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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18778/1733-8077.11.1.01>

Thinking Through New Methodologies. Sounding Out the City With Teenagers

Abstract This paper explores the place for sound within social theory, more specifically, how sound as a subject can be interpreted methodologically. The paper examines the various methods implemented within a Ph.D. research project. The research adopted a participatory approach, examining the missing voices in the post design of place. In this way, the research focused on those groups often excluded in the design of urban space, teenagers. The methods included participant documented soundwalking, sound mapping, focus groups, and ethnographic soundwalks. This paper argues that a closer attention to sound, when examining the urban area, will help shape one’s understanding of the everyday. Methods that explore sound as part of the makeup of social life, either as place building or space making, whether they are politically intentional or historically relevant, need to be advanced.

Keywords New Methodologies; Sound; Sound Mapping; Soundwalks; Soundscape

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This paper is drawn from a Ph.D. research project which examined the part that *sound* played in the construction of space and community. Sound is an experiential and immersive process by which one connects to urban space. Research into the phenomenological tends to focus on the immediate experience of the senses (Patterson 1990; Kreutzfeld 2006; Imai 2008; Waskul, Vannini, and Wilson 2009), or on the sensory as part of communications, placing the senses alongside “‘faculties,’ ‘modalities,’ ‘channels,’ ‘media,’

‘material culture,’ ‘capacities,’ ‘skills,’ ‘discourses,’ ‘codes,’ ‘arts,’ ‘intelligences’” (Finnegan 2002:34). This, of course, is offset by the continuing dominance of the visible over any other sensory experience in social life (Synnott 1992; Chandler 2010). Thus far studies of sound and society have been predominantly explored within the fine arts, communications, and ecology (Schafer 1977; Ferrington et al. 2000; Truax 2000; Westerkamp 2007). It is necessary to examine new methodologies to interrogate sound as socially constructed. This paper uses the term space to distinguish between place and space. Space is a more amorphous definition in which conceptually new ideas about place can be inscribed through less physical means. This research explored the concept of sound as a tool for the production of space, within working class areas. Though mediatization was examined as it related to walking through and/or mediating the city, the focus of the research was not on virtual spaces or experiences, that is, gaming or online social networking spaces. This research wished to further the study of the urban by including the sonic and its impact or influence on spatial use and interpretation. Over the course of four years I conducted three phases of methodological research. This paper examines two of those phases. The first was a series of autoethnographic soundwalks and the second involved working with 84 teenagers from four secondary schools located near the research area, Smithfield in Dublin’s north city center. There were approximately 20-22 participants from each school. Two schools were all boys schools and two all girls schools, three were state public schools and one a private school.

The Smithfield Soundscape

Traditionally, the north and south side of Dublin city have been defined as two distinct areas, usually distinguished by different economic practices and social groups, with a higher working class population located within the north inner city. For over 200 years, the north side of the city was connected to markets and the docks (Cahill 1861; McCarthy 1990). More recently the relationship between the inhabitants of the north inner city area to these trades has diminished. Surrounding this area is a collection of large public housing and flat complexes, as well as a mix of large private apartment complexes, the main city courthouse, and a police station. The west side of this area leads towards the largest public park in Europe, the Phoenix Park, and the east side leads towards a busy shopping district and the docks. There are distinct differences in the soundscape of these two areas, the Phoenix Park is generally a quieter space with a more natural soundscape, while the dockyards is filled with the sounds of moving trucks and shifting tankers. Smithfield still contains a wholesale fruit and vegetable market, its opening and closing times operate differently to most businesses in the city. From 4am till 2pm one is immersed in the sounds of a market: pallet trucks moving crates, delivery trucks parking, fork-lifts driving around, men talking to each other and the opening of metal shutters, groups gathering together, the voices of women purchasing produce, people walking to work, and the loud squawks of the seagulls. Elsewhere the city is extremely quiet in comparison. Its economic practices are connected to wider networks, such as shipping and farming, as well as deliveries to local and national businesses. This makes it sound distinctly different to the

Figure 1. Smithfield market.



Source: Image by researcher.

rest of the city (see: Figure 1 and Figure 2). Since the early 1990s it has undergone a series of rejuvenation projects to deal with the “post-industrial vacancy of Smithfield” (Reflecting City 2012).

Few traditional wholesale food markets are left in Dublin city; in the last three decades those that remain, such as the Smithfield market, have retreated in size and importance. In the 1990s, under the rubric of urban regeneration, the Historic area rejuvenation project was established in Ireland, HARP (DCC 2012). One of the many spaces to be rejuvenated was the Smithfield area of Dublin city. This space occupies a unique position in the city, as it is the only wholesale fruit and vegetable market left in Dublin. In this way, the Smithfield area is also a unique soundscape within Dublin city, as it stands apart from the everyday sounds of consumption, traffic, and pedestrian sounds. The research exam-

Figure 2. Interior of fruit, flower, and vegetable market.



Source: Image by researcher.

ined how these infrastructural changes impacted on the everyday experience of Smithfield, with a particular focus on the soundscape. The research participants, teenagers, became the principal cohort because rejuvenation projects rarely reflect the needs of this social group, particularly in urban design (Matthews, Limb, and Taylor 1999; Neuburger 2004). The contradiction to this process is that teenagers frequent public spaces far more than adults, primarily as a result of few public facilities being available to them. A second smaller cohort of older adults between the ages of 58 and 70 years was interviewed during the research. This group of five adults, two women and three men, was interviewed about their teenage and early adult memories of both the urban and mediated soundscape of the Smithfield area and markets. This data provided a historical soundscape backdrop in which to compare changes in the Dublin soundscape from the 1950s onwards.

We had the fish markets beside us, and all through the night the fish lorries came in during the night and they had to be unloaded, and you’d hear them banging the boxes, the banging of the boxes, and then at about 4 o’clock in the morning you’d have all the farmers coming up with their, now this is the 60s we’re speaking about, you would have all them coming up from the country with their cabbage, and the market at that time all had cobblestones, and you’d hear the horses on them, then we had the fruit market and you’d hear all the sellers roaring and cursing, you know, the boxes packing and unloading, so it was all, all different sounds. [2nd female mid 60s]

Interpreting Space and the Soundscape

The methodological approach adopted for this research was interpretivism. Interpretivism means “joining evaluative concerns with descriptions of facts” (Rabinow and Sullivan 1979:1). This is necessary when looking at an approach which goes against, or is opposed to, the positivist approach. Within this theoretical framework, the research also examined reflexivity, phenomenology, and feminist theory. They do not argue that it is one of many methods, but rather that it is the ultimate way of perceiving life. However, while this research was guided by interpretivism, social structures such as class, gender, politics, and economics were also examined. The construction of ideas and things do not happen in a vacuum. Interpretivism argues for the unique analysis of each space and social group, suggesting that it is the individual way we interpret the world that cannot be generalized. However, it is possible even with interpretivism to generalize aspects of one’s findings. Interpretivist researchers, such as Geertz (1977) and

Fisher (1993), have made general statements of fact concerning certain practices or experiences within similar fields as probabilistic. In using the interpretivist approach, it was necessary to continuously examine and interrogate the research methods, allowing the participants and the space to shape the research when necessary. Although interpretivism, emancipation, and the participants, as well as reflexivity pushed towards a constant re-examination of the research motives, these approaches provided the rigor necessary to counter the criticisms of bias and subjectivity. However, interpretivism and phenomenological interpretivism often only focus on the personal subjective experience, but this research project also explored the social structures, which shape the individual and group experience of place and space.

The methodologies had to consider how teenagers would best be able to research and reflect on urban soundscapes. Three stages of methods were created for the teenagers, these were: 1) listening soundwalks, 2) documented soundwalks, 3) sound mapping and focus groups. However, the first stage of the research was, as mentioned, a series of autoethnographic soundwalks, which I undertook at the beginning of the methods in 2011. Adams and colleagues (2008) and Degen and Rose (2012) argue that soundwalking allows researchers to immerse themselves in physical spaces, suggesting that it encourages them to actively engage with the phenomenological or the invisible processes of place.

Soundwalking

The concept of soundwalking dates back to the early research of Murray Schafer in the 1960s and

was further developed by Hildegard Westerkamp (2000), both acoustic ecologists. Westerkamp (2000) advanced that sound and space are linked within memory and that soundwalking is an “excursion whose main purpose is listening to the environment.” Her methods were based on storytelling and embodiment; she used walks as an approach to link stories and sounds to particular spaces. Her method involved bringing people on walks through spaces (some familiar to participants and some unfamiliar), they would walk through these areas wearing headphones which contained the voices of people talking about their memories of these spaces. These walks are intended to evoke an emotional reaction from the participants through the sounds and stories that they hear. Soundwalking is used as a method to explore different terrains within cities, as well as the relationship between sounds, a person’s connection to space, and economic and social practices (Drobnick 2004; Sémidor 2006; Venot and Sémidor 2006; Adams et al. 2008; Adams 2009). Venot and Sémidor (2006) argue that soundwalking allows urban planners to consider the soundscape as an ecological issue.

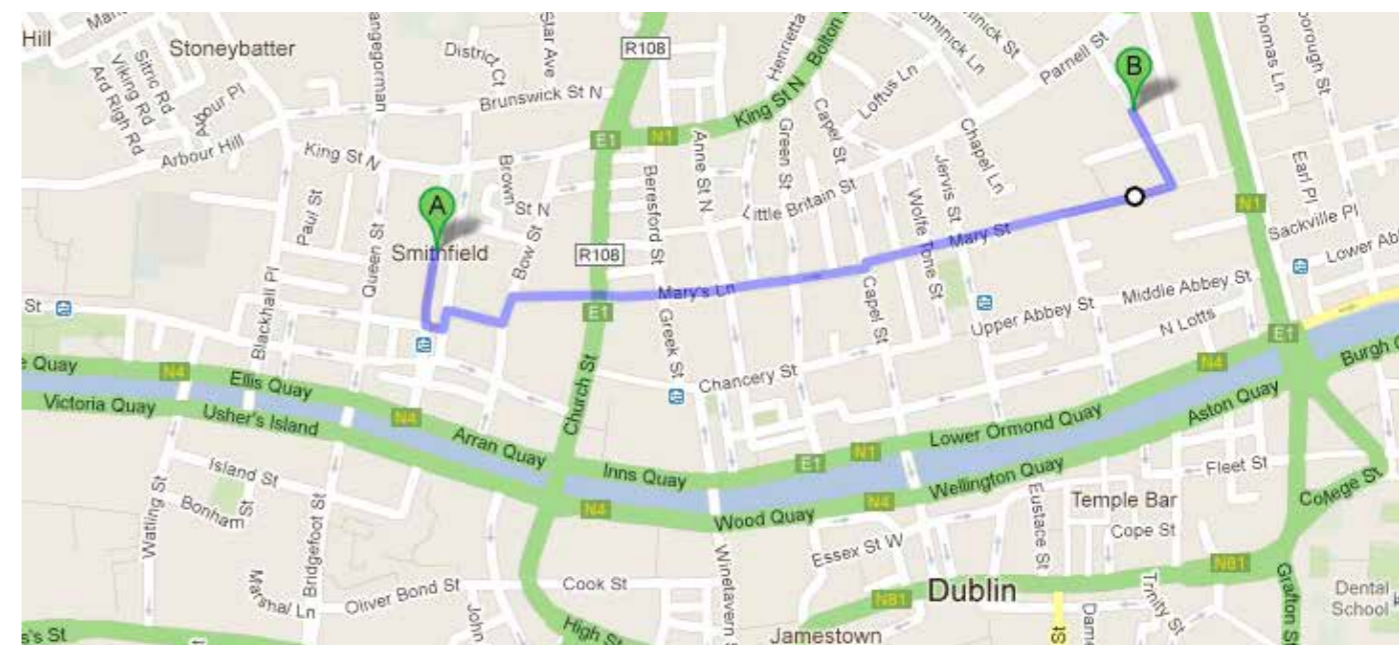
The rationale for including sound in design considerations is that sound is not limited to a particular viewpoint; sound diffuses through and around space and objects. Objects can block certain sounds and over time they dissipate; this means that when we change a space, through the construction of new buildings, roadways, pathways, et cetera, we alter the soundscape (Blessner and Salter 2009). Additionally, sounds are culturally and historically bound within space, and often the perception and interpretation of particular sounds are limited to a local knowledge of place (Feld 1993; 2012; Kreutzfeld 2006).

Journaling and Autoethnographic Soundwalks

This section details the first qualitative approach, a series of autoethnographic soundwalks and reflexive journaling. I spent a period of five months (these walks took place from February 2011 to June 2011) walking one day a week for two hours at different times of the day to cover the 24-hour cycle. These soundwalks were designed to cover the west side of Smithfield through to the main shopping district at the east end of the city, Henry St. and O’Connell St. (see: Figure 3). The walks were purposefully designed to examine the various degrees of sound levels connected with different types of work or social practices around the north inner city. In designing the soundwalks, it was necessary to develop a walk that took in the Smithfield area, as well as a small section of the surrounding housing spaces and the busier shopping areas. It was important to walk through very different soundscapes to highlight how spaces which are close to each other sound different based on the activities taking place within them. Part of the purpose of the walks, which passed through several different economic and social spaces, was to explore whether or not a uniform soundscape existed in Dublin city.

The first walk took place on the 9th of September 2010 and began at the Smithfield market at 4am (see: Figure 4). During the walks, I witnessed very different social and economic rhythms, which created a unique soundscape in the city. The working day was at least two hours away for the rest of the city, presenting a much quieter soundscape. Exploring this one area, Smithfield, meant examining a distinct soundscape within Dublin.

Figure 3. Map of soundwalk.



Source: Google Maps.

Figure 4. Dublin streetscape, 4am.



Source: Image by researcher.

Walking the city at regular intervals allowed me to hear the sounds that were repetitive, linked to production, but also the sounds of typical social practices within housing areas, children playing, street chatter, and traffic. Within Smithfield Square sounds were amplified because of its vast emptiness. Depending on the time of day, the sounds of footsteps (particularly women’s high heels), seagulls screeching, and the intermittent shouts of the homeless or addicts were reflected off the tall concrete and glass structures in the square. These sounds were not regularized, but were still a constant presence throughout everyday. The background sound of the Luas tram line, which runs through the heart of Smithfield, created a permanent, almost musical sonic backdrop. There were other less amplified technological sounds such as: mobile phone ring tones, the beeping of pedestrian street crossings, and the emergency services. This repetition of sound within society has become associated with technology, which increasingly regularizes the social soundscape, or as Augoyard and Torgue (2006:123) have termed it, the social chronophony and synchrony. That is, the synchronized and regularized sound that follows social patterns and activities. They also argue that it is the everyday repetition of events, making and “localizing periodicities of the world; from a ticking clock to a factory whistle” (Augoyard and Torgue 2006:93), which have come to regulate and define time and space. Few streets in Smithfield contain working businesses, this means that throughout the day very little changes sonically apart from the susurrations of traffic are heard in the distance. In addition, as the center of several judiciary buildings, the rel-

ative quiet of Smithfield is often pierced with the sounds of sirens.

A recording device was used to document the experience of the walk, which included recording personal reflections, as well as describing the source of some of the sounds heard on the walk. The issues that can arise when recording a space is where does one focus the microphone. Oliveros (2005) contends that there are different modes of listening: passive and active, or directional and focused. Similar to sight, one can focus in on sound; one can also tune it out, either to deal with monotonous or loud sounds (Ronayne, McDonald, and Smith 1981). The difficulties involved in recording a soundscape for analysis are that what was recorded is not necessarily what was heard. When listening, we focus in on the familiar or local rather than hearing all of the sounds in a space. The microphone, however, is not a discerning listener. Hence, on listening back I did not always remember hearing certain events or sound signals which were on the recordings. Also, during the soundwalks, I documented personal reflections and interpretations. These field notes were later transcribed.

After a day of soundwalking I found it frustrating to find that all I noticed was either the traffic or the absence of traffic. Is it a case that when I try to hear a place, I stop actually hearing it as a whole and break it up into pieces? This seems similar to photographing a space; we take a snapshot of the whole. The idea of Smithfield being in anyway an area of a particular kind of practice (as in economic or social activities) seems nil. When I walk up Grafton Street, I hear footfall, people, music, laughter, bags bang-

ing. It’s the sound of a shopping district. Smithfield seems empty of sounds that signify anything.

Conditions: Dry windy day, very difficult to hear at certain angles. Lunchtime traffic and lunch time crowds. Walked through Smithfield to markets, not too busy with market people, no kids. [Researcher’s notes, 2011]

These notes allowed for an analysis of the immersive experience of a space and the comparison of other spaces experienced on the walk. The next methodological approach involved working with teenagers.

Interpreting the Soundscape With Teenagers

This research argued that the Smithfield area—and particularly the Smithfield Square—did not work as

a community space, in part because the soundscape produced, as a consequence of redesign, was defined (by the teenage research participants) as negative and/or repressive to participation. The Smithfield area contains a number of social housing flats and private apartment complexes. While walking through Smithfield, I would hear the voices of children and teenagers coming from within the central squares of the social housing blocks (see: Figure 5). However, there was a notable absence of teenagers in all of the public spaces of Smithfield. As a large public space, with some stone blocks for seating, this seemed unusual (see: Figure 6 and Figure 7).

Teenagers generally congregate away from the parental or community observation (Kato 2006), the square would seem an ideal place for this. Instead, what emerged during discussions with the group of teenagers was a description of a place that was considered unapproachable.

Figure 5. Social housing complex, Smithfield.



Source: Image by researcher.

Figure 6. Smithfield Square, 2012.



Source: Image by researcher.

Figure 7. Smithfield Square, 2012.



Source: Image by researcher.

The research methodology centered on an introductory workshop on deep listening, a method and philosophy invented by the composer Pauline Oliveros, and soundscape studies. Then what followed were three soundwalks, and twenty separate focus groups. The methodology was designed so that the research group would become active participants in the data collection and analysis. The choice of age group was based on the relationship these teenagers would have to the Smithfield area between the years 2000 and 2012. It was also important to work with both male and female students. The students were aged between 15 and 16 years.

Consideration should be given to the reasons why a researcher chooses to work with one cohort over another; this is particularly so when the potential groups are deemed vulnerable. As with any research project, there were ethical issues to consider in this work. It was important that the research adheres to the Sociological Association of Ireland guidelines on working with human subjects (NUIM 2012). Because this research involved working with minors, it was also necessary to obtain Garda clearance for the research (the Garda are the Irish police force). This was received in February 2011. Garda clearance or vetting is usually required when working with children in

state institutions. Although it was recognized that legally these were minors and therefore one had to consider parental consent, it was felt that each student involved in the research should be allowed to have a say about their participation in this project.

The choice of age range reflects growing data on the apparent lack of control teenagers have over urban environments (Matthews et al. 1999; Bowden 2006; Dee 2008) and an attempt to understand what strategies they practice to navigate urban spaces. Contemporary research into space and spatial practices has highlighted the importance of working with young people (Matthews, Limb, and Percy-Smith 1998; Travlou 2003; Kato 2006). These researchers explore governmental policies concerning youth which has led to “the exclusion of young people from public space through the criminalization of certain activities (i.e., skateboarding, graffiti) and the policing of their movement (i.e., juvenile curfews)”¹ (Travlou 2003:3). The Smithfield area was designated a space for rejuvenation by the HARP project in the early 1990s. The restructuring of this space continued through the 2000s. As such, the teenage participants primary experience of Smithfield was through the lens and sounds of construction. During the early discussions of the design of Smithfield, teenagers were not consulted or considered in the reshaping of this public space. In an interview conducted by the researcher with a representative of the Dublin City Council, the public space of Smithfield Square was described as a place for potential commercial

¹ The Irish equivalent is the Juvenile Diversion program, “the intended outcome of the Program is to divert young people from committing further offences” (see: www.citizensinformation.ie).

opportunities, an “event space.” In addition, she stated that it had been seen as unnecessary to explore youth participation in the design of the space as there were so few young people in the area.

Teenagers are seen to sit in the in-between space of childhood and adulthood, which often excludes them from public participation, they are not given the status of adults (Matthews et al. 1998; Dee 2008; Emmel and Clark 2009). For the participant group in this research, the authorities and people, people generally being adults, have the power to control the construction of space and the resulting soundscapes.

Interviewer: So here’s a question for the paper (indicating the sound map), who has control of the city, who has control of the city sounds?

Group: (Participant 1) Us? (Participant 2) Government. (Participant 3) Aw people. (Participant 4) People. (Participant 5) People.

Interviewer: Well, for example, you talk about the emergency services and traffic and you’re talking about helicopters, can you get them to lower down [the volume]?

Group: (Group) No.

Interviewer: Who can?

Group: (Participant 2) The government. [Group 11b: female]

Although Lefebvre (1974) argues that one can alter the fixed meaning of space through the appropriation of city spaces, this is not always the case for young people, particularly within urban centers. Their use of public spaces is often restricted by the use of age limitations (see: Figure 8) (Travlou 2003; Kato 2006; Dee 2008).

Figure 8. Public playground, Dublin inner city housing complex.



Source: Image by researcher.

It is through the deployment of urban planning and the law which deals with “perceived public space issues” that “impact adversely on children and young people, contributing to their partial or complete removal from public space” (Dee 2008:2). Participants in the research expressed this view:

Interviewer: When you go out with your friends outside, do you tend to stand in places? Do you tend to hang around corners or...?

Group: No. (Participant 3) No. (Participant 2) No, not really.

Interviewer: No?

Group: (Participant 2) A lot of people think that though, cause they do be like... Don’t be hanging around streets or anything.

Interviewer: But you don’t anyway?

Group: (Participant 2) We don’t really like, we were standing at, right the church wall. (Participant 1) We go on a walk or something. (Participant 2) Yeah,

you just walk around like, but we were standing at the church and the Garda [Irish police] some of them like, and we were deciding like, standing on Church Road, whether to go up to the playground or go to the park, and all you’re doing is standing there and a Garda goes by and he tells you to move and you don’t even be doing anything. [Group 11b: female]

In this way, the creation of ephemeral spaces for young people in the city is restricted. They are then forced to find new spaces to socialize (Kato 2006), which again become demarcated by the sounds they produce. Curtin and Linehan (2002) argue that teenage boys (in particular) often feel excluded from space because their presence is seen as threatening.

Interviewer: Do you feel that there’s a sense that the presence of teenagers in spaces is not welcome?

Group: Yeah, but I can understand that, as well.

Interviewer: Why?

Group: Like a housing area, like you’d be sitting there and everyone would be making loads of noise cause like you’re having a bit of a laugh, like you’d be shouting, you wouldn’t realize that you’re shouting, but you are, and you’re told to move on like, I understand. [Group 2c: male]

This paradox suggests both a reflexive approach adopted by the teenagers to monitor their sounds and—paradoxically—ambivalence to being quiet. However, the participant suggested that part of the reason that young people use particular spaces at night was their closeness to communities, lights, and adults.

Qualitative Mixed Methods: Soundwalking With Teenagers

One of the primary goals of a soundwalk “is to reveal the nature of the structural, ecological relationships” (EHA 2010:27) among participants to the soundscape. When a person is asked to listen to the sounds of a space, it allows them to open an “inner space for noticing (emphasis in original)” (Westerkamp 2012:56). The young participants took on the role of researchers/ethnographers, documenting and collating data from the soundscape. The strength of this approach lies in the placing of research collection and data analysis in the hands of participants (Harding and Norberg 2005), it allows the research group a type of ownership of the knowledge they produce. Feminist methodologies argue that we must take into account “the observer’s standpoint, a direct challenge to universality and objectivity” (Schwartz-Shea 2006:89).

Prior to the first soundwalk the participants were asked to bring the soundscape to the foreground of their attention. Public spaces in a city are often “defined by the placement and height of buildings, the textures of surfaces, colors and light” (Billstrom and Atienza 2012:73). This makes a soundwalk truly distinctive, as there are very different processes involved in examining the sounds of a space. First, one is exploring where and how the sounds heard in a space are produced. Second, sounds can be ambiguous or diffused, which means there is no source or we cannot locate one. Finally, listening means paying attention and not talking, this was very difficult for the teenagers. There were three soundwalks conducted with each school group:

1. Walking and listening with intent, as a group.
2. Recording sound objects and spaces with a camera in groups of two.
3. Recording the soundscape with a digital audio recorder also in groups of two (see: Table 1).

The duration of each walk was approximately 40 minutes. Oliveros (2005) argues that when we walk a space to listen, we learn a new method of communicating with it; we also develop new ways of communicating with each other. In the act of soundwalking, the hope was that the young participants would get a chance to really listen to the city without the interruption of conversation or mediated listening. The soundwalks allowed the teenagers to reflect on the relationship between sound and source, for example, they began to note that certain sounds, such as the Luas tram line, added a kind of rhythm to the city.

Group: (Participant 1) I hear the Luas a lot. (Participant 2) People talking. (Participant 3) Yeah.

Interviewer: So you like the sound of the Luas? Does anybody else like the sound of the Luas?

Group: (Participant 1) Yeah. (Group) I love it.

Interviewer: Is it because you have just become used to it, what is it that you like about the sound of it?

Group: (Participant 1) It’s not too loud, it’s kind of peaceful. (Participant 2) It’s like a wave. A bus is [vocalizes a loud sound]. (Participant 1) Yeah, it’s quiet [the Luas]. Like a ballet. [Group 14a: female]

Other participants reflected on the mediated music of the city, some defining it as necessary to the

soundscape of consumption, others as a nuisance sound.

Group: You know the way the shops like to get customers in by playing music at full volume outside the shop or the entrance, that adds on a lot of sound, if they did away with that, if there’s a law, you can do that. (Participant 1) Sometimes three shops in a row do that, sometimes and you just like hear loads of noise. (Participant 2) Yes. (Participant 3) Yes. (Participant 4) And, you know, when you’re walking on the footpaths, and you’re right beside them, it’s loud. [Group 14a: female]

The aim of the first soundwalk was to examine what the young participants heard and if they understood how listening (which is active) impacted on their perception of space. Additionally, soundwalking allowed them the opportunity to examine the difference between hearing a space (which is passive) and listening (an active process). Thus, the research could ascertain what part, if any, sound played in their interpretation of certain spaces.

Walking in silence is extremely difficult for people, especially when they are part of a group. When participating in a Deeplisting summer school in 2010, I discovered that groups of people find it especially difficult to be near each other and not talk, or otherwise try to communicate non-verbally. People would find ways to communicate even if it was with hand signals and facial expressions. During the soundwalks with the teenagers, they would avoid eye contact and maintain a distance from each other, to keep silent, or gather in twos, discreetly gesticulating or mouthing words silently. After the first silent soundwalk, which some

participants described as “painful” and “exhausting” (several participants complained about the tiredness they felt after a silent walk), it was decided that for the subsequent three schools, there would be no silent soundwalk; instead, the students would walk the same route, but be attentive to the environment. In designing a new methodology, it was important to adopt a reflexive approach, allowing for possible changes in response to participant suggestion and reactions.

As a cohort teenagers tend to travel in pairs or small groups (Travlou 2003). Confronted with the idea of being together, but ignoring the social norms of conversation caused some consternation. When the groups were allowed to walk without having to be silent, their behavior in space altered. The connection to listening and vocalizing became group orientated; in this way, the researcher was not just following a group, but examining how they listen *in* groups (Aarts and Dijksterhuis 2003).

Table 1. Dates and types of soundwalks from 2011-2012.

Gender	School Type	No. of Students	School	(1) Soundwalk	(2) Photo Soundwalk	(3) Audio Recorded Soundwalk
Duration				40 min	40 min	40 min
Girls	Public School	23	a	9 th March 2011	16 th March 2011 (a2)	23 rd March 2011 (a3)
Girls	Public School	20	b	23 rd Sept. 2011	30 th Sept. 2011 (b2)	7 th Oct. 2011 (b3)
Boys	Private School	21	c	18 th Jan. 2012	25 th Jan. 2012 (c2)	1 st Feb. 2012 (c3)
Boys	Public School	20	d	19 th Jan. 2012	26 th Jan. 2012 (d2)	2 nd Feb. 2012 (d3)

Source: Self-elaboration.

The aim of the soundwalks were: 1) to examine what they heard, 2) to understand what the experience of listening meant to them, 3) to see if they could differentiate between hearing and listening, 4) and to find out what part, if any, sound plays in shaping the urban teenage experience. The participants interrogated the researched space, its purpose, and

the meaning of certain sounds in the everyday, how sound defined place, placelessness or the creation of non-places (Osborne 2001; Augé 2009).

The second soundwalk involved the students being placed into pairs and given a disposable camera to visually document sound producing objects, for exam-

ple, cars, alarms, people, and water/rain (defined as a particularly Irish sound) (see: Figure 9). For the final soundwalk, the group was again placed in pairs and given a digital audio recorder. The participants were asked to consider recording sounds that they could identify, as well as sounds which could be described as indeterminate of origin, such as background noise/sounds. Asking young people to listen to the environment while documenting, gave them a clear focus. It also raised challenges, for example, an uncertainty with how to document a sound with a cam-

era, or with the digital recorder, how to distinguish singular sounds within the larger *melee* of an urban soundscape. In addition, it was observed that during the soundwalks, the boys were less comfortable approaching certain groups such as buskers, street market sellers, small children, et cetera, whereas the girls felt quite comfortable walking up to people to record their sounds. The boys also tended to walk in larger groups; it was difficult to separate them out so that they could record sounds. Girls often went off either in pairs or individually to record sounds.

Figure 9. Images taken by teenage participants on their soundwalks.

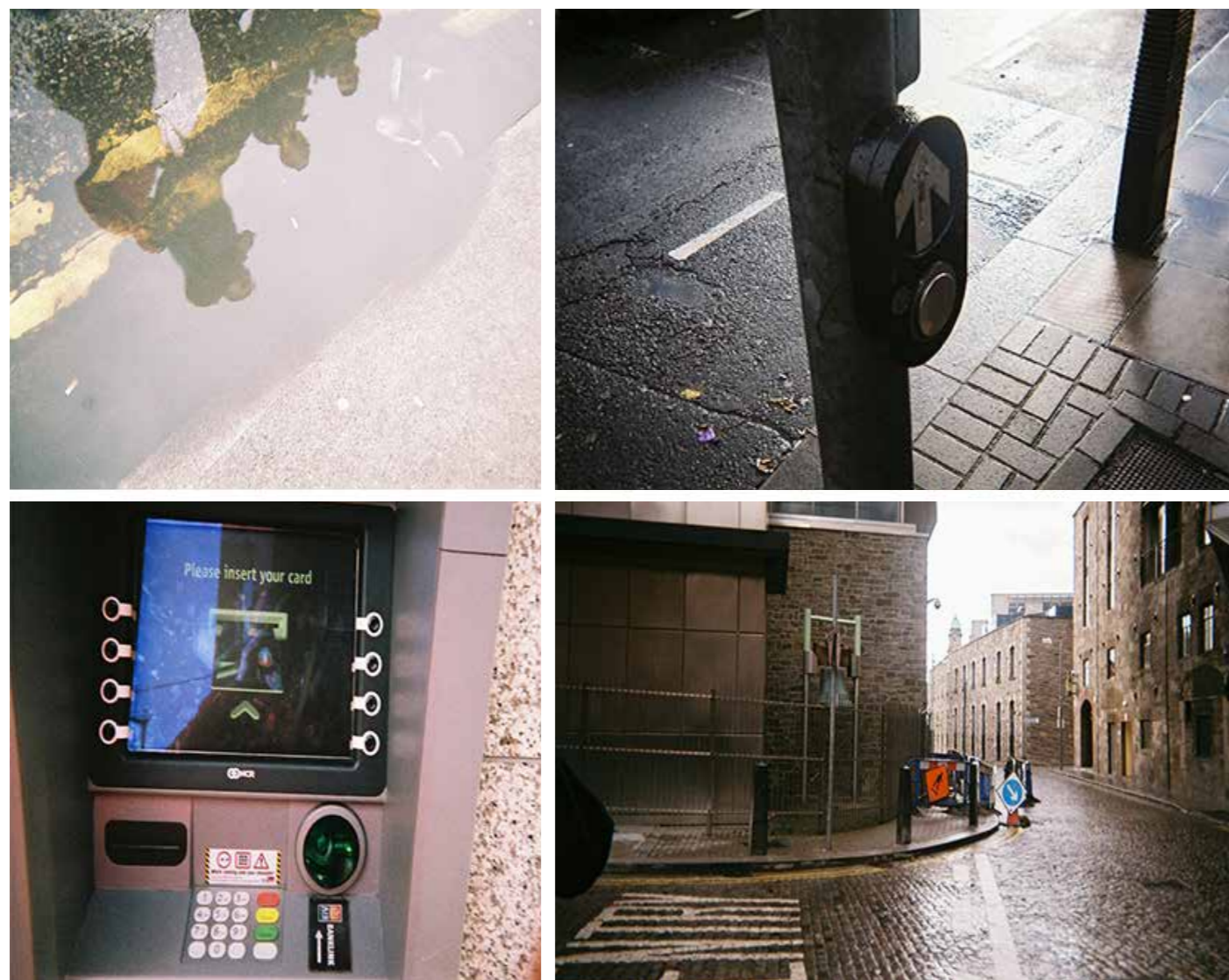


Table 2. Focus groups, 2011-2012.

GROUPS AND GENDER	NO. OF STUDENTS	DATES
Group A Girls¹		
13a	19 ²	16 th March 2011
14a	5	6 th April 2011
12a	5	16 th April 2011
Group B Girls		
10b	5	7 th October 2011
11b	5	14 th November 2011
8b	5	25 th November (1) 2011
9b	5	25 th November (2) 2011
Group C Boys		
1c	5	9 th February 2012
3c	4	23 rd February 2012
2c	4	22 nd March 2012
Group D Boys		
6d	5	15 th March 2012
7d	4	16 th March 2012
4d	5	29 th March (1) 2012
5d	5	29 th March (2) 2012

Source: Self-elaboration. For ^{1,2} see: Endnotes.

Focus Groups With Teenagers

The next stage consisted of a series of 40-minute focus groups with around 5 participants attending each discussion. The discussions were recorded onto a zoom digital audio recorder.² Focus groups can reveal common assumptions and highlight differences of opinion not previously considered (Raby 2010). For example, teenagers as a social group tend

to socialize within structured and unstructured group settings: classrooms, parks, youth clubs, or just hanging out (Curtin and Linehan 2002; Kato 2006; Boyd 2007). It was felt that the focus group situation would be both familiar and more comfortable than one-to-one interviews. There is always the potential for unruly behavior in focus groups because they “provide less studied personal ‘account-making’ than that emerging through interviews and life histories” (Raby 2010:2). There is also the problem of confidentiality and the risks involved when openly sharing ideas “because the group dynamic of sharing opinions can create vulnerabilities between

² It is important to use good audio recording technology to document discussions about sound and the everyday, the recorder will not only document what is being said but also the soundscape within which the discussion is taking place. This turned out to be vital on later analysis.

participants” (Hofmeyer and Scott 2008:69), known as “spatial familiarity.”

In this study, there were 14 focus groups held over a one-year period (see: Table 2). In school A, each focus group took place in the school library, a very quiet space. The other groups, B, C, and D, took place in classrooms within the schools. The duration of the focus group was dictated by the duration of a single class. In most instances, this averaged 40 minutes, with the longest at 54 minutes and the shortest at 33 minutes. Except for the first focus group with group A, where the teacher was present, I facilitated the rest of the groups. The conversations were recorded on a digital audio recorder. The purpose of the focus groups was not just to explore the participants’ interpretation of sound, either technological or natural; it was also to create a space for more active participation in the research. The focus groups were designed as a natural progression from the soundwalks. Typically the aims of the focus group were to:

- investigate the sounds the participants hear on a daily basis in school, at home, and while socializing;
- explore redesigning city spaces for better soundscapes;
- explore meaning and language to describe sounds, with a focus on the difference between noise and sound;
- explore sound and space in the context of digital audio technologies;

- discuss the various ways that participants use their mobile phones, for example, phoning, texting, listening to music, and the places they use their phones.

I was investigating where *spatially* different types of technological use took place, for example, where participants listened to music and why they chose particular spaces for certain activities. It was important to examine why different methods were used in different spaces to communicate: texting, phoning, emailing, and social networking. There is research that supports technological use as spatially specific (Ito 2004; Bull 2008; Hagood 2011). It can also be argued that mediated listening is spatially and context specific.

Where they chose to listen was as important as why they engaged in mediated listening. For some, mediated listening was used to create a sonic background even in group situations.

Group: (Participant 1) I always listen to the radio. (Participant 5) You could be sitting in (Mary’s) and we’ll just be talking and she’ll go like, I have to listen to the radio and she’ll put on Spin 103, and no songs would be on it and she’d still listen to it.

Interviewer: Just put it on in the background?

Group: Yeah. [Group 9b: female]

Interviewer: Do you listen to music?

Group: (Participant 1) I fall asleep listening to music. (Participant 2) When I’m walking alone to school, I listen to music.

Interviewer: What about you, do you listen to music?

Group: (Participant 3) Never. (Participant 4) If I’m going somewhere on my own or something. (Participant 1) If I was going training or something.

Interviewer: So, do you mostly listen to music when you’re by yourselves?

Group: Yes. (Participant 2) Say, if he was in town like say he told me he was in O’Connell Street I was walking from my house I could listen to music until I got to him.

Interviewer: Why?

Group: (Participant 2) Just something to amuse you, it puts you in a good humor I think.

Interviewer: What about you, why would you listen to music?

Group: (Participant 5) If I was in bed and I wanted to go asleep, I’d listen to music.

Interviewer: You listen to music for travelling like going on long journeys?

Group: Yes. [Group 1c: male]

One could argue that so much mediated listening forms a kind of disconnecting to space (Bull 2000). One possible outcome might be that young people will no longer use public spaces, which will enable urban planners to decide that teenagers should not be considered in urban design. For teenagers, bringing one’s mobile phone or iPod outside means that at some stage they will be consuming media. The reasons for this consumption are of concern to this researcher. In addition, teenagers mediate through different parts of the city as a means of adjusting their sensory perception to space. For the urban based teenagers, this can evolve into a constant form of acoustic shifting; they are no longer earwitnesses to their environments (Ystad et al. 2010).

Interviewer: Do you never bring [mobile device] it outside?

Group: (Participant 1) No. (Participant 2) Only the odd time. (Participant 3) Only when I’m walking by myself.

Interviewer: So you don’t do too much listening to music outside of the home?

Group: (Participant 4) No. (Participant 5) Only when you’re going out?

Interviewer: Do you use it going places?

Group: (Participant 2) No, only when you’re going to a party, you can listen to music. (Participant 3) Like you wouldn’t bring it out. (Participant 1) If you’re going on a jog or a walk or something, then I bring it out. [Group 10b: female]

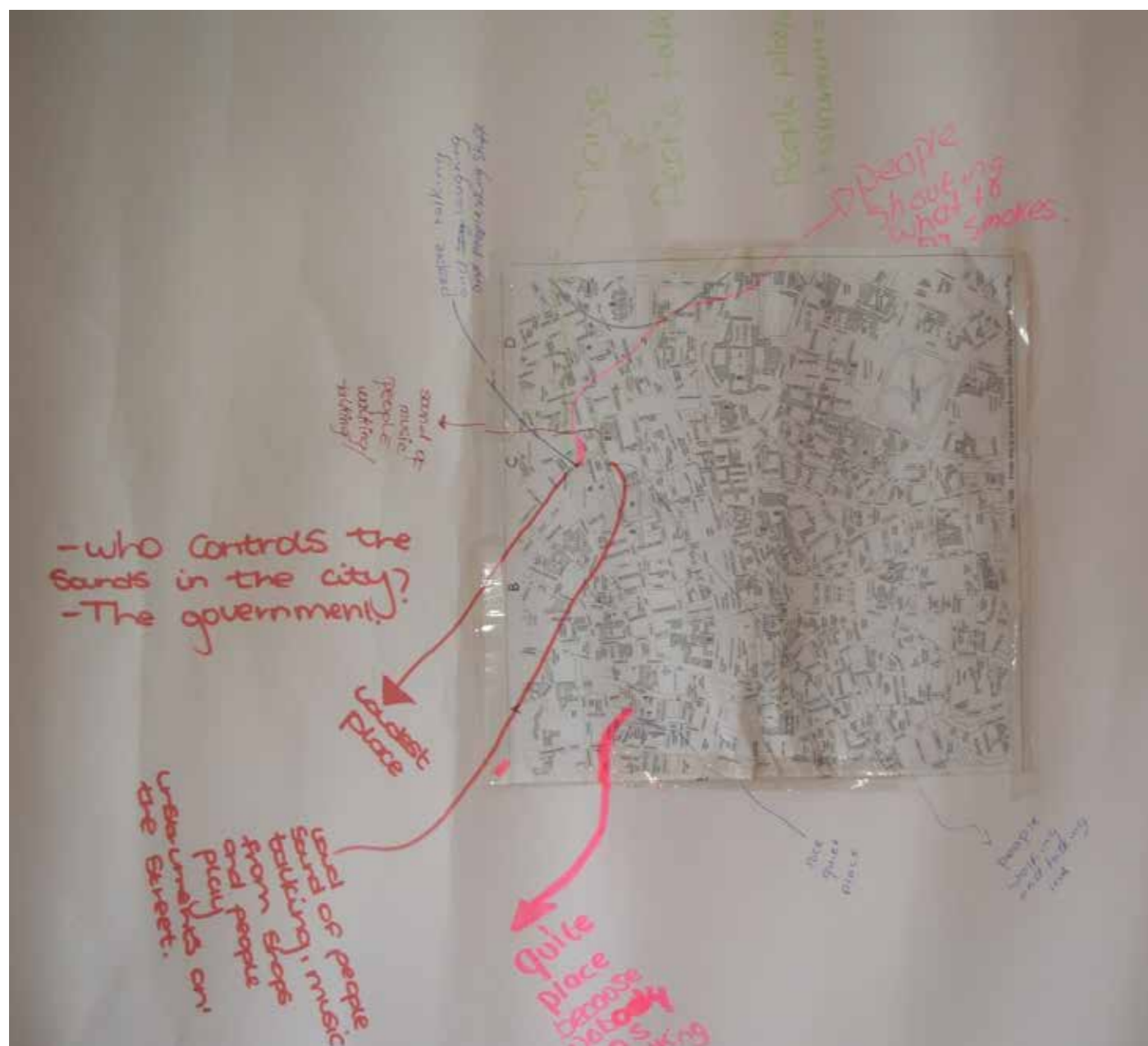
The heuristic approach of teenagers/young people is to reconfigure their sense experiences through media technologies. One could argue that this approach is a precursor to what Dyson (2009) calls the cyborgization of the senses; a process whereby one’s perceptual processes are enhanced or altered through the embedding of technology into the body (Haraway 1991).

Mapping Sound

Within the focus groups the participants worked with sound maps (see: Figure 10). The maps were intended to explore how one understands or places soundscapes within geographic territories, by designating spaces of sound, noise, or ambiguous soundscapes, and identifying spaces where the keynote sounds³ were non-directional and consequently hard to describe or place.

³ The “keynote sound” is the fundamental tone of a space and is analogous to a musical term, for example, the sounds of forklift trucks moving crates within a market space.

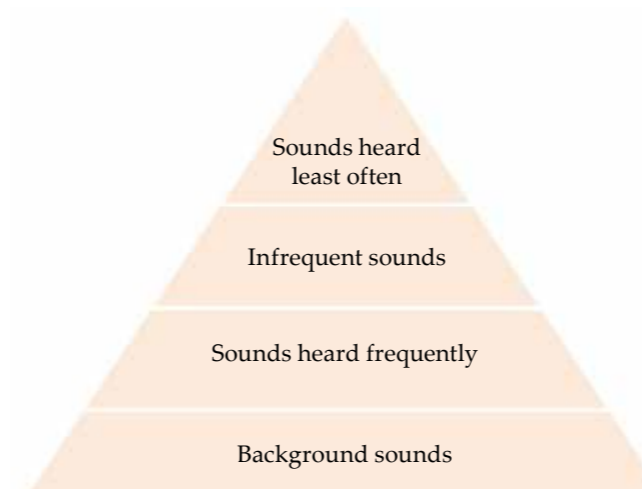
Figure 10. Sound map created with first school.



It was not my intention to have a cartographic narrative of space, as this would involve flattening out the landscape, a process which—de Certeau (1988) argues—ignores the processes of walking and experiencing space. These maps were intended to explore how we could look at a space geographically and designate spaces of sound, noise, and spaces of alteration.

The map was altered twice during the fieldwork phase, the first iteration created problems simply because these maps were primarily focused on specific sites and points of reference, it was decided that a sound pyramid would replace the geographical map. This involved removing the markers of physical space, such as lines and trajectories, and replacing them with a sonic construct (see: Figure 11).

Figure 11. Sound pyramid.



Source: Self-elaboration.

The sound pyramid is based on the concept of sound as three-dimensional. The design of the pyramid guides the participants to think of sound in terms of layers, each one sitting on top of the other (see: Figure 11 and Figure 12). Acoustically this is not the case, however, as a visual prompt it worked better than the maps in stimulating a discussion. The students were asked to see the bottom layer of the pyramid as the space for sounds that are constantly around them or in the background, and the top layer as sounds that are heard less frequently. The sound pyramid created a very different focus, a more discursive process, in general, it allowed individual voices to emerge within the group. It also created a debate over what constituted key sounds in a space.

Interviewer: What is a sound that you always hear?

Group: You know, you can always hear yourself thinking...

Group: When we're off to get the bus everyday like, we're always hearing drug addicts shouting and stuff like.

Figure 12. Sound pyramid made by group b3.



Interviewer: Write that down.

Group: Sorry? I didn't know if we could put that in...

Group: People talking would be at a higher level if you know what I mean.

Interviewer: Do you think?

Group: Cause they're talking directly to you...

Group: Ye, always hear whistles from my house cause the back entrance of it goes into St. Anne's park, so I always hear it at breakfast. [Group 6d: male]

The sound maps also highlighted differences of assigning meaning and importance to sounds within the city, these differences were noted between the genders and between the social classes. In exploring sound in the environment, the use of space, and the meaning of sounds, it was apparent in some instances that gender played a part in the construction of meaning. In the schools, there were instances when gendered practices of listening and making sounds became obviously different. Their behaviors in public spaces were dissimilar, boys made

a point of making sounds or shouting while on the soundwalks, whilst girls walked in small clusters, whispering. Sometimes the participants highlighted differences in the genders in sound production; for example, the male participants argued that girls talked for longer on the phone, were more demanding of attention, and were louder when in groups. Additionally, the researcher noted that the female participants described sound environments differently, often professing to love or hate sounds, in a dramatic manner.

Group: (Participant 2) Aw do you know what, I love the sound of wind. (Participant 1) Yeah, the leaves on the wind did you ever get, on like a real cold night, like coming up to Christmas, right, you just stay, you just stay in, and it’s, and it’s lashings of rain, and it’s so windy and you watch a film, have a cup of hot chocolate. (Participant 1) Aw yeah. (Group) I hate the traffic sounds. (Participant 1) I hate ambulance and police. (Participant 2) Aw yeah. [Group 11b: female]

Group: (Participant 1) I hate the traffic sounds. (Participant 5) I hate ambulance and police. (Participant 3) Aw yeah. (Participant 2) I hate that. (Participant 1) Yeah. (Participant 2) Like in the middle of a nice day and if you’re asleep and its deafening and the police just fly past my window. (Participant 1) I hate that, I like the noise of town, but I hate when addicts are shouting, just shouting.

Interviewer: You hear that a lot?

Group: (Group) Yeah. Yeah. (Participant 2) Like when its football night I can hear them on the street shouting [laughter]. (Participant 4) I love that, you know, when Ireland were playing it’s just the best atmosphere ever. [Group 10b: female]

For the boys, the sounds of emergency services, annoying as they might be, were seen and described as necessary:

Interviewer: What about sounds that you don’t like?

Group: (Participant 1) Not really. (Participant 2) But, you wouldn’t be bothered by it anymore because like it’s normal.

Interviewer: If someone said to you, look, if there is a sound that you don’t like in the city, a sound that you’re really bothered by, and we’ll take it out, we’ll actually remove it...

Group: (Participant 4) I don’t know, I can’t think of anything.

Interviewer: You would keep everything [sounds] that there is?

Group: (Participant 3) Probably. (Participant 1) Like there is nothing that I can think of that is so like annoying I want it gone. (Participant 2) The ambulance sirens they have to keep them because they are transporting someone. [Group 2c: male]

Interviewer: Would you describe the city as sound or noise?

Group: Noise. (Group response) Noise.

Interviewer: Really?

Group: Noise with sound.

Interviewer: And then, so are you seeing that in the negative?

Group: Yeah. (Participant 1) Yeah. (Participant 2) Basically yeah. (Participant 3) There’s a lot of car horns and... (Participant 2) Ambulances. (Participant 5) But it’s not like it’s noisy when we’re there, if ye get me, it’s not like ye get in a bad mood if you’re walking through town, the noise is just there, we’re used to it now, it’s kinda blocked out, it is noisy, it’s not like pleasant to hear police sirens. [Group 4d: male]

On the soundwalks, the researcher also observed the female participants, when walking by groups of young teenage boys, alter their behavior, becoming more muted in their speech. This highlights how gender separation in schools may impact on teenagers behavior—sound production—in public, particularly when they meet (Pipher 2005; Kimmel 2009). This may be one of the reasons why the participants, particularly the boys, define gendered differences in sound production.

Group: I don’t like to be sexist here, but if there’s more women, there’s more sounds, more noise actually. Yup.

Interviewer: So would you think that women make more noise than men?

Group: (Group response) Yes.

Interviewer: In what way?

Group: [They find it difficult to describe what they mean] (Participant 1) They talk loud. (Participant 2) Women they can’t have quiet time either to themselves and are constantly talking. (Participant 3) And when they do, they want perfect conditions. (Participant 2) Girls would be on the phone to their mates, lads just don’t have any of that. [Group 4d: male]

In one group, the girls stated that they would ring girls to chat, but “wouldn’t ring fellas” (Group 8b). This suggests the unusualness of girls talking to boys both through mediated technologies and in public spaces, perhaps indicative of the gendered education where girls and boys are separated through early childhood and then adolescents. During one lunch break, the researcher noted:

I was standing in the main foyer where the students congregate when changing classes or going on their lunch break. There is a room of this area, which is a canteen.

There is no canteen in the other schools. While standing there, I heard shouting, whistling, laughing a bell ringing. Nobody tries to have order, the teachers just move through the noise. The boys gather in groups and talk loud, what is interesting is that it seems like all of the boys must be talking, however, on closer inspection, a group may consist of 5 to 8 boys, gathered close together, while 3 or 4 at most might be talking loudly, the rest are just standing and listening. I noted this in a lot of male groups. This is very different to my visit to (2nd girls school) where during the break the girls were restricted to their classrooms with a female teacher walking up and down the corridor, telling them to “keep it down,” “keep quiet,” and “behave.” [Researcher’s notes, 2011]

It is in these very differences of perception that one could argue for gendered soundscapes; sounds that perhaps exclude or include gender into a space, or that a space may produce or repress a gender’s sound. The concept of gendered sounds is found throughout history. Schwartz (2011) argues that the female voice has, throughout history, been associated with noise, aggression, and possession, but also seduction. The devaluing of women in society, including the suppression and segregation of their voices, was—he argues—part of a move to supplant women from positions of power. The silencing of women today in public is not restricted to religion, or even a particular culture; there are distinct processes in play within various cultures to suppress the sound of women (Fortune and Enger 2005; Konrad 2006). Within this research, most of the female participants stated that their spaces for hanging out with friends were generally in a house or bedroom, whereas the male participants discussed hanging out outside. The older participants offered similar views, the women

remembered as teenagers hanging out at home with friends or at least staying close to where they lived. Conversely, the older male participants would bring their portable music devices, that is, radios, on to street corners or into parks, whereas the women remembered listening to the radio with their friends in their bedrooms or sitting rooms. Kimmel (2009:197) argues that “boys and girls learn—and teach each other—what are the appropriate behaviors and experiences for boys and girls and make sure that everyone acts according to plan.” The public performance of sound or expression is situated within different arenas, both public and private, for each gender.

Conclusion

The moment is very important when exploring the perception of space and sound. Schafer (1977) argues that in certain conditions the experience of sounds in space can be radically different. Air pressure, for example, can alter how sound diffuses through space, thus altering our perception of place. The different rhythms of the city (night-time sounds and day-time sounds) are shaped by different working and social activities (Lefebvre 1992). Throughout a week, month, or year the city will undergo constant changes to its soundscape. Blesser and Salter (2009) argue that there are shifting spatial definitions and practices which shape one’s understanding and experience of the soundscape. For example, a tourist in Smithfield might not be able to immediately interpret sound cues they cannot see, local sounds, for example. They must rely on visual cues to understand these sounds. Additionally, having no historical or community connection to these sounds, they will not be imbedded or resonate within their social lives with

any meaning. However, for most people, the sounds of a market are not necessarily new, so meaning will be attributed from other connections or memories to similar sound types.

Blesser and Salter (2009:34) argue that in most public situations people construct what they describe as acoustic architecture or “territorial bubbles.” These bubbles act to both enclose and excluded people within and from sound. Therefore, examining the soundscape requires an interrogation into spatial design and spatial use, as architecture and the design of space play a part in how one experiences and produces sound within space (Cain et al. 2008; Augé 2009). One must also examine the approach taken by urban planners in reshaping space (Hamnett 1991; Moore 1999; Peillon and Corcoran 2004). Thus, one must interrogate the social constructs that influenced the redesign of public and private spaces within Smithfield.

Combining methods, which examine sound as an immersive social experience, connected to all aspects of life, means using approaches not typical in social research. Methods such as soundwalking, deep listening, and even sound mapping have a basis within numerous studies examining the urban sound experience (Gell-Mann and Tsallis 2004; Venot and Sémidor 2006; Adams et al. 2008; Cain et al. 2008). However, the exploration of the qualia (the qualitative aspects of conscious experience) highlights the seldom-explored phenomena of sound as integral to spatial relations and community (Augoyard 1979; Degen 2008). Therefore, the design of a method to explore sound and its meaning involves the exploration of fields of research outside of sociology, it demands an interdisciplinary approach.

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Endnotes

- 1 The lettering and numbering are tied to the use of Excel for analyzing the data, and are somewhat random.
- 2 The size of the first focus group occurred as a result of miscommunication between researcher and staff, however, the group discussion occurred and was recorded, and whilst too large for a proper focus group, still created a dynamic discussion.

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