are. Soundscapes are always constructed, and the construction of soundscape should be regarded as part of the larger work of what Peter Sloterdijk has usefully called the work of "explicitation" in modernity.[9] Insofar as explication means the bringing into the foreground for the purposes of management and design of what had previously been merely given or implicit, and since the soundscape must be defined as a foregrounding of a background phenomenon, the making of a field into a figure, the construction of soundscape is part of the huge effort of rethinking the relations between the human and the natural that must characterize our future. In a world in which, as Michel Serres has repeatedly said, "we depend on things that depend on us,"[10] there seems no possibility of returning to a condition of immanence or innocence.

I began by suggesting that the concept of the soundscape both draws our attention to the particularity of sound and also draws us away from sound, or places sound beside itself. I then proposed that the audible presence of animals in urban sound is both a kind of haunting and a hollowing out of the tinnitant self-enclosure of human sound. Even as it points to the eviction of animals from the characteristically urban spaces of the modern world, the anomalous sounds of animals in the city point to a new, delocalized, even evaporated kind of urbanism, one in which the urban and the rural interpenetrate each other. This haunting serves to point us away from the cramping idea of location, of the factitious and reactionary notion of the here-and-now that hovers around every notion of the soundscape, and to adumbrate a newer, more conjugated, and convivial auditorium of the world.

Endnotes

1 R. Murray Schafer, *The Tuning of the World* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977) p. 7.
2 St. Ignatius of Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises*, trans. Micheal Ivens (Leominster: Gracewing, 2004) p. 19.
3 Charles Dickens, Jr., *Dickens's Dictionary of London*. 4th ed. (London: Macmillan and Co, 1882) p. 96.
4 Charles Dickens, *Martin Chuzzlewit*, ed. Margaret Cardwell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984) pp. 113–14.
5 J. L. Dowling, D. A. Luther, and P. P. Marra, "Comparative Effects of Urban Development and Anthropogenic Noise on Bird Songs," *Behavioral Ecology* (23) (2012): 201–9.
6 H. Brumm and P. J. B. Slater, "Ambient Noise, Motor Fatigue and Serial redundancy in Chaffinch Song," *Behavioral Ecology and Sociobiology* (60) (2006): pp. 475–81.
7 Alejandro Ariel Ríos-Chelén, "Bird Song: The Interplay Between Urban Noise and Sexual Selection," *Oecologia Australis* (13) (2009): 153–64, here p. 155.
8 Schafer, *The Tuning of the World* p. 78.
9 Peter Sloterdijk, *Schäume: Sphären, Vol. 3: Plurale Sphärologie* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2004) p. 87.
10 Michel Serres, *Temps des crises* (Paris: Le Pommier, 2009) p. 36 [my translation].

SOFT COERCION, THE CITY, AND THE RECORDED FEMALE VOICE

Nina Power

Four questions to begin with: What is the pitch of the neo-liberal city? How does the pitch of the city construct images of and for the humanity that travels through it? How does gender relate to control of this space—corporate, commercial, privatized space, and the few remaining places we might (often erroneously, or perhaps nostalgically) refer to as "public space"? How does the soundscape of the city relate to forms of control—what I will call here "soft coercion"—that often goes unnoticed, or at least blends into the background and becomes simply part of the tapestry of the urban sonic environment, alongside the whirr of traffic, the babble of the crowd, birdsong, sirens? We may think of the sound of the city as somehow being "neutral" on its own terms, or at least cacophonous enough to escape linear description, but by paying careful attention to the patterns of urban sounds, we do more than simply listen: the overfamiliarity of certain sonic tropes starts to tell us something signifcant about the way in which both gender and control are constructed and reinforced. This essay considers the now-ubiquitous use of female-sounding voices in a variety of urban settings: information announcements on public transport, especially buses, trains, and train stations; instructions on supermarket machines; security announcements[1]. The references here will apply mainly to the UK context, but it is apparent that many European and North American cities will exhibit similar features. Much of what I am looking at also applies to

more domestic and intimate technologies, such as mobile phones (consider, for example, the "Siri" application—a voice-activated knowledge locater that responds with a female voice on the default setting in most countries), GPS, or commercial automated telephone answering systems. But my focus here will be on the female-sounding voice as encountered in the context of the city, as a traveller, shopper, or commuter, in particular, where the choice of the gender of the voice is far less available to the listener, and where the voice operates at a generic or collective level, rather than relating to specific individual instructions. Here, the listener is perhaps passing through a transport hub, or buying food at a supermarket terminal on his or her way home hearing multiple recorded voices intermingle. This is the sound of the banal, everyday urban experience, rather than that of an ecstatic night out or serious state of emergency (although a low-level fear enters into the picture when we think about the way in which the message "in these times of heightened security…" becomes the norm and "if you see anything suspicious please contact a member of staff" is the sonic fabric of the everyday). It operates as a kind of aural clutter, but one whose pitch is supposed to remind us of a certain kind of female-sounding voice: in the British context, this voice is clipped, upper-middle class, brusque, sensible. It asks "have you swiped your Nectar card?" in the same way we might imagine a nurse in a field hospital in World War Two would ask if you'd been drinking enough fluids or getting enough rest.[2] It tells us which tube station is coming up next in a firm, bureaucratic way,[3] such that we feel reassured we know where we're going, but also faintly controlled and guided by some sort of invisible Mary Poppins. It is the regionless accent of BBC Radio 4, of a slight nostalgia for the War and post-war period, of hard work and no nonsense, of pragmatism and benevolent strictness. It conjures up images of governesses and schoolmistresses and films from the 1940s. It is the sound of Received Pronunciation and the Queen's English, of the voice that Margaret Thatcher never quite managed to get to sound anything other than forced.

This voice of soft coercion ("Go here if you want to do that," "Have you done x? It's for your own good, you know") announces something of a paradox: although women have yet to achieve quantitative representation in positions of power (as of 2013, in the UK women are 51 per cent of the population but only 22 per cent of MPs, 23 per cent of judges, and 31 per cent of local councillors[4]), their voices—albeit ghostly, disembodied, usually pre-recorded and extremely narrow in terms of origin, class, and pitch—are everywhere. This flooding of the commercial and transportational economy with female-sounding voices is inversely correlated to the number of women in parliament, with recorded female voices outnumbering male voices five to one.[5]

There are some observations to make, some technical, some political. The female voice in the places focused on here is typically pre-recorded, either as complete phrases (such as the name of the places on the tube map[6]), or as fragments of phrases that are later reconstituted by a second technology ("concatenation"). Think about those announcements you get that are ubiquitous but contingent, such as an announcement regarding the "late running" of a particular train. Here you are likely to hear a female-sounding voice that seems more fragmentary than usual: "Due to signal failure the … 9:52 … to … Penzance … will be approximately … 17 … minutes late. We apologize for any inconvenience this may cause." The pre-recorded blocks are played like notes in a particularly avant-garde piece, where the conductor is a machine and commuters the unwitting audience, rushing from one machine to the other at the behest of incorporeal commandments. But why make these voices female-sounding? Why not embrace a gender-neutral machinic-sounding pitch? Or to put it another way, what is it about male-sounding voices that train companies, supermarkets, and so on dislike? The clue perhaps lies in the separation between the everyday and the emergency, between the supposed smooth running of things and the potential for things to go wrong. If the role of the female-sounding voice is to reassure but also to direct, is the implication that a male-sounding voice would sound too dictatorial, too bossy, too "serious"? With personal technologies such as Siri, the implication that her (default) female voice fits into a continuum of secretaries and personal assistants is clear (if you ask Siri who "she" is, she will respond "I am your humble personal assistant"). In places that see a large number of passing human traffic, the situation is somewhat different—you do not command the machine, the machine "commands" you by informing, instructing, softly controlling. As female-sounding recorded messages take over more and more sonic space, we notice them bleed over into even those scenarios where emergency can be calculated and prepared for, albeit only sonically: not just the late running of trains, but coded messages for fire alerts in train stations ("Would Inspector Sands please report to Platform 2") are often "female-sounding." The soft coercion of the everyday thus includes and incorporates its own contingency.

But we could go further and ask what if the smooth running of things *was* the emergency? This would make the female-sounding voice the sound of quiet catastrophe, of social control as such, rather than just the ordinary running of things. This particular construction of gender—albeit of a disembodied, ghostly kind—would make the recorded female voice a kind of cover story for a normalcy that is in fact a state of emergency, of crisis, of barbarism, and capitalism. It would be more honest for this voice to be shouting, chastising, authoritarian, and perhaps therefore male-sounding to reflect the balance of power, but perhaps it is more alarming to reflect on why it doesn't need to be to have the same effect: the co-optation of the female-sounding voice as the voice of everyday control is no longer the voice of authority conceived as male (as in the pioneering voice work of Laurie Anderson for example), but of control regendered and recoded as female.[7] What effects might this have on the way in which we conceive of gender above and beyond our repeated fragmentary experience of the disembodied voice in urban spaces? Do the often unnoticed voices really have any effect on how we conceive of political representation, of the "public," of where "real" power lies? In so far as female-sounding voices represent order and soft coercion in a sensible mode, they arguably do present a misleading impression of gender and the real control of property

and space. The voices float monotonously over commercial and privatized zones, fusing an image of feminized "Englishness" with that of corporate culture. In other words, they are *symbolic* of the destruction of the welfare state and the ambiguity of the "public," as we witness it being finally hacked to death, but they are not *representative* of those doing the destroying (need it be pointed out that it is women and children who suffer most in times of economic crisis and benefit cuts). They are ideological sonic veneer for what lies beneath, the sonic equivalent of the "Keep Calm and Carry On" poster and its myriad spin-offs, a fusion of war and crisis made cute for the middle classes.

But what shall we do with the voices, the recordings that have replaced the real bodies of announcers and cashiers? We could do worse than to begin to pay attention to what they are saying, and not saying; of what they tell us about gender and the contemporary city, of where the power lies and where it doesn't, of the ideological function of "certain" voices and the exclusion of others. The protester in the street chanting spontaneous slogans hears her opponent in every beat of the neo-liberal city: to reclaim the machines—from supermarket tills to parliamentary processes—we must first identify who speaks in the voice of the enemy, and who speaks from elsewhere.

Endnotes

1 I use the term "female-sounding" to indicate that I am not interested in the normative question—what should "men" and "women" sound like if they are to perform "maleness" and "femaleness," as if this was anyway decidable—but rather for examining the intention of the companies that use voices that they have explicitly picked to "sound female." It is clear that when hearing voices we tend to "gender" them quickly, and often without reflecting on any assumptions that follow from this apparent recognition. I want to ask instead why the "female-sounding" voice has become a key sonic element in the urban landscape, and ask what it means for the maintenance of the running and order of the city.

2 A Nectar card is a reward card that contains points gathered through purchasing.

3 Though it should be noted that the story of Emma Clarke and her tube announcements is rather more complicated than we might initially think. See my earlier short piece on "The Dystopian Technology of the Female Voice" for the Her Noise Archive (2012): http://hernoise.org/nina-power/

4 http://www.parliament.uk/briefing-papers/SN02936/women-international-womens-day-2013-background-statistics.

5 http://britishlibrary.typepad.co.uk/archival_sounds/2010/08/womens-voices-calling-the-shots-in-recorded-announcements.html.

6 "Old Street," for example always comes to mind, as the way Emma Clarke pronounces it captures exactly the pitch and tone I mention above.

7 See her track "From The Air" from her LP *Big Science* (1982), and her widespread use of audio drag filters.

A BEAUTIFUL NOISE EMERGING FROM THE APPARATUS OF AN OBSTACLE: TRAINS AND THE SOUNDS OF THE JAPANESE CITY

David Novak

Japan's modernity has long been characterized by the proposal of its unique sensory culture, and the question of its survival in the face of urbanization. As early as 1898, Lafcadio Hearn described Japanese attention to environmental sounds as part of a special perceptual mode, which, he argued, was a cultural resource endangered by industrial Westernization:

> *Surely we have something to learn from the people in whose mind the simple chant of a cricket can awaken whole fairy-swarms of tender and delicate fancies. We may boast of being their masters in the mechanical, their teachers of the artificial in all its varieties of ugliness; but in the knowledge of the natural—in the feeling of the joy and beauty of earth—they exceed us like the Greeks of old. Yet perhaps it will be only when our blind aggressive industrialism has wasted and sterilized their paradise—substituting everywhere for beauty the utilitarian, the conventional, the vulgar, the utterly hideous—that we shall begin with remorseful amazement to comprehend the charm of that which we destroyed.*[1]

Hearn's identification of this local senseworld, then, was (like so many other fascinated narratives of intercultural discovery) already marked by its inevitable extinction. The future of the Japanese soundscape was bound up, part and parcel, with the colonial construction of