

Soundscape Composition in Lithuania: From Interpretation to Documentation

Abstract. The term soundscape composition was invented in the mid-seventies of the 20th century when the R. M. Schafer's movement of acoustic ecology started. But still now none really seems to be able to say what exactly is meant by it. It can hold documentary recordings of some places or complex compositions with environmental sound, as well as different soundscape activities (sound walkings, installations, internet projects, etc.). In this paper a short overview of soundscape music in Lithuania is introduced. It is based on compositional principles point of view, drawing acts of documentation, representation and interpretation as fundamental premises to define and typologise it.

Keywords: soundscape composition, field recording, sound installation, sound map.

During the 20th century the attention of artists, urbanists, sociologists, anthropologists and other experts on the phenomenon of soundscape has been growing. The futuristic movement at the beginning of the century admired the new industrial sound system. So that the sounds of the industry and city – cars, pistons, levers, hammers, etc. – do not become an undesirable noise, for Luigi Russolo it is only an issue of requalifying them and restructuring our listening. “Switching off the eyes”, as a means of freeing sound from its source and in this way opening oneself to pure (reduced) listening became essential in acousmatic music that focuses attention on how we listen to sounds and music and what the goal of listening is. The context of sound recording technologies and electronic music that do not require putting down notes made the discourse on sonological competence in cognitive musicology a topical issue. Finally, alternative art practice (George Antheil, Edgar Varèse, Henry Cowell) of the first half of the 20th century, musical experiments of post-war avant-garde electronic and tape music, artistic and theoretical Cowell's noise, Cage's silence manifestos changed dichotomies that were employed to structuralise musical culture: music *versus* noises, man *versus* machine, environmental sounds *versus* “distilled” spaces of concert halls.

The origin and development of the soundscape idea is directly linked with the history of the media and changing technologies, which opened new possibilities and forms of listening, shaped a new attitude to sound, its role in art and changes in social life. The rapid evolution of sound recording equipment (from phonographs, to gramophones, tape recorders, and digital recording systems) radically changed the way we make, listen, and market music, as well as the fundamental understanding of what we call music. Now is not necessary for a composer to use notation or scores to transfer music to listeners. The audio fixation is much more precise and unlimited than any visual representation. It brings music directly without any visual intermediate. Finally, any sound with the help of recording gained the musical feature to be reproduced, controlled and synchronized with the sounds of musical instruments.

The authorship of the term soundscape is attributed to the Canadian composer and sound ecologist, Ray Murray Schafer, who at the end of the fifth and the beginning of the sixth decade came up with the idea of a total appreciation of the acoustic environment. His concept of soundscape is to a certain extent analogous to the concept of landscape: while landscape defines the visual side of a locality, soundscape defines its sonic content, all sounds that reach our ears in a certain locality. For Schafer *soundscape* means not only authentic acoustic environment, but also such artificial constructs as music, montage of recorded sounds but only in such cases when they are treated as part of the environment. Therefore, since the first cases of the usage of this term *soundscape* acquires rather a wide umbrella character embracing many different phenomena: beginning with encyclopaedic collecting of the sounds made by birds, animals and insects, recordings of acoustic landscape, research in architecture acoustic and ending in saving the sounds for history, sound installations, montages or other artistic activities with environment sounds.

The usage of the term an “acoustic environment” has a long history. Beginning with the imitation of natural sounds in folklore traditions, continuing with their allusions in the music of the Middle Ages, Renaissance, Couperin, Haydn, Vivaldi or Olivier, the tradition of program music, and ending with the direct involvement of objects from the environment in the 20th century music scores by composers Eric Sati, John Cage and others. In this century with the spread of sound recording technologies the use of the acoustic environment enters a new qualitative stage. While in the music of the acoustic era, environmental sounds were “re-written” to be performed by traditional instruments thus becoming distant references to their original source (rhetoric, program music), in the 20th century the use of the phonogram made it possible to use them in a music composition as they are.

In 1930, Walter Ruttmann, the director of German abstract and documentary film created a 12-minute film *Wochenende* without any images – an acoustic collage made from the recorded sounds of Berlin (trains, street traffic, everyday life etc.)¹. In 1927–1938 Filippo Tommaso Marinetti demonstrated the radio compositions *Sintesi radiofoniche* that consisted of recorded environmental sounds. Finally, the idea of acousmatic music was manifested in Pierre Schaeffer's *musique concrète* and his emblematic *Étude aux chemins de fer* (1948)². This method was expanded in avant-garde compositions by Halim El-Dabh, Pierre Henry, Karlheinz Stockhausen, Iannis Xenakis, Michel Chion and other composers.

The composers mentioned treated recorded sounds rather freely, turning them into acoustic objects abstracted from the original source. However, the soundscape composition represented by Schafer raised other goals and emphasised not so much the aspect of the composer's self-expression: he tried to attract attention to the acoustic environment, the listening phenomenon, the aspects that unite the systems of people and nature. Field recording became the main practice in this kind of "music"³. Sound documentation sometimes called by the term phonography (according to a parallel with photography) started in the film and radio industry; it accompanied expeditions and research of ethnomusicologists and geographers. In the 1960s field recordings become an independent activity.

Although most of present-day soundscape artists combine various creative methods and means, all of them originate from several essential field-recording principles:

- 1) creative work does not start with sound editing, but with the beginning of sound recording or even earlier, looking for the right spot to make the recording, watching and exploring the surroundings;
- 2) no recording can fully recreate the sound coming from the environment. The microphone depending on its technical features, distorts the sound objectivity, bringing to light some sounds/frequencies, while hiding others and so on. As it is not a cognitive listening instrument, it does not have the possibility to focus on the sound the field recordist is interested in and to filter out undesirable acoustic material.

Therefore, the unavoidable subjectivity of the field recordist brings his/her activities closer to the composer's practice, and the recording work to the composer's act of creating music. Depending on the relationship with the environment being recorded, several soundscape compositions can be distinguished: documentation, representation, interpretation. The first – documentation – is a raw sound recording or direct sound broadcast. It is a certain neutral relationship between a recording man and environment, limited only by the choice of the locality and time as well as the transferring the recorded sound into a different context (CD, radio programme etc.). Generalising it could be called "found" compositions, in which authorship is minimally seen. The second – representation – includes edited (chosen, edited, treated) sound recordings. They are recordings made at a different time or even in different localities joined together, in order to obtain a generalised representation of the locality recorded. The third – interpretation – is most probably closest to the traditional *musique concrète*, where recorded sounds or their segments are freely manipulated, they are transformed and placed to make new compositions by the composer's free will. However, unlike in classical *musique concrète*, in soundscape compositions the recognition of the original sound is very important, while its goal is to evoke in the listeners associations, reminiscences and imaginations connected with it.

Based on this typology, it is possible to review the context of the art of Lithuanian soundscape. This tradition in Lithuania is rather new. The first examples of soundscape composition would be attributed to the interpretation type, when employing recorded sounds tape compositions were created. One of the first works of this type is Tomas Juzeliūnas' "Telephonics" (1987). This composition was edited with the help of a multichannel tape recorder employing only the sounds emitted from a telephone. Repeating combinations of the telephone signals somewhat reminds of the early works by Steve Reich and his phase shifting technique.

¹ A bit earlier, in 1927 Ruttmann created the famous full-length documentary *Berlin: Die Sinfonie der Großstadt*, which like the *Wochenende*, is more known for its collages of cityscapes organised according to musical principles rather than consecutive documentary narrative.

² The choice of train noises for the first concrete musical composition was conceptually linked with one of the first (and most probably historically most influential) films by Auguste and Louis Lumière's *L'arrivée d'un train à la Ciotat* in 1895. Pierre Schaeffer claimed that traditional music starts with abstraction (notes), later supplying it with an acoustic shape. Concrete music is composed the other way round – from concrete sound recordings, later abstracting them to musical composition.

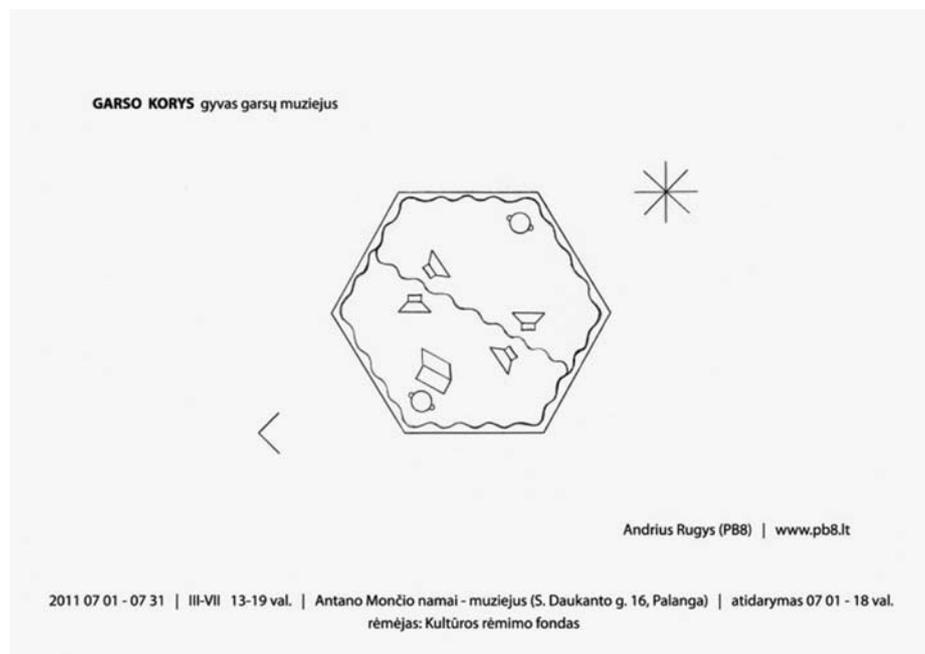
³ Often *soundscape* music itself is understood as the environment. For example, Luc Ferrari in his composition *Presque Rien No 1 "Le Lever du jour au bord de la mer"* (1970), in one of the first manifestations of such music, the recording of the noises of a definite Yugoslav village is heard. It is edited in a minimal way without any compositional intervention. It is an original 21-minute "summary" of the recording which lasted day and night. Ferrari defines this composition as one that does not have "abstract sounds", i.e., what most irritated him in the *musique concrète* school.

A new acoustic world is created from authentic technologic sounds, which gives a generalised sounding of the past time and a changed locality.

While in “Telephonics” the interpretation method employing the surrounding environment is very obvious, for example, in Šarūnas Nakas’ “At Heaven’s Door” (2000) the author’s intervention is markedly less. This thirty-minute long composition is a “sound film” that was made intuitively without any premeditated preliminary schemes in which the music of the extinct cultures that was written on little wax rolls, as well as the sounds of a river and wind, bird songs, and there is not a single sound created or changed by the author himself, no electronic improvement or deformations.

The younger Lithuanian composers Arturas Bumšteinas (b. 1982), Lina Lapelytė (b. 1984), Mykolas Natalevičius (b. 1985), Gailė Gričiūtė (b. 1985) and others devote more attention to soundscape compositions. Their multi-faceted creative style has examples of even more pure soundscape composition. The interpretation technique dominates in them. For example, Mykolas Natalevičius’ composition “Iron” (2016) metaphorically renders the sound of iron in the context of present-day Vilnius. It conceptually and ironically is linked with Vilnius history. Performed live the improvised sample of sound collage starts with Vilnius train station soundscapes that gradually become an interrupted drone. According to the author, it might remind of the sound emitted by the Iron Wolf, which, as legend goes, Duke Gediminas heard before building the city of Vilnius.

While the interpretation method working with the acoustic environment is closer to “traditional” composers with academic education, the representation and/or documentation means are more often seen in the activities of the “unprofessional” musicians or artists from other spheres. For instance, a representative of the visual arts (by education), Andrius Rugys (b. 1983) is engaged in sound archaeology – he collects sounds and creates sound installations. His installation “Sound Honeycomb” (2011; Ex. 1) is a sound museum, consisting of city noises, rustling trees, people’s stories, sounds of the underwater world recorded with hydro-microphones and others. It is constantly supplied with sounds collected in the surroundings of the installation; artistic auditions were created and performed for every listener personally.



Example 1. Andrius Rugys. *Sound Honeycomb* (2011)

Agnė Matulevičiūtė (b. 1991), also works a lot in the genre of sound installations. Thanks to her installation “Between Heaven and Earth” (2016; Ex. 2) listeners can hear the sounds recorded in the vaults of Vilnius Cathedral and bell tower simultaneously: one recording is heard in the left side of the headphones, while the other – in the right side. With the headphones on, it is possible to transfer oneself to heaven and underground at the same time. The composition of the echoes of the Cathedral vaults and the city noises as well as the bell tolls make it possible to hear what we would never be able to do without it.

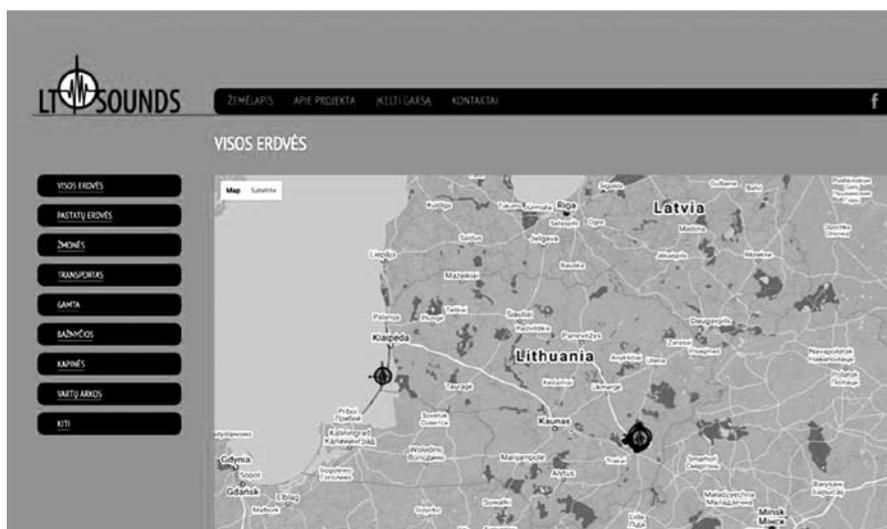


Example 2. Agnė Matulevičiūtė. *Cathedral Bell Tower and Vaults* (2016)

Sound director Vidmantas Blažys goes in for recording bird songs; he issues various publications, and carries out educational activities. His collections include a host of voices of Lithuanian birds and other living creatures. One can listen to them on <http://www.gamtosgarsai.lt>. Both the authors mentioned, although they did not alter the sounds of the acoustic environment, treated them rather freely. Transferring “documentary” sounds into a new space, decontextualising and forming a new possibility of choice, they distance themselves from reality and present individual representation of soundscape.

The activities of Andrius Šimkūnas is most probably closest to the documentation principal. A non-academic artist, a field recordist, a member of esoteric, black metal groups, he just records environmental sounds or objects (most often of inanimate nature) using contact microphones. Looking for music in everyday life he tries to maximally distance himself from his subjective “I”, leaving the sounds as they are. Samples of his recorded sounds can be found at the soundcloud Sala <https://soundcloud.com/sala-1> or the personal blog Sala soundscapes <http://alas23.blogspot.lt>.

Lithuanian sound maps can also be attributed to the documentation genre: Antanas Kučinskas’ initiated projects www.soudscape.lt and www.ltsounds.com (Ex. 3), Marielle Vitureau’s www.kitastotelestotis.lt.



Example 3. Web page www.ltsounds.com

Antanas Kučinskas, the initiator of this map, has also shown installations and sculptures. One of them is “Sound Shower” (2016; Ex. 4). It is loudspeakers installed in a standard shower construction that broadcast environmental sounds. Placing the “shower” in unusual public spaces – squares, offices – this sound-making equipment would immediately attract the attention of passers-by. This sound sculpture is introduced like this: “We are constantly surrounded by sounds. However, do we notice them? This installation offers you a sound procedure, during which Vilnius’ sound streams of various “temperature” and “pressure” are poured on the body. Turn on the taps and enjoy it.”



Example 4. Antanas Kučinskas. *Sound Shower* (2016)

Generalising these short insights we can state that the acoustic ecology contexts and application are very varied. Its ideas appeared, matured and manifested in various spheres – art, ecology, urbanisms, anthropology and others. Attention to the sound as a value per se and as a multi-layered source of meanings opened ways for new forms of artistic creation with environmental sounds, the promotion of sonologic competence, and fostering practices of the acoustic environment. New understanding of creativity and copyright without the “author” are clear factors that unite artistic expression and sound ecology.

Looking at the prospects of soundscape art development it is possible to notice that its role is still not big. In Lithuania this art is still starting to take the first steps and only separate artistic projects and or artworks are attributed to acoustic ecology. The initiatives of soundscape in Lithuania are spreading in several parallel directions. On the one hand, traditional composers more often involve soundscapes in their works, gradually moving from interpretation towards the documentation techniques, from traditional understanding of music towards the art of sound. In its turn, the principles of representation and documentation dominate among amateur musicians, when their generation enters the territories of the interpretation technique. Nowadays the watershed between “professionals” and “non-professionals” is rather faded; they take part in joint events, festivals, common creative projects. The same can be said about the definition of soundscape music that balances between music and sound art, sound recordings and listening practices.

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Kraštogarsio kompozicijos Lietuvoje: nuo interpretavimo iki dokumentavimo

Santrauka

Kraštogarsio idėjos kilmė ir raida yra tiesiogiai susijusi su medijų istorija ir besikeičiančiomis technologijomis, kurios atvėrė naujas klausymosi galimybes ir formas, atnaujino požiūrį į garsą, jo vaidmens menė ir visuomeniniame gyvenime pokyčius. Terminas „kraštogarsis“ (angl. *soundscape*) autorystė yra priskiriama kanadiečių kompozitoriui ir garso ekologui R. M. Schaferiui, kuris XX a. 6 deš. pabaigoje – 7 deš. pradžioje išklė visuotinio akustinės aplinkos pripažinimo idėją. Jo kraštogarsio samprata tam tikra prasme yra analogiška kraštovaizdžio (angl. *landscape*) konceptui: kraštovaizdis apibrėžia vizualinę vietovės aprėptį, o kraštogarsis – jos garsinį turinį, visus garsus, kurie pasiekia mūsų klausą tam tikroje vietoje.

R. M. Schaferio atstovaujama kraštogarsio kompozicija išklė kitus tikslus ir akcentavo ne tiek kompozitoriaus saviraiškos aspektą, kiek siekį atkreipti dėmesį į garsinę aplinką, klausymosi fenomeną, žmonių ir gamtos sistemas vienijančius aspektus. Nors dauguma šiandieninių kraštogarsio menininkų derina skirtingus kūrybinius metodus ir priemones, visos jos kyla iš kelių esminių lauko įrašų (angl. *field recording*) nuostatų.

Priklausomai nuo santykio su įrašoma aplinka, gali būti skiriamos kelios komponavimo technikos: dokumentavimas, reprezentavimas, interpretavimas. Pirmoji – dokumentavimas – tai neapdorotas garso įrašas ar tiesioginio garso transliacija. Tai tam tikras neutralus įrašinėtojo santykis su aplinka, apsiribojantis tik vietos ir laiko parinkimu bei įrašyto garso perkėlimu į kitą kontekstą (CD, radiją ar pan.). Apibendrintai tai galima vadinti „surastais“ kūriniais, kuriuose autorystės ryškumas yra minimalus. Antroji technika – reprezentavimas – apima redaguotus (atrinktus, sumontuotus, apdorotus) garso įrašus. Tai skirtingu metu ar net skirtingose vietose daryti įrašai, sujungti į vieną siekiant išgauti apibendrinančią įrašomos vietos reprezentaciją. Trečioji technika – interpretavimas – bene artimiausia tradicinei konkrečiai muzikai, kuria laisvai manipuluojami įrašyti garsai ar jų segmentai, jie transformuojami ir dėliojami laisva kompozitoriaus valia į naujas kompozicijas.

Pirmieji kraštogarsio kompozicijų pavyzdžiai Lietuvoje priskirtini interpretavimo tipui, kai pasitelkus įrašytus garsus buvo kuriamos juostinės kompozicijos. Tai Tomo Juzeliūno „Telephonics“ (1987), Šarūno Nako „Prie Dangaus vartų“ (2000) ir kt.

Interpretavimo metodas dirbant su aplinkos garsais artimesnis akademinį išsilavinimą turintiems „tradiciniams“ kompozitoriams, o reprezentavimo ir (ar) dokumentavimo būdai dažniau pasitaiko „neprofesionalų“ muzikų ar kitų sričių menininkų veikloje (A. Rugys, V. Blažys ir kt.). Bene arčiausiai dokumentavimo yra Andriaus Šimkūno veikla. Jis tiesiog įrašinėja aplinkos (dažniausiai negyvosios) garsus ar daiktus, tam panaudoja kontaktinius mikrofonus.

Prie dokumentavimo žanro galima priskirti Lietuvos garsų žemėlapius: Antano Kučinsko inicijuoti projektai www.soundscape.lt ir www.ltsounds.com, Marielle Vitureau www.kitastotelestotis.lt.

Apibendrinant šias glaustas įžvalgas galima konstatuoti, kad kraštogarsio iniciatyvos Lietuvoje plito keliomis paraleliomis kryptimis. Viena vertus, tradiciniai kompozitoriai vis dažniau įtraukdavo aplinkos garsus į savo kūrinius, pamažu slinkdami nuo interpretavimo link dokumentavimo technikų. Kita vertus, neakademinių menininkų darbuose pastebimos intencijos neapsiriboti dokumentavimo technika bei siekis akcentuoti muzikinius šio žanro aspektus.