

To Hear and Feel the Noise through the Glitch

MARINA PETERSON. 2021. *Atmospheric Noise. The Indefinite Urbanism of Los Angeles*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, pp. 256, ISBN: 978-1-4780-1182-8

Atmospheric Noise, by Marina Peterson, is a well-written and clever contribution to the vast literature that takes a sensuous approach to understand the world around us, human and nonhuman (cf. van Ede 2009; Pink 2015, 2021). If Eduardo Kohn (2013) uses signs to paint an ontological understanding of "how a forest thinks," and Hannah Knox (2020) uses numbers and policy practices to, as she suggests, "think like a climate," then Peterson utilizes noise to understand the atmospheric, insisting "on the significance of sound and listening, and by extension, a broader atmospheric sensorium" (p. 5).

Early in her book Peterson writes, "[t]his is a sonic ethnography of how people (and sometimes machines) listen" (p. 7). Peterson continues by explaining that she listens to a multitude of actors, human and nonhuman, and seeks to understand how the "noise they encounter is sensed and made sense of" in the context of an Urban Airport, that is, Los Angeles International Airport (p. 7). Peterson offers a way to understand the atmospheric through sound while showing how noise from above affects material, nonhumans, and humans on the ground – suggesting that sound is a form of touch.

The book consists of an introduction and six chapters, beginning with Chapter 1, *Aerial Attunements*, which tells the story of how "air and ground are drawn together" (p. 15) when tracking the way that residents around the airport experience the sound from aircraft above – how bodies and air are sensorially connected via sound. In Chapter 2, *Noise Annoys*, we learn about ways of tracking sound via, for example, heat maps. Here Peterson shows that maps and devices, although generally not thought about in these terms, have the capacity to do things. For example, how the color scale of the map affects and creates reactions in humans (p. 73-74). Chapter 3, *Environmental Imaginaries*, takes on the topic of "noise pollution." That is, how noise levels produced by aircraft can be thought of and treated as a form of pollution that can

and should be regulated. The chapter has a historical perspective, diving into the legislative history of noise pollution in the U.S. The following Chapter 4, *Murmurs: Experiments in Glitching*, offers several short stories, one could say, that jointly negotiate what counts as noise and what does not while keeping the what does not in the story. Peterson shows how that which does not count as noise still have humans respond and react. In Chapter 5, *Vibrating Matter*, we learn about the soundproofing of houses to shut the noise out. But inside these soundproofed "bubbles" sound is engaged otherwise. In the last chapter, *Indefinite Urbanism*, Peterson draws out what she calls "Indefinite Urbanism," engaging the edge space of infrastructure to show how airport noise has an effect also beyond the airport. This last chapter also brings a new being into the picture, that of the El Segundo Blue butterfly, noting that "[e]ncounters between people, neighborhoods, photographs, ice plant, and butterflies become atmospheric forms that echo those drawn together by noise" (p. 17).

To wind up this review, I wish to dig a little bit deeper into Peterson's proposed methodology, playing with the notion of glitches: "A sign of infrastructural failure or the materiality of digital technology, glitches are unintended sounds that are always potentially audible, with as much work required to keep them concealed as to make the intended sound heard" (p. 12). Paying attention to these glitches, tuning in on the sound that is not wanted, to sense and think with it follows what Yolanda van Ede (2009: 65) writes about sensuous ways to learn about and with the world: "We learn how to see; we learn to observe or not to observe. This is the same for all other senses as well." Peterson demonstrates her ability to listen with humans and nonhumans to localize the glitches that are part of constructing the atmospheric around the airport. For example, in Chapter 1 (p. 20), Peterson illustrates a gap – glitch – in the jurisdiction around the airspace that becomes tangible through the noise. Furthermore, throughout the book, she shows how noise and bodies are entangled (p.28), how noise (sound) is a form of touch (p. 125), and how noise reaches the most well sealed-off places, if there is a small "glitch" sound will find its way in (p. 133). Thus, albeit being a study embedded in legislation and human infrastructural attempts to conceal noise, that one typically could engage and study mainly through interviews and observations, Peterson's methodology of following noise through the glitches provides another perspective, and a rich one to that.

Atmospheric Noise is a book that offers an intriguing story that weaves together humans, machines, and animals in a joint worldmaking relationship with one another via the atmospheric. This is a book that should be read by scholars and students interested in the

sensorial, human – nonhuman relations, as well as by those interested in thinking about how human inventions and infrastructures affect and change the world.

Cited:

Knox, H. 2020. *Thinking Like a Climate: Governing a City in Times of Environmental Change*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Kohn, E. 2013. *How Forests Think: Toward an Anthropology Beyond the Human*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Pink, S. 2015. *Doing Sensory Ethnography*. London: SAGE Publications.

Pink, S. 2021. Sensuous futures: re-thinking the concept of trust in design anthropology. *The Senses and Society*, Vol. 16:2: 193-202.

van Ede, Y. 2009. Sensuous Anthropology: Sense and Sensibility and the Rehabilitation of Skill. *Anthropological Notebooks*, Vol. 15:2: 61-75.

Rasmus Rodineliussen is a Ph.D. student at the Department of Social Anthropology, Stockholm University. His current research lies within the domain/intersection of environmental anthropology and political ecology focusing on the relationship between water and waste. He has worked with migration and refugee studies, mainly focusing on Syria. Rasmus has published in peer-reviewed journals such as *Anthropology Now*, *Anthrovision*, *Irish Journal of Anthropology*, *Visual Studies*, and *Kritisk Etnografi*, and is currently co-editor of the *Anthropology Book Forum*.



© 2022 Rasmus Rodineliussen