

Brainwashed - Kate Carr, "The Story Surrounds Us"

Written by Creag Dunton

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A rather fast follow-up to her last tape (*It Was a Time of Laboured Metaphors*, also on Helen Scarsdale), Australian sound artist Kate Carr's latest work is another entry in a rapidly growing discography that blends elements of both traditional composition and the unpredictable nature of field recordings. She does this and merges them together seamlessly, coming together as a beautiful set of sounds and moods from across the globe, yet still unified as a part of the human experience.

[Helen Scarsdale](#)

Elements of *The Story Surrounds Us* were recorded during Carr's travels to Iceland, Mexico, Sweden, and Spain, all of which clearly had an influence on the work; most obviously in the natural recordings she utilizes throughout. The tape is bookended by two sets of untreated field recordings from Ólafsfjörður, Iceland that perfectly capture the juxtaposition of her work. The first, "The Creaking Door Of The Abandoned Concrete Factory" is half a minute of just that: creaking sounds of post-industrial decay, capturing the emptiness of what surely was once part of a thriving industry. The end is "Water Lapping at Ice on Melting Lake": the sound of wet and watery nature decaying, no doubt exacerbated by the same industry.

Between these two most obvious field recordings lay eight songs that are never truly a-musical, but never become overly conventional either. "Things That Stubbornly And Resiliently Subsist Without Leave" features a lot of sparse, delicate guitar playing, but the musicality is broken up by mysterious, more synthetic-like passages that never become unpleasant. This combination also features heavily in "I Didn't Get A Lot of Sleep in Mexico", with light floating tones melded with processed guitar-like sounds, peppered with incidental found recordings and hints of music throughout.

A brilliant pairing of compositions is the untreated recordings of "Communication Wires In Tropical Storm, Si'an Kaan, Mexico", and their appearance in the more compositionally based "We Were The Pulse Of A Wire Pulled Tightly". The former recordings are simply the sound of

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undulating metallic cables whipped about in heavy winds, taking on an odd beauty that contrasts their significantly more frightening pedigree. On "We Were The Pulse..." they reappear as overt pulses and jittery echoes resonating within electronic swarms and insinuations of percussion. The final product is moody and expansive, but concludes on a much lighter, drifting note compared to its more menacing moments.

Other moments of this tape showcase Carr's more conventional musical tendencies as well. Gentle melodies are the initial focus on "There Was a Lot of Whispering Involved", with a bit of plucked string being counterbalanced by the heavier subterranean rumble. On the whole it sounds much more traditional, but no less gripping. On the other hand, "1001 (Missed Connections)" begins with crackling voices on a PA system and ugly buzzing noises, but soon is realigned into sustained, yet chilly melodic moments. What even resembles a traditional 4/4 bass drum comes in, but just a bit too briefly.

Conceptually, *The Story Surrounds Us* continues Kate Carr's focus on studying the sounds of specific locations, as well as the effects of social decay and its inevitable renewal. However, the music is captivating on its own as well: a wonderful blend of composed sound blended with the incidental, ephemeral sounds that surround us at all times, culminating in a strange, sometimes almost alien, but never mundane experience.

samples:

- [Things That Stubbornly And Resiliently Subsist Without Leave](#)
- [I Didn't Get A Lot of Sleep in Mexico](#)
- [1001 \(Missed Connections\)](#)