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Steps to an Ecology of *Gagaku*
Nature, Place and Sound in Japanese 'Court Music'

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Abstract This paper is an attempt to develop a theoretically-concerned basis for what could become an 'ecology of Japanese court music'. It starts by reviewing recent developments in kindred disciplines such as music studies and ethnomusicology, stressing their tendency to employ an 'ecological paradigm', linking music and the environment, without reflecting on what exactly it means to perceive the world. To overcome similar weaknesses, the work of anthropologist Tim Ingold and philosopher Augustin Berque is examined, showing that there is much to gain in widening the field of music research to include more critical reflections on the notion of 'the environment'. Finally, this paper suggests a few ways in which the theoretical debate could be transported in the realm of Japanese court music and argues that taking these tentative steps may lead to a new path in its exploration, enjoyment and understanding.

Keywords Ecomusicology. Gagaku. Perception. Environment. Emplacement.

"All knowledge rests on sensitivity"
James Gibson (quoted in Clarke 2005, 31)

1 Sound and Music Through the Lenses of the 'Ecological Paradigm'

Since the 1990s, disciplines such as ethnomusicology and the sociology of music have been characterised by a shift in the conceptualisation of their elusive object of study. Gradually, a number of scholars started to reject views of music *as an object* (materially embodied in the score, the supreme 'it' of Euro-American musicology), and embraced instead the idea of music *as a process*. A "sustained critique of the idea of the reified musical work" (Cook 2012, 184) brought into view the interrelation of musical sounds

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with their music-makers, a term which came to include not only performers and listeners, but also non-human entities such as the instruments and circumstances of a performance (see Hennion 2015).[1] Working within this broad theoretical shift, researchers have increasingly emphasised the fact that music always takes place *somewhere*, and that the relationship between spatial and sonic components of *music-making* must be taken seriously. A mere list of the formulas used to describe recently emerged research fields, from 'soundscape ecology' and 'acoustic ecology', to 'music ecology' and 'ecomusicology', all the way to 'acoustemology' and 'echo-muse-ecology', reveals the underlying intention to bind place and sound together tightly.[2] After all, as Andrew J. Eisenberg has recently pointed out, "Sound and space – however one defines these terms – are phenomenologically and ontologically intertwined" (2015, 193). In all these cases, it is possible to detect the theoretical and methodological influence of an *ecological paradigm*, in which the interrelation between the sound and entities variously defined as 'the environment', 'space', or 'place' is considered crucial to the study. As noticed by sound artist and theorist Brandon LaBelle, in fact, "sound, as physical energy reflecting and absorbing into the materiality around us, and even one's self, provides a rich platform for understanding place and emplacement. Sound is always already a trace of location" (2012, 1). But the application of the ecological paradigm rests on the definition of characteristically elusive and often overlapping terms such as 'nature', 'space', and 'place': when these are left unspecified, the possibility to generalise the results obtained is severely limited. At any rate, the centrality of the sonic remains an inescapable prerogative. Nonetheless, the sheer proliferation of similar approaches points to an ongoing blurring of disciplinary boundaries and suggests a mutual interchange of methods and ideas worth taking seriously.[3]

In this essay, I will maintain that it is possible to rethink the study of an ancient Japanese performing art by emphasising how its practice is grounded in specific sites that contribute to its creation. I will focus on *gagaku* 雅楽 (literally 'elegant music'), a term referring to a bundle of repertoires comprising musics and dances brought to Japan around the 6th century from a variety of ancient Asian kingdoms corresponding to

1 In this new conception of music, "experience [...] belongs not just to musical work, composer, or accredited 'expert' but also, crucially, to the variegated practitioners and audiences" (Finnegan 2012, 355).

2 This is not to say that there is a unity of approaches. As Christoph Maeder pointed out, "research on the audio-sphere, the acoustic environment, the soundscape and even sound culture as we know it today remains an often confusing composition of different disciplines and perspectives" (2014, 425).

3 For an overview of three different "bundles" of research trends on sound, with special reference to Sound Studies, see Maeder 2014.

today's China, Korea, Vietnam, and even India. Gagaku's complex history has resulted in a strong centre-periphery dynamic that either stresses or denies the distinction between separate geographical traditions of music transmission (see Nelson 1990; Terauchi 2013, 2016). Although focused on *gagaku*, the approach presented here may be extended to any performing art which stresses the interconnection and of sound and place. I will start by analysing the little-known genealogy of a strand of research that stresses the importance of the 'environment' on the basis of an analogy between visual and acoustic perception, and traces this line of reasoning back to the concept of 'soundscape', put forth by Murray Shafer in the 1970s (1994). Next, I will present three recent examples of research on Japanese music that demonstrate the influence of the ecological paradigm, showing how they progressively rearticulate the approach in ways that shift the epistemological terms of the debate, essentially denying the validity of a clear-cut separation between nature and culture. I will then present a 'localised' example of the connection between place and *gagaku*, drawing from fieldwork conducted with a group of *gagaku* amateur practitioners in Nara between 2013 and 2016. Using the work of anthropologist Tim Ingold, I maintain that the ecological paradigm is merely the first step in a full-fledged phenomenological exploration of the "emplacement" of *gagaku* (Pink 2011; Giolai 2016), and conclude that the study of Japanese music as a whole could benefit from going beyond the dissection of human experience into discrete channels of sensory perception.

In 1977, Murray Schafer published his influential book *The Tuning of the World*, later republished as *The Soundscape* (1994). In it, the Canadian composer borrowed the term 'soundscape' from Michael Southworn and redefined it as "the acoustical characteristics of an area that reflect natural processes" (Schafer 1994, 9). The concept was clearly related to that of landscape, but Schafer left the connection largely untheorised: "like 'landscape', to which it alludes, a 'soundscape' seems to offer a way of describing the relationship between sound and place. It evokes the sonic counterpart of a landscape in which one sees trees or buildings, but hears wind, birds, or traffic. But what is a soundscape? Where is it? How is it bound or defined?" (Kelman 2010, 215). Although bitterly criticised as value-laden and nostalgic,[4] since its popularisation the concept of soundscape "has informed the work of almost everyone who has written on the phenomena of sound", and its semantic field has expanded well beyond the original intentions of its promoters (Kelman 2010, 214; see also Maeder 2014, 425-7; Eisenberg 2015, 197-9). Already in the 1980s and 1990s, Schafer's legacy was taken up by two loosely distinct lines of

4 In a review of some of the (mis)uses of the term, Kelman (2010, 228) concludes that "Schafer's vast and slippery explanation of the soundscape offers little or no workable model for studying the social life of sound".

research: *acoustic ecology* and *soundscape ecology*. While the former was characterised by the stress it put on sounds as mediators between listeners and the environment (Wrightson 2000, 12), the latter was more directly linked to ecology proper (Pijanowski et al. 2011, 204). In fact, soundscape ecology explicitly emphasised the study of "the ecological characteristics of sounds and their spatial-temporal patterns as they emerge from landscapes" and thus heavily relied on the supposed structural homology between the two concepts of sound- and landscape, introducing hybrid notions like "acoustic horizon" and "aural space" (203-4; see also Truax 1978). While using spectrograms and spectrographic maps to obtain sophisticated measurements of human and nonhuman sounds were clear attempts to provide scientific validation for an arrey of concepts left largely undefined by Schafer (see Wrightson 2000, 11; Pijanowski et al. 2011, 205), other contributions to the debate on 'sound-in-space' preferred to eviscerate a "particular understanding of the relationship between humans and the natural world" (Keogh 2013, 4). A case in point is Maria Harley's article *Notes on Music Ecology* (1996). Moving from a critique of the "postmodern paradigm" which often misses both "the vital connection of music to its sound material" and "the sonorous presence of music in the world", Harley introduces a new research paradigm: "music ecology" or "eco-musicology" (1996, 1). Her inclusive approach comprises: the relation between musical sound and other sonic realities, both natural and technological; tactile textures; spatial dimension; and timbral niches, all of which, "due to their diversity and abundance, evade unifying tendencies of theory-making" (Harley 1996, 2). Ecomusicology is (or rather should be) "the study of music in its environments – including cultural environments, since nature is not opposed to culture – with a particular emphasis on the aural experiences acquired in natural-and-cultural sonic habitats, rural and urban soundscapes" (Harley 1996, 2-4). In this ambitious program, Harley explicitly relies on the "ecophilosophy" of Arne Næss (1912-2009), (see Næss, Drengson 2005), but "does not argue why one should accept Naess's articulation of eco-philosophy as the correct understanding [of the relationship between humans and nature]" (Keogh 2013, 4) – a failure to substantiate her claims that severely limits the purview of music ecology "as a new research paradigm".

None withstanding its shortcomings, by subordinating the exploration of sound-in-space to a refusal of the nature-culture dichotomy, Harley has had the important merit of undermining the naïf assumption that the ecological model can be automatically applied to the study of music. Moreover, her contribution opened up a dialogue between the intellectual traditions that build on Schafer's concept and parallel developments in the field of ethnomusicology. Indeed, Harley herself made direct reference to the work of Steven Feld (1996, 6). Famous for his work among the Kaluli people

of Papua New Guinea,[5] Feld has in turn demonstrated an interest in the concept of soundscape. In an article first appeared in the 1994 edition of *The Soundscape Newsletter*,[6] Feld advocated a shift from ethnomusicology to what he called "acoustemology" or "echo-muse-ecology": "acoustic studies of how senses make place and places make sense" (Feld 1994, 11). Rearticulating the study of soundscape in highly original terms, Feld noticed that "a way of hearing the world comes from interacting with it", and wished for "an acoustemology of embodied place resounding", essentially reaffirming the central role of the phenomenological subject in the process of coming in contact with sound (Feld 1994, 11, 14). Although somewhat provocative, Feld's contribution should be understood in the larger context of that "aural reflexive turn in anthropology" (Samuels et al. 2010, 330) inaugurated by the prophetical question posed by Clifford and Marcus at the outset of *Writing Culture*: "we notice how much has been said, in criticism and praise, of the ethnographic gaze. But what of the ethnographic ear?" (1986, 12). By asking this, the authors intended to show that it was possible to rethink the study of culture on the basis of different conceptual metaphors: after all, "studying sound offers a way into understanding social processes and relationships differently than, say, vision or textuality alone" (Kelman 2010, 215) and, as noticed by Forsey (2010, 561), "ethnography is arguably more aural than ocular, the ethnographer more participant listener than observer". Another important consequence of Clifford and Marcus' observation was the exposure of what came to be known as "the presumption of Western ocularcentrism" (Samuels et al. 2010, 333): the predominance accorded to vision over the other senses as yielding "a knowledge of the outside world that is rational, detached, analytical and atomistic" (Ingold 2000, 245). Anthropologists' emphasis on acoustic experience, on the contrary, may "bring aural sensibilities to the worlds inhabited by the people with whom they work and consider those sounded worlds as more than performance genres to be extracted from their contexts" (Samuels et al. 2010, 339). Still, any serious application of a "politics of aurality" must necessarily be aware that "listening is space- and place-specific (Samuels et al. 2010, 336), and should thus include a parallel 'politics of place'.

Looking back at the ecological paradigm, then, anthropological reflections problematise the confusion between space, place and environment so often found in those streams of research dealing with the soundscape, bringing their attention to specific, grounded conceptualisations of these and other emic terms. As observed by Krims (2012, 141), in fact, notions

5 In which he analysed the importance of the complex relationship between birds and men in the sonic dimension of life in the rainforest (see Feld 1990).

6 See http://www.acousticecology.org/writings/echomuseecology.html (2015-11-15).

like "'landscape' and 'place' are not entirely separable objects […] and in the theoretically strongest studies, both emerge as interactions among locality, cultural interpretations of that locality, and the music being discussed". For this reason, anthropological attempts to study the sonic dimension of music in its relation with place ('sound-in-place') ultimately challenge the positivistic stance implied in the idea that the environment is nothing but a stable reality lying outside the experiencing subject. Schafer nearly touched on this issue when he said: "I do not wish to forget that the ear is but one sense receptor among many. The time has come to move out of the laboratory into the field of the living environment. Soundscape studies do this. But even they must be integrated into that wider study of the total environment" (Schafer 1994, 12). With Feld's contribution, it became finally possible to counter the epistemological and ontological implications of the 'ecological paradigm', and above all its widespread tendency to make an arbitrary distinction between manmade and unspoiled or 'natural' elements of reality. This nature-culture dichotomy reproduces a sort of "environmental orientalism": even if "the cultural configurations submitted to this type of analysis [differ] widely from one another, the actual content of the concepts of nature and culture used as classificatory indexes always [refers] implicitly to the ontological domains covered by these notions in western culture" (Descola, Pálsson 1996, 3). In this way, not only orientalist ethnographers but also ethnomusicologists and sociologists of music run the risk of "coloniz[ing] the reality they are studying in terms of a universalist discourse" that performs "an othering of nature" (Descola, Pálsson 1996, 65, 68). Feld's work, partly based on the phenomenology of place put forth by Edward Casey (1996), has the power to break free from the strictures of the nature-culture divide, opening up new ground for thinking about sound, place, and perception.

2 Place, Sound and Listening in Japanese Music Studies

Scholars of Japanese performing arts too have recently emphasised the many ways in which music is shaped differently depending on the localised contexts in and through which it is mediated. Acutely, Hugh de Ferranti and Alison Tokita have pointed out that "concepts of locality have their own history and significance in studies of Japanese music cultures", lamenting the fact that research, particularly when dealing with issues of 'modernity', has been overwhelmingly concerned with Tokyo as the symbolic and socio-political "centre" of the nation (2013, 9). Introducing the case of early 20th-century Hanshin (a region "comprising Osaka, Kobe and the coastal districts between them"), however, the authors observe that "the changes in Japanese musical life were played out in *locally inflected ways*" (De Ferranti, Tokita 2013, 3; emphasis added). Attention to issues of place as encountered in 'peripheral' areas of Japanese music, they seem to sug-

gest, may run counter to conventional or even hegemonic discourses. In the same edited volume, Jeffrey Hanes tackles directly "the soundscape of interwar Osaka", attempting "to recapture the aural ethos of interwar Japan's largest and loudest modern metropolis" (2013, 27). In his "attempt to listen to interwar Osaka and thus to enhance our sensory appreciation of its urban modernity" (2013, 27), Hanes builds on a conception of the soundscape that owes much to Murray Schafer and Alain Corbin, though mediated by historian of technology Emily Thompson:

> Like a landscape, a soundscape is simultaneously a physical environment and a way of perceiving that environment; it is both a world and a culture constructed to make sense of that world. The physical aspects of a soundscape consist not only of the sounds themselves, the waves of acoustical energy permeating the atmosphere in which people live, but also the material objects that create, and sometimes destroy, those sounds. [...] A soundscape, like a landscape, ultimately has more to do with civilization than with nature, and as such, it is constantly under construction and always undergoing change. (Thompson 2002, 1-2 quoted in Hanes 2013, 27)

Thus, even though he is greatly successful in portraying "the aural fabric of interwar urban life" (Hanes 2013, 28), Hanes still relies on conceptual tools that differentiate between nature and culture, as evidenced for instance by his choice of categorising the aural stimuli encountered in the city as "noises", "sounds", and "music". Still, his analysis provides evidence of the ways in which "musical culture influenced the city's cultural geography", concurring to the creation of a number of "spatial niches" (Hanes 2013, 40-1). In so doing, and rephrasing Steven Feld, Hanes manages to show how music makes place, and place makes music.[7]

Reflecting on the relationship between *onkyō* 音響, "a minimal form of electronic music that demands a heightened sense of listening" (Plourde 2014, 76) and its short-lived performance venue in Tokyo, called Off Site, Lorraine Plourde has taken the discussion of sound-in-place one step further. By describing he interplay of external sounds or "noises" (both welcomed and unwanted) and the ways in which "the act of concentration (*shōchū suru*) in listening became the perceptual focus desired by the performers" (Plourde 2014, 81), she successfully portrayed a "habitus of listening" (see also Becker 2011) characterised by one of Plourde's informants as "how to listen at Off Site" (2014, 80). This listening mode is understood as more complex and dynamic than the one alluded to by Murray Schafer:

7 Feld's famous passage reads: "place is sensed, senses are placed; as places make sense, senses make place" (2005, 179).

in fact, Schafer's notion of soundscapes "contained a strongly pedagogical dimension of listening to the world in a very peculiar way, a mode that was also highly prescriptive" (Plourde 2014, 81). Thus, even though she makes reference to "Tokyo's dense, cacophonous soundscape" (84) and briefly discusses other famous notions introduced by the Canadian thinker in light of their relation to *onkyō*, Plourde's analysis also reveals "the tenuous margins of the category of the urban soundscape" (85) and is ultimately more concerned with the shifts in sensory perception instantiated by a special listening practice. Interestingly, Plourde's informants seem to attribute a sort of agency to the place in which their "acts of listening" took place: "public talk events and dialogues were often centered on themes seemingly spurred on by Off Site's experimental aesthetic such as notions of listening, sound, and space that *were believed to be fostered by the performance venue*" (75; emphasis added). In these ways, despite numerous collaborations with international artists in Europe and North America, "*onkyō*'s localization at Off Site helped to inflect its transnational circulation with a very particular sense of place" (Novak 2010, 38).

A "discourse of embodied listening" (Novak 2013, 57) also characterises David Novak's compelling ethnography of "Japanoise", a genre that resists any simple categorisation as 'music' and indeed pushes the boundaries of this category as it shapes and reshapes itself through exchanges of alterative media (most notably cassette tapes) between Japan and the United States. Within Novak's discussion, what strikes as especially significant is the use of the layered metaphor of "feedback", itself as much an indispensable technological constituent of Noise as an image of theoretical and methodological strategies (Novak 2013, 139-68). Resisting the temptation of simply resorting to the idea of a 'transnational' circulation of musical style, Novak successfully demonstrates that Noise "has no clear point of geographic origin but can exist only in circulation" (Atkins 2015, 143). Still, the historicity of Noise's listening practices is also thoroughly explored through an analysis of the precedent set by *jazu kissa*, Japanese jazz coffeehouses, a space "for listening only" where "silence [was] often mandatory" (Novak 2008, 18). Thus the issue of place and its interrelation with listening practices and the circulation of sonic media is all the more present in Novak's work even if Noise seems to contradict the presupposition of genre as something that can only happen 'somewhere'. Indeed, Novak and Plourde's findings are especially resonant in the way they articulate listening as a fundamentally creative endeavour: as noticed by Novak (2008, 15), in fact, "social spaces for listening can refigure musical meaning in ways that fundamentally alter the spatial and temporal trajectories of recordings – modern music's primary vehicle", and listening can itself become "a distinctly virtuosic and creative practice of circulation". The reason perhaps lies in an observation by some of Plourde's informants: namely, that through listening their "ears changed" (*mimi ga kawatta*) (Plourde 2014, 73).

Beyond each work's specific focus on widely different social and historical processes, these recent examples of research on Japanese music attest to an ongoing, conscious rethinking of what I have called the ecological paradigm. Even when references to the concept of soundscape are not direct, in fact, these examples participate in the overarching tendency to explore sound-in-place as a phenomenon that fundamentally surpasses the aesthetic and ontological boundaries imposed by restrictive definitions of what 'music' is. To show how these discussions feed back into an alternative approach to Japanese traditional performing arts, and *gagaku* in particular, I now move to an account of the importance of place and space in the localised practice of *gagaku* within a specific amateur group in the city of Nara, in western Japan. I begin with a short sketch of a live performance witnessed in October 2015. Though necessarily personal, "the view from a body rather than the view from above" (Strathern 2004, 32), I hope that this account will resonate with the strands of research introduced above, and that it will serve as a narrative introduction to the 'next steps' of a theoretical path that may finally overcome the ontological limits of the ecological paradigm.

3 Escaping the -scapes: Emplacing *Gagaku* Beyond the Ecological Paradigm

Once a year, usually in October, the Music Department of the Board of Ceremonies of the Imperial Household of Japan offers a public concert of *gagaku*, an ancient performing art commonly known as "Japanese court music" (Nelson 2000, 2008a, 2008b; Endō 2013). On this occasion, the audience is allowed to enter the precinct of the Imperial Palace in Tokyo and wander around the practice rooms of the twenty-odd musicians-cum-state employees who, in 2009, were appointed by UNESCO Holders of this Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Flocking in with some advance, the audience has time to peek inside the rooms and even take a few selfies in front of the stage. This is framed by two large drums and surrounded by grey pebble, in what looks like a simple inner garden. Numerous chairs are arranged directly on the pebbles, increasing the capacity of the room (in recent years, these autumn concerts are have often been overcrowded). There are no curtains to draw; instead, a flat, metallic announcement signals the beginning of the concert, reminding everyone that recordings and pictures are strictly prohibited. As the performance progresses, the powerful, almost violently shaking sound of the sparingly struck *dadaiko* drum presses against the listeners' chest: sound hits the listener with remarkable physicality. Meanwhile, some of the architectural features of the building reinforce the feeling of being in the open air, rather than sitting inside a concert hall: the pebbles, of course, not dissimilar to the

ones resting at the bottom of Nō theatres' stages; but also the fact that a few small windows on the ceiling are open, allowing the sound of the wind to filter in and blend with the music. More elusively, and certainly subjective, is the awareness, that the music 'welcomes' in external 'noises', incorporating and recombining them: the feeling of a special interaction at play between the music and its environment.

The grounding in the lived experience of sound that this brief ethnographic vignette is meant to convey immediately reframes the anthropological study of *gagaku* in a context that resonates both with the attention to soundscape that characterised the ecological paradigm, and with the creative agency of listening explored by scholars like Novak and Plourde. Today, such a context is widely dissimilar from widespread academic descriptions of *gagaku*. In the vast and multifaceted panorama of Japanese- and English-language studies of '*Japanese court music*', in fact, the "ancient features" of the repertoire have received "relatively more importance" than the characteristics of their contemporary musical practice (Terauchi 2008, 94). A historical, almost philological methodology is still largely dominant.[8] Perhaps because they are not stakeholders in complex international dynamics concerning the issue of how to safeguard *gagaku* as Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Humanity,[9] and thus need not act as spokespersons for a centralised orthodoxy and orthopraxis, Japanese scholars interested in local and alternative traditions of *gagaku* practice have been more likely to employ qualitative methods close to those of anthropology (see e.g. Minamitani 2008; Takuwa 2007, 2015).

But the only example of research on 'Japanese court music' that demonstrates a direct affinity to the theoretical trends outlined above is Terauchi Naoko's aptly titled *Listening to Gagaku* (*Gagaku o kiku*) (2011). This agile and elegantly written book introduces the reader to "the places where *gagaku* resounds", identified as "gardens" (*niwa*) (Terauchi 2011, v), and presents "the energy of the topos" (*topos no chikara*), the "totality of a place where *gagaku* resounds" (Terauchi 2011, vi). Throughout her exploration of the most important "gardens" of Japanese *gagaku*, including Kyoto, Nara, Osaka, the Imperial Palace and the National Theatre, Terauchi is especially keen to covey "the experiential awareness of hearing and seeing" (2011, 95) that characterises participation in a performance of *gagaku*, providing maps and pictures of each site as well as diagrams of sound sources in relation to the listener (e.g. 2011, 93, 118). From the

8 This situation is in part justified by the immense value of this ancient performing art as cultural heritage. For excellent historical overviews, see Nelson 2000, 2008a, 2008b. For an important ethnomusicological exception, which nonetheless is only minimally experiential in tone (and knowingly so), see Garfias (1975).

9 *Gagaku* was enlisted by UNESCO in 2009. Its Holders are the performers of the Music Department of the Board of Ceremonies of the Imperial Household of Japan (see UNESCO 2009).

stimulating indeterminacy of rituals that take place in the open air (characterised by the presence of ambient "noises") to the somewhat "shut off" and purified atmosphere of the modern theatre, Terauchi also indirectly introduces the theme of the body of the researcher and his or her immersion in the surrounding, paying attention to *gagaku* not only aurally and visually, but with the whole sensorium. Despite the fact that her approach is not, strictly speaking, ethnographic, Terauchi thus comes closer to what could be described as a 'socio-anthropology of *gagaku*'. Furthermore, by noticing that "the actual performance of *gagaku* envelops the entire body of the listener" (Terauchi 2011, v), Terauchi also hints at the shortcomings of a naïf ecological approach to sound-in-place.

In fact, as also noticed by Plourde, "we never interact with or confront our surroundings via only one sense", and indeed the senses themselves "are not bounded discrete entities" (2014, 75). Despite quoting David Howes, a famed proponent of the so-called "sensory anthropology",[10] Plourde's words resonate more distinctly with Tim Ingold's line of thought. In *Stop, look and listen! Vision, hearing and human movement*, in fact, the British anthropologist maintained that "both looking and listening are aspects of a movement that, being generative of both space and time, is ontologically prior to any opposition we might draw between them" (2000, 274). If this is the case, continues Ingold, the ocularcentrism denounced by proponents of the ecological approach is not something we should impute to vision itself, but rather to what Johannes Fabian has called a "cognitive style" which, "incorporated into Western techniques of depiction, […] leads us to equate vision with visualisation – that is, with the formation, in the mind, of images or representations of the world" (Ingold 2000, 282). If this is the case, "it is not vision that objectifies the world, but rather the harnessing of vision to a project of objectification that has reduced it to an instrument of disinterested observation" (Ingold 2000, 284). The same also applies to sound: a theory of knowledge that sees cultures as systems of collective representations (that is, a representational theory of knowledge) will conceive of hearing as just another mode of perceiving the world – one among five, in the Euro-American account of 'the senses'. Building on these premises, Ingold maintains that Murray Schafer's famous concept of 'soundscape' should be altogether abandoned. First and foremost, because the slicing of the environment into 'scapes' is profoundly contrary to the experience we have of it: "the environment that we experience, know and move around in is not sliced up along the lines of the sensory pathways by which we enter into it. The world we perceive is the same

10 For an interesting discussion on the distinction between "sensory anthropology" and "the anthropology of the senses", see the debate between Sarah Pink and David Howes in *Social Anthropology* (Pink, Howes 2010). For an alternative view and a response by Tim Ingold, see Ingold 2011b.

world, whatever path we take, and in perceiving it, each of us acts as an undivided centre of movement and awareness. For this reason, I deplore the fashion for multiplying scapes of every possible kind" (Ingold 2011, 136). The reduction of vision to visualisation should not be replicated in the field of aural experience: "when we look around on a fine day, we see a landscape bathed in sunlight, not a lightscape. Likewise, listening to our surroundings, we do not hear a soundscape. For sound, I would argue, is not the object but the medium of our perception. It is what we hear *in*. Similarly, we do not see light but see *in* it" (Ingold 2011, 138; emphasis in the original). Ultimately, Ingold's position is nondualistic, and therefore alternative to the one put forth by most proponents of the ecological paradigm: "sound, in [his] view, is neither mental nor material, but a phenomenon of experience – that is, of our immersion in, and commingling with, the world in which we find ourselves" (Ingold 2011a, 137). In a similar vein, Novak and Sakakeeney (2015, 1) have recently suggested "to engage sound as the interrelation of materiality and metaphor", emphasising the fact that sound is "a substance of the world as well as a basic part of how people frame their knowledge about their world" (2). My own fieldwork experience with a group of *gagaku* amateurs-practitioners based in Nara supports this phenomenologically-oriented, experiential view of perception. Two examples will illustrate the interrelation of sound, place and movement in the practice of *gagaku* in contemporary Japan.

The group Nanto gakuso (a name that could be translated as "the office of *gagaku* of the southern capital") was officially established in 1968, but can lay claim to a history of musical transmission that dates back to the 8th century, when Nara was the capital of the political entity that later became 'Japan'. Thus, it is no exaggeration to say that Nanto gakuso's alleged origins are almost as old as Japanese *gagaku* itself. In its present state, however, the group is the product of the concerted efforts undertook at the turn of the 20th century by a local shrine, Kasuga Taisha, and a few local families with no prior connections to *gagaku*'s transmission to keep this performing art alive in Nara (see Kasagi 2006, 2008). With the creation of a centralised Office of *Gagaku* in Tokyo in 1870, in fact, local performers were forced to move to the new capital, and their disparate lines of transmission were suddenly put in danger. Local groups of performers responded differently to the challenge, trying to resist the new centripetal force. In the case of Nara, the deeply rooted association of *gagaku* with local rituals and festivals (*matsuri*) became the core argument in the movement that developed to preserve music and dances of the territory. Today, thanks to the success of this movement, Nanto gakuso performs *gagaku* as part of numerous rituals held at Kasuga Taisha (with which it also continues to maintain a privileged relation of cooperation),

Kōfukuji, Tōdaiji, and other temples and shrines of the province.[11] Ordinary rehearsals represent the most important activity for the group's members. Practitioners attend collective beginners' classes from 7 to 8 pm every Saturday night, and/or more advanced classes (also called "regulars' classes") from 8 to 10 pm. In all cases, the performers are grouped according to the wind instrument they play.[12] Classes are called *okeiko*, and take place in a quiet Japanese-style building slightly tucked away from a shopping street running from Nara's Kintetsu train station to the older merchant district known as Naramachi. Inside, the rooms are all deceptively simple: tatami floors, *fusuma* sliding doors, thick *zabuton* cushions to sit on. Each room is equipped with a window, below which a low table is prepared for the teacher who leads the class. A kettle and a few teacups sit on the right side of the entrance. Before and after the class, when the cushions are piled up next to the teacher's desk and nothing else punctuates the space, the appearance of the practice room (*okeikoba*) is minimal, almost frugal. However, as I have shown elsewhere, a special use of the space marks Nanto gakuso's practice of *gagaku* as a strongly "emplaced" activity (Giolai 2016).[13] The possibility to 'fuse' two or more rooms together in order to perform orchestral rehearsals; the precise way in which interpersonal relationships are 'mapped' onto the floor and marked by the distribution of practitioners sitting in certain rows of cushions; the distinctly different sociability observable among old-timers sitting in the back row, chatting and even smoking, and among newcomers sitting in the front, nervous and composed; the insistence on paying attention to the sound coming from adjacent rooms and the 'game' played among regular members of picking up a sonic clue, guessing which piece another group of practitioners is performing, and joining them on the spot, playing from memory: all these examples attest to the peculiar 'educational topology' co-produced by *gagaku* practitioners and by the practice room itself. In time, observing and participating in the classes made it clear that this "social construction of the space" (Keister 2008, 256) is inseparable from specific 'techniques of the body' (Marcel Mauss), also transmitted in a process that Ingold has called "enskilment", or "the embodiment of capacities of awareness and response by environmentally situated agents" (2000, 6). Whenever a young practitioner would perform the initial solo of a suite of pieces to accom-

11 The most significant of these rituals is the Kasuga Taisha Wakamiya Onmatsuri, held every year in December (in English, see Ishii 1987; in Japanese, see Nakashima et al. 1991; Terauchi 2011, 61-95; in Italian see Giolai 2016a).

12 The instruments of *gagaku* vary according to the repertoire played. They can be subdivided into aerophones (three transverse flutes, a small double reed oboe-like pipe, and a mouth organ); cordophones (two zithers and a pear-shaped lute); membranophones (three different drums) and ideophones (a suspended gong).

13 On the concept of emplacement, see especially Pink 2011.

pany dance (*bugaku*), for instance, an older teacher would either make 'floating' movements in the air with his hands, providing a gestural but wordless representation of the correct 'flow' or contour of the melody, or close his eyes and move his head up and down rhythmically in conjunction with the progression of the melody. It was always left to the sensibility of the performer to gain a valuable lesson from these soundless indications, and verbal remarks were always kept to a minimum. Indeed, the insistence on the part of old-timers that "If you don't feel it with your body, you can't play it right" was universally accepted, and getting to *feel* what those words meant through continuous dedication to practice (what I called 'passion attendance') was a crucial aspect of my own apprenticeship with Nanto gakuso.[14] In these ways, I have come to conceive of *gagaku* practice in terms of an emplaced activity shaped by one's use of his or her body-in-space.[15] In turn, these processes are inseparable from the need to pay attention to the aural features of *gagaku*, because sound and movement are intertwined in the way *gagaku* is *done*.

That practitioners themselves are aware of this connection, if not theoretically at least on a symbolic level, is evidenced by the way in which the leader of Nanto gakuso, Kasagi Kan'ichi (b. 1927), has recently represented *gagaku*. In fact, his most recent book, *Walking through the Nara of gagaku* (*Gagaku no Nara o aruku*) (2014), is a conscious attempt to establish a relationship between sound and place, and to present *gagaku* indirectly as a 'place-making entity' with considerable agency. As a guidebook to the heritage sites of the city of Nara which simultaneously introduces the reader to the history and main features of *gagaku*, the text uniquely presents a local, decentred view of what this performing art is. In the preface, Kasagi takes his readers on a walk along the route leading from Nara's Kintetsu station to the main hall of Kasuga Taisha (2014, 4-5). Noticing that "today *gagaku* is something that can be experienced in person", Kasagi concludes with a snapshot from the Wakamiya Onmatsuri festival: "listening from the feet to the *dadaiko* drum thudding '*zushin*, *zushin*', one can join the gods in enjoying the ice-cold wind. This is *gagaku*" (2014, 5). As these words demonstrate, practitioners in Nanto gakuso are fully aware of the connection between perception, place and sound that characterises their local 'version' of *gagaku* – to the point of equating this performing art with the immersive experience of listening with the body to the mutual resonances of co-constitutive features of the world.

14 On apprenticeship-based ethnography as method, see Downey, Dalidowicz, Mason 2015.

15 Importantly, the mutual "affordances" (Gibson) of bodily techniques and particular spaces like the *gagaku* practice room are gendered: women and men do exhibit a very different posture and bearing, and gender norms are transmitted through practice: within Nanto gakuso, for instance, women serve tea to all the practitioners at the beginning of each class; they also collect and wash the tea cups at the end.

4 Conclusion. Three Steps to an Ecology of *Gagaku*

This exploratory essay has reviewed some tendencies of what I have called an 'ecological paradigm' to the study of music. I have argued that studies that belong to this category are often based on excessively ambiguous definitions of critical terms such as 'place' and 'the environment', and that this imprecision reinforces a dichotomy between nature and culture. Subsequently, I have shown that recent research on Japanese music has been inspired by the ecological paradigm, but has consistently moved beyond its philosophical and epistemological fallacies. I have reviewed examples that span from the study of the soundscape of interwar Osaka (Hanes 2013), to the listening practices developed within a specific site in Tokyo (Plourde 2014; Novak 2010), and the media circulation that continuously redefined 'Noise' music (Novak 2008, 2013). Finally, I have introduced some examples taken from my fieldwork with the *gagaku* group Nanto gakuso in Nara, applying ideas elaborated by Tim Ingold to highlight the ways in which today's practitioners tie together sound and place to the point of equating the 'essence' of *gagaku* with the embodied experience of being affected by its sound. The thud of the huge drum called *dadaiko* served as an aural cue to the loop between my own immersion in a live performance and a practitioner's account of a similar sensory rapture. Below, I will offer a simple recapitulation of three hypothetical 'steps' towards this phenomenological and phenomenal plunge into *gagaku*.

Step one. By taking into consideration the concept of soundscape, it is possible to begin to do justice to some features of *gagaku* that are often confined to technical musicological jargon, thus leaving unexplored the lively account of participation in performance. For instance, the extensive use of heterophony[16] that is so characteristic of *gagaku* highlights each instrument's timbre and ornamentation, effectively emphasising rather than levelling out the diversity of their sonic qualities. Thus, in the case of the flute for example, a suppression of indeterminate elements such as the amount of air dispersed when blowing into the mouthpiece is not regarded as the essential procedure to obtain the tone quality considered aesthetically satisfying. In this sense, and despite their limitations, approaches such as the ones set in motion by Murray Schafer's notion of soundscape can help relating apparently non-musical elements of *gagaku* to a broader semantic context than the one provided by Euro-American conceptions of 'music'. Indeed, the inadequacy of analysing 'Japanese court music' through a so-called 'Western' paradigm separating 'musical sounds' from 'noise' on a historically constructed basis should be a

16 Defined as "the musical texture characterized by the simultaneous performance of variations of the same melody" (Koskoff 2008, 749).

strong indication that we may need a different way of thinking about the relationship between sound and 'the environment' in *gagaku*. Of course, ethnomusicological research has repeatedly questioned the efficacy of applying foreign categorizations indiscriminately, but *gagaku*'s features seem especially suitable to be analysed in terms of "sound experience" rather than as 'musical attributes' (see Clayton 2008).

Step two. Despite the insight provided by the application of the concept of soundscape to the study of *gagaku*, the ecological paradigm remains inescapably anchored to such philosophical dichotomies as nature vs culture, material vs immaterial, subject vs object. As evidenced by the work of Tim Ingold, however, such dichotomies distort our representations of the way we come in contact with the world. For instance, in most Euro-American philosophical traditions vision is associated with knowledge of an indirect kind, mediated by the mind and thus superior to that acquired by all other senses, while hearing is characterised as a more unmediated mode of knowing because of the supposed inward 'flow' of information entering the ever-open human ears (Ingold 2000, 243-9). But these arbitrary separations are rooted in a deeper issue, "a certain way of imagining the human subject – namely, as a seat of awareness, bounded by the skin, and set over against the world – that is deeply sedimented in the Western tradition of thought" (Ingold 2000, 243). In the study of *gagaku*, overcoming such a deep-seated perspective implies bringing to the fore the collective dimension of participating to its performance occasions, highlighting circumstances that may be peculiar to different local enactments of *gagaku*. In this sense, Terauchi's emphasis on the listener's sensory participation in the sonic life of *gagaku*, coupled by her attention to the historical details of each "garden of sound" considered, represents a promising starting point.

Step three. Taking part in the making of *gagaku* implies a rich sensorial involvement: during a ritual, for example, playing while walking in the cold, in a forest, with no light but that of a torch or of stars and moon, makes it impossible to ignore that one is there with a sensing body (see Kasagi 2014, 163-83). But even under ordinary conditions, as I have shown, *gagaku* practitioners always experience sounds in and through their body, learning how to use it correctly in order to physically *make gagaku*. Listening and performing *gagaku*, then, are immersive experiences first and foremost because of the materiality of sound. Indeed, this immersive character is due in part to the sheer volume of *gagaku*: a general preference for dynamics ranging from mezzoforte to fortissimo, the high-pitch range of the flutes and oboes, and the clusters of sounds played by the mouth organ tend to produce a strong 'enveloping' effect. Research on the role of the body in *gagaku* could apply Ingold's insights on the indivisibility of sensory perception reconnecting individual bodily involvement with the concurrent communitarian construction of territorial bonds within a community of practice such as a *gagaku* group.

In the 1970s, Gregory Bateson wondered: "'what sort of thing is this which we call 'organism plus environment'?" and proposed that we try to answer this question by postulating two ecologies: an ecology of material and energy exchanges, and an ecology of mind (as quoted in Ingold 2000, 18). But for Tim Ingold (2011, 19) "a properly ecological approach […] is one that would take as its point of departure the whole-organism-in-its-environment. In other words, 'organism plus environment' should denote not a compound of two things, but one indivisible totality". I would add that if, as he observes, "hearing is a mode of participatory engagement with the environment" (Ingold 2000, 277), then the primary scope of the steps envisioned here should be to help researchers theorise new ways to engage people's complex relationships with the world of *gagaku*. This would perhaps mean translating Alfred Schutz's idea of making music as a process of "mutual tuning-in" (1951, 92) into a theoretical and methodological perspective more attentive to the resonance between researchers, research participants, and the "sense of place" they can share (see Feld, Basso 1996). If, by "listening from our feet", to use Kasagi's expression, we follow these steps and figure out which ones lie ahead, maybe we can help opening a new route to that special world of sense we call *gagaku*. Step by step.

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