

j . k o t t i n g

_ A M I L L I O N L E A V E S . abstract of song commentary

I perch at the edge of the cliff, balancing my heels on all that is earthen, bound in particular matter and gravity. But my toes are stretching out, touching only air. They are aching to leap into the realm of virtual and infinitesimal possibility. It is not so much a choice as a spatial and temporal moment in which all geographers are similarly poised. The individual geographer is located at the crux of what geography was and what it is becoming. Though we have discourse, geographers need no words to tell the story of this moment. The tension between the dirt and the ether manifests in our most personal creative moments. For me, it is this song called "A Million Leaves." I wrote it because I heard the wind in the trees at my home. When I moved to start a PhD in Geography at the University of Minnesota, I played it on my nylon string guitar whenever I was homesick to lull myself to sleep. Each note breathed of home, and the layered hummed harmonies had a synesthesia-inducing throng of related scents, tastes, and textures. I wondered what would happen if I plugged the waves of this song into a computer audio program. So to answer my own question, I pushed the song off the cliff. I drew out the strands of melody into vast tones of ringing vibration, added a thumping beat, and let it become something entirely new, technically precise, and ethereal to the point of rapture without limiting its meaning to experiential reality. Emblematizing this process in music, I may repeat it in my research, writing, and teaching.

