

Journeys in and through sound

In this special issue, we have sought to engage with researchers and documentary/arts practitioners using sound as a part of their inquiry into the social and beyond. We situate this issue within a burgeoning body of interdisciplinary work in sound studies, which has explored sonic possibilities in research and practice in sociology, history, anthropology, social geography, education, performance and cultural studies. The ephemeral nature of sound is part of what makes it special; its consumption is based on a temporal experience, a fleeting moment of comprehension that accumulates to create a greater understanding of the whole form (LaBelle, 2015). By focusing on the sonic qualities highlighted within these contributions, a layer of understanding is made possible that cannot be replicated in another form. To be clear, we are not saying that sound and phonographic methods (the use of recording and playback, see Gallagher and Prior, 2014) should be elevated above visual, textual and other sensory accounts, we want to continue to build on the argument that sound offers us a distinct way of understanding in terms of being and knowing (Sterne, 2012; Gershon, 2013; Feld and Brenneis, 2004).

We agree with others (Pink, 2015; Bull and Back, 2016) who acknowledge the richness of sound as part of a multisensory shift in the methodological literature and also part of a turn toward the non-representational and performative. As a visceral and vibrational force, sound offers us considerations into that which falls between representational meaning, moving toward “how life is composed in the midst of affects” (Lorimer, 2008, p. 552). Aural approaches can articulate knowledge about places, spaces and the environments around us, conveying timbral information and frequency, but also the “immaterial, invisible, taken-for-granted atmospheres and emotional resonances” (Gallagher and Prior, 2014, p. 269). As LaBelle (2015) eloquently identifies what makes sound so extraordinary is its relationality, “it emanates, propagates, communicates, vibrates, and agitates; it sends the body moving, the mind dreaming, the air oscillating” (p. xi). As such, sound offers us something generative and emergent in the ontological and epistemological realms, holding the material and non-material in complexity through what Gallagher (2016) conceptualizes as “vibrational assemblages” (p. 43).

In bringing this special issue together, we also sought to reflect the ideas of Gergen and Gergen’s (2011) about performative-oriented work that creates “truth zones” through creative, democratic and polyvocal knowledge pursuits. In crafting this special issue, we aimed to push back on hegemonic modes of knowledge production in the academy, which have often privileged written text as the sole channel through which we can collect, analyze represent and disseminate research. We also seek to contribute theory in relation to sound, rather than simply how sonic methods and techniques can be incorporated into qualitative research, following Back and Puwar’s (2012) call to mobilize sound and listening as a way to re-imagine modes of social research and develop social methods that are collaborative, imaginative and lively. Thus, we sought pieces that were generated from documentary studies and artistic-led practice, and those that are conceptualized as being anchored in qualitative methodology more broadly.

Inquiry and sound

Murray Schafer’s (1977, 1993) seminal works on soundscapes and listening can serve as a foundation for many researchers seeking to engage with sonic approaches. He detailed a range of features of soundscapes (i.e. soundmarks, keynote sounds and signals), while calling for deeper attention to listening (sound and aural perception) through his



conceptualization of earwitnessing and cliraudience. While Schafer (1977) defined the “soundscape” defined as “any acoustic field of study” (p. 4), Anthropologists Samuels *et al.* (2010) add to this to include “cultural histories, ideologies, and practices of seeing, soundscape implicates listening as a cultural practice” (p. 330).

Delving into sound, music, noise, hearing, listening and silences provides qualitative researchers with the opportunity to [re]create and “interrogate the relationship of [...] time, place and culture” (Bandt *et al.*, 2009). More recently, social scientists and qualitative researchers, in particular, have engaged with sensory methods (i.e. “the sensorial turn,” Howes, 2006), particularly as part of fieldwork practice in ethnographic approaches (see Pink, 2013, 2015). As those in documentary studies have argued, sound, and in particular audio documentary work, can contribute to “nuanced portrayals of experiences, people and places that are well-known, extraordinary or seemingly ordinary” and offer creative alternatives in showing cultural phenomena and raise important questions about the politics of representation (Makagon and Neumann, 2009, p. xi). Aligned well with the constructive and reflective aspects of ethnographic research, Makagon and Neumann (2009) believe that sonic methods (i.e. soundwalks, radio/sound diaries, sonic maps and soundscapes) allow us to record and document cultural life for the purpose of social change through critical pedagogies and methods of activism.

In this special issue, sound has driven the inquiry process in diverse ways. For example, Lacey, Pink, Harvey and Moore’s paper “Noise transformation: a critical listening-based methodology for the design of motorway soundscapes” explores the use of sound within an interdisciplinary approach that mobilized a mixed-methods approach and critical listening to redesign a noisy urban soundscape. Also employing a listening-based methodology, Munro’s paper “Listening as practice: a month in Ólafsfjörður” uses documentary and ethnographic approaches to create an audio essay walk entitled “Why do the ducks not fly south?” A number of other practice-led papers also show how sound approaches can be taken up as a lead in a multisensory inquiry. For example, in Anderson-Kunert’s sound artwork “Almost there” using sonically controlled vibrators (playing an electronic composition the author created), captures ten participants’ masturbation experiences. The author then synchronizes these recordings to create an intimate, emotive and erotic soundscape. Whilst Anderson-Kunert’s paper and sound art piece speak to the ways in which technology and sound can productively intersect in embodied inquiry, Stanton’s paper “Sound, listening and the moving image” details the relationship between vision and sound in arts-led inquiry, particularly in gallery spaces. Through her paper, she explores not only the marginalized status of sound in audio–visual artworks, but details the ways in which sound, when given equal consideration, can inform multisensory understandings that convey fluid and dynamic experiences.

A number of papers uncover new and creative ways of using sound into explorations into identity, relationships and broader social scripts. For example, Prescott-Steed’s paper details a practice-led approach to creating an archive named “Daddy diary” which are a series-free association monologues to document and reflect on his first-time experience as the primary caregiver to his daughter. His piece emphasizes the intersections of memories, reflexivity and aural culture as a methodology for exploring relationality and privileging familial forms of knowledge. Both Baker’s paper “Battle for truth: poetic interruptions into symbolic violence through sound portraits” and Macdonald’s paper “The affective quality of sound: repositioning the listener” draw on qualitative and documentary approaches to engage sound in understanding racism in Australia and the experiences of young people of African heritage. These two papers mobilize sound in different ways, they both make the argument for action-oriented methodologies that expose racist narratives and use sound as a tool for counter-storytelling. Finally, in Glasser’s audio documentary *Sounds Inside*, he spends 24 h documenting the HMP Brixton prison soundscape in the UK, interviewing inmates about the impacts these sounds have on them during incarceration.

Whilst these pieces all forefront different sonic approaches and offer insights into diverse areas of inquiry, they are a constellation that motions us toward creative and auditory ways of knowing. In the following sections, we further situate and discuss these papers in relation to listening, memories, voice and affect.

This issue: journeys in and through sound

Each piece in this special issue takes listeners into foreign or familiar places and spaces – inside the walls of a prison in the UK, a quiet town in Iceland, alongside a motorway in Melbourne and into the lives of young people of African heritage in Australia. We come up against people's erotic moans and into a third "audio-visual" space where we can lose our sense of self and time. These sonic journeys offer each listener something different, they are shaped by our own histories, cultural experiences and the intersections of our many identities and their positioning in the social landscape (across race, class, sexuality etc.). We are, if only temporarily, both displaced and emplaced through our immersion into listening. We are affected by and through these journeys into sound. Recently, a growing number of scholars have theorised the connections between knowledge creation, sound and affect. Gallagher (2016) asks us to consider sonic affect which he defines as:

the vibrational movement of bodies, [that] can be understood as a base layer of sound which, due to its liveliness, often produces effects in other registers such as feeling, cognition, memory and meaning, but which also operates beneath and beyond these registers. (p. 47)

It is here, at what Gerson theorises as the intersection of sound, affect, ontology, knowledge and methodology that we must consider how sounds are "affective vibrations that resonate" to "form educational systems of knowledge" (p. 257). While affect is often related to that which is felt, in sound this encompasses the ways in which vibrational forces of sound and its movement through bodies, in spaces and across time. Gallagher (2016) articulates that whilst affect through sound can register as feelings, it also includes the ways in which bodies are moved, changed and affected. For this special issue, we believe this is an important movement toward thinking through aesthetic and affect as processes or methods themselves that form part of socially engaged research practice. It generates questions about where we go in our listening journeys and what ways of being and knowing emerge.

Into listening

A special issue on sound necessarily brings listening to the forefront, both as a methodology in the creation of knowledge and art, but also considering the conditions for listening as sound pieces move into different realms. Gallope (2008, p. 158 as cited in Abramo 2014, p. 82) makes a key distinction between hearing and listening in analyzing the work of Philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy, stating:

The difference between hearing and listening is a difference in the epistemological conclusions of an aural experience. "Where *entendre* [hearing] implies the closure of understanding and truth, *écouter* [listening], implies the openness of negotiation, uncertainty, and exposure."

This epistemological position is one that echoes the sentiments of other scholars (Cage, 2011; Chion, 2015; Oliveros, 2005) about listening as a deeply relational process in which we consciously engage in exploration and (re)signification. Listening has important implications for qualitative research, as papers and sound pieces in this special issue shows, listening is a site for being in place and being with others. Echoing other sound studies work (Bull and Beck, 2016) a number of these papers push for listening as a site for

change and reflexivity, questioning our place in the world, our relationship to power and our connection to nature. As Nancy (2007) articulates:

[...] to listen is to enter that spatiality by which, at the same time, I am penetrated, for it opens up in me as well as around me: it opens up inside me as well as outside and it is through such a double, quadruple, or sextuple opening that a “self” can take place. (p. 14)

The recreation of self through the intersections of sound in time a space is articulated in Munro's paper. In developing her audio essay walk, she draws on documentary and ethnographic approaches and uses interviews, local soundscapes and her own voice to narrate us through the rhythms of daily life, the unheard voices of the environment and the polyphonic nature of this particular local ecology in Iceland. She contends it is through “daily immersion in place,” and embodied listening that we glean insights into the invisible and immaterial and the “sounds of life.” Similarly, Glasser's work confronts us with listening as a way of understanding the experience of imprisonment, and the ways in which particular sounds in that space come to represent freedoms, confinement, trouble and hope. In this work, listeners are transported into the psychological and social spaces of prisoners, becoming attuned to the ways in which noise and sound can torment, relieve and create both loneliness and solidarity.

Into memories

At a time when parents are reaching for their mobile phones to photograph or film their child/ren, Prescott-Steed's audio archive-in-the-making brings us into an alternative space in which listening becomes site for reflection and a way to “see ourselves” differently through sound. *Daddy Diary* allows us to delve into Prescott-Steed's life, his memories and his experience of being and becoming a father to his young daughter. As the primary caregiver for his young daughter, this has inherent connections to his own experience in and out of traditional gender roles. *Daddy Diary*, he contends is “recording the past for the future,” activating familial knowledge that captures change as it happens. Sound recording and deep and reflexive forms of listening used in this way can bring the past into dialogue with the present and future. His piece brings possibilities for documentary makers, researchers using autobiographical approaches that often use memories as a primary source of data or as part of documenting cultural practice (Bijsterveld and van Dijck, 2009). Such approaches can be generative, which Bluck (2003) notes can preserve a sense of being and self, strengthen bonds among people and allow for individuals to use the past to understand themselves in new ways. Similarly, an audio archive-in-the-making holds rich possibilities for participatory research practices and the co-construction of collective memory around important identities, events or places.

Into other's voices and interiorities

Sound has the potential to give life and voice to qualitative research because it “creates a sensory experience of the present,” that “preserve[s] a sense of presence and immediacy that places the listener in a scene” (Makagon and Neumann, 2009, p. 12). While the notion of voice has been examined extensively in qualitative research, in relation to “giving voice,” and as a way to attain authenticity and a standalone truth, the notion of voice was simultaneously homogenised and being taken out of context (White and Drew, 2011). A number of researchers contend that voice is not apolitical, but it is inextricably linked to power and broader conditions that dictate who speaks and who and who's terms (Fine, 1992, 2012). As Kanngieser (2012) theorises in relation to sonic approaches that “voice, in its expression of affective and ethico-political forces, creates worlds” (p. 337). Thus, sound can offer important insights and movements for community-based and critical approaches to research, particularly for those projects that seek to challenge oppressive structures and open up the airwaves for voices or

sounds that have been sequestered, distorted or silenced. For example, Baker purports that sound portraits can be a way to expose the racist echo chamber in broader Australian society, but also to serve as a site for reimagining ways of being and organizing our social worlds. When sound forefronts the voices of young women of African heritage with the sounds of public discourse, it places them within the broader socio-political landscape. Juxtaposing these voices draws out power relations, moving toward counter narratives that are “important tool[s] for disrupting dynamics of oppression and surfacing the everyday ways in which racialised oppression was achieved and continues to structure contemporary social relations” (Sonn *et al.*, 2013, p. 295).

Similarly, Macdonald’s piece, also exploring the experience of young Africans in Australia and surfaces the ways in which interviews convey embodied voices “promoting what can be sensed and felt [...] not often captured through text.” Her paper echoes questions asked by other researchers when we rely only on transcription and text, asking “what are the costs of representing social life in this way?” (Barthes, 1985). Macdonald argues that when we are distanced from embodied voices, we lose sight of the profound impact that “silent” forms of racism have on young people. LaBelle (2006, p. 28) citing Ong (1958) brings into focus the change we have to create connection and a deeper form of relationality when we engage with voice:

As exhalation, the voice carries with it the interior of the one who speaks; the interior is essentially externalised, to enter the interior of the listener, thus ‘pulling them into his [the speaker’s] own interior and forcing them to share the state which exists there.

Baker, Macdonald, and Glasser’s documentary piece in prisons, brings us into relationships with those groups and communities who have been marginalized, those transgressing society’s stereotypes and expectations, inviting listeners into sonic undergrounds that “create, reproduce and subvert dominant discourses” (Attali, 2004, p. 11). In critical and action-oriented research sound can contribute to an emotive and passionate mode of inquiry, one that rejects apolitical and dehistoricized voice/s and instead demands social action that can create new worlds.

Finally, Anderson-Kunert’s sound piece “Almost there” and the written account detailing his practice using sonically controlled vibrators, takes us to the most intimate and private of places: people’s sexuality. This piece carries traces of people’s most guarded interiors, their thoughts, fantasies and erotic utterances and exhalations. Through the elements of this piece, we share the state of interiors that is both synchronous and polyvocal, connecting bodies, emotions and erotic tensions.

An invitation to be affected

LaBelle (2015) contends that listening is a way of finding place, that “to listen deeply is to arrive at a place of alienation, not necessarily disheartening but rather productive” (p. 211). Across these papers as we journey into new and potentially alienating spaces, we will indeed be charting unfamiliar territory, but we will also be finding comfort and resonance, a sense of belonging and liveliness. With the echoes of other people’s voices, stories and the accompanying sounds reaching our interiors, we must grapple with our own psychic realities, histories, and positionalities, particularly when sound pieces travel across cultural, social and political boundaries. It is a journey that inevitably turns us inward:

Soundscape work without the journey into the inner world of listening is devoid of meaning. Listening as a totality, from external to the internal, seeking information about the whole spectrum of sound and its meanings, from noise to silence to sacred, is what give soundscape work its depth. (Westerkamp, 2003, p. 12)

This “inner work” creates a “deep opening and predisposition toward change” are the conditions for listening that can shape the ways we see and understand art, knowledge and

the world more broadly (Rinaldi, 2006, p. 114). Abramo (2014) tells us that “every sound has an envelope, with a beginning and an end, and it morphs through its attack, sustain, and decay.” Yet within this envelope, there is an invitation to open oneself to sound more meaningfully. It is with this spirit that we invite you to listen.

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