

## Intermedial environmental aesthetics in the music of Erland Cooper

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In this paper, we investigate the role of poetry in contemporary music audiences' perceptions of musical meaning, focusing on the relationship between musical aesthetics and the natural world. Our aim is to advance understanding the intermediality of environmental themes in contemporary music and their impact on listeners' interpretations and experiences. To do so, we consider how contemporary composers have chosen to integrate nature-focused poetry—both spoken and set to music—into their work, focusing on a single case-study: the recent music of Scottish composer Erland Cooper.

Musicologists have engaged extensively in ecocritical analysis of individual musical works and their texts, demonstrating how composers construct and represent ideas of the natural world in their music. However, we don't yet know how such analyses correspond with audiences' experiences, particularly with regard to perceptions of nature-related meanings in contemporary music.

As a result, in this paper, we adopt a combined music-analytic and social-psychological approach, presenting musical and poetic analysis of Cooper's album *Folded Landscapes* (2023) together with qualitative insights from an ongoing survey of Cooper's audiences. Through analysing and interpreting specific music recordings, performances, and associated paratextual materials, we aim to characterise Cooper's musico-poetic practices and the environmental values they afford.

Our analysis shows that the incorporation of poetry and spoken word into Cooper's music enables audiences to experience the music as a space for reflection on nature, which highlights its entanglement in processes of environmental meaning-making. We pay close attention to Cooper's creation of an intermedial aesthetic that exploits multiple senses, yoking spoken word together with sung vocals, instrumental music, nature recordings, and visuals. We examine how Cooper incorporates recordings made by renowned poets (including the current British Poet Laureate, Simon Armitage), as well as the sounds of Orcadian dialects and soundscapes (via field recordings), in his music to evoke the sense of a place-specific natural world. The paper helps develop a theoretical framework that can inform the way we understand the place of spoken word in audiences' environmental values.

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