Soundscapes and the Rural: a Conceptual Review from a British perspective

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Summary

This paper explores how British rural space is variously constructed through the sonic-aural realm. Through a review of literature from the social scientific and artistic domains, the article proposes a typology of approaches and conceptual frameworks to illustrate the processes and actors involved in a sonic geography / rural aurality. Tranquillity / pastoralism, acoustic ecology, quotidian lives / local speech, artist creativity and consumer technology, in their different ways, drive or are driven by discourses and aesthetics within society. The article is offered as a foundation stone on which an integrative analytical framework might be built.

1. Introduction

Recently, a consortium of organisations led by the Campaign to Protect Rural England commissioned research by academics into the concept of tranquillity in rural England. The study (MacFarlane et al. 2004) entailed a sophisticated and reflexive exploration of the conceptualisation and methodology of rural tranquillity. Although it also included the visual experience of tranquillity, the study was noteworthy in being a none too common exploration of rurality and rural locations in terms of their sonic-aural characteristics. It was even more remarkable for this to be the object of social enquiry (qualitative and quantitative).

Yet, for all its impressive academic achievements, the study was, by definition and as acknowledged by the authors, confined to merely one register of the rural sonic realm: that is, tranquillity. Notwithstanding MacFarlane et al.'s careful presentation of tranquillity as a multi-dimensional concept with manifold and subjective definitions, their report unavoidably resonates with a neo-Romantic discourse (below) of the English countryside that prevails among public and voluntary sector organisations.

The present article was inspired by MacFarlane et al but proposes that the study of the rural sonic realm requires a more inclusive and critical conceptual framework. It would need to allow for the analysis all the sonic components (and their associated acoustic communities) that manifest in any given place. Schafer (1977) coined the term soundscape to portray how sonic elements — speech, music, human (sound producing) activity and the physical (natural and built) environment — variously manifest themselves in place and time.

Moreover, the sonic realm is not solely, nor even primarily, a phenomenon of physical acoustics. Sonic sensations assist individuals in locating themselves in physical space but the sonic characteristics of an area need also to be understood as being a function of wider social conditions and dynamics. What is heard, and the significance applied to a soundscape, are socially constructed.

In terms of Bourdieu's ideas on the forms of capital (Bourdieu 1973; 1986), the values inculcated into soundscapes could be understood as one means by which social structure is maintained, with the interests of the bourgeois class being particularly prominent. The aesthetic distinctions attached to different soundscapes thus feeds back as accumulating (cultural-educational) capital of the class concerned, and thereby reinforcing social structure.

In The Glass Bead Game by Herman Hesse (1943/1987), the narrator at one point recalls the ancient Chinese myth concerning the sociological significance of the aural realm:

"The music of a well-ordered age is calm and cheerful, and so is its government. The music of a restive age is excited and fierce, and its government perverted. The music of a decaying state is sentimental and sad, and its government imperilled."

In the present day, soundscapes can be understood as both means and manifestations of the activities of movements abroad in society. Sonic means are used by various interests in order to promote social change or reaction. After the work of McLuhan (1964), it is also evident how important technologies are not only as means of transmission but also in influencing the values within society. Central to McLuhan's thesis is the notion that our organisation of experience / place has moved from its pre-Modernity basis in aurality to an emphasis on visuality, and is now being transformed yet again by the rise of electric / electronic culture.

The sonic aesthetics of generic rurality and of rural places are constantly being worked on by discourses of rurality (and 'rural development') and by the way that various actors engage with technology. Prominent in the rural domain — at least in an English context — is a set of neo-Romantic ideas regarding what rurality should be like. Sometimes in collaboration, other times in conflict, with neo-Romanticism are various other ideas at work in the aural realm such as environmentalism, regionalism and humanistic notions of the agency of the individual.

This article presents a selective review of secondary material in order to identify some of the elements of a framework that would promote the sociological analysis of soundscapes in general and of rural soundscapes in particular. This material comes partly from academia, partly from the work of sonic-based artists.

2. Marshall McLuhan, technology and characterisations of society

McLuhan (1964) argued that the ascendancy of a literacy-based society had resulted in the transformation in the way experience and space were organised: "Phonetic writing translated tribal man into a visual world and invited him to undertake the visual organisation of space" (104). Literacy promoted a visual-based society and thus revolutionised social conditions. Literacy/visuality-based society cultivates a general mode of 'passive scanning' of the written word and all visual sensory input and thereby also elevates the status of extra-local authors (whether in fiction, technical or officialdom).

This, in turn, translated into the primary rationale for the design and management of space and place. McLuhan went on to claim that this transformation in media had been accompanied by a separation of the senses allowing for the option of 'dispassionate reflexion' and, thereby, promoting a distinction

between individual and group. Technological change had resulted in the privileging of one aspect of the sensorium and thereby shifted societal norms and structure.

Writing in the 1960s, McLuhan announced that the rapidly emerging electric age was presaging a societal transmogrification. With everybody living in close proximity to everyone else — his metaphor of the global village — conditions were now favourable for the inclusive and participative spoken word over the specialist written word, and the quick reactivity to situations: "Industrialised areas, having eroded their oral traditions automatically, are in the position of having to rediscover them in order to cope with the electric age" (McLuhan 1964, 29). Aurality society — in the sense of re-emergent aural-based communication — results in the replacement of the "cool, neutral eye" with the "hyper-aesthetic, delicate and all-inclusive" speech / hearing sense (193).

Thus, McLuhan portrayed the present age as one in which society is changing from one based on the primacy of visuality to the characteristics of the new electric / electronic society. In the latter, individuals as 'receivers' interact (react / participate) with message producers and with each other, and this he likened to the dynamics of pre-modern tribal-oral society. In other words, a re-tribalisation of society was occurring, driven by 'cool media' that allow much information to be filled-in by those seemingly on the 'receiving' end. The arrival of Internet — a post-McLuhan phenomenon — serves merely to extend his thesis in that, although it is a highly visual medium, it is assumes many of the dynamic characteristics associated with oral / sonic realm.

This technology-driven dynamic thus affects our organisation of (engagement with) space and place. At one level, it re-emphasises the relevance of oral- and quasi-oral based society in (socially) constructing our experience of space / place. This, it can be argued, extends also to the acoustic characteristics of place — that is, all sound and not just speech — and how they are given significance /value. In the rural domain, the pursuit of socio-cultural and economic vibrancy includes strategies to protect place specificity (just as urban economies do in terms of agglomeration imperative and attraction of tourists etc.). Thus, the technological and social dynamics of present times provide a rationale for an aural dimension to our sense of rurality and of rural place. Below, examples are presented of how social factors and types of actor are forming rural soundscapes through a variety of sonic media.

3. Rurality as tranquillity and pastoralism

The aforementioned MacFarlane et al. study was concerned with what the authors called areas of 'relative tranquillity'. These were defined as:

"areas where the physical and experiential characteristics of the landscape are more likely to provide countryside users with the space and conditions to relax, achieve mental balance and a sense of distance from stress. Relatively tranquil areas are characterised by a low density of people, minimum levels of artificial noise and a landscape that is preserved as relatively natural, with few overt signs of human influence." (8)

A central element of their definition is, therefore, an explicit recognition of the subjective nature of tranquillity. Opinions collected from groups of 'countryside users' in specified study areas mirrored the findings of previous studies in emphasising how the nature and value of tranquillity is mediated through individual perceptions and needs. Tranquillity, although a phenomenon of public / open space, is thus very much a matter of individual experience. Yet common among these accounts was the notion of tranquillity providing a restorative function for the individual. The authors cite Mace et al. (1999) who came to the same conclusion about "the importance of the natural environment in facilitating recovery from stress" (24).

This draws on Attention Restoration theory from environmental psychology which, for example, contrasts urban locations that induce attentional fatigue with restorative environments whose inherent tranquillity encourages 'effortless attention' ('soft fascination') and thereby enables the individual to recover a sense of psychological well-being (Herzog and Chernick 2000). MacFarlane et al. emphasise the perceptual dimension of this. Drawing on Kaplan (2001) as well as their own field work, they argue that the restorative function of tranquil areas seems to be a function of the type of location (that is, natural / rural) and the sense of place as being different from the quotidian (different from the individual's everyday environment).

Rural tranquillity is therefore valued by a certain social category (countryside users) for its recuperative function. We can take from this that, although the precise characteristics of a tranquil area vary according to the individual, rural tranquillity is part of a more general therapy culture and conforms, therefore, to the concept of the consumption countryside.

The sonic nature of the tranquil-consumption countryside is variously constructed on the interrelated, yet distinct, concepts of naturalness and (absence of) noise. McFarlane et al. acknowledge the work of Bell (1999) in which naturalness captures the sense of "getting away from it all" (20).

In his seminal work on soundscapes, Schafer (1977) repeatedly contrasted rural with urban soundscapes. The former he categorises as hi-fi in that they had a "favourable signal to noise ratio" (43) in which "discreet sounds can be heard clearly because of the low ambient noise level". In the urban setting — 'lo fi' soundscapes — the overall loudness and sonic frequencies involved mean that "perspective is lost. On a downtown street corner of the modern city, there is no distance, there is only presence" (43). In hi-fi rural soundscapes, by contrast, the sonic realm has the capacity to communicate a greater amount of useful, even vital, information. The listener can discern subtle degrees of difference between components. It is easier in the rural context for individuals to use sonic inputs to locate themselves in space. The relative discreteness (in terms of time periods and frequencies) and local distinctiveness also assist the listener to attach emotional and symbolic-cultural significance to a rural soundscape.

According to Schafer, modernity and urbanism were 'noisy' because of the density and overlapping frequencies of their sonic components. Moreover, they were characterised formerly by the mechanical rhythms of industrial mechanisation and, latterly, by the continuous and extended sonic 'flat line'; electric culture manifests as the mains hum, tyre-road noise, the drone of the electric motor. Whereas, the soundscapes of traditional society were marked by discreet sounds, present-day urban modernity is underpinned by the flat line which has no sense of duration ; it is 'suprabiological' in its longevity.

According to Schafer (and colleagues in the World Soundscapes Project — below), a major aspect of soundscape 'degradation' is the level of noise. 'Noise' — associated with industrial / electric technology and urbanism — works by overwhelming the discrete and valued sonic elements that otherwise constitute hi fi local soundscapes. In art theory terms, noise represents an increase in presence of 'ground' (that is, background) so that it overwhelms, or at least severely undermines the perception and appreciation of, 'figure'.

In a soundscape degraded by noise, a sense of space — the ability to track the physical and temporal geography of location— by the individual is compromised. Places become more amorphous and homogenous. In Schafer's terms, areas no longer sound as locally distinctive as, in retrospect, they seemed to be. Noise, therefore, undermines the capacity various sonic elements — separately and together — to generate pleasurable acoustic sensations and normative mental constructions in the minds of hearers.

Tranquillity, therefore, is not only the absence of general 'noise' but also the presence of a rather narrow set of culturally-defined sonic elements. These various elements constitute what a pristine, 'pre-

modernity' countryside is taken to sound like: at a generic level and in terms of the specificity of rural localities. The aesthetics of hi fi rural soundscapes, according to the theoretical frameworks of Bourdieu (1973; 1986) and Foucault, are a function of discourses — and, thus, social relations — within society. Social structure will operate to engineer rural soundscapes so as to produce what is thought to be appropriate rural society, different from and better than their urban counterparts.

The equating of the difference between rural and urban soundscapes to their underlying social relations seems to be a general feature of the modern era. Smith (2003) studied this in relation to Antebellum America in which the South equated to rurality and the North to industrial, liberal capitalist, urban society. In the North, the industrial capitalist class elite valued their soundscapes for the associations with progress (production, consumption, innovation). Quietitude – and the absence of mechanical cadences — equated with economic depression: "an aural interregnum in the sound of progress ... antebellum elites dreaded the silence of the looms" (!) (139). On the slave plantations in the South, by contrast: "Masters trained their ears northward and heard ... industrialism, democratic capitalism and the unmistakable keynote of reckless modernity" (144). The soundscapes of urban society, in the minds of rural slaveholder elites, conjured up threats of social change and unruly society. They sought, therefore, to maintain "the cadence of organic social and economic relations" (144). Rural southern elites equated their soundscapes with "the melancholy but spiritually pure quietude of nature" (143) and the plantation mode of production with the aesthetics of refinement. For them, social order was required to emulate the sonic qualities of a good church bell: "evenness of tone, freedom of vibration and strength of cohesion" (142).

In the rural setting, soundscapes have served as a mechanism by which to reproduce social relations. Corbin's study 'Village Bells: sound and meaning in the 19th century French countryside' (cited in Filmer 2003) demonstrates how that most quintessential component of village soundscapes — the church bell — served as a proxy for social relations. In the quietude of hi fi rural locations, the village bell maintained a sense of community. Everyone within hearing distance of a bell was a member of the parish community. Moreover, the ringing of the bell imposed religious authority by summoning the population to worship at prescribed times and announcing events such as weddings. Latterly, in a more secular way, the bell would mark off the hours of the working day.

In 19th century England, Romantics such as Wordsworth similarly reflected and developed elite aesthetics by portraying rural sound- (and land-) scapes as proxies for a refined (that is, aesthetically elitist) society under threat from urban society: industrialisation and mass tourism. This continues to resonate in the present day discourse of English rurality. Common among the various professional and lay contributions to the MacFarlane et al. study is the view that the sensation of rural tranquillity required the sonic (and visual) qualities of a location to seem 'natural' (that is, 'unspoilt'). Although

clearly culturally-specific as well as subjective, it seems that the much of the quality of naturalness equates with the idea of pastoralism.

So far, we have been treating soundscapes — whether the countryside in general or specific rural localities — as a realm of the lived experience: what do rural areas (albeit socially constructed) sound like? We have also begun to construct an argument that soundscapes reflect the interests of the class structure of wider society. Part of this dynamic — a process that Bourdieu would refer to as the accumulation of cultural capital — involves a role for creative professionals, in particular, composers working in high-status musical genres. Certain works of orchestral music have come to embody the quintessence of English rurality. They have thereby served to support the notion that the essence of rurality is pastoral.

The English pastoral genre that emerged in the early decades of the 20th century seeks to evoke emotions about the English rural landscape on the generic level, particularly (although implicitly) lowland England. The raw material comes from the composers imagination and from musicological techniques rather than empirically from the soundscapes of actual locations.

According to Foxon[1], the pastoral genre is "more than mere depiction of rural life: it carries associations of Eden, Arcadia or a Golden Age, its nostalgic stance a reflection of beauty lost through the Fall or the degeneration of Man".   The prevailing mood is one of introspection or nostalgia. By including a distinctly pastoral section within a larger piece of work, a composer juxtaposes "simplicity with complexity, constancy with change"; the pastoral interlude presenting nature as an object of desire.

Vaughan Williams is particularly notable in this regard. His Third Symphony (1922), subtitled 'The Pastoral' is popularly regarded as evoking both the lush imagery of the English countryside and a melancholic nostalgia through the use of 'heartbreaking melodies'. Yet Vaughan William's role in promoting a pastoral interpretation of the English countryside was fully established through the rise in popularity of 'The Lark Ascending', first performed in 1921 with its opening "calm set of sustained chords from the strings and winds" followed by the representation of the lark through the violin playing of "a series of ascending, repeated intervals and nimble, then elongated arpeggios". The quiet entry of the orchestral accompaniment to develop an "introspective, folk-like motif" is always "restrained, never forceful".   "The violin soars in cadenzas over the orchestra, an effect seen by some as representing the lark flying over the countryside" until the piece fades "lost on aerial rings".[2]

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[1] http://www.musicalresources.co.uk/WhatisEnglishPastoralMusic.php
[2] http://www.barbwired.com/barbweb/programs/ vaughanwilliams_lark.html

The canon of English pastoralism has also adopted works originally written in relation to a different geographical context. Dvorák's Symphony No. 9 in E (opus 95) From the New World — especially the second movement with its wistful and nostalgic mood — is commonly used as a soundtrack to depict traditional rural life even though its origins are decidedly not English.

The use of tranquillity and pastoralism, therefore, to evoke or partially regulate rurality works on a number of fronts. For some, it seems to serve an emotional restorative function. Particular soundscapes are sought out and consumed during interludes from modern lifestyles. In Schafer's terms, they are valued as hi fi environments in which "all sounds may be heard clearly, with whatever detail and spatial orientation they may have" and where the act of listening involves an easy interaction with sonic components. The McFarlane et al. study, however, strongly suggests that the experience of tranquillity also requires inputs of appropriate visual stimuli.

Some sort of balance between sonic components: not just appropriate sounds but somehow proportional to each other, and not overwhelming. In the terms of Schafer's acoustic ecology, components of soundscapes include signals (components that are in the foreground and which are listened to directly) and soundmarks (sounds which are either unique to a locality or which are particularly noticed and valued by the community and its visitors). For example, in former times, certain rural areas were characterised by the seasonal sound of the corncrake. Although highly evocative of a type of rurality, this sound signal also had the capacity to degrade an area temporarily from a hi- to a lo-fi soundscape; in the Outer Hebrides "their stridulations from light dusk to brief dark in the summer evenings of boyhood were to become as implanted in the memory as the sound of the sea itself", but their sound could also become noise "loud enough to make to preacher raise his voice at evening service" (Macdonald 1985, 27).

In general, tranquility and pastorality portray the countryside either in a romantic fashion (an idealised former condition) or as a space within modern therapy culture. The rural locations — actual or imagined — offer a simpler experience in terms both of acoustics and of symbolic associations. To their advocates, they are more human-scale than the anomie of urban life and yet, at the core of their stimuli, largely devoid of humans and human activity. The acoustic qualities of tranquil / pastoral places encourage introspection and affect actions by slowing movement and speech. Arkette (2004) has observed the same tranquility effect in churches and cathedrals, as the individual become hyper-sensitive in a non-stressful way to "long reverberation times" and "internal harmonic fluctuations as tones decay" resulting in a sense of "heightened presence" (167). Watson [3] in a documentary study for BBC Radio 4 even suggested that the essence of tranquility lay beyond the specifics of place.

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[3] http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/science/tranquility.shtml

Ending his enquiries with his experience of a flotarium, he observed how tranquility manifested itself in the absence of visual or even sonic input of any sort. His suggestion was that "in searching for tranquility, we seek commonality with some primitive association with our earliest sensations even before we were born".

Yet, whatever emotional / consumption function is satisfied by tranquility / pastorality at the individual level, it is nonetheless the case that there are also concrete consequences. The valorisation by sectors of society of this form of rural experience may serve their material demands. Tranquility is translatable into the regulation of rural space which, in turn, not only supports the lifestyles of certain groups but also underpins of a particular mode of production.

4. Rurality as disappearing lifeworlds

(a) Schafer and acoustic ecology

The portrayal of rural soundscapes — recording and presenting what is out there — includes a genre that focuses on local cultural identity. The genre is influenced particularly by the work of Schafer (1977) and Truax (1978; 2000) who, with others, were responsible in the 1970s for introducing and developing the concept of acoustic ecology.

This was a set of concepts and field/analytical methods for the study of contemporary soundscapes. Its agenda was to enhance the 'sonological competence' (Wrightson 2000, 10) — the aesthetics and skills deemed necessary to listen critically — of citizens and officials and, thereby, encourage the acoustic re-designing of localities. Central to acoustic ecology were five concepts. *Soundmarks* are sounds valued by local people for their unique and historical importance. They can be natural or human-made. They are sometimes called sound symbols to denote how they evoke personal responses because of collective and cultural associations. *Sound signals*, by contrast, are sounds in the foreground intended to attract attention. They can be centripetal (drawing people together) or centrifugal (warning people to stay away from danger) in effect. A *keynote* describes the sonic 'ground' / ambience of a place: the fundamental tonality around which the soundscape modulates. It could be livestock sounds, distant traffic, ambulance sirens near a hospital, train sounds, church bells and so on: depending on the location. Generally, the keynote is not consciously noticed by locals but it nonetheless defines the general sonic / cultural character of place. Hi fi soundscapes — in which soundmarks and signals are not compromised by ambient noise — are described as having a wide or long *acoustic horizon*, that is, sounds from a locality can be heard at a considerable distance and thereby reinforcing the inhabitants (and visitors) sense of place and space. An *acoustic community*, by contrast, is "any soundscape in which acoustic information plays a pervasive role in the lives of the

inhabitants no matter how the commonality of such people is understood" (Truax 2000, 66). It can refer to a physical room, a neighbourhood, a broadcast media catchment area, population of speakers of a particular language and so on. It refers to the flow of information and significance through the sonic realm.

Schafer's initial investigations of noise pollution developed into the wider concept of acoustic ecology through the World Soundscape Project of the 1970s. Sonic surveys produced the seminal Vancouver Soundscape (published on tape in 1973 and released in 1996), categorising recordings as ocean sounds, entrance to the harbour ambience, the music of horns and whistles, Homo Ludens - Vancouverites at Play, New Year's Eve in Vancouver harbour and the music / soundmarks of various city neighbourhoods. This was followed by a Soundscapes of Canada programme and a study of Five European Villages.

Acoustic ecology was presented as a scientific approach to the study of the sonic expression of localities. Its pioneers undertook the systematic recording of 'concrete' sounds. Empirical data was categorised according to domains of sound and (acoustic) ecological concepts. The objective was to construct a 'grammar' of how components interact with each other and with the socio-economic context to produce a soundscape.

At the same time, acoustic ecology was polemical. So called hi-fi soundscapes were not only deemed to be of an acoustic high quality but also more ennobling to human society. Rural soundscapes, insofar as they retained a traditional character, were generally superior to urban locations. Acoustic ecology prized the sounds of tranquillity, pre-industrial / modern technology and human speech. What is more, the overall agenda of acoustic ecology was to change social attitudes. The field recordings and products of acoustic ecology were designed to encourage what it called 'ear cleaning' (and subsequently by Oliveros as 'deep listening'[4] and thereby encourage action towards the production of 'appropriate' soundscapes and thus appropriate forms of society.

(b) Touring Exhibition of Sound Environments projects

Whereas the World Soundscapes Project was conducted by professional musicians and academics, its present day manifestation includes the principles of local participation. Akin to the tradition of outreach activities of professional artists, the Touring Exhibition of Sound Environments (TESE) project has produced two soundscape studies.

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[4] http://www.deeplistening.org/

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In the Sounds of Harris and Lewis, Wagstaff (2002) synthesised a collage of present day soundmarks from the Outer Hebrides. Sounds such as gull cries, a scythe being sharpened, a working paraffin-fuelled tractor, Oyster catchers on a beech, a fishing boat together with a radio and a woman gutting herring while speaking in Gaelic evoke the natural environment and socio-economic life of rurality in a particular location.

"A couple of days later I was recording Joan MacLennan (still operating the island's last wooden tweed loom at 80 years+) scraping lichen from the rocks by her house to die wool. She lit a fire under a metal barrel,
filled it with water, into which she put the lichen and the fleece. The boiling process took 2-3 hours to impart a deep brown colour to the wool. I left during this period. When I returned there was a
minibus of 12 Japanese tourists who had come to see Joan work the loom and purchase some hand made tweed. I can recall the sounds now; spoken Japanese, Gaelic, English, gasps of wonderment at the boiling wool, the 'clickety-clack' of the loom, cameras going off, cockerel and sheep in the background - this I thought is a contemporary Harris Soundscape." [5]

The output from the Sounding Dartmoor project[6], also presented a very rural location: Dartmoor being the largest open semi-natural landscape in southern England. Local people were invited to nominate favourite or characteristic sounds. The result was a collage of "the chopping of wood, the cry and mewing of buzzards, stags roaring, low-flying military aircraft, the blacksmith shoeing, crows, gorse popping, cars driving over cattle grids, wind in different kinds of trees, water gushing in streams, fox calls, the huntsman's horn, rain, tawny owls, horses hooves on turf, the twittering of the skylark, sheep, bat calls, cockerels crowing in the morning, bagpipes, the raven's 'cronk' call, pack hounds, the silence of Dartmoor".[7]

On one level, such projects are presented as an empirical record of places: empirical material is collated into unadulterated compilations. What is offered is the evocation of a threatened / disappearing way of life. Rural soundscapes are depicted as threatened habitats and their component sounds as endangered species. Indeed, Touring Exhibition of Sound Environments project is explicit about its agenda:

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[5] http://archive.futuresonic.com/sensesonic/archive/ GREGG/msg-0001.html
[6] Drever, http://www.sounding.org.uk/start.html
[7] http://www.sounding.org.uk/start.html

"Sounding Dartmoor is an environmentally orientated public arts project... [which understands] the soundscape as a valuable means of increasing public awareness of our environments and the interpretation of our cultural and natural heritage".[8]

At the same time, these portrayals of rural society and location come with credentials of the participative approach. Local people are viewed as experts in their soundscape and are invited to identify which material should be included in the study. Folk knowledge is not only the raw material but also, apparently, provides the normative framework.

The results are depictions of a traditional (essentially pre-Modern) soundscape as if they were in some sense organic and, therefore, needing to be conserved. By implication, an essentially conservative underpinning to local society is valued. In turn, this supports the new orthodoxy of rural policy / action based on the valorisation of place-specific resources and the engineering of a mode of production around their small-scale exploitation.

Yet these projects introduced another dimension to the phenomenon of soundscapes. Selections of field material were put into the public domain in the form of compact disc and broadcast media. Rural soundscapes are, thereby, converted into an art form. The rural sound realm and the way of life thus evoked and celebrated are presented not so much as science in the case of early acoustic ecology projects but as art (and heritage). Whether this art serves to promote social action (reactionary or revolutionary) or whether it feeds consumer capitalism is a moot point.

5. Rurality and local forms of speech

(a) Local lives

In the previous section, the portrayal of local soundscapes included examples of local people speaking. We can now consider, albeit briefly, portrayals in which local speech takes centre stage. Analytically, it is possible to distinguish between, on the one hand, opportunities afforded to local people to talk about their lives and worldview and, on the other, projects designed to capture the way that people speak, that is, dialects and accents.

In the case of people talking about their lives and locality — and thereby presenting a soundscape — reference is often made to the seminal productions by Ewan McColl for BBC Radio. From 1957 to 1964, McColl, Peggy Seeger and Charles Parker collaborated in the production of a number of radio

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[8] http://www.sounding.org.uk/start.html

broadcasts, including: The Ballad of John Axon (about a Stockport railwayman); Song of a Road (the building of Britain's first motor highway, the M-1); Singing the Fishing (the herring fishing industry); The Big Hewer (Britain's coal miners); and The Traveling People (Britain's Gypsies). The ballads dealt, for the most part, with the industrial life of the period but they were also, if only implicitly, rural in their geography.

They were the beginnings of what has now become a commonplace in broadcasting: the depiction of a sense of place based on contemporary recordings of local people talking and the sounds of human activity in various domains. The material was supplemented by newly composed songs and folk instrumentation.

Yet McColl was also a political artist and the radio ballads followed immediately from his political theatre experiment of the 1950s. The evocation of local life in industrial-rural locations were, thus, studies in political awareness from the working class perspective.

However, more than being just folk documentaries, McEwan's productions can also be seen as another phase in the translation of (industrial) rural life into (sonic) art. By portraying the quotidian as extraordinary, McEwan was attaching to contemporary working class rural life the quality of an epic.[9] What is more, McEwan also valorised the recordings of real local speech and working/ domestic sounds by using them as inspiration for the composed songs that also went into the broadcasts:

" It was immediately apparent that here was a form which could achieve something of a breakthrough in popular art; for by speaking in the unquestionable accents of everyday experience, we were able to evoke that thrill of recognition by which a listener was able to identify himself with the action; at the same time the musical setting gave overt dramatic or lyrical significance to that everyday experience, and in musical accents entirely appropriate to the speech, and able to awaken echoes of traditional popular modes - folk echoes if you like - in the listener".[10]

Rural working class and its locations were thus becoming art as popular fascination with real lives and quotidian 'others' grew. This was enabled by the evolutionary path of the institution of public broadcasting — the BBC — that provided the space for programme producers (creative professionals) to devise such depictions of local life. In these early celebrations of local life — and the use concrete audio material from such locations — national public broadcasting was at the vanguard of McLuhan's technology-led return to aurality-based society. Local soundscapes were being valorised by the attention of creative professionals and by the primary audio medium (radio):

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[9] http:// www.topicrecords.co.uk/acatalog/index2.html
[10] Parker: http://www.topicrecords.co.uk/acatalog/index2.html

"The dramatic writer must of necessity attempt to close the enormous gap which exists between our literary and our oral traditions. He/she does not do this by acting merely as an amplifier for everyday speech, but by analysing the speech rhythms, idioms and nuances of everyday conversation, and then crystallising them in the way that Shakespeare and Ben Johnson did in their time".[11]

As (rural) locality began to be re-associated with aurality— this time through mass media broadcasting. McLuhan's concept of the re-tribalisation of society was set in train. Not only was the sonic specificity of places was being celebrated, but so was local working class solidarity. More than that, portrayals focused in spoken interaction (aurality) among locals and then communicated to others through the primary sonic medium of the time: broadcast radio.

(b) Dialect and accent

Yet speech most directly expresses the local specificity of a soundscape / acoustic community in terms of dialect and accent (although these too are a function of social class and the type of 'speech event'). The seminal academic study is Orton's survey of the dialects of England undertaken in the 1950s: a systematic empirical study of phonology, morphology, syntax and lexicology. The material is now stored at the British Library[12].

The 311 study areas were of a predominantly agricultural nature. Moreover, they were selected for those with "a fairly stable population of about 500 inhabitants for a century or so" and, within a locality, for men over 60 years old: "men speak vernacular more frequently, more consistently and more genuinely than women" (Orton & Dieth 1962, 15). For Orton and his contemporaries, interest in dialects translated as an issue of rurality. Not only that but 'authentic' local speech could only be recorded in communities also steeped in a traditional mode of production and social relations. Speakers of a dialect — and, therefore, representatives of the sonic characteristics of authentic rural localities — were required never to have travelled out of the immediate area; they were only considered local and rural if they were untainted not only by urban / cosmopolitan influences but also by other localities, including rural ones. They were also male and elderly.

Recent 'follow-up' studies — namely material collected for the British Library /BBC 1998/9 Millennium Memory Bank project[13] and the on-going Survey of Regional English by Leeds and Sheffield universities

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[11] http://www.pegseeger.com/index.html
[12] http://www.bl.uk/collections/sound-archive/accents.html#survey
[13] http://www.bl.uk/collections/sound-archive/accents.html

[14]— by contrast, reflect the changing nature of society as well as current socio-linguistic analysis by being more urban in nature. Yet the Orton study, although a product of its time, is not merely of historical interest. It reverberates through the activities of present-day county dialect societies. More generally, it continues to inform the discourse that rurality and its soundscapes are different from, and terminally threatened by, that of city society.

Moving away from academic dialectology, the BBC has been driving a revival in popular interest in the way local people speak. The Voices project has been collecting audio recordings of real people talking about their lives, accents and dialects / sociolects.[15] In this project, there is very little sense of dialect authenticity equating with traditional rural life. Rather, dialect and accent map onto a dynamic concept of regionalism. Local speech soundscapes are presented as essentially phenomena of regions, each clustered around a metropolitan centre. Indeed, local speech is likely to be more vibrant — in terms of linguistic innovation and prominence — in cities than in the countryside (echoing the seminal study by Labov 1972, of Black English speech innovation on USA city streets). Insofar as an explicitly rural dimension remains, it is consigned either to the realm of heritage interest (for example county dialect societies) and conservative cultural projects such as the Cowboy Poet residency in Coquetdale, Northumberland National Park.[16]

The BBC project transcribes the phenomenon of accent / dialect onto the map of regionalism. It is also driven the discourse of participative democracy and multiculturalism. Dialects may emerge, thus, from 'low' status speech (Fishman 1972) to become a choice of reinvigorated territorial identity. Acoustic communities manifest themselves through a renewed awareness, and valorisation, of local speech. This is enabled by a radio that is McLuhan -like in its coolness. Radio (and to a similar effect, the internet) is a cool – interactive medium. The BBC, moreover, operationalises the project through its network of local / regional radio stations and thereby influences the geographical expression of present-day dialect / accent awareness.

6. Artist-led depiction of soundscapes for political purpose

So far, in this exploration of soundscapes, the focus has been on what are more or less empirical approaches. The sonic nature of places is perceived by listeners (or various actors invite us to perceive them) as something that exists 'out there'. Soundscapes are perceived as a distinct category of naturally-occurring phenomena, albeit, as argued above, refracted through discourses. Insofar as soundscapes are intentionally recorded, analysed and communicated as such through various media,

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[14] http://www.yorksj.ac.uk/dialect/ university_of_leeds.htm
[15] http://www.bbc.co.uk/voices/
[16] http://www.poetrysociety.org.uk/places/cowboy.htm

the aim is to emphasise these qualities of naturalness and discreteness (that is, identifiable as field recordings).

Alongside this realist genre, however, has been the persistent and growing alternative approach. This involves the introduction of the sensibility of the experimental artist to the portrayal, and therefore perception of, the sonic realm. In this section, therefore, attention turns to how the concept of a soundscape can be given additional layers of significance that enhance or challenge the realist / empirical genre. The engagement by sonic artists (including musicians) with local soundscape material contrasts markedly with the tradition of composers — such as the neo-Romantics discussed above — who attempt to evoke the sense of place but without using field recordings at all. Sonic artists variously incorporate and exploit real life recordings. They are enabled / driven by the interaction between, on the one hand, the perpetual innovation in audio technology (microphony, magnetic tape and its successors, analogue then digital manipulation, analogue and electronic sound synthesis) and, on the other, the dynamic of aural aesthetics that is a function of wider societal structure and change.

To illustrate the artistic approach to present-day soundscapes, three examples are presented here: Hildegard Westerkamp and the environmentalist / deep ecology sensibility; Matthew Herbert and ethical consumerism; and artists such as Max Eastley who use locations as performance instruments and thereby create new soundscapes.

(a) Westerkamp and environmentalism

Westerkamp has been a prominent soundscape artist since her time with the World Soundscape Project. Her approach is to make sonic studies of locations, recording sounds not normally heard or noticed. Field recordings from a location are then subjected to manipulation in the studio so as to highlight aspects of acoustic / musical specific to the locality. The field technique involves reducing the scale of observation / perception to intensify nature of sonic information captured:

"to position the microphone very close to the tiny, quiet, complex sounds of nature, then amplify and highlight them so that they can be understood as occupying an important place in the soundscape and warrant respect".[17]

Westerkamp's approach to fieldwork also makes explicit the listener/recorder's interaction with the locality: physically (in terms of moving around the areas and handling found objects) and emotionally

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[17] McCartney, http://www.emf.org/artists/mccartney00/text.html — chap 3

(vocalising the emotions and associations evoked by the place). Soundscapes are, thus, highly subjective experiences, varying according to the individual concerned. According to McCartney, experiencing a soundscape should be thought of, therefore, as a dialogue between listener and place.

At the Edge of Wilderness[18] as a soundscape study by Westerkamp of abandoned industrial sites in rural British Columbia, Canada. The context was the former resource extraction industries and how: "a once noisy bustling place becomes a quiet ghost town full of memories. An old industry becomes artefact...".[19] The product in 2000 took the form of an installation exhibition — that is, a portrayal of a soundscape away from the geographical source) that invited audiences to reflect on the human stories and the interaction between industry and nature inherent in the sounds and images: "perceptions of a shameful past in need of clean-up collide with feelings of pride towards a heritage worth preserving" (ibid.).

Walking through each location, Westerkamp made recordings of the sounds of the place (natural and manmade), her physical interaction with artefacts (striking them like musical instruments but in an experimental way: "exploring their acoustic/musical properties in their dilapidated state"), as well as her personal narrative. The sonic sense of place emerges through, at one level, "sounds that carry us from the presence of the existing ghost towns into the imagined past of these places" and, at another, "the particular edge that has been created between nature and this form of civilization" (ibid). The result of this approach takes the form of a hyper-real genre: new soundscape experiences created out of (a) the hidden or unnoticed and (b) what doesn't sonically exist until the soundscape artist acts (as in playing the found artefacts life instruments).

The metaphor is of a biological system. The locations for such soundscape studies are chosen as much for their environmental and social significance as for any inherent musicality. Moreover, the process of composing soundscape creations from field recordings represents a study of how the various sounds relate to each and to their environment.   On one level, the soundscape represents a system of a real location; source sounds are studio processed but never to the degree of being unrecognisable. On another level, the soundscape is an "imaginary space" (McCartney, ibid).

Fieldwork technique, choice of location, studio processing and compositional metaphor all indicate that this approach to depicting soundscapes is driven by an environmentalist morality. Each soundscape composition is a commentary on concrete human-nature interactions, or rather, given the explicit subjectivity in the method, an invitation to listeners to reflect on these cases of interactions.

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[18] http://www.sfu.ca/~westerka/installations/edgewilderness/edgewild.html
[19] http:// www.sfu.ca/~westerka /installations/ edgewilderness/edgewild.html

Indeed, these compositions are proffered as an aural-environmentalist mode by which the individual in general 'should' engage with and understand localities (of all sorts).

(b) Herbert and ethical consumerism

If Westerkamp takes field recordings and looks for their inherent musicality and thereby promotes a moral / political message, others take field recordings and then incorporate them into various recognised genres of music. Matthew Herbert is a recent example of this in which soundscape components are slotted into otherwise generic modern jazz pieces.

In 2005, he released his Plat du Jour project on CD, downloadable mp3 file and associated website.[20] This is a critique on the contemporary food industry and a plea for localness, variety, ethical trade, energy efficiency and so on. Inherent in the politics of food is the issue of place, in terns of where it is produced, the socio-economic and environmental implications of various modes of production as well as of consumption behaviour. Food is also, of course, central to the idea of the countryside and of the idea of local rural development.

In Plat du Jour, the composer / musician includes a mixture of actual as well as generic places: *The Truncated life of a modern industrialised chicken* includes field recordings of "30,000 broiler chickens in one barn; 24,000 one minute old chicks in one room of a commercial hatchery ; 40 free-range chickens in a coop; one of those chickens being killed for a local farmers' market and its feathers washed and plucked; a dozen organic eggs from Tescos; a 21cm Pyrex classic bowl made in the UK". Field sounds are also employed in a musical way: "all live percussion is made from a dozen organic free-range eggs, egg boxes and egg cups and played with chopsticks" whilst "the bassline is a 'cheep' from a minute-old chick pitched down".[21] Other tracks include: *These branded waters* (incorporating recordings of different bottled waters); *Pigs in shit* (using "Tesco's healthy living British butchers' choice pork sausages"); *An apple a day* (featuring the sounds of around 3255 people eating an apple); *White bread, brown bread* (commenting on the decline of the Chorleywood bread process); *Fatter, slimmer, faster, slower* (with recordings of "an Atkins fried breakfast, and various slimfast breakfast replacement drinks and bars tied to a bike and ridden round the yard at the dairy recording studios" followed by "recordings of a Scottish salmon farm and their computerised feeding system").

The jazz music component serves as a vehicle to hold and the selected field recordings and to transmit their ethical message:

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[20] http:// www.platdujour.co.uk/index.php
[21] http://www.platdujour.co.uk/index.php

"The familiar English rituals, textures and tastes have been undermined at every turn. The inevitable consequence has been a growing obsession with the international language of food and how almost every choice we are being asked to make about what we eat is laced with deadly compromises" (ibid).

Local specificity, cultural and economic vibrancy and human health, Herbert argues, are being destroyed by the present day food regime: "The industry's unholy trinity for cheap food - sugar, salt and fat - has replaced the traditions of locally grown, seasonal produce from grocers, markets, butchers and bakers, squeezed out of high streets by supermarkets". By implication, the sounds of place are changing and homogenising. Herbert's 'industrial food' soundscapes are offered as dystopian and contrasted with the Green / Bourgeois desire for a more traditional mode of production and values of consumption: "We have handed over control of what goes in to our bodies to faceless transnational companies, operating in a geographical no-man's land" (ibid).

Herbert is communicating a polemic to a bourgeois audience that may be particularly receptive to the politics involved. In live performances, other devices are used to make the message more explicit as well as more entertaining. The depiction of soundscapes in Plat du Jour is a dialogue between brutal realism and Romantic utopian imaginings. Soundscapes of actual locations are presented partly in their own right and partly to illustrate an extralocal political polemic. At the same time, he claims that the field recordings have also influenced the musical qualities of each composition.

(c) Interventions to produce new soundscapes

Sonic artists in the mold of Westerkamp or Herbert use acoustic recordings from actual field locations. Such recordings serve, at one level, as carriers of socio-cultural, economic and political information about the locations. Other soundscape genres, however, involve field material being used as 'environmental instruments' within experimental electro-acoustic music. Here, sonic artists interact with real locations in order to create new soundscape experiences (installations or recordings for subsequent studio compositions).

Within this genre, Alan Lamb is regarded as a seminal practitioner. He has specialised in making field recordings of the intricate ways in which the wind 'plays' long telegraph / power cables in the open landscapes of Australian outback (released as Night Passage in 1981). Purely acoustic phenomena consists of wind-driven wire oscillations, physical collisions with the wires (insects touching and birds landing on the wires, cattle knocking into the supports; birdsong transmitted along the wires through the birds' feet). These elements are supplemented by the sounds that register only through contact microphones or through attachments to various types of resonating devices (harmonics, the

movement of wires in the insulators, etcetera). Lamb also creates new sounds by mechanically altering the tension of the wires. The effect is of physical artifacts (the wires) being employed as a massive local 'Aeolian (wind) organ' that is being played by the natural elements and by the sonic artist / observer.

The complex of sound elements are subsequently enhanced and edited in the studio and then synthesised into a soundscape composition which is both place specific (although this would not be discernable from listening to the composition without further information) and a product of 'abstract' musical sensibility on the part of the artist:

"Typically, prior to composing, Lamb will spend a few days or up to several weeks recording, sometimes amassing up to 40 hours of tape or even recording almost continuously for more than 24 hours. At these times, he becomes aware of correspondences between the sounds and cyclic changes brought on by day and night, the weather and the seasons ... From his pool of raw material he chooses sounds for compositions ... Sounds are classified according to pitch, rhythm, timbre, predominant key structure and emotional color".[22]

Max Eastley, another soundscape artist working in this genre, has taken the soundscape creation aspect further. In 1990, he installed a set of ad hoc constructed large wind harps on an open site at Sutton Edge, Yorkshire. In this example, the artistic sensibility resulted in 'instruments' being constructed and then assembled in particular locations in order to 'perform' a local soundscape. Each performance was both unique to the circumstances at the time and a register of the physical local specificity of the site. Yet, although local and natural, the soundscape performances were also created in that they would not have happened without the artist intervention. This aspect of a local soundscape might be thought of, therefore, as latent as well as time specific (see also Didier Ferment and his playable Aeolian harps).

Thus, we see the role of the professional sonic artist in interrogating our relationships with place. By creating aurally pleasing experiences (experimental music), the artist generates a commentary on the nature of localities, or rather, invites listeners to re-assess their attitudes to a place.

This phenomenon is also driven by an avant garde sensibility regarding the aesthetics of sound (that is, what constitutes music?). In 1913, Luigi Russolo published his Futurist manifesto L'Arte de Rumori (Art of Noise) in which he argued in favour of the expansion of repertoire of sounds considered to be beautiful / musical: "The industrial revolution had given men a greater capacity to appreciate more complex

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[22] http://www.rainerlinz.net/NMA/22CAC/lamb.html

sounds".[23]   Russolo demonstrated his ideas by introducing novel mechanical noise/sound making devices called intonarumori as instruments in the concert hall. These metropolitan beginnings were followed by innovators such as Pierre Schaeffer / Pierre Henry who explored the concept of 'musique concrète' which included field recordings but which were then abstracted into pure, contextless, sounds (Vejvoda and Young 2005).

Noise, in terms of communication theory, can be understood as whatever disrupts or distorts the perception of a signal (Truax 2000). It includes sounds whose acoustic or associative characteristics can produce illness in individuals. Yet, the differentiation of noise from pleasant sound, on the acoustic dimension, is not at all straight forward:

"The sound of the roaring sea, for example, is not far [acoustically] from white noise (untuned radio receiver etc] but is nonetheless not considered unpleasant and irritating".[24] The din of the sea can be tranquil or enervating.

The categorisation of places as noisy or pleasing / tranquil, therefore, is partly personal and partly a function of societal factors. For Russolo, conventional Western music was confining. Moreover, it somehow represented a society in which the culturally-conservative bourgeois class predominated. Advocacy of the aesthetics of noise, therefore, was a critique of how a particular social structure was represented by, and reproduced itself through, musical genres whose composition and aesthetics relied on 'order and beauty' (certain harmonic intervals, rhythms, the 12-tone scale etcetera). To expand the realm of music was to argue for the sonic artist-led critique, and disruption, of the social order.

Over recent decades, the aestheticisation of what was previously noise, has taken on a popular participation dimension. Assisted by electronic technology innovation and consumerism, the ability to record, create and output new sounds is expanding both in terms of the sounds themselves and in terms of the types of individuals producing them (see Tamm 1995, on the rise of 'non-musicians' such as Brian Eno). This dynamic operated alongside the post-1950's social transformations in the West.

The valuation of soundscapes for the apparent tranquil or pastoral qualities, therefore, registers an angst by bourgeois and conservative-rural classes against urban/modern noise as a manifestation of social disruption and urbanisation / cosmopolitanisation. As in the myth cited from the Glass Bead Game (above), the sonic realm that is in the ascendancy at any moment reflects the type of society.

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[23] Russolo, http://www.ubu.com/papers/russolo.html
[24] Sangild, http://www.ubu.com/papers/ noise.html

Those of an environmentalist persuasion, in a similar way, seek to employ soundscapes in order to interpret human activities (and the option for future action) through sonic media.

7. Individualised soundscapes

In the first part of this exploration of soundscapes, the emphasis was on the alliance of discourses and groups in society as the producer of soundscapes. Then the emphasis switched to soundscape production by the class of creative professionals: musicians, sonic artists, radio and television programme-makers — whether conservative, ruralist, avant gardists, noise-makers or political activists.

Yet, there is another way in which wider dynamics may influence the nature and valuation of soundscapes. This comes from the idea of Individualisation society (variously expounded by Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2001 and Giddens 1999) and the emerging phenomenon in which the individual — enabled or driven by audio technology — crafts personalised local soundscapes. Rather than a passive receiver of sonic experience formed and signified 'out there', the individual acquires the option to function as a prosumer (Toffler 1980) of their sonic realm. Moreover, whereas exponents of acoustic ecology advocate 'deep listening' or 'ear cleaning' in order to enhance the individuals capacity to perceive critically the soundscapes in which they are present at any moment, individualised soundscapes not only exist solely within the mind of the individual but may also be merely temporary ad hoc experiences.

Bull (2004) in his empirical-based study of the every-day use of Walkman devices (and, by implication, Minidisc and MP3 players, mobile phones and car sound systems), showed how this technology allows people to "transform both the experience of movement and the spaces they move through" (105). At one level, Bull portrays this phenomenon as a strategy by individuals to cope with the sonic stress of contemporary urban life. Reflecting Schafer's idea (above) that urban soundscapes are impoverished in information about distance, Bull analyses the use of Walkman-like technology as a mechanism to "shrink space into something manageable and habitable" (106), driven by "desire for proximity" (103). The sounds flowing through ear/headphones, therefore, create a soundwall between the individual and the surrounding 'noise' as well as a mental space whose aural components and associations are more controllable by the individual. At another level, however, Bull argues that the Walkman phenomenon is about the re-aestheticisation of the experience of place, aestheticised as a function of the individual's imagination as mediated through music playing on the equipment, and privatised through earphones. The individual can select which sonic recorded material to play on the equipment, endlessly adding to and sorting their repertoire of sonic elements (songs, tunes, speech). This capacity to re-aestheticise any place, Bull found, affords the individual a sense of agency regarding the experience of place.

In fact, the experience is one that is simultaneously privatised and driven by wider forces. By describing the individual as being "cocooned in their own space and the mediated space of the culture industry", Bull relates the modern phenomenon to Adorno & Horkheimer's (1997) critique of society as the cultivation of 'accompanied solitude' through the substitution of direct experience, transcending the social. Using a Walkman constitutes "a mode of being in the world ... through the power of sound, the world becomes intimate, known and possessed" (110). The individual selects sonic material to hear through the earphones and thus creates a material soundscape in the mind. In turn, this variously affects how they experience / interpret the location they are in / moving through. The soundscape exists now solely within the head and then affects the input of visual material: "the listener gets more out of the environment not by interacting with it but precisely by not interacting with it ... the environment is received as a personal artefact via the Walkman" (112).

Bull's study, in some ways, can be compared with that of Tacchi (2005) which explored the strategic use of broadcast radio by individuals in the domestic domain. As with the Bull study, Tacchi found that the lay individual was anything but a passive listener responding according to the contrivances of programme producers and presenters. Instead, individuals devise ad hoc strategies in the management of their emotional life: to alter mood, combat loneliness or cope with routine, responding to how they feel or want to feel. The subjects / listeners in Tacchi's anthropological study deliberately created local soundscapes by selecting types of broadcast material to which they attached personal significance. Sometimes this involved the creation of temporary acoustic conditions in the locality. (In Tacchi's study, this was the urban home but the analysis is extendable to other situations) whilst, at others, it entailed the individual electing to join various acoustic communities (such as that constituted by the phone-in genre of transmission).

But to return to the Bull study, we are left with the question of which recorded materials are chosen by an individual. Bull notes that individual choice may be variously framed by the nature of the material produced by what Adorno called the culture industry. Wider factors of aesthetics and social control may nonetheless, in indirectly, be operating even at this highly individualised level. Yet, technological innovation (including the internet) and consumerisation have also enabled a major expansion of independent ('indie') music production and distribution. Avant Garde sonic art and the ability of the individual not only the collate customised collections but also to transform pieces created by others might drive the individualisation of soundscapes along yet to be discerned pathways.

Conclusion

The purpose of this review was to explore the notion that the sonic nature of rurality is about much more than tranquillity, without disparaging the consumption value of tranquil areas. Rural soundscapes are prey to the same social forces that drive the present-day discourses of rurality (at least in the British context). The tranquillity study discussed above illustrates how the social construction of the rural sonic realm continues to be framed by rather conservative / Romantic notions of rural areas as being essentially pastoral and recuperative, and fundamentally different from, and 'better' than, the urban / cosmopolitan / industrial realm. The concept of tranquillity resonates with the idea of a countryside under threat of extinction or at least despoilation.

By contrast, the idea of soundscapes is more geographically and socially inclusive. Soundscapes are dynamic and overlapping clusters made up of local specificity, generic rurality and cosmopolitan elements. The variously include speech, music, speech, music, human (mechanical / electrical sound producing) activity and the physical (natural and built) environment. Soundscapes can exist as empirical phenomena, artistic interpretations / productions or as temporary creations in the heads of 'prosumer' individuals. They can, thus, be experienced (only) in their source locality or reproduced and consumed at a distance.

The sonic realm is not only an empirical category, reflecting the acoustic nature of areas, it also has the capacity to impact on rural areas. Soundscapes — as discursively / aesthetically mediated — can mould physical and social characteristics of localities. The process of cultural capital accumulation recruits the concept of noise in pursuit of the consumption interests of certain sectors of society. This manifests as an on-going contest between interests in the regulation of economic activity and physical planning. Yet, noise itself is a social construct, reflecting the aesthetics of certain class values.

If tranquillity is essentially a reactionary concept, then the concept of soundscapes has the potential to be progressive or at least to serve as a domain for political discussion. Actors with an artistic sensibility, in particular, can politicise local (rural) soundscapes. Their aim is to use the sonic realm as a device either to raise awareness of how various factors impact on localities or to drive change in the wider society. For some, the political agenda is about social change towards a more inclusive and socio-economically equitable countryside. However, sonic artists are just as likely to be conservative / bourgeois, in effect if not necessarily in intent.

Populism and music reproduction technology have resulted in a new sonic aesthetics which offers an alternative to the pastoral / romantic by valorising musical innovation and questioning the validity of the concept of noise. Populism and critical theory also continue to search for and valorise the sounds

of marginalised areas (as in, for example, social attitudes to dialect speech). Soundscapes are, in this sense, a manifestation or driver of participative democratic society. The potential of soundscapes is to reconsider what constitutes the appropriate and pleasurable sonic experience of being in, passing through or consuming at a distance a rural locality.

A sonic geography of (British) rurality requires us to reflect on the interaction between local specificity and wider cosmopolitan factors. It also brings to the forefront the contrast between scientific (or at least systematic) social enquiry and the insights that emerge from the artistic sensibility. A sonic geography has merit in that it emphasises the social construction of soundscapes, and thus of rurality and rural areas. For some, the sonic realm might represent merely a source of empirical material with which to triangulate conventional sources. McLuhan, however, argued that insofar as society operates on a sonic / aural basis, then this had profound implications. Sounds serves as a mode of communication and as a philosophy for the organisation of space and experience; and this is different, he argues, from when a society emphasises the visual basis. Although the visual realm is widely regarded to be paramount, the sonic realm is also at work. Not only that, but the internet and digital technology in general share many characteristics with sonic-based society. What is more, soundscapes are not only registers of processes but are also resources that can be employed strategically. Schafer and the World Soundscapes Project argued that physical planning (in which the visual realm is emphasised) should be supplemented with sonic criteria. Initially, the project's polemic was directed towards the abatement of 'noise' but subsequently it developed into the notion that place could be designed and managed according to musical criteria.

Yet, to date, the social enquiry of soundscapes remains under-developed. This is partly because of the fragmentary nature of sonic geography: environmental acoustics, dialectology and minority linguistics, and musicology / sonic artistry are generally pursued separately and according to their own analytical frameworks.

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