

direction, and with it a fascination with paganism, the occult, and – a recurring theme in the hauntological world – ghosts. Late 1960s and 70s folk-horror films like *The Wicker Man*, beloved by many hauntological artists, offer a certain satisfying sense of mystery and escape from 21st century urban culture.

But, more than anything, the fascination with, and creative use of, physical spaces, especially faintly remembered ones, distinguishes hauntology from other musical genres. Howlround's *The Ghosts Of Bush* incorporates sounds of the studios, corridors and stairwells in empty BBC building Bush House. Vaporwave (arguably a sub-genre of hauntology) is built around the eerie romanticism of dead shopping malls. Richard Skelton's work focuses on rural and desolate landscapes.

One explanation for this recurring theme comes from cultural critic Svetlana Boym. Making a distinction between what she calls restorative and reflective nostalgia, she writes that while the former merely longs for the static monuments of a clearly recalled past, the latter "lingers on ruins, the patina of time and history, in the dreams of another place and another time".

Dave Mandl

***Do What You Fear Most: The History Of The Velvet Underground*
Richie Unterberger**

Omnibus Hbk 804 pp

Although this surely will not be the last book written about Manhattan's most legendary band, it's equally certain all subsequent Velvet Underground books will mine this one for facts. *Do What You Fear Most* is the second volume Richie Unterberger has devoted to the band, and in many ways it's an expanded, narrative-driven version of his 2009 tome, *White Light/White Heat: The Velvet Underground Day-By-Day*.

Unterberger, who I first encountered when he was the editor of *Option*, has become one of the major rock researchers of his era, authoring countless band bios for the *AllMusic* site, over 200 sets of sleeve notes

and more than a dozen books. His writing style can be dry, but his ability to collect and weave together disparate historical threads is excellent, and his tenacity in chasing down all possible versions of stories that have swirled mysteriously around VU for the past 60 years is unparalleled. Which is especially useful since The Velvet Underground are a band whose tale has more countervailing viewpoints than Kurosawa's *Rashomon*.

The early portions of the book are the most revelatory. Since the band's debut album is not released until page 300 or so, there is much data about how early gigs came about, how Lou Reed's work for Pickwick Records actually proceeded, the sequence of interactions between John Cale's music inside and outside the band, details of their management structure, etc and so on. This may sound boring, but as someone who's been listening to and reading about VU since early 1968, the revelations and specifics are riveting. There are still many nuggets of history that aren't settled, but Unterberger does a great job tracing them back to their sources, then allowing readers to weigh the facts that exist.

One of the most heartening aspects of the book is his devotion to highlighting the work of drummer Maureen Tucker and guitarist Sterling Morrison, who are often treated as minor figures in the VU saga. Citing contemporary live reviews in which Tucker is repeatedly called the best rock drummer ever and Morrison gets full credit for his amazing lead guitar work, Unterberger puts balance back into a story that has too long revolved around Cale and Reed, as well as Nico, whose presence was always somewhat tangential.

My only real gripe is that Unterberger does not seem to believe that the avant garde noise aspect of VU was truly the original basis of their appeal. To my mind, they began as part of an ecstatic spasm of intermedia art that was in the air of Manhattan's lower quadrant in the early 60s. The 200 to 300 freaks involved in creating the poetry/free jazz/pop art/avant noise/Fluxus/happening/folk music/art film scene were a vital community, and VU (along with The Fugs) were that scene's hometown band.

To infer, as Unterberger does, that The Velvet Underground were more interesting in their latter iteration (with Doug Yule, without Cale and Nico) simply because they were a "better" rock band misconstrues the amazing impact of their first two LPs. But that's a personal aesthetic quibble, and one that will be argued for years.

In the meantime, if you're already a VU devotee, *Do What You Fear Most* will answer a lot of questions. Not the best place to start if you're not fully conversant with the band, but if that's the case, what are you waiting for? Get started elsewhere. You'll end up reading this one eventually.

Byron Coley

***Conversation Avec Edgard Varèse*
Gunther Schuller**

Lenka lente Pbk 36 pp

This recent offering from the Nantes based publisher Lenka lente can hardly be called a book, and at 36 pages (which furthermore includes both English and French versions of the text) is barely even a booklet. But the thin paperback, a reprint of a 1965 conversation between two of the most important figures in 20th century music for the academic journal *Perspectives Of New Music*, is no less indispensable for that. It is also priced at a reasonable €7.

Conversation is not so much a conversation as an interview with Edgard Varèse conducted by Gunther Schuller, the musician/composer probably best known for coining the term third stream to describe his then radical vision of a classical/jazz hybrid in the late 50s. Varèse, for his part, was among other things a pioneer of musique concrète, incorporating such non-musical instruments as sirens and whistles in his work. He was also an early adopter of electronic instruments, including the theremin, and of multitrack tape.

Though Schuller was clearly familiar with Varèse's philosophies and the progression of his work throughout his life (significantly, the interview took place just months before Varèse's death), the conversation is dominated by a highly articulate Varèse expounding on his work and the development of his ideas, with Schuller providing only gentle prompts. The interview – by word count a fairly standard magazine length piece – is dense enough in detail that it stands on its own as a solid introduction to Varèse.

Much of the interview is taken up with reminiscences going back to Varèse's childhood, and they show that certain pieces were already falling into place then. At the age of 11, when he wrote an opera based on a Jules Verne novel, he claims that he already "detested" all conventional instruments. When he first learned the musical scales, he reacted with "Well, they all sound alike".

He rebelled against his father, who had insisted that he study mathematics and physics, and apparently against some of his early teachers, leaving several conservatories either voluntarily or involuntarily. Significantly, at a young age he was already disenchanted with the tempered, 12-tone system and incredulous that composers should limit themselves to it when musical instruments



The Velvet Underground

A radical new contribution to vocal theory argues for the voice as something we feel as much as something we listen to

By Matthew Blackwell

Building A Voice: Sound, Surface, Skin
Zeynep Bulut

Goldsmiths Press Hbk 259 pp

In 2006, Zeynep Bulut wrote a performance piece called *Dialogues Between Multiple Soul-Mates* that required her to sing briefly into plastic bags, zip them up and throw them away. That piece contains the main concepts that would motivate her research for the next 20 years: voice, surface, plasticity. She noted that her voice sounded different depending on the type of bag used, which would in turn sound different depending on her vocal techniques. Expanding on this observation, she asks how our voices change according to our surroundings, and even considers how material objects might have their own voices too.

Of course, it's not as simple as 'having' a voice; as Bulut puts it in her title, one must build a voice, and a voice is always partial, contextual, in progress. Her objective in *Building A Voice: Sound, Surface, Skin* is to investigate this process and explore its political ramifications. She does so through a resolutely non-linguistic lens, not interested in communication but in "non-dialogic voicing", instances of voice that don't necessarily call for understanding or response.

Bulut writes that "we can feel responsible for one another without knowing or saying, without being reduced to the theoretical logos or intentions of language". This focus on experiential, tactile modes of voice leads to a compelling set of case studies that encompasses experimental music, psychotherapy and technology.

Building A Voice is divided into three parts, "Plastic", "Electric" and "Haptic". The first part details how voice responds to, and is shaped by, its environment through three works: Henry Eliot's multimedia walk/reading of TS Eliot's *The Waste Land* throughout London; John Cage's 1970 piece *Song Books*, based in part on Henry David Thoreau's accounts of Concord, Massachusetts; and Pauline Oliveros's *Environmental Dialogue*. In each case, there is no actual dialogue – the East London Cemetery doesn't "talk back" to the poem – but voices take part in a complex network of distributed meaning in which awareness and intentionality are shifted and amplified via their surroundings.

In the second part, voices do indeed come from the environment, whether external or internal. Christina Kubisch's project *Electrical Walks* uncovers the voices of the electrical grid with special electromagnetic headphones, making ATMs and automatic doors sing out. Then, with the assistance of



Christina Kubisch

various technologies, schizophrenics and other voice-hearers externalise their inner voices via therapies that reconfigure our notion of empathy.

Aside from voice, skin is the most important concept in Bulut's argument, and "voice-as-skin" perhaps her most abstract coinage. In her definition, skin is "a sounding board that both echoes and diffracts", a "surface that does not simply operate with words", but with "sensations, affects, feelings and chills". Voice-as-skin, then, can be imagined as an invisible surface that both connects and separates us. The book's third section "Haptic" grounds this concept with a discussion of touch-based musical technologies like the BioMuse, the Xth Sense, and the Oral Resonance Ball (ORB). In different ways, these instruments translate gestures and biodata into sound or vocals into tactile vibrations. Unlike Siri or Alexa, they don't presume to communicate; instead, their value is in the indeterminate, expressive nature of their output.

The political meaning of this multi-sensory cacophony of voices lies exactly in this indeterminacy. Our age is defined by uncertainty, and navigating a multitude of voices unlike our own is one of our greatest responsibilities.

"The point," Bulut writes, "is that we would hear a variety of voices including the ones we might possibly miss or otherwise dismiss." To recognise a voice, we not only have to listen, but to feel. ●

were capable of a far wider range of sounds.

Most intriguing (and revealing, in the context of the more mature works that he's known for), he describes his early compositions as "architectonic", which he means almost literally, as in "blocks of sound... I was preoccupied with volume in an architectural sense". He claims that, early on, he wasn't influenced by composers as much as by physical objects and phenomena, and just so there's no mistaking what he means, he discusses how fascinated he was by the varieties of granite he saw when visiting his grandfather in Burgundy. No one familiar with the battalions of percussion Varèse used

in pieces like *Ionisation*, and the dozens of woodwind and brass instruments he deployed in *Amériques*, will be surprised by this.

On electronic and computer music, still a fairly recent development in 1965, Varèse differentiates himself from composers like Milton Babbitt (whom he admired) by remarking that Babbitt developed his music first and then had it performed on the synthesizer. This was a traditional composer's approach, in which he exerted control over the electronic materials as if he were above them.

Varèse, on the other hand, wanted to "compose with living sounds", initiating electronic sounds live and having them

take their own course. "I want to be in the material, part of the acoustical vibration." And on John Cage (whom he also had mostly kind words for, and whom he'd known back when Cage was first making the move from painting to music), Varèse differed on what might be called the performative aspect of his work. He felt that one of Cage's objectives was "to create a spectacle in order to reach the public". Varèse, in contrast, cared more about "reaching certain musical-acoustical phenomena" than about reaching the public. His goal, as he described it, was "to disturb the atmosphere".

Dave Mandl