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2016

Practices of emotional and affective geographies of sound

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Practices of emotional and affective geographies of sound

Abstract

The articles that comprise this special issue reflect the growing scholarship that investigates the role of sound in understandings of self, others and place.

Disciplines

Education | Social and Behavioral Sciences

Publication Details

Doughty, K., Duffy, M. & Harada, T. (2016). Practices of emotional and affective geographies of sound. *Emotion, Space and Society*, 20 39-41.

Keywords:

Sound geographies
Emotion and affect
Place
Qualitative methods
Audio walks

The articles that comprise this special issue reflect the growing scholarship that investigates the role of sound in understandings of self, others and place. We acknowledge that attending to sound is not new to the humanities and social sciences (Atkinson, 2007; Anderson, 2009; Bull, 2000; Smith, 1994, 2000; Thibaud, 2003). Yet, until the recent interest in performativity, embodiment, affect and non-representational theory, studies of music and sound have most often focused on sound as an object, where it is something to be seen or observed rather than heard or felt. This has resulted in an emphasis on representation, which obscures the ways in which the processes of sound influence us and shape our actions, thoughts and feelings in space and time. In the discussions presented here we are not arguing that such a focus is misguided or in error; sound can be characterized as a discrete object, with definable features that can be representative of a clearly demarcated and spatialized community or group. However such studies of sonic processes and practices demonstrate the difficulties inherent in capturing a broader range of effects and the diverse impacts of sound. Sound and music are not simply physiological outcomes of hearing sonic qualities arising within particular social contexts or individual environments; rather sound and music may move us in unpredictable ways, that is, something *happens*. One important outcome of sound is that it taps into our emotional and intuitive selves, and this has opened up a means to examine how emotions and affects influence social interactions (DeNora, 2000; Duffy et al., 2011; Reville, 2016; Simpson, 2016; Smith, 2000; Wood and Smith, 2004).

The focus for this issue originated in a series of sessions held at the 2013 *Emotional Geographies* conference held in Groningen that explored sound and emotion. The organisers of this series, Karolina Doughty (Wageningen) and Maja Lagerqvist (Stockholm), facilitated interdisciplinary conversations between scholars seeking to better understand the impact of sounds on emotions and the ways in which these then shape place encounters, conviviality and the potential of places to be experienced in different ways. Given the interest and exciting conversations that followed, we decided to collate work currently being produced in this

intersection between sound, emotion, affect and place. In this special issue we have brought together recent contributions from an interdisciplinary field of contemporary social science research that focus on how sound can provide insights into reciprocal affective and emotional relations between bodies, objects, places and ideas.

The articles collected in this issue address three broad themes, yet readers will find numerous connections and interjections between these that serve to encapsulate the liveliness of this field of research. First is the creative potential of sound for producing spaces that are sites of welcome and social inclusion, but also where sound can produce atmospheres of exclusion and confrontation and that these conflicting states can and do occur simultaneously. For example, Karolina Doughty and Maja Lagerqvist's case study of migrant buskers illustrate that while encounters with others in public spaces are subject to unequal power-geometries, sound has the potential to affectively reconfigure social spaces in ways that open them up for alternative ways of being and feeling. The authors suggest that exploring urban public life through an engagement with different modalities of music highlights the creative potential of sound geographies for understanding and creating different encounters with the city. Thus thinking about music and sound as ways to mediate the relations between people and place through affective and emotional registers can provide insights into how to address issues of power, justice, access and belonging to urban space by considering how particular sounds might work to open connections between bodies.

As Michael Gallagher points out in his different examples of sonic interventions, the atmospheres created through music and sound operate through the generation of affective forces that impact on human (and non-human) bodies in varied ways. This reference to affect is important. As Gallagher notes, while there are differing genealogies of thought on affect, much of what currently inspires work in the humanities and social sciences originates out of the work of Spinoza through Deleuze and Guattari via Massumi. Affect in this framework is pre-cognitive and transpersonal, moving in and through bodies, but also exceeds the conscious states of perception (Clough, 2007). We often struggle to make sense of these affective atmospheres, particularly when they disturb and alarm us, and this may happen because, as Gallagher argues, our cognitive assessment of a situation seems to be in catch-up mode with our bodies and their intuitive sensations. Herein lie the capacities of sound; its power and its effects.

Nonetheless emotion and affect are not discrete things, and indeed geographer Liz Bondi argues that distinctions made between them are 'unhelpful dualisms' (2005: 445). Owain Jones and Louisa Fairclough beautifully capture the complex interchange

between sound, emotion, affect and place in their collaborations within the intertidal landscape of the Severn Estuary (UK). As their discussions on this place as a site of grief and loss suggest, 'sound has particular and complex relations to emotion and affect within the tensions of self-in-landscape' (Jones & Fairclough, this issue), which can productively and creatively open out our understandings of being and knowing. In a very different context, that nonetheless starts from the body, Martin Zebracki draws on auto-ethnography as a means to critically engage with the ways techno electronic dance music moves bodies such that an 'affective publicness' is constituted, which nonetheless comes about through a social performance of physical contact and shared emotions.

A second theme that arises in this collection of work is the need to pay attention to the affordances of the affective qualities of sound. Rather than sound as a taken-for-granted and largely overlooked background to everyday life, what is encouraged is an exploration of the way that sound constitutes material and discursive spaces. Thus this has consequences for how we might conceptualize everyday, therapeutic or recreational spaces and encourages thinking around the potential of sound for altering engagements with space. For example, Katie Hemsworth's exploration of the role of sound in creating, maintaining or disrupting affective atmospheres in a prison demonstrates how such containment requires learning to pay closer attention to sound's emotional content in order to prevent and survive potentially violent relations. The harnessing of music's emotional content is explored in Alexander Brown's discussion of Tokyo's anti-nuclear 'sound demonstrations'. In these events, music has been understood to help shape collective identity and political response, yet, as Brown notes, engaging with music allows for a diverse set of involvement better conceptualised in Stephen Shukaitis' (2007) term, 'affective composition', where there is a sense of a 'shared affective experiences [that] create the communal bonds which fuel political action' (Brown, this issue). These papers point to the way that sounds can afford particular ways of thinking, sensing and acting. As such, investigating the affordances of the affective qualities of sound can build on understandings of how embodied relations with space may be mediated to produce particular emotional behaviours and deter others. Nor are these benign processes, for as each of these examples demonstrate, relations of power are embedded within sonic elements.

Finally, this collection of papers also address the methodological possibilities and challenges of attending to an exploration of sound geographies. In line with the recent theoretical arguments around the conceptualization of mobile bodies and embodied practices, scholars are increasingly focused on the movement and intensities of affect and emotion that are experienced through bodies (Revill, 2016; Simpson, 2016). Yet empirical research practices have yet to develop additional or alternative methodologies to address the challenges of this recent theoretical shift. The paper by Michelle Duffy, Gordon Waitt and Theresa Harada seeks to provide a helpful starting point for how as researchers we might more empathetically deal with sound and music in our research practices. Attending to sound offers possibilities for exploring a range of embodied responses that arise through everyday practices and points to the ways that sound mediates emotional and affective engagements between people, objects, places and ideas. For example, Kevin Logan's invitation to engage with performative writing starts with an almost playful act of the removal of the letter 'p' from a piece written for performance and yet in asking the reader to complete the text 'with a sonic event of their choice' (Logan, this issue) makes the reader re-engage with the words on the page; we interact with this text by adding our sound of choice and so become part of the sound-writing performance, and in doing this new facets of embodied 'being-in-the-world' (Logan, this issue) are revealed.

In this issue, authors have engaged with methods that may begin to trace and capture something of the movement of affect and emotion across bodies, objects, places and ideas. This includes audio, audio walks, audio-visual or performative methods that illustrate the challenges of capturing, analysing and interpreting data that is generated through an attunement to sonic geographies. Angharad Saunders and Kate Moles' exploration of a community-based audio walk project in Cardiff, Wales, reveals audio walks as lively and emotionally rich spatial experiences that are not confined to 'the tightly marshalled' choreographies produced by tourist audio walks. When used to explore participants' own place in the world, audio walks can be understood as 'practices of making and doing'; as pathways that are not rigid but rather 'pliable, yielding and rich in opportunity' (Saunders and Moles, this issue). In consideration of listening as an embodied practice, Karla Berrens (this issue) argues for closer awareness of sound's emotional and affective influences on the shaping of urban spaces. In this she draws on the work of Doreen Massey to demonstrate the significance of relationality in constituting place, the ways in which a place arises out of on-going and dynamic interactions that include the senses. This sound is not only an important element in the complexity of a place; it enfolds us in through its emotional and affective capacities.

We hope that by bringing this special issue together current thinking around music and sound may continue to expand across disciplines. The liveliness of sonic processes and practices promises to open up new avenues for collaborative practices, experimental approaches and a greater awareness of the creative potential for enhancing research practices. We wish to thank all of the contributors for their sustained time and patience in bringing the special issue to fruition, and to the editors for their helpful advice and insights. We hope that you as the reader will enjoy travelling along the different paths that these papers lead you on, and that they may stimulate you to think in different ways about how sound pervades everyday life. When you are listening to or hearing familiar choreographies of sound, whether that be garbage trucks and sirens, or birdsong and wind, we hope that you might be prompted to reflect on how this mediates your own relation to people and place.

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15 June 2016
Available online 29 June 2016