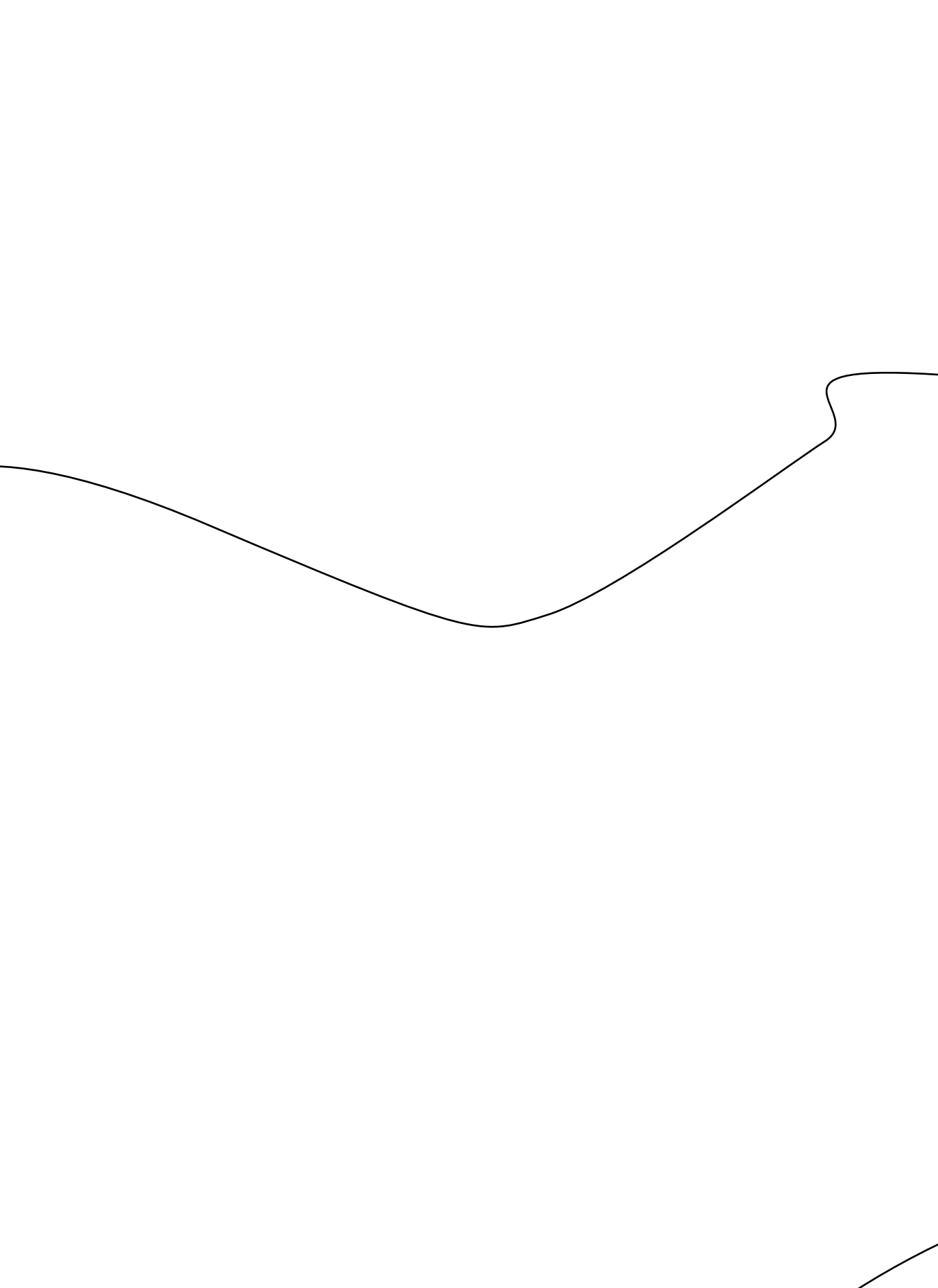


# SONIC

The background is a solid teal color. It features several thin, white, wavy lines that meander across the page, creating a sense of movement and organic form. These lines are most prominent in the middle and lower sections of the cover.

edited by  
&beyond  
for Theatrum Mundi

# URBANISM



# SONIC

A thin, continuous black line drawing of a human profile, facing right. The line is irregular and expressive, capturing the basic shape of the head, ear, nose, and chin.

edited by  
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# URBANISM

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# PREFACE

During &eyond's penultimate editorial meeting in the process of designing and editing this publication, a siren wailed past one of our windows in Berlin-Mitte. Connected, as we so often are, by Skype, the siren forced us to pause our discussion for a moment as it echoed through the digital networks that joined us and spread out into the sonic ecosystems of Porto, London and nearby Berlin-Kreuzberg. The sound was jarring, but it was also a forceful moment of sonic unity that felt apt in the wake of the weeks spent thinking about how sound works in urban space.

*Sonic Urbanism* is the product of these meetings and regular contact with the project's initiators, the education and research charity Theatrum Mundi, whose collaborative team mirrors our own disciplinarily-divergent collective. These essays and interview are pioneering an emerging academic field that bridges sound and the city, but also politics, architecture, acoustics, public space, noise, streets, music and infrastructure. The inroads their authors take to the texts are as varied as the future work they will inspire: from urban designer Sara Adhitya's composition of the city through musical tools to artist Sharon Phelan's framing of sonic communities. In between we encounter student experiments in sonic experience initiated and documented by their tutors, the sonic urbanist Caroline Claus and collaborative architectural design professor Burak Pak. The composer Frédéric Mathevet, meanwhile, muses on the sonic object the 'gaze of the microphone' and independent searcher Nathan Belval introduces us to the 1970s musical architecture of the Villa des Glycines. *Voi[e,x,s]*, an experimental

and ongoing performance project by Theatrum Mundi with Marta Gentilucci and Alexandra Lacroix, forms the centrepiece of the book, through an introductory essay by Theatrum Mundi's director, John Bingham-Hall, that is followed by a conversation between the project's authors.

In keeping with our ongoing efforts to transcend the widely perceived limits of publishing formats, &beyond have edited the texts of *Sonic Urbanism* for broad and open-minded audiences and the graphic design by &beyond's Diana Portela actively plays with visual signals veering between foreground sound and background noise. Borne out of eclectic and interdisciplinary approaches to the built environment, and a reluctance to fall into familiar academic tropes, this is a project befitting a collaboration between teams used to experimenting with platforms for performance, publishing and beyond. ●

&beyond

# INTRODUCTION

Attention is increasingly turning to the soundscapes of cities as materials to be shaped through design, as cultural commons generating physical wellbeing but also as sites of conflict and violence to be regulated.

What we hear and what we see are different. Sound does not adhere to the same boundaries as light; it travels through and around space in different ways, it has physical as well as informational affect. The way we participate in the public realm through speaking and appearing might have radically different implications. For example, the banning of face coverings in some European countries assumes that visibility is a prerequisite to being a valid urban citizen. How would a city be shaped if audibility were the fundamental condition for participation in public? What if hearing one another rather than seeing one another was the basis for sociability? What if the acoustics of an urban space were more important than its appearance?

In *Crafting a Sonic Urbanism*, the 2018 colloquium that forms the background to this publication, we asked how the practice of urbanism could look beyond the soundscape as an object and build sonic concerns, methods and modes of thinking into its ways of working. A sonic urbanism, as we imagined it, would be one that uses listening, scoring and performing as tools for design processes. This would be an urbanism that relies on cross-disciplinary collaborations and challenges the visually-biased epistemologies that fundamental assumptions about urban design have been based upon.



This publication brings together people and projects that span these approaches, but it also forms part of a wider interest in sound that has taken diverse forms since *Theatrum Mundi*'s inception in 2012. Early workshops on the architecture of sound used discussions around design for music to reflect on the ways spaces can create acoustic focus or multiplicity. The 2018 symposium, *New Resonances*, followed this by asking how music itself is shaped by the public, politics, acoustics and memories bound up in the places in which it is composed and performed.

Another new project, *Scoring the City* in collaboration with Gascia Ouzounian, is bringing together composers and architects in a series of design workshops developing notational approaches in architecture. The recent *Acoustic Cities: London & Beirut* edition published in collaboration with Optophono and the Institute for Global Prosperity, UCL, collects audio-visual works interrogating the politics of sonic memory in these two cities following a three-day workshop in Beirut in 2018. The Atelier TM meetings in Paris<sup>1</sup> invited the performance artist Mercedes Azpilicueta to lead a workshop on translating soundscape recordings into bodily actions, the filmmakers Graham Thompson and Silvia Maglioni to facilitate a soundwalk and discussion focused on unlearning habitual ways of hearing, and the opera director Alexandra Lacroix to show how the voice could be used to explore the limits of acoustically sociable space at Chapelle Charbon, a wasteland destined to become a new public space. Some of these experiences are left only as traces in the bodies and memories of

# Theatrum Mundi

<sup>1</sup> Atelier TM was a series of meetings that took place from 2016-2017 in partnership between *Theatrum Mundi* and the Collège d'études mondiales, as part of the *Global Cities* research chair held by Richard Sennett and Saskia Sassen, through funding from the CGET. They were coordinated by John Bingham-Hall and Vera Vidal and were attended by an ongoing group of sonic and spatial practitioners.

their participants, offering new embodied knowledge to be taken into their practices. Others have become creative endeavours.

Responding to our call to practitioners and scholars alike, asking what a sonic urbanism might look and sound like, the articles here draw on architectural and performance projects, pedagogy, and social analysis. Masterstudio L\_28 and *Voi[e,x,s]* both show how long-term collaborations between the crafts of sound- and space-making can lead to learning in action, making an argument for a new a-disciplinarity in urbanism that opens it to transformational encounters with other fields. This collaboration though, as Nathan Belval shows, can highlight the limits of urbanism's capacity for sonic design. The Villa des Glycènes showed that a shared urban space can be composed with sound as a primary concern. Pitch, rhythm, and intensity, rather than the light and mass foregrounded by architects, become the preferred qualities in question, utilised via a design process involving a composer. But these sonic qualities are quickly lost sight of when they meet budget constraints and the demands of publics. It is not only architects whose ears need opening, but also developers, public authorities and inhabitants.

Caroline Claus and Burak Pak also point to the need for a typology of approaches to sound in urbanism: is it being understood as an issue to solve, a material to sculpt or the byproduct of design decisions? Or, as Frédéric Mathevet suggests, is sound a source of knowledge with which to speculate? Sound recording is already a challenge to the dominance of visual forms in

urbanism, such as photography and mapping, but as our Unlearning Listening workshop did, Mathevet aims to expand the possibilities phonography itself presents. He frames it as a mode of intervention as well as documentation. By piecing together the city through fragments of sound heard through cyborg configurations of ear and microphone,, shared meaning and structure, he argues, can be built from the incoherence of a noisy city.

This is echoed in the way Sarah Adhitya's urban design interventions enable acoustic spaces to be made and reconfigured in real time, whether through embedded instruments or recordings. This kind of epistemology – one that understands the city as a system of sonic communication whose meaning is changed as it is documented and remixed – demands new kinds of representation. Sound cannot be mapped in the way space can. It moves, fades, ebbs and flows.

Adhitya's approach to sonification finds means in the scoring of music to represent dynamic aspects of urban experience that do not fit within architectural drawings.

Sharon Phelan also frames the city as an acoustic communication system, revealing the sonic configurations within the public sphere of political discourse. She builds out from analysis of human microphones to the ways that acoustic notions such as having a voice and being heard can go beyond the metaphorical, with the ability for people to make sound in the city as the basis for political agency. This poses a provocation: sonic urbanism cannot just be about the making of cities that "sound nice", it must also be

a framework that amplifies the political  
power of voices and the disruptive  
potential of noise. ●



# VOI[E,X,S]

## Part I: Score for a *terrain vague*

Initiated as a joint project between Theatrum Mundi, the opera company Cie MDPa – Alexandra Lacroix, and the composer Marta Gentilucci, *Voi[e,x,s]* follows the transformation of Chapelle Charbon, a publicly-owned site in the north of Paris, from an abandoned rail depot to a brand new urban park. *Voi[e,x,s]* signifies rail tracks (French: *voies*) and voices (French: *voix*). It combines recordings of this space, its industrial materials and its unique acoustic conditions with the recorded voices of local inhabitants speaking their names, in dialogue with live performers, to create a sound installation and performance event that will animate the new park and open it to its community. The project is marked by three performances, two of which took place in June 2018 in the temporary Parc des 12 Saisons created on the edge of the site by Collectif Chapelle Charbon as part of the public engagement preceding the transformation. The final performance will be in the new park when it is complete.

[T]he *terrain vague* [...] lies forgotten among massive structures and construction projects [...] We can find the *terrain vague* in even the densest city. With its visual markings as underutilised space, these spaces are often charged with memories of other visual orders, with presences of the past, thereby unsettling their current meaning as underutilised space. They are thus charged precisely because they are underutilised. [...] They are the vacant grounds that enable residents who feel bypassed by their city to connect with it via memory at a time of rapid changes – an empty space that can be filled with memories.

Saskia Sassen, *Does the City Have Speech?*<sup>1</sup>

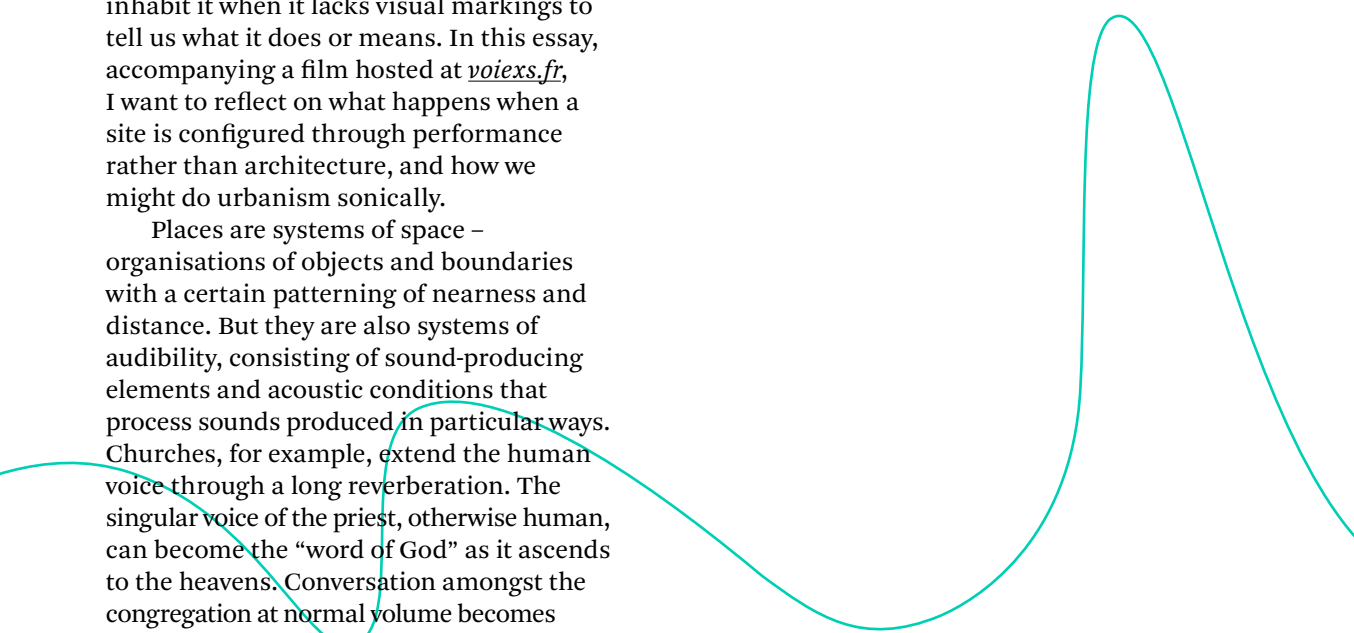
1 Saskia Sassen, "Does the City Have Speech?" *Public Culture*, 25 (270), Durham, 2013, pp.209-21.

*Voi[e,x,s] Chapelle Charbon #1* is a project about exactly this: making a place speak that has lain silent; taking ownership of it by creating new memories rather than unearthing its history; using movement and sound to find how to inhabit it when it lacks visual markings to tell us what it does or means. In this essay, accompanying a film hosted at [voixs.fr](http://voixs.fr), I want to reflect on what happens when a site is configured through performance rather than architecture, and how we might do urbanism sonically.

Places are systems of space – organisations of objects and boundaries with a certain patterning of nearness and distance. But they are also systems of audibility, consisting of sound-producing elements and acoustic conditions that process sounds produced in particular ways. Churches, for example, extend the human voice through a long reverberation. The singular voice of the priest, otherwise human, can become the “word of God” as it ascends to the heavens. Conversation amongst the congregation at normal volume becomes blurred, embarrassing its interlocutors into silence as they hear their profane words accentuated like those holy ones of the priest. Nightclubs muffle the voice: constant high-decibel low-frequency emissions make conversation near impossible but allow for a more level, interpersonal communication where bodies demonstrate to one another their rhythmic and sensual capabilities. The acoustics are dry, so that fast-moving beats do not bleed into one another and the voices of the crowd do not echo over the music.

What kind of acoustic, or system of hearing, then, could change a place like Chapelle Charbon from a silent wasteland

## John Bingham-Hall



## What happens when a site is configured through performance rather than architecture?

to a piece of public realm, a setting for social life? What kind of sociability is possible within its current acoustic conditions? Importantly, how would we find out? Performance is a temporary acoustic, a temporary network of sound sources and listeners structured by a *mise-en-scène*. It is also a temporary social situation – subjects listening to subjects. Performance extends expression beyond the everyday, using expanded capabilities for movement and sound-making developed by performers to create hypothetical situations.

So, when performance is transposed from the stage to the street, it becomes a strategy for experimenting temporarily with the social acoustics of the public realm. It proposes a hypothetical system for hearing and seeing, demands modes of attention that are different to the ones we employ for moving about the city. In designing ways of hearing and seeing one another beyond the habitual, performance is a way of testing ways of sounding and moving – the spatial, acoustic, kinaesthetic possibilities encoded into a place that are not revealed by everyday usage.

We could think about *Voi[e,x,s]* Chapelle Charbon #1 as a series of acoustic arrangements. Just as the church's acoustic elevates whatever is spoken by the priest, or the way the sonic density of a nightclub foregrounds bodily over discursive encounter, each arrangement in *Voi[e,x,s]*

encoded a kind of system or structure of communication whose functional properties are socially meaningful before we even consider the words or actions communicated within them. These words and actions were also rich with meaning – the names of local residents whose etymologies became ways of moving in response to the environment. These acoustic situations I want to focus on as ways to change what a space is without changing how it looks – designing it sonically rather than visually.

Entering the space, we hear a single voice. It is raised to address the crowd akin to someone delivering a lecture or a list of missing people. It is loud and definite enough to convey information through a slight raising of volume beyond the conversational, but not so much that the material effect of the voice supersedes its informational value, as in shouting or the most dramatic strains of operatic singing. Though there is no stage, the raising of one voice in clear address invites the self-imposed silencing of others. This creates an acoustic asymmetry – it acts the same way as the stage that gives to the actors upon it the privilege of attention from an audience. A park is usually a symmetrical communication space – no one is on stage, there is no audience. This equality informs the way we understand its spatial form: ledges and benches are for group conversations or silent reflection rather than spectatorship.

*Voi[e,x,s]* Chapelle Charbon #1 revealed that the Parc des 12 Saisons is split into two parts. One is just the right size for a single human voice to address a crowd of people, giving detailed information without shouting. It revealed that the

ledges scattered through the park provided just enough seating for the gathered crowd, and that they provided a view of a single point from which the crowd could be addressed. The surrounding buildings provided just enough acoustic protection to reflect the voice back into the space, precluding the need for an enclosure that would shut the space off from the public, like the Pnyx of ancient Athens, used for public gathering and political speeches. The other half of the space, the football pitch, works differently. Open and flat, it is for running rather than watching and is just far enough from the performance space that it can be host to a separate activity, such as children playing and shouting, while focus continues elsewhere.

*Voi[e,x,s]* inserted artificial performative elements into a setting that utilised and drew attention to the real social capabilities of that setting. The audience gathered in a space that acted as a stage for public address, to hear “democratic” information (the reading of names and their etymology acting like a kind of register of citizens of that space) proper to that place. Children played on the football pitch as part of the performance, disrupting the artifice to remind us that this place is also acting, right now, for them, as a playground.

This alludes to a conscious strategy articulated in discussions that took place within Theatrum Mundi meetings that shaped this project. In making a performance in and with a public site, what layers of the space can be translated into musical and dramatic form? One approach is to tell the history of a site, uncover and fix a narrative of what it has meant and to whom. But if a place

is defined by its history, how can those that have no part in that story feel that it is theirs? Instead, our aim was to make the site speak, as Sassen suggests. We treated it like an instrument or a tool – a set of possibilities – rather than a historical document to be communicated.

**If a place is defined by its history, how can those that have no part in that story feel that it is theirs?**

The metal railings surrounding it were heard springing into life as percussion instruments, via amplified and recorded acts played back into the space. Sticks were drawn across the ground in live percussive acts. Attention was drawn to the rhythmic, tonal and acoustic possibilities of its current materiality, rather than the loss of its history. This counterpoint between memory and possibility gives texture to the notion of inclusion – the former is fixed and unchangeable, demanding acceptance, while the latter is an invitation to anyone to carry out new actions in that place. Though here we are speaking of inclusion in a work of art, that work is also a real situation of public life, so inclusion takes on an even more political bent: becoming part of society by being offered the possibility to use public space as a tool for the creation of new memory, rather than by being asked to incorporate the memories of somebody else.

If performance is a way to reveal the productive possibilities of public space for making new forms of movement and

sound in the hypothetical reality of a performance, how does this creation leave its mark on the Parc des 12 Saisons? There is no physical trace of the one-hour events that took place on June 22 and 23, 2018. Hopefully it is carried in the memories of those that attended – the people called for by their names will always be present there in the minds of those that heard them. But memory here does not just mean a mental trace, it is also a way of acting or paying attention that leaves traces on the body. People become skilled at using their environments, urbanites especially so. Dark alleyways, open public squares, busy shopping streets do not come with instruction manuals, but we know how to inhabit each of them differently. If we are presented with a new kind of space, like Chapelle Charbon or Parc des 12 Saisons, that is not visibly like a place we have experience of, how do we know how to use it? Performance, perhaps, can be a way of skilling the body in relation to an environment. Could those temporary, staged ways of behaving be left as traces in that space via the embodied knowledge of local residents that participate in the performance and later will become users of the park? We do not know, but it raises rich territory for future research alongside the creation of the next stage of *Voi[e,x,s]* Chapelle Charbon.

As well as experimenting with ways of using a single space, this performance used dramatic techniques to play with the way coherence in space is perceived in the first place. How, at any given moment, do we determine *where* we are? Rooms with four walls are nearly enclosed, and homes usually have clear ways of marking the boundary between domestic interior and

public exterior. Streets offer addresses, and public squares use defined landscaping to denote their edges. We usually use visual clues: anything beyond what we can see is somewhere else.

Somewhere like the Parc des 12 Saisons is less clear: it is composed of two distinct terrains, enclosed in two layers of fencing, and offers views that are bounded clearly on one side by the walls of neighbouring buildings but overlap in other directions into the street and depot surrounding the site. Which of these scales describes the single space occupied by the audience for *Voi[e,x,s]*? Visually, we might choose the closest boundary: the construction fences used to close off the space at night probably mark a line beyond which a different space begins. At the start of the performance, the acoustic field replicates this edge, with the positioning of hidden speakers tracing its route. Whispered voices amplified to the level of public speech created an intense sense of interiority. Regardless of what is said, whispering is suggestive of sharing between intimates. The space it creates distances the world beyond. Tower blocks in the background are somewhere else – seen but not heard.

Later the performers broke free of the performance space and started playing the outside of the fences as percussion instruments. At this point, the immediate exterior surrounding the park became incorporated into the space of focus and the recorded voices expanded outwards in the acoustic field created by the speakers, taking our attention outwards with them. In each case, it was aural clues that told us what was inside and what was outside. As the scale of the performance expanded outwards, voices from far-off rooftops were



added to the ensemble, and suddenly we were inhabiting a single space far beyond the immediate visual confines, tied together as a system of hearing. The two most diametrically positioned performers were 483 metres apart, and the space drawn between all of them enclosed 60,000 sqm. 60,000 sqm of city become one space – a stage, or theatre perhaps – without a single physical change.

**Suddenly we were inhabiting a single space far beyond the immediate visual confines, tied together as a system of hearing.**

What *Voif[e,x,s]* offers, then, is a model of how the built environment can not only be represented by, or a passive setting for, performance, but how performative techniques tested out through composition and *mise-en-scène* can actually change its functional possibilities, the way it is used, and the relationships between its parts.

How, then, does a work like this travel elsewhere? This is a big question for the project as it develops beyond 2020 and beyond Chapelle Charbon. Rather than being specific to a site, we wanted to be informed by it, in the way a composer is informed by an instrument to write music that can later be played by another instrument, revealing new qualities of both the instrument and the score. A score written for a site could be “played” by other sites, as ways of revealing spatial and acoustic potentials within those sites,

whereas a recording of that site can only be listened to. This does not mean the same sounds will be heard – here the score represents a whole protocol for working with people to activate, record, and perform. The score acts as an invitation to make rather than an object to consume.

There is also a political imperative to this: at a time in which local identities are asserting themselves against the global values of migration and universal citizenship, art should resist reinforcing fixed identities of place and instead stimulate modes of cooperation. This is not to say that art is placeless or itself universal – it is developed in and with the material, cultural, economic specificities that are geographically distributed, but can be circulated as scores, tools, knowledge rather than objects, recordings, and facts.

To return to Saskia Sassen’s question, ‘does the city have speech’? The answer here is yes, but to hear it we need a score that the city can perform. ●

# VOI[E,X,S]

## Part II: A discussion with Alexandra Lacroix and Marta Gentilucci

Voi[e,x,s] is a project that sees opera director and stage designer Alexandra Lacroix and composer Marta Gentilucci working alongside Theatrum Mundi to explore how the qualities of a sonic urbanism might transform the space of Chapelle Charbon, in the 18<sup>th</sup> arrondissement of Paris. In this interview, Lacroix and Gentilucci discuss with Theatrum Mundi's director John Bingham-Hall what it means to use a piece of public space as a sonic instrument, how sound both identifies and creates an identity for space, and how the project relates to a wider city context. The project can be viewed online at [voiexs.fr](http://voiexs.fr).

**John** Maybe the best way to start, is with you saying in a few sentences how you understand this project. Between us we have language that we've used over and over again, but it's probably all developing in different ways in our own minds. So, how do you view what we are creating here at the moment?

**Marta** [laughs] Good question!

**Alexandra** I have to say it's a very exciting but also difficult project for me. I am used to crossing different fields, but this is something really special. We are outside of the theatre and we are meeting not only artistic fields but also sociology, architecture and urbanism, so it's difficult to say what this project is. Really, it's an experiment – a musical, artistic and sociological experience, but one that has no name, in a way.

**John** That's true, this kind of project has no existing name. It is somewhere between sound installation, spatial design, community opera and acoustic ecology.

**Marta** I would add two things: one is that for me it's very interesting to share and confront my work with Alexandra's. As a composer I usually work by myself, completely owning and controlling the procedure and the method I use to compose. Meanwhile Alexandra is leading the *mise-en-scène*, so she's the director of the stage. Having two entities that usually conduct their creative process independently together, and having to find a common place, is extremely interesting.

The second thing is that I see an exciting possibility in this work. Usually, I have a container to work with: I can write music for a theatre, for a concert hall, for a smaller or bigger space. I try to develop a musical discourse for different situations. Here there is something different, because there is the possibility to create not only a container for the performance, but also to create a common context, the roots, from which I have to implement and modify my own language. It's changing my way of composing.

**John** Part of the challenge is taking something into the public realm. This project forms part of a wider reflection for *Theatrum Mundi* on sound, not just as a material, but the way that we use sound and the way that we create sound and how performative techniques and compositional techniques could inform urban design. How do you think that *Chapelle Charbon*, its space and the way it is changing, have been affecting you in terms of the work that you're making?

**Alexandra** You need to be very clear why you are doing this thing. When we are doing something in the theatre or in another cultural place, people want you and expect you to make an artistic piece.

## John Bingham-Hall

But in urban space it's not obvious. Nobody is waiting for you or asking something from you, so you need to be different. You need to defend an artistic thing in a world where that thing is not necessary.

**John** There's much more competition for attention in the public realm. Not just in terms of the immediate setting of the performance, but different things competing for space, competing for the right to be there.

**Marta** Yes! Exactly

**John** A theatre creates emptiness that is intended to be filled, whereas a true city, or at least its public realm, is always full, in a sense. That's one of the reasons we were so stimulated by Chapelle Charbon as a space, because it was genuinely empty apart from one small group of people we met who were living there. Whereas in the rest of the city there's traffic, there's commerce and so on.

**Alexandra** In the city you don't have any place where you can really exist and the space to do something. You need to make it exist. You need to identify the needs of the streets, the needs of people, of the urbanist, and to find a way to say, "Yes, it's important to have this artistic dialogue with you".

**Marta** Chapelle Charbon is like a huge playground in which there are few instruments, but many sonic possibilities. That's why it takes so much time and so many visits and so many recordings to have a sense of this huge instrument that is the park.

You need to defend  
an artistic thing in  
a world where that thing  
is not necessary.

**John** You mean Chapelle Charbon as a space?

**Marta** Yeah, it's a huge instrument, a sonic instrument, that incorporates the people that were there for the show. I think that one question that we have to ask ourselves, is if we need to think about the kind of people that are coming. Or do we need to develop the necessity of our work – the artistic, social, urbanistic necessity – from inside, for its own sake? Then afterwards to try to give it an "outside", in terms of the reaction in different contexts. On the one hand, we try to figure out which or whom is the public, and then work with this public in mind. Or, on the other hand, we try to focus internally on an exchange of knowledge, questions, creative process between ourselves, and then we put it outside. And after the performance we try to figure out the reaction of the public. It's not a project that is just "OK, I'm doing this and that, it's a piece, it's written, then we perform it" – it's not like there is score that is finished and then others will interpret it. We are interpreting it all the time, in different ways.

**John** I think another way to frame what you've just raised is: Are we saying that a community already exists for this piece? Or are we going to create a public?

**Marta** I think there is a third way: that we are not creating, but we are already part of it. So being there doing the project and the performance is not creating something that the others will fill with their presence; instead we are already part of that community. We are creators and spectators at the same time, from the very beginning.

**John** We're creating an intensification of the public, in a sense. There are already loose connections between people that are near to that site, its potential community. This gives a certain level of connection, but we're kind of coalescing that potential community into a real one via an intensified, shared sensory experience. This is Jacques Rancière's idea of a community of senses, which emerges in a space. A community might not be linked by anything else other than the same sensory experience they're having at that moment.

**Alexandra** It's an empty space and that's a good thing, I think, because there is no expectation. It's a new space for the inhabitants and for us. So the only connection is to be there at the same time, doing something new there.

**John** There was this notion that we weren't trying to capture the place and say, "This is how it sounds"; instead we were trying to say it could sound like this. You could make it sound this way by activating this piece of material or by saying this name. What for you is the difference between that documentation, which operates in a supposedly neutral way, and what we're doing?

**Marta** I think, that it has something to do with fluidity. The fingerprints of today's sonic and emotional social space are in continuous change. When we recorded the sounds at Chapelle Charbon, the raw material – a hit with a wooden block, a piece of metal – these sounds could come from anywhere, they are not specific. Some sounds become specific because of our memories of the place. We recorded many names of the inhabitants and I was moved when listening back to the names because I knew exactly when we recorded it, the faces of the children who were saying names, the person whom you were laughing with during the recording and so on. But then, when it's recorded and re-created and replayed over and over you lose this connection with the actual act of recording. That's where I think we need to find a way to go beyond the specificity of Chapelle Charbon. How can the process of being in Chapelle Charbon produce a way of operating that can be meaningful in another situation? With other people who are coming? With other sounds of a different city?

**Alexandra** But it was a very special moment. You can't cheat, it's not a recording, it's not electronic... it's the very organic connection between the bodies, the voices of these bodies and this space.

**John** I want to pick up again on the playing of names. Marta, you can see the materials that made the sounds you recorded, but an audience can also have a real and meaningful sensory response to these sounds. We don't have to understand somebody's name for it to give us an

intimate sense of them. So, I wondered if you could reflect upon the way that, when we play those sounds – when we play the names into the space – does it represent those people or invoke their presence?

**Alexandra** Another question related to that for you, Marta: you recorded some names, but many were recorded without you being present. You had the files but not the faces, so how did it become alive in the moment for you?

**Marta** As a composer I'm very sensitive to the quality of sounds. So when you listen to the voice of a kid you know if it is a boy or a girl, if it's lively or a bit sad, or if it's shy or not. You have all this information there in the voice of the person and you can almost see as if he or she were real. You can create an image, an identity of the face.

**Alexandra** That means, as you say John, all the people who hear those names can imagine and seize the faces. The identities of those people are in their voices. Even the sonority of the names, the origin, is giving you so much information that everybody can begin to imagine the person.

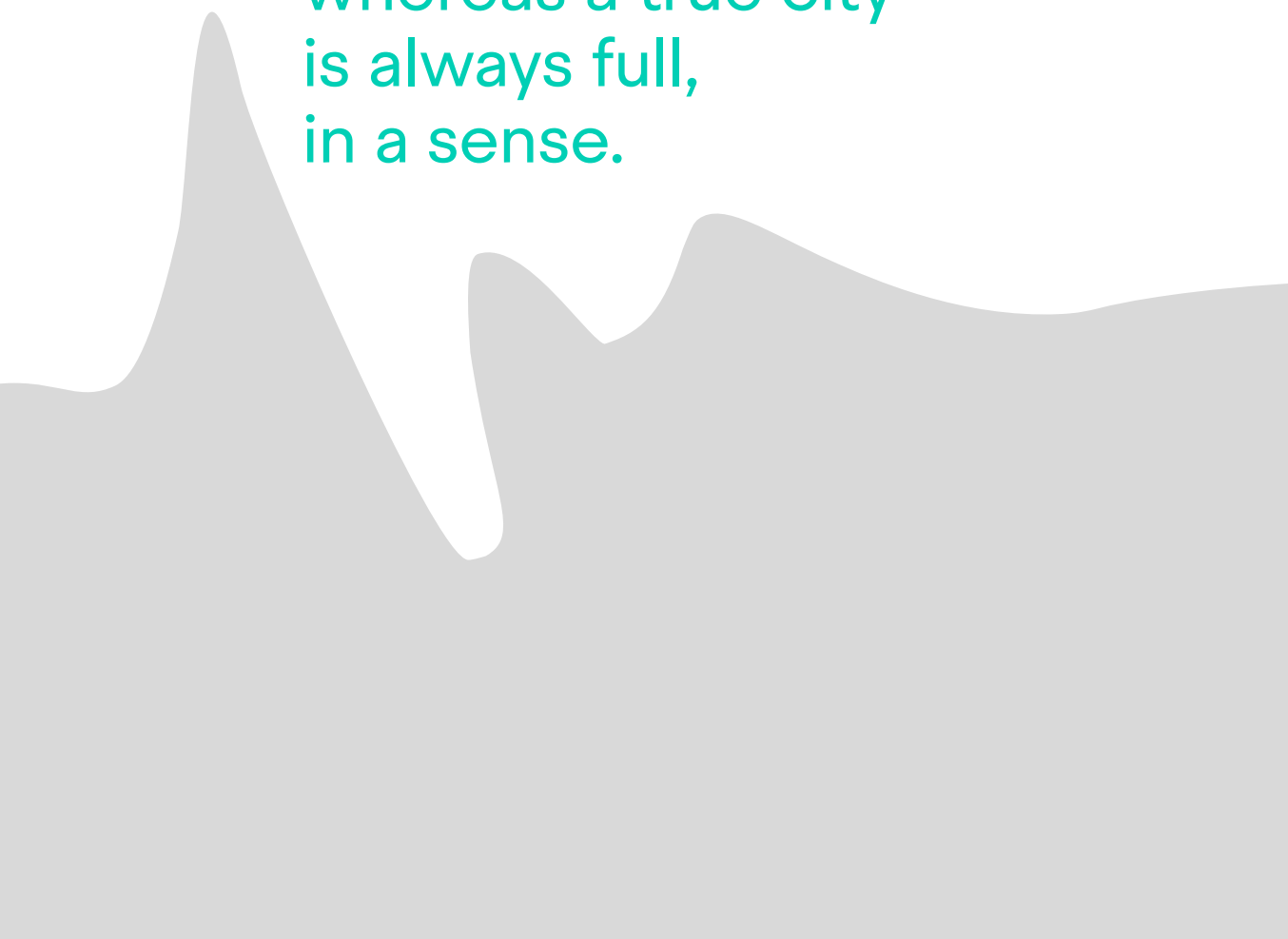
**Marta** Personal names identify a personal space, so when you say a name you are creating an identity. And I think there are things in the performance, that were a kind of a confirmation of that capacity of names. Today we are surrounded by technology – TV, radio, advertisements outside, etc. – so everything pretty much has a connection with technology. Sounds that we hear are often coming from something electronic, so we are constantly listening to real sound mixed in with

digital sound. The techniques used to spatialise the voices in the performance – having voices in different spaces, speakers hidden behind the public and the performers also whispering – produced a constant interaction between the created reality and the real reality of the place. The sounds were not misleading the perception but amplifying and making it bigger.

**John** This leads beautifully onto the last thing I wanted to raise. In one of the workshops this project grew from, we asked: "What is a sociable acoustic?" In other words, how could you understand the social configuration of a space via its acoustic properties? Could you reflect on this? To what extent could the carving out of these virtual acoustic spaces Marta just mentioned create a realm within which people respond socially to one another in a different way? Perhaps they feel more intimate with one another or they feel more like they're part of the same thing? Or where suddenly you feel connected to the wider city, as the voices were coming from the rooftops of the surrounding buildings.

**Alexandra** For me the big emotion concerned how to communicate in this big space. You could have a dialogue between the kids and the performers who were really far apart, those in the space and others placed on surrounding rooftops up to 500 metres from each other. For me this was something very emotional that opened up the possibilities of having a dialogue in a huge space. We don't need to be very close to share an intimacy; we can have something really intimate in a huge space.

A theatre creates  
emptiness that is  
intended to be filled,  
whereas a true city  
is always full,  
in a sense.



**John** It's a really valuable idea, using the public realm, which can be very big and very overwhelming, in such a way. More and more it has to become a shared space, because many of the other shared spaces in the city are organised into different kinds of social categories around different subcultures, religions, consumption preferences, and so on. We have to be able to have an encounter that doesn't involve you explaining yourself to someone else, but which involves you feeling much closer to them than you do when you're just passing in the street.

**Alexandra** What is super exciting for me is the fact that we can create different listening experiences that come from sound in the bodies of people. The way Alexandra is creating space through the *mise-en-scène* and through the sound – this interaction creates a common language. If we can find this common place in which space, bodies and sound are mixed, and create many listening experiences through this... I think that is going to be what the project is about. And these listening experiences are the interaction with the people. So people are free to interact in those spaces that we create.

**John** This is making me think more clearly about the how people use these different spaces that are created within workshops and the performances. And within these, how people change their physical responses to the space, which go beyond what one does in the everyday sense. Usually, in order to protect ourselves from one another and from the overwhelming nature of the public, we really limit our bodies, so this experience can open people's bodily openness to one another,

There's an opportunity to have a very different, intimate relationship with strangers within that sonic envelope we're creating.

or at least give them the opportunity to do that. There's an opportunity to have a very different, intimate relationship with strangers within that sonic envelope we're creating. ●





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Reverberations in a new field

with

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