Hearing Places
Hearing Places
Sound, Place, Time and Culture

Edited by

Ros Bandt, Michelle Duffy and Dolly MacKinnon

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Tracks 2, 3, 4, 5
Peter Read, *At the Cemetery*, 1.44, 1.18, 1.39,1.30

Tracks 6, 7, 8, 9
Aaron Ximm, *Cathedral in the Desert*, 0:49, 0:50, 0:50, 0:49

Track 10
Roger Dean, *Space of History*, 3.03

Track 11
Johannes S. Sistermanns, *Klangort*, 3.32

Tracks 12, 13, 14, 15, 16

Tracks 17, 18
Carolyn Birdsall, *All of Germany Listens to the Fuhrer: Sondermeldung 24/6/1940, 2.33, and 5/5/1943, 0:34*

Track 19
Paul Carter, *The Irish Famine Memorial*, 3.38

Track 20

Track 21
Kozo Hiramatsu, *Gion Festival*, 2.39
Each track is a discrete acoustic event designed by the sound artist or framed by the scholar. Listening with headphones is recommended. Playing times are listed after the titles. Every effort has been made to retain the recorded image of the original. Most tracks are excerpts from larger works. Copyright remains with the contributors and no part may be reproduced without the consent of the artist, scholar and publisher.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors are indebted to the scholars, artists and communities who made these contributions possible. For the preparation and processing of the audio material we would like to thank Iain Mott, David Worrall and Angie Grant. We are very grateful to Arthur McDevitt for his very careful proof reading of the final manuscript and index, and to Joseph Griffiths for the cover and CD design. Publication of this work was assisted by a publication grant from the University of Melbourne. We would also like to thank the University of Melbourne, the Faculty of Arts, and the Australian Centre for awarding the editors publication subsidy grants. We are indebted to the Australian Centre, University of Melbourne, for its support and hosting of this project.
INTRODUCTION

ROS BANDT, MICHELLE DUFFY
AND DOLLY MACKINNON

Hearing Places brings together thirty-seven scholars and artists whose work explores the concept of place as a variety of sonic landscapes, and the significance of the sounds and many voices that inscribe and create such landscapes. This anthology contributes to the recent interest in sound and the sonic environment, such as The Auditory Reader (2003), Hearing Cultures (2004), Hearing History (2004), Empire of the Senses (2005) and Spaces Speak, Are You Listening (2006). This publication is the first edited collection by both scholars and artists of different disciplines that interrogates, from theoretical and creative perspectives, the relationship of sound, time, place, and culture. Drawing on a diverse range of evidence—a defined landscape, a geographical location, a printed page, a sonic habitat or an intersection of human communication—contributors have responded to how “hearing place” is understood and interpreted across social, cultural, artistic, historical and geographical perspectives.

Section One explores the significance of listening and how this shapes our ideas and perceptions about a place and its inhabitants. Sound fragments, overheard conversations, “auditory glances,” witnessing, and silences—these everyday, almost mundane sounds contribute to our relationship to place, yet, these are not simply passive and untroubled activities. Listening and not listening have moral and ethical implications, not only for the voices that speak and are heard, but also for the ways in which voices constitute particular forms of power that can entrap others in muted, misheard or silenced spaces.

The activity of hearing refocuses our attention on the experience of place, for we are asked then to take note of our connection to, and immersion in, place through sound. In Section Two, place is constructed, remembered, embodied, restored and re-created through certain aural signatures that enable us to interact with that place in new ways. Yet, as these authors point out, this experiential approach to place is not simply one of immediacy, even though the sounds themselves may be ephemeral. Rather, such aural signatures are the outcomes of our complex relationship to place, representations that arise out of our
memories, our perceptions and needs, as well as the cognitive and creative responses generated through sound.

The chapters of Section Three ask us to consider the challenges faced in attempting to hear other voices often obscured by the activities and beliefs of the everyday. Our daily lives are haunted by numerous soundscapes, not only in the sense of the past entering the present, but also in the physical presence of “others”—or, as one author discusses, the way we can be made ‘other’ in an alien landscape. What is evident in these writings is the way in which sound becomes a signifier of identity and power, and the ramifications this has for those deemed “outsiders.” These chapters address ways we can perhaps enable such voices to be heard, so reminding us of the heterogeneity of place (and time), as well as the ways in which deeply political, historical, social and cultural relations are embedded but often hidden within our daily soundscapes.

In Section Four, authors and artists examine how soundscapes are transformed through the introduction of difference, in particular, difference as embodied in cultural or ethnic identity. Evoking different places, times and identities, these chapters explore the ways in which the presence of others transforms the taken-for-grantedness of the everyday, so problematising ideas of being-in-place. The case studies discussed in this section demonstrate how the cross-cultural dialogues arising from these interjections of difference serve to reinvigorate notions of belonging and place.

The accompanying audio disc is a fundamental component of this publication, in which both scholars and artists interrogate sound and place. It is in these samples that we can hear place, expressing what we cannot in language.1 We ask that you take the time to listen to these extracts.

Works Cited


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1 Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key*. 
Part I
CHAPTER ONE

SUBSCRIPTION TO ANONYMITY

JAY NEEDHAM

CD Track 1

We are lured by the sonorous, aurally detained and at times surrounded by countless conversations. We all want to hear secrets and we wish to have them told to us; we need the inflection, crave the contract of the undisclosed. In our image-burdened global culture we seek the visual but require the audible to complete the message.

*Listening at the Border* examines what it means to monitor airwaves on patrol, listening in from the perspective of a westerner trained by the American military in the nuances of a foreign language. This sphere of signals and translation can become overwhelming, causing ruptures through which individuals exit wholly. For this linguist this listening, this concentration of sense became a means of disconnecting, antithetical to military rhetoric: his way out. He returned to the States the veteran of an ongoing language battle and test of wills fought within a figurative airspace over Korea. His experiences as a spy and translator forever altered his listening skills and also informed his desire.

What is the experience of the State body, the ears of a military specialist trained to listen intently and discern the nuances and stresses in a human voice, while translating the language of the other? What about the media maker who wishes to know what effect living in an almost constant state of secrecy and translation might be like? When interviewing a subject such as this who is listening to whom? And what story is really being told? Given the nature of the subject, much of what we discussed was “off the record.” As a sonic practice this form of documenting becomes more about erasure than it does about scribing.

The linguist agreed to speak with me under a condition of anonymity. In order to create my work, I promised I would forever protect his identity, to keep secrets … Thus began my relationship to State, agency and a culture of secrets.
To make this piece I agreed to keep quiet, agreed to not make sound so that I could tell a sound story. This silencing from afar greatly influenced how my subject answered questions; often he reflects on the nature of knowing and owning secrets and the price people pay for engaging in that activity. This silencing from afar also affected my questions. I knew that he would not be able to answer queries regarding details, names, locations, technologies and their applications. My subscription to his anonymity is an implied contract, an accord of silence that in many ways keeps the government machine of quiet alive. This is how it works: implicate yourself and you will protect the ones who told you. Words become weaponized.

I was not interested in the specific details and technologies related to his duties; rather I was interested in how monitoring and simultaneously translating day after day affected him psychologically and informed decisions about his future. I learned that he and his colleagues worked tediously long shifts someplace near Seoul. He described a rowdy and competitive workplace, an environment that sounded like a highly technological fraternity. I wanted to know about what, if any, stresses he was under while working as a linguist (or spy as he states). Also, having spent several years of acute listening through static, tuning out the rest of the world in a language and culture not his own, what effect did that have on him as a communicator?

The sonic topography of a military airspace is a well-guarded arena, a signalscape where frequencies are protected, encrypted. In this airspace of layered broadcast, place is transposed and political borders are re-mapped by intersecting radio waves. Transmissions change the normally flat perception of a border; they are layered in the atmosphere, unconfined by political boundaries. The Korean airspace is a bubble of both publicly available and encoded frequencies. The linguist I interviewed, stationed near a city where food vendors recycled classified documents, saw himself as a participant in an ongoing military narrative that had no real boundaries.

When he listened in, he was the relocated ears of a select group of Washington policy makers. He was the ear of the State body, cycling materials to be examined and archived in a vast and ever-growing military library. In this library entire archives will not be read because there is not enough time, not enough bodies to work the process of translation.

Although the intensely close listening this person practiced focused his senses as a sonic spy, translator and witness to the secretly audible, in Korea he allowed himself to conceive of a new vision and sound for his future. He would attend college and study theatre in the hopes of becoming a stage actor. One interpretation of this linguist’s desire to exit a State-performed theatric and enter another theatre is that it marks a shift for him from document to narrative. He stated several times that he missed the structure that military life offered him.
and he has considered re-enlisting, but the theatre now commanded his imagination.

Were the language training and experiences in the military all a part of his “acting training”? He wove the two together skilfully in the interviews I performed with him. He blurred the line and I listened. During the interviews I sometimes felt as if he were performing or re-performing elements of his past in a theatrical manner, but I believe that he had rehearsed his Korean narrative before I even approached him about an interview. I feel that his recounting is a form of storytelling that he needs as a way of locating himself in a hierarchy. His former superiors dictated his narratives and edited them for him; in this way the ears of the military have been given a voice. It is that silent and distant voice of Washington that controls the grains of sound, directs the utterances and occasionally offers escape for those who are willing to burn out.

Living as we are in the States, in a mediated zone between war and peace, it is vitally important to reflect on approaches to creating media and consider their re-invention. As I make creative works, it becomes harder to label this form of media “documentary”; it stands at an intersection, someplace between narrative and document. Is the real document the record of my involvement, is it something about my engagement in a power play with State secrecy, or is it my attempt to tell a story that speaks about the confusion, boredom and deprivation of the person I interviewed?
I begin with a proposal or observation: speech is always site-specific.

No
Six
Speaking about
Um
Fork
Croissant
405
uh
Alfred Hitchcock knew that
Music
Thank you yes
You know what
Right side
Iced coffee
Beep beep beep
Same
Anything else
Yeah
O
Yeah
Ummm
How late is it open

Catching phrases in a crowded café, my writing can only glimpse the conversation, grabbing hold of fragments or jolts of speech. Yet reading back reveals or hints at a sense of place found in instances of food and drink orders, culinary references, and the occasional exclamation of gastronomical delight.
Place embeds itself in the flow of words, as secondary meaning or syntax. It is found in what words produce, and also in how words are shaped. Can we locate a secret map or cartography within a bit of dialogue, a map made up of the exchanges not only of individuals, but of speech and place?

**Movements of speech**

Overhearing another’s conversation, of you and you over there, speaking about ____, brings identity and personality forward, for the voice is most readily aligned with a sense of self. One’s voice is given the status of person: I hear a voice, and in doing so I recognize someone. This someone encircles me already with their speaking. With this presence of self, and the shaping of personality, lurks the dynamics of place as located against and within voice. For place partially directs speech, impinging upon conversation and its self-fashioned rhythms. Within the space of the café, place intrudes or shapes through syntax of necessity, etiquette, and delight—coffee, forks, thank you, and ummmm—echoing between local situation and the greater shared space created amongst people and how they know one another. Place comes to the fore in what we say, in what creeps into the flow of words and their evolution. Friends and strangers, colleagues and workers, neighbours and landlords, conversations are made of bonds forged by the particularities of how we share and where we share. We draw upon such locational details as a means to share not only in the making of conversation and relationship, but also the surrounding views and experiences that ground us. In the sharing of words, conversation slips in and out of local reference—I speak about where I was this morning, the bus ride to work yesterday, or how this café is due for renovation, revealing myself in the ways in which place lives through me. Thus, place partially leads the voice through its course of narration, adding to it through subject matter that in turn says something about who we are.

On the other side of this movement, of location as conversational content, place also acts as a form to speech: it may not appear directly in what is said or referred to; rather it surfaces in the shape of conversation. To follow this other speech is to partially leave behind the actuality of words, the particulars of description or narrative, and instead to engage the social architectures that shadow conversation.

*I begin with a proposal or observation: speech is always site-specific.*

Site-specific in that to speak is to give expression through a modulation of orality to the pressures of place and situation. One speaks not only words drawn out of the larger field of language, but the structuring intensities of place. To follow such site-specifics is to locate the self not as self-sufficient, but as relational—I am literally pressed into audibility, my words given shape by the
particular sociality of the event. The café is hence not simply a backdrop to the whimsy of speech, a kind of soundtrack to the unfolding of narrative. Rather, place is what in turn produces narrative; it actively composes soundtrack, and partially writes the script of social relation. In this regard, the architecture of the café is in turn a social architecture, positioning bodies and voices in particular ways, through specific modes of conduct and behaviour.

Sharing amongst friends, ordering coffee at a café, or phoning a lawyer to request information, each are ways not only of conversing but of negotiating limits produced by situations. In what way does “sharing amongst friends” come to rest on the voice? How do the dynamics found in “ordering coffee at a café” position speech? And in “phoning a lawyer”, does the absence of sharing a single space come to effect what I imagine I am able to say? Negotiating such limits produces both anxiety and possibility, for we hear in speech a radical flexibility that enables one to traverse, overcome, and refashion a given situation. To be “put on the spot” literally means to heighten the already existing intensities of being site-specific: the situational details, nuanced by the playful and violent twists of speech, manipulates one into a site of unease—one is called upon to answer up, to toss back driving invective or light banter, which gain significance through situational understanding. Embarrassment is often derived not only from being shamefully revealed in front of another, but also from how this takes place within a given context.

Accident happens to bring together several friends in this café: a whole bundle of affects. The situation is charged; though I am involved in it and even suffer from it, I experience it as a scene, a carefully drawn and well composed tableau...; the situation is crammed with meanings, I read them, I follow them in their last articulations; I observe, I decipher, I enjoy a text bursting with legibility for the reason that it does not speak. I merely see what is spoken, as in a silent movie... I am nailed to the scene and yet very wide awake: my attention constitutes part of what is being acted out, nothing is external to the scene...1

Roland Barthes’ narrative hints at the ways in which experience, and the more unsettled exchanges amongst people, abound with locational influence. The “situation is charged” due to a meeting in which no one can escape, for the café holds everyone—it is a site where a “whole bundle of affects” finds their place. The café is both the space of a chance occurrence and an active player in granting meaning to such occurrence.

To get at this place-bound vocality, I need to listen in, to eavesdrop, as a kind of thief on the field of speech, because the pressures and intensities of place and situation are mostly found in the shadows of orality, as tremors of

1 Barthes, A Lover’s Discourse, Fragments, 122-23.
voice, as details of breath or exclamation, of whisper and the pull of jagged intention shared between people, or in moments of being tongue-tied—dry-lipped, swallowing an embarrassing word, or searching for the right one. As Barthes’ own speechlessness attests, often so much is said with so little. Situations appear in which one is unable to get past, to get into, the moment of dialogue, where place positions the self on uneven ground, in unfamiliar territory, on the edge of known vocabularies, in the heat of unsteady glances.

From this vantage point, place is not only an adjunct to every word, influencing and cutting into dialogue through locational reference, as subject matter, but also, and above all, a contextual intensity that contorts the movements of the tongue, the flow of thought and the breath of speaking, creating fissures and closures of possibility. To speak then is to relate to others, enacting the promise of conversation, and also, to arrive at or construct a place for orality, as geographic coordinate.

The eavesdrop leads me to consider this other dialogue, where speech and place intersect, by operating spatially: the eavesdrop is always off-stage. Thus, to occupy the eavesdropper’s position is to position speech as site; it inaugurates the spoken as situated by occupying a territory that is ulterior. By occupying this territory, this brief situated dynamic, eavesdropping creates a relation to the very act of relating, for in occupying this role, this position, the eavesdropper opens up the exchange of words to the shadowy ear.

**Ear-ethic**

I am looking to spatialize the voice, to locate the geography of vocality as it lends to the positioning of individuals and their stories; and how such geography is implicated within the larger network of interaction, and the social relatedness occurring across, through, and against boundaries. For the voice speaks according to the spaces offered to it; according to the spaces it struggles to appropriate; and within the spaces it can imagine for itself. It in turn creates space, as an architecture that leans in on the social, looming over the subtle malleability of living. To spatialize the voice is to reveal the geography already in place, and at the same time to point out how such geography may contribute to the reverberations inherent to the potential of what it means to speak. The phrase “to find one’s voice” already suggests, appropriately so, that the voice must always be fashioned as it exists in relation to somewhere.

This spatial voice contains the spatial ear, for every voice implicates every ear: the ethical encounter is built on the presumed dynamic of speaker and listener, voice and ear, and their entwined exchange. Such dynamic of the voice and ear, in speaking and hearing each other, is often imagined as a self-contained unit, cast within a narrative of intimacy. This ethical encounter is thus
written as a fantasy of possible sharing, which may in turn function as a microcosm for the social world: if the face-to-face ethical encounter is given definition according to such sensitivity and detail, this then may lead to more responsible social relations. In other words, the microcosm may be amplified to nurture a dynamic of mutuality. What the third, eavesdropping ear introduces to such a fantasy is the ever-present looming social world understood as always something other, or someone else than expected. The very term “eavesdrop” derives from the Anglo-Saxon word “yfæsdrypæ” defining a person who stands under the eaves to listen to private conversations. The eavesdropper is then a snoop spying on others from an outside. In Swedish “eavesdrop” is “tjuvlyssna”, literally meaning “thief-listening”, which underscores more poignantly the outstretched ear as criminal. Such criminality is furthered in the more pronounced forms of electronic surveillance. The one standing under the eaves or holding a drinking glass up to the wall so as to catch the words of neighbours is replaced by covert professionals equipped with bugging devices. The technological capability to penetrate walls, tap into the conversation of others, to spy on someone’s movements through their audible life, fixes the dynamics of audition within the realm of both policing and criminality. The policing-eavesdropper seeks to detect incriminating information by identifying voices in the dark, secret messages passed down phone-lines, details of drops and rendezvous, while the criminal looks for cracks in the system, vital information to support plots of crime. To overhear functions is a method of detective work that is often shared by both sides. Such technologies in turn instigate confrontations between nations, where spying complements the staged diplomacy between leaders, influencing policy with shadowy information as one tries to guess whether the other knows what they know. With early radar technologies, overhearing takes the form of military practice whereby the ear is at the fore of security. The Hythe Sound Mirrors built on the east coast of England in 1916 (and continued throughout the 20s) functioned to aid in detecting German bombers. Such devices demanded intensive training in tuning the ear to hear as early as possible the roar of planes. Listeners would spend hours in concrete cellars built under the gigantic concave discs, waiting for a faint signal. Detection work here is tantamount to national defence: stealing sound equates with the saving of lives.

Emmanuel Levinas describes the ethical encounter as a face-to-face relation, whereby I am called into responsibility by the “naked exposure” of the face, to attend to the intrinsic demand of another. “The Other becomes my neighbour precisely through the way the face summons me, calls for me, begs for me, and in so doing recalls my responsibility, and calls me into question.”

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1 Levinas, “Ethics as first philosophy,” 83.
The ethical is a direct sharing of the very possibility of relating, which for Levinas is always embroiled in essential tensions. Following Levinas, the face in all its silent demand precedes the voice. The Other appears as a primary intrusion, which calls into question one’s very being. Yet the voice makes audible the intensities buried in the pressures of the face-to-face, and the inherent demands of the ethical. We might recall instances of political struggle, as in the Civil Rights movement, where “having a voice” outweighed the appearance of a face: the plight “to be heard” sought to move beyond the surface of the skin. To remain with the face was to undermine the specificity of words.

Within Levinas’ face-to-face, we might also glimpse the ethical encounter as a spatial encounter: I face the other, in the midst of a given place and a given time, and am therefore situated by facing the face. The distance thus between you and me is a field of potential that adds to or subtracts from the momentum of relating by positioning the dynamic between faces spatially.

The figure was over there, I saw it motionless, almost turned away, as it seemed to me, and I had the feeling that at the moment my eyes were fixed on it, it was preparing to climb the last steps and disappear. This movement, which was not carried out, gave that presence a new truth, and the whole distance that separated us, measuring a few steps, made it astonishingly close, closer than a short time before when, as I realized, what made its insane proximity apparent was the distress of its distance.3

Echoed in Maurice Blanchot’s work, The One Who Was Standing Apart From Me, the face-to-face articulated by Levinas is a form of spatializing the ethical encounter, for to appear before another is to participate in the making of distance and its ultimate negotiation. In this way, place continually modulates the opening and closing of appearing one to another, by allowing the encounter to take place—whether Blanchot’s street scene or Barthes’ café of extreme theatre. The specificity of place, and the spatiality of the encounter, thus precedes the voice: it is already there, on the street or in the café, as an existing situation or scene. At the same time, the encounter, in all it’s dynamic, fashions place in a flash: Barthes’ “bundle of affects” instantly charges the café, making everyone speechless and yet absolutely understood. Place comes to compose the encounter while at the same time being composed by it. In each direction flow intensities that are multiplied by the rhythms of speech and the drama of the voice. For to vocalize is to enact an added complication onto the field of the face-to-face encounter: by adding to the inherent “call” each face enacts, the voice summons not through naked exposure, but through dynamic personality.

3 Blanchot, The One Who Was Standing Apart From Me, 32.
Voicing, speaking up, articulating, orality contributes to the face-to-face as spatial construction by fragmenting the central perspective of the one-to-one. The voice comes from the crowd, stepping forward, to make the face not a primary, essential Other, but an individual with a name. It specifies the inherent demands found in the appearance of the face.

Thus, found in speech are the details of social architectures, ethical relations grounded in place, orality modulated by the particulars of the other as found in the details of the situation. My voice is then an amalgamation of self, the other, and geographic coordinates, which are here, there, and everywhere, moulded and shaped by the particulars of the instance.

To speak is both a form of negotiation, through encounter, and also a form of navigation, through spatial pressures and social architectures. For we can imagine the voice registering place through a modulation of rhythm and pitch, excitation or intimacy, according to the pressures or fissures of various situations. From weddings to bars, lectures to parties, the voice signals its place, not solely as local reference or even physical structures, but as buried pressures that reveal through the hesitations, excitations, and errors of vocality the emotions of social interaction.

What I am interested in though is not this one-to-one pressure, the encounter of your gaze and my voice, and the responsibility of building place, between you and me, but the third body or third ear, the one sitting over there, in the wings, off-screen, out of frame; the one, that is, who overhears, whether in the café or in the basement cellar at the Hythe Mirrors. To “over/hear” is both listening and location: it is the “here” of the “hear”, a listening that is located, that brings the “there” to the “hear”. To overhear is to insert the ear secretly, and in doing so, to misplace place, to dislocate location, and to shadow the social.

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To return to the scene of the social, eavesdropping expands the notion of shared information and common values to that of hidden secrets, whispered words, miscommunication, and scrambled code. Shadowing the spoken, to eavesdrop could be said to introduce the uninvited guest that is somehow always due to arrive. Eavesdropping casts the scene as multiple—narrative with its own silent echo, conversation haunted by the outstretched ear, actions spied upon. Thus, the ethical encounter I want to follow is not the face-to-face, the one-to-one, or the eye-to-eye, but the ear-to-ear in which listening occupies the presence of the now as well as the other side of the relation.

The eavesdropper is an ethical shadow, an attendant to another’s drama,