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Sensobiography and Tangible Music: Theoretical and Methodological Approaches

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This article investigates how listening to music is connected with our bodily and multisensory relationship to the world around us. Particular attention is paid to the tangibility and intangibility of music, including its diverse platforms as a source of multi- and intersensory information, and the use of media consisting of both technical devices and human bodies/ minds which are repeatedly involved in the process. Methodologically, the research draws on the concepts of sensobiography and sensobiographic walks and interviews supported by a listening walk method. Utilising empirical fieldwork data, the article elaborates issues of sensory turn and puts sensory turn into a dialogue with theoretical and methodological approaches from ethnomusicology and sound studies. Theoretical approaches are supported by empirical evidence from previous research addressing the sensory experiences of diverse generations and how they relate to and overlap with each other.

Keywords: sensory turn; tangibility; listening; sound studies; sensobiography

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Introduction

Although often considered to be intangible and ephemeral, music is tied to varying physical media. In the wake of the invention of recording technology, musical phenomena became tangible. Recorded sound was no longer "a fragile, almost mythical entity" but "information", since it could be amplified and broadcast (Katz 2004, 9; Milner 2009, 60).

Technological applications and innovations transform ontological ideas of what music is. In the early days of the recording industry, recordings were perceived as representations of music, whereas now these representations *are* music, and live music performances are evaluated through diverse media such as radio, phonograms or contemporary sound streaming technologies (see Bennett 1980; Milner 2009, 12). In the popular discourse on technology, these categories of live and recorded music are mutually exclusive, but also socially and historically constructed.

Music making is always based on some kind of technology, especially when technology is understood in a broad sense as not only machines, but as practices and ways of organising production and consumption, which involve various relationships between technical apparatuses and human actors (Théberge [1999] 2006, 209; Auvinen 2018). Technology, referring to the ways in which sounds were and are produced and reproduced, consists of music stored in human bodies, stored through notation and finally stored on phonogram, disc or tape and retrieved mechanically, digitally and electronically (Frith 1998, 226–227).

Apart from producing and reproducing sounds, technology covers music consumption and its discourses. Twenty years ago, Steven Feld (2000, 175) discussed the fantasies and realisations of music and pointed out how technology makes diverse forms of music actually or potentially transportable and how the "ubiquitous label 'world music'" has been nat-

uralised as part of these processes. Contemporary technologically mediated sound worlds are simultaneously "local and translocal", encompassing one hundred years of diverse human history.

Against the backdrop outlined above, the primary objective of this article is to examine how music's tangibility and intangibility are intertwined with multisensoriality and a sense of place. The examination pays special attention to the use of mobile music, that is, the use of music through mobile devices, in three European cities, thus concentrating on listening to music and how it is inextricably connected to our bodily and sensorial relationship with our physical, technological and cultural environments.

The research leans empirically on preliminary results of the research project SENSOTRA, Sensory Transformations and Transgenerational Environmental Relationships in Europe, 1950–2020 (2018), which seeks to create a new understanding of temporal and cultural changes in people's sensory environmental relationships. Carried out in the medium-sized cities of Turku (Finland), Ljubljana (Slovenia), and Brighton (UK), the project focuses on cultural transformations of the sensory environment through using grounded, transgenerational and ethnographic research methods. Theoretically and methodologically, SENSOTRA draws on sensobiography and sensobiographic walks, referring to walks carried out jointly by the researchers and research participants (Järviluoma 2019). Accompanied by one or several researchers, two participants walk together on self-selected routes, while the walks are documented with a digital sound recorder and a video camera. During these walks, the participants are encouraged to discuss how they relate to their sensorial environments including their use of contemporary media technology. Walks carried out simultaneously with two participants, representing different generations, are expected to create a "shifting space-time for interactions among diverse memories discovered by the participants as they move together through urban situations" (Tiainen, Järviluoma & Aula 2019).

Theoretical in orientation, this article explores music and its diverse platforms, above all, as a source for multi- and intersensory information. In addition to examining these questions through the preliminary results and the research methodology of SENSOTRA, I also consider them in relation to a case study belonging to another research project that was carried out in a shopping mall sonic environment in 2017 (Kontukoski & Uimonen 2019). Both SENSOTRA and the case study are connected to issues concerning ethnomusicological interpretations of how knowledge is acquired and constructed in the research process by using walking as

the key research method. These approaches will be supported by empirical evidence from previous research dealing with sensory experiences of diverse generations and how they relate to and overlap with each other (Uimonen 2019a; Sensotra 2018).

Theoretically, the article sheds new light on the relationship between the senses and music and on the field of sensory studies, referring to "a cultural approach to the study of the senses and a sensory approach to the study of culture" (Howes 2013). This approach is placed in dialogue with theoretical and methodological approaches from ethnomusicology, sound anthropology and sound studies, seeking to further elaborate them in the context of sensobiographic walking.

The aforementioned topics are scrutinised predominantly in the context of mediated music. More precisely, music is understood here as something which has been historically tangible, but has later been discursively constructed as intangible due to technological transformations in recording technology and music-listening devices related especially to the emergence of digital technologies. Questions of sensing, movement, mediation and tactility are connected to the multisensoriality of music and the transforming cultural uses of technology. After introducing how various places of music are related to sensobiographic walks and to research approaches within the sensory turn, the topic of music technology and sensory mediations will be addressed more closely. These article sections on tangible/intangible music, and sensobiographic and listening walks, are followed by a discussion on sonic environments and the ambiance of place. Finally, the concluding section summarises the main findings and arguments of the article.

Places of music and sensobiographic walking as a method

Sensory turn challenges and partly questions the linguistic turn and its wide-ranging influence on the humanities and social sciences since the 1960s and 1970s. This challenge includes a focus on the social life of the senses and how this not only complements previous paradigms of cultural interpretation, such as approaching cultures as texts, discourses, worldviews or pictures, but also contests conventional theories of representation. The senses mediate the relationship between self and society, mind and body, idea and object (Bull, Gilroy, Howes & Kahn 2006; Howes 2013).

Sensory turn is interwoven with technological developments and addresses them also in relation to ethnographical and ethnomusicological research. The use of tape recorders and video cameras in the late 20th century gave anthropological knowledge "an audiovisual cast", thus further challenging the language-based and text-based methods of previous decades. This enhanced the notion that we make sense of the world not only through language but also through our senses and their extension in the form of diverse media. These transforming tactile practices and perceptions have shaped the transition from pre-modern to modern culture (Classen 2005, 2012; Howes 2013).

Sensobiographic walking draws from the scholarly tradition of collecting qualitative research data by walking (Tixier 2002; Järviluoma, Kytö, Truax, Uimonen & Vikman 2009). This ethnographic method is deployed to examine embodied and site-specific sensory experiences and remembering. Walking enables access to experiences in a shared situation, and when carried out with an ageing and a young participant, as in the SENSOTRA project, the walks enable a transgenerational mode of investigation. The pairs undertake joint walks with one or several researchers, with one participant taking the lead within each walk. Walks are documented with a digital recorder and a video camera, which are attached to the research participants' clothing. After the walk, a short reflective interview is carried out, and approximately one third of the pairs will be selected for a dialogic deep interview.

During the sensobiographic walks, the "audiovisual cast" was taken into account by applying adequate equipment for recorded documentation. The videoed walks were later presented to those participants who took part in deep interviews conducted after the walks. Listening to and watching field material together with the participants was used in order to elicit memories and give the participants an opportunity to further comment on and contribute to data collecting (B2 2019).

Participants' own use of media is included in the SENSOTRA research by scrutinising especially the role and use of digital technologies in how the participants obtain and share sensory experiences of and in urban space. This research interest resonates with the ideas of musical tangibility and intangibility, and with how, for over a century, the modern era in music listening has been very much characterised by concrete sound platforms and their mobility, enabling transformation of the listener's relationship with the overall sensory environment. Since their invention, tangible music platforms have created new sensory hierarchies by prioritising the sense of hearing. They have enabled the use of music

in selected environments, and often reduced the multisensory live music experience to that enjoyed predominantly through the sense of hearing. At the same time, these platforms create novel sensory and experiential environments by challenging the existing sensory order. According to some of the SENSOTRA findings, participants' portable record players with "amazingly long battery-life" (S 2018) transformed not only many baby boomers' music consumption in the Turku area and but also the sonic environments of the city (Uimonen 2020a).

Sensory environments should be documented and explored with contemporary urban ethnographical and ethnomusicological research methods in the context of the sensory turn, since different music genres and their appropriate venues are not self-evidently composed only of auditory information. Music always needs a place where it is performed, listened to, and experienced (see e.g. Frith 2010; Webster 2011). Accordingly, places are an integral part of the performance and experiences of music. Apart from sound, the venues are saturated with and composed of multisensory information, be it the fragrance of incense in a church or a fully-packed rock club that accommodates a dense crowd of people, sweat, cigarette smoke and spilled alcohol on the floor sticking to shoe soles. An ageing sensobiographic walker participating in SENSOTRA described entering a mid-1950s dancehall in Brighton as follows: "And the exciting thing was, when you went in, you didn't go upstairs, it was a lift. […] So, you come in out of perhaps a cold evening where it'll rain or whatever, get into the lift and as the lift opened at the top you were hit by this beautiful cacophony of lights and sounds and pretty girls and music… It was amazing! It was like going to another world!" (A 2019).

Venues composed of sensory information may be drastically different from one another. Thus, they also construct different intersensorial musical experiences, understood as "multi-directional interaction of the senses and of sensory ideologies […]" (Howes 2005, 9). This interrelation and transmutation of the senses can take many forms, such as cooperation/opposition, hierarchy/equality, fusion/separation, and simultaneity/sequentiality (Howes 2013). Auditory sense is given priority in classical music concerts premised on attentive listening, in which the audience may have been specifically advised not to wear strong perfume, which might distract from the act of listening. The opposition of the senses was taken to extremes by Theodor Adorno who stated that opera as a visual music genre is best heard from recordings, without seeing the costumes and contemporary staging (Katz 2004, 21), thus deliberately discarding

the multisensory aspects making up the opera experience in the first place.

When collecting research material and knowledge on sensorial environments, the sensobiographic walk is a more dynamic way compared to more sedentary methods of doing ethnographic research. It focuses on the interrelations of the body, place and motion, and endorses an understanding that bodies do not only *stay in place, move within a place*, or *move between places*, but they also *carry culture(s) into places* (Casey 1996, 34). As a research method, sensobiographic walking draws from the changing perceptions and memories of the participants. Steven Feld's statement, "as place is sensed, senses are placed; as places make sense, senses make place" (Feld 1996, 91), leads to the conclusion that sensed environments are not only interpreted, but actively produced within the triangular relationship between a sensing individual, the environment and sensorial information. This construction of place is constant and never-ending: "places not only *are*, they *happen*" (Casey 1996, 19, 24–27; Uimonen 2020a).

This was described by a sensobiographic walker in Brighton who used Spotify playlists to accompany him while cycling, and occasionally "listen[ed] to Amelie soundtrack… move around in bicycle in Paris. Very quaint… 'Oh! I'm in Paris'". This somewhat romanticised notion of an environment found typically in French films was intentionally transported to the streets of Brighton, thus transforming the English coastal city into a movie-like milieu, with the cyclist becoming part of the scene (Uimonen 2020b).

As a two-stage phenomenon, perception involves the reception of sense data and the organisation of these data into collectively held and enduring representations. It is not executed by organising sensations, but takes place "in circuits that cross-cut the boundaries between brain, body, and world". A contrast exists between the temporality and the durability of sensations, as sensations are tied to a particular moment that will never recur as such. If experiences are to be shared, they need to be talked about, which must be done by means of concepts expressed in words (Ingold 2000, 157–159, 244), although sensory experiences need not always be represented solely verbally or literally; they can also be communicated by facial expressions or other bodily gestures.

Based on these insights, individual sensing and its public and social representations are always intertwined. A subject is encultured, which means that their relationship to the environment is constructed personally, communally and socially. A sensing individual's consciousness is con-

structed in the bodily and sensory world, but is soon thereafter subjected to interaction with shared cultural and social possibilities and restraints for communicating sensory experiences (Uimonen 2020b). Furthermore, while sensations may be private and individual, their representations are public and social.

As stated above, the sensed and experienced environment is in constant flux and does not stay the same from one situation to the next. This flux can be momentarily stopped by representing it in more enduring forms of communication such as speech, written text, or by using other platforms that preserve sensorial information (see also Uimonen 2005, 42). The relationship between an individual's experience and its public representation is reciprocal. Individual consciousness is based on the body and the senses, but at the same time it is socially constructed and mediated by diverse platforms and their communal and social uses.

During sensobiographic walks, diverse ethnographic and ethnomusicological histories are constructed. The processes of remembering while walking are connected to places and memories, and thus become part of multi-layered urban environments. Routes which are geographically identical are seldom the same with different walkers or even with the same walker on different occasions, as underlined by a Turku-based sensobiographic walker: "You somehow tend to dramatise this. You are creating yourself a narrative, which includes the route and the order of things. When you're walking the same route again mentally, it brings new topics to your mind" (S 2018). The participant explains how he engaged in a mental exercise by creating a narrative about his walk, and how this made him realise that the route would not stay the same even if it was physically identical.

Music technology and sensory mediations

Auditory and visual representations of mechanical, electro-acoustic and digital sound production, reproduction and dissemination have been widely discussed in scholarly literature since the foundational works of Benjamin ([1931] 2008b) and Adorno ([1938] 2002). Musicology, ethnomusicology, sound anthropology, soundscape studies and sound studies have contributed conceptually not only to understanding diverse uses of music but also to examining how these uses are having a profound effect

on the senses, including, but also exceeding, the sense of hearing (see e.g. Feld 1996; Järviluoma & Wagstaff 2002; Novak & Sakakeeny 2015).

Technologies have repeatedly prompted new or reconfigured existing discourses about recorded and live music. Some of these discourses are closely linked to mobile digital applications and understandings of environmental relationships. On the one hand, there are discourses based on the assumption about an essential and authentic experience and technology as a corrupting force; on the other hand, there is a glorified notion of liberation provided by music technology for musicians and audiences alike. The positioning of live music performance as the essential form of music often presents technology as a dishonest falsifier of musical performance and its experience. However, these mutually exclusive notions are socially and historically constructed, usually emphasising technology itself, not necessarily the practices including diverse uses of equipment and different ways of organising production and consumption. Overall, these differing positions can be regarded as a continuum from Adorno's "nostalgic cultural elitism" to "the progressive politics of Benjamin" (Théberge [1999] 2006, 208–210, 214).

Phonograph effects are manifestations of sound recording's influences. Compared to the pre-phonographic era, they transformed music production and consumption in terms of music's tangibility, portability, visibility/invisibility, repeatability, receptivity, manipulability and temporality (Katz 2004, 3, 8–47; see also Taylor 2001). The use of different formats, starting from phonograph cylinders and gramophone records and continuing to digital platforms, has attached music to tangible objects and devices. After the introduction of digital dissemination and music streaming, scholarly questions concerning the tangibility of music and its relationship to sensory transformation and discursive practices must be rearticulated. Although digital music does not seemingly require tangible analogue platforms any longer, it cannot be transformed from digital bytes to vibrating air molecules without the use of tangible devices and interfaces.

The tactile use of any digital music is facilitated by interfaces often similar to other applications or software. Because of this, the act of listening can differ fundamentally from historically earlier forms: contrary to analogue-era music platforms used predominantly for music listening, music that is listened to via digital interfaces has to compete with other predominantly visual and auditory media contents. This idea is hardly unique, but it would deserve further elaboration in the context of our daily music listening practices in the midst of contemporary media affordances of social media platforms, news feeds and so on.

Along with tangible and intangible uses of music, the transformation of platforms is having an effect not only on our sense of hearing but also, more holistically, on our bodies immersed in a multisensory world. While using headphones, listening to music is interwoven with tactility, bodily sensations and the environment. In terms of renegotiating sensory hierarchies, the use of headphones needs to be adjusted in accordance with multiple circumstances. While walking on a busy street, a Brighton-based sensobiographic walker described the challenges of listening to music and using earphones when cycling: "I put one in, in my left ear. I keep my right ear clear, it's my traffic ear, you know, you can hear things coming" (B 2019). Not only the fit of the actual device to the users' ear canal, but also their usability and sound level need to be personally modified in relation to diverse situations of moving through and sensing the given environment.

Apart from software updating, the tactility of contemporary digital music platforms remains largely the same, at least when compared to analogue-era music consumption devices, which were tangibly rather diverse and required special competences. Opening the plastic box of a compact cassette necessitated skills to handle it with one hand, just like the tightening of a tangled tape by winding the reel with a pencil. The smell and feel of a brand-new cassette composed of plastic and cellophane was considered a special experience, thus making music consumption a multisensory experiential process and underlining the fact that the cassette was more than just another medium for music listening only (Kurkela, Kilpiö & Uimonen 2015).

These multisensorial competences are made visible in video clips published on YouTube (2018), in which children are asked to use analogue-era devices such as a Sony Walkman, while these may appear to them as clumsy, perplexing, and somewhat challenging to use. In addition to the entertainment value of these excerpts, they also manage to reveal the more serious undercurrents related to transforming media use. When one media is replaced with another, the individual and social ways of using tactile platforms also vanish, including their cultural and social history, along with innovative, unusual, and in some case subversive uses. In the late 1960s, LPs and portable record players were utilised by teenagers who used to hang out on the hill by the Turku Arts Museum. According to a Turku-based sensobiographic walker "It was a barter economy. Then there was someone who nicked them [LPs] from the department store and traded them". The LPs were later recorded on compact cassettes to a significant extent (S 2018).

Coined by Stephen Feld, the concept of schismogenesis describes "progressive mutual differentiation" which can be found in issues such as musical ownership, fandom, and musical styles. In relation to discourses and practices of World Music, music technology has empowered traditionally powerless people and strengthened local music practices. However, the transformation from representation to reproduction in music creates new networks for social organisation (Feld 1994; see also Greene & Porcello 2005). To paraphrase Jacques Attali (1985, 32), "The network is no longer a form of sociality, an opportunity for spectators to meet and communicate, but rather a tool making the individualised stockpiling of music possible on a huge scale." This context directs critical attention to the process of splitting, as well as to the statuses of 'copy' and 'authenticity.'

Music reproduction is associated with fundamental questions of music ontology: How is "music" defined and evaluated culturally and aesthetically in the contexts of music production and consumption? The notion of recording consciousness refers to consciousness defining the "social reality" of popular music, since live performances need to "approximate to the sounds which inhabit this consciousness" (Bennett 1980; Middleton 1990, 88). Thus, like processes described with the term schismogenesis, recording consciousness is an aesthetic and political act: the recording studio and the diverse possibilities it offers give "rise to a variety of musical directions, depending on intention, convention and market" (Middleton 1990, 89).

Detaching sounds from a specific environment and attaching them to another raises questions about how media representations are moulding our conceptions of and sensory relationships to music. Instead of alienating its users from bodily experience or replacing actual reality with virtual reality, the uses of media and the ways in which they mediate our being and shape our processes of living are tightly interwoven within daily reality. Digital media represent a fundamental part of their users' environment, prompting new bodily and social behaviour patterns and reconfiguring lived time and attention, and novel ways of feeling and thinking (Sensotra 2018).

Transgenerational urban music experiences

The sensobiographic walking method produces data on the embodied and technology-related experiences and recollections of research parti-

cipants in relation to particular sensory environments. During the walks, the act of remembering the past becomes dynamic and situational. Sensobiography was inspired by the concept of topobiography, referring to the description of a life-course and how it relates to lived places (Karjalainen 2009, 31; Tiainen, Järviluoma & Aula 2019). While remembering is thinking, at the same time it is "movement in the field of time and place", where inner and outer worlds are in constant dialogue with each other (Karjalainen 1997, 236).

According to Tim Ingold "[…] every inhabitant lays a trail. Where inhabitants meet, trails are entwined, as the life of each becomes bound up with the other" (2009, 33; Aula 2018, 81). This entwinement was constructed discursively in Turku, where the challenges and possibilities of the aforementioned grass-roots barter economy, subversive uses of music, control of music copyrights, and digital modes of music dissemination were discussed with the research participants in the context of the contemporary media environment. A young sensobiographic walker shared her experience of temporary use of a David Bowie song in order to advise musicians on composing background music for her video production. A few minutes after uploading a video on YouTube and sharing the password with three users, she received an email stating that "according to our interpretation" copyrighted material was used in her work (E 2018).

The term "media generation" refers to media content that unites and divides different generations. It also refers to media technology and how it is being used, including generational "self-understanding as a media generation which is based on their media biography" (Herkman & Vainikka 2012; Bolin 2017, 42). The concept is somewhat overly generalising in the context of varied uses of music media and manifestations of music consumption. Especially musical genres or other music-related factors such as sound quality are seldom appreciated unanimously, as pointed out by yet another sensobiographic walker: "Music does not have to be clean, and you cannot make punk rock vinyl clean no matter what equipment you are using" (M 2018). Also, the criteria for what determines good sound quality might not be the same among different generations or within the same generation. Some contemporary recordings are produced with excessive volume and lack of dynamics, which sounds inferior to uncompressed music, but at the same time enables them to be heard in noisy environments. This excessive compression can be considered as the norm among the younger generation or some of its representatives (Milner 2009, 282, 354).

Media generations and their uses of music are also reflected in environmental relationships in urban settings – something that has come to the fore during the sensobiographic walks. Memories are connected to diverse practices and contexts where music is circulated in material and immaterial forms (Brusila, Johnson & Richardson 2016, 4). A young record collector remembered the city centre of Turku quite differently than his ageing fellow-walker. His memories related to the locations of contemporary and former record shops and how economic and social relations were and are organised in these premises where "music fans" congregate. The act of acquiring music in the past was considered sensorially somewhat different from how it is today. "First you felt the tactile object and made your buying decision after checking out the record cover or perhaps you could make up your mind in accordance with the record company label" (M 2018). The act of buying, per se, was considered socially pleasant – or occasionally not-so-pleasant: according to this participant, some of the record shop keepers were notoriously rude, but "you got used to that" (M 2018).

Transmitting music and attaching it to analogue platforms has been described by the provocative term, schizophonia, coined mainly for pedagogical purposes (Schafer 1977). Drawing from this term, the notion of transphonia has been developed by the author of this article in order to underline the *processual nature* of transmitted and relocated sounds, particularly when studying the reception of music. The concept refers to the mechanical, electroacoustic and digital storing, moulding, reproducing and transmitting of sounds. Most of all, the concept was developed to direct scholarly attention to past and current music performance practices in terms of multiple individual and social meanings given to these practices, which far exceed the original contexts of the sounds (Uimonen 2019b).

The phenomenon of transphonia is not only auditory but also inherently multisensory and thoroughly physical; music has voluntary and involuntary effects on listeners' bodily movements and on how they experience their environments while listening to music when on the move. A Turku sensobiographic walker used in-ear headphones while walking to work, commuting on the bus and exercising, but made clear that the given environment and the purpose of his walk affect his use of music: "While commuting, yes, but not when walking in nature. It would be *inappropriate* if in the forest you'd be listening to some synthwave music" (M 2018, italics by the author). His music selections based on personal preferences were affected by what he considered to be culturally appro-

priate behaviour, thus underlining the notion that senses are bearers of culture and therefore always subject to moral regulation, and that sensory values also are social values (Howes 2019, 22).

Personal audio player users re-spatialise their environment through a solipsistic aestheticisation of the environment enabled by music, thus creating an aesthetically pleasing world for themselves (see Hosokawa 1984; Bull 2012, 199). Arguably, the consumeristic pleasures that are often based on external auditory or visual stimuli consumed passively are transformed by personal audio player users to acts of control targeted at transforming their sense of the environment. Whereas the urban experience is often mediated by the advertising technologies of commodity culture, personal audio player culture, at least partly, reverses this phenomenon (Bull 2012, 206).

The aestheticisation of the environment was taken to another level by a 30-year-old sensobiographic walker in Turku who as an artist practises street photography and listens to music "almost all the time to block out the city sounds". She described that as a street photographer she is wearing a "bundle of equipment, so the ears are covered with music and things are observed through the camera lens." She follows people and their actions and how these all relate to "bigger issues of the world, you know, to put it simply" (F 2018). For this research participant, music helps in "producing environments that afford concentration" (DeNora 2000, 58). The use of the earphones also signifies visually her desire to be left alone in order to work undisturbed in urban surroundings (Uimonen 2005, 219).

The same sensobiographic walker had accustomed herself to daily challenges and possible health threats caused by other pedestrians, bicycles, cars, and buses with her sense of hearing partly or completely blocked out. It wasn't until the utterly shocking occurrence of a terrorist attack at the Turku marketplace in 2017 that her daily routines of listening were disrupted, making her aware of possible serious threats and health hazards associated with the use of mobile media. Her friend advised her to restrict her use of the personal audio player. "'From now on F, just do not listen to your in-ear headphones. You just walk without them. This is what we all do here in London. […] Just walk a bit smarter from now on' […] I don't know, I would not be scared in Turku" (F 2018).

Interpreting Sonic Environments and the Ambiance of Place

Musical sounds are the result of human actions in different places. Research involving place, music and listeners should thus pay attention to the diverse cultural meanings attached to these elements and aspects and to the spatial and temporal conditions of physical signal propagation in the various places where people carry out their quotidian or festive routines. This can be accomplished by understanding given auditory cultures as music practicing cultures consisting of "ideas, actions, institutions, material objects – everything that has to do with music" (see Titon 2009, 4).

Music creates ambiances, which are characterised by terms such as multimodality, three-dimensionality, and immersion. Ambiances concern the ways people sense and feel a place. Every ambiance has its own specific mood, expressed in the material presence of things and embodied in the life of city dwellers. Ambiance involves the lived experience of people as well as the built environment of a particular place where social, spatial and physical aspects interrelate and are articulated together (Thibaud 2003; 2011; see also Augoyard & Torgue 2008, 4).

In winter 2017, an ethnographic case study on shopping mall music was carried out and reported by the author of this article and his colleague in Seinäjoki, Finland, with four research participants. In comparison to sensobiographic walking, this survey was conducted indoors, with the aim of finding out how participants relate to background music in shopping mall aisles and individual stores. The case study tackled conceptual and empirical questions concerning urban architectural planning and how diverse spaces are experienced aurally. A listening walk method was used, referring literally to studying meanings of the environmental sounds with the help of recording equipment and interviews (Kontukoski & Uimonen 2019).

This case study brings further diversity into the current discussion, while also supporting findings based on the SENSOTRA research data, since it concentrates on ubiquitous music – music characterised as something which covers a multiplicity of listening experiences in varied contexts, such as shopping, sleeping, and office work. In addition, ubiquitous music refers to musical events and experiences that take place alongside other activities (Quiñones et al. 2013, 6–7). Due to its omnipresent nature, background music can also be characterised as a sonic environment referring to sound's immersive qualities: the verb "environ", with connotations to "surrounding" and "enclosing", instead of the commonly used

"soundscape" deriving from the word landscape, refers to the listener's panoramic perception, whereas factually our auditory field encompasses 360 degrees (Uimonen 2005: 34; Guillebaud 2017).

It turned out that all four research participants of this case study, born between 1991 and 1996, were conscious of the function of background music and the way companies allegedly use it as a tool for customer profiling and marketing. When listened to attentively, the grocery stores, restaurants and commercial facilities using music from different radio channels were criticised by the participants for not having "music of their own". An easily available radio channel was considered as lacking character or being too detached from the products or services offered. In Finland, radio is the dominant source of background music; over 68 per cent of enterprises choose radio as the source for background music because of its easy usability and readily available music and speech content during working hours (Teosto 2020; H1, H2 2017).

Urban sonic environments arguably create "distributed subjectivities" by altering the affective state and modes of attention of subjects. These subjectivities are "constructed in and through our responses to acts of culture" such as "ubiquitous musics that bond and bind the field of distribution together" (Kassabian 2013, xxxiv). At the same time, streaming technologies used by active listener-consumers in their selection of personal music challenge the supposed effects of ubiquitous music in commercial areas. The participants were aware of the fact that music aims to contribute to consumer behaviour in shops, which at least partly contradicts the claims about the unconscious influence of music on consumers. On the contrary, ubiquitous music was considered as a resource, since the participants used their smart phone applications for retrieving information about what they heard in the examined shopping mall ("The Zara clothing store played such great music, that you needed to, you know, track the song [with Sound Hound] to find out what it was"; H4 2017).

Ambiance manifests itself sonically in the diverse acoustic rhythms heard or otherwise sensed in the environment or its partial ambiance, which recur at fixed intervals and sonically denote time (see Järviluoma et al. 2009, 360). These rhythms include the sounds and music of annual rites such as Christmas time, which caused "slowly creeping anxiousness" in one participant of the shopping mall study while she was witnessing customers getting their parcels wrapped and realising that she too "needed to buy Christmas presents" (H3 2017). This experience demonstrates that multisensory environment and related background music can indeed be affective, but at the same time it highlights that the

people choosing the music in shopping malls and stores "can no more guarantee listeners' responses to the music than the producer of any cultural text can guarantee its meaning in advance" (Sterne 2013, 126).

Bodily sensations and affectivity play a key role in how we feel and associate with the world. When we enter a new place, we feel its atmosphere and make sense of it with our body, responding to the place and tending "to adopt its rhythm and tonality." The ambiance takes over before we are able to clearly interpret or symbolically represent the given situation (Thibaud 2011). Different spaces enhance or decrease diverse kinds of sensory information, thus requiring an individual to rearticulate their environmental relationship. The notion of senses as interactive and collaborating, but also conflicting and commonly hierarchised (Howes 2013), found support in our findings in the mall. The scent of coffee and pastries engendered a general feeling of cosiness for the participants. By contrast, a pharmacy with its pervading smell of drugs caused one of the participants to want to leave the premises (H1, H3 2017).

Rather than just recipients and perceivers, a city's inhabitants are also active producers of its atmosphere through their lifestyles. Ambiance is always situated and spatially contextualised, and the sounds and voices of a space "mix together in a single affective tonality that specifies an ambiance" (Thibaud 2011). This ambiance is partly produced and transformed by technology and the uses of media. New tramcars introduced in Helsinki in 2013 were more spacious and more silent than their predecessors, seemingly encouraging passengers to use their mobile media devices. In this almost "ritualistic silence", technology-connected physical space opened several and simultaneous virtual and symbolic spaces for the passengers, in which they could become embedded while at the same time creating their own personal experiential territories (Riikonen 2014, 94–95).

The concepts of sonic environment and ambiance help us to further consider not only the nature of sensory environments in research, but also the ways in which we relate to the world by experiencing it aesthetically and politically. Sound is a phenomenon of experience: it is not the object but the medium of perception. Sound is "what we hear in", just as we do not see light but rather "see in it". Methodologically, this insight underlines the need to develop understandings of ambiance in terms of sound and its multisensory experience, instead of reducing it simply to the involved sonic components (Ingold 2007, 11; Thibaud 2011). This also holds true for how individuals with different sensory histories and competencies are interpreting their environments, and what the trans-

generational implications of these interpretations might be. Shopping mall background music is compiled within the given cultural context, but this does not necessarily ensure that song-related meanings are conveyed similarly to listeners of different ages, genders, cultural backgrounds, and so on, although they move within the same premises.

Conclusion

When conducting research on multisensory environments and experiences, the individual senses, their differentiation, their specific characteristics as well as possible sensory deprivation should all be taken into consideration. These issues were contemplated in this article while elaborating on the theoretical and methodological approaches of ethnomusicology, sound anthropology and soundscape studies.

The primary objective of the article was to investigate how the methods of sensobiographic and listening walks can further contribute to studying the sensory environments of musical performance and experience – especially the study of music's tangibility and intangibility and their intertwinement with a multisensorial sense of place. The theoretical and methodological questions discussed in the article were supported by preliminary empirical data from SENSOTRA, as well as by the results of a case study carried out in a shopping mall. These data were interpreted in the context of the sensory turn, the study of music technology and sensory mediations, as well as questions of tangibility and intangibility, sonic environment, and the ambiance of place.

The outcome of sensobiographic walks is not only the act of documenting and collecting qualitative data. This method also foregrounds, and can even partly create, a specific dimension to the participants' involvement in the world. The method is parallel to Benjamin's ([1931] 2008a, 277–278; see also Mason & Davies 2009) notion of optical unconsciousness, referring to photography's ability to reveal aspects unseen by the eye with slow motion and enlargement, for "it is another nature that speaks to the camera rather than to the eye".

Theoretically and methodologically, sensobiographic and listening walks do not only serve and enrich the scholarly interests of ethnomusicologists and scholars working in sensory studies. The data collected during the walks could also contribute to the environmental planning and acoustic design of public places and commercial premises. Further-

more, local social and cultural history could be deepened and diversified by collecting individual and collective remembrances connected with particular areas, also in the context of urban music cultures (see also Bottà 2015; Uimonen 2020a).

Since the 1980s, the sensory turn has rearticulated scholarly practices in environmental research and in studies on how individuals and communities construct their environments. This theoretical turn has challenged the alleged audiovisual paradigm with an emphasis on multi- and intersensoriality. Apart from sensory information, the experience of sense-making in a given time and place is constructed in dialogue with past experiences and memories thereof. This relates also to the reproduction of sound and the mobility of recorded music, and how these phenomena have changed our understandings of what musical space is and is not.

The tangibility and intangibility of transphonic music are intertwined with issues such as music's virtuality, ubiquitous music and musical ambiance, music's ownership, sound reproduction, performance practices, and copyrights, to name but a few. Diverse platforms and kinds of music are put to use in varying listening environments, thus constructing and renegotiating listening experiences including our bodily relationship to the world. Tangible and intangible musics are inherently intersensorial, since different platforms not only deliver musical or other sounds, but also appeal to different senses and sense-related memories. Digital platforms have further challenged the preceding practices of music production, consumption and dissemination, including streamlining and lowering the costs of disseminating tangible music platforms (see e.g. Bourbon & Zagorski-Thomas 2020). Companies such as Spotify, which are transforming the culture of production, have also rearticulated music industry business models and the share of revenues.

In our multisensory and technological existence, music needs an interface. Previously, certain tactile platforms were reserved predominantly for music consumption, whereas contemporary uses of music are redefined by digital interfaces, which challenge the previous sensorial order due to the multisensory content of digital platforms. Furthermore, extensive and consistent use of mobile and online equipment means that a subject's sensorial relationship with the world is constantly redefined economically. Also, the interfaces of music are related to pressing issues of sustainability and ecological thinking. The renewed surge of interest in record collecting and new vinyl releases raises questions about carbon footprint when using oil-based products related to music platforms.

However, streaming services' lack of material platform does not, as such, make music consumption environmentally friendly, since streamed music is stored on cooled servers, and the information retrieved and transmitted for the end-user costs energy (see George & McKay 2019; Devine 2019).

Sensory ethnography in general, and sensobiographic walks in particular, highlight the fact that gendered, ethnic, generational, professional or other identities are associated with diverse and different ways of practicing, understanding, recalling and representing one's experiences sensorially (Pink 2009, 52). Different sensory hierarchies are constructed and framed by material, social and cultural properties of a place, and by the ways in which these affordances are sensed or how different places are designed to activate different senses. Thus, ambiances of a place transform depending on how different elements are connected in a given time and space. While conducting sensobiographic walks, the walkers' interests, and their former or current profession, largely affect the selection and experiencing of particular routes and the role of music therein. This is especially true when walking along familiar routes. During the walks, visual artists have pointed out galleries and stories related to art exhibitions and pondered how statues fit into the cityscape. These perceptions have crossed trails with those of music enthusiasts and record collectors who are well aware of contemporary and closed record shops. Rather than technological innovations, it is their social and individual uses that transform people's environmental relationships, and the interpretation of these relationships is affected by the personal history, age, profession and social status of both the people studied and the researchers.

Reacting to sound events and interpreting sound-related meanings are culturally learned activities, including the sharing and recollection of experiences. When applied to all the senses, scholarly attention should be paid to how cultural and social orderings concerning multi- and intersensory experience – of music and beyond – come about in subjects' interpretations of the sensory world. This shifts the question of how the sensory environment is interpreted and constructed individually and collectively towards how individuals and groups are enculturated to their sensory environments as sensorially competent members of their community.

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