual games to deep listening to an enjoyment of its musicality, that give cues to each other and help the work resolve, as an aesthetic experience.

Art is speculative thinking that you do with your senses. And that can be incredibly pleasurable.

GS: That's fine definition of art right there! You just pointed to what is a major philosophical concern of mine, that of non-dialectical reasoning strategies and the tree model of organization. When asked to write the alternative to dialectics, I use the same equation as you (you write it as *this* and *that*. I choose to write it as *this and that*). Your small and delightful difference, that shows how even similar views show the principle of difference at work). Your last response was so well rounded that it could have finished the interview, but alas my curiosity is not quenched yet: Do you feel any kinship with the current hybridization between modern composition and electro-acoustic improvisation (based on a common appreciation of silence and the act of listening)? We got to know each other while dealing with these very issues back in 2005, and I remember that my knowledge of Wandelweiser was limited to one CD, which I dearly love but bought based on the Wolff name and title. Was it in the air, this sort of inquiry into aspects other than the showy and gabby, the growing realization of a wider context coming much later?

AG: Well you had a jump on me there -- I didn't actually hear anything by the Wandelweiser collective until I came to Berlin. I am enjoying their recent box set and a lot has been made of their permission to incorporate improvisation into the work. To be honest, though, that has never been a stumbling block for me. I think if one comes out of academic music then that distinction is more present and requires a more explicit response. But I am coming from sound rather than music, specifically from how it functions within cinema. That's how I started. So while I think a lot of people struggle with how to get around the massive wall of John Cage (or under, or over, or through...) I only ever recognized the permissiveness and call to transform the self that was in his work. That's instead, musique concrète is my stumbling block -- I have trouble getting around the wall of Luc Ferrari! But that's another story.

I feel like this idea that composition and improv could be integrated is so engrained already, so comfortably available, that while I definitely feel a kinship with the stress placed on listening and the very open field of activity that many people are working with now, I don't necessarily feel like there is much of a challenge in that position. And it's great that you mention EA, the collective we were both part of. Because we worked from the beginning with scores to accompany improvised interactions using a very wide field of sound possibilities. I don't think it ever once occurred to any of us that we could or would write something that told a player *what to do*. That would have caused a riot. Or three hours of discussion at any rate. What I took away from that time was an awareness that the communication that exists within the making of sounds is very complex -- that improvisation is communicating about the making of the sound *with* the sound, and that these other layers of control are in a way outgrowths of this conversational logic of making a moment of sound come into being. A moment of silence happens to be one of the most sublime results of this process, I guess.

GS: I really wanted to have some of these thoughts on record, because I think it points to actualities that are not so common when discussing aesthetics. That is, much too credit is given to theory (however due) when talking about any given work of music or art. I understand the practicalities of the whole name checking influences line of reasoning, but in reality one ends up with a bunch of one-liners and adjectives (feldmanesque, anyone?), and often giving the wrong view. The most exciting part (assuming one has already strong notions about why one does what one does) is precisely that which is unknown, and the fun here is not in the music making alone, but also in the development of the particular heuristics your experiment seems to be calling for. It could be the barrier that separates the player from the spectator. In fact, the whole EA experience is so singular that I am still extracting valuable lessons from it (there are instances in which the work we did eight years ago is still forward looking, such as the video score pieces like your "Rise Over Run for Four Players" (2005). But it was all crammed into a very short amount of time and it was very intense in retrospect, a lowcase big bang, if you want. We were working intensely, without a full understanding of each other's aesthetic concerns (not to mention the burden of big egos) and so we were somehow coerced by our best instincts to listen to each other. And when you have five guys with laptops you really need at least some sort of compass to get through the fog that such an ensemble can produce. What I'm trying to say here is that these solutions, such as "Balancing Act with Controlled Dynamics" (2005-06), were devised not as solutions to problems in a larger context (not trying to impose an aesthetic agenda, basically) but as ways to deal with specific problems of the ensemble at hand, and this is something music historians tend to be unaware of, focused as they are with the larger picture.

That admission of yours about Luc Ferrari does not surprise me one bit! I remember during a gig where we were performing balancing act with controlled dynamics (it was our "Louie, Louie"), the piece was going on rather smoothly and I felt at the time that it might need a jolt. Following the indications of the score, I played a loud sound of a maximum of eight seconds, namely the introductory riff from "Cromlech", by Norwegian band and Darkthrone. I remember you looking at the ceiling in resignation and saying, with a half smile, "oh, well..."