

EAST {hyphen} WEST

— Sound Impressions of Istanbul —

by Magda Stawarska-Beavan

*Personal reflections on Istanbul written by three authors, in Turkish and English.
Translations by Tuna Pase and Behzat Diriker, introduced and edited by Dr Mat Gregory.*

Our Sonic Territories Barkin Engin
Istanbul Aylin Unal
My Ears are Already Open Selcuk Artut

*A folio book of interwoven leaves concealing fragments of re-told soundscapes of the city
from the notebooks of Ekin Sanac and Lubaina Himid.*

Istanbul 2014. I write as an outsider; a visitor; a researcher; a stranger. I can only approach the city and the subject from that perspective and, when left to memory alone, I perhaps cannot help but romanticise. I walk through the city on foot. It is summer and I pass over the bridge from the old town, past the plastic buckets of the men and women fishing, across the busy intersection of traffic and through the steep and winding streets that lead to the tower. I walk along the edge of the water, past the cafes, the sleeping dogs, the men shooting balloons tied with string in the waves. I sit on the pavement on a hill, the sun already down, watching the endless passing of boats below, faint music playing from a party ferry somewhere, cats laying silent and alert on the steps behind me.

I cannot help but romanticise, but I am also aware that these memories consist of more than simply visual impressions. I try, as Luigi Russolo demanded in 1913, to walk 'with my ears more alert than my eyes.' I search my

pressions that they make, bringing into focus the small moments, the fleeting observations and the chance encounters that define and represent a specific place and time. It is perhaps as the result of such intimate detail that I begin to search through my own memories as I listen. I picture Istanbul, make connections between the recordings and my own experiences, visualising the sounds I hear in an instinctive and representational way. Through sound we generate experiences, we create mental pictures, we move through time, and are reminded of the extent to which sound informs our understanding of the spaces we inhabit.

Central to many key moments in this body of work is the Bosphorus, the strait that runs through Istanbul and connects the Sea of Marmara to the Black Sea. It is also a stretch of water that draws one of the boundaries between Asia and Europe and therefore, historically, between east and west. But how should these terms be understood now? What do we mean by them?

highlighting the distinctiveness of each sonic landscape. When listening to the recordings on this LP, and reading the accompanying essays by musician Barkin Engin, writer Aylin Unal and artist Selcuk Artut, we contemplate the city within the context of a far more open set of discourses and perspectives.

As I continue to listen, I begin to think not only about the sources of the sounds, but become acutely aware of the qualities of Stawarska-Beavan's soundscapes in and of themselves. Moving away from representation, away from memory and away from visualisation, I think about artist Francisco López's concept of 'sound matter' and Pierre Schaeffer's 'acousmatic listening.' The recordings contained on this vinyl LP not only document a certain place and point in time, but they also possess their own rich and independent value as aural compositions. As Francisco Lopez proposes, 'the richness of this sound matter in nature is astonishing, but to appreciate it in depth we ...have to shift the focus of our attention and understanding from representation to being...'



memory. I hear the call for prayers. I hear the restauranters. I hear the traffic sound and the bird sound. I hear the construction work, so prominent in Istanbul. I hear the voices, the music, the vendors and a multiplicity of languages and accents. And most of all, I hear the water. Not the water, but the life that it generates: the ceaseless engines of the boats, the horns and whistles of the ferries as they depart, the megaphone announcements of tourist cruises, and somewhere above all of that the seabirds and gulls. From memory alone, I cannot help but romanticise. But as I listen now to Magda Stawarska-Beavan's intricate, vivid, drifting sound-journey through the streets and waterways of Istanbul, an entirely new set of questions, narratives and realisations begin to form.

Recorded during the summer of 2014, East [Hyphen] West Sound Impressions of Istanbul is divided into four separate interconnected tracks, documenting Magda Stawarska-Beavan's journeys through and around Istanbul. The recordings are as intimate in their detail as they are profound in the im-

Just as Stawarska-Beavan's recordings reflect the complexity and diversity of Istanbul, so too might they invite a critical discourse into the nature and usage of the categories east and west. More than simply geographical designations, these terms belong to a broader set of historical, cultural and religious discourses, and it is clear that we must maintain a critical perspective, alert to their use within problematic and divisive political rhetoric. This is pertinent at the current time within Turkey, for example, where in recent years the government's rhetoric towards the west has become increasingly contentious, countering claims of authoritarianism and democratic 'regression' with those of interference and imperialism on the part of the west.

Walking through Istanbul, one moves from neighbourhood to neighbourhood, from one district to the next, and in doing so often becomes aware of the inherent characteristics of each area. Sometimes the transition is subtle, other times more pronounced. With this, Stawarska-Beavan's soundscapes ebb and flow, moving fluidly and subtly from one time and location to the next,

So I begin to listen again, engaging with Stawarska-Beavan's compositions, and I become increasingly aware of their intricate qualities as autonomous 'sound objects' that exist independently of the events, activities and actions that produced them. I hear them as interwoven patterns and textures; as music, rhythm and timbre; I experience moments of joy and energy, of transience and introspection. 'Sound recording,' Lopez points out, 'does not document or represent a richer and more significant "real world." Rather, it focuses on the inner world of sounds.'

Dr Mat Gregory.