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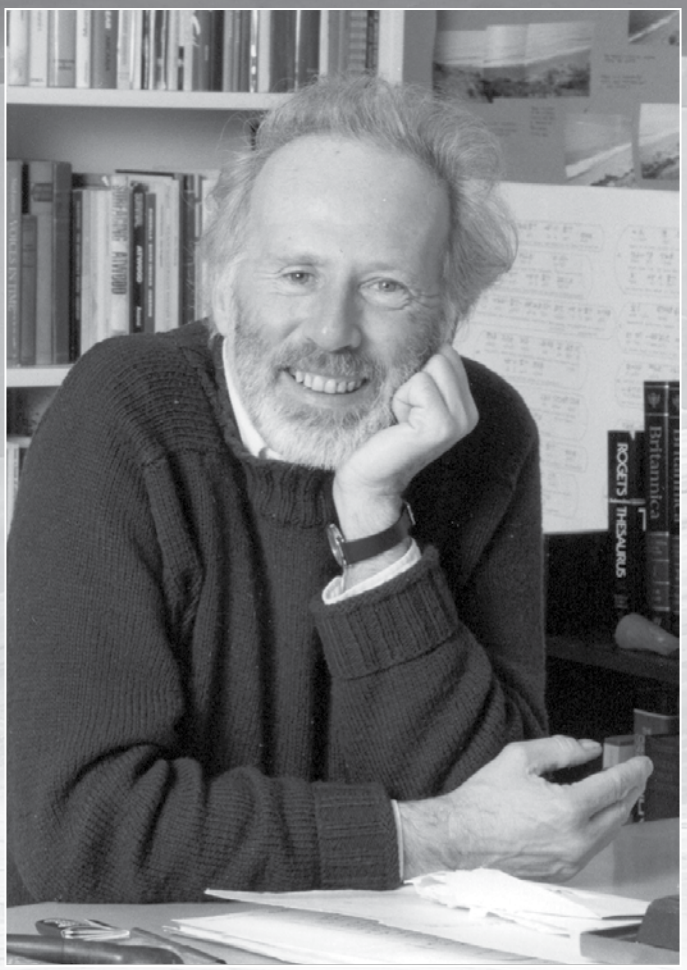

The Global Composition:

Dedicated to R. Murray Schafer on his 80th Birthday (July 18)
Founder of Acoustic Ecology

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Interferences Between Acoustic Communication Threads in Enclosed Social Environments of Istanbul

By Anıl Çamcı and Koray Erkan

Abstract

Various threads of acoustic communication emerge in enclosed social environments (e.g. cafés, pubs, concert venues). While their hierarchical order may vary based on the social occasion, these coexisting channels interfere with and condition each other. A primary strand which materializes amongst two or more individuals in a social space is that of verbal interaction. Another originates from recorded music playback in such venues; the music functions as an affordance of the establishment and conveys the mood of the place. Therefore, an acoustic communication thread, the main function of which is to moderate social behaviour, is formed between the environment and the individuals within it. A third avenue for acoustic communication within enclosed social environments can be traced between the live music performer and the audience at a concert venue.

This study aims at elaborating a real-world review of the aforementioned threads, and the interferences in-between, in the context of Istanbul's social life. Enclosed environments that range in social functions will be investigated as case studies; the communication processes that emerge within these spaces will be scrutinized through interviews and surveys with managers and customers, to portray the acoustic habitats of the given environments. This multi-perspective approach will allow us to reveal how differently these habitats impact social behaviour and whether the interference between two threads conditions the listening habits pertinent to a third one. Through these discussions, this paper will delineate a culturally idiosyncratic and modern view of social soundscapes in the city of Istanbul.

Introduction

Social environments within urban settings display ever-changing soundscapes. The acoustic characteristics of these soundscapes are predominantly determined by the activities of its inhabitants (Westerkamp 1991). The resulting sonic affordances of these environments play a substantial role in establishing the acoustic quality of a city experienced by its residents. Therefore, a feedback loop emerges between the behavioural idiosyncrasies of the city-dwellers and the acoustic habitat within which they reside. The continual presence of the lo-fi soundscapes and the steady increase in the levels of ambient noise (Schafer 1977, 186) condition the listening cultures cultivated by the modern city.

Within the context of urban life, music plays a significant role in forming social soundscapes and shaping the said listening cultures. Playback of recorded music and live performances by musicians are embedded and widely-accepted components of the acoustic communication that takes place in social environments. The well-documented behavioural and emotional effects of music (Hallam 2012) are being commonly utilized in social venues where the ubiquitous presence of music is effectively entrenched in our acoustic communication routines. In this article, we investigate the threads of acoustic communication in enclosed social environments by focusing on the city of Istanbul, Turkey as a case study. The city's historical background, the variety of cultures it nurtures, and its economic significance in Turkey's industrial infrastructure render Istanbul's social scene an especially chaotic — yet interesting — subject to study from a soundscape perspective, relying on a series of interviews and surveys[1]. The survey was conducted with venue owners and customers, and bore multi-perspective and comprehensive insights into the public perception of Istanbul's social soundscapes, its "sensory anthropology" (Blesser and Salter 2007, 3), as well as the acoustic policies practiced by its local venues.

Soundscapes of Enclosed Social Environments

The acoustic experience of the city has the power to shape the habitual relationships we have to our environments; these relationships can bind or isolate the individuals that make up a community (Truax 2001, 13). The causalities between the acoustic composition of a city and the behavioural characteristics of its inhabitants render relevant acoustic ecology research, an immensely complex task. This current study undertakes a soundscape analysis of Istanbul by adopting a bottom-up approach, starting from smaller-scale components of the city. The authors of this article are both of musical backgrounds with years of experience in composition, sound design and performance, predominantly within the music scene of Istanbul. It was therefore an obvious choice to focus on enclosed social environments where soundscape considerations are inherently intertwined with musical policies. But prior to focusing on specific effects of music on acoustic communication and the overall perception of social soundscapes, we will first investigate some ontological perspectives regarding sound, such as "externality" and "coherence of noise," which surfaced as critical communication factors in our survey findings.

Other's noise

Numerous studies have shown that the "casual externality" of a noise determines the level to which we are cognitively annoyed by it regardless of its physical attributes: When one produces a similar type of noise as another individual, at the same or even higher levels, we subjectively evaluate the noise originating from the "other" to be more disturbing (Gloag 1980). This behavioural principal also applies to the collective self, as "we are more tolerant of noise produced by people from our own social group" (Davies et al. 2005). Accordingly, our surveys revealed that, in an individual's experience

of a social soundscape at a public establishment, "other customers' noises" are found to be equally or more affecting than musical noise, and much more so than any other possible sound sources within or outside the venue, such as traffic and construction noises, TV or spoken radio broadcast within the venue, and noises leaking from neighbouring establishments.

We witness a similar attitude towards music played by other people as well (Kang 2007, 72; Thompson 2002, 149). Although music diffusion may not be particularly inappropriate for a certain environment, the fact that it is being projected under someone else's licence renders it more likely to be evaluated as noise. In the context of an enclosed social environment where customers principally submit to the policies of the venue simply by choosing to go there, we have observed the concept of "genre" emerges in our survey results as a key factor in the demarcation of the "acoustic self" and the "other." A large portion of the participants specified the genre of the music played at a venue as the primary reason for preferring to frequent that particular location. In this way, the customer acquires a sense of acoustic ownership, or "spatial ownership" (Blesser and Salter 2008) which induces a loyalty towards the venue to the extent of considering excessive levels of loudness acceptable.

> "Soundscapes not only influence how we interpret our immediate environments but also how we communicate within them.

Functional coherence of social soundscapes

The music dominating the auditory space of a venue is not always a welcome trait for the customers. Both surveys and interviews revealed that the pleasantness of the constituent sounds of a venue's acoustic habitat relies heavily upon whether they maintain a "functional coherence" with the space. For example, loud music, which was frequently listed as an undesirable acoustic affordance for restaurants, was mainly found to be an "appealing" feature for concert halls and night clubs; ironically, the latter also surfaced as the most avoided venue due to its soundscape characteristics. It should be noted here that no sound level regulations are being applied for the indoor areas of the venues in Istanbul, provided that customers are forewarned about possible hearing hazards. What is being regulated, however, is the level of the sound leaking out from the venue, which at no time should raise the average environmental noise level more than 10 dBA (e.Mevzuat 2012).

Acoustic Communication Threads in Enclosed Social Environments

Soundscapes not only influence how we interpret our immediate environments but also how we communicate within them. Acoustic communication, as Truax (2001, xviii) explains it, studies "the interlocking behaviour of sound, the listener and the environment as a system of relationships (...)." He describes the three major systems of acoustic communication as speech, music and soundscape (2001, 43). Congruently, while developing the theoretical framework of this research, we have specified a customer-venue-musician trichotomy which plays a pivotal role in the formation of soundscapes within enclosed social environments. Studying the interactions amongst the components of this trichotomy, we have delineated three threads of acoustic communication.

Customer-customer thread (CC)

A main function of social gatherings is verbal communication. Therefore, we commonly observe the emergence of an acoustic communication thread, which is at times enhanced by bodily gestures, between two or more people inhabiting a social space. The predominance of the customer-customer thread within the soundscape of a venue is dependent on the venue's function. However, regardless of this function, the "CC thread" is omnipresent, albeit at varying ranks within the communication hierarchy.

Venue-customer thread (VC)

The venue-customer thread is formulated from an ecological perspective by drawing from Gibson's model of "affordances." An affordance is described as "the quality of an object or an environment" which allows for action possibilities (Gibson 1986). Within the conceptual framework of this study, we will describe the acoustic output of a venue as an affordance of the environment which yields for the customers, the action possibilities of hearing and listening. Although the acoustic affordance of a venue may also include maintenance/staff noises and sounds leaking from outside, our surveys and interviews reveal "music projection" as the foremost acoustic output of a venue. This affordance has been described, both by managers and customers, as establishing the "character" of the space.

Musician-customer thread (MC)

A third notable strand emerges between the live performer and the customers inhabiting the concert space. It goes without saying that, while the first two threads are relevant for almost every venue regardless of its function, not every establishment provides a platform for live performances. However, since this research investigates the formation of listening cultures as a result of interferences between the listed acoustic communication threads, it is necessary to study these relationships across different venues with varying functions. It should be noted that the musician-customer thread is assumed to emerge only within the context of a "performance," where this function is made clear to the customers. Therefore, a musical affordance of a venue that is not specified as a performance, whether it is DJ'd or played-back from an automated system, is not considered to motivate an "MC thread" but rather establishes a "VC thread."

Case Studies: Three Venues in Istanbul

We have conducted interviews with the managers of three venues in Istanbul so as to establish an understanding of the intercorrelations between the acoustic policies these venues adopt and the customer perception of the resulting soundscapes as portrayed in our survey results. All of the venues listed below are located at the social entertainment center of the city and they target young adults of ages between 18 and 25, which has been consistently described by our interviewees as a phase of "financial imprudence."

Venue with music-playback

Venues with music-playback, such as restaurants, cafés and pubs, represent the majority of enclosed social environments in Istanbul. The specific venue we chose for this study is named "Joker." Within its relatively short history of 10 years, "Joker" has managed to establish a substantial popularity amongst college students. "Joker" fulfills café, bar and dance club functions throughout the consecutive periods of the day. We interviewed the venue's owner and manager, Volkan Tangör. The two predominant threads of acoustic communication at "Joker" are the "VC" and the "CC threads." The main mediator of the "VC thread" is music-playback which dynamically and stylisti-

cally evolves throughout the day from popular indie music to dance music. It should be noted that "Joker" does not boast a particularly high-end sound system or any engineered acoustic design.

One of the most significant findings of the interview was that music at "Joker" was considered the main vehicle of control over the customers. Tangör has developed heuristic strategies in this domain over the course of years; some of these strategies, as will be further discussed in this and coming sections, show notable consistencies with the theoretical and experiment-based findings of previous research on behavioural effects of music (Guéguen et al. 2008). The venue's primary source of income is alcohol sales. Tangör describes how changing musical strategies can as much as double these sales. He claims that the volume of the music needs to be gradually increased throughout the day in congruence with customer behaviour; this, he believes, rejuvenates the soundscape of the environment and induces a fresh perception of the venue. Here, we observe a clear concordance with Blesser's concept of "altered states of consciousness," which explains that the energy transmitted to the customers through loudness of the music psychologically transports them to another place (Blesser 2007). This spatial rejuvenation, in return, maintains that a customer can inhabit the venue for extended periods of time and therefore consume more alcohol. Tangör admits that customers arriving at a much later period of the evening find the music to be extremely loud while customers who have been gradually accustomed to this peak loudness do not necessarily find it disturbing. However, as the night proceeds with more customers arriving, increasing the loudness becomes more of a necessity than a strategy, due to higher levels of sound absorption.

Another significant role of the music-driven "VC thread" at "Joker" is inducing familiarity and therefore a sense of loyalty towards the venue. Tangör explains that people tend to refresh their drinks when they are cued with what he calls "key songs," prompting this familiarity. The effects of music are not always immediate: certain pieces imply "a promise of fun" during daytime when music generally serves a background function for the "CC thread." However, throughout the evening, musical style and volume evolves so as to allow Tangör to gain "spatial ownership:" "Otherwise, I am not in charge of the venue," he explains. While dancing impedes alcohol sales, this corporeal experience of the soundscape ingrains a memory of entertainment and encourages future attendance.

Live music venue

The live music venue chosen for this study is one of Istanbul's foremost concert spaces, "Babylon." Having been in business for over 13 years, "Babylon" has managed to gain a strong public identity as a high profile live music establishment which hosts a significant portion of the concerts by foreign acts in Istanbul. Our correspondent was "Babylon's" booking manager Barış Başaran who has described his duty as being in charge of every aspect of the concert experience at the venue. Live music is the primary, and for the most part, only affordance of "Babylon." Therefore, the "MC thread" dominates the experience of the venue. Their ideal customer is the music listener whose main incentive to visit the venue is to witness a live performance rather than socialize through "CC threads." The venue does not necessarily rely on alcohol sales since it hosts ticketed events, and the peak hours of operation are rather early, between 21:00 and 23:00. Başaran does point out that listening behaviours change through the night with alcohol consumption. However, he goes on to explicate that this has mainly to do with what a performance demands, and furthermore, allows. In other words, alcohol sales are not causal factors but rather outcomes; indicators of whether a given performance was a rousing success or not. The musical strategies at "Babylon" are meticulously calculated: "No message given via the music is at random." Başaran believes that the acoustic quality of the venue and the stylistic make of its soundscape are of utmost importance, much more so than the physical being of the establishment.

The "MC thread," in his opinion, necessitates a good sound engineer and a well-thought-out acoustic design without any compromises: "The sound needs to be strong." However, strength of sound, as he explains it, is not simply a function of loudness or other discrete parameters, but the product of what a specific genre stipulates from a gestalt understanding of sound. When asked about the broader context of night life and other venues in Istanbul, Başaran explains that most of the enterprises are unable to cultivate a venue-specific culture and the resulting lack of a consistent following impedes long term financial stability. "Babylon," in this sense, is considered one of the fringe cases. However, "Babylon" too, is highly affected by the recent social transformations in its particular neighborhood as the region becomes more populated and more vibrant by the year. Strategies developed to adapt to this evolution and to rectify possible discrepancies between the function of the venue and the emerging listening cultures will be discussed in the following sections.

Hybrid venue

Hybrid venues which offer both recorded music playback and live music are also fairly common in Istanbul. These venues are home to "VC" and "MC threads," either at discrete periods of the day or simultaneously, provided that the architecture of the space allows for it. The specific venue chosen to fulfill our study under this category is called "Peyote," which is one of the earliest hybrid establishments in its region, having survived through several drastic transformations. In its current state, which has been established over the past 6 years, "Peyote" boasts a three-story structure with a live music/DJ performance/dancing area on the first floor; a second and main live music hall on the second floor; and a pub with a terrace on the third floor. The venue operates 12 hours a day with peak hours between 22:00 to 02:00 during which all three floors function simultaneously. For this interview, our correspondent was Emre Ersoy, who has been co-managing the musical operations at "Peyote" on a daily basis for the past 6 years.

"Peyote's" second floor concert space is considered the ultimate venue for local indie acts in Istanbul. Ersoy explains that "Peyote's" main policy is to make people listen to music by promoting it as a lifestyle. This mentality has gained "Peyote" a strong public perception to the extent where visiting the venue has almost touristic traits for people who do not necessarily fit into this reputed lifestyle. Even on its third floor, where the "CC thread" takes precedence over the "VC thread," the music is not considered a background element. The choices of played-back music and the bands they host ultimately define "Peyote." The venue's soundscape, as an outcome of these choices, is its foremost product. Interestingly, "Peyote's" customer base is mostly composed of the members of the bands they host and their social circles, a fact which almost renders the product and the customer at "Peyote" as one and the same.

There are no strictly calculated acoustic designs on either floors of the venue but the bands and the sound engineers are so accustomed to the acoustic shortcomings of the concert spaces that they can utilize them to their advantage. Sound leakage between floors is not a particular issue as the architecture of the building naturally isolates the floors from one another, and what little leakage may happen is welcome due to its implication of vibrance and multi-functionality throughout the venue. Further perspectives regarding "Peyote's" acoustic strategies are provided in the coming section.

Interferences Between Acoustic Communication Threads

VC-CC Interference

As previously mentioned, music playback at a venue constitutes the main instigator of the "VC thread" but the foremost inhibitor of

the "CC thread." Managers of the venues that utilize recorded music playback have different perspectives towards this type of interference; for "Joker," the music can serve a background function during the day, leaving an acoustic space for the "CC thread." However, later in the evening, the "CC thread" is not particularly welcome, since "people drink less while talking." Therefore, Tangör deliberately interferes with the "CC thread" to assume the "spatial ownership" of the venue and isolate the customers from their social groups. He explains that if the music does not overpower the dialogue amongst customers, he loses control of the soundscape and therefore that of the venue. While new customers may react against this interference, they get familiar with the venue's varying acoustic characteristics for the different intervals of the day and either attend accordingly or get subjected to a gradual acoustic acculturation and adapt to its soundscape.

"Peyote," on the other hand, prioritizes the "CC thread" on its third floor while promoting a strong "VC-CC interference" on the first floor. The music played-back on the third floor, although being selected through a highly stylistic filter to serve a foreground function, is intended for "nurturing the effects of socialization and alcohol" as Ersoy puts it. In the cases when strong negative feedback is received from customers due to "VC-CC interference," not the style but the loudness of the music is adjusted. Since music at "Peyote," as a "soundmark" (Schafer 1977, 10), establishes the identity of the venue, they prefer to try to persuade the customers through dialogue, rather than submitting to their stylistic complaints. The "VC-CC interference" is considered a tool to support this imposition. Once the customers' attention is shifted from the "CC thread" to the "VC thread," they are observed to display a more vibrant mental participation to the soundscape. This, at times, leads to a feedback loop between the customers and the venue, in which the DJs start pushing the envelope of stylistic marginality of the music to the extent where the customers get aurally exhausted.

> "With the rapid transformations in Istanbul's economic and social fabrics over the last few decades, there have been strong cultural shifts between consecutive generations . . . the new generation has lost contact with the musical heritage and the listening manners of the previous eras.

Ersoy, who also occasionally spins the music on the third floor, explains that the "VC-CC interference" renders him especially self-conscious of his actions as a DJ: "I start to overly worry about the loudness and the spectral balance of the music" which he reports as causing him considerable mental labor and elongation of the perceived time. A recent upgrade to the third floor sound system at "Peyote" has supposedly expanded the repertoire of music the DJs are able to play, since this higher resolution system can better reflect complex musical textures. This surge in the intelligibility of music also improved the "VC thread's" capacity to interfere with the "CC thread," as they have been observing more attentive listening amongst the third floor customers since the upgrade.

CC-MC Interference

Seventy-one percent of the participants (n =248) who took the survey described the negative effects of other customers' noises at a concert situation to be "average" to "much." This, alongside the report from venue owners, highlights the "CC-MC interference" as a pronounced phenomena at live music venues. If the customers themselves commonly describe this type of interference to be undesired, how does it remain to be such a prevalent issue?

In the case of "Peyote," we observed a functional obfuscation of the concert space. Many customers of the venue travel between the floors throughout the evening, exploring different entertainment possibilities. Since the other two floors of this hybrid venue serve mostly social functions, sounds emanating from customer behaviour leak into the concert space. Although the managers believe that the "MC thread" on the second floor should be of prime importance in an ideal situation, they are not in favor of adopting a domineering policy to impede the acoustic communication amongst customers which is considered an organic component of the venue's soundscape.

At "Babylon," however, the "CC-MC interference" is contextualized from an entirely different perspective. Since the sole function of the venue is to host live performances, the "CC thread" directly contradicts with the experience that the managers rigorously labor to design. The evaluation of this matter from the viewpoint of the musician has strong implications as well. As Başaran explains, focused and attentive audiences alter the musicians' performance greatly, which in turn enhances the overall experience at both ends of the "MC thread." The contrary situation not only negatively impacts the concert but also damages "Babylon's" global reputation when certain foreign acts and their managers who have access to larger talent networks become hesitant to book future events.

To rectify such negative effects of the "CC-MC interference," the venue "Babylon" established a "silent concert" policy in 2010, at a time when the steady increase in this interference had reached a point where certain acts almost walked off the stage due to customer noises. The policy is applied to concerts that are expected to exhibit a high dynamic range and necessitate, at times, a particularly quiet environment. Whether the venue for a particular concert will adhere to this policy is declared in press releases in advance; it is also announced right before the concert that customers who do not follow the policy will be asked to leave the venue.

"We are yet to be forced to ask anyone out," tells Başaran, explaining that administering this policy should not have been necessary in the first place but it has been greatly successful and the customer attentiveness from the earlier days of "Babylon" has been largely reinstated. "We are helping our customers to regain their capacity to remain silent during a concert," he says.

For the events that are not labeled "silent concert," there still remain measures to address the "CC-MC interference." In our brief discussion with "Babylon's" head sound engineer, he stated that the music should overpower the overall volume of the audience at all times. He, therefore, actively moderates the overall volume of a performance within the amplitude limits permitted by the specific genre in order to mask the customer noises. He observes this masking effect to shift the attention of a considerable portion of the audience back to music immediately.

Başaran sees the deterioration in listening cultures, which necessitates such policies, an intrinsically socio-cultural phenomenon. With the rapid transformations in Istanbul's economic and social fabrics over the last few decades, there have been strong cultural shifts between consecutive generations. He believes that the new generation has lost contact with the musical heritage and the listening manners of the previous eras; he partly puts the blame on a possible devaluation of music perpetrated by the internet. A similar sentiment was also expressed by Ersoy regarding customers of "Peyote." In his opinion, the massive access to music via the internet has lead to an over-consumption of the art form which in return has eroded the public appetite towards music and bred a "less-sensitive" listening culture.

(VC-CC)-MC Interference

While formulating the acoustic communication threads pertinent to enclosed social environments, we have hypothesized that interferences that emerge between particular threads could influence the acoustic communication routines of an external thread. The interviews have indeed illuminated such possibility with the managers of two venues separately underlining how the acoustic strategies of venues that utilize recorded music might be externally conditioning the listening habits in concert situations.

To explain this phenomenon, Başaran situates Istanbul's social life in a global context. He describes that there can be found a variety of social venues that offer soundscapes of different dynamic ranges in most European countries. However, a significant portion of the venues in Istanbul exercise the "VC thread" above a certain volume threshold, which establishes an "automatism." Başaran refers to it as, "talking loudly," which is a common defense against obstruction of verbal communication due to loud music (Rohrmann 2008), and consequently becomes a behavioural norm. "People got conditioned to speak at high decibels and we need to raise an awareness to interrupt this habit," he emphasizes. This "automatism" resonates in the concert hall to the detriment of the performance. Similarly, Ersoy recounts regularly observing audience members who react to live performances in a similar fashion to how they would behave at a bar in the presence of loud music playback. He explains that this leads to a "perceptual deviation" that accentuates a stark contrast between the function of a concert venue and the prevalent listening habits.

Referring to modern music mastering standards, Rodgers states that by over-compressing and therefore ridding the music from its dynamic tensions, "we've made it truly a background object" (Rodgers 2009). Similarly, we can speculate that the acoustic strategies exercised by venues in Istanbul rendered music in social contexts as "no longer a listening object." The customers develop not a physiological but a "cognitive deafness" towards music which becomes evident in the concert space as a sign of the deterioration in "concentrated listening" (Schafer 1977, 117) which was historically made possible by the concert hall in the first place.

Conclusion

Current research has yielded various perspectives towards the characteristics of acoustic communication in enclosed social environments of Istanbul. While some of the survey findings of this study coincide with similar research conducted in other parts of the world (as cited above), coupling of these deductions with the analyses of the interviews with venue managers has given us a broader understanding of the reciprocal relationships between customer behaviours and soundscape policies. This inspection of the interferences between acoustic communication threads and the resulting listening cultures idiosyncratic to Istanbul constitutes merely a first step in unraveling the complex dynamics of the city's soundscape. Future work will involve further field studies and surveys combined with an investigation of casual listening habits outside of social contexts in order to reveal possible external sources of interference that influence our acoustic communication routines.

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Endnotes

1. Surveys were conducted via the web in the year of 2012 with 248 participants.

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WORLD LISTENING DAY

Join us for World Listening Day — July 18th! Since 2010, WFAE celebrates World Listening Day, in honor of R. Murray Schafer's Birthday. Information is available on the WLP website: www.worldlisteningproject.org.