

## SCORING THE JOURNEY: LISTENING TO CLAUDIA MOLITOR'S

### SONORAMA

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ABSTRACT: *Sonorama* is a 2015 sonic artwork by Claudia Molitor, consisting of a number of audio files designed for listening on a train journey between London St Pancras and Margate, and a graphic score based on the composer's own 'reading' of this journey. This article analyses the relationship between the sonic and the spatial in the work, exploring how Molitor's site-specific composition interacts with its environment on multiple scales. By drawing on the strategy of 'situated listening' developed by Gascia Ouzounian, as well as urbanist language introduced by Richard Sennett, this article seeks to elucidate the relationship between a number of 'nested' spaces, present across varying realisations, and the political agenda that energises the work. Written in the midst of summer 2015's European refugee crisis, the work brings into sharp focus themes of British exceptionalism, immigration, and inclusion.

It is the end of August, and so when the doors of the train finally light up to let me inside, I'm grateful to step off platform 12 and into the relentlessly air-conditioned interior of the train. As I board I'm greeted by a familiar voice: 'welcome aboard this Southeastern service to Margate, calling at...', but before they can finish, I've put my headphones in my ears. I take my choice of seat (in a row of two, by the window, facing forwards—like always), but I can still vaguely hear the voice as the opening track of Claudia Molitor's *Sonorama* begins. A cacophony of steam train and crowd sound effects belies the empty-looking Southeastern service before me, and soon Florrie Forde is singing the once-popular music hall song 'All Aboard for Margate'. Her words mingle with the announcements: '*I know a place where... calling at Stratford International, Ashford... it's the one place to go!... Ramsgate, Broadstairs, and Mar... down by the river, it's not far away*'. As the train pulls away from St Pancras, Forde's distorted melody takes centre stage and I begin my journey to sunny Margate.

Claudia Molitor is a composer, artist and performer based in Brighton. Her diverse output includes compositions for conventional instrumental groups as well as works that might more readily be described as sound art, either in their deconstructive approach to hierarchies of performer, audience and score, their emphasis on ambient or 'noisy' sounds of the environment, or in their concern with what Brandon LaBelle calls 'locational sensitivity'.<sup>1</sup> Discernible across both categories is an interest in questioning 'conventions of notation and performance' and 'hierarchies of listening and seeing'.<sup>2</sup> For example, *You touched the twinkle on the helix of my ear* was conceived in collaboration with pianist Zubin Kanga as a dialogue between an absent composer and a present performer, drawing attention to the interplay between performing, notating and sounding through a destabilisation of conventional score-making. For *A Sonic View Map*, Molitor invited five London-based artists to draw and describe a location in the city that was meaningful to them in both sonic and visual terms. Molitor was inspired to create a more sound-focused alternative to the essentially silent concept of 'The View'.<sup>3</sup> An unconventional approach to scoring, and a questioning of ocular-centric culture, are also central to the focus of this article: Molitor's 2015 work *Sonorama*.

*Sonorama* is an audio work composed for 'the otherwise silent view of the train journey between London St Pancras and Margate'. Inspired by 'trains, journeying and the disconnect between looking at the passing landscape and hearing only the interior sounds of the carriage', Molitor's work 'fills the gap between the visual and sonic realities of train travel'.<sup>4</sup> It is immediately clear that hierarchies of listening and seeing are central to this work. Molitor suggests that 'the train carriage does not necessarily have to be a non-space which is endured in order to reach the desired destination, but that being in this moving space might be a meaningful experience in and of itself'.<sup>5</sup> Accordingly, *Sonorama* uses the train journey between London St. Pancras and Margate as

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1 Brandon LaBelle, *Background Noise: Perspectives on Sound Art* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015), p. 11.

2 NMC Recordings, 'Claudia Molitor', 2019, <https://www.nmcrec.co.uk/composer/molitor-claudia>.

3 Claudia Molitor, 'Claudia Molitor', 2019, [claudiamolitor.org](http://claudiamolitor.org).

4 Claudia Molitor, 'Sonorama', Strangeloop, 2015, <http://www.strangeloop.co.uk/sonorama/>.

5 Claudia Molitor, *Sonorama: Listening to the View from the Train* (Axminster: Uniformbooks, 2015), p. 7.

a 'score' from which material of various types is composed, collected, and arranged. She writes:

So I started to wonder... what if I were to use a particular train route as the score for a work, where I would become the interpreter of this score by making an episodic work made of original compositions, field recordings, archive recordings, readings and conversations. A piece that could be listened to whilst travelling along this score, and importantly one that would relate specifically to that route.<sup>6</sup>

*Sonorama* is structured in five sections that each comprise several audio files. These audio files are intended for listening whilst taking the train between London St Pancras and Margate, though Molitor suggests you are free to listen 'on any train journey'.<sup>7</sup> The table below (see Table 1) details the nature of these audio files more comprehensively and makes clear that each section soundtracks a specific section of the larger journey.

**Table 1:** Structure of *Sonorama*.<sup>8</sup>

As this table indicates, many of these audio files make use of pre-existing recordings of archival material. Molitor worked in close collaboration with several other individuals on the project, including media historian David Hendy, who spent time 'digging around in the history of the London-to-Margate train journey' and drawing out a number of relevant archival recordings from the British Library and BBC Sound Archives.<sup>9 10</sup>

In addition to the twenty audio tracks detailed above, *Sonorama* also comprises a graphic score that represents Molitor's reading of the journey (*The Sketch of the Score for Sonorama*), which was exhibited at the Turner Contemporary gallery in Margate between 20 June and 13 September 2015.<sup>11</sup> Accordingly, the

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<sup>6</sup> Molitor, *Sonorama: Listening to the View from the Train*, p. 8.

<sup>7</sup> Claudia Molitor in conversation with the author, 28 November 2019.

<sup>8</sup> Molitor, *Sonorama: Listening to the View from the Train*, pp. 60-61.

<sup>9</sup> A full list of credited artists is available at <http://www.strangeloop.co.uk/sonorama/>.

<sup>10</sup> Turner Contemporary, 'The Sketch of the Sonorama by Claudia Molitor', 2015, <https://www.artlyst.com/whats-on-archive/the-sketch-of-the-sonorama-by-claudia-molitor-turner-contemporary-2/>.

<sup>11</sup> These audio files are currently playable only through a mobile, tablet or laptop browser. Originally they could be played via a dedicated app developed by Strangeloop Limited but this is no longer available on the iOS App Store.

relationship between sound, space and score is complex (see Figure 1). The 'train-journey-space' between London St Pancras and Margate is used as a 'score' for the audio material detailed above. This composed material has been prepared for listening in the same train-journey space. Moreover, because the graphic element (*The Sketch of the Score for Sonorama*) was also inspired by Molitor's reading of the train journey as a score, it too functions as a representation of the train-journey-space.

**Figure 1:** Relationships between sound, space and score in *Sonorama*.

Viewed holistically, *Sonorama* triangulates the three closely linked objects highlighted in dark grey in the diagram above. This complex relationship between score, site, and sound is typical of Molitor's sonic art practice, and compounds its distinction with her more conventionally scored work.

As detailed in Table 1, *Sonorama* draws from a wide variety of archival and recorded sources. Curator and researcher Irene Revell suggests that 'from the very start [there is] a powerful underlying ambivalence about the past and the present... *Sonorama* is a singular work, yet fragmented in as much as it comprises these heterogenous elements; the knotted web of relations'.<sup>12</sup> Molitor weaves a rich tapestry of cultural and historical threads: from immigration and Britain's relationship with Europe, to ancient Roman history, Kentish hop-picking, and even an history of the rail network. These are presented through superimposition or juxtaposition as a network of subjects whose unanticipated interconnections are as rich a seam to mine as the subjects themselves.

Though Florrie Forde's voice 'heralds us from more than a hundred years past into the work' in the opening track 'All Aboard for Margate', the very next sounds—a low rumbling followed by heavily processed cello recordings—are unmistakably of the late twentieth or twenty-first century.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, whilst the penultimate track is a performance of 'Die Muschel von Margate'—a 1928 protest song by Kurt Weill decrying the destructive effects of petrocapi-

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12 Irene Revell, 'Sonorama: On Given Co-ordinates', pp. 82-83 in Molitor, *Sonorama: Listening to the View from the Train*, p. 82.

13 Revell, 'Sonorama: On Given Co-ordinates', p. 82.

the same radical politics find voice 71 years later in 'Immigration RSVP', a text written and performed by Lemn Sissay that forms part of the subsequent movement 'In celebration of immigration'. It is no accident that both Forde and Weill were migratory artists: Forde emigrated to the United Kingdom in the 1890s after Australia was plunged into a depression and Weill fled Nazi Germany in 1933 for New York City.<sup>14</sup> References to seemingly disconnected eras in *Sonorama* are not only juxtaposed but superimposed. Each of the four 'Reading' sections integrates quotations from temporally divergent historical sources, whilst a number of movements (such as 'Woodland Variations, no. 14' and 'Bird Song') incorporate newly composed music by Molitor and less recent field recordings concurrently. These juxtapositions and superimpositions attempt to dissolve the divisions between temporally disparate subjects. One could consider this a kind of temporal synchronicity, with many different eras are equally accessible from *Sonorama*'s nuclear centre.

Molitor's commitment to this temporal synchronicity is complemented by a similar approach to geography, primarily expressed through the lens of immigration. The text by Lemn Sissay is a perfect example of this. A first-generation immigrant himself, Sissay's poem emphasises the cosmopolitan synchronicity of our present culture in a playful but thoughtful way.<sup>15</sup> The text mirrors Molitor's own proclivity for 'working with people from different backgrounds'.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, *Sonorama* features a diverse cast of collaborators, a diversity that also extends to instrumental forces: the final track 'In celebration of immigration' features Jan Hendrickse playing flutes from Afghanistan and Turkey, but the material played on these flutes is adapted from folk tunes indigenous to England and France, a sonic exemplar of the richness of multiculturalism.

The concept of spatial or temporal synchronicity is no clearer than in Molitor's conversation with Charlotte Higgins in section four ('Canterbury to Ramsgate'), which references the complex history of immigration in Kent. Higgins says:

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<sup>14</sup> See Stephen Alomes, *When London Calls: The Expatriation of Australian Creative Artists to Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). for more on Australian performers who emigrated to the UK around this time.

<sup>15</sup> Lemn Sissay, *Morning Breaks in the Elevator* (Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 1999).

<sup>16</sup> Claudia Molitor in conversation with the author, 28 November 2019.

The Romans were just one layer: the Celts would have arrived at some point in the deep past, and then the Romans, the Saxons, the Normans, and so on. Very close to here [Richborough Fort, Kent] there was a huge refugee camp during the Second World War for young male Jewish refugees from continental Europe... it's kind of hard to imagine the cacophony of voices of all nations... people talking Latin in different accents; British people talking in funny accents, or amongst themselves in their own language.<sup>17</sup>

Spatial synchronicity is here rendered as a diverse set of individuated geographies, superimposed in a tiny corner of England. In her preface to the book that accompanies *Sonorama*, Molitor suggests that the work engages with a number of 'contemporary concerns', and most relevantly 'the negative attitude towards immigration that has reared its ugly head once again'.<sup>18</sup> At the time of writing and release, the political landscape of the UK was changing rapidly.<sup>19</sup> A sharp rise in anti-immigration and anti-multiculturalist rhetoric was accompanied by a renewed sense of British exceptionalism, conveyed especially in prominent debates in the House of Commons over the European Union Referendum Act of 2015, which had come into force by early 2016 and made possible the European Union membership referendum of June that year.<sup>20</sup> At the same time, Britain was implicated in a profound human tragedy on the continent. A shipwreck off the coast of Libya in April 2015 brought into sharp focus a 'European migrant crisis' that saw large numbers of predominantly Syrian refugees and asylum seekers attempt to cross into Europe via dangerous sea and land routes.<sup>21</sup> The then Home Secretary Theresa May announced that she would take no responsibility for migrants or refugees under the proposed 'EU emergency resettlement programme'.<sup>22</sup> By July 2016, following the UK's vote to leave the European Union, she would be Prime Minister. In the midst of such

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17 Charlotte Higgins and Claudia Molitor, 'Reflections on Roman Kent', pp. 63-70 in Molitor, *Sonorama: Listening to the View from the Train*, pp. 67-68.

18 Molitor, *Sonorama: Listening to the View from the Train*, pp. 8-9.

19 *Sonorama* was available on the App Store between 19 June and 13 September 2015.

20 HC Deb (9 Jun 2015). Vol 596, cc. 1047-1062.

21 UNHCR, 'United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees: Mediterranean Situation', 2019, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean>.

22 Alan Travis, 'Home Secretary Hardens Refusal to Accept EU Resettlement Programme', *The Guardian*, 11 May 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2015/may/11/home-secretary-theresa-may-eu-emergency-resettlement-programme-theresa-may>.

events, Molitor's work extols the 'social and cultural enrichment that immigration brings'.<sup>23</sup>

One could argue that Molitor's incorporation of the 'sounds of the past' constitutes a kind of sonic archaeology, a concept compounded by the inclusion of historical texts as well as in her conversation on Roman Kent with writer Charlotte Higgins. As David Hendy writes, 'immersed in sound, we become not detached spectators, but fully implicated participants. We are, for a moment, right there—side-by-side—with our ancestors. History and Imagination and Empathy all become deliciously entwined.'<sup>24</sup> This process of entwining happens in and through sound, emphasising the complex geographies of history through references to many different spaces and times. Listening to *Sonorama*, these are experienced in the same moment: past and present, near and far, fascinatingly interwoven.

It is interesting to also consider this process in terms of intertextuality. More than just examining the origins of referential material in *Sonorama*, such an approach brings with it 'an acknowledgment of the flow of movement, meaning and ideas'.<sup>25</sup> The flow of texts across temporal, cultural and geographic boundaries accentuates the multiculturalism and internationalism that characterises *Sonorama*'s spatio-temporal synchronicity. Whilst we have so far mostly focused on the globalised world more in terms of the 'utopian vision of world citizenry' latent in McLuhan's 'global village', we might also consider it through the lens of international capitalist expansion.<sup>26</sup> This apparent dichotomy helps to highlight the politics of immigration and citizenship at play here. In particular, the unabated international movement of capital does not create freedom for displaced peoples, and their plight has been made worse in the UK by recent changes to immigration policy set in motion by the vote to leave the

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23 Molitor, *Sonorama: Listening to the View from the Train*, p. 9.

24 David Hendy, 'Moving Echoes: tracking and evoking the lost sounds of the past', pp. 79-81 in Molitor, *Sonorama: Listening to the View from the Train*, p. 81.

25 Mehita Iqani, 'Megatextuality: Re-Enunciating Media Intertextuality in the Age of Global Media Discourse'. *MEDIA@LSE Electronic Working Papers*, 2009, p. 5.

26 Iqani, 'Megatextuality', p. 14. See also Marshall McLuhan and Bruce R. Powers. *The Global Village: Transformations in World Life and Media in the 21st Century*. Oxford University Press, 1989.

EU. From January 2021 migrants to the UK will be judged by unsympathetic and rigidly economic criteria as part of a 'points-based system'.<sup>27</sup>

*Sonorama*'s activation within a journey-space is extremely pertinent here: for whom does the journey represent an enriching opportunity to experience different cultures, and for whom is travel a necessity provoked by—among other things—interventionist foreign policy? For whom is the train an image of leisure —“all aboard for Margate!”—and for whom does it accentuate feelings of foreignness, homelessness and displacement? These are also questions that may be experientially central for any executor of the work. The portrait painter at the centre of Haruki Murakami's novel *Killing Commendatore* suggests that 'memory can give warmth to time'.<sup>28</sup> It follows that personalised knowledge and circumstances might affect, or 'warm', our experience of *Sonorama*'s spatio-temporal synchronicity. Irene Revell reminds us that 'our understanding of history can only ever be partial, fleeting and, situated by our own personal histories'.<sup>29</sup> Individuated 'personal histories' help to punctuate the chaotic, global intertextuality of these synchronous spaces and times, rendering them more comprehensible.

The urbanist Richard Sennett addresses the challenges involved in constructing and experiencing synchronous spaces, suggesting that a central issue is the balance between 'stimulation' and 'confusion'. His solution is to 'mark [the space] in some way which provides orientation', using what he describes as 'punctuation'. He writes that 'it's possible to give a space character by punctuating it just as one would a piece of writing'. Like the 'exclamation mark' of an 'obelisk' that declares a town square's importance, or the 'quote marks' of a 'plastic bench' which is 'problematic and value-making', urban punctuation is an 'arbitrary intrusion' in the city.<sup>30</sup> Such intrusions ask us to stop and consider

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27 UK Government. 'The UK's Points-Based Immigration System: An Introduction for Employers'. gov.uk, 2020. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-points-based-immigration-system-employer-information/the-uks-points-based-immigration-system-an-introduction-for-employers>.

28 Haruki Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, trans. Philip Gabriel and Ted Goossen (London: Penguin Random House UK, 2018), p. 407.

29 Revell, 'Sonorama: On Given Co-ordinates', p. 82.

30 Richard Sennett, *Building and Dwelling: Ethics for the City* (London: Allen Lane, Penguin Random House, 2018), p. 211.

our surroundings. The complex web of allusions discussed above disrupts the linear sequence of experiential time. We might then make sense of this chaotic referential synchronicity through ‘punctuation’.

These kind of ‘punctuation’ marks can also be identified in scores. Molitor suggests that *The Sketch of the Score for Sonorama* is a ‘kind of visible glue’, allowing the composer to conceptualise the piece ‘not as blocks but a line’.<sup>31</sup> The score presents in a more stable form what is experientially ‘multiversal’ and therefore in constant flux. If, on the one hand, we have the entirety of history and, on the other, the tiny sliver that comprises everything we have personally experienced, the score represents a way to ‘bridge this fracture’. Reflecting on our own experiences is one way of making sense of history, just as *The Sketch of the Score* is one way of making sense of an audio work that can be listened to in infinitely variable train-journey-spaces.<sup>32</sup> This conceptualisation sets in opposition an overwhelming and fluctuating totality with snapshots of individual perspective. These stabilised snapshots punctuate the confusing whole, giving us an opportunity as participants to orientate ourselves; in Sennett’s words, to ‘take [our] bearings’.<sup>33</sup>

Interestingly, *The Sketch of the Score* incorporates a representation of this opposition. It maps the ‘train-journey-space’ between London St Pancras and Margate in two chief ways: as a topology—resulting in a familiar cartographic rendering of the geographical space—and in perspective, illustrating an individual’s viewpoint from the moving train.

**Figure 2:** Extract from *The Sketch of the Score to Sonorama*.<sup>34</sup>

**Figure 3:** Extract from *The Sketch of the Score to Sonorama*.<sup>35</sup>

Following Henri Lefebvre’s understanding of spatial representations as ‘informed by ideology’, these contrasting approaches can be interpreted in

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31 Claudia Molitor in conversation with the author, 28 November 2019.

32 Molitor, *Sonorama: Listening to the View from the Train*, p. 82.

33 Sennett, *Building and Dwelling: Ethics for the City*, p. 213.

34 Molitor, *Sonorama: Listening to the View from the Train*, p. 17.

35 Molitor, *Sonorama: Listening to the View from the Train*, pp. 26-27.

political terms.<sup>36</sup> We might interpret the topological approach as dictatorial, rigid, and alienating. For Molitor, this kind of representation stresses the notion of 'land... as controlled and observed by God'.<sup>37</sup> Topology shows space as possessed, not as experienced—a land viewed at a distance rather than lived or felt. Such a vision of the world might remind us of the compassionless capitalist infrastructure—both historical and contemporary—that mediates our experience of *Sonorama*: the advertising boards plastering every inch of saleable space through the railway station concourse, the proliferation of overpriced chain shops at St Pancras International, the extortionate ticket prices on the privatised Southeastern Railways. This infrastructure may make us feel that we can never change the spatial banality of the commercialised public world with its endless Prêt-à-Mangers and WH Smiths. We are disorientated passengers in the midst of what Gabe Meier describes as the 'intentionally unfathomable dimensions of multinational capital'.<sup>38</sup> We could be anywhere and thus are nowhere.

Nevertheless, the perspectival view incorporated into the score suggests an alternative. In *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Fredric Jameson briefly touches on the notion of 'disalienation', a 'practice of spatial contextualization'.<sup>39</sup> Jameson's strategy—which builds on the work of urban theorist Kevin Lynch—aims to 'provide the individual subject with a "heightened sense of its place"' in the face of an unsympathetic late capitalist urban totality.<sup>40</sup> Lynch's writing emphasises the city as 'perceived by its inhabitants'.<sup>41</sup> Building on Lynch's central thesis—that citizens navigate cities predominantly using mental images of the city, based on their sensory experiences—Jameson suggests that the alienated city is 'above all a space in which people are unable

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36 Bjørn Sletto, 'Producing Space(s), Representing Landscapes: Maps and Resource Conflicts in Trinidad', *Cultural Geographies* 9 (2002): 389-420, p. 395.

37 Claudia Molitor in conversation with the author, 28 November 2019.

38 Gabe Meier, 'Against Mirrored Totems: Cognitive Mapping Strategies in Contemporary Dance Music', *The Astral Plane* (blog), 13 January 2020, <https://dotheastralplane.com/2020/01/13/against-mirrored-totems-cognitive-mapping-strategies-in-contemporary-dance-music/>.

39 Meier, 'Against Mirrored Totems: Cognitive Mapping Strategies in Contemporary Dance Music'.

40 Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991).

41 Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City*, Publication of the Joint Center for Urban Studies (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2005), p. 3.

to map... their own positions'. Accordingly, Jameson's disalienation strategy proposes 'the reconstruction of an articulated (or punctuated) ensemble which the individual subject can map and remap along the moments of mobile, alternative trajectories'.<sup>42</sup> Articulation—or punctuation—helps us to take our bearings.

In *The Sketch of the Score* more conventional cartography is punctuated by the representation of individual perspective, reminding us that we might orientate ourselves according to our senses, and counterbalancing the alienating effects of topology. This is also the experience of the listener on the train, who orients themselves anew with each passing station and/or audio file. As Irene Revell points out, *The Sketch of the Score* 'allows the traveller, the listener to gain their own position' (individual perspective) within 'specific space-time co-ordinates' (topology).<sup>43</sup>



A train carriage can be a very busy place. Travellers—each the protagonist in their voyage across this small island—chatter, eat, laugh, or listen to music at a volume that just 'leaks' into the public realm. The carriage is full of people taking up space, and, even in the so-called 'quiet carriage', these people are noisy. *Sonorama* encourages a flexible membrane between the private auditory world of the headphone listener and the public world of the train carriage.

*Sonorama* is porous to the sounds of the wider acoustic ecology. As Molitor writes, sometimes 'it's hard to tell where the sounds are coming from: headphones, the carriage, the outside'.<sup>44</sup> This instability of source-bonding ties into Molitor's wider concerns around listening and a primary focus of the composition is the disconnect between the 'static interior' of the train carriage and the picturesque passing view that is seen and not heard. The audio work is

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<sup>42</sup> Jameson, *Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, parentheses added.

<sup>43</sup> Revell, 'Sonorama: On Given Co-ordinates', p. 83.

<sup>44</sup> Claudia Molitor in conversation with the author, 28 November 2019.

an attempt to bridge this gap, drawing attention to a central question: 'what are all the sounds I'm missing in the (outdoor) space'?<sup>45</sup>

We could also apply the same logic to the headphone listener. Molitor draws attention to the sonic border between interior and exterior space through her focus on 'listening to the view'.<sup>46</sup> The predominant silence of the passing view is emphasised by the audio work. Moreover, the process of listening to the audio work produces another sonic border between interior and exterior—or public and private—that is much less retentive. Some scholarly contributions characterise headphone listening as a kind of privacy-producing 'bubble' but, in the absence of active noise-cancelling technology, they can be a porous listening environment.<sup>47</sup> A wider acoustic ecology exists beyond the segregated 'listening space' of the work: sounds 'interior' to the composition mix with those from the wider sounding environment.<sup>48</sup> Accordingly, one could argue that in *Sonorama* this porosity frames a request to 'listen', to be open to the sounding world. If we believe that our musical experiences offer more than just the ventriloquism of ideologies but can also function as arenas for staging genuine change, then Molitor's situated practice is deeply political.



One strategy for thinking through this is using the notion of 'multiplicity', another urbanist term borrowed from Richard Sennett. If you sow a seed in 'different circumstances of water, wind and soil', you will yield different results. In urbanism, 'seed-planning' refers to an approach in which architectural spaces are prepared in such a way that they can change and grow based on the environments in which they are situated. Function completes form according to circumstance. Different material, urban or social conditions require different solutions; seed-planning produces type-forms that can and do 'change

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45 Claudia Molitor in conversation with the author, 28 November 2019, parentheses added.

46 Molitor, *Sonorama: Listening to the View from the Train*.

47 See for example Tiziano Bonini and Marta Perrotta, 'On and off the Air: Radio-Listening Experiences in the San Vittore Prison', *Media, Culture & Society* 29, no. 2 (1 March 2007): 179-93, and Michael Bull, 'iPod Use, Mediation, and Privatization in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in *The Oxford Handbook of Mobile Music Studies, Volume 1*, vol. 1 (Oxford University Press, 2014).

48 Claudia Molitor in conversation with the author, 28 November 2019.

character in different circumstances'.<sup>49</sup> Thus a single 'seed' type-form can produce a multiplicity of manifestations. Situating a 'seed' object in different environments—or 'habitats'—makes possible the process of mediation and change effected by these circumstances.<sup>50</sup>

We can think about works such as *Sonorama* in much the same way: the composition is prepared so that it might be realised—listened to—differently by varying executants. The specific circumstances of these realisations might then highlight different elements of *Sonorama*'s politics. If we understand the train as comprising a number of nested habitats for Molitor's 'seed' audio score, then we can explore how different aspects of the political message behind Molitor's sonic intervention are amplified across different scales. This approach requires a form of what Gascia Ouzounian calls 'situated listening', which reveals the 'particular, contingent situations of hearing *as these occur within specific listening environments*'.<sup>51</sup> Situating our understanding of Molitor's political agenda, as it is realised in and through *Sonorama*'s specific listening environment(s) reveals the role of space in the construction of musical meaning.

*Sonorama*'s spatial architecture could be said to exist across three scales. The first habitat is the space of travel. This generalised space of the train journey is significant because for Molitor 'the technology to travel allows cultures to intertwine, our perception to be altered and our experience to be expanded'.<sup>52</sup> Listening to *Sonorama* in such a space is intensified by the contemporary and

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49 Sennett, *Building and Dwelling: Ethics for the City*, p. 236.

50 It's worth acknowledging briefly here that the seed metaphor is not deployed in a totally uncritical manner. As Ruth Solie's work on organicism has shown, music scholarship has long employed organic metaphors of growth. The pitch space formalism of Heinrich Schenker references the notion that a musical 'seed' '[grows] by its own teleology and in an inevitable, foreordained direction'. It is thus important to recognise that not every seed grows into a tree—and if they do so it is not through an innate and deterministic vital force. In the same way, not every 'seed object' grows in every habitat: a 'successful performance'—whatever this might look like in the context of a work—is not guaranteed and acknowledgment of this fact is central to this article's critical framework, in contrast with the 'mysticism and obscurantism' of organicism. For more, see Ruth A. Solie, 'The Living Work: Organicism and Musical Analysis', *19th-Century Music* 4, no. 2 (2020): 147-56, pp. 154-156.

51 Gascia Ouzounian, 'Embodied Sound: Aural Architectures and the Body'. *Contemporary Music Review* 25, no. 1-2 (2006): pp. 69-79, emphasis added.

52 Molitor, *Sonorama: Listening to the View from the Train*, p. 9.

historical significance of the train as it appears in migratory narratives, lending affective weight to the pro-immigration texts throughout the work.

Secondly, Molitor's politics resonate within the specific geographical space between St Pancras and Margate. Margate is in the parliamentary constituency of South Thanet, where Nigel Farage of the UK Independence Party (UKIP) stood during the 2015 general election. UKIP are a right-wing populist and Eurosceptic political organisation founded in 1991 by Alan Sked as a single-issue party campaigning for the United Kingdom's removal from the European Union. In a speech at UKIP's spring conference in the Winter Gardens, Margate in February 2015, Farage claimed that Kent was 'one of the most Eurosceptic counties in the whole of this country'<sup>53</sup> and in the 2015 General Election Farage polled 16,026 votes, losing to Conservative Craig Mackinlay (a defector from UKIP) by fewer than 3,000 votes (The Guardian 2015b).<sup>54</sup> A year later South Thanet voted strongly in favour of leaving the European Union, Mackinlay writing the morning after the vote that 'we wake to a new dawn... Parliament will be sovereign & we are able to forge a new place in the world'.<sup>55</sup>

More generally, the history of migration weighs heavy on this county: it has 'accreted like archaeological layers over the landscape'. Kent's identity as a place of 'national exits and entrances' and 'the point of arrival for wave after wave of people arriving in Britain' makes it a resonant site for Molitor's multiculturalist beliefs, in contrast with its current political reality.<sup>56</sup> At the time of *Sonorama's* release, one of the Roman forts described in the conversation between Molitor and Higgins was the site of the Dover Immigration Removal Centre. A blog post from May 2015 written by a detainee at the centre said 'there are no human rights at all. There is no medication. They say you're not entitled to it. There are people with HIV, Hep B, Hep C and they're not getting

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53 The Guardian, 'Nigel Farage Addresses Ukip's Spring Conference in Margate - Video', *The Guardian*, 28 February 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/video/2015/feb/28/nigel-farage-addresses-ukip-spring-conference-margate-video>.

54 To put this figure into perspective, UKIP received only 2,529 votes when Trevor Shonk stood in the same constituency in 2010. Farage himself had also stood in South Thanet in 2005, receiving only 2,079 votes.

55 Craig Mackinlay, 'Craig Mackinlay MP (@cmackinlay)', *Twitter*, 2015, <https://twitter.com/cmackinlay>.

56 Higgins and Molitor, 'Reflections on Roman Kent', pp. 64-68.

any medication'.<sup>57</sup> This alleged physical and psychological abuse of detainees and the populist anti-immigration rhetoric championed at the polls put *Sonorama's* specific references to the region into frightening context, a nested habitat that intensifies and amplifies Molitor's political message.

The final habitat for Molitor's political seed-object is the private auditory world within the listener's personal headphones. Earlier I mentioned the porous nature of headphone listening, but headphone listening also allows users, as Michael Bull says, to reconfigure 'everyday experience' with 'personalized meanings' through more private auditory arenas afforded by the use of individual earphones.<sup>58</sup> It is important, however, to acknowledge that 'everyday experience' is not a monolithic entity and the reception of Molitor's political message is necessarily mediated by individual subjectivities, such as class, race and gender identity. For example, Judy Wajcman has argued against the suitability of public transport for women's needs, suggesting that the 'physical burden of undertaking the multiple trips that often characterise women's daily time-space, together with the problems associated with fear of sexual harassment... limit mobility and create a very different experience of spaces of transport that can be mapped out along gender lines'.<sup>59</sup> As Leslie Kern has written more recently, 'women still experience the city through a set of barriers—physical, social, economic, and symbolic—that shape their daily lives in ways that are deeply (although not only) gendered'.<sup>60</sup>

If encounters with public transit systems are mediated by gender, economic background is also a potential determining factor in a listener's experience. The technology that allows the listener to engage with *Sonorama* as an audio work is cross-cut by notions of class and economic standing. Like the 'well-to-do train travellers' of the nineteenth century, who 'paid a pretty penny to avoid the din of

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57 Detained Voices, 'I Saw a Detainee Running toward the Door and up onto the Roof', *Detained Voices* (blog), 15 May 2015, <https://detainedvoices.com/2015/05/15/i-saw-a-detainee-running-toward-the-door-and-up-onto-the-roof/>.

58 Michael Bull, 'The World According to Sound: Investigating the World of Walkman Users', *New Media and Society* 3, no. 2 (2001): 179–97, p. 193.

59 Judy Wajcman, *Feminism Confronts Technology* (University Park, Pa: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991), pp. 129-133, see also David Bissell, 'Conceptualising Differently-Mobile Passengers: Geographies of Everyday Encumbrance in the Railway Station', *Social & Cultural Geography* 10, no. 2 (March 2009): 173-95, pp. 174-5.

60 Leslie Kern, *Feminist City* (London & New York: Verso, 2020).

the... third-class carriages', contemporary travellers reinforce similar acoustic hierarchies through wireless or noise-cancelling earbuds.<sup>61</sup> In an article on Apple AirPods, Tomi Obaro writes that 'class barriers are represented in extremely visible ways... AirPods say, "I can afford not to hear the same sounds you do"'.<sup>62</sup> Though the employment of specific texts and recordings are allied to a political agenda, the highly subjective nature of headphone listening means that users may be led towards conclusions more tangibly mediated by their personal 'everyday experience', and in directions unanticipated by Molitor.

For Molitor, travel allows 'our perception to be altered and our experience to be expanded'.<sup>63</sup> This altering of perception and expansion of experience is effected in sound. Through explicit and implicit references to the enriching properties of immigration, *Sonorama* attempts to sonically reconfigure the space of travel, the space of (UK) migration and the space of personal listening. In the same way that the audio work seeks to destabilise an ocular-centric understanding of the landscape, so too might the political landscape be rendered more empathetic by Molitor's sonic intervention. If 'cultural geographies of inclusion and exclusion are played out in sound', then perhaps sound can also destabilise these boundaries.<sup>64</sup>

We might also consider the theme of connection as it relates to the privacy of the headphone listening environment. *Sonorama* explores the advantages of a more inclusive, multicultural and empathetic society and invites us to listen and feel more, to connect to our environment and its history and culture in a multi-sensory way. Molitor says that she 'doesn't do activist art' but there remains a

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61 Hendy, 'Moving Echoes: tracking and evoking the lost sounds of the past', p. 81. For more on noise cancellation, see Mack Hagood's 2011 essay 'Quiet Comfort: Noise, Otherness, and the Mobile Production of Personal Space'. He characterises 'soundscaping technology' as an extension of the 'exclusive spaces of the air terminal and air cabin' which appeal predominantly to (white, male, affluent) business travellers. Indeed, just as 'home audio equipment has long been used to construct a masculine refuge in the shared domestic space of the home', noise-cancelling headphones can construct a 'mobile office' by 'diminishing the audible evidence of the shared space users inhabit'. For more see Mack Hagood, 'Quiet Comfort: Noise, Otherness, and the Mobile Production of Personal Space'. *American Quarterly* 63, no. 3 (2011): 573–89.

62 Tomi Obaro, 'AirPods Are Dumb!', BuzzFeed News, 2019, <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/tomiobaro/i-hate-airpods>.

63 Molitor, *Sonorama: Listening to the View from the Train*, p. 9.

64 George Revill, 'Music and the Politics of Sound: Nationalism, Citizenship, and Auditory Space', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 18, no. 5 (2000): 597–613, p. 598.

curious tension between the notion of forging connections—with those whose backgrounds differ from ours, with the wider world in all its multi-sensory glory—and the ultimately personal and private listening experience of the audio work itself.<sup>65</sup>

The globalised, ultra-connected world can be a complicated and disorientating environment. Molitor's punctuated score enacts recontextualising and disalienating strategies to make sense of the chaos, inviting us to 'take our bearings'. The porous listening space is a reminder to be present. The opportunity to define the performance context for a work comes with the acknowledgment that there are always elements that cannot be controlled. As an audio work *Sonorama* can 'withstand being disrupted', in part because it wholeheartedly situates itself within the porous space of the train carriage.<sup>66</sup> At the same time the work is beautifully incomplete: activation in situ is the only way to experience its conceptual richness; only in its realisation is the piece's multiplicity made manifest.

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65 Claudia Molitor in conversation with the author, 28 November 2019.

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