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# Atmosphere and Northern Music: Ecomusicological-Phenomenological Analysis of Kalevi Aho's *Eight Seasons*

Juha Torvinen

Historically speaking, only love, death and religion can compete with nature as the most common topic in European music (see Toliver 2011, 8).<sup>1</sup> In the context of current environmental crises, this close relationship between music and nature has been given a novel twist. On the one hand, explicitly ecocritical musical practices are today more frequent than ever. On the other, while “being under crisis” is a fundamental condition of today’s environment, any contemporary nature-related music can be seen and heard as a site for negotiations about ecological concerns and human-nature relationships regardless of the level of conspicuousness of music’s possible ecocritical message. Environmental concerns transform also the way we hear nature-related music made before the current era of major ecological problems. For example, the centuries-old topic of the pastoral in music can be perceived nowadays with ecocritical ears. (Allen 2011a; Grimley 2011; Toliver 2011; Torvinen & Välimäki [forthcoming a]; see also Buell 1995, 6–14.) As the environmental philosopher Timothy Morton put it in *Ecology without Nature* (2007), even though a Shakespeare sonnet may not appear to be “about” gender, we nowadays may still ask what it might have to do with gender. Similarly, we should be able to ask of any text today, “What does this say about the environment?” (Morton 2007, 5.)

Environmental problems have become part of our everyday lives, something we constantly have to live with. In addition, environmental philosophy, social constructivism, deep ecology as well as post- and trans-humanist thinking have questioned the concept of ‘nature’ and challenged the borderlines between human/nature and nature/non-nature. At the same time, it has been widely acknowledged that scientific research, technological know-how, and legislative regulation are not sufficient to gain a full understanding of environmental problems; we also need negotiations in culture, imagination, the arts and the environmental humanities. (See Buell 2005, 4–5; Guy 2009; Allen 2012; Garrard 2012, 1–17; Heise, Christensen, and Niemann 2017; Oppermann and Iovino 2017.) Accordingly, a radically new phase in the long relationship between music and nature can be seen as taking place: music and musical practices form today an influential arena for

increasing eco-sensitivity and for reflecting upon and negotiating about values and meanings related to environmental concerns. In accordance to this, there is a heightened need for novel methods for analysing the relationship between music and nature in today's world.

Northern areas of the globe have a distinctive place within the otherwise global environmental crisis. Here, relatively unpolluted and uninhabited nature can still be found, but the melting of permafrost layers due to global warming will have drastic effects on northern flora and fauna.<sup>2</sup> In scholarly work of previous times, the culture and nature of northern areas may have been seen as a periphery that is studied only because it is needed in order to say something about the (European) centre (Möller and Pehkonen 2003). The Finnish cultural geographer Juha Ridanpää has pointed out that almost all meanings attributed to the North become meaningful through a binary view of the North as a mythological-stereotypical contrast to the South (2007, 12–13).<sup>3</sup> However, as cultural geographers Kenneth R. Olwig and Michael Jones argue, northern regions can function also as “a liminal zone where [...] alternative cultural forms can continue to thrive and perhaps later provide inspiration for changes at the core” (Olwig and Jones 2008, x).

This chapter applies the latter principle: regions, cultures or ideas of the North can be considered a “liminal zone” able to form a globally relevant springboard for novel and critical ways to articulate environmental concerns in and through music. The purpose is to study this potentiality by drawing on the phenomenological concept of atmosphere that follows the post-Husserlian tradition of phenomenology and emphasises non-individual forms of experience and feeling that characterise a specific place or situation rather than a personal state of mind (see e.g. Heidegger 1993 [1927]; Schmitz 2005 [1969]; Böhme 1998; Dreyfus and Kelly 2011). In other words, I will bring together three seemingly unrelated themes – the “inspirational” potentiality of the North, ecocritical research of music, and a phenomenology of atmosphere – with the aim of showing how north-related music can trigger eco-sensitive feelings and experiences and thereby exert greater influence on our wider environmental thinking, actions and practices.

In a previous article I discussed, through analysis of the Finnish composer Outi Tarkiainen's song-cycle *The Earth Spring's Daughter* (2014–2015), how music represents the ways human relationships with nature can be framed with and grounded in feelings (Torvinen 2019). In this

chapter I will develop this argument further, first, by drawing more extensively on atmosphereological thought and, second, by broadening the focus with a musical analysis that draws attention to ecocritical potential of the debatable “northern tone” in music. The analytical example in this chapter is *Kahdeksan vuodenaikaa – Acht Jahreszeiten* (Eight seasons), a work with a north-related subject matter composed in 2011 for theremin and chamber orchestra by the Finnish composer Kalevi Aho (b. 1949). I aim to illuminate how music and the theoretical premises for studying it are entwined and interact with surrounding culture, environment and the immediate context of interpretation. In this sense, the musical analysis in this chapter comes close to musicologist and literary critic Lawrence Kramer’s idea of cultural music analysis as *constructive description*, which means that the meanings of music are always constructed in and through the cultural conditions of the interpretative process (Kramer 2011).

### **The five principles of ecomusicology**

Despite the fact that nature is one of the most common topics in music, nature and environment were not among the main topics of musicology in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Instead, the so-called “new musicology” of the era focused on issues of gender, sex, ethnicity and social class. Granted these themes are still important in cultural studies and musicology, but addressing the questions related to the survival of the biosphere has become equally if not more important: without the biosphere there would be no issues of gender or class to discuss (Coupe 2000, 5; see also Rigby 2011, 140). Ecomusicology (ecocritical musicology), a branch of music research that has gained currency in the decades around the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, shares this radical starting point. The field of ecomusicology has been given many definitions of which Jeff Todd Titon’s is perhaps the most concise one: ecomusicology is “the study of music, culture, sound and nature in a period of environmental crisis” (Allen & Dawe 2015a, 1–2).<sup>4</sup>

I have proposed five basic principles that characterise ecomusicological research (Torvinen 2012). These principles are 1) *political activism*: ecomusicological work aims at influencing cultural practices and public opinions by disseminating knowledge of environmental matters and/or focusing on similar features in music/musical practices under study, 2) *sustainability*: musical cultures have inherent value and the right to exist, musical practices should not burden

the environment, 3) *topophilia and place*: concrete places and/or their acoustemologies determine musical thinking and motivate ecocritical music research and musical practices, 4) *affectivity*: ecomusicological study often involves emotional relationships to nature under threat; ecocritical music/musical practice often aims at creating strong affective responses, and 5) *ecocritical overinterpretation*: the context of environmental crisis and the political-activist ethos of ecomusicology justifies ecocritical reading and/or listening of a musical composition or performance as an ecocritical text even when the music/performance in question has no explicit ecocritical topic.

While not every single ecocritical study of music is necessarily concerned with all of these principles, at least some of the principles are usually present in every study. Furthermore, these principles do not describe methodology only: they indicate what ecomusicology is looking for in its objects of study as well. With regards to music analytic approaches, this twofoldness is in line with Kramer's principle of constructive description discussed above.

In this chapter, special attention is given to the categories of place and affectivity. In the ecocritical study of literature 'place' has long been an important critical category and concept in analogy to the use of notions of gender, sexuality, class or ethnicity (Glotfelty 1996, xix; Cooley 2009, v).<sup>5</sup> In this chapter I follow anthropologist and ecomusicologist Mark Pedelty (2016, 4–5), who has pointed out (with reference to singer-songwriter Adrian Chalifour) how an environmentalist piece of music that involves lyrics, performance practices or musical characteristics which place it in a recognizable locale, resonates with listeners living far away, in other parts of the globe. This is not because listeners can relate to the locale described in this particular piece of music, but because they too live in places with definite identities, meanings, and emotional connections. In the following section, I will complement these ecomusicological ideas with the phenomenological concept of atmosphere. Atmosphereological ideas have not yet been elaborated to any significant degree in ecocritical music research (see however Torvinen 2019; Torvinen & Välimäki [forthcoming a]). Considering northerly music, I maintain that 'atmosphere' can prove to be an especially fruitful concept for understanding how "placed" music "resonates" with listeners around the world.

## **Atmosphere and the “northern tone”**

My ecomusicological adaptation of atmosphereological ideas in this chapter is more methodological than philosophically critical in nature. This means that instead of making ontological claims about music in an atmosphereological vein, my take on (music) atmosphereology is somewhat eclectic and motivated by the main objective of this chapter: to find fruitful ways and methods to analyse the environmental(ist) potential and significance of northerly music. Accordingly, while being aware of the discrepancies between Hermann Schmitz’s philosophical atmosphereology and Gernot Böhme’s atmosphereological aesthetics on the one hand, and affinities of the concepts of atmosphere and affect on the other, I will scrutinise these differences and similarities merely with respect to the objectives of this chapter (see Schmitz 2005 [1969]; Böhme 2013 [1995]; Schmitz 1998; Schmitz, Müllan, and Slaby 2011; Riedel 2015, 88). Thus, in the following I will focus on selected atmosphereological themes and debates that are useful for my “northerly” approach.

I share Schmitz’s critical stance towards what he calls “psychologicistic-reductionistic-introjectionistic” understanding of human experience, dominant in the West since the Ancient Greeks, and according to which experience has been reduced to a personal state of mind (Schmitz 2014, 7–9). Atmospheres are, according to Schmitz, something quite the opposite. They are spatially extended feelings that are neither personal nor subjective experiences but rather (characteristics of) situations.

According to Schmitz, music intensifies atmospheres just as it opens up surfaceless space (Schmitz 2014, 78–91). I would go even further and maintain, as Friedlind Riedel (2015) has done before me, that music isn’t merely intensification of atmosphere. Music – or a piece of music – forms a situation of its own, that is, music is (an) atmosphere. Accordingly, the form of constructive descriptive music analysis executed in this chapter is not just about recounting the temporal unfolding or formal properties of music. Rather it is a matter of interpreting how atmospheres “pour into space” (see Schmitz, Müllan, and Slaby 2011, 247; Schmitz 2014, 30) in music and how music forms “significant situations” charged with “meaningfulness” (Ger. *Bedeutsamkeit*) (Schmitz, Müllan, and Slaby 2011, 244; see also Vadén and Torvinen 2014;

Abels 2018, 223–224). In other words, atmospheres in music – or, music as atmosphere – are understood here as fundamental motivation, potentiality, opportunity or “suggestions” for explicating meanings within specific cultural, historical, local and conceptual limits.

Moreover, the temporality of music makes it a revealing case in point regarding atmospheres. Schmitz’s term “movement suggestion” (*Bewegungssuggestion*) refers to the way atmosphere suggests or affords motion, felt movements, that may or may not materialise in a physical form (Schmitz 1978 [2005], 38). In this vein, rhythmic, metric, timbral, tonal as well as all other fundamentally temporal shifts and transformations in music can be understood as primal stages in the emergence of singular meanings from the meaningfulness of music. (See Riedel 2015; Abels 2018; Eisenlohr 2019.)

This can be illuminated further by returning to the theme of the “northern tone”. It is quite common in academic, artistic, and popular discourses alike that compositions and musical styles from northern regions are ascribed with having a peculiar “northern” quality even when the music in question doesn’t include explicitly north-related lyrics, titles, musical tropes, or narrative contents. It is not rare, for example, that recordings and sheet music publications of the works by the Finnish composer Jean Sibelius are marketed with “Lappish” or Saami-related imagery despite the fact that Sibelius never visited Lapland nor composed a work with a Lappish/Saami topic. (On the idea of the North in music see e.g. Mantere 2005; Nicholson 2005; Sallis 2005; Torvinen 2010; Feisst 2012; Torvinen [forthcoming].)

As far as a particularly northern tone in music exists, it is usually attributed to a compositional whole, musical style, or a general tenor of music rather than to smaller musical units such as a melody, theme, chord progression or musical motif. Moreover, we could argue that the northern tone is not so much about aesthetic principles but connected to the temporal *process* of eluding fixed musical subjects or, better, musical singularities – idiosyncratic musical themes, motifs, melodies, rhythms, timbres, topics and tropes etc. (see Torvinen 2019; Torvinen & Välimäki forthcoming a).<sup>6</sup> For example, what is often considered a constant organic development of a single (and relatively simple) musical motif in Jean Sibelius’s *Tapiola* Op. 112 (1926)<sup>7</sup> could be interpreted from the viewpoint of the northern tone as being its total opposite: it is a

compositional technique of avoiding and/or suspending excessive individualisation.<sup>8</sup>

Paraphrasing Morton (2007, 45), one can say that as far as a specific northern tone exists, it is something that tries to evoke the background *as* background while, paradoxically, not dragging it into the foreground. Musical elements of intensity, stasis, and suspension are put to the fore. A (musical) subject is not (yet) formed and suspensions create static affective qualities. A northern tone is a temporal process of a sheer gratification about not *quite* being a subject, of not *quite* representing, of not *quite* being fixed (Vadén & Torvinen 2014, 219). In this sense, the northern tone closely resembles atmosphere understood as a situation preceding singularities, where music's temporal-structural unfolding consists of atmospheric relations rather than interrelated fixed meanings.

Calling any overall tone or obvious meanings of music “northern” only makes sense in appropriate cultural, social, geographic, climatic, historical or acoustemological conditions (cf. Ramnarine 2009). It is also necessary to be wary of the fact that talking about a northern tone might be just another form of mythologizing, referred to above. Therefore, the ecomusicological-phenomenological approach of this chapter considers the northern tone in music merely as one possible type of musical-atmospheric situation, a “shared affective place”. The connections of this tone to the northerly nature is discussed further below.

### **Atmosphere and musical signification**

Important for this chapter is also the way atmosphereology criticises the subject-object divide. Philosopher Gernot Böhme understands atmosphere as a fundamentally shared reality of subject and object. Atmosphere is sensed as an affective consternation, a synaesthetic and undifferentiated disposition, with a clear affective character but without being a personalised emotion or feeling. (See e.g. Böhme 1998, 78; Böhme 2001, 46–47.) However, the difference between Schmitz's phenomenological-ontological concept of atmosphere and Böhme's aesthetic concept of atmosphere is remarkable: whereas atmosphere for Schmitz forms a necessary condition for singularities, for Böhme singularities are a precondition for atmosphere. In Böhme's theory, atmospheres are created by the way things and objects go forth from themselves in the manner of Aristotelian *ek-stasis*. An atmosphere of, say, a concert hall is created by the



way every individual thing in this space shapes the overall affective character of that space. Following Böhme's aesthetic notion of atmospheres means treating atmospheres as aggregations of singularities. In accordance to this, Böhme's atmospheres are "quasi-objective" in essence, something intangible but identifiable (Böhme 1998, 8–9; Böhme 2001, 48–49).

The difference between Schmitz's and Böhme's notion of atmosphere becomes evident when applied to music. As I mentioned before, viewed through Schmitz's notion of atmosphere, music appears as a situation of internally diffuse meaningfulness. Viewed through Böhme's notion of atmosphere, however, music appears as *meaninglessness*. I will clarify in the following what I mean by this assertion.

In the article "Acoustic Atmospheres: A Contribution to the Study of Ecological Aesthetics" (2000) Böhme sees today's music as "the fundamental atmospheric art", a spatial phenomenon, "a modification of space as it is experienced by the body" (Böhme 2000, 16). This is in line with the philosophical-aesthetic emphasis on carnal knowledge and relationality, a central theme in Böhme's thought according to literary scholar Kate Rigby. In Böhme's ecological aesthetics "somatics precedes semantics" (Rigby 2011, 141). Interestingly enough, the "ecology" of Böhme's ecological aesthetics becomes a debatable issue when considered in terms of music and sound. In addition to being a "modification of space" as experienced by the body, music is, according to Böhme, able to form and inform "the listener's sense of self" (Böhme 2000, 16). Accordingly, in listening to tones, voices, and sounds listeners "sense tones, voices, sounds as modifications of their own space of being" (Böhme 2000, 17–18). If music forms listener's "sense of self" and if space modified by music is, ultimately, listener's "own space," the aesthetics of auditory phenomena becomes a matter which is more egological than ecological in nature. The isolatedness of personal carnal experiences points to meaninglessness because these experiences do not refer to anything outside of themselves.

Another aspect of meaninglessness in Böhme's view of music and sound is a well-known Romantic-Modernist music ontological and aesthetic premise that echoes the contention of music as an abstract, autonomous or absolute form of art. Böhme maintains that "it has always been clear that, unlike the image, music has no object; it does not represent anything" (Böhme 2000,

17). For a culturally oriented musicologist, such an argument is completely untenable. As a cultural practice, music represents and has always represented as much as any other cultural practice – only with different means and in different ways. A lack of linguistic and pictorial representation is not tantamount to meaninglessness. Böhme doesn't see somatics preceding semantics in music, because for him there are actually no semantics in music at all.

Although music is “an atmospheric art”, Böhme does not consider music atmospheres. Nevertheless, he discusses sounds in a manner very similar to his definition of atmosphere as *ek-stasis*. He writes that, “voices, tones [and] sounds [...] can be separated from their sources, or rather, they detach themselves, fill the space and wander through it *much in the manner of objects*” (Böhme 2000, 17, my emphasis). “Much in the manner of objects” equates to the idea of the “quasi-objective” nature of atmospheres, referred to above. Should we conclude, then, that sounds are the radiations of things, things ekstatically going outside themselves? That is, are sounds atmospheres? If so, what would they radiate *from*, of what would they be the *ek-stasis*?

Whatever the answer, such a view can hold only as far as we either don't separate music from sounds or stick to formalist, non-representational aesthetics of music according to which music and therefore its sounds (tones) do not refer to anything outside themselves. The former standpoint characterises Böhme's theorisation of atmosphere with the example of the violin, whose *ek-stasis* is the very sounds it makes when bowed (Böhme 2013, 261–275). It seems that Böhme does not distinguish, first, between sounds as acoustic phenomenon and music as a cultural-aesthetic practice, and, second, between sounds as contingent radiations of physical things and music as an artistic combination of tones with a clear identity independent of the physical things they are created by. Only through such acoustic and non-representational commitments can tones be awarded inchoate enough an essence to give them atmospheric quasi-objective character. Contrary to this, I would suggest that if one wants to make Böhme's ideas about aesthetic atmospheres relevant for musical analysis, it would be fruitful to presume that self-referencing sounds and tones are not atmospheric *ek-stasies* of something indefinite. Instead, atmospheric *ek-stasies* are, preferably, phenomenological-affective outcomes of the historical and socio-cultural conventions for the musical organisation of sounds – familiar stylistic traits, commonplace musical gestures, musical topics, standard timbres, rhetorical figures etc. – that are

essential part of any music cultural practice. The analysis of Kalevi Aho's composition in this chapter exemplifies and draws on this basic idea.

According to Riedel, music is always connected to surrounding atmosphere and, therefore, studying music is always studying the atmosphere alongside which it occurs (Riedel 2015, 94–95). This is an eloquent way to say how music and the performance of it are always contextual. Furthermore, this assertion also implies that atmosphere in music, music as atmosphere, is in some essential way different from other forms of atmospheres. Moreover, differences between different forms of music, musical works and performances as well as differences in the contexts of performance and listening matter. Without taking this aspect into account, it would be difficult – and conceptually almost impossible – to distinguish between music as atmosphere and surrounding atmosphere; to consider music simply as atmosphere in a Schmitzean sense, without a more detailed analysis of music or musical practice in question, is more or less equal to calling music music. However, focussing on the opposite – on music understood as symbolic structure consisting of singular and verbally expressible meanings only – would be equally unsatisfying. What, then, separates music from other signifying cultural and artistic practices and how should we deal with music's obvious affective and temporal dimensions? If music is understood as ontologically similar to atmosphere (Schmitz 2005 [1978], 260), analysing music from the point of view of cultural meanings only reminds one of the challenge, which Tim Flohr Sørensen pointed out: a second-hand communication or inference of an atmosphere does not recreate it, but only produces its mediation (Sørensen 2015, 64). However, I'd like to maintain that ontologically music can be both atmosphere and its mediation as shared meanings at the same time (cf. Scassillo 2018, 113). Combining a Schmitzean approach with the Böhmean conception of a single atmosphereological music analytic method that was elaborated above, allows one to explore the diffuse meaningfulness and experiential dynamism of music together with composition-specific movement suggestions and cultural signification (see also Vadén and Torvinen 2014, 213.)

**From stasis to movement: northern nature in Kalevi Aho's *Eight seasons***

Kalevi Aho (b. 1949) is a Finnish composer who has written several works on topics related to Lapland and its culture and nature, including Symphony No. 12 “Luosto” (2002–2003) for orchestra, chamber orchestra, 10 field musicians and 2 soloists (soprano and tenor), and *Sieidi*, a concerto for percussion and orchestra (2010).<sup>9</sup> One of these works is *Kahdeksan vuodenaikaa – Acht Jahreszeiten* (Eight Seasons, 2011), a concerto for theremin, an early electronic instrument, and chamber orchestra. The work was premiered in Rovaniemi, northern Finland, in October 2012 by Carolina Eyck and the Lapland Chamber Orchestra led by conductor John Storgårds.

Aho’s compositional ethos has mostly followed a non-Modernist aesthetic path in the sense that his works have aimed at being narrative, communicative and societal, and they are often based on a subject or programme that can be interpreted hermeneutically (see Torvinen 2009, 10–15). *Kahdeksan vuodenaikaa* is no exception. The work is influenced by the pace of the age-old Saami conception of the cycle of the year. Saami life is customarily divided into eight instead of four seasons by the migration of reindeer, the cultivation of crops and the changes in the amount of light. The northern natural environment and its changes have defined the Saami rhythm of being. In the following, Aho’s *Kahdeksan vuodenaikaa* will be discussed in a context of Lappish (Saami) culture and related notions of nature as well as through the afore-discussed atmospherological background.

Aho’s work begins with the movement “Sadonkorjuu” (“Harvest”). The low pedal points, a commonplace musical symbol for nature (Torvinen & Välimäki [forthcoming a]), of the strings and the tremolo of the cymbal set on the timpani bring about a feel and association with a steady land that carries the crops. The theremin transforms from a bellow akin to the double bass to the piercing upper register akin to the oboe. Finally, the entire orchestra supports the theremin with monumental parallel movements bringing to mind the rugged sublimity of the fells. The first movement creates a strong feel of music as space, place and situation in an atmospherological vein.

The second part, “Ruska”, follows with the Finnish word “ruska” referring to the time of autumn, when the air cools down and the leaves are aflame in reds and yellows as they prepare to leave the trees bare. The musical imagery in this and the following movements is strong and

conspicuous. For instance, the flickering arpeggios of the woodwinds that start off “Ruska” and the descending and floating movements in the theremin’s glissandi immediately bring to mind falling leaves. By the end of the movement, the strings are playing a dense *sul ponticello* “frost.” Then comes the time of year when the leaves have fallen to the ground, but a permanent layer of snow does not yet illuminate the scenery. Accordingly, the third movement is called “Musta lumi” (“Black Snow”) and the melancholy oboe sings like a lonely bird, the theremin plays an improvised lament (*lamentando*), while a rain stick and the orchestra’s falling staccatos create impressions of rain. The Saami season of Black Snow falls in the common calendar roughly in November. For Saami this is also the time of death: reindeers are slaughtered then for human needs.

This kind of analysis of Aho’s work draws mainly on characteristics of northern nature. Indeed, phenomenological similarities between northerly music and the northern natural environment prove to be important if the North is understood as a ‘place’ in an ecomusicological sense. For example, excessive use of musical time and space or the avoidance of strongly contrasting musical themes, both typical for many northerly compositions, can be seen as an analogue to extended northern seasons, untypical forms of illumination in the North (a long winter without day, a long summer without night) or to large and sparsely habited northern regions.

But there are also possibilities for other kinds of “Lappish” interpretations in the following movements of Aho’s work. For example, in many mythologies of the world *doppelgängers*, in the form of guardian spirits, saints or monstrosities, are symbols for hidden powers and often associated with the gift of fortune-telling. According to the philosopher and literary critic René Girard, mythological doubles are always monsters (Girard 2004 [1972]). An appearance of a monster-double is a sign of an archaic experience, common to many religions. In the concerto’s fourth movement, “Kaamos” (Polar Night), the theremin soloist starts to sing (without words) thus doubling herself as a soloist. Whether intentional or not by the composer, it is quite appropriate that the soloist’s role is divided in two precisely in the movement that describes the darkest time of the Saami year, a time most connected to shamanistic practices. Polar Night is something that cannot be experienced in Southern cultural centres. Without a light that separates things from each other, a common dusky space for all that is strange and unusual is opened up.

In most cultures of the world Shamans, priests or other religious and magical leaders are those who mediate between our world and other worlds. Shamanism is, after all, said to be one of the most original forms of religion (Kulonen, Seurujärvi-Kari, and Pulkkinen 2005, 385). In “Kaamos” the strings reverberate low and deep (in the underworld), and the piccolo and crotales twinkle extremely high (in the celestial world) while the doubled soloist mediates in between. Thus, with respect to culture, religion and history, the movement’s overall design reflects the basic world-view of Saami religion. And, with respect to phenomenological analysis, it reflects the structure of human experience as a constant oscillation between distinctive things and subjects on one side, and the pure meaningful situational potentiality, what Schmitz calls atmosphere, on the other side.

In the Saami cycle of seasons, kaamos is followed by the coldest time of winter. The fifth movement, “Pakkanen” (Frost), starts off as stormy before brightening into extreme cold, where the theremin tries to do its best to survive. With the sixth part “Hankikanto” (Supporting Snow) the music evokes more light and movement; and in the seventh part, “Jäiden lähtö” (Thawing Ice), the timpani first rumble like the breaking ice of the rivers before finally the waters flow freely in a lively musical move. Whereas stasis is central to movements “Sadonkorjuu”, “Kaamos”, and “Keskiyön aurinko” (see below, also Figure 1), motion is essential for “Hankikanto” and “Jäiden lähtö”. Sørensen, who has studied archeological atmospheres, points out how prehistoric atmospheres, although they obviously existed, are exceptionally distant because there are no narrations or descriptions about them. However, as spatiality is not simply defined by material setting, but is something that emerges in the intermingling of moving human bodies and material culture, prehistoric atmospheres can be studied through a bodily presence and motion in archeological sites. Architectonic and other material forms emerge and dissolve through the passage of bodies in an inhabited space. (Sørensen 2015, 64–66.)

The challenge raised up by Sørensen’s study of prehistoric atmospheres is even more compelling when dealing with mythological sites (i.e. those that never existed or, better, exist outside of chronological time) or places that are too large to sense through a human body. The Saami conception of northern nature, depicted in Aho’s composition, involves both of these elements.

One possible explanation for music's obvious ability to afford a sense of vast places and their atmosphere is, I suggest, a special variation of the "movement suggestion" discussed above. In the co-presence of a human body and a natural or architectonic material setting it is not only a human body that has the potential to move. Whereas Sørensen (2015) senses a prehistoric atmosphere when himself moving in an immovable ancient tomb, I suggest that in music it is the place itself that is put in motion. We are not merely hearing northern nature or its mythological variants in Aho's composition. We feel them moving in music. This is atmosphere as "poured out in space" in its purest form.

The concerto ends with the eighth movement, "Keskiyön aurinko" (Midnight Sun). This sun that never sets is similar in its extremity to kaamos and the polar night when the sun does not rise at all (and might have significant resemblances to what is called the northern tone discussed above). Therefore, it is no surprise that in this movement, as in "Kaamos," the theremin is doubled with singing. Both movements, "Kaamos" and "Keskiyön aurinko," show the meaning of light for the northern atmosphere and mentality. This is quite independent of the other historical and mythological themes in Aho's work that also remain relevant for today's culture. As Mikkel Bille has demonstrated in his study on the use of light to stage atmospheres in a Danish residential area, light is still actively used to join and separate things, people and places. Light is more than a mere medium for subjective perception: it shapes and expresses moods, and ideas of self, neighbourhood and domesticity. Furthermore, it is used in today's urban culture to attune one mentally to a situation and to shape attachment to one's activities. (Bille 2015, 56–57, 62; see also Sørensen 2015.)

This aspect can be interpreted further by drawing on *Nightlands* (1996), a phenomenological study of Nordic architecture by the Norwegian Christian Norberg-Schulz. In this book, Norberg-Schulz proposed a compelling interpretation of how all discreteness (like subjectivity) disappears in the North, and how this is precisely due to the quality of light in northern regions. Light defines the way things look, since it substantiates the very space inhabited by things and life. Southern light separates. Shining high or even directly overhead, the sun makes each thing discrete and appear with its own form and character. That is why it can be said, following Norberg-Schulz, that "the southern world constitutes a lucid whole in which each thing 'knows'

what it is.” In the North, by contrast, light defines the world by infusing all things with a single atmosphere. Where the sun does not rise high, always shining more or less horizontally, we face a world of shadows and “shifting nuances, of never-resting forces,” in which the “fundamental tenor is dread, but a dread that also conveys a kind of freedom different from the South’s conditional acceptance.” The world in the North is always more of an atmosphere than a collection of discrete and individual things (Norberg-Schulz 1996, 2–4). It can be said that the North can create a particular atmospheric quality rooted in northerly environmental wholeness.<sup>10</sup>

“Keskiyön aurinko” begins with a sarabande rhythm and a melody played by the winds until the *doppelgänger* soloist starts its internal dialogue. Occasionally, especially at the beginning and end of the movement, the all-encompassing midnight sun appears in the form of a static texture of the strings (see Torvinen and Välimäki [forthcoming a]). The movement ends with the theremin’s improvised imitation of birdsong (*come cinguettio d’uccelli*) (see Figure 1). From an ecomusicological standpoint, it is interesting to ponder the following: does this mean that nature is ultimately given the final word in Aho’s work, or, does the work depict a future nostalgia for something inevitably lost (birds) as a result of environmental disasters? It is also noteworthy that from the two sides of the doubled soloist it is the bird-imitating theremin that ultimately survives (and not the human voice doubling it). Is this a metaphor for the fact that nature has become alien to us just like the theremin is often considered alien to classical chamber orchestra culture in context in which it is put in Aho’s work? Is an old electronic instrument today less estranged from nature than we are ourselves?

The choice of *theremin* as a solo instrument indeed deserves attention. The theremin is one of the earliest electronic instruments, originating in the 1920’s. Even though the instrument comes from a different tradition than classic acoustic orchestra instrumentation, it adapts seamlessly to the soundscape of *Kahdeksan vuodenaikaa*. Here the *theremin* does not have the estranged and eerie effect that it often has in films, popular music and psychedelic rock. However, coming from outside the realm of common orchestral musical instruments, the theremin can symbolise a distinct northern nature-bound world-view as compared to the more common European ideology.

*Kahdeksan vuodenaikaa* focuses our attention on the fragility of northern nature. Climate change



immediately threatens the diversity of northern seasons, increasing the rainfall, bringing the snow later than usual and possibly skipping the supporting snow season. Non-human animals, the rest of the environment, and people themselves all suffer from the change because the constant and gradual changes in nature have defined the mentality and rhythm of the northern people. As Peter Davidson puts it, *Ultima Thule*, the mythological and most distant place in the North, has done long service as a metaphor and reference point for the end of the knowable world (Davidson 2005, 22). Can we say, therefore, that global warming is a symbolic representation of our inability to face the most fundamental questions, since it is constantly moving the climatic North further away from the centers?

<FIGURE 1. HERE>

## **Conclusions**

As musicologist Daniel M. Grimley has pointed out, ecomusicological research has to find a fragile balance between the idea of nature as the origin of a particular ecology or environment and as a critical practice or way of knowing. According to Grimley, turning towards the former is a “risky process” because it points to our own contingency and transient presence in the world. The latter, in turn, may become a form of irresponsibility especially if it relies on a “deceptive autonomy of enquiry, perception, or the musical work” (Grimley 2011, 398). This chapter has tried to find and demonstrate the balance Grimley called for through phenomenological-atmosphereological considerations and ecomusicological (over)interpretation of composer Kalevi Aho’s north-related music. With a focus on “northern tone” in music, the aim has been to show how eco-sensitive aspects of music exist both at the level of immediate experience and as cultural signification. These two aspects of musical experience find parallels in the different conceptions of atmosphere. The twofold relationship to atmospheres maintains our connection to both the immediate sense of belonging to nature and our intellectual and symbolic apprehension of it. It likewise shows how both of these aspects are necessary for any music (analysis) to have ecological influence. Atmosphereological analysis of north-related music may help us to remember that encountering nature as a prerequisite for our own existence, rather than as

something to utilize or exploit, is necessary if humankind and nature's diversity are to be persevered.

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<sup>2</sup> Sure, there are many other regions on the globe that are equally threatened by the environmental problems.

<sup>3</sup> Of course, a similar exoticist and orientalist attitude has been part of European views to the South and East too.

<sup>4</sup> So far, ecocritical music research has – not always under the rubric of “ecomusicology”, though – produced about half a dozen anthologies or special issues (e.g. Allen & Dawe 2015b; Feisst 2016; Torvinen and Välimäki [forthcoming b]), and many articles and books with topics ranging from cultural and ecological sustainability (Titon 2009; Pedelty 2012; Schippers and Grant 2016) to environmentalist popular music (Ingram 2010; Pedelty 2016), nature themes in old and new classical music (Grimley 2006; Välimäki 2009; Allen 2011a; Torvinen 2019; Torvinen and Välimäki [forthcoming a]), theoretical and methodological questions of ecocritical music research

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(Allen 2011b; Allen 2012; Grimley 2011; Torvinen 2012), place and locality (Guy 2009; Ramnarine 2009; Watkins 2011; Feisst 2012), gender (von Glahn 2013), and audiovisual media (Välimäki 2015).

<sup>5</sup> Using place as a critical category has also caused some confusion, at least when it has been associated with nationalist ideologies. Many environmentalists have had to explicitly distance themselves from problematic traditions. See Rigby & Goodbody (2011, 5).

<sup>6</sup> To be more precise: avoiding strictly defined musical singularities is a necessary but not sufficient condition for northern tone, because there are obviously also many other forms of music that avoid overly dominant musical centers.

<sup>7</sup> In Finnish mythology, the word “tapiola” means forest.

<sup>8</sup> For a similar strategy in Sibelius’s *Kyllikki* Op. 41 for piano, see Välimäki 2005, 207–235.

<sup>9</sup> Luosto is a fell in northern Finland. “Sieidi” is a Saami word for a shrine, a sacred natural object.

<sup>10</sup> Norberg-Schulz uses the word “mood” instead of “atmosphere.” However, the use of ‘mood’ in Norberg-Schulz’s text roughly equates to definitions given in this article for “atmosphere.”