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Sleep/relax/work/study/read

—YouTube, sound, and music in the construction of listening spaces to fall asleep

Abstract

Sleeping is a basic need, but all persons have their own unique way of doing it. Some people need total silence, whereas others need the presence of specific sounds to fall asleep and enjoy a restful night. On YouTube, users share playlists and original compositions to promote sleepiness and relaxation and help people to get a good night's sleep. Some of this content is also intended to help people study, work, or read, as indicated by the titles, descriptions, and tags that accompany the compositions.

In this article, I examine YouTube as a source of sound, music, and other audiovisual content that aims to help people fall asleep. I also analyze the role of this type of content in the construction of listening spaces suitable for the activity of sleeping and look at why the same kind of compositions and genres of music are likewise recommended for other activities such as reading, working, or studying.

The main argument is that this kind of content is the result of shared and distributed subjectivities constructed from the relationship between users, content, and producers. The alleged effectiveness of this kind of content comes from these subjectivities and from the audio characteristics that enable these videos to mask other sounds. For this reason, they can be considered to be orphic media *with the capacity to build listening spaces that can function as* sound asylums*.*

Introduction

There are several aspects to consider when configuring a sleeping space: the right furniture and its position in the room, the quality and quantity of sheets and blankets, duvets and pillows, and aspects such as light, temperature, and specific scents from candles, incense, or oils. The inclusion or exclusion of specific sounds can also be important for a good night's sleep. In the set of strategies related to configuring the sound of a space, some decisions may be as simple as closing or opening a bedroom window to allow or prevent street sounds from entering the room, but others may be more complex and involve the choice of specific content that users know will be effective to give them a good night's sleep.

In order to gauge the diversity of sleeping strategies related to sound, I built a questionnaire, using Google Forms, and shared it on Facebook and by email on August 30, 2019. By the end of the year, 196 people had answered. The questionnaire responses show people use diverse strategies relating to sound to fall asleep: 46.4% say they need silence to fall asleep; 13.8% turn on the TV timer and fall asleep with the TV on; 9.7% concentrate on the sounds coming from the street and/or home appliances; 8.7% choose specific YouTube content; 5.1% use a specific smartphone/

tablet application; 3.6% choose iTunes/Spotify content. The remaining 12.7% indicated specific strategies that are similar to those already mentioned, or say they fall asleep easily and do not feel the need to manipulate the sound environment. Despite the diversity of strategies and content, one thing is obvious: sound control in the sleeping space is important.

With this in mind, this article focuses on the manipulation of sound in sleeping spaces in order to create a suitable environment using the resource of YouTube videos. The relationship between sound, listening, and the human being as an agent that can alter their domestic space is considered, paying particular attention to how specific audiovisual content can be used to mediate this relationship. The article is divided into three parts: *Research context and methodological matters* details the conditions and methodology of the research; *Theoretical framework* presents the key questions; *Sleep sound and beyond* explores specific YouTube content related to sleeping.

Research context and methodological matters

This article specifically covers spaces where people sleep. However, it relates to my wider PhD research which is dedicated to domestic space and the manipulation of soundscapes.[1] Part of this research involves cataloguing the sounds that are part of everyday life at home and mapping sound and audiovisual content shared on YouTube.

YouTube was selected in preference to other platforms partly to circumscribe the research scope and partly due to YouTube's prevalence in the context of the domestic space: "[...] platforms such as YouTube contribute to the increasing individualization of media consumption and use, reinforcing the logic of DIY, according to the growing individualization of social relations, since they are based on the value of experience and personal choice." (Monteiro & Policarpo, 2015, p. 336).[2] This is down to the seemingly infinite content YouTube makes available to its users and the ease and speed of access. In addition, YouTube makes it possible to add hashtags, descriptions, and keywords to the videos when they are shared which allows users to find videos for specific situations: it is difficult to think of a situation for which no content can be found. YouTube fosters a feedback culture—through the possibility for its users to comment on the content that is shared—and also allows the same users to be both consumers and producers, often producing material to meet their own needs (Horst & Miller, 2012, pp. 23-24).

Emerging from this broader context, this article focuses on the bedroom, the concrete activity of sleeping, and the use of content shared on YouTube designed to aid sleep. It is based on the results obtained from my research about music and sound related to domestic space that is shared on YouTube. I have been using search

terms related to an activity, a room, an hour of the day, or a specific situation. In this process, I have taken a user's point of view, starting from my own experience of daily life at home, in articulation with the results I have obtained from conducting questionnaires. I have covered the various hypotheses of search terms that a user may resort to when looking for content for specific situations.

In this specific case I tried out search terms that a user may employ when looking for audio content related to sleeping. I started from the idea of an activity "sleeping", a space "bedroom", and content such as "music", "sound", "soundscape" and "noise". From the articulation of these ideas the following terms were used to research videos and playlists: music for sleeping, music for sleep, music to sleep, music for sleeping, sleeping music, sleeping sounds, sleeping soundscape, sleeping noise, sleeping background sound, sleeping background noise, music for the bedroom, sounds for the bedroom, music to fall asleep, sounds to fall asleep, and noise to fall asleep. These terms were put into YouTube's search engine and, for each search term, I selected and copied the link from the first 20 results of videos or playlists that, without the application of any filter, appear, ranked by "relevance". Using the same terms, I then applied the filter "view count" and copied the first 20 results of each term as well. This option is relevant because, although it showed different results that are often not related to the content of interest, it allowed me to access results that, while not appearing in the first 20 places of relevance to the search terms, may have had a considerable number of views. The YouTube search was always done anonymously (using a private Google Chrome window and using YouTube without logging in) in order to minimize the impact of algorithmic personalization of the results. The links were then checked and only those links whose content was built and shared for the purpose of sleeping were taken into account. In total, I found and analyzed 162 results relating to falling asleep and/or having a good night's sleep.

Theoretical framework

Three theoretical strands interweave to address the question of how people create and use sound and audiovisual content to configure listening spaces that offer conditions for a good night's sleep: the idea of music as a technology of the "self" and as a mediator in the construction of *music asylums* (DeNora, 2004; 2013), the idea of fighting sound with sound and the concept of *orphic media* (Hagood, 2019), and the distribution of subjectivities (Kassabian, 2013a; 2013b).

In everyday life, various materials are used to shape self-identity and the way it is presented to others, distinguishing between "private self" and "public self" (Goffman, 2002). Tia DeNora (2004) argues that "self" and its narrative are, together, one of the pillars of modern social organization. Music can be used by individuals

as a resource for the permanent constitution of their selves and their psychosocial, physiological, and emotional states, as part of a strategy of self-regulation and a sociocultural practice for the construction and maintenance of humor, memory, and identity. Music is considered by DeNora as a temporal structure that offers "semiotic particles" and as a means of conventional or biographical associations, acting together with a device for ordering the "self" (DeNora, 2004, pp. 46-74). Although the bedroom can be occupied by more than one person, sleeping is first and foremost an individual and private activity, however:

> Sleep can thus be understood as the product of the interaction between the individual (or biological) self and the shared (or social) self. Together these form a composite sleep identity, reflecting the interplay of biological, social and psychological factors as well as normative expectations of appropriate sleep behaviour (Hislop, 2007, p. 147).

As I will discuss later, the audio content created for sleep, whether or not it follows the patterns of what is usually considered to be music, can— in articulation with and filtered by the subject— act as a device for the social ordering and constitution of the "self".

The effects of audio content can be even more evident when related to the concept of *music asylums* (DeNora, 2013), where the term asylum refers to a space— physical or imagined—of safety and comfort. These asylums are created individually or in groups and serve to establish ontological security, a feeling of control, space for creativity, pleasure, personal appreciation, or the feeling of comfort in a space, scene, or environment. For these asylums to be built, two strategies are offered: removal and refurnishing (DeNora, 2013, p. 55). The strategy of removal is used from an individual perspective, in an attempt to isolate from the world, creating asylums that protect the subject from a social scenario that may be somewhat distressing, creating a space for the imagination, for rambling, and for recovering personal time and rhythms (DeNora, 2013, pp. 63-68). In the refurnishing strategy, the individual intervenes directly in the shared environment and manipulates it. This manipulation is associated with a process that involves a collaborative game of reconstruction or renegotiation of a social setting. It allows individuals to act in their own ways, without abandoning the norms and ways of acting associated with the scenario (DeNora, 2013, pp. 70-71). Whether through refurnishing or removal, the author gives the name *music asylums* to these spaces, places, and environments built from music (DeNora, 2013, pp. 63-96). The manipulation of sound in the bedroom to create a suitable listening space for sleeping is a good example of the creation of an asylum. However, as I will explore further, as these practices also use other sounds that are not usually understood as music, the concept of *music asylum* is here transformed into *sound asylum*.

Underneath these two *sound asylum* construction strategies lie ideas of suppression, masking, and cancellation in the sound configuration of a sleeping space. Mack Hagood (2019) discusses the idea of suppression associated with *tinnitus* (pp. 29-72), explores media as sound-masking devices in the context of the dual use of sleep/concentration (pp. 73-173), and explores the idea of sound cancellation from headphones with noise-canceling functionality (pp. 175-229). Related to these strategies of "fighting" sound with sound is the concept of *orphic media*. To create this concept, Hagood starts from the episode of Greek mythology in which Orpheus sings and plays his lyre to create a safe space for the passage of the Argonauts without being bewitched by the sirens' songs. In the context of his exploration, the author assigns the term *orphic media* to noise-canceling headphones, *tinnitus* masking devices, records that reproduce ocean sounds, and mobile applications that emit nature sounds (Hagood, 2019, p. 3). The argument is that these media are not intended to transmit information, but rather to control how the subject engages with the environment (Hagood, 2019, pp. 4-5).

Hagood articulates the concept of *orphic media* with the three potentialities of sound mediation defined by Barry Truax (1984)—*energy transfer model*, *signal processing*, and *sound as the medium itself* (Hagood, 2019, pp. 25-27)—to propose three modes of *orphic mediation*:

> (1) sound is mediated as mechanical waves in an environmental medium, such as the air; (2) sound can also be mediated and altered as a signal through electroacoustic and digital processes of transduction and signal processing; and (3) sound is also mediatic in itself, a sensory-spatial process of interaction though which subjects and objects emerge in modes of affective relation. Through the first potential, subjects and objects make sound. Through the third potential, sound makes subjects and objects. Using technologies we call electronic media, subjects leverage the second potential of signal processing as they attempt to control the modes of affectivity enacted through the first and third potentials (Hagood, 2019, p.28).

The concepts of *orphic media* and *orphic mediation* will be important for my exploration of YouTube videos which have *orphic media* characteristics and can be used in *orphic mediation* strategies. Although *orphic media* are intended to give the user the ability to control the sound environment, Hagood (2019) argues that "the technologies I call orphic media may be designed to hush an age-old secret that is both too obvious and too frightening to contemplate: that we have never been, and will never be, in control." (p. 6).

The false sense of control of the sound environment provided by these media is, I believe, related to the distribution of subjectivities (Kassabian, 2013b, pp. XXV). In a chapter titled "Music for Sleeping", Anahid Kassabian (2013a) applies this concept to mobile apps used for sleep:

> I defined distributed subjectivity as a non-individual field of subjectivity with lumpy nodes of dense, intersecting activities, where those nodes might be selves, but might also be computers, or collectives, or libraries, or places, or smartphones. Management of the self takes place across just such a field, on which apparently discrete entities – 'selves' – learn to 'improve' themselves not only by gathering data about our sleep, exercise, eating and so on, but also by gathering it in public contexts, such as Twitter or online support groups, so that the field around us collects data for many uses, including the management of the participating selves. Self-management, I am suggesting, is a management *of* the self, where in any case the self is far closer to a neurological processing artefact, much like binaural beats are auditory processing artefacts, than to anything else. Wolf's delight in the use of sensor and data-processing technologies for self-reflection is, as with most pleasures, a very ambivalent one if taken seriously. The question for us, both as scholars and as players on the field of distributed subjectivity, is what, beyond a good night's sleep, we hope to get out of the game (Kassabian, 2013a, p. 181).

Kassabian analyzes smartphone and tablet applications designed to be used for sleep and finds several common points in their audio content, which is divided into four categories: *voice, music, binaural beats,* and *sounds* (Kassabian, 2013a, pp. 167). These four categories are also identifiable in the YouTube videos which I analyzed, as I will explore below.

The author notes that the apps that focus on the voice use a warm, soft, and intimate voice that guides the user to a state of mental and physical relaxation. There is almost never a combination of voice and music. The voices do not relate bedtime stories, but use tropes of intimacy achieved by recording with a very close microphone, the absence of echo, and the use of a whispered voice like the voice of parents in the child's ear, for example (Kassabian, 2013a, pp. 167-169).

In the *music* category, Kassabian (2013a) includes content based on the principles of Muzak associated with an idea of "beautiful music"—tracks without percussion, without voice and with simple harmonies. In addition, there are clear associations with Eastern music, especially that of Southern Asia, and an idea of *orientalism* (pp. 171-174).

Content in the *binaural beats* category depends on the combination of two different frequencies and is referred to as:

> [...] an auditory phenomenon first discovered in 1839 by Heinrich Wilhelm Dove. If you play two pitches with a small difference in frequency, one in each ear, you will hear apparent beats at the frequency of the difference between the two pitches. So, if I ask you to put on headphones, and in your left ear I play you a 300Hz and in your right I play you a 310Hz, you will hear a 10Hz beat. It is a processing artefact in the brain, not an actual sound." (Kassabian 2013a, p. 175).

In the content I analyzed, the YouTube tracks using this effect shared a formal organization and timbre characteristic of the idea of music. For that reason, I did

not use a separate category for binaural music, although the technique is used in some of the musical compositions.

The category *sounds* is considered by Kassabian (2013a) to be the most significant among these apps, with "sound of water" as the most prevalent and "sounds of nature" in second place. Many noise machines are also used in these apps (fans, airplane interiors, subways, traffic, interiors of crowded restaurants, or very busy cities). Despite this diversity, the order of preference is always water, sounds of nature, noise machines (pp. 169-171). I observed the same trend in the YouTube videos I analyzed, where the sounds of water and nature are always presented as relaxing. This is evident from the presence of these sounds, whether alone or with music, and also from the images that are added to the videos which always refer to scenarios of idyllic nature, in which water often plays the main role.

I now turn to how YouTube content is chosen and is used to set up listening spaces for sleeping. My argument is that the choice of content is based on the characteristics that define *orphic media* (Hagood, 2019) and therefore can be used to create *sound asylums* (DeNora, 2013), the self-regulating spaces essential to the permanent construction of identity and "self" (DeNora, 2004). However, while the choice of content appears to be free, it is nevertheless influenced by agents who "dictate" what is effective at bedtime and who, in conjunction with users, contribute to the distribution of subjectivities (Kassabian, 2013a; 2013b).

Sleep sound and beyond

Content shared on YouTube to facilitate the sleeping process is produced by channels with thousands of subscribers, and the videos have millions of views.[3] YouTube content can be in one of three formats: *video*—prerecorded moving images with sound;[4] *playlist*—a set of videos grouped under the same topic;[5] and *live*—a live broadcast with the same features as a video.[6] Of the 162 results in my research, three are *live*, the rest are *videos*. Although many channels have their playlists organized according to specific purposes, in this particular search, no *playlist* appeared in the results. There are, however, two videos that contain more than one track and therefore end up being a *playlist*, in the sense that the same content is not being transmitted from the beginning to the end of the video, as is the case with the rest.[7]

Regarding the content, there are five possibilities: *music*—sound organization where melodies and rhythms are identified, and these sounds are produced by musical instruments; *soundscape*—a set of sounds from the same place/environment; *sound*—just one sound from a single sound source; *mixed*—music + soundscape, or music + sound; *ASMR*—a specific model in which a person creates an intimate relationship with the listener, speaks in a whispered voice and makes other sounds such as clicks or hitting hard surfaces with the nails.[8] There are some videos with

ASMR in the title which do not have a protagonist and are just sounds of a kitchen, for example, or a fireplace. These were not considered as ASMRs in this context, despite being labeled as such in their titles. The distribution of the 162 results by types of content is as follows: *music* - 45; *mixed* - 26; *sound* - 43; *soundscape* - 44; *ASMR* - 4. The names of these categories differ from Kassabian's (2013a), but both are used to organize similar types of content.

One of the categories presented by Kassabian is *voice*, which corresponds to *ASMR* in my research and, despite the different nomenclature, includes the same type of audio content and uses the same type of voice: intimate, whispered, close, feminine.[9]

The category *music*, present in both analyses, includes the same type of sounds. There is a systematic use of the synthesizer, either to imitate the sound of other musical instruments (usually strings or tuned metal bars) or to make characteristic synthesizer sounds that refer to an idea of mysticism and divinity, and to the *orientalism* pointed out by Kassabian.[10] The harmonic structure is simple, with long chord sequences, like a drone, which are sometimes complemented by melodies that refer to lullabies. The beat is never too marked—sometimes it is not even defined—and there is never recourse to percussion.[11]

The categories I identified as *sound* and *soundscape* fit into the category *sounds* identified by Kassabian. On YouTube, this is also the category with the most significant number of results: 87 (*sound* - 43; *soundscape* - 44). As in the mobile apps, the sound of water is predominant, taking several forms: rain (of various intensities), sea, creeks, or waterfalls. Next follow the sounds of nature that translate into things like the sounds of the wind, birds chirping, crickets, or frogs.[12] There are also white noise machines. Some are just white noise, not attributed to any specific sound source, but others are attributed to a concrete sound source. Fans are the most frequent sound, but there are others, such as airplanes or spaceship interiors.[13] Fireplace and bonfire sounds are also used, especially in combination with rain and thunder or with nocturnal environments represented by owls, crickets, or frogs.[14] In the *mixed* format, all these features are present. The musical element follows the same patterns as presented above, and the sounds added to the music are almost always water, be it in the form of rain, a creek, or even a bamboo fountain.[15]

The images used in these videos are most often related to nature. Tropical forests, paradisiacal beaches, and verdant meadows star in the images added to the sound component, especially in videos where the content is *music*. The videos in the *sound* and *soundscape* categories use another type of image, representative of the sounds that are part of the composition. There are images of rain falling, of a night camp with a bonfire burning, or even of fans. Although most images are static, some have movement, such as rain or the flames of a campfire. Some are images of bedrooms, although the sound represented is that of rain and thunder. In this kind of image

there is almost always a window where you see the rain falling outside and the flash of lightning, to convey the feeling of comfort inside the house. Some videos have images during the first hour, but then the screen turns black so that light does not disturb the listener's sleep. Regardless of the content, even if the video is 10 hours long, the sound is the same from beginning to end, and it makes no difference at what point you start listening.

YOUTUBE VIDEOS TO FALL ASLEEP TO

Categories		Description	Number of videos	Some examples
Formats	Video	Prerecorded moving images with sound.	157/162	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4zqKJBxRyuo
	Live	A live broadcast with the same features as a video.	3/162	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y7e-GC6oGhg
	Playlist	A set of videos grouped under the same topic.	2/162	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=txQ6t4yPIM0&list=PLQkQfzsIUwRYyENOH8e-AD2xdK--NSYYe
Audio content	Sound	Just one sound from a single sound source.	43/162	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zJQ0_cHOk4w
	Music	Sound organization where melodies and rhythms are identified, and these sounds are produced by musical instruments.	45/162	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mhXHd25zeGU
	Sound-scape	A set of sounds from the same place/environment.	44/162	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UAGBiNckW2w
	ASMR	A specific model in which a person creates an intimate relationship with the listener, speaks in a whispered voice and makes other sounds such as clicks, or hitting hard surfaces with the nails.	4/162	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8qKOaD2AgSg
	Mixed	Music + soundscape or music + sound.	26/162	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x5zGL9q8BZ0

Table 1 – The 162 analyzed YouTube videos to fall asleep to, divided into categories of format and audio content, with some examples.

The titles of these videos are always descriptive. They can convey information about the sound characteristics, using expressions such as "rain at cozy attic", "relaxing piano music", or "fan white noise", but they can also convey the purposes for which they are intended, using expressions such as "Background for meditation, sleep, yoga, stress relief", "Nature white noise for sleep, studying or relaxation", or "10 triggers to help you sleep". In addition to the titles, the descriptions that accompany the videos also refer to the purpose for which they are intended. Although the topic

of this research was audio content for sleep, it can be seen from titles and descriptions that many are designed for other purposes, such as relaxing, studying, working, meditating, reading, yoga, staying focused, releasing stress. Of the 162 results obtained, 61 are exclusively intended for sleep. The remaining 101 are also intended for other purposes, some related, such as relaxing or relieving stress, while others are for active pursuits, such as working or studying.

MOST COMMONLY USED SOUNDS AND IMAGES IN YOUTUBE VIDEOS TO FALL ASLEEP TO

	Description	Some examples
Most commonly used sounds	Synthesizer (either to imitate the sound of other musical instruments, usually strings or tuned metal bars).	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lo4H13uAnXU
	Water (in several formats: rain (of various intensities), sea, creeks, or waterfalls).	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gVKEM4K8J8A
	Sounds of nature (that translate into things like the sounds of the wind, birds chirping, crickets, or frogs).	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FoSo9zIu5ZI
	White noise (in some cases without being attributed to any specific sound source, but in other cases attributed a concrete sound source).	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wzjWIxXBs_s
	Fireplace and bonfire sounds (are also used, especially in combination with rain and thunder or with nocturnal environments represented by owls, crickets, or frogs).	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qsOUv9EzKsg
Most commonly used images	Related to nature (tropical forests, paradisiacal beaches, and verdant meadows star in the images added to the sound component, especially in videos where the content is music).	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=857bt64SomQ
	Representative of the sounds that are part of the composition (images of rain falling, of a night camp with a bonfire burning, or even of fans).	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5E67XUpbiIE
	Images of bedrooms (although the sound represented is that of rain and thunder. In this kind of image there is almost always a window where you see the rain falling outside and the flash of lightning, to convey the feeling of comfort inside the house).	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6IijcqELJbQ

Table 2 - Indication of the most commonly used sounds and images in YouTube videos to fall asleep to, with some examples.

As well as the number of views, there are a large number of comments on these videos.[16] Some comments report the effectiveness of the videos for their users, mentioning things like: "This is a God send. My GF snores. I put this between us at night, and it masks the sound. TYVM for posting!!" (Brad M, YouTube user); "Fan noises help me sleep so I just watch this when I'm away from home." (Beast4856, YouTube user); "This is the only thing that can help me sleep when I'm struggling. It's really good." (Happybatman21, YouTube user); "After tossing and turning in bed, I decided to play some meditation music for deep sleep and landed on this one. I dozed off

a few minutes into this video, so it works." (Khurty Ramudu, YouTube user). In accordance with the titles and descriptions that indicate more than one use, there are also comments that refer to the way in which these videos were used in other activities besides sleeping: "We're doing silent study in my class so I decided to put some music into my headphones, forgot to plug in, and this starts playing in class. I quickly move to shut it off, but the teacher stops me and tells me to let it play. It was a good day." (輕鬆的音樂, YouTube user); "Thanks for this. Helps to drown out loud library people." (Mikez, YouTube user); "I play this as background music in my classroom." (Debbie Hawkins, YouTube user); "This Helped Me Study for A Science Quiz :)." (Popcorn, YouTube user).

Both the titles and descriptions and the users' comments reveal that, although sleeping is the main purpose of these videos, they are also intended for other tasks. Although some tasks are almost opposites, such as sleeping and studying, all the videos share a common element: sound masking (Augoyard & Torgue, 2005, pp. 66-73). In the case of sleeping, this sound masking is necessary to prevent the arbitrariness of other sounds from disturbing the process of falling asleep. Together, the repetitive nature of this content plus the timbre associated with ideas of peace, tranquility, and well-being construct a *sound asylum*. Such *sound asylums* are created through strategies of both removal and refurnishing. In a first stage the refurnishing strategy is used since, by playing this content, the subject is intervening in an environment that can be shared with other people, manipulating it so that it acquires the desired configuration. However, in a second stage, listening to this content is a strategy of removal, used by the subject to gain distance from the world.

In the case of other activities, such as studying, this content helps to maintain concentration. The sound masking prevents other sounds from disturbing the activity. Of course, another musical genre, such as pop, rock, etc., might have the same masking effect, but instead of helping with focus and concentration, the song lyrics, marked rhythms, and track changes would distract the user. Just as in sleeping, in activities such as studying or working and helping to focus, the content selected also collaborates in the process of creating *sound asylums*, through both refurnishing and removal strategies: the choice of content serves to reconfigure the sound environment, but it is this reconfiguration that allows the distance necessary to create a listening space conducive to concentration.

Whatever the activity, the sound masking and consequent creation of *sound asylums* provided by this content are forms of *orphic mediation*. The way the content is shared and received shows that "sound is also mediatic in itself, a sensory-spatial process of interaction though which subjects and objects emerge in modes of affective relation" (Hagood, 2019, p. 28). Being a digital platform, YouTube allows content to be accessible anywhere. The characteristics of sound allow the videos to be articulated with various spaces and activities and therefore to be endowed with

this multi-functionality. As the digital content can be transmitted via different devices—on a smartphone or a computer, on speakers, headphones, or on television—it can transform all sorts of objects into *orphic media*. The purpose of these objects is no longer to transmit information, but rather to collaborate in the control of space and in the way the subjects engage with their environment, by fighting sound with sound.

Summing up

In this article I aimed to demonstrate that audiovisual content shared on YouTube for the stated purpose of helping people to fall asleep can function as a mediator in the construction of listening spaces suitable for sleep. To this end, I articulated the concepts of *orphic media* (Hagood, 2019), *sound asylums* (DeNora, 2013), and the idea of distribution of subjectivities (Kassabian, 2013a; 2013b). I did this in order to show how, on the one hand, the effectiveness of this kind of content comes from its *orphic* characteristics, which enable these videos to mask other sounds (or silences) that can be disturbing, and, on the other hand, how the addition of images, titles, hashtags, and keywords to sound and musical pieces reassures users of YouTube's suitability as a resource to help them. Additionally, I aimed to show how YouTube can function as a digital social network (Monteiro & Policarpo, 2015, p. 336; Horst & Miller, 2012, pp. 23-24), allowing its users to comment on videos, with such comments contributing to the success of these videos. In this relation between users and videos, there is a continuous influence in which the titles influence users and the user comments attest to the content effectiveness for other users, thereby triggering the production of more content with the same audiovisual characteristics, titles, hashtags, and keywords.

Although I specifically analyzed the interplay between videos, user comments, and paratextual elements regarding videos to help people fall asleep, the same logic can be applied to other kinds of YouTube content as it is not a characteristic of the specific content, but of YouTube. What has not been discussed here is the commercial aspect inherent in the chain of creation, consumption, and circulation of audiovisuals on YouTube. In this context, the titles, hashtags, and keywords added to the videos not only serve to indicate to consumers the purposes for which they are intended, but also to "wrap" and reconfigure sounds that often already exist in everyday life at home, giving them an "appetizing look" and turning them into a ready-to-consume product (Larsen and Patterson, 2018). However, this aspect would require a separate approach and is beyond the scope of this paper.

To summarize, this article has shown that—taking into account the textual and paratextual elements and the way it circulates— audiovisual content designed to help with sleeping or other activities acts as a tool of self-regulation or self-care: it

changes mood and energy levels (DeNora, 2004, pp. 53-58), affecting the body and generating emotional states (DeNora, 2004, pp. 103-108), thus becoming a tool for social ordering and the creation of an environment of tranquility (DeNora, 2004, pp. 111-121). The interaction between sounds, the space where they are transmitted, and the way they are filtered and manipulated by the subject who selects them, allows the emergence of *sound asylums*, listening spaces where it is possible to sleep, relax, work, study, or read. In the next stages of my research, I will analyze other videos in relation to different domestic activities and spaces in the hope of contributing further to the discussion about the creation, consumption, and circulation of audiovisual content shared on digital platforms.

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Notes

1   This research is being carried out as part of my individual PhD project in Musicology (BD FCT SFRH/BD/13624/2018) at the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities of the NOVA University of Lisbon and started in September 2018. The central object of this research is the soundscapes of daily life in domestic space and how, in that context, sound can be used as a decorative object. It is based on the relationship between domestic soundscapes, sound and audiovisual content, and the human being as an agent of production and configuration of the domestic space. It examines how new content-sharing technologies, namely online platforms and portable and multifaceted devices, have altered the opportunities to create and disseminate music. The main objectives are to explore how sound and audiovisual content is articulated with domestic daily life, and to propose a type of sound and audiovisual composition that allows sound to be used as an object of decoration.

2   The original quote is in Portuguevse, here translated by author.

3   On July 9, 2020, the most viewed video of this group had 192,541,663 views— https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ZYbU82GVz4

4   Example: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4zqKJBxRyuo

5   Example: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=txQ6t4yPIM0&list=PLQkQfzsIUwRYyENOH8e-AD2xdK--NSYYe

6   Example: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y7e-GC6oGhg

7   The two videos that take on the function of playlist:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iloh1SUe42g
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aNBkRZWor9I

8   *ASMR – Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response* "is a previously unstudied sensory phenomenon, in which individuals experience a tingling, static-like sensation across the scalp, back of the neck and at times further areas in response to specific triggering audio and visual stimuli." (Barrat & Davis, 2015, pp. 1). The term, which is not scientific, was coined by Jenifer Allen in 2010. These "chills", described and felt by people, are often called *tingles* and described as a sense of calm, relaxation, pleasure. On YouTube, as a way to provoke these tingles, audiovisual content known as ASMR videos appear, and are produced and consumed by the community that was created around this sensory phenomenon (Barrat & Davis, 2015, pp. 1-2).

9   Example: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8qKOaD2AgSg

10   Example: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lo4H13uAnXU

11   Example: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mhXHd25zeGU

12   Examples: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gVKEM4K8J8A
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f77SKdyn-1Y
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UAGBiNckW2w
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HchoJcYNYlU
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FoSo9zIu5ZI

13   Examples: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wzjWIxXBs_s
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5E67XUpbiIE
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=co7KgV2edvI
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KRnjwBD341s

14   Example: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qsOUv9EzKsg

15   Example: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x5zGL9q8BZ0

16   On July 9, 2020, the video with most comments had 97477 comments— https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xQ6xgDI7Whc