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Introduction

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Introduction

K.J. Donnelly and Aimee Mollaghan

In recent years, there has not only been an emerging interest in soundtracks in audiovisual culture but also an interest in the less solid spectral aspects of culture more generally. The turn of the Millennium has heralded a significant outgrowth of culture that demonstrates an awareness of the ephemeral nature of history and the complexity underpinning the relationship between location and the past. This has been especially apparent in the contemplation of the shifting relationship between landscape, memory and sound in film, television and beyond. The scope of inquiry for this collection of essays emphasises the ineffable ghostly qualities of a certain body of soundtracks, extending beyond merely the idea of “scary films: or “haunted houses”. Rather, the sonic haunting under consideration here is tied to trauma, anxiety or nostalgia associated with spatial and temporal dislocation in the face of population moves and pressures, ecological issues and destruction of the traditional countryside, unstable borders, and porous boundaries, as well as increasingly intensified tourism and travel to consume landscape and location. This shift in focus from how audiovisual landscapes can be experienced from one of seeing to one of listening allows for an examination of how music and sound are essential to the composition of intangible topologies present in the texts investigated here. Rather than using landscape merely as a physical space for the site of action these representations of landscapes *haunted* by sonic ghosts allow for a psychological engagement with these sonically constructed landscapes.

The term landscape can be understood in a myriad of ways. As a culturally constructed concept, it implies a physical environment that is composed or manufactured, a shaping of the natural environment, something ideological that potentially informs the manner in which the world can be seen or experienced. Geographers such as James Duncan, Nancy Duncan and Denis Cosgrove position landscape as a socio-political concept writing that the history of

landscape can only be understood as part of a wider history of economy and society.¹ It has its own implications that represent the way certain groups of people have signified themselves and their world through their imagined relationship with nature, and through which they have underlined and communicated their own social role and that of others with respect to the external environment. As James Duncan asserts, landscape acts as a “signifying system through which a social system is communicated, reproduced, experienced, and explored.”² If landscape is something that can be fabricated, then it is something that can be subject to multiple readings or interpretations particularly when encapsulated as an audiovisual artefact.

The audiovisual landscapes of interest here are interior and exterior, shaped and haunted not necessarily by spectral visibility or invisibility of image, but rather by sound. The diffuse nature of sound makes it a particularly useful medium for the presentation of trauma and nostalgia, providing a conduit for specters to whisper their secrets. To paraphrase Jacques Derrida, haunting is historical, but it is not dated.³ It does not have a specific chronology or time. It functions outside of temporality, outside of linear narrative. It also has the ability to shift chronologies off-kilter. Due to the ability of sound to diffuse across space, it can bleed into or haunt an environment beyond what can visually be perceived, dissolving the discrete boundaries of the landscape. Sound can shape the spatial contours of the landscape by coalescing sonic ecologies. Ubiquitous, yet often largely unnoticed, these sonic or musical ecologies can help to construct aspects of cultural and personal identity. Furthermore, sound can blur the barriers between interiority and exteriority. It can detect aspects of the landscape not visible to the eye; geophones can allow us to hear sounds underneath the ground, hydrophones return subaqueous sounds from beneath the waves, ultrasound transducers shift the interior bruit of our bodies to the outside.

Acoustic ecologist, R. Murray Schafer, writes that “hearing is a way of touching at a distance”⁴, but more than that one could surmise that it is also a way of touching across time.

Sound space is not the same as image space and differences in the time that it takes a sound to arrive at the ear tells us something about spatial relationships within an environment. Sonic phantoms manifest themselves through their aurality, their voices lurking out of time, diffusing through the temporal membranes of past, present and future to conjure up a sonic identity that is at once both construct and memory, and, just like Schafer's concept of the soundscape, is both actual and abstract. Nowhere is this more obvious than in the moving image, where the space between sound and images can conjure ghosts, evident at times when some films lose direct "synch".⁵

The fleeting nature of memories inherently bestow on them a spectral character and sounds are particularly effective as potent memory triggers particularly when connected to a specific space or place. Songs, musical compositions, and even certain sounds are able to directly access the recesses of our minds and sometimes uncertain feelings from long ago. In a different process, perhaps, music can also carry collective as well as personal memory, and indeed some cultures appear to use the sonic to address the trauma of the past to try to heal the present, or at the least to try to break the impasses of present social and cultural issues.

Landscape ought also to be conceived as a palimpsest that can be written over in order to create and recreate senses of identity. This relies on collective memories passed down through generations, but also can engage that which ought to be forgotten for one reason or another. Indeed, "haunting" can make for an unstable and questioning presence that upsets the dominant order by implication and suggestion rather than a direct force of conflict.

Part of the wave of the so-called "sonic turn" in theory and the study of culture, this collection will focus in particular on audiovisual forms that foreground landscape, sound and memory. It will address how soundscapes become or are an intrinsic part of landscape, and how this can hold a meaning or emotion that is nearly tangible but not explicit. This is the first book of its sort that deals with the ephemeral but affecting soundtrack in audiovisual culture

(films, television, and other arts) in the light of sound's persistent but ambiguous relationship to location. As such, it will offer a distinct and novel approach to analysis drawn from a range of disciplines including, but not limited to, film studies, sound studies, philosophy, and cultural geography. This mode of analysis will be informed by psychogeography (a desire to consider location and landscape as essentially emotional or psychological objects rather than merely backdrops for drama), and Jacques Derrida's notion of "hauntology,"⁶ which promotes a less positivist approach to history and finds forgotten, spectral history present in the margins of culture. Hauntology works against unitary and linear understandings of the past, registering that all past elements remain, sometimes as significant "absent structuring" or trace memory in something else. Consequently, the past in the present can be rethought and understood anew. This book contends that a particularly strong way of achieving this is through a consideration of landscape's relationship to sound in audiovisual culture, helping to concretise more supernatural or evanescent concerns into aesthetic forms or artefacts that validates their existence.

One issue that we have had to contend with in the process of developing this collection is the insufficiency of language to express the psychological, temporal, and spatial processes of haunting at play in the audiovisual texts under consideration here. Terms such as "psychogeography" or "hauntology", although pervasive, can sometimes seem vague or subject to perceived malapropism, severed from their etymological roots. The essays in this collection go some way to articulating a syntax for concepts such as these, lifting the veil between the effable and ineffable to reify these ideas. Just as Guy Debord conceived the portmanteau psychogeography and Jacques Derrida contrived the term hauntology, authors within this collection also find themselves in the position where existing words and idioms are not always adequate for their needs.

In order to engage with the sonic spaces under consideration in Antonioni's *Blow-Up*

(1966), for example, Paul Newland draws on Mikhail Bakhtin's literary concept of the chronotype, a concept which accounts for the unification of space and time. Newland, however, refashions this concept into that of the "phonotype", an audiovisual analogue, which more fully accounts for sound spaces in *Blow-Up*. Through a process of close listening to the fabricated sound spaces in the film which he refers to as a "blowing up of the sound space", he asserts that wind sounds in particular evoke a sense of an uncanny, otherworldly natural presence reacting to the events of the film, while simultaneously trying to communicate the alienation experienced by photographer Thomas (David Hemmings), the central protagonist of the film.

Both K.J. Donnelly and Daniel Bishop examines the ambiguous relationship between space and the occult within a certain body of moving image. Donnelly interrogates how the soundtrack in Robert Eggers folk horror film *The Witch* (2015) provides material form for a supernatural presence, haunting the landscape, and manifesting affective atmospheres. He identifies that the seemingly unstructured music in the film serves a predominantly spatial rather than temporal role, providing a dimensional rather than chronological continuum. Although visual and narrative structure help to provide some temporal scaffolding for the sonic structure of the film, Donnelly suggests that the space in the film is constructed through the melding of the sound with the landscape, haunting the landscape and imbuing it with a sense of uncanniness.

Bishop makes a compelling case for the usefulness of philosopher Gaston Bachelard's phenomenological theories of space when the probing the mutability of audiovisual spaces in screen media. Drawing on Bachelard's poetics of space, his chapter questions how Canadian filmmaker Guy Maddin's film *Keyhole* (2011) probes the connection between ghosts and the illusory physical space of the occult imagination. He posits that the score hovers somewhere between perceptible musical presence and amorphous, yet dynamic ambience. It is this spatial and material indistinctness, which allows the soundtrack to diffuse across spatial and temporal

boundaries and states.

At the core of this collection then, is a consideration of the porousness of boundaries. Jessica Shine demonstrates how the use of *musique concrète* can disrupt the traditionally delineated sonic spaces of diegetic and non-diegetic within the film soundtrack. She convincingly argues the case for extending Gus Van Sant's *Death Trilogy* (2002-5)⁷ to a *Death Quartet* by including *Paranoid Park* (2007) amongst its corpus. Perhaps more importantly though, she contends that *musique concrète* haunts the diegetic space of the films of the *Death Quartet*. Expressly focusing on *Paranoid Park*, she questions how *musique concrète* can challenge our preconceptions of what a moving score might entail and how interior trauma might be expressed, in its ability to cross the “fantastical gap”⁸ between the realm of the diegetic and non-diegetic.

Jamie Sexton's chapter explores how cult British films of the 1970s such as *The Stone Tape* (Sasdy, 1972) and *The Legend of Hell House* (Hough, 1973), utilise electronic sound produced by the BBC Radiophonic workshop signify ghostly and occultic phenomena. He investigates how these films use electronic soundtracks to engage with science and the paranormal, yet simultaneously blur any such divisions. On a macro scale he extends this consideration of the sonic practices apparent in these moving image texts to interrogate how they destabilise temporal boundaries, creating ambiguities between where the sound design ends, and the score begins.

This is something that Craig Wallace also explores in his consideration of the relationship between landscape and sound in the British television adaptations of author Alan Garner's novels *The Owl Service* (ITV, 1967) and *Red Shift* (BBC, 1973). As Wallace asserts sound disrupts chronological distance and allows the stratified landscapes to be haunted by ghosts of the past, present and future simultaneously. In *Red Shift* characters from different time periods seem to inhabit the Cheshire landscape concurrently. In a similar fashion, linear time and

narrative unravel in the valley of *The Owl Service*, sonically haunted by traumatised ghosts of the present.

Many of the chapters in this collection centre on sonic representations of trauma and grief. Aimee Mollaghan's chapter examines sonic haunting in British period dramas which have emerged since the beginning of the 21st century. Often incorporating Gothic or supernatural elements, these adaptations of 19th and early 20th century novels locate themselves within the British rural landscape, irrespective of the original setting. The psychogeographical landscapes of trauma within the two case studies discussed in the chapter, *Wuthering Heights* (Andrea Arnold, 2011) and *Sunset Song* (Terence Davies, 2015), are constructed and through a process of sonic haunting by spectral presences unconstrained by spatio-temporal borders.

Danijela Kulezic-Wilson's chapter on the "long trajectory of death" in Justin Kurzel's feature film adaption of *Macbeth* interrogates how the landscape embodies the memories of violent deaths, which psychologically haunt the character of Macbeth. Furthermore, she considers how the score both gives corporeal form to the forces of trauma and grief within the film which haunt these scarred landscapes, while also grieving for the characters.

In a similar fashion John McGrath's chapter explores how Alex Garland's science fiction film *Annihilation* (2018) is haunted not only by its characters' traumatic histories, but also through the spectral traces of analogue technology. He proposes that the notion of analogue technology becomes a referent for more metaphysical themes connected to the dysregulated tendencies of humanity. In the world of the film, the protagonists are trapped in a cycle of repetition, absorption, and mutation in an uncanny shimmer world of *doppelgängers*. The crackle and materiality of the analogue score and folk music recordings haunt both the "weird" landscapes and the digitally manipulated sound of the film, imprinting them with a sense of human presence.

Turning these sonic manifestations of grief and trauma towards the Arctic, Lisa Coulthard's chapter considers what she refers to as "uncanny sonic geographies of extinction" in the Arctic as expressed in two limited "polar Gothic" television series *The Terror: Season 1* (2018) and *The North Water* (2021). Rather than simply reviving or recreating sounds from the mid-nineteenth century, she avers that the landscapes of both series are sonically haunted by both an awareness of their own history, and a recognition of the present and future erosion of the polar ice caps.

Both Andrea Wright and Jady Jiang grapple with the Australian and New Zealand Gothic. Jiang uses Peter Weir's 1975 film *Picnic at Hanging Rock* as a way to interrogate national anxieties surrounding Australia's colonial past. Jiang explores the tensions between the civilized sites of colonial Victorian society and the untamed landscapes of the Australian outback. For her, the dichotomy of these spaces is sonically marked by a similar musical duality in which the classical music imposes a European culture on the landscape, whereas the idiosyncratic exoticism of the panpipes haunts the undomesticated spaces of the Australian wilderness.

Like Jiang, Wright probes the duality present in the representation of landscape and nature in Australian and New Zealand cinema. She also highlights the two readings of the Romanticized New Zealand landscape, which have become central to how it is presented on screen; it is either wild and sublime, or cultivated and topographically well behaved. She locates the short films *Possum* (Brad McGann, 1997) and *Nature's Way* (Jane Shearer, 2006) within this tradition, questioning how the encroachment of uncanny and often threatening soundscapes from exterior to domestic spaces disrupt the settler myth of mastering nature.

¹ See Denis Cosgrove, *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984); James Duncan, *The City as Text: The Politics of Landscape Interpretation in the Kandyan Kingdom*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); James Duncan and Nancy Duncan, *Landscapes of Privilege: The Politics of the Aesthetic in an American Suburb*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

² James Duncan, *The City as Text*, 17.

³ Jacques Derrida. *Specters of Marx: the state of the debt, the work of mourning, and the New international*, (London: Routledge, 1994).

⁴ R. Murray Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World* (Rochester, Vermont: Destiny Books, 1977/1994), 11.

⁵ K.J. Donnelly, *Occult Aesthetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

⁶ Jacques Derrida. *Specters of Marx*.

⁷ Gus Van Sant's *Death Trilogy* consists of the following three films: *Gerry* (2002), *Elephant* (2003) and *Last Days* (2005).

⁸ Robynn J. Stilwell, "The Fantastical Gap between Diegetic and Nondiegetic" [in] *Beyond the Soundtrack: Representing Music in Cinema*, ed. Daniel Goldmark, Lawrence Kramer and Richard D. Leppert (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 186.