

Sonic Genealogies

Eleh (John Brien) on Eliane

Radigue

Hello, my name is John Brien and I run a north-american label called Important Records. I'm also a lifelong musician and at some point, in the 99's, I've become fascinated by analogue synthesis which served as my own introduction into the sound world that Eliane Radigue inhabits. I was introduced to Eliane's work somewhere around 2002 when Table Of the Elements release the Adnos box set. I started working with her somewhere around 2007, and then in 2009 we released Triptych on CD which was followed by Transamoren - Transmortem. And in the consequent years we coproduced maybe different projects together. I think of Eliane's work as singularly independent from anyone else who may be considered in the electronic drone minimalist realm. It's said that she was inspired by jet engines in early 50's, which is similar to the way that La Monte Young was inspired by the sound of electric transformers. And it's easy to line everybody up behind La Monte Young but I prefer more an egalitarian perspective of that era. Radigue started working with feedback in tape prior to Young's 1958 Trio for Strains. So, it's important to me that she isn't considered as following anyone's footsteps necessarily.

Eliane and I have talked a little bit about my work in relation with her work and it's clear that we are both pursuing similar goals. I don't have an ARP 2500 and I was unfamiliar with her when I first started to work with analogue synthesis, but we both been working with the same tools, and I think those tools steer me towards the music I made, just giving the basic functionality of the instruments. Like, when I try to sync two oscillators by hand, and I heard the slow beating of closely toned frequencies. That completely drew me in and slowed time down, it slowed me down. I persuaded that sound because it felt good to hear it. Because of the work I was doing with synths I started listening more closely to the natural world around me and along sonic events like highway drones, passing airplanes, engines, stuff like that. I

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know that Eliane had a very intimate relationship with her ARP 2500. I'm not surprised that she found what she was looking for in that analogue circuitry and in this massive synthesizer since it would allow her to generate and mix sounds slowly, the way that she wanted to. It really gives her, as a composer and performer, a lot of the controls that she would appreciate in tape music and then, also, new things that she couldn't have done as readily. Eliane acoustic work does remind me in a simple way of Alvin Lucier or Phill Niblock, but the essence of the compositions are still very much Eliane's. And I appreciate the way they slowly change, much like her synthesizer work does. Lucier and Niblock, and other people, other composers like them, create music that is either unchanging or changing in a way that's ultraslow. But Radigue's work seems to always be changing in a way that's difficult to notice but it doesn't happen so slowly that you might not even noticed at all. There is still a very organic element within her work, possibly even more now that it is written in compositions for acoustic instruments. Also, the way her electronic work is all about the most subtle of changes, seems to be something that's uniquely her own too. She and I are both performers and composers, but now she's more of a composer collaborating on new work with performers. In a way I would be relieved if I could be taken out of the performance in that way, but I also had a lot of powerful experiences performing live and I'm not ready to give that up yet.

Time been of known importance is probably what makes time so important in this kind of work. It's often said that our music slows time or interferes with one's perception of time. Most importantly I've set up to have this experience while I'm working on the music, so if I lose track of time then I'm getting the results I want. I would imagine that Eliane has probably the same transcended, meditated experiences when she is slowly pushing a fader on a mixer or synthesizer. Stillness and nearly impossible slow changes are essential attributes in Radigue's music, and much of my own work too. However, as you mentioned, it is always growing so the stillness seems immovable, but it isn't, it grows like a plant or a tree. If you try to see the growth happening in real time is not possible, but you get a sense of the growth by observing changes over time. I find that Eliane's work is as pleasing as observing growth in nature. I think mixers and modular synths really lend themselves to this kind of work because you can impose slow changes, either faded by hand or by controllable digitalization. And by doing this kind of musical work it is a form of meditation. You can't really focus on anything else other than trying to hear the change and the artifacts of change as it's happening. And I know that this has been said a lot, but Eliane's music reminds me of just the surface of water. On one hand you see this sort of solid unified whole, but it's also changing and rippling with vibrations, and they appear both steady and ever-changing. So, for me as a listener, her work drew me in, pulled me in and I couldn't stop listening to it. It's really difficult to understand the parts of her work, but it's easy to feel, in a sense, the organic wholeness of those compositions. There's always a natural texture to Eliane's sound even if they are extremely desperate tones that play. And that kind of natural cohesion could be attributable to her masterful ability to mix. Her mixes are just so nice and so dense that what you are hearing is the sum of all the parts and not really those individual parts, which you can focus on but what you really hear and what you really feel is just her incredible mixes.

The term drone reminds me of someone who said that notes in western music are over before you can really hear them. Drones have a way to opening up frequencies so you can hear what they are and how they interact over time. But I don't necessarily feel that drone is inherently ominous or provoked by vast dread. I do think drone music connects you with the fundamental nature of sound and the fundamental nature of vibration, which does suggest that cosmic order in that way kind of connects you to the source of life. Listening to it can evoke a spiritual experience, especially because it can ease the listener into a state that is much different from their normal state or even the normal experience of listening to music. There is a relationship between creativity and death, and whether is conscious or not, an artist is preserving a moment of time when they are creating something, creating a work that could be beyond the artist life. And I think about that when I look at things like blankets knitted by relatives a long time ago, that each knot is a moment in their life and death is something that is present in every living moment. So, losing yourself in sound, something that I think can happen more readily when music is slow or droning can cause you to transcend feelings of death, dread, and be fully conscious in the moment and pulling auditory phenomenon in your work is an interesting way to interact with the fundamental elements of life, so it's a way to connect with something much larger.

What you're hearing in the background is "Kailasha" is the second part of Eliane Radigue's Trilogie De La Mort. Of the trilogy, this might be the heaviest and the deepest of her work and had a really profound effect on me. Eliane had been working of the first piece of the trilogy for a few years and this, which was the second piece, was started two weeks after she lost her son in a car accident. She spent two years morning and working on this, and when the piece was done, her time of morning was also done. So, you can sense the pain and I also sense relief and release, not just from that pain but from life itself. A word that comes to mind in relation to her work is discipline. It requires an intense amount of solitary focus and discipline to realize this kind of music. So, I'm not surprised it took her so long to complete it. This trilogy is sacred work and it's got one foot in the reality and another foot in the divine. I can't really imagine music much more perfect than this. I find this music to be both disorienting and grounding, which seem at odds with one another, but they really are just two sides of the same coin. It's also totally restorative, it is completely intense always shifting, moving, always changing. It is also very focused, specially by the horn like drones beneath it. I think that to listen to this work is a sublime experience available only for the living so in that way is a celebration of life, just to be able to listen to this music makes me feel alive. And it's not necessarily minimal either, there's a kind of sonic density into it. The same way that a gong has a lot of density. And to me that's life affirming, it's also somber and we know what this work is about. In the end, that density subsides in a very simple way of one persists, which is an incredible and quite profound sonic and philosophical experience.

Eliane's work, for me, it is all about a uniquely personal zone that an artist can create for themselves. To me, she created a sound world that is uniquely to her own, in a way, similar to what James Turrell has done with light. She created sonic atmospheres, where you practically desensitized and completely disarmed. I think a young composer, or a young artist can learn the power of interacting with the basic elements of their creative

practices through listening to Eliane's work. Whether is color or sound, you really only need the basics and the right amount of control in order to create something very powerful. And it's up to the individual to find something that works. If you slow down, if you focus and you work with what you have, and resist adding layer upon layer of extras, of superfluous sounds. I think Radigue really teaches us how to peel back layers, rather than continuing to add them. And then by removing layers, ultimately, you can get to the heart of the sound, which is all you really need.



Eliane Radigue. Arman, 1971