

Recording the environment: creating an archive of ambience

Budhaditya Chattopadhyay, Satyajit Ray Film and Television Institute, Kolkata, India

Nearly every day sounds are disappearing from our environment; new sounds are replacing them; sounds that are monochromatic in texture and quality, initiates transfiguration within the sound world, turning it into a homogenized sound-space. However, the specter of change has become all pervasive in the contemporary world severely reorganized by phenomena like globalization, urbanization, digitization and convergence. These phenomena are noticeably evident in developing countries like India where the places are rapidly transforming into industrial belts, special economic zones and landscapes of gross urbanization; the audiovisual world changes accordingly creating lapses and lacunas within the cultural memory. Environmental sounds or ambience of places are significantly affected by the processes of metamorphoses while subtle and discreet sound objects stop producing sound under the pressure of a new hegemonic industrial soundscape. These sounds are gradually getting lost from the aural landscape as well as from collective tradition and associated sound culture. Question is how these sounds can be restored on recording media? We can consider the indigenous and personal archives created and maintained by the individual sound chroniclers like field recordists, nature recordists and phonographers who keep track of changing sounds; and they are indeed forming a virtual repository however discreetly with their efforts at recording our environment with the help of different digital recording devices currently available at ease. Nonetheless, a sound that is yet to be recorded can fade away in this ever evaporating landscape of change, making it increasingly impossible to return to the sound source that eludes to be archived and kept for future reference. This requires further awareness of ambience as the repository of natural and ecological resources of the audiovisual heritage of places. The local archives formed by these discreet sound recordings need to be networked as social hubs for exchange, access and formulating awareness for archiving sounds from our very surrounding environment and everyday atmosphere. This paper is an endeavor to write on environmental sounds in extinction in order to propose formation of a networked archive for environmental sound or ambience to promote the culture of sound archiving at large, particularly from developing countries like India where the acoustic environment are under severe transformation. If we concentrate into a few chosen areas for localization to understand the change in the soundscapes; and few representative efforts of phonographic studies, these observations can be articulated with some illustrations.