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SOUNDSCAPES: GEOGRAPHIES OF SOUND AND MUSIC

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Abstract

The study of soundscapes encourages geographers to hear the world, paying attention to the diversity and specificity of difference as heard, and the production of space by and through sound. A consideration of music as organised sound is a particular aspect within this consideration but the geographer should pay attention to all natural and manmade sounds in an environment. Changes in sound over time or between places can inform an understanding of geographical change or regional distinctiveness and it is critical that the geographer considers the processes in the production, dissemination and consumption of sound. The geographies of sound may be represented in visual art and film, shaped by tourism and political movements, or altered by memory and reproduction.

Keywords

Music, Soundscape, identity, aesthetics, sonic spatialities.

Body text

SOUNDSCAPES: GEOGRAPHIES OF SOUND AND MUSIC

The cultural turn in human geography presents an opportunity to open up a greater range of sensory awareness in geographical study that seeks to align or bring to prominence sound, smell, touch and taste alongside the visual and realise the importance of affect and emotion in shaping human behaviour and the perception of space and place. People all around the globe are surrounded by sound and create music that is shaped by their experience of the world and communicates aspects of their identity, networks and their emotions to others. Sounds may be natural or manmade. These sounds are not only experienced in the present but through the dissemination of reproductions of sound. Geographers often consider the specificity and distinctiveness of sonic spaces but neglect the materiality of sound. Sound is both mediated (physically and socio-culturally) and forms an immersive medium through which worlds are experienced. Geographical interest in sonic spaces may engage with a phenomenological approach, or critically consider the role of sound in the practice of politics and the making of political spaces, and a consideration of affective, emotional and performative responses to sonic events, practices, locations and performances.

Music may be understood as organized sound that is meaningful to people within a given time and place; thus the study of sound can give both historical and contemporary insights into place and society. Places may have a single musical tradition or multiplicity of musical styles that draw on local and global influences that are influenced by nature and human creativity and which may change over time. The sound, setting and significance of music (to both performers and listeners) are all important in understanding the geography of music. A greater awareness of sound and music, the study of soundscapes, can inform the study of landscapes, spaces, the relationships between people and environments, regions and localities. Thus geographies of sound and music inform and are informed by many other areas including regional geography, economic geography, urban geography and the geography of migration and tourism.

GEOGRAPHICAL LISTENING

Scholars at the end of the twentieth century raised awareness of a preoccupation with the visual in geography with the realisation that knowing the world through sounds is fundamentally different from knowing the world through vision. Through sound, the invisible may be heard. Geographies of sound must consider the making and consuming of sound, which may be shaped by the spaces in which it is created and consumed and changing contexts and locations for sounds and musics. Some sounds or types of music or parts of a repertoire may be performed in or associated with particular spaces and may be shaped by the architecture and acoustics of these spaces. Sound, in turn, may influence the design of certain spaces or manipulate how we experience these spaces. Sounds also have a significant role in the identification of places and regions. Many composers draw on the sounds of nature while the development of cathedral spaces influenced composers to use the natural acoustics to create harmonic effect using resonant sounds. Composers have been influenced by technological advancement and the sound of industry and machines while people may also choose to experience a place through soundwalks, listening and sometimes recording sounds while moving through a place at a walking pace.

Incorporating sound into geographical studies requires an engagement with sounds that are produced by both nature and by humans; they may be natural, unnatural, of the built environment, related to well-being or a blend between all of these. To this end, R. Murray Schafer points to keynote sounds of a landscape that are produced by its geography, ecology and climate such as water, wind, forests, plains, birds, insects and animals. He has noted humans' failure to recognise and interpret sounds, which has consequences for nature and the environment. Changes in the sound of a river can indicate change in the flow of water. Over time, the changing soundscape may relate to climate change or changes in landscape and ecology. Similarly, change in musical practices can signal changes in social, political and economic structures or lifestyles in different places.

The exploration of soundscapes can challenge the organisation of sound into music. Soundwalking developed in Canada in contrast with the development of studio recorded music and concerns how people engage with their surrounding sonic environment. The practice was developed by members of the World Soundscape Project led by Murray Schafer in the 1970s and today soundwalks are a feature of many music festivals and conferences. Sound, for example a distinctive accent in spoken language or the performance of music, affects the construction of local identity. Soundwalking has been translated across media for radio, gallery installations, and the internet and the development of sound art challenges the distinction between sound and music. The World Soundscapes Project presents an alternative approach to engaging with the sound of a place with an emphasis on the sounds of the environment and changes therein.

Although Murray Schafer is often cited as the origins of the soundscape context, there has been a long history of engagement in connecting sound, space, place and music. John Connell and Chris Gibson (2003) point to an awareness of sound in geography from the 1920s but in the 1990s, there are still calls for a greater awareness of sound in geographical paradigms. The work of French economist Jaques Attali, is also highly influential, pointing to social distinction between nature and culture, the localising and commodifying of sound, and the mobilization of particular sound as a universalising globalizing aesthetic, political and economic force. *The Place of Music* is a notable compilation of works that consider how spatiality and music are intertwined, focusing on the production of music, space and place rather than locating musical practice in a single place. George Revill is further concerned with what makes sonic spatiality distinctive and the processes and practices by which sound actually makes space, shaping and transforming experiences of spatiality and providing the resources and affordances for diverse political practice and action in the process. The work of ethnomusicologists is also informative to geographical discourse as many also demonstrate an engagement with the understanding of geographies of people, space and place through the study of music in its cultural context.

Soundscapes form an important part of intangible cultural heritage and play a role in strengthening cultural memory. Sonic culture threatened by the physical characteristics of sound itself and the dynamic structure of intangible culture. The UNESCO Committee for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage recognises a number of soundscapes and musical traditions that require protection while many others are celebrated. These soundscapes capture aspects of human history and geography that relate to landuse and agricultural practices, industrial development, migration including slavery, festive occasions and ritual, the use of song in everyday life and the invention, construction and diffusion of musical instruments.

Music is an integral part of many soundscapes. Music is much more than a hobby or enjoyable experience used in entertainment or for personal satisfaction but informs how people understand their world and their relationships with others. Warren Gill recognises music as a commercial entertainment, symbol of rebellion, factor in collective consciousness, and subcultural and regional identity. Music is connected to the assertion and interrogation of power, an economic and cultural resource, integral to the identity of places and social or ethnic groups. Music is both a material and imagined entity and the meaning of music is shaped by complex networks, practices, institutions, technologies and artifacts. Geographers of sound and music are cognisant of discourses relating to culture, politics and social order, as well as art and aesthetics. Geography music also be critically aware of the function of sound and music. Animals in nature use sounds to attract mates, warn of danger and mark territory. In human society, music may be enjoyed as art, employed in the construction of personal, community and regional identities, used in the evocation and creation of memory, utilised in political acts to communicate or undermine power, or to contribute to economic growth and stability.

SOUNDSCAPES AS PROCESS

It is important to note that sounds and spaces, cultures and places are processes, and identities are always in a state of flux. This is complicated by the development of competing identities and notions of authenticity in relation to sound and music. Soundscapes, music, places, spaces are not things or entities, fixed bounded texts but rather processes shaped by social practice, creativity, interaction with the material environment and other people. Sounds do not, in themselves, have an inherent meaning but meaning must be culturally specific and socially constructed. Soundscapes, both as something that is created and experienced, may be understood as a space in which sound is created,

heard and listened to, always undergoing change in how it is created, perceived and interpreted. The time-space geography of the sonic event or experience must be considered to understand the interpretations of the music by the audience and the geographical study of soundscapes must take into consideration the range of factors and processes that shape both the sound and space.

It is generally accepted that sound, space and place are inextricable and co-constitutive in the processes of becoming – sound produces space as space produces sound. As Sara Cohen asserts, music reflects aspects of place and helps to produce place. Many note that, beyond the study of the sound, there is a need to critically consider the social, cultural and economic production of sound, space and place. The Place of Music presents space and place not simply as sites where or about which music happens to be made, or over which music has diffused; rather, different spatialities are identified as being formative of the sounding and resounding of music - space produces as space is produced. Music and sound can draw attention to social, cultural, political and environmental issues across time and space. Soundscapes may be viewed as a mirror but also a predictor of social, cultural and economic change. Music has had an integral role in formulating and sounding the politics of dissent and has been used in various political movements, notably nationalism in many places.

A number of geographical processes may be identified in the study of music: delimitation of music regions and identification of cultural hearths; evolution of musical style with place; impact of migration, transportation, communication; psychological and symbolic association of music and place; development of cultural landscapes; location of music industry; impact of environment; role of local, national and nationalist politics; and relationship between cultures. The process of creating space through sound must also be considered.

MAPPING SOUNDS AND MUSICS

Early geographical studies of sound and music focused on cartographies of mapping the location and diffusion of sounds and music. These developed from a broad national scale to local minutiae including consideration of spaces within urban environments and gradually moved from a focus on ethnic divisions to the study of music in everyday life, often in cosmopolitan contexts. The soundscapes of everyday life bring a more personal perspective to aurally aware geographies. The employment of 'parish maps' present alternative cartographies of music and sound that consider everyday cultural practice and which are constructed through shared experience focusing on face-to-face relations and site-specific aesthetic activities. The importance of the ethnographic experience, although challenged by scale and generalisation, underpins later geographies or 'new regional geographies' that consider the production and reproduction of social life linked to the dynamic process of conflict between individuals or groups and the structural elements that constitute society.

In some instances, the development of particular musical cultures in a place was shaped by the environment. Musical instruments were initially crafted from locally available materials or later materials that were made accessible through trade with colonies. Many musical traditions drew inspiration from the sounds of nature. Music was shaped by potential and desire for indoor or outdoor music-making, which may have been seasonal and could relate to occupational practices such as agriculture outdoors and industry indoors. Geographical change shaped by colonial expansion, migration, urbanisation and the internet have all had significant impacts on music and the potential to map distinctive features to communities, localities and regions.

Geographies of sound and music considered the signification, identification and representation of places, nations, and regions. Music was imagined as something that could unite a community and construct boundaries with others. American music geography focused on regions and the diffusion of musics while the work of Alan Lomax in relation to cantometrics sought to create a global sense of

musical difference, motivated in part by increased trends towards globalisation and the threat of cultural homogenization. These are now widely available online through the Global Jukebox project, providing a historical perspective on local music making that may be contrasted with ethnographic approaches.

Regions of music may be delineated by a number of means. Musical instruments or approaches to music making become emblematic or symbolic of a place such as the harp in Ireland, the didgeridoo in Australia, yodelling in Switzerland or raga in India. Many countries have distinctive instruments such as the Hardanger fiddle in Norway or the Javanese Gamelan. Often, these can become integrated into a tourist industry to create intensified representations of place such as hula in Hawaii, Tango in Argentina or Samba in Brazil. Associations with bands (Liverpool, The Beatles) or individual performers (Graceland, Elvis) can construct meanings for places leading to (pilgrimage) tourism. Sometimes the resulting geographies are again silenced as sites of memory develop tangible and visually-consumed representations such as monuments and statues, although spaces may also include venues in which music is reproduced. Particular musical spaces become sites of memory or significance based on narratives of musical practice such as La Scala in Milan or Carnegie Hall in New York. The primary function of some music spaces may be overshadowed by their architectural design, such as the Sydney Opera House, but they remain significant in the imagination of place.

Performance spaces create particular points of engagement for geographers as spaces of cultural exchange. These include festivals, religious sites, educational institutions and organisations, competitions, sessions and protests or demonstrations. Within these spaces, the level of engagement with music and sound is critical. Engagement can be passive, active or involve deep listening or creating. The construction of music spaces – such as an opera house or centre for traditional and folk music – may be a statement of ideology or philosophy related to a broader construction of identity for places. Composers may seek to shape the nature of these spaces through the arrangement of sound production, embracing spatial techniques employed by sound design and the use of multi-channel speakers or surround sound. Composers may be influenced by the Japanese concept of 'Ma' meaning both space and time, creating music in which silences and the spatial arrangement of the instruments are critically important.

The advance of globalisation and the impact of the internet have challenged the validity of locating musical styles but cartographies of musical activity remain useful in understanding cultural identities and distinctiveness. The geography of sound and music is a geography of scale, incorporating local and global focus and the interaction between. Scales of study include scene, subculture and micromusic. In addition to the mapping of sounds and spaces for the production and consumption of sounds, another music geography emerges in the mapping of monuments and public statuary that signify or celebrate sound and music, creating a landscape of commemoration that may reinforce the imagination of a place as having significant musical heritage.

SOUND AND MUSIC AS (AND IN) ART

In considering soundscapes that are created by humans, the geographer must also engage with the artistry (of the performer and the musical work), the role of the composer, and the intention or non-intention of the artist to signify, reflect or represent place. Music and sounds can be used to teach about and distinguish between places while the experience of places through soundwalks or the representation of space and place through soundart and performance can reinforce engagement with a place. Collective engagement with music develops a discourse concerning the context for music making that may be influenced by the opportunities, conventions, and constraints that exist in a given place and time. The development of methodologies and dissemination involving the performance of

geographical research further positions sound and soundscapes within the discipline and informs the study of process through reflective creative practice.

The evocation of landscape through music and the connection between sound and landscape in art has been developed in a variety of ways, notably in Western Art Music but increasingly in the context of environmental sound composition, site specific works, installations and interactive performance.

The pioneering work of John Cage (1912-1992) from the 1940s evokes a sense of ambient spatiality and leads to site specific composition. The greater engagement of artists with environmental issues has led to the creation of artistic works and practices that draw on different aspects of the environment.

Historically there was a privileging of Western Art Music over traditional and popular musics but geographers including Lily Kong, John Connell and Chris Gibson have done much to emphasise the potential of study through popular music. Lyrics that made reference to place were examined in terms of the narratives of place that they constructed. Extra-musical elements including artwork, reunited the sound with visual while technological developments in multi-media require a greater consideration of the combined impact of sensuous experience of space. The association between music and food, sound and sport, and the representation of music in visual arts all lead to a multi-sense geography.

Sound is implied in many forms of art including paintings, statues and monuments of and to musicians, literature and film. In some of these instances, the sound is created by the human imagination based on the sonic landscapes created by the artist, and the prior sonic experience of the consumer. Monuments anchor music in a place; paintings indicate or suggest the presence of sound in a place; literature may describe musical activity; and film can use music to create a sense of location, enhance the viewing experience and add to the story. Music can impact on the interpretation of the visual and, from a geographical perspective, make reference to the cultural heritage and soundscape of a character or geographical setting. Sound in film may be diegetic or non-diegetic and this may shape the interpretation of the film and the geographical messages therein.

IDENTITY FORMATION / AFFIRMATION

Sound and music is explored by geographers as a source of identification or part of the process of identity formation, becoming a shared symbol of collectivity and prominent in the establishment, representation and demonstration of social groupings. Sounds act as anchors to regions or acoustic identifiers of communities or environments. Music plays a role in generating and enforcing social conformity. Thus music production is both social and political, coercive and collaborative. The mobility of music challenges attempts at defining boundaries and locating cultures. Performance spaces and ritualised soundscapes can reinforce community identity and belonging (or indicate division) at different levels. Music plays an important role amongst emigrant communities who maintain a dual identity linked to their place of origin and their place of domicile. Performances for tourists can promote a positive sense of self/community and encourage greater participation in cultural traditions. Ruth Finnegan has examined the role of music in community contexts at the micro level, highlighting the diversity of music making that can exist and the contexts and processes that facilitate this music making.

Sound and music are related to power and order and Martin Stokes amongst others points to the role of music in social and political unrest/movements while. Those in power may represent their power through sound and music or attempt to colonise or silence sounds and music of others. Sounds may take on a particular role within a soundscape such as church bells or marching bands, which can be symbols of community and consensus or resistance and dissent. The Muslim call for prayer or the use

of bells in the Christian world is sonic markers of place and identity. In some religious ceremonies, the congregation are encouraged to participate in the singing of sacred music. Visitors to a Native American Pow-Wow may observe but not participate in all aspects. Sound and music can draw attention to or give a voice to the marginalised and disenfranchised and the volume of sound may related to power and social order. In Northern Ireland, communities developed increasingly bigger and louder drums that become associated with events on particular dates, their sound crossing community divides.

Sound and music is often conceived in terms of national and regional identities, incorporating concepts such as Anderson's Imagined Communities. Music has been appropriated by states and political movements, composed to support cultural nationalism or assert and represent imperial superiority. Ethnomusicologists, such as Bruno Nettl, have highlighted the role of folk music as national expression while Philip Bohlman amongst others has examined the role of music in European nationalism.

Music may be embodied through dance and movement. In many cultures, dance facilitates social meetings between members of a community and can play a role in distinguishing members of that community in terms of status, social class and education. Marching with music is a significant act in many parts of the world with sound adding to the intensity of the act. In Northern Ireland, marching bands may not perform when marching through some communities as it is viewed as a provocative act. Music may have a religious or spiritual function and its ceremonial role can indicate differences in cultures in different parts of the world or differences within communities. Musical rituals may have different meanings. In Mexico, *la quinceañera*, marks the passage of a teenage girl into adulthood but for some urban women it represents historical limitations on women in society. There are imagined geographies of musical cultures created through listening practices and the performance of music. The Kaluli people of Papua New Guinea use auditory culture as a means to create order in their world, influenced by their relationship with the natural world. Stephen Feld highlights how soundscapes are perceived and interpreted by human actors to construct their place in and through the world, investing their soundscapes with significance.

The association between sounds and particular identities is not absolute. The performance of a particular musical genre does not imply ethnic presence; music can transcend categories of class or ethnicity even it has traditionally been associated with divisions but equally, to follow Bourdieu, music can reinforce distinction as a form of cultural capital that is not only unequally distributed between classes but also in socially ranked geographical space. The globalisation of particular musics, such as Irish traditional music and its performance by musicians with no Irish heritage, highlights the diffusion of music and separation of music and place/ethnicity. Sounds considered may include language, dialect and accent, types of instruments and repertoire, rhythms, harmonic patterns.

MEMORY

One of the challenges of studying music is engaging with subjectivity, emotion and memory. It is important to consider historical soundscapes in their context of time and mode of creation and heed Bull and Back's warning not to listen through contemporary ears. Soundscapes become embodied histories that draw on the influence of the past experience of a community or culture or an individual. The spaces evoked by sound and music may be real or imagined. Sound and music may act as a signifier, inspire memory, be a participatory activity such as developed in Christopher Small's concept of 'musicking' or be an object or artefact. Musicking allows a person to interact with their world, creating expressions of place, networks, exchange, memory, emotion and mobility. Sara Cohen notes the use of music to maintain a link with the past and attachment to specific places with music used to

remember those places and memory has a particular role amongst migrant and dispossessed communities where songs reinforce a connection to a place. Stories, legends and traditions are mechanisms for maintaining a scene or musical community, commensurate with an understanding of place as an accumulation of stories. In Australia, aboriginal communities use songlines to construct imagined maps of their world whereby a musical phrase is a map reference. Integral to understanding the role of music in understanding the world is recognising how humans attach meanings to the sounds that they hear and the cultural meanings attached to sounds are part of enculturation within a society. Sonic geographies of cultural memory can reinforce identity and division.

ECONOMIC AND VIRTUAL GEOGRAPHIES

Following Attali's Political Economy of Sound, the economy of sound and politics of production are key to understanding the geographies of music and sound and the role of these geographies in a broader geographical understanding. Various genres, including popular music and world music, highlight a commercial potential in the relationship between music and place. While the global music industry is largely controlled by a small number of large companies, these are dependent on local music making and are increasingly challenged by the democratization of the industry through technological development and the use of internet technologies. Political, economic and social networks influence the connection between music and place, providing support and finance for the development of music and arts spaces and highlighting the role of these spaces in shaping the perception of the place and region.

The consideration of sound and music in the context of economic geography must consider an economy of scale. A superstar economy leads to global artists but local social networks are critical to global success and can create alternative centres of music production. The creation of musical places by attracting talent to institutions, record companies and studios, or the promotion of music education leads to the development of cultural capital but to place a musical form may deny its mobility, mutability and global mediation. The location of the music industry can play a significant role, for example the presence of recording and songwriting in Nashville. Festivals play a significant role in the economy of places and are part of the construction of identity, such as Woodstock (USA), Glastonbury (England) or the Tamworth Country Music Festival (Australia).

The links between music and place are often examined through geographies of tourism and film, which both reinforce the connection between music and place and also influence the development of music in a place. Tourism and film inform and sustain soundscapes. Sound and music can evoke idealised, utopian or dystopian landscapes and places. From British pastoral music to Woodie Guthrie's songs of the American Dustbowl, composers create a sense of place for people who may never experience that place and, in some instances, can create a desire to experience that place leading to tourism. Equally the presence of music in film can enhance the representation of the imagined place and, in some instances, lead to a transformation of the real place, creating expectations about the soundscape amongst those who live there and those who visit.

Geographies of sound may also consider the presence of third space, initially through radio and expanding the concept to engage with digital soundscapes and archives that are available on the internet. Music on the radio and internet creates a context in which people connect outside of the physical space and in doing so connect the diverse spaces we inhabit. There can be a contrast between local messages and global musics on local radio or the subversion of national identity and political power through listening to local or foreign musics. Radio presenters become between listeners, performers and performance spaces, sharing information and creating impressions of events and spaces and constructing communities. Digital radio changes the geographical impact of broadcast

radio; television brings a multi-sensory dimension; the internet facilitates greater accessibility to a wider range of musics created in a greater diversity of places and spaces and shapes understanding of personal and social locations and cultures.

Recording technology, broadcast media and film has influenced the relationship between music and landscape, while the development of personal listening from the Walkman to portable digital media players have privatised the experience of sounds in space. The control of sound in the landscape has led to conflict on sonic judgement – from the use of music in protest, the location of amplified concerts and music festivals near homes or in rural areas, the impact of the tourist gaze on the development of local musical cultures, or the location of airports, wind turbines and other ‘new’ sources of sound that impact on people’s lives and environments.

Future considerations

The globalisation of musical culture has led to reactive localisation and localism, regionalisation and regionalism, and glocalisation. As sound is consistently formed and reformed, interpreted and reinterpreted, it is necessary to engage with sonic geographies in new time-space contexts. As new sound sources are developed and existing soundscapes disappear, new understandings can emerge of changing geographies of everyday life. Of particular note for future consideration is the impact of future technologies on soundscapes.

Conclusion

Sound, Music, Space and Place are all inextricably linked. Changing economic dynamics, environmental change, the development and use of the internet and a virtual community, political movements and unrest are all shaped by and responsive to changes in sound and music.

Further Reading

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The World Soundscape Project <https://www.sfu.ca/sonic-studio/WSP/index.html>

UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage <https://ich.unesco.org/>

The Global Jukebox http://www.culturalequity.org/rc/ce_rc_psr_global_jukebox.php

Oxford Bibliographies: Geographies of Music, Sound and Auditory Culture <http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199874002/obo-9780199874002-0130.xml>

Cross-References

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Author Biography and Photograph

Ethnomusicologist, geographer and performer Dr Daithí Kearney is a lecturer in Music and co-director of the Creative Arts Research Centre at Dundalk Institute of Technology. His research is primarily focused on Irish traditional music but extends to include the geography of music, performance studies, community music, music education and tourism. Daithí has toured regularly as a musician, singer and dancer with a

number of groups including Siamsa Tíre, The National Folk Theatre of Ireland. In 2012 he released an album with Cork accordion player John Cronin entitled *Middleton Rare*, which is related to a wider research project on the music and musicians of the Sliabh Luachra region in the south west of Ireland. In 2017 he released an album of new compositions with Dr Adèle Commins entitled *A Louth Lilt*. Current research focuses on the representation and imagination of place through traditional music with a particular focus on tourism.

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