

Sounding Epistemologies: Placemaking Through Sound

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Introduction

In the past decades, the relationship between sound and space has been explored in a variety of ways. From Marshall McLuhan's *acoustic space* (McLuhan, 2017), R. Murray Schafer's works about soundscapes (Schafer, 1977) and the subsequent emergence of acoustic ecology as an interdisciplinary practice to the evolution of *sound studies* and research-creation working with sound as its primary "material," sound epistemologies have gained in visibility/hearability. Often characterized through the prism of the "turn," that is, the emergence of pivotal publications, dedicated journals, research projects, handbooks, and so on, it has been championed as a mode of access to experience and knowledge like no other and consequently also criticized in its essentializations and oppositions to other senses.¹ Nevertheless, it appears that sound has "established itself," taking place, as valid access to knowledge and research methods—a fact that was less discussed than one could think, as Bijsterveld notes in *Sonic Skills* (Bijsterveld, 2019).

In the following special issue, several contributions will explore how sounding and listening practices are not only taking place/happening but also placemaking as sounding epistemologies. In this understanding, sound is still playing a central role in the generation of knowledge, but also needs to be considered critically, being embedded and located in practices and methodologies reproducing inequalities. Sound is therefore not only creating, generating, immersing, emanating, elevating, and englobing, but it is also disrupting, destroying, displacing, and silencing. At the time of writing this introduction,² voices are struggling to take place, and their protests are being heavily repressed. The voices for peace, for survival, are being muffled by wars, genocides, and blindness toward our planetary crises. If the following articles do not necessarily touch on those struggles directly, they undeniably show the importance of thinking with and working with sound, so that those voices never remain silent. As sound philosopher Salomé Voegelin notes:

"Knowledge is a fundamental engine of political change and transformation. Sonic knowledge, the knowledge of the invisible and what remains unheard, opens politics, political actions, decisions and institutions to the plural slices of the world. . . . Knowledge is refracted in the invisible light of sound: more voices come to be heard as barer of information, insight and facts" (Voegelin, 2019, pp. 37–38).

Presentation of the Contributions

The first article in this special issue, written by Mickey Vallee, focuses on the technological aspect of sounding as placemaking. In *Listening Beyond the Human: The Autonomous Recording*

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Unit and the Ethics of Sound in Biodiversity Conservation, Vallee expresses the dynamics and controversies implied in working with devices such as Autonomous Recording Units (ARUs), which reconfigure practices of listening, in particular when mediated through seemingly “passive” technology. Such units, used, for instance, to monitor animal behaviors, and which can “listen” beyond human listening range, are “challenging the conventional emphasis on human sensory experiences in listening” (Vallee, this issue). The definitions of bodies and actors actively engaged in the practice of listening are being blurred, by the device and by the entities involved. They are made uncertain through the practice itself, thus inviting to rethink what listening as a practice is, and what it does to others—humans and non-humans—in relation to place.

This ethical dimension of listening and sounding is also what plays a central role in Giancarlo Chicaro’s piece *Sanctuary of Slavery: Relocating Race through Sound in an Alpine Town*. In this paper, Chicaro shows how *Black spaces* exist in alpine regions and how they are shaped by musical performance. Referring to the concept of human geographer Heather Merrill (2018), diasporic “Black spaces” are both spaces of invisibilization through displacement (to peripheries), control, and “social death” (p. 59, quoted by Chicaro) as well as spaces where a sense of community and identity-building emerges “that crisscross established ethnic, racial, and sometimes class divisions” (pp. 56–57, quoted by Chicaro). Illustrating this frame through an ethnography of the event *Sanctuary of Slavery* he co-organized, Chicaro explains how the performance engaged with discourses about race, migration, and, in particular, with the discrimination of black bodies in contemporary Italy, where the event took place: namely, in the South-Tyrolean Vinschau Valley, close to the Austrian border.

In the following article, sound becomes less the object of inquiry than a mode of doing research. It becomes a *sonic thinking* (Schulze, 2017, 2020) vibrant as practice of creative intervention. In *Between Taking and Making Place: Exploring the Linkages Between Serres’ Le Parasite and the Research Practice of Creative Intervention*, Nicholas Hardy presents the theoretical undertaking co-constituting the production of an experimental film featured during the conference *Celebrating 25 years of Space and Culture: Taking Place and Making Place*. In his article, Hardy explores how the creative intervention itself becomes a theoretical experiment, thinking with and through the work of Michel Serres, and questioning his own experience in and his relation to the city of Edmonton, where he currently lives, as well as the politics transpiring its downtown area. The uncanny computerized voice narrating the film in a dissonant and repetitive rhythm, transcribed at the end of the article, amplifies the interferences and fluctuations which are part of the creative practice.

The next contribution, *Taking and Making Place through Sound: From the Phonotope to the Phonocene*, is my own exploration of how such thinking with sounds, either through technology, musical or audio-visual performances, challenge and broaden the scope of modes of knowledge production as making place, through the multiplicity of practices and entities engaged, as well as the aesthetic (as *aisthesis*), critical and ethical dimension constituting them. In particular, the article will present the notion of the *Phonocene*, introduced by philosopher Vinciane Despret, a frame from which one can also think about sounding epistemologies, and within which this special issue seems to resonate, as all featured articles seem to present ways “to leave the sphere where the logos of the anthropos has all privileges” (Despret, 2020, trad. by the author).

The special issue closes with two further contributions. The first one takes the form of a *postcard*, a format which already appeared in past issues of *Space and Culture*. Edited by Sena Karahan, the postcard *Acoustic Palimpsests* presents two experiments engaging with sound collage, soundscape study and soundwalks performed in Istanbul, Turkey. The postcards display some of the maps, photos, and QR codes used for the soundwalks. More information about the project and Karahan’s research is available at: <https://soundinbetweenness.org>

The last contribution of this special issue is a singular and important one. *Placemaking Eichstätt: Perspectives and Intersections*, written by Richard Costa, presents a review of the

conference *Celebrating 25 years of Space and Culture: Taking Place and Making Place*, from which most contributions of this issue emerged. In his detailed and very generous description, Costa operates another way of knowledge-making as *placemaking*, reminding those of us present of the moments shared, displaying for others what such an event encompasses. His kind and thought-provoking words reinforce the importance of a journal such as *Space and Culture*, and how its existence (and its anniversary conferences) helps build spaces for exchange, experiment, and collective thinking.

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Notes

1. See, for instance, Jonathan Sterne's *The Audible Past* (Sterne, 2003), in which the author describes the "audio-visual litany" as the way in which sound and the auditive is being used against the visual, in an attempt to reverse a hierarchical separation of the senses in human experience.
2. Early Spring 2024.

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Dr. Rémy Bocquillon is a researcher and lecturer in sociology at the Catholic University Eichstätt-Ingolstadt, Germany. His research interests revolve around epistemic practices bridging the gap between arts, science, and philosophy, which he explores through his own creative work as a sound artist and musician. Some of his latest projects include the publication of his book "Sound Formations. Towards a socio-logical thinking-with sounds" and the sound installation "in_between", realised during an artistic residency for the 2023 SpokenWeb Symposium at the University of Alberta, Canada.