Where is that sound?

Description

The highly worthwhile project to create an archive of sounds from across the UK, and to place these on a map, is interesting from several points of view. http://sounds.bl.uk/uksoundmap. Crowdsourced data collection is an exciting development. The sounds are interesting to browse and identify. The project also raises the question of how difficult it is to apply visually-oriented mapping practices to sound.

The differences between aural and visual media, sound and sight, the culture of the ear and that of the eye, are well documented. Sound is immediate, time-based, felt as much as thought about, and pertains to undifferentiation. As evident in the case of portable stereos, contemporary urban dwellers immerse themselves in sounds. By contract, vision invokes a sense of separateness, overview, the ability to lay things out as on a map. The spatial attributes of sound are fascinating and challenging, not least as we think of thresholds, zones of transition in our environment.

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Acoustic thresholds are characterized by leakages and an even greater dynamism than the strictly formal and visual. In an essay on sounds in the city, Jean-Paul Thibaud calls on people to think of public spaces in terms of sonic â??thresholds, knots and configurations.â?• The traveler with a personal stereo crosses a threshold when leaving the house, and encounters knots of concentration when negotiating the interface between ear, footstep, and built environment. Moving around the city involves the configuration of various â??lived itineraries.â?• In their study of everyday sounds in the environment, Augoyard and Torgue explain sonic thresholds in terms of the cut, which: â??is a sudden drop in intensity associated with an abrupt change in the spectral envelope of a sound or a modification of reverberation (moving from reverberant to dull spaces, for instance). This effect is an important process of articulation between spaces and locations; it punctuates movement from one ambience to another.â?•

Here a sound space is characterized as an ambience. The correspondences between visual and acoustic spaces are only loosely formed, and characterized as so many leakages across each otherâ??s thresholds. In a journey along a street the walker experiences the sound of someone operating electrical equipment in a side street. The sound increases in intensity as she moves towards the side street and recedes as she continues on her journey. The sound is cut by buildings lining the streets in ways that views are not. Sound is subject to dissipation effects, reflections, and leakages. It also operates obliquely. You donâ??t need to face the side street to experience the sound. As with vision, the sound transitions can be abrupt, but unpredictable, and of unidentified source. Sounds can travel over and around obstructions. How therefore do we map sounds?

Category

1. Voice and text

Tags

1. aural
2. ear

3. eye
4. maps
5. sound
6. vision

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