
Editorial: Socially engaged sound practices

The study of ‘the social’ in music is a broad and diverse field, one that includes numerous developments and debates in popular music studies and ethnomusicology – both historic and ongoing. These are intersected by further lines of disciplinary and subdisciplinary discourse from the social sciences, among others. While some viewpoints place music as a predominantly, even entirely, abstract artform, it can also be argued that most musical practices are, at least in part, inherently informed by social constructions, and so too any participation in the dissemination of music and sound, including the act of listening. Christopher Small’s concept of ‘musicking’ (Small 1998) is an often-cited foundational text in this regard, where he describes the act of music as fundamentally social and also illustrates the ways in which those who do not produce or perform music in a traditional sense are still considered participants in the act of ‘doing music’. Simon Frith’s writing at that time equally asserts that popular music ‘constructs our sense of identity through the direct experiences it offers of the body, time and sociability’ (Frith 1996: 124). More recently, musicologist and anthropologist Georgina Born’s chapter on social aesthetics is summarised as describing the impact of the social on our understanding of musical and sonic encounters – particularly (though not exclusively) through improvisation – to analyse the variety of ‘ways that music, and the aesthetic experiences that it engenders, mediate and are mediated by social processes’ (Born 2017: 13).

What of creative sound practices, electroacoustic music and sonic arts in this socially oriented discourse? How do artistic uses of sound and its technological mediation allow for socially engaged and participative practice to emerge distinctly in these areas – in relation to, say, popular musics or improvisation? Scholarship and practice-as-research in the area of socially engaged sound practices is now developing rapidly, with emerging structures and discourse interrogating the aesthetics, ethics and politics of collaborative, participative and otherwise socially engaged approaches to and in sound. Increasingly, a range of robust methodologies are available to sound practitioners: from the politics of expanded and distributed listening (Voegelin 2019; Gallagher et al. 2017) to the ethics of sonically networked organisational thinking (Schroeder and Rebelo 2016) and collaborative compositional aesthetics (Rennie 2014, 2015, 2020; Koutsomichalis 2018). Voegelin’s ‘ethics of

participation’ through sound and listening, proposing to harness the ‘ephemeral mobility and generative nature of sound . . . to different political possibilities’ (2019: 37), begins to be evidenced through recent practice.

This issue on socially engaged sound practices is intended to contribute to this growing area of research in several ways. First, the authorial positions in this collection are often of practitioner–researcher and participant–observer. These are scholarly accounts written by those *doing* socially engaged sound practices; and by authors who simultaneously adopt reflexive approaches in order to critically interrogate their experiences for the benefit and learning of their own practice and for others in the field. Second, such active criticality by the author–artist pursues a conceptual move *beyond* the routine notion of participation and collaboration understood as positive forces in and of themselves – towards more inherently (self-) critical sound practices and studies of such works. Third, while the articles are evidently interlinked in addressing this broader theme of social engagement through sound, the collection is decidedly diverse: in interpretations of ‘sociality’; and in addressing distinct areas and eras of sound practices – the contemporary, canonical and hereto less-heard. Considering this issue as a single entity, the authors thus become united in their aim to diversify the conversation, in decentralising theoretical approaches to the subject matter and in the positive inclusion of a wider variety of voices, experiences, sounding bodies and attitudes to listening. These articles move beyond dominant hierarchies and towards greater inclusivity, intersectionality and decolonisation and then into the more-than-human register – all through creative sonic forms, at a scale larger than the individual.

The time in which the call for papers was issued and that these articles were written, reviewed, edited and published was a time of incredible (and continued) uncertainty, change and flux. During that 14-month arc, world events and sector-wide developments have almost certainly affected the content in some significant ways and are important to mention, not least to respect the efforts of the authors, reviewers and editors in managing to succeed to continue their work in such circumstances. These include the emergence and devastating worldwide effects of the coronavirus pandemic, the murder of George Floyd and invigorated wave of engagement with the Black Lives Matter movement, the escalation of the

discussions and efforts around decolonising the (music) curriculum, and wider equality, diversity and inclusion issues in higher education, to name only some. It is also appropriate to appreciate the ways in which a community of practitioners, theorists and writers within the fields of research of this journal and also the specific theme here have come together to engage in further critical debate and reflection, including confronting these issues in tandem with those themes outlined earlier – both implicitly and explicitly.

In proposing the active choice of *silence* as a method of participation, in ‘Withdrawn from Use: Silence, Listening and Undoing’, Sebastiane Hegarty challenges the traditional paradigm of what might, on surface level at least, be considered socially engaged work. This approach – far from presenting a lack of agency or type of withdrawal – is explored for a potential communal-ity, heard through the ‘sounding of silence’ found in the author’s creative practice. We encounter works sited within the hush of libraries and through static pauses in landline telephone conversations – all aiming towards ‘undoing purposeful agency, shyly engaging us in the anti-social practice of inaction’.

In ‘Localising Acoustic Ecology: A critique towards a relational collaborative paradigm’, Rui Chaves and Thais Aragão provide a timely argument towards broadening the context of ‘the soundscape’ beyond Anglo/Euro/US-centric thought. Their article provides examples of how socially engaged sound practice may address this bias, through two works emanating from Brazil. A robust engagement counteracting the hegemonic cultural biases and ‘localised epistemic slippages’ of work and thought in the areas of soundscape studies and soundscape composition moves towards ‘a more nuanced relationship between author/composer and would-be participants’.

Joseph Browning’s article rigorously and positively addresses various aspects of sound art theory and acoustic ecological practice. ‘Sound and More-than-Human Sociality in Catherine Clover’s *Oh! Ah ah pree trra trra*’ begins with a thoughtful and inclusive written account of the participative sound workshop named in the title. The author then provides a framework for speculative and expansive interspecies encounters, which attend to the ‘dynamics of evasion, non-encounter and undecidability in our relationships with the more-than-human world’, and furthering these notions towards soundscape composition by addressing the subject of ‘organised sound’ in relation to such dynamics.

In ‘Soundscapes of Resistance: Amplifying social justice activism and aural counterpublics through field recording-based sound practices’, Nimalan Yoganathan’s timely and imperative contribution considers the work of three practitioners – Mbanna Kantako, Muqata’a and Christopher DeLaurenti – artists whose field recordings and soundscape

compositions engage with social justice issues, including systemic racism and apartheid. The article proposes that ‘the act of listening itself be considered a politically radical gesture’ and argues a need for ‘intersectional and decolonised approaches to soundscape studies that hone in on how environmental soundscapes themselves are sites of political struggle’.

Sam Mackay’s article directly addresses the global coronavirus pandemic, presenting new research conducted since the outbreak. In ‘Polite Applause: The sonic politics of “Clap for Carers”’, the author explores this public initiative – and associated sonic phenomena – in the UK, one that emerged as a response to public health and lockdown measures. The article justifies framing this unique and historic event as a participative sonic arts practice, in which the participants’ sonic agency is heard pointing to ‘sound’s distinctive capacity for (per)forming agonistic kinds of participatory practice’.

Franziska Schroeder and Alex Lucas provide a discussion on themes of neurodiversity, and notions of distributed practice and inclusivity in creative sound. This is presented through the lens of the additional challenges facing such practices in the time of covid-19. ‘Distributed Participatory Design: The challenges of designing with physically disabled musicians during a global pandemic’ presents the authors’ research into collaborative design practices within music technology, aiming to afford better inclusion and accessibility for disabled participants.

Chris J. H. Cook’s article ‘*Trevurr*: A dialogic composition on dementia, auraldiversity and companion listening’ documents important aspects of participatory practice with neurodiverse collaborators, told through the lens of a co-created sound work. The author reflects on the ethics of working with vulnerable groups in such a way and towards developing practices through which the auditory experiences, particularly of an auraldiverse participants, may be documented, represented and understood in a reciprocal and egalitarian manner through ‘dialogic situations of companion listening, discussion and mutual learning’.

Inclusive co-composition with participants of varying degrees of experience and formative training is a central theme of Adam Hart and Alan Williams’s work. In ‘A Space for Making: Collaborative composition as social participation’, they recount and critically reflect on project workshops using digital technologies to facilitate and transcribe graphic scoring, designed for use by children between 5 and 11 years old. The authors posit how electroacoustic music composition might be an inclusive and ‘powerful route in for compositional thinking for many students who otherwise lack confidence and skill in the creation of music’, with the article providing crucial context for other researchers doing or planning similar work.

As the burgeoning practice of sound mapping becomes ever more present and contested in the ways we consider sound in art, Conor McCafferty reconsiders such work in terms of its participatory elements. ‘Distributing Authorship at a Localised Scale: Developing public engagement in sound mapping’ provides first-hand insight and identifies some of the problems often associated with sound-mapping practices, their translation and representations – both conceptually and pragmatically – before discussing a case study of a participative sound mapping workshop in Lisbon.

Carter Weleminsky provides new insights for the underdeveloped area of scholarship – that of exploratory sonic methods in diaspora studies and Jewish identity. ‘Sounds of Aliyah: A journey towards a sonic methodology for diaspora studies’ presents a socially engaged application of soundscape composition, presenting how ‘interdisciplinary soundscape composition that incorporates social inquiry is a valuable tool for investigating community change’.

A. M. DeVito’s ‘Sonic Sentimentality and the Unification of the Listening Space: Exploring the intersections of oral history and sonic art’ is a discussion of socially engaged art works involving listening pedagogy, oral history, the notion of audience as participant, and participatory/group listening – with reference to Pauline Oliveros’s methods. The article also analyses sonic storytelling and the use of oral history material within electroacoustic composition. The author summarises these various sonic arts practices as ways to ‘incite action in their audiences, encouraging social and cultural involvement while cherishing robust, intersectional and empathetic communities’.

Maja Zećo’s ‘Listening and Recording In Situ: Entanglement in the socio-political context of place’ challenges aesthetic essentialism within practices of sound recording – including the bracketing out of context and the notion of sonic tourism. The author calls for the recordist and recordings to engage with the social, political and historical dimensions from which they emanate, providing a more critical approach to ‘the ways that soundwalking and field recording entangle the listener in a sociopolitical relationship with place’.

A further off-theme article concludes the issue. Gustavo Branco Germano’s ‘“The McBrides are from here”: Listening to *Green Ways* as creative cartophony’ continues a critical engagement with sound-mapping practice through the lens of sound artists Áine O’Dwyer and Graham Lambkin’s collaborative work *Green Ways*. This analysis provides new ways to understand relationships between listener and place, artist/recordist’s presence, and provokes a

‘problematic distinction between performance situations and everyday life’.

I am indebted to all the collaborators whose efforts have made this issue possible. Thank you to the contributors for moving this field of study forward with such breadth of ideas and sonic imagination, and to all of the participants in the many projects detailed within for their valuable and needed involvement. As in issue 26/1, this issue received several high-quality submissions and it has been decided to place some of these in its second part, which will be published in issue 28/1. I am hugely grateful to all the peer reviewers for their insight, constructive criticality, and their efforts at a time of extreme and unending pressure in the academic sector. Biggest thanks of all to *Organised Sound*’s editor, Leigh Landy, for his guidance, wisdom and patience, particularly during such a challenging time, to bring this issue together.

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