



An emotional cartography of resonance

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ABSTRACT

When we consider the relationship with the urban soundscape, this aural 'moment' is intrinsically intertwined with the body as part of the making of place. How can attending to the making of place through sound unveil an emotional cartography of the city? This paper will address these questions by exploring the processes that bind sound, emotion and place together.

Elaborating on Nancy's (2007) concept of listening as *methexis* (participation) and LaBelle's (2010) idea of the moment of sound as a participatory event, this paper presents two extended vignettes taken from empirical research in London's East End, which used interviews and audio walks to examine sensory engagements with everyday urban spaces. It distinguishes an approach to the production of place that integrates aural perception, affect and emotion. It concludes outlining the importance of being re-acquainted with our ensounded body in order to explore geography from the sentient body to generate a fluid cartography that evolves at the same speed the soundscape does, making an argument for the importance of an embodied listening while strengthening the affective and emotional aspects of the urban soundscape.

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1. Exploring through listening

My work lies at the junction between sensory research and sound studies (Feld, 1982; Gershon, 2011; Kanngieser, 2012; Rice, 2003; Schwartz, 2011). I am researching how the emotional body can relate to the making of place in an ever-increasingly fast and connected city like London (Agnew, 2011) by examining affective experiences through participative listening and walking around London's East End. The research investigates the influence of sound in the making of place, and so, focuses on the impact of sound on the representation of space, and how we relate our bodies to the soundscape (Scarfe, 2011). Talking about the soundscape is talking about how we sense our environment, aurally in this case, and shifting the focus from cognition to sensation. This is not to say that awakening to our sensuous bodies is a magical cure to our social attitudes to the outside world but a sensory awakening which enables a more profound approach to our environment, using our minds and bodies to gather information, to make meaning (Erlmann, 2004). The sensuous awakening is coming back to our senses so as to inform our making of meaning, the body can learn and unlearn and I am arguing to reconnect with our sensory body (Merleau-Ponty, 2002). Setting the research within the urban environment brings together a sense of listening to the voices of

space and takes into consideration the more mechanical and architectural aspect of sound (Blessner and Salter, 2009) as well as its physical impact on our body (Drever, 2009, 2011).

The body and its emotional capacity are often forgotten (Bates, 2011; Davies et al., 2008a, 2008b; 2009a, 2009b); either the senses are understood as enclosed in an invisible body or their role diluted in the relationship between emotion and place-making (Howes, 2005; Simmel, 1908; Smart, 2007). In addition, the occulocentrism of the 20th century, both in research and social life, is in this age of screens and the digital, more present than ever, championing the world of mimesis (Howes, 2005; Knowles and Sweetman, 2004).

Mimesis comes through a focus on vision instead of listening (Nancy, 2007). Nancy explores the act of listening as being in tension between the outer and the inner world. He describes sensing as "feeling-oneself-feel" *se sentir sentir* (ibid 2007: 8). Hence, the resonating body senses itself feel while listening (Scarfe, 2011). Listening is not reducible to the body or the mind alone, it is a process in which body, mind and culture participate (Nancy, 2007). Drawing on an analysis of interviews with participants who took part in urban audio walks, this paper explores how emotion influences our perception of listening to the ambiance of the city. Listening is the moment where the tension between inner and outer worlds is resolved (ibid 2007); yet there is a tendency to lean outwards and forget that the listening body is not only listening to the environment but also listening to itself. This sonic moment is the intersection between the interaction of the listener with a space and this aural 'moment' being intrinsically intertwined with the

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body as part of the making of place (LaBelle, 2010). How can attending to the making of place through sound unveil an emotional cartography of the city?

This paper will address these questions by identifying elements of the emotional textures that arise when listening to the urban soundscape, notably examining the role of temporality in auditory and affective dynamics. Then, an exploration of my own research will distinguish an approach to the production of place that integrates aural perception and emotion by presenting a sensuous methodology to explore geography from the sentient body and the paper concludes by proposing an approach to place that resonates with the emotional geographies of sound.

2. The senses and the body

2.1. Body and embodiment

After the focus on discourse (Clifford 1992), the fields of emotion and sensation started to emerge (Pink, 2009). Having slowly re-entered scholarly research (Atkinson, 2007; Blesser and Salter, 2009; Bull, 2000, 2007; Degen, 2008, 2014; Gershon, 2011; Kangieser, 2012; LaBelle, 2010, 2012; Pink, 2009; Rhys-Taylor, 2010; Scarfe, 2011; Sterne, 2003; Tan, 2013; Voegelin, 2012) as Howes (2005) states, I argue for the senses to go back to the epicentre of research projects,¹ like in London's seminal work on the London poor (London (1903) 2007). As researchers, we can learn a great deal from emphasizing our own sensoriality in the research process.

Sensing, or more precisely realising that we sense, is something we can re-learn by awakening our dormant bodies (Perec, 1973). If we are aware of our tuning into the world, then we can relate to our processes of being and navigating in it; without perception there is no emotion (Merleau-Ponty, 2002). Without emotion the synergies that make place are silent, the body's relation to the space is inactive, limited to the realm of the intellectual. Indeed, awakening our bodies to consciousness, to their own subjectivities, to perception and to emotion will enable an embodied understanding of our surroundings (Ahmed, 2008; Bates, 2011; Merleau-Ponty, 2002; Stoller, 1997; Thrift, 2004; Wetherell, 2012).

In addition, talking about emotion does also involve our bodies and environment. Emotion comes from the French word "émouvoir" which is derived from the Latin *emovere*, coming from the root *movere*, which means to move (<http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/emotion>). Therefore, emotion is a term that has movement in its core (Burkitt, 2014). Besides being personal and interpersonal, emotion does appear as something that can be realised by the bodies affected (Pile, 2010). Emotions contribute to our situatedness and to the ways in which we relate bodily to the world, hence to our emplacement (Haraway, 1988; Pink, 2009; Rose, 1997). In addition, emotions connect us to ourselves and to others (Burkitt, 2014) and engage us with each other but also with space and with memory (Seremetakis, 1994). In this sense, we can see that an emotional practice is relational since it puts us in patterns of relationship with others, with our environment and with ourselves.

In this research, our disconnection with the stimuli the city constantly offers (Simmel, 1908) has been reflected as a random deafness to certain aspects of the soundscape. Ahmed (2008), Geurts (2003), Latour (2004), Seremetakis (1994), and Stoller (1997) warn against this de-tuning to our environment and propose re-connecting with our sensuousness in order to gain a richer understanding of our everyday life. Bodily experience is quite important in the perception of our environment and, as Stoller

(1997) argued, it is not a contingent part but a key and central process of the research and should be reflected in the writing up (Feld, 1982, 1987, 1994; Geurts, 2003; Seremetakis, 1994).

3. The urban texture of the soundscape

3.1. Listening and hearing

Schafer (1994) defined the soundscape as the sounds that emanate from a determinate space. Hence the soundscape was envisaged as originally situated and being a sonic reflection of said space. Instead of talking about the soundscape, Ingold proposed talking about ensounded bodies (2007). For him, the soundscape is problematic since we hear in sound. Since we hear (and may listen) from the moment we are born and our environment has a constant soundscape, when we listen, we are listening for sound in an already rich never ending soundscape, thus, following Ingold's argument, our bodies, whenever open to the urban soundscape, become ensounded with it.

Indeed, the impact that sound has on the body is not only aural, it is also physical and emotional. We hear by vibrational impact on our eardrums but we also hear through our bones, through the flesh and the ways in which our bodies are traversed by sound (Horowitz, 2013), may it be resonance or vibration (Feld, 2005; Helmreich, 2010). The sound waves trigger our ear bones to move and send electric signals that our brains then decipher. Thus, our bodies are ensounded, traversed and vibrating with sound from tip to toe. Our brain is not only physically impacted by sound waves but also interpreting the electric signals sent by the inner ear. I would go further, bodies are ensounded at all times, and it is up to us to process that ensoundment or try and ignore it. Sensing is sensorial, using the sensory apparatus of our bodies, whereas perceiving is filtering these senses through the mind to understand them (Thibaud, 2002). The former is a reaction of our bodies to external stimuli, such as sound waves impacting on our eardrums; the latter is our way of rendering the senses. In this process, memory and emotion are at play when making meaning of our sensory perceptions (Wetherell, 2012).

Hence the soundscape is not an object, but instead a constant experience we live in. It may initiate in a certain space (the soundscape is site-specific, at least at inception) but our bodies integrate it and transform it into meaning. In turn, we can think of the transduction that is felt underwater, where sound becomes and is perceived in a totally different manner, as another way to make meaning (Helmreich, 2010). This idea of trying to envisage urban sound as a transduction (hearing in, out and beyond the soundscape) ties different cultures and different moments in time through a same act of listening. Sound can immerse, but it can also bring back memories, it can link people to a certain place emotionally, it goes beyond a body's vibratory immersion. The physical element of sound is key in the composition of the texture of the urban soundscape but its 'transductive' capacities also inform how can sound affect us culturally, socially and personally. This research concentrates on the perception of space and making of place done by ensounded bodies listening in sound while at the same time, understanding hearing as sensing sound without paying attention to it, and listening as attending to the sound heard and making meaning of it (Nancy, 2007; Sen and Silverman, 2014).

3.2. Researching ways of listening

Understanding the way in which somebody hears is quite hard, not only because of physical differences in hearing, variations between sexes and ages, but also depending on the wave lengths the hearing apparatus has been subjected to (Corso, 1963; Morrell et al.

¹ See also Wickberg (2007) and Syrotinski (2013).

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