

Cartographies of Simultaneity

Carmen Pardo Salgado¹

Abstract

Reading Bruce Chatwin's *The Songlines*, the Australian landscape appears, in the Dreamtime, like a musical score in which the lines of different songs make up cartography of simultaneity. After centuries of sedentary lifestyle, 20th Century man lends his ear to his sonic city. From the futurist Luigi Russolo to Murray Schafer, we could draw an arc which would demonstrate the tension of sedentary man's listening. During the first half of the 20th Century, man opens his ears to the sounds of the city builds instruments which reproduce the sounds that machines produce. Later, when the hum of the streets is unbearable to him, then his ears will attune to the pressure of the sound and to his ecological and aesthetic analysis. In consequence, a sonic cartography becomes a map which attends to the distribution of simultaneity of lines which are difficult to reconcile; demonstrating the formation of geographical-sonic strata which correspond to different kinds of classes and cultures. Sonic cartographies are ultimately a guide as to the place where each listener resides in this territory and the way in which he aims to interact with it. Each sonic cartography of a city reveals a multiplicity of cities to the ear. In a sonic cartography the ear recovers its nomadism because the sound is subjected to constant change. Along with sonic/acoustic ecology we would also have to consider what Guattari calls 'mental ecology'. This mental ecology could permit the intoning of the city we want to create and listen to.

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Introduction: The Songlines of the World

Numerous legends would have us believe that to create the world is to listen to and intone the world. They tell us that through sound, in a primitive age, light, stones, trees, all of nature, appeared with animals and human beings.

¹ Professor of History and Aesthetics of Music, Department of History of Art, University of Girona (Spain), Address: Pl. Ferrater Mora 1, 17071, Girona (Spain), Email: carme.pardo@udg.edu
ORCID: 0000-0002-4026-9923

The entire universe, we are told, shares sound. Each element, each being, has a tone of its own which must be looked after in order to maintain a type of universal harmony. The music which every being can intone would contain wisdom, the gesture of a fundamental act, the transmission of a sacred memory. To sing is to know and recognize the world. Basing himself on these legends, Bruce Chatwin (1988: 2), explains in *The Songlines*, that Aboriginal creation myths tell of the legendary totemic beings who had wandered over Australia in the Dreamtime, singing out the name of everything that crossed their path and so singing the world into existence.

The world does not exist before being named, told and sung. If the world is to appear it has to be intoned. In the Dreamtime, those totemic beings knew the tone of the stones, the rocks, the birds and the waters they found on their travels. Time passed by and the Aboriginals, on their wanderings, continued to intone those ancestral songs which established the direction they were to take. The songs would function, says Chatwin, like a map of memory which would guide the step of a people on the move:

In theory, at least, the whole of Australia could be read as a musical score. There was hardly a rock or a creek in the country that could not or had not been sung. One should perhaps visualize the Songlines as a spaghetti of *Iliads* and *Odysseys*, writhing this way and that, in which every 'episode' was readable in terms of geology. (Chatwin, 1988: 13).

Australia would be a musical score in which the lines of the different songs would make up a cartography of simultaneity, a sonic and geological polyphony. In this polyphony each songline, like in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, would narrate an 'episode,' a stretch of the journey. Each song would open the possibility of a sonic journey which is, in turn, a journey of knowledge and recognition of the earth, of the tone of that land.

In the Dreamtime the journey of the totemic figures was not delimited by time and space. In the same way, neither does the cartography of the simultaneity which their songs draw heed spatial and/or temporal limitations. The lines of sound are interwoven and can be read by following the horizontal and the vertical lines, revealing, in short, the simultaneity of the sonic as well as of the world, the earth itself.

The simultaneity of that sonic cartography does not affect the singing of the lines. Each line is transformed into a centre, a fundamental line which makes it possible to recognise and cross the land while the rest might appear only for a moment, without obstructing the fundamental line. The song gives order to geography and sound.

With their song, the Aboriginals would turn their bodies into soundboxes of this cartography of simultaneity, they would look after the tones of the world. With it they would, once more bring the world to existence, as they would each time they were capable of intoning song. But now, when marking the contours of a present which escapes the Dreamtime, the Aboriginals' song cannot recognise the world. Their sonic memory, those *dreamt-up footprints*, lead them along trails continually interrupted by a different song, that of Modernity. They cannot understand why the Sydney Opera House lies on a sacred site. They cannot explain why, perhaps deliberately, the world began to lose its tones to intone sounds that led them nowhere, forcing them to stay put, to be sedentary. By losing their song, they also lost, amongst other things, the possibility of walking.

The man who sings is he who allows himself to be host to a sonic presence which leads him somewhere, where the song dictates. The man who sings must first listen to his inner self, find those *dreamt-up footprints*, recognises his sonic memory. The man who sits does not sing; he takes possession of a space, occupies it and from there, observes. When man becomes sedentary he stops singing.

2. Listening to the cities

After centuries of sedentariness, man understood that apart from observing he ought to learn to listen. And thus it was that he lent his ear to the sounds of the cities and opened himself up to the new sounds of his world. Perhaps by listening like this, that sedentary man wanted to regain the capacity to sing like in days gone by, if this were possible first of all it would be necessary to remember that to listen is also to sound.

The 20th Century man who lends his ear to his sonic city is the man who takes delight in the hustle and bustle as if it formed a part of the needs of his being. He doesn't go into a café which is empty, he does not trust silent places.

But he is also the man who rejects the excess of sonic pressure from an atmosphere which oppresses him and who from time to time seeks solitude and apparent silence. The man who lends his ear is on continuous exposure in a city which never stops emitting sounds, which is why the apparent contradiction arises. And all that occurs is that it is not him who sings but the city. And just as in the Dreamtime the elements of nature were intoned, in the age of machines we will learn how to intone the sounds they produce. In this way another type of recognition of territory will come about.

Realising that it is the city which sings will shake the ear into action and therefore its relationship with sounds and the city itself. From the futurist Luigi Russolo's *The Art of Noises* (1913) up to Murray Schafer's coining of the term 'soundscape' at the end of the 1960s, we could draw an arch which would demonstrate the tension of this sedentary man's listening. At the start, during the first half of the 20th Century our man opens his ears to the sounds of the city and of wars; to build instruments which reproduce the sounds that machines produce; to introduce the noise of the machine in the musical environment.² Later, when the city grows even more and the hum of its streets are unbearable to him, then his ears will attend to the pressure of the sound, his ecological and aesthetic analysis, which we could call the sound design of the city, its soundscape.

The term soundscape is usually translated as 'sonic landscape,' and it is often repeated that this is an erroneous translation. The mistake would seem to lie in the fact that the term 'landscape' refers to something visual and that, therefore, it would lead us to something like a contemplative listening. The English term –which comes from landscape–, also orients us towards the design of a piece of land, to a garden and to a view. However, the ornamental or artistic nature of what is seen is always maintained and, consequently, the fact that what is observed needs a specific point from which to be observed. The land appears as a landscape when the location is the right one. Then it is observed or worked with artistic intent.

² In his work Russolo specifies that the ultimate aim of the production and reproduction of the sounds of machines is for the listener the pleasure he finds in them and not mere imitation. In this sense, he writes: "Although the characteristic of noise is that reminding us brutally of life, the *Art of noises* should not limit itself to an imitative reproduction. It will achieve its greatest emotional power in acoustical enjoyment itself, which the inspiration of the artist will know how to draw from the combining of noises." (Russolo, 1998: 27-28).

In the case of sound we would be talking of a sonic territory which is listened to with an artistic and cognitive intentionality very much in mind. It should not be forgotten that, after all, it is the sedentary man, he who mainly observes and calculates, who gives sound this term.

Interest in the artistic, in sonic creation and the making of a sonic document which makes it possible to attend to what has come to be called acoustic ecology coincide when considering a sonic landscape. In fact, as is known, Schafer was more interested in the need for an acoustic ecology than for its musical derivation. This dual aspect refers to the links that, starting from the sonic, are going to be established with the artistic, on the one hand, and with the living conditions in the different sonic territories to be listened to.

If, before, the man who walked attended to the time which he remembered with the tones of the geography he was walking across by singing, now the man who sits lends his ear to the new tones of his environment and perhaps such tones will allow him to understand himself a little better.

2.1. A psychospheric and sonospheric continuity

With attention placed on the listening, one remembers that the world is a sonic composition and that, in this sense and following Schafer, the acoustic atmosphere of a society can act as an indicator of social relationships and of the meaning that the development of a society is taking on. This concept is applied by Peter Sloterdijk to his theory on primitive hordes and their successors, as those who maintain "a psychospheric and sonospheric continuity in which mutual existence and correspondence are still dimensions which can hardly be distinguished between" (Sloterdijk, 1993: 21).

To exist is to belong to a same group, maintain contact with one another and, therefore, as Sloterdijk himself points out, to listen to one another mutually. In societies today, the continuity between the psychospheric and the sonospheric seems to have become fractured, although, if we pay sufficient attention, we will realise that some links between the two still remain.

Even if the capacity to listen to one another mutually would seem to be suffering some degree of crisis and that therefore we could not really talk of correspondence, continuity remains, although it changes register and is situated on different levels: "The spirits of the hordes are sonic bodies in which the members of the horde are incarcerated as if in soundboxes. The small sonic body, vibrant in itself, focussed on itself, creates the earliest form of those configurations of the social uterus which, in every age of history throughout humanity, have achieved the effect of an interior community space. So it is that living in society has also always involved forming a part of a ghostly lap, part imaginary and part acoustic" (Sloterdijk, 1993: 22).

If the world is a sonic composition and, in that primitive age, human beings were sonic bodies which acted as if a soundbox, then the continuity to which Sloterdijk alludes only took in the territory in which the horde was located. According to Sloterdijk, who establishes a difference between 'group noises' and 'world noises,' the continuity between psychosphere and sonosphere and the distinction between group noises and the rest of the world's noises lay in the fact that it was the human beings themselves who acted as the soundbox of a tradition, a transmission, articulated both by their very psyche as well as by belonging to a community. The act of listening, in these hordes, was based on the capacity to understand and respond within what we could call the same tone. Hordes maintained the same tonality. The rest were 'what was left,' what was 'outside' the sphere.

The man who in the 20th Century decides to expose himself to the noises of the world is the man who lives in the big cities, who forms a part of the mass which clamours for another tonality: that of the noises of the street, the workplace, the sounds which reach us via the mass media... In this transformation both the scope of the sonosphere, which will extend beyond the group noises, as well as, for example, those that may be familiar will be affected, until the constitution of a psychosphere which will tend to be changing, to multiply itself, in the same way that the sonosphere will.

In the simultaneity formed by what up until now could be called a multiple sonosphere, the new psychosphere inhabited more now by processes of subjectivation than by a constitution of identities would also be included.

The attentive listening of the territories of our time leads to this experience of a simultaneity whose lines are yet to be drawn.

The drawing of the lines of a sonic territory makes it necessary, first of all, to define what we understand the word territory to mean. According to the entries for this term given in the *Dictionary of the Royal Spanish Academy*, it is in our interest to pick the following three:

1. A space inhabited by an animal which it defends as its own.
2. Sphere of action, terrain in which the characteristics or nature of a thing can be shown.
3. Part of a piece of land with geographical, administrative or political delimitations.

A sonic territory implies a geographically delimited piece of land inhabited by any organism which emits sound, all of nature and any animal, including man. In this territory, the multiple sonic lines draw a sphere of action which can make visible these characteristics or the nature of something, in this case, the social relationships which are established. In this territory, the administrative and political administrations may also play a fundamental role. But, going beyond the will to turn a portion of land into a territory, when will we be able to affirm that a territory has been mapped out from a sonic point of view?

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari offer a reply to this question when they define a territory in the following way: "There is a territory precisely when milieu components cease to be directional, becoming dimensional instead, when they cease to be functional to become expressive. There is a territory when the rhythm has expressiveness" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 347).

Where milieu components appear as qualities and not merely properties aimed at carrying out a function is where the territory emerges, in the persistence of a happening. When the sound of a city's buses transcends the fact of forming a part of its functionality and, given its persistence or peculiar feature, it is heard as a typical characteristic of the city or when it is heard from an artistic viewpoint, then the sonic territory is being born. This is what futurists discovered, the dimension of the city's noises, their expressivity. But at that time, as we have said, the listener's first action was to imitate the sounds of the city in order to integrate them in musical ambits.

It was only later when the decision was made to draw up a sonic cartography of the different territories.

These cartographies would give us information on social relationships: on the ways in which the ancient continuity between the psychoacoustic ambit and the sonosphere has been modified. But we would also receive information on the links that sound establishes with the administrative authorities, with the political exercise of a State, with the forces of power throughout the social fabric. A sonic cartography is, in this sense, a map which attends to the distribution of a simultaneity of lines difficult to reconcile; which demonstrates the formation of geographical-sonic strata which correspond to different kinds of classes and cultures. Sonic cartographies are ultimately a guide as to the place where each listener resides in this territory and the way in which he aims to interact with it. In this sense, it can be affirmed that a sonic cartography reveals a territory in which an experience with and through sound is managed.

One single sonic cartography always denotes an experience of simultaneity. At the same time, each cartography can be considered a sonic map which responds to a specific type of listening.

In the Dreamtime or the age of the hordes, a cartography was one single map of simultaneity in which it resounded were it a territory or the ethical and legal legacy of a tradition. In that age, men were soundboxes, they intoned the cartography itself. We are not capable of intoning a cartography which serves as a single point of reference for the group. Thus, we think that the problem of our cartography lies in that the sonic density is much greater now, that it was never that difficult to draw it up, and maybe this is true. And that sedentary human beings walk hardly singing at all.

In the age that began with the listening to the noises of cities and machines, it is not surprising that sonic cartographies are drawn up mainly with the help of sound recording and reproduction instruments. The city sings and makes itself sing to the instruments, they are the first to capture the city's tones, those which could be unnoticeable to the listener but which the apparatus is capable of registering. The listener's body is often not the first soundbox and it was undoubtedly necessary that it occurred that way.

2.2. The cities of the ear

With each sonic cartography of a city emerges a multiplicity of cities for the ear, invisible cities. The city that forms each sonic line crosses, merges or ignores any other line, but they can all act at the same time. It might be conceived that each line administers, at the very least, a type of sonic experience in and of the territory we call city. Imagine their listening.

A first line could be formed by the sounds of the city traffic: public and private transport. The high or low sonic pressure of this line would undoubtedly make itself felt to the walker who, immersed in it, is tuned in. His listening may be artistic, but for the one who moves along that line the animal listening, that which is alert, is the main one. A territorial counterpoint such as the one formed by the rain which has just started to fall could be added to this line.

The second line would be formed with the music played in the big shopping malls. This line is accompanied by the sound of movement and the chatting of the customers. On this line, as on the one which is woven in a waiting room of a doctor's private practice, an airport or rail station, music is offered as a sort of 'musical furniture' (Satie, 2003: 396). Among the objectives of this music is the desire to superimpose on the physical space –for the most part hostile on account of its size or psychological connotations– and on the people gathered there a sonic prosthesis in which everything would be integrated, producing what is called an environment, a state in which everything and everyone would be subsumed.

The third line would be made up of those who carry their own soundtrack: people who listen to music in groups with a radio-cassette player or individually on a personal stereo, MP3, iPod, in a boom car or even on a mobile phone. This broken line is occupied by sonic islands which form and defend a territory of their own and which, at times, radiate the sound towards the other lines which make up this cartography of simultaneity. Each island constitutes in itself a territory which must be defended. In these cases, the ambit of the psychosphere and the sonosphere coincide. The sound track which forms the sonosphere asserts itself as a presence in a psychosphere which can even be constituted for a few instants in absolute union with the former.

Identity creation phenomena using music would go in this direction. Furthermore, the different manifestations of what are known as urban tribes could be listened to as an attempt to re-establish the continuity between a common psychosphere and sonosphere, although this continuity has been reduced to a group which lives in a wider society. In this sense, the confrontations between different urban tribes would bring to mind the difference that Sloterdijk established between group noises and world noises. In the same way, sole expression as a tribe compared to the rest of the social group would make it possible to make this distinction.

Another line, and this would be the fourth, would be made up of the sounds which are inserted as the living memory of a city: bells, boat sirens, the siren which once a month remembers the victims of the Second World War in some European cities. This line could represent a territorial counterpoint to the sonic line which speaks of the uniformity of a city, of its sonic similarity to so many other developed cities (García López, 2005: 12-25).

It would also be necessary to capture with another line the movement of all those who are unable to lend their ear to the city, in a rush in the external space or simply in a rush with themselves.

And we could add numerous other lines to this one: the sounds of the city arousing from its slumber, and the city at night; children getting out of school and football grounds; the anthems which draw an administrative border, sometimes a cultural one too, and on to exhaustion.

Finally, we would have the cartography of a city, cartography of simultaneity whose principle value would lie in the incapacity to subsume the multiplicity of the sonic to a single parameter. In a sonic cartography the ear recovers its characteristic nomadism, the fact that sound is ephemeral, subjected to constant change. The body can also be recovered as a soundbox of all those lines in continuity and simultaneously. Thus, the nomadic ear once again asserts its right to be a pedestrian, a passenger and not merely a client.

However, it is also necessary to recognise that, looking beyond the pleasure that sounds provide to the ear, the act of drawing up a cartography forms a part of the will to learn more about our own western culture.

It might be said that, compared to the importance played by sight in western culture now it's the ear's turn; it might be said along with McLuhan and Carpenter that we have once more entered the acoustic space and that, consequently, that's what is expected of us, perhaps, but we know that the very notion of cartography owes much to that ancient imperative of vision (Carpenter and McLuhan, 1960: 65-70). We know that the notions characteristic of a piece of aural knowledge develop slowly and, in the meantime, in the eagerness to gain that knowledge, we appropriate others which, although only approximately, indicate what it should be, what we would like it to be.

If the listener acts as a motionless observer who is hunting sound, then, as Benjamin recalls, he must beware, because the hunt is always dangerous and sound can cut through him at any moment.³ And it is when we are waiting to hear that we are in danger of being surprised by sound.

It cannot be ignored that by attending to the sounds of a city, two well-differentiated aspects can be recognised. On the one hand, the sonic urbanism the city itself is subjected to: the way in which sound forms a part of power strategies, of territory establishment which pretend to be neutralized or extolled. And among these territories can also be found the internal territory of each one of its citizens. On the other hand, attending to these sounds produces the desire to reorganize the sonic differently, if possible to turn down its pressure, what corresponds to acoustic ecology. However, the danger for a society such as ours –a managed society in the end–, would be to include the sonic in that management project without thinking of other ways of dreaming, of considering again what is possible for a society.

A cartography of simultaneity shows the amount of sonospheres which inhabit the city and, at the same time, that unique *sonosphere* which often appears to compose the neuralgic centres of the city.

³ "Noises. High in the empty streets of the harbor district they are as densely and loosely clustered as butterflies on a hot flower bed. Every step stirs a song, a quarrel, a flapping of wet linen, a rattling of boards, a baby's bawling, a clatter of buckets. Only you have to have strayed up here alone, if you are to pursue them with a net as they flutter away unsteadily into the stillness. For in these deserted corners all sounds and things still have their own silences, just as, at midday in the mountains, there is a silence of hens, of the ax, of cicadas. But the chase is dangerous, and the net is finally torn when, like a gigantic hornet, a grindstone impales it from behind with its whizzing sting". (Benjamin, 2005: 233).

The listening teaches that following the inflexible logic of a managed society whose main problem is how to get so many people to live together would make our cities spaces with less sonic pressure, quieter some say. In order for this to occur, we will be given statistics on illnesses caused by noise, decibels will be measured and we will once again turn to considering sound as a therapy. All of this might be true. But we believe that if any link still remains between the psychosphere and the sonosphere, however weak it might be, regulating sound is not going to change the well-being indexes of societies which are becoming more and more characterised by their different types of mental illnesses, by unhappiness, in the final analysis.

To think of designing cities from an acoustic point of view without bearing in mind the way in which social, political and economic relationships evolve would only be putting a patch on a tiny piece of fabric in an ocean. Along with sonic and/or acoustic ecology we would have to consider what Guattari (2008) calls 'mental ecology.' This mental ecology might perhaps mean pushing out everything to do with the *psycho* to refer back to a previous state in which, it would seem, people listened to each other, looked after each other. In this state, feeling what was happening was still not classified according to clinical categories, feeling was there to be listened to and responded to. It could be said that the practice is the same, only more developed. But it isn't. It isn't the same. Listening to ourselves to check out what is happening to us is not the same as listening to ourselves to place what is listened to into an already-established category.

Just as lending your ear to the city and exposing yourself to it is not the same as walking through the city making out it is being heard. The debate on a sonic ecology must be played out on a two-sided territory; the one which establishes the relationships of each individual with the group and the one in which the individual has a relationship with himself.

To the cartography of simultaneity which draws us a city another line, then, would have to be added that which each of us can make of ourselves: sometimes a broken line, finer or stronger, a line which, like sound, shows its character to a fragile and strong time, but always in movement. In this cartography we could appeal to that Dreamtime in which people found the sonic footprint of their journey. And if it is not possible to find the footprints, they'll have to be made up, each and every one of the elements which make up the city intoned to make them stand out, make them seen once again through hearing.

Only when we are capable of intoning the city we want to create will we have the city we want to listen to.

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