

**Approaching an Understanding of ‘Historically-Informed Ecological Sound-Art’
A Ladder is Not the Only Kind of Time as Case Study for a Nonmodern Ecological Art**

Anthropologists, sociologists, and philosophers have increasingly come to reject modern ideas of progress insofar as they can be understood as having contributed to climate breakdown. What is needed, argued Bruno Latour, is a ‘nonmodern’ worldview; one that rejects the modern temporality and that foregrounds our entanglements with the nonhuman.¹ Existing ecological sound-art practice rarely, however, engages overtly with issues of time and history. This paper therefore presents a recent practice research project, *A Ladder is Not the Only Kind of Time*, that combined aspects of the post-HIP² and ecological sound-art traditions to approach such ideas. In doing so, it hopes to engage with the research question: what can post-HIP practice research contribute to ecological sound-art, and how can it help us better relate to the nonhuman in the Anthropocene?

A Ladder is Not the Only Kind of Time featured new water-powered historical instruments designed and built by Benjamin Tassie and Sam Underwood: a harpsichord, hurdy gurdy, and hydraulus (or water organ). ‘Played’ by the river, these instruments were installed, recorded, and filmed in the historic Rivelin Valley in Sheffield, UK. For centuries a thriving hub of water-powered industry, the project engaged with the valley’s rich industrial heritage. It utilised what Latour calls a ‘polytemporal’ approach; combining performance on historical instruments (bass viol, Medieval rebec, and nyckelharpa) with digital recording and dissemination technologies. Arguing for the particular significance of historically-informed ecological sound-art, this paper will share excerpts of the film that was the project’s outcome, as well as drawing on existing practice and theory to outline the project’s original contribution to the field.

You can view the film *A Ladder is Not the Only Kind of Time* here:
https://youtu.be/hpTBT_gw8Ww



Benjamin Tassie
Royal Birmingham Conservatoire (Birmingham, UK)
benjamin.tassie@buc.ac.uk

Benjamin Tassie (b.1987) is a composer, artist, and researcher. His music has been commissioned and performed by organisations, ensembles, and soloists including The National Galley (London), Tate Britain, Historic Royal Palaces, Nordic Affect, Zubin Kanga, Liam Byrne, the Ligeti Quartet, and the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment. Awards include the prestigious PRS Foundation and Jerwood Arts Composers’ Fund award. He is presenter of the weekly radio show *Future Classical* on Resonance FM, and is Visiting Lecturer at the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire.

¹ Latour, B. (1993) *We Have Never Been Modern* Translated by C. Porter. Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press

² Post- Historically Informed Performance. See: Tassie, B. (2021) ‘Post-HIP’: New Music for Old Instruments in the Twenty-first Century’ *TEMPO* 75(297) pp.61-70

