

# Composing the soundscape: Re-engaging with place

**Anthony Phillips**

Interact Lab, University of Sussex

Brighton, UK

+44 1442865580

A.D.Phillips@sussex.ac.uk

## INTRODUCTION

How does sound shape the everyday experience of our environment? Before audio technology and the now ubiquitous use of mobile devices that incorporate sound our natural or acoustic soundscape provided us with meaningful interaction. Sounds held both personal and collective meanings, articulating a sense of community, place and aesthetic value to the individual. Acoustic ecology has shown how soundscapes have changed over time, from the well defined acoustic profiles of the rural environment to the mechanical and media rich environments of the modern day city [5, 7]. In the city significant sounds are increasingly hidden in a homogeneous soundscape of mediated sound and urban noise in which meaningful interaction with the auditory environment is replaced by a 'tuning out'. Mobile audio technologies further perpetuate this sense of detachment through the creation of multiple spaces both virtual and physical that the user has to occupy and negotiate. These technologies encourage a type of distracted listening that I refer to as 'mobile mediated listening'. Bull refers to this negative dialectic in which 'as we become immersed in our mobile media sound bubbles of communication so those spaces we habitually pass through in our daily lives increasingly lose significance for us and progressively turn into the 'non-spaces' of daily lives which we try, through those self same technologies, to transcend' [1].

Schafer asked 'is the soundscape an indeterminate composition over which we have no control, or are we its composers and performers, responsible for giving it form and beauty?' [5]. A number of mobile music applications have explored soundscape composition as a way of reconnecting people to their environment [2, 3]. Different types of audio delivery have been used to find a balance between private and public experience in a mobile setting. But mobile mediated listening is disruptive; it imposes multiple spaces around a device that makes demands on the users attention. Truax outlines a model of communication in which sound mediates the relationship between the individual and their environment [7]. I would

argue that to be present in the 'here and now' requires that sound is situated within the environment itself. That a realignment between the virtual and physical space has to occur. Consequently my research focuses on soundscape composition for a mobile audience in a more situated and sensor-based context.

Drawing on 20<sup>th</sup> century compositional practices and in particular soundscape composition and acousmatic music my research extends existing work on meaning and representation in musical composition. Within auditory design there has been a preoccupation with 'sound as information' rather than sound as 'an aesthetic experience'. Music provides an alternative in which aesthetic response determines the personal significance of our experience, what Raffman refers to as a 'different kind of meaning' [4, 6]. Going forward in my research two questions are key: what affect do different types of sounds have on the 'significance of our experience' and is it possible to categorize aesthetic response based on different types of sounds? The latter question raises an issue that I would like to discuss at the workshop i.e. methods of measuring aesthetic response to sound in contexts that are both transitory and public.

## REFERENCES

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