

## ROBERT CURGENVEN – CLIMATA – Part 1: Précis

Open to the sky and outside world via their ceiling apertures, James Turrell's Skyspaces let in and frame not only the light famous to Turrell's installation but also sound and its medium, air. Through the use of sound, meteorological, geo-philosophical and socio-cultural dimensions, framed by the Skyspaces and their archetypical architecture, can be made tangibly and physically apparent.

*Climata* is a project posited between sound and contemporary visual arts, comprised entirely of site-specific recordings made across 9 countries in 15 of James Turrell's Skyspaces, an architectural light installation. Each of the individual recordings, with their quiet & slowly changing microtonal interventions made in-situ, interrogate and offer a specific document of weather, location and duration framed by the architecture of the Skyspace – a frame that blurs the distinction between interiority and exteriority – while also allowing the physicality of the Skyspace to be subtly rendered audible.

Turrell views the 87 Skyspaces around the world as manifestations of a singular work. The 15 Skyspaces selected and recorded for *Climata* are rhizomatic nodes which, through the recording process, become indices within a global matrix. In addition, within the project's recordings, the Skyspaces' architecture frames the additional matrices of weather, location & duration as the air oscillates in and out of the aperture - the threshold between interior and exterior - via the microtonal intervention. From these recordings the resultant archive of over 200 individual recordings, distilled from the sessions in the 15 Skyspaces, itself forms a matrix of these matrices.

Skyspace locations selected for *Climata* range from a rural idyll in [Sweden](#) to a metropolitan hill amidst the cathedrals and sirens of [Salzburg](#), to a sculpture park in [Yorkshire](#) replete with its own quiet population of sheep; from gusty echoes playing out on a [tree-lined lake](#) after a Belgian storm, to the quiet edge of the snowline in the [Swiss Alps](#) and the world's only [light art museum](#). *Climata* covers the breadth of Skyspaces' architecture (circular, square, elliptical, domed) each with their own "piece of sky" beneath an ocean of air.

Through 2015 the series of recordings that constitute *Climata* were undertaken across 15 Skyspace locations in Europe, the UK & Australia to capture the specific relation between the Skyspaces' interior space and the 'outside' world (or more simply, the World). Each of these 200 recordings is very different, but can be characterised by three elements – the sound in the surrounding area outside the Skyspace including sound's terrestrial incarnation as weather; the microtonal intervention via two custom-made oscillators and a portable speaker to yield two quiet tones, both of which have in each instance been tuned closely to the resonant frequencies of each of the Skyspaces that bring the air inside into movement against the air outside, drawing the sounds outside in; and of equal volume is the soft swishing and fluttering of the air as it is brought into motion through the phasing between outside and inside the Skyspace via the tones from the speaker acting upon air framed by the Skyspace's aperture as a Helmholtz resonator. The Skyspaces colour the tones played into them, shaping the air and its exchange with the outside world. Each recording builds a sound atlas of the Skyspaces and their surrounding areas (the Location), the movement of air between the interior and exterior and the unique combination of tones.

You can hear an extract which overlays individual recordings from Skyspaces at Lhoist (BE), Unna (DE), Houghton Hall & Tremeneheere (UK): [https://soundcloud.com/recorded\\_fields/climata-extract](https://soundcloud.com/recorded_fields/climata-extract)

These quietly complex and delicate recordings, made in consultation with James Turrell and the individual Skyspace owners, has been formed into several project outcomes which includes the CD release and installation versions. For the CD release, the archive of recordings has, without any further studio additions, been layered to build a series of microtonal fields framed by each Skyspaces' architecture. These rich shimmering fields are presented as six tracks across the double CD, where the listener can literally hear the air move. The two CDs each comprise three 19minute tracks, each track being composed using layers from up to 40 individual recordings across the 15 Skyspaces, sometimes having up to 10 layers at the most dense moments within the track. The tracks through their simple unprocessed layering, presents the microtonal

intervention and accompanying phasing sound as not just a starkly physical “sound-in-space” which demonstrates a strong interaction with the Skyspaces’ architecture, but each microtonal recording also projects an acoustic agency which interacts with and modulates the constellation of surrounding recordings and their sounds from each location within the mix.

A unique aspect to the format of the double CD release is that the dramaturgical and microtonal basis of the tracks has been structured such that both of the album’s CDs can be played together in any order, ideally on two soundsystems in one room. The CD release essentially a 4channel installation-becoming which will be modulated by its surroundings upon installation through a feature beyond that of a regular CD which yields several hours of unique combinations from two linear 58 minute CDs. The CDs can of course be played individually, but together, their effect becomes like standing in two places (or Skyspaces) at the same time. When both CDs are played together complexity arises such that each combination sounds very different, with new overtones and a different sense of duration emerging from the same fixed time-period. Several of the tracks were also re-recorded in different Skyspaces, providing a final overlay of the acoustic interaction of the microtonal fields of the compositions interacting with an additional Skyspace, specially selected for its own acoustic properties relative to the composition of the track.

The pieces presented on the album represent a matrix of possible pieces when played in combination and, as mentioned, this has been drawn from the matrix of Skyspaces via the series of site-specific microtonal recordings that are themselves a matrix. Each of the 9 possible unique combinations of two pieces together has a different dramaturgy, the individual pieces’ microtonal material plus accompanying sounds from the location specific to the surrounds of each Skyspace modulate one another and produce markedly different experiences for a listener.

A site –specific installation version of *Climata* was first exhibited in the [National Gallery of Australia’s Skyspace](#) where the effects of these fields were even more apparent in the movement of air and relation between inside and outside the Skyspace and how the Skyspaces’ interior architecture shape how quiet sounds from the World move within it in an unusual way. A multichannel sound installation environment has the potential to transport an audience directly into the distinct locations where the microtonal Skyspace recordings were made and experience these locations and the composite recordings’ individual dramaturgies interacting with the Skyspace which forms the site of the installation, in turn modulating and framing these recordings.

The layered combination of recordings in the album and installation compositions also give rise to a new dramaturgical duration from the individual recordings, as the fields of sound describing the matrix of each locale interact, they build additional overtones between the geo-philosophy and meteorological topology as well as the socio-cultural engagement and inhabitation of the area surrounding the Skyspaces. These matrices, together with the physical role of the Skyspace as instrument and filter, underscores *Climata’s* specific relation with sound and air and the considerations that emerge for sound from this approach: one that is truly site-specific. These complex and non-linear relations form the backdrop to the project.

These interlaced and inhabitable fields of sound allow the listener to experience multiple locations through the lens of the Skyspaces, to draw together and hear the specificity of the locations constituting the Skyspaces: the socio-cultural elements present which produced and accompany the manifestation of these art installations and which are also borne out through a geo-philosophy comprising further topological and meteorological dimensions. For example, one of the recordings is embedded in the hum of traffic in a city punctuated by church bells and police sirens in the wind, the sound from which, on their way to the Skyspace, are caught in a convection current rising up a valley and causing a slight change in the movement of sound with each peal and each wail – this complex nesting of elements reveals a set of socio-cultural

relations, which include: the existence, presence and the power of the church<sup>1</sup> and therefore belief systems and aggregations of social order and even moral regulation which may govern cultural values; the enforcement of law and/or the possibility of crime or danger within an urban area of a density suggested by the specificity of the traffic hum and vehicle movement; the cooling of air on sunset that causes a convection shift up a city valley and with it a concomitant change in the city's rhythms. These distinct elements and their depth of field are all heard to be acting amid a socially informed environment<sup>2</sup>, with a further topologically induced meteorological influence upon the transmission of sound through this specific locale as heard through the frame of the Skyspace, which itself with its specific acoustics, colours the sound recorded through distinct phase relations exploited in the microtonal interventions in the recordings.

The microtonal recordings that form the *Climata* project use the Skyspaces as filter and instrument and the layered fields composed from these individual recordings for the installation and album pieces present the aforementioned matrix of weather, location and duration in such a way that 'the world' can be heard to 'intrude' into the recorded fields through the Skyspaces' specific architecture. In combination, these recordings build a gestalt field of these "worlds", the surrounding locations, around each of the Skyspaces: In the same way that the Skyspace-as-matrix may offer views of 15 skies - these are all *one* sky - so too the "worlds" around the Skyspaces are all different facets of the one World we collectively experience and in which the ontologies of the diverse Skyspaces are unified. This is all to say that these locations are all collectively manifest in-the-world as the World rather than constitute separate skies and "worlds"<sup>3</sup>. Rather than fostering a self-awareness through meditational looking-at or listening-to, *Climata* presents an opportunity to instil an awareness of the layers of the world in which art acts via a physical rendering around the aware listener. This rendering is at the core of *Climata*, through the physical medium of sound and its movement through an otherwise invisible and transparent medium: the air that surrounds us.

#### Skyspaces involved in the project:

Tremenheere Sculpture Gardens (UK) – "Kernow Towlwolow" (2015)  
 Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst Antwerpen (Belgium) – "6m Skyspace" (1998)  
 Zentrum für internationale Lichtkunst (Unna, Germany) – "Third Breath" (2005)  
 Hotel Castell (Zuoz, Switzerland) – "Piz Uter" (2005)  
 MAK - Österreichisches Museum für angewandte Kunst (Vienna, Austria) – "Other Horizon" (2004)  
 Wurth Gruppe - Salzburg Museum der Moderne (Salzburg, Austria) – "Blue Pearl" (2006)  
 Kunsthalle Bremen (Bremen, Germany) – "Above – Between – Below" (2011)  
 Lhoist Group Collection (private, Brussels) – "Boullée's Eye" (2003)  
 Yorkshire Sculpture Park (Wakefield, UK) – "Deer Shelter" (2006)  
 Kielder Water & Forest Park (Kielder, UK) – "Cat Cairn" (2000)  
 Houghton Hall, Norfolk (Kings Lynn, UK) – "Seldom Seen" (2004)  
 Kilfane Gardens (Thomastown, Ireland) – "Air Mass" (1994)  
 National Gallery of Australia (Canberra, Australia) – "Within Without" (2010)  
 Kulturforum (Järna, Sweden) – "Outside, Insight" (2011)  
 Ekebergparken Skulpturpark (Oslo, Norway) – "The Color Beneath" (2013)



<sup>1</sup> Cf.: [Alain Corbin - Identity, Bells & the 19C French village](#), study of echo & sonic constitution of territory where "range of the bells in the clock tower defined the limit of a community, socially & administratively."

<sup>2</sup> some of these cultural forces would have constituted the possible commissioning of the Skyspace.

<sup>3</sup> A combined critique of Heidegger's *Worldhood of the world* alongside his 4 different senses of "world" and concept *Dasein* could emerge here. A critique of these phenomenologies would concern *signifying relations*, notions of *being there*, *authenticity* and *disclosure* plus a deconstruction of Heidegger's concept of *otherness*, which could be enacted through the lens of Deleuze's ontological approaches to *geophilosophy* and the subjective notion of (Bergsonian) *duration* as opposed to an objective and linear concept of (Einsteinian) *time*. This will be explored in another text.