

# Transcript: Sound as Method



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Rishika Mukhopadhyay:

So broadly, as you know, that sound research can be mapped onto three thematic domains of inquiry in social science specifically, and it expands from health to urban to political spaces. Historically, sound's deep effect on body and mind has been used both as a therapeutic tool for health and body, it has been also used as a tool for manipulation, discipline and control of human behaviour, as well as a powerful mode of treatment and healing, and effective wellbeing. So sound mapping suggests also in terms of urban studies, a place-based narrative of development, a rapid urbanisation process, lowered boundaries of public/private spaces, changing livelihood, loss of natural habitat and biodiversity. We also know that voice, sound and active listening has been mobilised to understand questions of political citizenship, marginalisation, surveillance, security, invisibility, resistance, violence and coloniality, to name just a few.

Interdisciplinary scholars like me, we have also looked into the humanities aspect of sound, and I'm particularly interested in the questions of cultural heritage, identity, memories, belongingness and experience of the past, as well as speculative future. So with this particular introduction, I will now move on to introduce to all of you the project that I was involved, and it will... this was the first project which actually gave me the opportunity to delve into sound method.

So on your screen, you can see the project team, and it comprises of five of us, Raktim, Rishika, Sayantan, Nilanjan and Suromita.

So to move onto this, entering into the field of sound research as a critical heritage scholar, I also felt a sense of disquiet in how conventionally heritage has been imagined, mostly in the practice domain, not in the research domain, as such. And my longstanding research interests on craft and community heritage in urban

India, it made me attuned to sound of craft workshops, and thus the sensory heritage aspect of the project kind of came about. So in this presentation, I'll be focusing on the process of doing this research, and as you can see, the methodological concern on your screen, rather than the analytical threads that emerged out of the larger research questions.

So what were the initial methodological concerns? I can broadly situate them within three domains – technologies, politics and ethics of sound capture to sound analysis, to sound dissemination. So the first question is how do we make heritage with people, which is to some extent an epistemological concern as well because conventionally cultural heritage spaces have remained quite exclusive to certain class/race/caste. It was also kind of held by aesthetic visuality, and it was limited to the association with grandeur and opulence of certain architectural heritage. So heritage-making process has been always quite politicised and selected, as many scholars have identified before, so that was kind of my starting point. Then I moved on to understanding how do we imagine heritage beyond this dominant visuality, where heritage can be felt and embodied by people. And finally, I also wanted to ask how to capture subtle, hidden and ordinary features of heritage which are not usually graspable, which are not meant to be graspable. So which those features, which want to remain outside the remit of capturing and organising and ordering. So how do these features, which evoke kind of wonder or general sense of loss at some point, how do we want to capture them? In order to do this, to understand these questions, the way we started, we actually wanted to move beyond this expert driven heritage narrative, so our team did not follow a linear process of kind of identifying, documenting, recording, cleansing and archiving sound.

To start with, we released actually a public call on social media where we invited people to record any sound of the city that they feel they are drawn towards, that they feel that captures their sense of the city, and they uploaded the sounds in a common Google Drive. The intention was to build a participatory sound archive from the very beginning. We did not want to install any sound capturing technologies in the city, knowing that there is a possibility that it can be

manipulated or can be hacked as symbols of surveillance. And also the scope of the research was quite small at the very beginning, so we did not have those kind of technologies in hand to capture largescale sound. So that was the first method.

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The second was field recording, of course, and our field, our research team went into the field to start recording. We identified one of the oldest neighbourhoods in the city, and started our recording with the craft workshops that we were mostly familiar with, and the street pedlars. So this was one of our primary inspirations. Eventually we moved from this area to other areas as well and gathered sound from other parts of the city. But given the political possibilities of sound, our main inspiration was the bodies from which sounds emerged, as well as the sounds themselves. So we did not want to invisible-ise them by collecting sounds.

Hawkers who walk across the city and sell their wares, we kind of followed them first, we started listening to them closely, and eventually a range of sounds emerged from varieties of product that they sell, to the places of their dwelling. So our process was quite self-generative at this moment, we did not have a list of things that we wanted to capture, rather we just walked around in the city and stumbled upon sounds of vehicles and doctors and buses, announcements in train stations, echoes of people's voices from religious processions or political protests and rallies, prayer halls and bells. Sounds also started to arrive in our Google Drive, we were surprised, we actually received birdsong, sounds of the rain, and contrasting sounds, for instance, machines from factories or ambulance, or haggling over fish in a bazaar or market.

So in a city which is very concretised, we were quite surprised to see the varieties of sound that started to emerge, from nature to culture, to machine, to home spaces actually. Our scope was streets of Kolkata, but the boundary between public/private started to get blurred at some point. So after an initial screening, the sounds were then uploaded to SoundCloud, and I'm going to share with you a couple of sound snippets from SoundCloud. And the intention was to make this open source sound common for everybody to access, mainly because people

contributed in the sound making process, we wanted also to create an open sound archive.

So these sounds, we need to remember that these were the sounds that we uploaded on SoundCloud, they were not separated from the atmospheric sound because it kind of acts against...we wanted to act against the sound of separation, we wanted to capture the atmospheric sound as well as the sound itself, to go beyond the understanding of binaries that we have in sound capture, that there is something which is quite pure and another sound which is quite mixed and noisy. So even though we avoided categorising at this moment, later on for the public exhibition, we actually categorised sounds into certain domains.

Right, let me now try to share with you some of the sounds, hopefully you will be able to hear. I think I clicked on that sound sharing option.

[sounds playing]

This is one of the hawkers. As you can see that somebody might have captured it from their balcony because you can also see or hear the sound of the cooking at the background. We also have a stone carver from the craft workshop.

[sounds playing]

Let's move on to one of the prayer sounds here, I think it's a prayer.

[sounds playing]

So the bell at the background, which is actually the tram sound, but you can hear a lot of noise from the street itself, because as I've said, we did not really clear those sounds. This is another.

[sounds playing]

This is really good, this was the slogans. But you get a kind of a vibe of the kind of sounds that we gathered, and we have, in this SoundCloud, at least 52 sounds.

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So we did talk about two aspects of sound capture, we started off with the participatory call, and then second, we also captured some of the sounds through field recording. But our next challenge was to find traces of sound from the past, to juxtapose them with the present, to address the question of loss that we had overall. But however, there was...there is an absence of sound archive in the city, you can find sounds of the city in some of the cinema, in some of the private collections, but not publicly available sound archive. To revoke this challenge and to meet this question of absence, we thought of turning our attention to the rich tapestry of vernacular literature that we have in the city. So we managed to finalise 10 books, spanning from the 19<sup>th</sup> century to contemporary Kolkata, and through narrative analysis, we outlined six themes which captured Kolkata's sound sensorium, urban sensorium. So you can see... So we really, the project was based on translation a lot, and you have seen, well, I don't want to kind of delete the Bengali part of it, that's why I've kept both Bengali and English, because we were also trying to reach out to city dwellers who are not only English speakers, so there were, of course, participants and audience who are much more acquainted with English, but it was imperative that we keep our local language.

So these six themes that emerged was about lost identity and emerging soundscape of the city, home and the world, and how women hawkers entered the home through the mode of sound, temporality of sound and smell – I'll have a short snippet of that, how sound actually captured the passing of the day, and different times of a day. Inaudibility of more than human sound, and finally, multisensory city, because one aspect of our project was smell as well, which I'm not going to talk today, but we did capture a couple of snippets from the literature where the smell of the city was also expressed. And finally, sounds in poem or poetic sounds, where sounds of the city, delayed rhythms of the city, was captured through poem, and where you have one of these poems.

So with that, let me move onto the snippet where you can see – this is a translation from a quote from a woman and it goes, "Jorasankor Dhare," Jorasankor is one of the neighbourhoods in the old city, where we started our

sound capture. It is from 1944's memoir of Abanindranath Tagore. It depicts the changing nature of the sound and the smell of the city, as they mark the shifting horizons of a day itself. His accounts are so vivid that one can feel the morning creeping into our life, through the re-emergence of the auditory world, after a quiet nightfall. Each time of the day arrives at a sensory atmosphere through the announcement of various modalities of sound and smell, even before the time reveals itself. So I'll just read it out, the translation is not as good as the Bengali writing itself.

"With the fall of the afternoon, a sound rips forward from the corner of the lane. 'Anyone for utensils? Utensils, anyone?'" – this is the sound of the hawker. "A characteristic metallic sound emanates from it, and then it melts away from far horizon. Then comes the bangle and the toy sellers. Evenings are replete with sweet smelling Mogra sellers, who call, 'Anyone wants Mogra?' Their call travels from one end of the lane to another, and slowly fades away."

So this is how our authors have captured the sound and smell of the city, and when we finally ventured into understanding the contemporary sounds, we actually found quite a few sounds have existed, but in people's minds, it was interesting to see that they thought these sounds have been already lost. And although I'm not talking about the analysis at this point, but it's very tempting, and I can't help but to share with you how people constantly went back to their past, to their childhood or their grandmother, thinking, "These are the sounds from the past," when we can definitely hear them, they're kind of hidden in some part of the city, and they're very palpable if you have the ear to understand and hear them.

So the final challenge was to bring this auditory experience captured through field recording, crowdsourcing, and literary narrative, back to the public domain, because we wanted to bring them together and invite the public as well, because that is how we started. We invited them to capture and record sound, and be part of our larger project. So we organised a two day public engagement event, to use it as a form of dissemination. Now a lot can be said about the process of curation itself, from the choices of the venue, to the material that we used for insulation,

to the engagement of the local community itself, but that can be another presentation.

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So I'm moving on to the exhibition itself. So the literary themes contextualised contemporary sounds as well as it raised questions on how do we conceptualise loss? Is it loss if the sounds are always emerging, amplifying and re-inventing themselves? In those two days, 200 people turned up, they engaged with the sound by addressing two questions: What kind of memories do these sounds evoke in your mind? And how do you associate these sounds with the city? We had these small cards, if you can see, not very clearly, but probably a little bit if I'm holding it far. So people started to write their insights on these cards, so the responses then analysed how to approach the main research concern on heritage, which is imagined beyond the dominant visual built heritage, and how do people feel and embody heritage.

Finally, I will close this commentary by reflecting back on the process of data collection and dissemination. Even though we left traces of the recorded and crowdsourced archive through SoundCloud, we also maintained the transitory and fleeting nature of sound through the curated exhibition, which was temporary. We gathered, collected, assembled sound and literary pieces, we played with them over two days, we invited the public, and we created an atmosphere in a specific space and time, but we also dismantled the exhibition, as we established the varied process and nature of everyday heritage, everyday ordinary heritage, which refuses to be reduced to permanency.

Elona M Hoover:

Hello everyone, I'm really glad to be here, and thanks for the invitation, Rishika. So I am going to speak to you today about sensing – I put in brackets, I added “with” – sound, and composing affective practices. And just a little outline of it, I'll propose today just locate the research that this presentation is grounded in, talk to you a little bit about sensing and attending to affective environments, then I'll

just introduce the notion of sound as a technique, then go on to collecting, cataloguing, listening, composing, and then some more on composing, and a few openings.

So I'm talking to you today about work that came out of my doctoral project, that took place between 2016 and 2020, and one of the main questions was how might collective affective experiences, so collective feelings, cultivate ethical relationships with human and non-human others. And so this led me to researching the ethical potential of difficult affects, and I'll say a bit more on that later, and particularly learning with urban commoning projects, so just a little footnote in case urban commoning is something you're not familiar with, the idea is that there are place-based initiatives in cities, mainly, that are kind of about cultivating practice, non-extractive ways of relating with people, with materials, with place, with the earth, inspired by notions of commons, which have been around for a while, there's lots of international solidarity involved, conviviality and relations to land. But the notion of commoning as a verb is newer; the historian Peter Linebaugh wrote about it in 2008, and it's about focusing on practices, rather than commons as a resource, but more about the things that humans and non-humans do in those kind of spaces, so that's the whole footnote.

And so the two specific projects I still, yeah, that I was learning with, were in London, a place called The Commonhouse, which was put up in 2013, mostly by radical left and feminist collective that came out of Occupy and Climate camps, and needed a more...a space where they wouldn't be policed, and also a space to organise in an open way and in a non-partisan way, and so it was a small flat that was rented in East London. Unfortunately, it closed in 2021 following the Covid pandemic, and the inability to meet up and sustain the costs.

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Then in Paris, I was learning with Les Grands Voisins, which was a temporary urbanism project, so a transition urbanism project, as they're known as well. So that was a meanwhile lease on an old hospital site, it was about 3.4 hectares, and much larger in size, between 2015 and 2020, so it was a five year project.

So dancing and attending were kind of the methodological aspect of this work, focused, as I was focusing on affect and collective practices in terms of the research questions, also carrying out a multisided ethnographic approach, these came to be important aspects of the ethnographic research. Also I was being inspired by experimental geographies, which call for kind of a close interrogation of methods and sensitivity to what is relevant, so even the focus on troubling affects or difficult affects, which I mentioned that came out of the ethnographic research process, and also material feminist orientation which I was taking in my work, which involved also respectfully engaged with indigenous and anticolonial knowledge, and also about kind of valuing reason, thought and sensory experiences equally, and those other connected notions, such as attunement, aesthesis, listening, I won't go into those different notions in this presentation, that's also for another presentation, but I'll mention them here, and just put also a footnote about respectful engagement, that is also a very...I've written about this at more length in other places, where it's a very important mention here, for instance, practices of attending, I've written about, and work in country, for example, as practices of knowing based on recognition, conceptual or sensory of more-than-human agency as well. So those kinds of...the broader approach to sensing and attending in my work, and within that was sound, so now I'm going to focus on the sound bit.

So I'll just invite you, it's an invitation, you don't have to do it, just to close your eyes. And if you can exhale completely. And let the air come back in on its own. And then just an invitation to pay attention to the sounds around you. Maybe just notice where there was a sound that affected you more than another. And you can open your eyes. That was a very short little exercise, but it was just to get you into that space of sound as a technique. So kind of as Rishika was saying, working with sound was...I didn't have a particular plan of what I was going to record, or where I was going to do, I was more carried by the ethnographic work, the context I was in, the sounds that we were marking, or, yes, I thought resonated with an issue that I had been thinking about or speaking about with people. And so sound was, yeah, as I said, one of several techniques. But why sound? I didn't put it there, but I'm also a musician, so I have a particular

sensitivity to sound, it's something that affects me as well in a particular way, so...that felt like a really interesting thing to work with as well. It's also... A M Kanngieser wrote a piece on sound and the commons, which I thought was a nice provocation because I was working more with urban commoning, saying that it's a property of all bodies, and it can act as the geophilosophical provocation to and a method for political contestation. And also that as the way also to attending to the more-than-human, so it's interesting also that Rishika said that one of the themes was the inaudibility of the more-than-human, I found that maybe something we can extend. And sounds' relation to place as well, it can magnify liminal features of places, for example, and there are many other reasons, and Rishika mentioned a few, others could add to that, but those are some of the ones that resonated in my work.

Another footnote here about property of all bodies, I just wanted to make a little note of work on oral diversity, that doesn't mean that all bodies here sound equally, and just thanks for Bethan Prosser for alerting me to this work and being...doing great work with the Network on that. So technique – why technique and not method? I just thought I'd say a word on that. I was really taken by the notion of technique as something that...things that are honed through skills or practise, and also pertinent for studying affect. And also as practices of thinking, making, doing, that are needed in the kinds of methods beyond proceduralism in the kind of material feminist approaches, in the more-than-human research. And also, for me, it was about also enacting styles of thinking with the kind of material encounters of my fieldwork, I was kind of paying attention to human relations, but also relations with the environment, with materials, with the space, and I also was quite attentive to...ending up paying quite close attention to concrete as well, in relation to the concrete of the material. So that was...and let's just put a note here about method; it's not to say that I'm in opposition to, or don't want to speak about method, it's just an interesting addition to the discussions around method, as something that requires an application or the idea of getting to a destination.

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And so the approach to sound as a technique, for me was inspired by sonic geographies, by sound art practice, also as a technique, but not as a technical act, and investigating the relationship between sound, setting and listener, I think Rishika really invoked that nicely in that work that she presented. And also closer to kind of a listening body, Hope Mohr calls our listening body. That was kind of the intentions behind also the sound practice. And so the process that I went about which with collecting, cataloguing, listening, composing, if you like, so I did collect 143 sounds during the fieldwork, most of them...there was a few that were gifted to me but most of them were from my own recorder, doing some sound collaborations during my fieldwork was also a way to inspire me and keep thinking of the relevance of working with sound, so we did a listening installation in Les Grands Voisins, and also started a podcast at the Commonhouse. And then I did start cataloguing the three kind of types of sounds that were inspired by the listening installation work we did, which was atmosphere, single sounds and interviews, and also by length and location. And then starting to listen and thinking about the analysis, I just wanted to share an excerpt from the methodology, but as I said, I was not satisfied with the thematic approach I was doing.

In September 2019, I wrote in my research notes, "The kind of analysis I needs to do needs to go beyond the thematic as I know it. I am trying to get a sense of atmosphere here, of sensations, of ethics. These might be different to what I could have coded in a thematic analysis." So I put my headphones on again and tuned into my recorded sounds, and that was really what I did to help work through. So because indeed, the composing affect of practices with the composing act of kind of the metaphorical guide, to a way of approaching my analysis, but also because I was using sounds. Just to give you a sense of what I meant by affective practices, I won't go into these, but I ended up focusing on the three echoes, so I just put a section of, like, the visual outline of my pieces, the echoes were discomfort, a sense of discomfort, feelings of urgency and ineffable affects, so things that were more kind of about enchantment or spiritual. And then each of these were kind of ethnographic stories that were about affective practices, so spaces that shake us up, "à cœur ouvert", which is like open heart, doing things seriously without taking ourselves seriously, and the

crazy...and then urgency was around making manifestos, campaign intensity, and companions in the meanwhile, which was also about relations to chickens. And ineffable affects was putting glitter on a tip, attending to the moon or mixing concrete.

In this process of composing, I spoke, I think, again on the sound here, two types of sound compositions came out of this process, one which was more like echoes, so these were edited field recordings where I also tried to keep the texture, not filter things out, keep also perhaps the sound of the microphone coming on and off, and the manipulation of the object. And I had 12 of these that accompanied text, and so here I have just an image of how it might sit in...the invitation to listen might sit in the text, and I know those...Michael Gallagher and other sonic geographers have also done this and some papers published, and so this was also a source of inspiration.

And the I also had five concrete samples, I call them, which were more kind of compositional, musical or rhythmic elements to them, and the idea was to capture kind of an affective quality and sensations related to five characteristics of concrete environments, which were kind of the broader environments within which these projects were taking part. So these were the five characteristics – so austere, cracks, alchemy, urban nature, and earthbound. Each of these are accompanied with an ethnographic poem, so I won't go into the ethnographic poems here, but I'll focus more on the composition of the first part of the samples, which are the kind of sound bit. So I thought I'd share with you an example of each of those. So the first one is an echo, and this was relating to putting glitter on a tip.

"What's interesting is that in the mass of Les Grands Voisins there are people doing things that are absolutely extraordinary" Andrea tells me, "do you have any examples?", "yeah I have examples: the band! Have you heard them?" I say yes. We turn to the computer in the corner of the office to watch some videos

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[sound playing]

An hour or so into the set someone staggers onto the stage. Glistening grey hair with an unsteady step. Not a random someone. It's Thierry, one of KaceKode's six vocalists. He nearly topples over the front of the stage as his band mates welcome him. A few catch his arms and help his hands find the microphone stand. A steady friend in the shimmer of the stage. Adrien strums a chord on the guitar. The stand sways. Then cavernous passion creeps out of the speakers.

There is a power in this voice, rough from years living in the streets. Something that's hard to capture in words. Something that shines from a swaying stand with rough abysmal radiance. Thierry sings The Pogues, Louis Armstrong and Léo Ferré from a still steady depth. We're not always sure who is going to make the gigs. I remember Pierre telling me other members find this stressful sometimes yet it's amazing, that this guy is up on a stage. There is something miraculous about it.

The band started after Adrien, a luthier who set up his workshop in the early stages of Les Grands Voisins, started giving guitar lessons. Sharing this is central to the project. Initially the group called themselves "les casse-couilles" – which is, "The law breakers." The strong personalities with alcohol addiction and housing problems.

Adrien is also attentive to relations: between musicians and instruments, instrument-maker and materials, musicians and instrument-maker. He recognises wood by its smell – cedar, maple, walnut – and collects materials for his hand-made guitars.

Back in front of the computer, Andrea shares, "So they will tell you, Adrien and others, that they've seen guys recover the light in their eyes, guys whose gaze was lost, out there, and who found it again...with music..." We turn away from the screen "That's incredible... completely crazy actually".

They have volunteers and social workers in Les Grands Voisins, and spend a lot of time and energy bringing joy, playfulness, friendship and desire to

counterbalance difficult conditions and hellish situations, forget them... if only for a while. But “sometimes with all that glitter”, Kim tells me, “we also forget”. When one sings from the heart, sings from steady depths, the pain of here and elsewhere, with those who suffer, have suffered, and continue to suffer, then one sings to heal, and not to forget.

And the second one I wanted to share was...so a different type of composition, which was a sample, which is, “Cracks,” hence the little screenshot of the...I’m a complete, also, I learned how to do a lot of sound editing and things through my research and I’m in no way an expert and have lots of things to develop. So people who are experts might see things in it.

[sound plays]

And that, before the poem reading. Yeah, so that’s just some openings, I guess, sensing with sound – there might be also other approaches to that. Composing affective practices, what else...maybe other things. Really important for me was that also to develop further was the link between sound, listening and poetic practices, and that was interesting as well that Rishika mentioned the poetic as one of the themes. It’s a continued exploration, lots still to learn, skills, techniques, other things, also the accessibility of certain kinds of sound practices, and also for me, how to involve people in the process, in the future. So yeah, there is a desire to do more participatory sound composition work.

[00:43:51]

Matilde Meireles:

So today I’ll introduce the collaborative methodologies and interdisciplinary research behind the multireach online platform, Constellations, experiments in multimedia urban ethnography. The projects results from an interdisciplinary ethnographic study focused on sonic trajectories in and out of Brixton, an area of London marked by conflicting urban social processes. It’s part of...it was a one year ethnographic study and is part of a larger research, as Rishika mentioned, which is an ERC-funded project, Sonorous Cities: Towards a Sonic Urbanism.

So this people-centred study interwove ethnography with sound art and was developed with the aim to better understand cities and urban life through a critical investigation of the sonic conditions of cities, and of people's experiences of urban environments.

The study was led by Dr Christabel Stirling, who I will refer to as Chrissie, and collaboratively developed with myself. The study looked at how urban sound environments may be experienced differently, and as such, the ability to seek and gain access to difference was essential. We selected a location where sociological factors such as ethnicity, class and age were highly differentiated, as well as places of social and cultural tension, where urban renewal and gentrification were in motion. We chose Brixton in south-west London for several reasons: Firstly, it's historically diverse, and encompasses multiple flows of migration, notable African-Caribbean, Portuguese, Polish, Latin American and East African, and is also sustaining a mixed age, socioeconomic and gender demographic. Secondly, in the last 20 years, it has seen a rapid gentrification and consequently it has been marked by displacement based on class and race. It is also a site of historic and contemporary resistance to urban corporatisation. And lastly, Brixton is a site with a prominent musical history, stemming from postwar African-Caribbean settlement, and British Reggae culture, and an example of how musical histories get inscribed into built environment processes of touristification and culture regeneration.

So rather than approaching Brixton as a unified neighbourhood, we focused on several carefully chosen sites across Brixton, with different sound worlds emerging from them, and this included Brixton Mall, Brixton Plaza, Brixton Station Road, Windrush Square, Brixton Village, Brixton Underground, and the Electric Avenue. Fieldwork with participants at these sites not only entailed understanding more about their experience of sound in and around Brixton, but also involved inviting them to document their journey and movement to other parts of London, as a way of grasping more about their personal sound worlds and sonic relationships to other domestic, cultural and public spaces. Brixton was conceptualised as a forcefield of relations, whereby site-based research was

supplemented and enriched by the technique of following relations, as argued by Marcus, so tracing people's sonic trajectories into and out of Brixton, from/to other parts of London, and tapping into flows that already exist allowed us to access other parts of the city, adding a mobile and multisited aspect to the fieldwork.

The ethnographic study encompassed participant observation as key in subsidiary sites, informal discussion with people living and working in Brixton, 40 semi-structured interviews with a broad range of participants, audio recordings, participation in analysis in and analysis of local neighbourhood forums, experimental participant-centred live methods, such as audio diaries, sound tours, hand drawn maps, as argued by Back and Puwar. These methods were conducted in dialogue with extensive systematic field recordings of various sites, involving both stationary and mobile recordings made at different times of the day, also systematic timelapse filming of selected sites, sites recorded as well at different times of the day, and lastly, multimedia creative research, in a form of an online platform led by myself.

Brixton is a highly charged area with a complex history of displacement and this is sense in reflecting how belonging is tensely expressed and perceived. And so as two white middle class women, academics representing Oxford University, we were definitely not exempt of profiling, and we were often asked questions such as, "Do you live in Brixton? How long have you lived here? Have you moved recently? Why Brixton?" And these very engaged debates made us realise that suspicion towards us needed addressing. It heightened our sense about who is entitled to Brixton and who can claim belonging here. To assert the appropriate fieldwork methodologies, Chrissie and I started by exploring what could happen when we intertwine our individual practices. We repetitively navigated the sites together, as it seemed more intuitive and informal. It also raised curiosity, and particularly at the start of fieldwork, in a more intimate or male-dominated space, spaces like the Brixton Plaza, like, "Who are these women? What are they doing here?" So repetition led to familiarity and we slowly became part of the routines, which gave us a renewed sense of confidence and acceptance.

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During this time, we were also carrying out participant observation, hanging out, and getting to know people, experimenting with individual sustained modes of listening, and recording in key locations. With collaborative modes of listening, we went with our microphones as well as recording and documenting the various locations with audio and video. These exploratory modes enabled us to be situated, immersed in the field sites, and experience these places while being sensed in return, to slowly become part of the fabric of these sites. We started by using Brixton Station Road as a testing ground, walking the street at different times of the day and different times of the week, while recording the audio with a lapel mic attached to a winter coat, and made timelapse videos with a GoPro held at chest height, so kind of roughly here.

These focused multimodal and critical methods provided a visceral access to the street, it also allowed us to retrace our experiences and compare perspectives. However, we found that the technology was too present and caused discomfort to some of the Brixton Station Road users, particularly the historically surveilled communities. Going through this process informed how to retain some of these documental aspects, whilst advising a more responsive approach, catered to each of the different sites.

So alongside, we also designed a range of approaches to solicit participation, as well as deepening the people-centred work across sites. So this included forming trusting relationships on site with contacting key local community representatives, and launching an online call for participants through a signup page hosted in the Son Cities website. This information was disseminated through our social media and focused on local forums, such as the Next Door app. And these different approaches guaranteed a varied range of participants and people mainly living and working locally, but also with a strong relation or history to Brixton, but currently living elsewhere in London.

In addition to the interviews and participant observation, we also employed a range of experimental live methods, as I said earlier. This included activities as, “Draw this sounds of your neighbourhood,” and audio diaries. So Chrissie invited participants to create a mind map of the sounds and music they noticed and

associated with their local area, and then in conversation, critically discuss the meanings of their decision making, as previously she experimented in other projects. Participants were also invited to make audio diaries using a small zoom film recorder with a Lavalier mic, and this activity involved technical introduction to the equipment, to field recording in general, and its ethics. Then equipment was loaned to the participants for two to three weeks, and sometimes more, if they showed interest. And during this time, participants were invited to record the sounds of their everyday lives and if comfortable, make commentaries guiding the recordings, and at the end of each activity, we shared the recordings with each of the participants. The activities also allowed us to follow participants' traces and journeys by analysing their drawings in conversation with them, and by individually listening back and collectively reflecting on their audio diaries. Through them, we got to know the types of sounds people were more attuned to, felt threatened by, the history of their neighbourhoods and how they related to concepts such as belonging and safety, for example.

In the meantime, while activities with participants were ongoing, I systematically used sound and where possible, timelapse video, to explore the selected sites. The process has allowed us to complement participants' work by revealing the wider patterns of... various sites, and how this changed throughout the times of the day and days of the week. This is an example of an excerpt of the montage of Brixton Station Road. So recording in public space is an activity that rarely passes unnoticed, and particularly in sites with such a strong history of extraction, such as Brixton, therefore it was paramount that to take the learnings from the work we've done with participants in our initial methodology applied to Brixton Station Road, it helped select appropriate recording equipment to respond to each site. I tried to keep my presence noticeable, but attenuated and informal. The set up included a Zoom H5 field recorder, to record audio, and a GoPro camera placed on a small tripod to record the timelapse videos. Each of these sites was explored from different perspectives in sound and image. In sites where we were recording image, particularly on a systematic basis seemed invasive, I or we, as we did this often collaboratively, made recordings, made mobile sound

recordings using microphones, and made an occasional photograph with our phones.

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These methodologies provided us with ways to address the discomfort felt at the start of the fieldwork and how this shifted throughout. These shared processes also allowed us to benefit from our background differences, explore disciplinary differences, as well as fill possible gaps between perceived realities, our experiences of the sites and their representations. So all activities, as I was saying, were both individual and then in collaboration between Chrissie and I, which offered a sense of immersion as well as an overarching and detailed sense of the field work.

So Chrissie and I have different degrees of familiarity with Brixton and these various degrees of insider and outsiderism inevitably affected the research as well as our positionality in relation to Brixton, the various sites we chose, and the people we met along the way. So I'm Portuguese and I've lived in the UK for 12 years, but I've never been to Brixton until the field work. On the other hand, Chrissie's background and nationality is English, she grew up all her life in South London and Brixton, and as such is widely familiar with the area through her lived experience as well as extensive ethnographic work done in South London. So these different backgrounds contributed greatly to balancing perspectives, while allowing us to fluidly negotiate and recalibrate our positionalities across sites. As an example, being fluent in Portuguese provided access to the Portuguese café, one of the busiest cafes on Brixton Station Road, and also one of the oldest businesses on the street. This allowed us to tap into the various communities using the café, including, of course, the Portuguese community, but also the Eritrean community that shared the time between the café and Brixton Plaza. It also provided earlier in the field work, access to the history of the street, from the perspective of a longstanding business owner, which has accompanied and been impacted by the many changes happening on the street over the last 20 years.

This process offered a different insight into the intricate history of the street, and it also shifted how we related and perceived the street. It helped us identify who we should talk to to complement the shared perspectives, as well as observe how people working at the café changed their relation with us as time progressed, and in that way, becoming a regular customer made us relatable and changed future interactions with additional participants.

So the platform was designed as a multimodal experience, and sort of broad, spanning cartography, deeply rooted in people's experiences. And the project is, to a great extent, an entanglement of our practices, and together, we curated and presented materials generated during the fieldwork, often inaccessible in a more conventional ethnography or ethnographic outputs. The platform is organised by location and the 32 locations have the same layout. The curated fieldwork materials are displayed in two main sections, to convey people's nuanced, plural and mood to layer the experience of sounds. Additionally, each anonymised participant is identifiable by a circle of a different colour. In this way, as we travel through the various locations, we can follow each participant's movements in relation to the wider city. So section one is emerging themes and ideas, and it pivots around people's experience, conveyed by the multiple, non-linear text-based narratives, made of excerpts taken from conversations and interviews with the project participants. These are tied together through a series of recurring themes, which emerge from Chrissie's in-depth fieldwork analysis. For additional context, the narrative is often complemented by field notes from Chrissie and myself, and users can move between locations and themes, where the participants' comments reveal connections.

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The second section is a multimedia content of the area and includes a selection of creative materials, collected during the fieldwork, that are relevant to the various main themes. These materials complement the interview excerpts and provided additional perspectives. They include participants' audio diaries, and additional documentation by myself and Chrissie, such as the systematic

recordings, made with audio and video or photographs of the locations. I made this small video to kind of give you a quick idea.

[video plays]

So when discussing cartography, Mishuana Goeman, a scholar of native literature, geography and feminism proposed a move away from romanticised notions of resistance. Instead, Goeman presents a map as a potential active apparatus, that can be structured in spatial domination and epistemological violence, as highlighted by Bessner and Goeman. If a possible way to alter narratives of power is a move towards inclusive sonic perspective, we first need to blur advantage points. By presenting multiple entangled narratives of unheard communities, we acknowledge the world is multilayered, multifaceted, polyphonic and interdependent, and as suggested by Kanngieser and Peter Wright, how we listen, who we listen to, why and to what end should be key questions embedded in any act of recording. Listening, at the same time, to and with, are ways to actively take in what's around us by being present and receptive. This gesture can instigate an essential critical reflection about the world and how we can better understand the relationships within it. Field recording carries with it a baggage of a complex history, but nevertheless, the act of recording as a caring gesture is critical at the forefront of transformation and new understandings of coexistence.

[End of Transcript]