

Editorial

Middle ear acoustigraphies and ethnography of audible worlds

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Accepting the question of what one listens to when one hears something implies encountering a kind of attention shaken by questions in continuous resonance. Those who carry out ethnomusical research and take listening without essentialism, that is, by ceasing to rely for a moment on their inner ear, are frequently confronted by questions ranging from who is or what is the listener, what constitutes the audience; to questions about the kinds of knowledge and figures of the sensible that (in)capacitate the senses in situations where listening and the sonic establish and amplify sets of relations. One way of sensing-thinking these sets is to take the anatomical quality of the middle ear as a linking point, as an “onto-epistemological opening” (De la Cadena 2018, 167), from which these questions can be addressed and analyzed.

The middle ear is something in the body, connected to the bones and simultaneously exposed to the internal in our organism and the external in the cosmos. This linking point, partial, non-complete, medium, accompanies us when we think what we perceive, and exposes us to contact zones where spatiality and temporality fold to emerge as worlds, audible worlds, in which the middle ear struggles to recognize and listen (Nogueira 1997, Ochoa 2011, Castillejo-Cuéllar 2020). Situating, transcribing and analyzing these contact zones is what I refer to here as middle ear acoustigraphies.

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Acoustigraphy

This type of acoustigraphy refers to an analytical and investigative practice based on an immersive and ethnographically oriented exercise in which the writing and translation of other forms of listening moves towards the use of other non-verbal sign systems in which transcription is called upon to establish meaningful relationships between multiple interpreters and audiences. Deliberately here I am transforming the term ethnography into acoustigraphy by resonating it with a form of translation that anthropologist Jonathan Hill conceived of as one of the fundamental axes of what he called a “sound-centred anthropology of the verbal and musical arts.” This mode of anthropology proposed by Hill should concentrate on.

to explore poetic processes that take us from the original medium, however it is replicated in audio recordings to visual transcriptions, towards a translation that somehow manages to present as many emotive resonators, degrees of (in)formality and implicit knowledge of the original recording or transcription as possible. [...Such processes] are not merely mechanical procedures of sound capture but a technology of creative and analytical mediation that opens up possibilities for anthropologists to think about sounds and their associated meanings in new directions. (Hill, 2015, 11, 13. emphasis added)

Focusing only on musicians as the object of this type of research is similar to placing music at the centre of the projects. In both cases we would be ordering a priori the course of any descriptive and analytical initiative by leaving out the middle ear. Although these two ways of centring the analysis allow us to explain and explore themes that have interested ethnomusicology such as identity and nation-state projects, the forms of interpellation between sociabilities and subjectivities through musical genres, among others, the way in which these explorations are elaborated and thought rarely allow other modes of knowledge, other archives, other modalities of actors together with their onto-epistemologies to be attended to and taken into account. The consequence of this, in the most immediate scenario, is that the differences in what we hear and listen to are of form. That is to say, that the changing and transitory aspects of what we call musics are presented and analyzed as the characteristics of something that is essentially the same and singular: music or musicians making music in different ways.

Middle ear acoustigraphy invites us to push our analysis and ways of listening to its limits. That is, considering differences to appear as background differences, or as qualities of something that is in essence distinct. But I do not mean an immeasurable and abstract ideal background or qualities that emerge by negation or contrast to what we think music should be. I am referring to a background in conflictual relation to its forms and figures, and to the multiple agents that make those qualities appear sensible, knowable, unrecognizable and transformative. It is in these relations that we appear situated with our average ears, exposed to situations and worlds that make us wonder about the ways in which the sensitive that touches us in the audible and sonic transfigures other bodies, sociabilities, ecologies and spatio-temporalities.

Tensions and Contact Zones

I started this acoustigraphic opening by developing didactic concerts for university television at the University of Antioquia. These concerts were broadcasted from the programme “Tardes de Concierto” during 2006 and 2008, and in them I introduced Turkish-Ottoman repertoires and musical instruments to musicians and audiences in Medellín in order to compare the ways of reception and valuation of these sounds with the valuations of those I interviewed in Istanbul during my fieldwork carried out between 2005 and 2010. Among Turkish audiences who experience Islam as a system of reorientation and transformation of their deepest selves, listening to these repertoires is presented as an opportunity to sensorially inhabit and explore audible worlds in resonance with the sacred, and in particular, the paths opened by Muslim saints as they are amplified and modulated through the verbal and musical components of Sufi liturgies (Corbin, 2005).

Now, when I speak of audible worlds, I am not referring to a new way of saying “World Music”. I am referring in general to what researchers such as Anthony Seeger, Jonathan Hill, Rafael José Meneses Bastos, Bernd de Mori and Matthias Lewy have mentioned regarding the vibrant and audible materiality where the self-determination of human and non-human collectivities, as well as the configuration of their affectivities, onto-epistemologies and historicities acquire and produce dimension and duration (Seeger 2015, Hill 2015, Meneses Bastos 2015, Lewy 2015).

The audible worlds that I have studied ethnographically over the past two decades in Istanbul and Vaupés have become distinguishable in sound only through conflict, tension and controversy. I have thought of this difficult, conflictive listening as that prior friction that is generated in the trajectory of any relationship on the way to becoming sound, music, or something else. It has been the prohibitions and multiple tensions regarding the sonic, its imprecision, and its need to be re-evaluated and replicated, that have signalled the uncomfortable—and in other cases silent—presence for many of these audible worlds. On several occasions, for example, the Turkish government of the mid-1950s and 1960s increased the prohibition of the so-called “magical and irrational” practices of Muslim mystical and heterodox communities amplified by certain instruments and repertoires. Disabling that audible world implied the dislocation of the system of physical and personal places where the learning of the liturgical use of Sufi aural and musical language took place. In this system, the alchemy of the soul operates through auditory and instrumental training and the expansion of the vital presence of deceased persons through the amplification of their mystical passion, musicalized in Sufi liturgies, and oriented towards theophanic experience (Castrillón, 2012, 2014). On the other hand, Italian, American and Antioquia missionaries decimated and inflicted multiple damages on the expressive activities of the inhabitants of the Vaupés River basin throughout the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Their attitude to these other worlds not only compromised the existence of instruments, plants and rituals indispensable to their design and assembly, but also disabled and greatly reduced the scope of the onto-episte-

mological and perceptual systems of today's indigenous Amazonian communities necessary to inhabit and care for these worlds. Missionary intervention in the region, endorsed and promoted by the Colombian government at different levels, strove to eradicate those worlds or to transform them, until the Apostolic Prefecture of Mitú managed in one way or another to stagnate them through folklorisation, assimilation and their recognition as the culture of the “new believers” of southeastern Colombia (Castrillón, 2021a, 2021b).

In this sense, when someone asks me if my studies are based on indigenous “musics” or on the “musics” of Islam, I answer yes. But I clarify that my research around the Vaupés River basin explores the relationships that indigenous populations—mainly the Cubeo people—establish with living species and other entities that inhabit their territories to recompose and re-member their repertoires and instruments (Castrillón, 2023). Similarly, in the case of the music of Islam, I clarify that my work analyzes and describes the modalities of listening through which bodies and tactics are produced to inhabit and move through the qualities of the divine cultivated by certain esoteric traditions that survive in Islam (Castrillón, 2012).

Multimodal research artefacts

More recently, this acoustographic work has been exploring experimental non-textual modalities to present the results of my academic research (Castrillón, 2020). These include documentaries entitled *Kiraiña* (Long Flutes), *Rehavi* (Caretakers of the Instant) and *Visitors*. These documentaries explore different debates about the sonic and the possibilities of generating meaning from the experience of listening as lived and embodied by different perspectives.

Kiraiña (Long Flutes) is an audiovisual essay on how an instrument sound. The documentary immerses us in the process of remaking instruments and affectivities in Camutí, a community located within the Gran Resguardo Indígena del Vaupés on the banks of the Cuduyarí River in southeastern Colombia. From its academic approach, *Kiraiña* (Long Flutes) breaks with the documentary perspective of ethnomusicological films on musical instruments through a cinematic dialogue characterized by the non-linear linking forms and ritual discourses of the Cubeo Emi-Hehenava people of Vaupés. The documentary presents the capacity of this indigenous community to combine memory and emotion through their ritual and expressive practices and thus recover from the traumas caused by the prohibitions imposed by the Catholic and Protestant missionaries who strongly censored their ritual and expressive practices during the mid-twentieth century in the Amazon region. As an audiovisual essay, the film brings together the scattered fragments of everyday life shared by an ethnomusicologist and an indigenous community in their efforts to remember and retell the sound of the long flutes, also known as yapurutú. The film aims to repair

the forms of multilingual and perspectival exchange between indigenous and non-indigenous audiences by presenting a cinematic language that is respectful of indigenous points of view and open to contemporary debates that are akin to hybrid audiences.

Rehavi (*Keepers of the Instant*) presents the story of an old migrant clock. The documentary explores how music and mysticism resonate in contemporary Istanbul. It presents the drift of an old mechanical clock that is lost, found and circulated among different owners between Colombia, Turkey and the United States. The documentary presents the philosophy of time and the holography between clocks and human beings, which have been two central themes of Muslim spirituality in Anatolia. *Caretakers of the Instant* opens a vignette on how contemporary Turks value ancient aesthetic traditions and invites other international audiences to get to know lesser-known dimensions of the auditory worlds in the Anatolian peninsula. From a more political dimension, *Caretakers of the Instant* presents how the current Turkish government promotes and celebrates Sufi music and Turkish-Ottoman arts. In other words, it presents an object that is abandoned, but at the same time intentionally valued, given that it possesses the capacity to assemble both the rhythm of personal interiorities as well as the constant transformation of contemporary Turkish society. From this point of view, the actual documentary is a meta-commentary on the meaning of Turkish Sufi music that is constantly being lost and recomposed. Although *Caretakers of the Instant* was filmed and produced during a season of fieldwork in Istanbul in 2016, it is hardly characterized as an ethnographic documentary. Rather, it is an audiovisual narrative that combines narrative and interviews to produce a multimodal experimental ethnographic writing in which current debates such as object ontologies and sonorism (Lewy 2015) take on a creative and performative role. Rather than documenting or representing the reality of Turkish musicians and artists, *Caretakers of the Instant* presents the issues of concern of their everyday practices by unfolding the multiple meanings that these practices can take on.

Visitors is a short film that explores three aspects of my most recent field research with the Cubeo Emi-Heheneva people of Vaupés: the (in)ability of my camera and sound recorder to amplify forms that can only be witnessed at night; the call to facilitate zones of contact so that the inaudible and unseen can be perceived; and the voices of the Yurupari ancestors as they come during the rainy season to the indigenous communities of the Vaupés region. Based on a poem by W.E.B Du-bois recited in a Cubeo Emi-Heheneva indigenous community, the film explores the generative tension between visual and auditory forms of knowledge among Amazonians presented to a non-indigenous audience. Similarly, the film experiments with various modes of perceiving Yurupari ancestors and other non-human entities as they appear through diffuse, dimly lit forms of ephemeral duration and deep resonance through multiple resonators. These indirect ways of knowing inform the people of the indigenous communities in this region of Colombia about the Yurupari ancestors, and also shape the sensory composition of those who visit and are visited during this time of year. The unintelligible and opaque musicalized discourse of the Yurupari ancestors' folds

and gives shape and meaning to the sensory dimension in which indigenous communities manage their relations of otherness, and helps them to establish the onto-epistemological limits of their expressive and communicative praxis (Hill 2015).

In conclusion, I would like to bring back the words of Jonathan Hill who reminds us that these multimodal forms of academic practice are best appreciated for their contribution to the generation and transmission of knowledge to the extent that they have begun to be published in indexed journals and evaluated as “technologies of creative and analytical mediation”, since they open up new directions for those doing research about audible worlds, their sounds and the associated meanings for those who perceive them.

Conflict of interest

The authors state that they do not have a conflict of interest with the institution or any commercial association.

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