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INTRODUCTION TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE ETHNOGRAPHIC EAR

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Ethnography has never been undertaken in a world of complete silence.[1] Despite this, ethnographers have barely acknowledged that the world they study is also layered with sounds. It was only in the eighties, when publications forming the foundations of the anthropology of sound emerged, that the incorporation of the sonic in ethnographic work began.

However, despite wide admiration for the works of Paul Stoller (1989), Tim Ingold (2016) or Steven Feld (1982), sound for many ethnographers remains something of an exotic field, involving a research methodology that by some is perceived as almost esoteric. Yet, sound is not a separate world, or a distinct sphere of fieldwork. The way in which we experience sound in the environment is integrated with our other senses, and indeed with our entire bodily constitution. Moreover, even if we are dealing with a recorded sound, the materiality of the medium and the location of the listener's body in space are crucial. The spaces throughout which sound reverberates are built by physical (recently also virtual) infrastructures, material surfaces and elements of the landscape. Or, to put it in the terms of an example from an essential study, the ethnographic description of rainforest sounds integrates trees, animals and, finally, people living in the forest, and concerns their perceptions of sounds as intertwined with their other senses (Feld 1982).

Yet, writing an ethnographic description centred on sound is challenging. How to address something that is "deafeningly obvious" to paraphrase the words of Daniel Miller and Sophie Woodward (2007, 341)? The task is puzzling because, as Mbembe argues, "there is nothing more complex than verbalizing that which involves the non-verbal, or describing sound, which in essence is neither linguistic nor involves the purely spontaneous practice of language" (Mbembe 2005, 74). Moreover, the

1 The only exception is when ethnographers study the social worlds of deafness (Friedner and Helmreich 2012).

sound experience presents ethnographers with difficulties because it is embodied and pre-discursive. In fact, sound anthropologists assume that sound constitutes a phenomenon that is never "fully crystal clear" (Helmreich 2016, 18). Nevertheless, if any discipline can undertake an engagement with sound, it is surely ethnography, with its ability to uncover knowledge in places where other methodologies render zero data.

That is why it is our aim in this special issue of *Ethnologia Polona* to disenchant the anthropology of sound and to introduce its methodology to those who have not previously practised it. A concomitant aim is also to act as an urge to start using one's own ethnographic ear. When we begin to listen attentively – sound starts to meaningfully emanate everywhere.

Where to start? Probably, as usual, from ethnography and from fieldwork. A common assumption locates participant observation at the centre of ethnographic research (notwithstanding an obvious need to problematise this method). Angrosino explains participant observation as a process of attentive experience using all the senses (Angrosino 2007, 53). Hearing as one of these five senses is, therefore, at the essence of this process. What are we then able to hear? Sounds of the environment and everyday life; human speech, particularly in correlation with the second favourite method of ethnographers – the interview; and finally, music, as a specific form of sound organization. At the same time, when we begin to listen as part of ethnographic being-in-the-field, we access new, emerging layers of ethnographic knowledge. Sound transmits that which evaporates when the research experience turns into data. Sound provides a mode of ethnographic knowledge that surpasses the coding sometimes used in the analysis of interviews or field notes. This knowledge may throw light on, for example, what is to be found in-between designated symbols, actors or objects. For instance, the tone of voice and manner of speaking redefine or enhance the meaning of a sum of words. To give another example, Louise Meintjes argues that elusive in its social nature sound reveals the "indefinable, provisional and deeply felt" (2003, 112). At the same time, this approach requires practice in attentive listening, which is equally attuned to both social and acoustic qualities.

Attentive listening also opens up a type of ethnographic (or more broadly scientific) imagination different from an occulocentric one, with its notions of perspective, distance and control. An ethnographic imagination founded on sound, on the other hand, empowers varied modes of understanding and explanation.[2] Instead of *a priori*

2 An important aspect of this change of focus is also that of representation, often leading to the questioning of the inflexible requirements of textual form (e.g. Cichocki 2019, Groth and Samson 2016). The limited capacity of this introduction does not provide space for a thorough discussion of this question. Luckily, some of the texts in this issue (by Cichocki, Gugolati and Ramirez, and Tiragallo) discuss experimental sonic representations of ethnographic knowledge.

utilizing epistemological hierarchies, these modes might foreground the relationship between sounding actors.

Sound ethnography can concern relationships between people, objects and landscape elements that constitute distinct environments. The ethnographic description of such local and direct relations may inspire the decolonization of research methods and anthropological theory. To give only one example from general anthropology, the critique of the occulocentric figure of structure favours instead the figure of the voice (Marcus 1998, 65–66). As a result, research interests may concern the voice in its various associations with varied subjectivities – such as political, gendered, aesthetic or religious, to identify just a few (Weidman 2015, 232–246) – or may even relate to voices of inhuman actors. However, voice is just one instance. In fact, we should equally pre-consider any conceptualizations of sound – whether these be academic, such as wave, power, music, object or light, and also a myriad of non-academic, local notions of what sound is or might be.

The papers gathered in this thematic issue of *Ethnologia Polona* propose diverse strategies of researching and describing connected to the question of how to use one's own sonic-being-in-the-field to acquire unique, subtle knowledge. To ease the navigation for readers, we have organised the issue into three parts concerning SPACES, MUSICS and NETWORKS, respectively.

Starting the SPACES part, Felice Tiragallo discusses two types of sound experience. Firstly, he listens attentively to human speech, by focusing not only on *what is* said, but also on *how it is* said. Secondly, the tones of voices reveal specific accounts of the relation between Sardinian miners and mines. Therefore, the article examines how sensory data can be interpreted beyond their quality of simply functioning as "messages".

Nick Wees describes the important role of sound in the spaces of metro corridors. For buskers, metro passengers and the ethnographer, the shared environment is determined by sonic reverberation. The ethnographic description of this context refers to all the subtleties of the sonic properties of space. The effect is a resonating ethnography of an environment consisting of objects, surfaces, textures and people moving between them.

Maica Gugolati and Jose Ramirez discuss their research and artistic project in which sound subtly evokes an ethereal notion of Caribbeanness. Method-wise, the authors describe how ethnographic knowledge is represented by an exhibition which performatively engages meaningful material and sonic objects (shells). As the authors argue, "sound has the ability to transform and the capacity of connecting". In this case, fieldwork is connected with its medium of representation.

The MUSICS section concerns a specific type of sound organization and its social context. Marzanna Popławska explains how shared music performance enables the researcher to understand music's cosmological and ethical roles. The sense of joy and

togetherness that characterised performances of gamelan music allowed the author to understand the cultural contexts of the sound. The article discusses the concept of bi-musicality as a way to confront the complexities of music experience and meaning in music.

The article by Maria Małanicz-Przybylska is a result of the author's immersion in the audiosphere of "the most musical place in Poland" – Podhale. It starts with an ethnographic description of Krupówki Street, stirring with divergent music styles – from classic *Górale* tunes to local disco polo. This description helps to refine a research question about the discrepancy between elite acoustic music and omnipresent disco-polo music.

In the NETWORKS part, Piotr Cichocki addresses how sound recording can be incorporated into ethnographic research methods. The proposition is a method based on a reflective practice of shared listening, interaction and situational activity. Through this, ethnography is understood as a method based not only on the description of reality, but also on its collective provocation.

Agata Stanisz, in her turn, writes about how a shared interest in field recording generates a virtual community. The ethnographic description of the community concerns the distribution of knowledge based on field recordings. At the same time, the author is interested in how specific cultural practices related to sound have emerged in a modern cultural context.

Finally, a few words about how this thematic issue of Ethnologia Polona has been produced. The initial idea was based on a panel, "Socio-technologic Configurations of Sound", submitted by myself with Ayda Melika and Anton Nikolotov for the IUAES 2017 congress in Ottawa. Even though the panel became more of a seed for, rather than directly yielding this volume, I want to thank Anton and Ayda for their initial input. Thereafter, the idea evolved and finally achieved realisation thanks to the invaluable editorial input of Agnieszka Halemba, Helena Patzer, Agata Ładykowska and Benjamin Cope, and the work of Dang Thuy Duong who designed the front cover. We are delighted to bring the final effect of these endeavours to readers and listeners.

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