

CORE SAMPLE by Teri Rueb

Art on the Harbor Islands, June 23 - October 8, 2007
Spectacle Island & ICA Founders Gallery

Overview

Core Sample is a GPS-based interactive sound walk and corresponding sound sculpture that evokes the material and cultural histories contained in and suggested by the landscape of Spectacle Island. The piece engages the extended landscape of Boston Harbor as bound by the new Boston Institute of Contemporary Art building on the downtown waterfront, and Spectacle Island, a former dump and reclaimed landfill park visible just off the coast. The two sites function dialogically, questioning what is seen versus what is not seen, what is preserved and recorded versus what is suppressed.

Spectacle Island was recently transformed into a publicly accessible landfill park after serving the city of Boston as a dump for nearly a century. The island has long been used for recreation, recycling and waste disposal, having been home to horse rendering and grease extraction plants, casinos, hotels and families who worked in these industries. 20th century waste and recycling industries eventually reduced the island to a toxic state such that it was closed in the late 1950s. Recently capped with tons of excavation material from Boston's Big Dig Tunnel Project, the island is now a public landfill park that includes over 28,000 plantings embedded in a top layer of scientifically formulated loam.

Core Sample seeks to pierce the picturesque surface that conceals Spectacle Island's complex past, present and future, exposing it through layers of sound. Visitors to the island borrow small computer / headphone units equipped with GPS and wander the island to hear sounds inspired by the island's complex material and cultural history. Sounds play back automatically as the GPS senses the visitor's movement in the landscape. Over 250 sounds are spatially and thematically organized according to elevation, evoking a metaphoric core sample. Open cell headphones allow blurring to occur between actual and pre-recorded ambient sound. Abstract sounds and musical compositions are sparsely punctuated with occasional passages of spoken word, dissolving boundaries between surface and core, natural and artificial, industrial and organic, past, present and future. Spoken word passages include interviews with current and former island residents and laborers, landfill technology experts, and botanists who study disturbed landscapes and ecosystems.

Visitors to the museum encounter a ninety-nine foot sound sculpture that first appears as a railing running the length of the gallery that overlooks the harbor. The sculpture, embedded with tactile drivers, functions as a giant speaker. Sounds from the island installation quietly emanate from within the form at spatial intervals corresponding to the "depths" of the metaphoric core sample. The sculpture invites the absent-minded touch of viewers as they lean on the railing to take in the view. The soundscape is subtle, cycling through thematic sequences such that it may even be mistaken for ambient outdoor sound permeating the glass façade.

Awards and reviews

- Prix Ars Electronica Award of Distinction: Digital Musics
http://www.aec.at/en/prix/winners_awards.asp
- Networked Music Review, turbulence.org
http://transition.turbulence.org/networked_music_review/2007/07/13/teri-rueb-core-sample/
- The Boston Phoenix, "Flow Chart." Greg Cook
<http://thephoenix.com/Boston/Arts/44674-Flow-chart/>
- Mobile Sound blog, Frauke Behrendt
<http://mobilesound.wordpress.com/2007/09/19/magic-moments-butterflies-and-a-gps-sound-walk/>

About the Artist

TERI RUEB is a landscape artist whose work engages digital, architectural and traditional media and modes of production. Working in the domain of what she has coined "network landscapes", her large-scale responsive environments and location-aware installations explore issues of architecture and urbanism, landscape and the body, and sonic and acoustic space. She has created GPS-based interactive sound installations since 1996 and has received numerous grants and commissions from institutions including The Banff Center for the Arts, the Boston ICA, LEF Foundation, Artslink, Turbulence.org, the Akademie der Kuenst, Cuxhavener Kunstverein, the U.S. National Park Service, and various State Arts Councils. Rueb has lectured and presented her work worldwide at venues including ISEA, SIGGRAPH, Transmediale, ResFest, Consciousness Reframed, The New Museum of Contemporary Art, Kiasma, the Corcoran Gallery of Art, Bell Laboratories, Interval Research and IR-CAM. Her work has been published and anthologized in diverse publications including "Information Arts: Intersections of Art, Science and Technology", (Ed. Wilson, MIT Press), "Digital Art" (Ed. Christiane Paul, Thames & Hudson, World of Art Series, 2nd edition), and "Second Person: New Media as Story, Performance and Game" (Eds. Harrigan and Wardrip-Fruin, MIT Press). She recently published an essay in "Small Tech: The Culture of Digital Tools" (Ed. Hawk et al, University of Minnesota Press). Rueb holds degrees from New York University / Tisch School of the Arts / Interactive Telecommunications Program and Carnegie Mellon University where she studied Art & Literary and Cultural Studies. She is currently a doctoral candidate at the Harvard University Graduate School of Design where her research addresses the intersection of mobile network culture and constructions of landscape and subjectivity. She is Department Head of Digital + Media at the Rhode Island School of Design and is founder and principal of Open Air Studio in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Her work is documented online at www.terirueb.net

Credits and Acknowledgments

CORE SAMPLE | TERI RUEB *Spectacle Island*: Sound Design: Peter Segerstrom, Additional sound production: Ean White. *ICA Founders Gallery*: Teri Rueb with Michelle Fornabai, Sound Design: Ean White, Additional sound composition: Peter Segerstrom, Fabrication: Charles Mathis. Special thanks to Kate Rivera, Ken & Jenny Hollingsworth, Niall Kirkwood and Peter del Tredici for interviews on the island. Additional thanks to all the many talented students at RISD | Digital + Media, especially Serena Kuo and Lucas Roy. And most of all, to Erik Conrad.