

SoundEffects



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Editorial

Sound and Listening Spaces

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At the core of contemporary sound studies is the understanding of sound as a *spatial* medium. The long-standing conception of the temporal art form of music can be said to have shifted to a broader idea of a spatial medium of sound. Since what has commonly been called ‘the spatial turn’ in the second half of the 20th century, space has been studied from many angles and has generally been considered a social, political and cultural construct, as, for instance, Henri Lefebvre points out in *The Production of Space* (1974).

The modern conception of sound and space can be roughly distinguished as two lines of scholarships: One thinking of space through sound, and one thinking of sound through spatial categories. As early as in the 1950’s, Marshall McLuhan described space through sound with his concept of ‘acoustic space’. This had a direct influence on Murray Schafer and the now famous concept of soundscapes (see *The Tuning of the World* (1977)), which later has been further developed by many (see also Barry Truax’ work *Acoustic Communication* (1984)). This idea of spaces constructed by sounds has been canalised into many perspectives, such as architectural approaches to sound (see, for instance, Juhani Pallasmaa’s *The Eyes of the Skin* (1996)) and urbanism (see, for instance, Michael Bull’s *Sounding Out the City* (2000) or Brandon LaBelle’s *Acoustic Territories* (2010)). For the second line, thinking of sound through spatial categories, Max Neuhaus, the inventor of sound installations, famously wrote in 1974: ‘Traditionally composers have located the elements of a composition in time. One idea which I am interested in is locating them, instead, in space, and letting the listener place them in his own time’. (Max Neuhaus, *Max Neuhaus: Inscription, sound works vol. 1*, Ostfildern, Germany: Cantz Verlag, 1994, p. 34). Such a conception of spatial sound is one basis in contemporary sound art and sound installations (see, for instance, the German anthology *Klangkunst: Tönende Objekte und klingende Räume* (1999), edited by Helga de la Motte-Haber, or the anthology *Music, Sound and Space* (2013), edited by Georgina Born).

This shift in the notion of space has also affected the perception of artworks that are taking place in space. Whether we listen to the sounds of natural or urban environments, online playlists, audio books, curated sound art or Muzak, or we experience the tingling sensations of ASMR, we find ourselves as listeners, positioned in an affective space filled with sound and at the same time created by sound – a social construct. Such listening spaces are central to this special issue of *SoundEffects*.

The intersection of spaces and sounds is currently being renegotiated due to the revolution of digital media, with sound spaces becoming even more fluid and increasingly mobile and portable. For instance, listening to one’s own exclusive playlist or a podcast while strolling through the park creates a personal listening space. Live concerts, soundscapes and sound art are performative spaces that produce an experience on their own terms, although they can also be transmitted and saved, if necessary. The space of listening becomes a *selective* space that changes and

colours the immanent sounds of a specific place. This mobility of modern media as well as a deeper concern for various aspects of listening (affective, sociological, technological, political, cultural, phenomenological etc.), make it interesting to study the experiences of sound and music as particular listening spaces.

In the year 2020, our conception of space has changed widely due to the COVID-19 pandemic that has left cities and workplaces deserted. Many domestic spaces suddenly became workspaces, and many people listened to changed soundscapes of silent cities or changed their own listening habits at home. The crisis and lockdowns created new spaces in private and public and introduced new ways of acting in familiar spaces. Obviously, this special issue of *SoundEffects* cannot avoid touching upon these changed spatial conditions for listening. The subject of COVID-19 is evident in many of the articles. Meredith C. Ward's essay 'The sounds of lockdown: Virtual connection, online listening, and the emotional weight of COVID-19' launches the issue down this path and centres around the changed soundscapes in the US after the lockdown in spring 2020. Based on a broad selection of empirical material, she examines a group of online music memes on YouTube where popular music is played in empty public spaces. These memes have existed since the late 2010's, but Ward argues that they now serve as a vehicle to understand the experience of lockdown – and the other way around: Lockdown helps us understand what those memes were already doing.

In João Francisco Porfírio's article 'Sleep/relax/work/study/read: YouTube, sound, and music in the construction of listening spaces to fall asleep', he follows this subject of listening in domestic spaces. Like Ward, Porfírio analyses content from YouTube and, more specifically, he focuses on certain YouTube videos that help users fall asleep. Porfírio analyses the role of this type of content in the construction of listening spaces suitable for the activity of sleeping and also looks at why the same kind of compositions and genres of music/sounds/ambiences are recommended for other activities, such as reading, working or studying.

The changed listening practices caused by COVID-19 is evident in Sara Tanderup Linkis' article 'Reading spaces: Original audiobooks and mobile listening' that examines the spaces created by audiobooks when listening at home and in public. According to her, many audiobook users have changed their listening practices during lockdown. Linkis is interested in how the mobile audio book format promotes interaction between listeners, text and surroundings and works based on the guiding question: How are the content and reception of audiobooks affected by mobile media and shifting reading places? While many phenomenological approaches focus on the audiobook *experience*, Linkis is interested in how the *texts* and, especially, the so-called born-audio narratives are adjusted to shifting reading places and situations. Focusing on Storytel's born-audios, she analyses the representation of places in *Askehave* (2019-2020), a Storytel Original series by Jakob Melander, and

how Storytel produces textual content directed at a mobile listener. Listeners are, however, not always on the move. By analysing Cecilia Garme's Storytel Original series *Dagbok från Corona-bubblan* (2020), Linkis studies how this type of work that discusses everyday life during the COVID-19 lockdown reflects a community and participatory sense when listening from home.

Therese Wiwe Vilmar also deals with a literary perspective on listening spaces in 'Literature's listening spaces: Representations of music listening in two contemporary novels'. Where Linkis is interested in the concrete sounds of audio books, Vilmar focuses on what contemporary fiction can reveal about aspects of modern-day music listening – the discourse of listening rather than the sounds themselves. From a phenomenological approach of 'atmospheres', she studies the bodies and minds of fictional characters in Jennifer Egan's *A Visit from the Goon Squad* (2010) and Haruki Murakami's *Kafka on the Shore* (2005) while those characters experience music.

Iain Findlay-Walsh's 'Virtual Auditory Reality: Inhabiting digital pop music as simulated space' also deals with the musical space. He examines listening to popular music in the light of recent research in auditory perception and spatial experience, record production and virtual reality, while considering parallel developments in digital pop music production. The article is conceptualising listening as a process of environmental 'inhabiting' and considering auditory experience as the real-time construction of 'reality'. With particular focus on matters of spatial sound design, Findlay-Walsh relates the construction of 'reality' to understandings of narrative VR user experience through the ideas of Jaron Lanier on 'first-person' immersion and embodied perception in VR.

In the article 'Listening from the in-between: The influence of sound on homelessness as a liminal space', Ed Cooper investigates a previously unexplored aspect of homelessness as engagement with sound. The article addresses this by investigating how the understanding of sonic space is related to individuals' experiences of homelessness. The article considers homelessness through the analytical lens of 'liminality' – period when an individual or space has neither a former nor future identity, whilst simultaneously, paradoxically, possessing both. The study demonstrates the ways in which participants actively engage with sound and liminality in day-to-day life, regularly curating inhabited sonic environments.

In the article 'Sound installation art and the intervention of urban public space in Latin America', Mario Duarte and Emma Wilde explore the relationship between sound installation art and the appropriation of urban public spaces in selected cities across Latin America. The paper explores how sound art and technology have been used to re-formulate public space in cities. Analysing the strategies of selected major works and installations from social and spatial perspectives, the article wishes to shed light on the potential of sound installation art and intervention of space as a way to engage audiences in urban contexts.

Sonification in public and semi-public spaces from a design perspective is also at stake in the article ‘Designing the user experience of musical sonification in public and semi-public spaces’ by Jonas Löwgren og Niklas Rönberg. As sonification is often referred to as sonic expression of data or information, the article wishes to direct the interest toward listening spaces created by sonification as a hybrid where auditory augmentation complements other information modalities as well as spatial qualities. In the article, the authors identify the experiential qualities of *sonic atmosphere* and *performativity* as important aspects of sonification, and they focus on sonification in public and semi-public spaces, specifically on musical sonification – the use of musical sounds to create a sonic environment augmenting or complementing a physical shared space.

The article ‘Transient Soundscape Production: Creative and Pedagogical Significance for Educators and Practitioners’ by Daniel Walzer advocates for an updated notion of soundscape composition that integrates field recordings, studio production, and collaboration from musicians representing a broad range of stylistic influences. Positioning the studio as a site of cultural production and creativity has implications for how soundscape production is taught to young composers. The author argues for a more inclusive, process-oriented view on both creativity and the places where musicians, composers and producers work.

Returning to the impact from the COVID-19 pandemic, Valentin Ris writes in ‘The environmentalization of space and listening: An archaeology of noise-cancelling headphones and Spotify’s concentration playlists’ on how – just as many employees started working from home – Spotify recorded a strong increase in user activity. From this offset, Ris focuses on different forms of sonic control in environmental listening spaces in two technologies: noise-cancelling headphones and specific *Spotify* playlists. Ris works on the basis that both current phenomena are characterised by a process of advancing cybernetisation and thus the formation of controllable environments. *Spotify*’s concentration playlists and noise-cancelling headphones operate based on the principle of modulation and represent modes of environmental technologies. In that way, listening spaces can offer an approach to analysing power structures and subjectivation.

To round off this issue, Domenico Napolitano and Renato Grieco investigate the inverse listening space: How machines listen to us. In ‘The folded space of machine listening’ they study new machine listening technologies as a ‘folded space’, inspired by Gilles Deleuze. According to the authors, more spaces can be in one sound: from the specific sound which occurs in three-dimensional physical space, to its mathematical representation in vector space, to the one-dimensional informational space of data processing and machine-to-machine communication. Because where is the space when YouTube ‘listens’ to the sound of the birthday party? What is the relation between sound and space when sound is processed ‘as data’? From a media-

archaeological approach similar to Ris', they focus on two case studies: *acoustic fingerprinting* and *audio watermarking*, based on which they propose some techno-philosophical interpretations of the idea of space and of the position of the listening subject within the framework of machine listening. The thing that makes fingerprinting and watermarking representative of the shift introduced by machine listening is that they do not just measure sound – recording devices have long had this capability – but that they *recognise events*.

With these 11 highly diverse perspectives on sound and listening spaces (in times of crisis as well as generally), we welcome readers to SoundEffects, vol. 10, No. 1.

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