

# SoundEffects



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**Editorial**

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When Max Neuhaus first installed his sound work *Times Square* in New York City in 1977 it not only placed him at the centre of the contemporary art scene, it also paved the way for a more general understanding of how sound art can merge with the acoustic expression of the city co-creating an ever-changing urban soundscape. Neuhaus' use of complex technology to interact with the pulsating urban environment was and still is unique. It can, however, be argued that early sound works such as Walter Ruttmann's *Wochenende* (1930) or the works of musique concrete composers such as Pierre Henry and Else Marie Pade from the 1950s and 1960s had already paved the way for artistic interaction with the urban. However, it was not until soundscape analysis was introduced within media and cultural studies that the relation between urban life, technology and sound studies was established. In his groundbreaking formalisation of everyday sound experiences, *The Tuning of the World*, from 1977 (Schafer, 1997) R. Murray Schafer, who was generally sceptical towards modern urban life, criticised urban soundscapes as such, conceptualising them as lo-fi in relation to the hi-fi condition of the pre-modern village. The prominent urban feature registered in Schafer's works from the early 1970s was that of noise, outlining a narrative within which the signals of human voices were increasingly disturbed and masked by mechanical noises and commercial muzak. However, the comprehensive conceptual framework sketched out by Schafer and his colleagues proved valuable in directing attention to the 'other' of urban environments, incorporating mechanical, commercial and human noises. While cultural studies during the late 1970s and the early 1980s increasingly turned its attention to the practices of everyday life, new approaches and vocabularies for contemporary sonic experiences were established. With the establishment of Cresson (Centre de recherche sur l'espace sonore et l'environnement urbain) in 1979 Jean-François Augoyard turned his attention to practices of hearing and sounding everyday environments. The attention to sound followed from Augoyard's earlier study of the walking practices of the residents in a modernist housing complex, Arlequin, in Grenoble. In *Pas à Pas* (Augoyard, 1979) Augoyard developed a theory of an inhabitant rhetoric constituted by *spatial practices*, a theory that greatly inspired Michel de Certeau in his *L'invention du quotidien*, and which later led Augoyard to a series of groundbreaking investigations on the role of sound in everyday life. The publication in 1995 of a vocabulary of sonic effects underlines the urban perspective of Cresson's work, a work that was guided by questions such as: 'What instruments are available to technicians and researchers, administrators and users, designers and inhabitants? What is the sonic *instrumentarium* of urban environments?' (Augoyard & Torgue, 2005, p. 4).

The emergence of the international field of sound studies over the past 20 years is probably a well-known story in this context. Many themes and practices have emerged under the broadly defined auspices of sound studies, among them the question of mediation of urban experience through sound technologies: the walk-

man (Hosokawa, 1984; Bull, 2000; Thibaud, 2003) and later the iPod (Bull, 2008) and mobile multimedia devices (Bassett, 2003). We have seen studies of urban history (Smith, 1999; Picker, 2003), of architectural form incorporating acoustic concerns (Dyrssen, 1995; Hellström, 2003; Thompson, 2004) and of representations of urban space in sound (Bijsterveld, 2013). No doubt media and mediated practices have entered the field of sound studies. As sound studies continue to build a field of knowledge and develop methods and terminologies, one could argue that the question of urban experience is moving out of focus. However, the question is not so much if it still makes sense to address the issue of sound in urban experience, but rather if it is still possible to analyse an increasingly mediated life world without an implicit urban perspective? Rephrasing the question of the 'urban' within contemporary sound studies we have invited researchers throughout the humanities and social sciences to respond to an open call for articles on urban sounds with a specific focus on human experience in the city: 'The experience of the post-industrial city takes on many forms, all depending on how we approach the city: walking with headphones on, driving in a car, dwelling in a park lying on the back, sitting in the movie theatre or listening to the radio. All these bodily and sensorial entries to the city relate to auditory aspects of the urban experience. Of course the city is full of sounds, not just in terms of noise or of city soundscapes, but also of concerts, sport events, installation art, social unrest, activist politics and foreign languages. All these topics have in the past two decades played an important role for the development of sound studies as an independent area of research. With the emergence of digital technologies, new communication systems and mobile devices, but also of experience economy and environmental initiatives, the city is full of new sounds and forms of expression'.

The present special issue of *SoundEffects* contains eight responses to that call, which give indications of a wide range of contemporary experiences of urban life forms articulated in and through sound. It takes us from the global mediascapes of television, gaming and smart phones in Michael Bull's article 'Sound Mix' to the construction sites of emerging Indian cities in Budhaditya Chattopadhyay's article 'Sonic Drifting' through to the multiple voices heard and recorded at the Syntagma Square in Athens during the summer of 2011 in Nikos Bubaris' article 'The Acoustic Phenomenon of the "Cocktail Party"'. Three other articles analyse different artistic and cultural practices: from the installation of large-scale urban soundscape systems in Sydney in Lawrence Harvey's article 'Improving Models for Urban Soundscape Systems' to Sanne Krogh Groth and Kristine Samson's analysis of sound installations in public spaces in Copenhagen and Berlin in the article 'Urban Sound Ecologies' through to Robert Strachan's examination of sound creative practices and the representation of landscape and environment in Liverpool in the article 'The Spectacular Suburb'. In 'Conceptual Overlays for Urban Soundscape

Design Emerging from a Transversal Analysis of Lefebvre, Deleuze and Guattari, and Arendt' Jordan Lacey presents a sociopolitical and ecological understanding of the urban based on four conceptual overlays. And finally Jean-Paul Thibaud and Pascal Amphoux investigate the intense longing for silence deeply embedded within the contemporary urban imagination.

The issue closes with a brief review section. Welcome!

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