



## JASON.SLOAN

### The Persistence of the Landscape

#### FIELDS

...the landscape is in constant evolution. from the aural elements to its physical structure; minute to minute it is never the same. this hybrid creation of both the sound and structure born from a cycle of birth and death, so to speak, is the core of the FIELDS series of performances and recordings. in this trilogy of three sound works [each movement titled with the longitude and latitude coordinates which generated the original audio files used to create each part] the decision to use analogue cassettes seemed like the only logical choice in attempting to re.create this “constant evolution.” an analogue recording is more malleable because of it’s susceptibility to change. each time the cassette is played, rewind or fast forwarded, the actual tape is stretched, altering its content slightly. because each transcription device used to playback the content is different, the alteration that occurs is unique for each individual listener. this process is not true with optical or digital recordings. therefore, the deterioration which occurs, eventually makes each listening experience very unique. just as

any experience in a shared space yields a different response to every visitor...

– Jason.Sloan

Jennie Fleming: The FIELDS series examines the metamorphosis of landscape with three different fields you have chosen. How did the FIELDS series begin? Could you explain more about the significance of the chosen fields?

Jason.Sloan: I’ve always been drawn to open remote spaces since I was very young. Growing up in the country I would lay in a huge field near my parents house looking towards the sky watching airplanes fly overhead. I’d imagine myself on board, not caring where they were going. At the time, it was the only thing that allowed me an opportunity to escape feeling trapped in the middle of nowhere. This became a very sacred space and a refuge. After moving away for college, I found myself attracted to another field that ironically, was directly across from the residence hall I was living in. I began to have paranormal experiences while living there and through further investigation pin pointed them to

ABOVE: FIELD // 41° 07.750' 079°  
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Digital image



the field. This really peaked my interest in the paranormal sciences, which had always been there but was dormant for while. A few years later, I came across some photos of Stonehenge in Wiltshire England, and became very curious about the huge field across from the henge and the numerous burial mounds located there. Ploughs have now flattened many of these mounds over the years but some impressive barrow cemeteries can still be seen there. When I visited these barrows for the first time last summer, I was immediately taken by the scale. After spending sometime there, I began to think how the landscape of this space has changed over the years, but yet certain elements both visible and invisible remain constant. After this trip, it became pretty clear to me that these three fields have played a rather large role in my life. At that point I decided to create a series of work that explored the visual, sonic and spiritual properties of these spaces and their evolutions.

JF: Importance of three? The series does seem to suggest a trinity of personal space, intellectual space, and sacred space.

JS: It's probably just ironic, but most times when I work, I seem to settle on three works in most series. It isn't a con-

scious decision on my part, it just usually ends up that way. For this project, while doing some research I discovered the three smallest bones in the human body, the auditory ossicles, are located in the inner ear and these are critical to our ability to hear. That was pretty interesting because the core of this work is about the sonic properties of these spaces. Maybe being raised Catholic has some subconscious influence, but the trinity also appears in many religions beyond Catholicism. The three Indian Gods for example are Brahma, Vishnu, Maheshwara (Shiva); three Greek gods: Zeus, Poseidon, Hades (Air, Water, Earth); it just goes on and on.

JF: Explain the process behind each FIELDS piece, how you gather visual and aural evidence from the site and further extract information from the documents themselves to compose the works.

JS: The process for the FIELDS series begins by visiting the site and spending some time there to familiarize or re.familiarize myself with the location. I then used portable solid state recorder with a couple high end stereo microphones and recorded about two hours of audio from different locations within the field. I also take as many photographs as I can to create a visual record of the loca-

ABOVE: FIELD // 41° 52.216' 080°  
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ABOVE: FIELD : 51° 10' 48.213" // -1°  
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audio cassette and artist book

tion during the time I'm there. For the field across from my former residence hall where I had many paranormal experiences, I conducted two separate recording sessions. The first was for a few hours during the day and the second was in the evening. For the recordings at night, I conducted a three hour EVP session<sup>1</sup> from 11:00pm until 2:00am. After parsing through all the data, I use a variety of software applications, both prewritten and custom, that allow me to extract or convert the images into audio. This concept is interesting to me because many cultures believe photographs capture a part of our soul or the energy of a space. So maybe this is one method of extracting the energy, literally or conceptually. During the recording where I conducted an EVP session, I did capture some rather interesting, unexplained audio I did not hear at the time. For this FIELD work, I've embedded the recording into the final work as looping subliminal audio that only the subconscious may hear.

JF: McLuhan believed that before the invention of the alphabet, humans lived in an acoustic space, a world of speech that was boundless and emotional, as opposed to the space of the written word, which he viewed as fragmented

and distanced.<sup>2</sup> Western artists perceived their environment as purely visual; they depicted what they could see. Non-Western and ancient cultures integrate time and space by depicting everything they know, rather than only what the see.<sup>3</sup> In your practice then, you want to incorporate not just what you see, but what you hear, and quite possibly what you do not see or hear, but feel about a particular landscape.

JS: Correct. The key word is "feel." The emotive dialogue a space can have with a person is very important and interests me very much. I've always been fascinated by the idea of how sound, smell, and other non-visual senses, not historically associated with the visual arts, can trigger very powerful and sometimes forgotten or repressed memories. People have a bounty of perceptions that I would like to tap into, and FIELDS is just scratching the surface.

JF: In earlier conversations, we talked about your choice to use audio cassette tape as the medium for the sound portion of the work. The first FIELDS release, received some baffled and even harsh feedback from people who acquired your other sound works in the cd or mp3 formats. You talked about the cassettes being a tactile experience, in which you have to invest time; they do not offer immediate gratification like an mp3 file.

JS: The idea of the cassette being a tactile object was very important to me. I do believe our culture is becoming less and less interested in the object as far as music is concerned. The birth of digital distribution and P2P (peer-to-peer) services allows instant gratification and in many cases for next to nothing in terms of cost. How can you compete with this? I don't particularly think there is anything wrong with this direction as the method of delivery has always evolved. We've gone from vinyl to eight track, to cassette tape and then to compact disc. The removal of the actual packaging is all that is really left to do. What saddens me about it is the package was always part of the experience. When I listened to a record, cassette or even

a cd, I would take the time to listen to the music while reading the liner notes on the sleeve, following along with the lyrics and looking forward to the second side of the record or cassette. For the true music lover, this ritual is slowly becoming extinct. This was some of the reasoning I used when deciding to release *FIELDS* on cassette. The package was also rather elaborate and came packaged with a book containing many images of the *FIELD* and text discussing the project. It was interesting when it was released because there was somewhat of an unexpected backlash. Many people that have purchased my work in the past were very upset about *FIELD* being only available on a cassette. They shared their feelings on a few public discussion boards about it and many stated they didn't even care about the package, all they wanted was the music.

JF: Beyond the cassette tape's tactility, you seem interested in exploiting the weakness of the medium, its malleability, so that the sound ultimately changes over a period of listening, just as the landscape changes.

JS: Correct. That is another reason for my decision to use a cassette for *FIELDS*. The landscape is in a constant state of flux from one second to another and I wanted to literally capture the essence of this process. Today's digital media is about longevity and being archival, magnetic tape is not. Over time the tape stretches and eventually becomes worn out. Every time it is wound on the reel it slowly stretches, slightly altering the content. I've also found different playback devices can slightly vary in speed depending on the vintage and this also aids in an individual aural experience.

JF: In the Edinboro field, you mentioned in your research discovering a history of paranormal experiences that you knew of anecdotally while attending college there.

JS: Yes, that's true. If there are spirits or residual energy in that *FIELD*, I feel it's important to keep it intact. This is what brought me to my choice for including

any EVP's I may have captured. As mentioned earlier, EVP or Electronic Voice Phenomena are unexplained sounds and/or disembodied voices that appear on audio recordings. No one has every really been able to explain this phenomena. There are many theories as to what they could be but nothing has ever really been proven. I was always fascinated by the paranormal growing up and studied it pretty heavily, but never had any first hand experiences until I began college. I never really discussed it that much, but because it's part of my history with that space I feel it's important in this work. When I traveled back to that *FIELD* this summer to record the audio and photographs, I did capture some rather interesting EVP's that are included as subliminals in the final work. The choice to make them inaudible to the conscious mind was key because they are something many times we cannot hear at the time we are recording them. It's not until we play back the session that we discover the results. Because these may be spectral voices, I wanted to keep that sense of mystery about them and a feeling of wonderment.

JF: How do subliminals work?

JS: Subliminal audio is any sound or collection of sounds that are above the range of what can be perceived by the human ear but are recognizable to the unconscious mind. Some people are more sensitive to this than others. Although this idea is still very controversial subliminal audio is most effective when it is within the 18KHz range. There are different tonal ranges that can help the mind to tune into subliminal audio. The 1 to 3Hz range [Delta or sleep state], the 3-6Hz range [Theta or deep meditative state] and the 6-12Hz range [Alpha or relaxed alert state].

JF: After our first meeting discussing this project, I found a book by Emily D. Edwards, *Metaphysical Media: The Occult Experience in Popular Culture*. Have you read it? I haven't been able to give it a full read, but she brings up an interesting point about how technological media, as extensions of our physical

bodies, can also expand the limitations of our physical bodies and engage human metaphysical faculties.<sup>4</sup> She also talked about how medium is defined as the agent through which information is transmitted, and medium is also the term used to describe a person who communicates with spirits. Media can allow humans to transcend mortality.

JS: That book has been recommended to me a few times, but I have not read it yet. I do believe that technological media can allow us to expand our awareness beyond normal perceptions. Humans have been trying to do this for centuries through the use of all kinds of analogue, electronic and now digital devices. George Meek and Bill O'Neil's SPIRICOM device in the late 70's is one of the better documented experiments into this field.<sup>5</sup> I think the statement about media allowing us to transcend mortality is a powerful statement and historically our western culture doesn't give much credibility to these ideas which is unfortunate. What I have found interesting recently is how media has begun to mainstream these ideas in television shows like *Ghosthunters* and *A Haunting*. This dialogue has now become a bit more acceptable to discuss since it's a part of our reality television line up. The paranormal in media isn't anything new, but until now most of it was kept on the fictional side of the fence.

JF: As an aside, you mentioned in an earlier interview that you placed an ad for the first FIELDS project in Second Life, causing quite a bit of irritation. What did you do?

JS: That's a funny story. I've been using Second Life for a few years now for an ongoing project that allows me, at least in theory, to surpass our human body and become post-human. I'm working on a script that will keep my avatar logged in to the Second Life grid, animate and interacting. So hypothetically, if I died, my avatar could go on living in this life while I moved on to whatever is next. I could be a binary-ghost unless Linden Labs pulls the plug on their servers [laughs]. Anyway, while I was adventuring in Second Life, I decided to post huge floating billboards advertising the FIELDS proj-

ect in the first life. The ads had a URL to my site and other information about the project. I think I probably dropped close to 200 ads in different regions and places, most of which were vandalized, removed or sent back to me. The first round of this project was really met with a lot of unexpected hostility, initially because of the method of delivery (cassettes), and then all the ads in Second Life.<sup>6</sup>

1 EVP or Electronic Voice Phenomena are unexplained sounds and/or disembodied voices that appear on audio recording. Their origins begin around 1959, when Swedish painter and film producer Friedrich Jürgenson was recording bird songs. Upon playing the tape later, he heard what he interpreted to be his dead father's voice and then the spirit of his deceased wife calling his name. "Breakthrough - An Amazing Experiment in Electronic Communication with the Dead" first published in 1968, was the first of many books to be written on the topic.

2 McLuhan, Marshall. "The medium is the message." *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. New York: Signet, 1964. 48.

3 Ibid. 56.

4 Edwards, Emily D. *Metaphysical Media: The Occult Experience in Popular Culture*. Carbondale, Illinois: Southern University Press, 2005. 22-3.

5 From 1979 to 1982, George Meek and Bill O'Neil developed a device they dubbed the "SPIRICOM" (short for spirit communication). The SPIRICOM was a set of 13 tone generators spanning the frequency range of the adult male voice. The idea was to use the different frequency waves being generated, as a carrier signal for the voice of any willing disembodied human who spoke from the other side. Recordings of the SPIRICOM in action still exist today.

6 The interview was compiled over several in-person interviews, phone conversations, and e-mail conversations between January and July, 2008.



ABOVE: Sloan Recording in  
FIELD // 41° 52.216' 080° 06.967' 2008  
Digital image