
Hearing places, making spaces: sonorous geographies, ephemeral rhythms, and the Blackburn warehouse parties

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Abstract. In this paper we provide a consideration of sound and space. Much of the early literature on this topic, we argue, failed to conceptualise sound adequately. More recent literature has begun to explore more carefully the nature of sound and the aural sensing of the environment in its social, political, economic, and cultural contexts. Here we contribute to this exploration not solely by offering a theoretical consideration of sound but also by providing a detailed analysis of the ways in which one particular place, over a particular period of time, became involved in a new set of relations centred on sound. The place in question is Blackburn in Lancashire, England, where, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, ‘warehouse parties’ revolving around ‘acid house’ music and the drug Ecstasy (‘E’) had a major impact on the town, in all manner of ways. By offering an empirical study as well as a more theoretical discussion on the relations between sound and space, we hope to demonstrate the significance of these relations to themes that have traditionally been regarded as central to geographical enquiry.

“I heard the news today, oh boy
four thousand holes in Blackburn, Lancashire” (Lennon and McCartney, 1967)

“Look at the holes, if you can” (Derrida, 1986, page 210)

Introduction

In the autumn of 1933 J B Priestley visited the Lancashire cotton centre of Blackburn. There he found a “sad-looking town” displaying the outward signs of economic depression: a lack of commercial traffic in the streets; an absence of smoke from factory chimneys; and the consequent reemergence of brick and stone from beneath the layer of smuts coating the buildings. Yet, he concluded, Blackburn and its neighbouring towns “have not the derelict look of some places elsewhere. The streets are not filled with men dismally loafing about. You do not see abandoned shops, which look as if they are closed for ever, down every street” (Priestley, 1977, page 263). Priestley was not concerned with the precise visual description of Blackburn as a place, yet much of what he wrote about the environment of the town undeniably relies upon visual perception: we learn of what he saw, but not what he heard, smelled, tasted, or touched. Moreover, Priestley goes on to compare the depressed and depressing present with a photograph of the town in its more prosperous past. In many ways Priestley’s reflections on Blackburn are unremarkable. This reliance upon the visual sense and the deployment of visual tropes runs as a consistent thread through a multitude of descriptions of place by academics, journalists, and creative writers. Such is the degree to which the manifold qualities of place are conventionally reduced to the visual alone. Our example has not, however, been selected at random. We shall return to Blackburn later in the paper, when we attempt to understand, in a very different way, aspects of what is now a very different place. Specifically, we consider Blackburn in relation to a

particular form of music, 'acid house', which brought the town into the public eye when it became an important location for 'warehouse parties' in the late 1980s and early 1990s. We hope thus to contribute to a growing challenge to the visual biases of conventional geographical understandings of place and space. And although, in common with Leyshon et al (1995, 1998) and Smith (1994; 1997), our particular concern is with sound and music, we affirm the general necessity of a fuller sensory appreciation of place (Rodaway, 1994; Pocock, 1993), which in turn suggests a more dynamic conception of the ways in which places are continually (though not necessarily continuously or coherently) made and remade. Our aim here is to explore the often discontinuous and disjunctive qualities of place that are in many ways opened up by appealing to a more broadly defined sensory environment.

The senses of modernity

The priority that western modernity has afforded to vision has by now been widely discussed. The visual has been accorded an impressive historical pedigree intertwining it with notions of spatiality, representation, and power (Burgin, 1996; Cosgrove, 1985; Lefebvre, 1991). Central to this was the Renaissance development of perspectival representation, which ultimately enabled the forging of vision as "the master sense of the modern era" (Jay, 1988, page 3). Within the field of vision defined by linear perspective, the omnipotent gaze formerly reserved for God was made available to a purportedly 'sovereign' human subject; a development intimately related to developments in science and knowledge, as well as in mercantile capitalism. All of this served to construct and position an individuated subject, characterized by a dominant specularity, and capable of exercising (typically) *his* all-seeing power over space.

The priority of the visual, established through its fundamental role in the constitution of subjectivity, has underpinned a range of developments centred on the power of the eye (Crary, 1990). Amidst the markedly uneven historical development of technologies aiming to capture and reproduce a range of sensory experiences, it is the technologies of vision, including both the practices of artistic reproduction and the mechanical or chemical technologies of photography and cinema, that have generally been the most advanced or most ubiquitous (Clarke, 1997; Schwartz and Ryan, 1998). Within this broader history, the representation of place specifically has remained fundamentally tied to the visual. Thus, from the artistic mementoes of classical sights visited by the eighteenth-century elite on their Grand Tours of Europe (Black, 1985), to the mass-produced imagery of place and travel today, scopophilia has assumed a predominant role (Urry, 1990). The picture postcard, for instance, has no equivalent appealing to the other senses, despite the evocative place-related qualities of, especially, sound and smell.

That vision assumed the ascendancy it did throughout modernity necessitated the denigration and disciplining of the other senses. Indeed, those senses less capable of being enlisted into the modern preoccupation with the maintenance of order have been forced to take a subordinate role, even to the point of apparent disappearance. Perhaps the paradigmatic case is smell. "Was it an accident that modernity declared war on smells?" asks Bauman (1993, page 24). Clearly not, given that smells "are the most obstreperous, irregular, defiantly ungovernable of all impressions. ... Odours do not respect borderlines and do not fear border guards: they travel freely between spaces which—if order is to be preserved—have to be kept strictly apart" (1993, page 24). Although this proposition applies broadly to sound as well, the aural perhaps represents an even more interesting case. Sound seems to encompass radically divergent possibilities, even *within* any particular one of its modalities (as evidenced, for instance by the difference between purely instrumental verbal communication on the one hand

and poetry on the other), let alone *between* modalities. Yet modernity seems to have attempted to order sound. The spoken word, for example, is frequently accompanied by all manner of guttural noises and hisses which escape from the speaker's mouth. Such sounds seemingly defy control and, to the modern ear, are not simply unnecessary noise (surplus to the requirements of clear communication) but are also *unpleasant* noises (to be purged from a decent world, however impossible such a task actually is). The desire to order and control sound, however, reveals a fundamental aporia within modernity. In fostering new technologies of sound reproduction, modernity dramatically increased the availability of different sounds. Hence, as the desire to discipline this cacophony grows, so too does the probability that such a desire will be frustrated (compare Attali, 1985).

It cannot be suggested that the different modalities of sound accord hearing a particular significance over and above all other sensory data. Nonetheless, sound represents a medium that is particularly notable, inasmuch as it carries the potential of departing from communication pure and simple, and opening onto other possibilities. Consideration of the aural reveals its capacity for setting moods, stimulating memories and influencing emotional responses. Hence, the Russian writer Leonidas Andreiyeff distinguished powerfully between 'stillness', which is the absence of sounds, and 'silence', a brooding, emotionally charged withdrawal from the world of sound and human interaction (Kern, 1983, page 170). Moreover, in practical terms, sound seems to evade a simple scale: there is no straightforward 'degree zero' of sound, as the American composer John Cage challenges us to acknowledge and explore in his composition, *4'33"*. In this piece the pianist sits at the piano for four minutes and thirty-three seconds, silently deploying his or her arms to suggest three distinct movements, but without playing a single note. Cage himself (cited in Kosterlanetz, 1989, page 65), considered that the audience at the première in 1952 had

"missed the point. There's no such thing as silence. What they thought was silence, because they didn't know how to listen, was full of accidental sounds. You could hear the wind stirring outside during the first movement. During the second, raindrops began pattering the roof, and during the third the people themselves made all kinds of interesting sounds as they talked or walked out."

The effect of *4'33"* is, by way of an impossible 'silence', to open up the concert situation, in which 'musical' sounds are expected, to 'nonmusical' sounds. Cage's piece thus deconstructs senses of opposition between musical and nonmusical, intentional and unintentional, motivated and unmotivated sound. By requiring that we listen to incidental sounds in the context of a musical concert, Cage challenges the conventions of aural experience. Thus, one person's noise is another person's music, and music is not coterminous with intention. More broadly, he seeks to impress upon us that not only is all music sound but all sound is music.

The way in which any given performance of *4'33"* is unique, being subject to all manner of chance occurrences that are woven into the performance—for Cage, a reflexive acknowledgement of an aspect of music largely underplayed or disavowed—reveals a further characteristic feature of sound. As Ong (1967, page 40–41) notes, "The world of sound is an event-world" whereas "the world of vision is an object-world". And as Lyotard (1987, page 11) suggests, an event is "Not a thing, but a *cæsura* in space–time". Music and sound thus possess a transformative effectivity, which disturbs the formal, measurable qualities imposed by modernity upon space and time. All of this points to the underlying difficulties facing attempts to promote a geographical engagement with sound; difficulties reinforced by a disciplinary history that lies firmly within modernity's predominantly scopic régime (Cosgrove, 1985; Gregory, 1994; Rose, 1992). The conceptual and methodological resources upon which we habitually draw marginalise

those aspects of the world that remain invisible (but not thereby unknowable or intrinsically less important). The handling of data from senses other than the visual, the ability to engage in the nonvisual counterpart of ‘observation’, the representation of sound, smell, touch, and so on, pose difficulties that are not evident to anything like the same extent (if they exist as the same kind of problem, or indeed as ‘problems’ at all) when it comes to specifically *visual* sensory data.

Most of the disciplinary conventions of geography are, then, ill-equipped to cope with sound; and music, especially, seems to contain an excess that cannot but be reductively expressed through conventional forms of verbal communication. Indeed, William S Burroughs once likened “talking about music” to “dancing about architecture” (cited in Spence, 1994, page 146). Fuzzily bounded, overlapping sound events depart from neat patterns of categorisation and meaning, and create difficulties and disorder in their wake. Hence, Frith (1992) reports Derrida’s observation that pop music is akin to his own project of undoing and unsettling, and that what set the musician apart was the “possibility of his meaninglessness”. Thus, for many, the “point of music” is to “flout the strict sense of the word” (Frith, 1992, page 83). As Chion (1994, page 33) phrases it, “there is always something about sound that bypasses and surprises us, no matter what we do”

Evidently, therefore, perceptions of aural space differ significantly from visual space. We can look in only one direction at a time, and sights can be excluded by turning away or closing the eyes. Sounds, however, are not so easily blocked out and our ears detect, simultaneously, overlapping sounds from all directions, often permeating through solid intervening barriers. This is the world that the Futurist artist Umberto Boccioni portrays in his painting *The Noise of the Street Penetrates the House*. Boccioni plays with the conventions of visual representation to create an image of multiple perspectives and fractured open forms around a central female figure so that “The material world penetrates her body as sounds and images penetrate her consciousness” (Kern, 1983, page 197–198).

By tuning into sound, geography faces a profound challenge. To the extent that sound contains the potential for an always surprising excess, constantly serves to open up *cæsuras* in space–time, and departs from the usual order of things, it demands fuller appreciation than it has generally received. The promise of an engagement with sound is not simply one of disclosing the place-related qualities of sounds, but also of revealing the role of sound in creating and defining particular spaces. The application of techniques derived from geographical conventions of mapping and analysis by the likes of Schafer (1976, 1977) have chiefly served to demonstrate the sterility of such an enterprise. In attempting to define ‘soundscapes’, Schafer’s work, which has found some echo amongst geographers (Pocock, 1988; Porteous and Mastin, 1985), attempts to identify and evaluate particular ‘soundmarks’ within the soundscape, which (in a manner supposedly analogous to landmarks) are unique to particular communities or places (Schafer, 1976; 1977; Westerkemp, 1994).

Even if we overlook the elitism in the apparent desire of Schafer and fellow workers on the World Soundscape Project—in marked contrast to the aural catholicism of Cage—to impose their own value judgements about the worth of particular sounds, their approach does little to assist our attempt to understand the multiple dynamic of sound in space (Laske, 1975; Schafer, 1976; 1977). In part, this reflects Schafer’s impulse to preserve discrete and distinctive sounds amidst an indiscriminate and imperialistic spread of more and louder sounds into every corner of life (see also Pocock, 1988; Porteous and Mastin, 1985). As Smith (1994) notes, such work fails to listen *in context*. In so doing, it neglects the social and political significance of sounds and soundscapes, and the experience of sound in space, which is invariably about the jamming of discrete and disjunctive sounds. For Schafer (1977), the characteristic soundmark of Vienna is the

'virtuoso drumming' of Austrian bureaucrats with their long-handled rubber stamps, an observation which conspicuously fails to capture any greater sense of the dynamic of sound or of urban space. Far better, in this respect, is Robert Musil's evocation of early twentieth-century Vienna (1988, page 3):

"Motor-cars came shooting out of deep, narrow streets into the shallows of bright squares. Dark patches of pedestrian bustle formed into cloudy streams. Where stronger lines of speed transected their loose-woven hurrying, they clotted up - only to trickle on all the faster then and after a few ripples regain their regular pulse-beat. Hundreds of sounds were intertwined into a coil of wiry noise with single barbs projecting, sharp edges running along it and submerging again, and clearer notes splintering off—flying and scattering. Even though the peculiar nature of this noise could not be defined, a man returning after years of absence would have known, with his eyes shut, that he was in that ancient and imperial city, Vienna. Cities can be recognized by their pace just as people can by their walk."

This passage proclaims the power of sound to elicit an emotional response; to establish or reestablish a bond of familiarity with a place. Yet, contra Schafer, this potency, although it is derived from the particular sounds of a place, does not at all rest on the ability to define or categorise individual, identifiable sounds (no more than the recognition of a person by their gait depends upon the recognition of the individual movements of particular limbs).

Moreover, sound cannot be isolated from the broader sensory appreciation of place and environment. In this respect, work such as the World Soundscape Project challenges the privilege afforded to vision, only to grant sound precisely the same privilege, by allying the whole project with that element in modernism engaged in a vain attempt to impose order onto a situation that threatens chaos. Its lack of appreciation of the dynamic extends to a failure to explore the spontaneous interaction of the senses. Again, the recognition voiced by Murch (1994, page xxvi)—that "one perception influences the other and transforms it. We never see the same thing when we also hear; we don't hear the same thing when we see as well"—may be reinforced by reference to Cage's *4'33"*. His audience, "in being given nothing to listen to from the performer... were made even more aware of the spectacle, the 'theatre' or visual nature of musical performance itself. ... Sight (and site) and sound and performance and audience are thus shown as inextricably linked and interdependent" (Shaw-Miller, 1996, pages 4–5).

The sensory appreciation of place and environment, we would therefore argue, departs significantly from the straightforward process assumed by some existing work, particularly given the emotional dimension to sensory experiences, which entails that these are never simply confined to the present time and immediate location, but are charged with the (collective) memories and associations of other times and places. Sensory perception opens onto a disjointed proximity in space–time. As Chambers (1997, page 232, citing Bhabha, 1995, page 217) writes, "music draws us into the passages of memory and its 'sudden disjunction of the present'."

This dimension of sensory perception is vital to acknowledge, moreover, given the extent to which it is itself open to manipulation and alteration. The latter are readily apparent in those commercial spaces that deploy an increasing range of sensory stimuli. Visual display in shops and supermarkets is frequently augmented by background 'mood music' (or Muzak®) and the diffusion of tempting smells such as that of freshly baked bread, sometimes simulated rather than the product of actual baking. Also an invitation may be extended to sample a product through taste and touch. This capacity to induce changes in sensation and sensibility need not amount to manipulation, however. It points also to the capacity to create new spaces or to change the function and meaning of existing spaces. More precisely still, it reveals the extent to

which places are, in and of themselves, by varying degrees discontinuous, dynamic, and heterotopic. Certain of the changes experienced within a given place are cyclical variations, associated with the passing of the hours or the seasons and rendering any place always and already ephemeral. Others can be more directly induced changes ranging from, for instance, the transformations wrought upon a person's living space by their attempts to make the place homely to more anarchistic attempts to subvert the conventions of a particular place. Such factors, which we have merely hinted at here, are arguably far more attuned to the dynamism of environmental sensing than the preservationist impulse represented by the mapping of soundscapes. Accordingly, it is vital to support and extend the existing impetus of work that revisits the question of the relations between sound and space, which is informed by a sense of the dynamic of the lifeworld. Rather than using audio technology to record sound and sound levels in order to map the differential incidence of sound across space, we must develop a more sensitised appreciation of the role of sound—increasingly mediated through accessible and controllable technology but, simultaneously, beyond control and capable of proliferating in unintended and unexpected ways—in creating and changing places and spaces. Rather than concentrating on space as a kind of vessel, we emphasise the fluid; to borrow again from Musil's writings on Vienna:

“Like all big cities, it consisted of irregularity, change, sliding forward, not keeping in step, collision of things and affairs, and fathomless points of silence in between, of paved ways and wilderness, of one great rhythmic throb and the perpetual discord and dislocation of all opposing rhythms, and as a whole resembled a seething, bubbling fluid in a vessel consisting of the solid material of buildings, laws, regulations, and historical traditions” (Musil, 1988, page 4).

Although this dichotomy is useful for distinguishing the different experiential dimensions of place and space, we must acknowledge the dialectic between the two. The solidity of the ‘vessel’ amounts to the illusion of ‘permanences’ in space described by Harvey (1996, page 261); for these, “no matter how solid they may seem—are not eternal: they are always subject to time as ‘perpetual perishing.’” They are contingent upon the processes that create, sustain, and dissolve them. Thus, all definitions of harmony are achieved via acts of *excision*, which ineluctably establish a ‘deceptive harmony’ (Calvino, 1992). Harmony achieves its definition in opposition to disharmony, concord in opposition to discord, order in opposition to disorder. Thus, what purport to be self-definitions are, inevitably, merely acts of boundary-drawing, which in and of themselves establish the possibility of border crossings and of transgression. The permanence of the vessel is an illusory perception imposed upon a constantly changing multiplicity of flows. Hence, if modernity sought its own self-definition in terms of order and harmony, it succeeded in providing the opportunity for transgression and disharmony.

In accordance with this ambivalence underlying modernity, the relations between sound and space need to be appreciated in a far more considered way than is offered by the soundscape studies referred to above. This necessarily requires an appreciation of the role of sound in making and remaking space and place. Once again, we are drawn to Cage's 4'33". Central to the composer's intention was the transformation of the space of the concert hall through the creative possibilities of such a work. Moreover, Cage aimed to challenge conventional demarcations between producers and consumers of both sound and space. An active and participatory role, on a par with Cage's own involvement as composer and the pianist's as performer, is accorded to an audience no longer perceived as *passively* consuming through listening (compare Barthes, 1977). But Cage also recognises that the changes the performance permits are temporary; the access to other spaces that sound affords is not continuously open to us and the chances of revisiting a particular space are remote, if not impossible.

Space – time, transgression, and the repetitive-beat generation

In exploring the territory of sound, we are conscious of the echoes of other work that has similarly sought to engage with challenges to a rigid and authoritarian ordering of space and with the temporary appropriation of space to alternative ends. Not all of this work is directly concerned with sound (Soja and Hooper, 1993), although some is explicitly concerned to engage with the transformative or transgressive potential of sound and music—though often in a different key than we have sought to write in here (compare Valentine, 1995). Undoubtedly, sound cannot be regarded as intrinsic or essential to such challenges to the sociospatial order. There is, though, an uncanny sense in which sound and music seem so frequently to challenge such order. Thus, for instance, in his analysis of the potential of Afro-Caribbean carnival to create a space beyond the reach of racism, Jackson (1988) cites Gilroy's (1987) ascription to black music of a power "to disperse and suspend the temporal and spatial order of the dominant culture" (compare also Lipsitz, 1994). The power of carnival to create a democratic space within the public place of the street has, however, become circumscribed by routine and an increasingly formalised relationship with a sanctioning mainstream authority. This represents, perhaps, the kind of attempt to negotiate, dilute, and incorporate the dangerous but tempting 'other' by the forces of authority, law, and order considered in detail by Stallybrass and White (1986). In other instances, authority attempts not containment but outright prevention. Legal penalties have been enacted in an effort to exclude unwanted manifestations of diversity, the out of place, to counter what are portrayed as acts of social and spatial transgression (Cresswell, 1996; Sibley, 1993; 1995). The challenge that transgression represents in such circumstances is thus all the more potent; actions and presences are charged with meaning both for those who transgress and those who define their actions as transgression. The subversive potential of the temporary transformation of space is thrown into sharp relief. Mobility and the perpetual appropriation and relinquishment of territories in a manner and in locations beyond the immediate control of authorities charged with social control become central to the protection and perpetuation of difference (Cresswell, 1997; de Certeau, 1984). It is this potential that is captured by the anarchistic conception of the Temporary Autonomous Zone or TAZ (Bey, 1991).

Bey suggests that the historical experience of the creation of a 'state' by Gabriele D'Annunzio in 1919 demonstrates the dynamic quality of sound in the formation of a TAZ. D'Annunzio having emerged from the First World War with a small army at his command, decided to capture the city of Fiume from Yugoslavia, intent on reclaiming it for Italy. Having captured it, but finding Italy rebutting his gift of the city, D'Annunzio declared independence. He and an anarchist companion drafted the constitution of the new city-state, and proclaimed music as its central principle. Each morning, D'Annunzio gave public readings of poetry and manifestos from his balcony; every evening a concert took place, rounded off by fireworks. This was the entire activity of the government. Eighteen months after the initial declaration of independence, with the wine and money exhausted, the Italian fleet arrived to resolve the situation. They found no capacity for resistance amongst D'Annunzio and his followers, whose somewhat bizarre experiment in governance had seemingly run its course. The tale perfectly exemplifies the qualities of the TAZ. Thus, for Bey (1991, page 101), a TAZ is defined by "an uprising which does not engage directly with the State, a guerrilla operation which liberates an area (of land, of time, of imagination) [and which] dissolves itself to re-form elsewhere/elsewhen, before the State can crush it." The concept of the TAZ thus embraces the dynamic power of the ephemeral which is also an aspect of Cage's exploration of sound:

“As soon as the TAZ is named (represented, mediated) it must vanish, leaving behind it an empty husk, only to spring up again somewhere else, once again invisible because undefinable in terms of the Spectacle. The TAZ is thus a perfect tactic for an era in which the state is omnipresent and all powerful and yet simultaneously riddled with cracks and vacancies” (Bey, 1991, page 101).

Hence, the TAZ runs counter “to the natural impulse when you have a beautiful experience to nail it down, make it keep on happening” (Bey, quoted in McEnery, 1995, page 92). By its very nature the TAZ is not meant to last, but is a means of maintaining the potential to have ‘beautiful experiences’. To escape incorporation within an “all devouring commercial culture: therefore you gotta *drift*, you gotta stay on the edge of the wave” (Bey, 1995, page 66). Bey’s conception, therefore, extends the arguments already made above, inasmuch as it contains an explicit recognition of the liberation that is associated with the dynamic. However much modernity has sought to construct a vessel to contain, once and for all, the mobility and fluidity that seem to pose the threat of undermining the sought-for order, this amounts to an impossible task—insofar as its own internal distinction between ‘order’ and ‘disorder’ erects a rigid boundary that would otherwise not be there to transgress. The history of modernity is—amongst other things, and far from uniquely—the history of the attempt to order and stultify the vitality which flows through the world, and to privilege one side of the dialectic between Musil’s ‘vessel’ and ‘flow’ at the expense of the other; that is, to disavow the ‘perpetual perishing’ of ‘permanences’ that are, in actuality, only ever ephemeral. Accordingly, the history of modernity is littered with numerous examples of acts that transgress the established order. Although many examples of such a process belong to the previous century—for instance, the removal from the streets of popular pastimes such as football, or the attempted regulation of the ‘nuisance’ of street musicians and other noises offensive to bourgeois sensibilities (Delves, 1981; Holt, 1989; Sponza, 1988, pages 163–194)—in the remainder of the paper we examine far more recent events, which illustrate directly our concerns with sound and music, and which return us, literally, to the place where we began our discussion.

We draw on the case of Blackburn, and aim to explore its importance as a locationally specific precursor to a wider cultural (or countercultural) movement centred on ‘house music’ and the drug Ecstasy (MDMA), commonly known as ‘E’. Most work on this topic has its origins in popular journalism (for example, Collin, 1997). In general, however, such work pays insufficient regard to problematising the supposedly metropolitan origins of such cultural trends. The story of dance culture has generally focused disproportionately on the south east of England, with only occasional mention of the importance of the north. Neglect of the geography of such movements is unfortunate, as a more sensitive *historical* appreciation has begun to emerge in the study of such subcultures. Thus, Collin (1997, page 7), for instance, suggests that, in the context of Thatcherism, “The dance—drug scene ... reappropriated libertarian capitalism and put it to uses for which it wasn’t intended”; whereas McKay (1996) provides a detailed exegesis which questions the historical continuity (or otherwise) of such ‘countercultural’ movements. There are some important points to be taken from the notion that such movements embody significant historical discontinuities. These discontinuities are, for example, implicit to Malbon’s (1998) account of ‘clubbing’ and ‘clubbers’, which he considers in terms of Maffesoli’s (1996) theorisation of a new kind of ‘neo-tribal’ sociality. In accordance with this, it would seem that ‘dance culture’ is more *transpolitical* than political in nature (Baudrillard, 1990; Clarke and Doel, 1995). This is not to imply that the transpolitical does not lead to the mobilisation of existing political resources and institutions, as we seek to demonstrate below, but it does suggest that the repetitive-beat generation has departed in significant ways from the modern political sphere into the postmodern realm of the

transpolitical. The sentiment “Fuck rioting, let’s dance”⁽¹⁾ may appear as simply apolitical and naïve—but is more properly considered transpolitical, insofar as it expresses a self-consciously *transversal*, rather than *oppositional*, message.

Underpinning our analysis of the Blackburn case, therefore, is an attempt to document in detail a neglected, geographically specific component of what was later to become a major popular cultural movement. Of course, the ‘underground’ nature of the Blackburn warehouse parties present difficulties in reconstructing anything more than a descriptive account of such events. Yet this case deserves such an exposition, not simply given its subsequent importance to dance culture, but also because many of the ideas considered above in theoretical terms can be seen at work in such concrete, historically and geographically specific events. Thus, however impossible it may be to capture the sense and experience of the parties themselves, the way in which they challenged everything from the nature of music events, through the senses of ‘space’ and ‘time’ that frame everyday life, to the established institutions of authority themselves, gives to them an importance that deserves consideration.

The Blackburn warehouse parties

Towards the end of the 1980s a new type of music, ‘house music’, together with the drug Ecstasy, arrived in Blackburn. The new configuration of the technologies of the 12” dance single, DJ equipment, and Ecstasy had a dramatic impact on the local landscape and soundscape. This new configuration permitted the transformation of industrial warehouses into the venues for acid house parties. Briefly—usually for one night only—void spaces became venues, thus creating new spaces that were oriented around the aural; temporary autonomous zones that existed in a fleeting space–time of their own. Many have commented on the serendipitous nature of such an occurrence (see, for instance, Champion, 1997; Collin, 1997). House music had developed first in Chicago and, although there are elements of similarity between the experience of economic decline and the vacation of industrial premises for other uses in this area of the United States and in northern England, the specifics of any transatlantic cultural transfer were hardly predictable (for a comparable discussion of the uptake of ‘techno’ in Germany, see Richard and Kruger, 1998). House music had been available in the UK since the mid 1980s, and had found a receptive audience amongst northern clubgoers. There are parallels here with soul music; like Chicago house, soul originated in the industrial heartland of north America only to find some of its most enthusiastic followers in Britain’s northern industrial towns (Hollows and Milestone, 1998; McKenna, 1996). It was not until 1987, however, that a number of London DJs returning from Ibiza launched acid house in the UK by combining house music and the drug Ecstasy. This combination refuelled the northern scene. Such a complex geographical dynamic provides a vivid exemplification of the way in which a set of flows—primarily cultural and technological—can come to engage with the legacy of an earlier set of permanences; the specific configuration of types of space created by and creating a particular place. We will begin here by making some preliminary (and necessarily brief) remarks on both the broader context of the Blackburn case and the musical forebears of the sound developed in the Blackburn warehouse parties, before turning to consider in more detail the events which transformed Blackburn into “the acid house capital of the north” (Richards and Slater, 1990, page 21) and the responses these provoked.

Blackburn’s past as the cotton town described by Priestley is a relevant point of departure. The depression that he observed during the early 1930s proved to be the prelude to a more permanent postwar structural readjustment of the global geography

⁽¹⁾ Graffiti, Leeds, 1995.

of textile production. Yet the rapid decline of the British cotton industry has not expunged the imprint of Victorian industrialism upon the built environment of towns such as Blackburn. The legacy remains in their municipal buildings, their stock of terraced housing and, most obviously, in a multitude of industrial premises. By the end of the 1980s many such industrial spaces in Blackburn were unoccupied; alongside the former cotton mills and warehouses still awaiting demolition or refurbishment, the onset of cyclical recession ensured that newer premises were also vacant. Blackburn was, of course, far from unique in the state of its economy or built environment; viewed from this perspective there is no singularly evident reason why a town with few previous associations with musical innovation (certainly compared with Merseyside or Manchester) should have come to host the events that began in the late 1980s. Yet without the empty spaces there could have been no parties and hence none of the ensuing conflict over the definition and the dynamic of urban space. The economic past of Blackburn was a necessary, if not sufficient, precondition for struggle over its alternative presents.

If there was an engagement between past and present in the reuse of former industrial premises for Blackburn's warehouse parties, then there was also a sense in which the parties themselves took their form from earlier events elsewhere. This was no simple replication of Chicago house music, but the sounds and spatial arrangements of the Blackburn parties did ultimately derive from previous musical developments. In Blackburn music was created using techniques—specifically the 'unique mix'—developed by the DJ Frankie Knuckles at the legendary Warehouse club in Chicago between 1977 and 1985. The mixing that was central to Knuckles's style involved running one record into the next, often with the two playing simultaneously at the changeover point. It was not just a sequence of records; rather, Knuckles created new sounds for the moment by combining the records. The tune and the beat went on and on, with the listener/dancer not necessarily being consciously aware that the record had changed. The mix at the Warehouse would often last continuously from midnight on Saturday until noon on Sunday. The turntable became a musical instrument as Knuckles layered sound from one record over the beat of another.

Knuckles was, in turn, influenced by the sounds and techniques of 1970s New York disco music. The notion that the records and the record player are transformed from the means of mere mechanical reproduction of predefined sounds to themselves becoming musical instruments owes much to the impact of dub reggae on disco music, which was chiefly engineered through the work of such record producers as François Kevorkian. Dub is a form of electronically produced music which emphasises rhythmic drum and bass. But more than this, dub can be defined as the creation of a virtual sound world via electronic studio techniques. The results from the studio are recorded onto acetate discs to create 'specials'. The social performance of these 'specials' on powerful 'sound systems' (record decks, amplifiers, and speakers) is a further transformation of the aural environment.

Acid house was thus, for both its enthusiasts and those who sought to demonise it, more than just another musical fad. Its power to create new soundspaces was one of the reasons that house music created such an impact when it first arrived in Britain. After an initial wave of parties in the metropolitan south-east, the rave culture arrived in the north-west of England. Here the 'shock of the new' was perhaps even greater, which was reflected in part by the numerical concentration of parties in the area. The official police record, quoted by the Chief Constable of Lancashire, indicates that there were some 64 acid house parties in East Lancashire between March 1989 and March 1990. Figure 1, in which the locations of parties between 1 July 1989 and 1 March 1990 are mapped (the dates and locations of earlier parties cannot be reliably ascertained), confirms their concentration within the urban area of Blackburn. Indeed, most of the

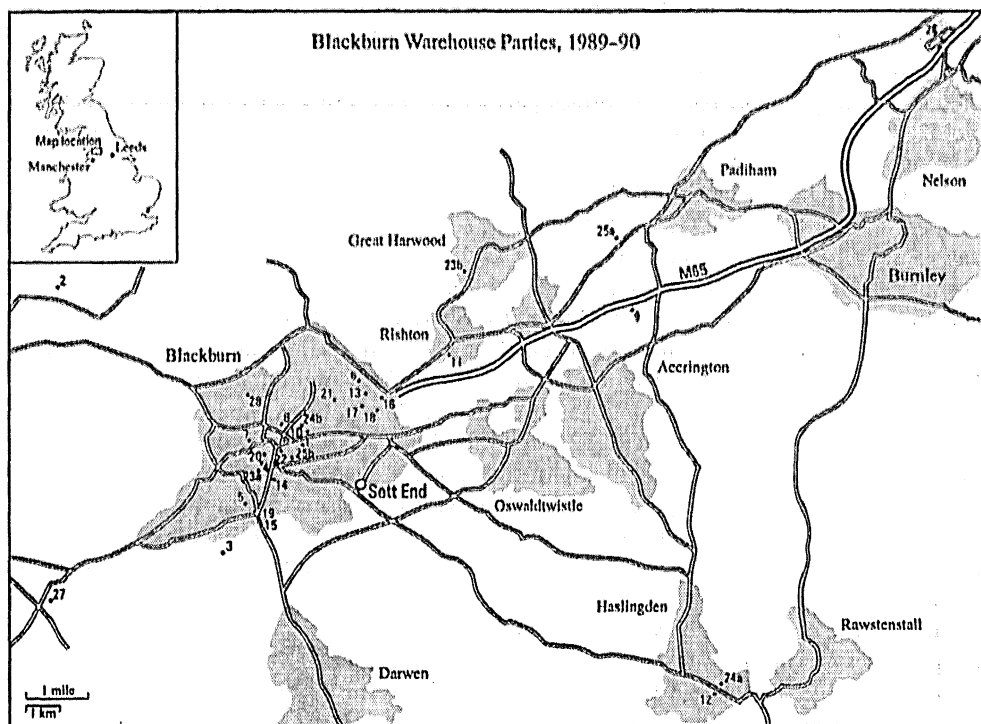


Figure 1. Blackburn warehouse parties, 1989–90 (see appendix for key).

parties occurred in the central, southern, and eastern districts of the town, which reflects the geography of warehouse premises. Only two major parties—"Blast Off" and "Live the Dream"—were not locationally tied to the temporary 'liberation' of industrial premises. These two early events, together with "Joy" in nearby Rochdale, involved the same sort of music as at the warehouse parties but there were few other similarities and little equivalence in the experience of the creation of a soundspace. That "Blast Off" and "Live the Dream" were deemed to be private parties, held in marquees pitched on land which they had been given formal permission to use, marked them out as different experiences acoustically, legally, and in terms of their ability to generate a sense of participatory excitement.

Indeed the existence of "Blast Off" and "Live the Dream" helps to define the particular characteristics of the true warehouse parties, not least their resonance with the power of the TAZ claimed by Bey. It was the temporary and transgressive nature of the warehouse parties that made them special, feelings amplified by the illegal use of the premises and often by the consumption of drugs. There was a sense of adventure in the exploration (or creation) of a territory at once known to the majority of partygoers, who were in large part local inhabitants, yet also excitingly unfamiliar in its newly revealed potential for transformation through sound. This sense was heightened by the fact that the partygoers did not know at the beginning of the night where the party would take place. By contrast the locations of "Blast Off" and "Live the Dream" were well advertised in advance, given their exploitation of a claimed status as private parties which enabled them legally to circumvent the normal requirements for the licensing and control of gatherings involving music and dancing. Thus, there was potentially less sense of liberation—territorial or social—in the creation of these soundspaces. Moreover, notions of a collective project of urban transformation were

perhaps eroded by the greater commercial organisation of the marquee parties. They were certainly also considerably more expensive, with entrance fees of £15 compared with admission costs of £3–£5 for most warehouse parties.

For the majority of true warehouse parties, the sense of excitement and collective—almost conspiratorial—involvement in changing urban spaces and thus in challenging existing urban structures and mores permeated the entire course of the event. Exact locations were kept secret until the last minute, largely in order to conceal the venue of the party from the police (Hall, 1989, page 1), so that “the event of the week starts in the dark in more ways than one” (Richards and Slater, 1990, page 21). The parties did, however, have a fixed point of departure with the meeting of a convoy of cars outside the Sett End pub and Red Parrot nightclub on the Shadsworth Road in Blackburn. Numbers at the pub rendezvous eventually reached into the thousands as the parties grew in popularity. The initial local catchment area extended throughout East Lancashire, also embracing Manchester as the parties became big “attractions [for] the region’s dance culture” (Redhead and Rietveld, 1992, page 73). The motorway network, in particular the M66, allowed people to travel quickly from Manchester to Blackburn in the early hours of the morning once the nightclubs had shut. Motorway service stations also provided meeting points for partygoers. Typically, the main convoy of cars began assembling in Blackburn at around 2 o’clock on Sunday morning, moving off to the party venue about an hour later.

Before the convoy reached the venue the organisers would have already broken into the premises, set up the music equipment (loudspeakers, amplifiers, two record decks, in addition to a generator), and often also installed a refreshment van. Within the empty premises, the entire space of the warehouse became a dancefloor for the duration of the party. The void of uncompartimentalised space was reconfigured through the electronically amplified sound produced by the music equipment into a new virtual world. On entering the building, often by a narrow door, partygoers would be greeted by an “onslaught of frenetic almost deafening house music” (Richards and Slater, 1990, page 21), at the origin of which was the DJ. Within this space there was “wall to wall dancing,” it being, unlike more conventional nightclubs, “no place for socialising, though everybody seems to know dozens of other revellers” (1990, page 21). The music, which started in the small hours of Sunday morning, could continue seamlessly for up to twelve hours, with the DJ using records and decks together creatively to produce new sounds and often interacting with the crowd of dancers to heighten the frenetic atmosphere. As Thornton (1995, page 65) explains, “DJs respond to the crowd through the choice and sequence [of records], seek[ing] to direct their energies and build up the tension until the event climaxes.”

To understand the experience such events provided for the partygoers, it is necessary to consider the combined experience of music, dance, and drugs. Although the main attraction of the parties was undoubtedly the music, without which they could never have taken place, for a large number of partygoers this was enjoyed in association with drugs—particularly Ecstasy, often together with ‘speed’ (amphetamine sulphate). The use of such drugs had an important effect, transforming the sensory experience of the partygoers. Ecstasy produces hyperactive behaviour of a repetitive kind, which amplifies the steady beat of dance music. It also alters senses of space–time, visual appearance, and aural reception. As well as making users wish to (and able to) dance all night, the serotonin rush delivered by Ecstasy also increases the user’s sense of well-being and sociability. The sensory experience and transformation of the warehouse space was an outcome of repetitive music and altered perceptions on E conjoined. However, these altered states were to become one of the main justifications or rationalisations for the subsequent clampdown on the parties.

It should be remembered, though, that the parties were illegal in and of themselves. For a start, they fell outside of the local authority licensing system that sanctions the use of specific premises for music and dancing. This circumventing of the licensing system prompted (sometimes disingenuous) concerns about the safety of the premises used. It was principally, however, the fact that the warehouse parties caused a broader nuisance that allowed the parties to come to be regarded as a problem. The anger voiced by local residents about the disturbance created by the convoy of arrivals prior to a party was particularly important in framing this perception. It was also the case that the sounds of the parties themselves sometimes permeated beyond the immediate venues, thus heightening public opposition. The TAZ became a threat because of the permeability of its soundspace, and because the priorities and values of the partygoers conflicted with the prevailing values of mainstream society. This reveals some important pragmatic considerations with respect to sound, noise, and music. Mary Douglas (1970) famously defined dirt as 'matter out of place'. The point Cage made about the context-dependent meaning of sounds was intended to reveal the potential musicality of all sound. But this also extends in the other direction. The leakage of music from party venues, not to mention the sounds associated with the convoys, were perceived by many residents as noise. Music out of place is noise, and noise is a legally recognised form of nuisance.

Partygoers attended the events, above all, to experience the music; without this excess of sound, albeit often enhanced by drugs, there could be no sense of the construction of an alternative space, no liberating sensation of the creation of a TAZ. For the partygoers, moreover, their access to disused industrial spaces, although often acknowledged as illegal, was nonetheless seen as legitimate. The void of an abandoned space was temporarily given meaning; it was argued that little or no damage was caused to property (usually already derelict), and in empty premises there were, seemingly by definition, no conflicts with the needs of other users. There are parallels with the views expressed by one London party organiser (cited in Collin, 1997, page 132): "One minute it's empty, deserted, no one wants to know, the rich fat businessmen have finished with it, the sign's up 'for sale', and all of a sudden, in the space of eight hours you've brought so much happiness and enjoyment into so many lives." Such a perspective is clearly at odds with the legal definition of private property rights claimed by the owners of the premises; rights which extend to the exclusion of nonapproved uses even in otherwise redundant property.

The popularity of the warehouse parties, and the different possible interpretations with which they challenged establishment (or at least established) notions of 'appropriate' behaviour, of the distinction between music and noise, and of rights of ownership and access to premises, meant that conflict was inevitable. The police, local residents, owners of industrial premises, the media, and local politicians all became involved in a concerted effort to end the parties. Indeed, the case demonstrates the potential for real conflicts of interest inherent in the dynamic complexities of urban form and geographies of sound. Although this tension rapidly became transposed into the terms of the established structures of power, in so doing it tended to lead to the issues being presented in a reductive manner, which left little or no space for creative negotiation between the starkly oppositional terms of 'right' and 'wrong'. The legitimacy of the views of the many residents for whom the parties genuinely were nothing but a source of disturbance does not automatically render the interests of the partygoers illegitimate, however much the established powers asserted this view. We are dealing here with the kind of situation conceptualised in Lyotard's (1986) notion of the 'differend': a situation where equal legitimacies contradict one another and where, in practice, established power structures are destined to pass judgement in a manner that simply represses rather than resolves the legitimacy of one group.

At first, however, the Lancashire police did not try to prevent the parties from going ahead; even though police forces in southern England had previously adopted such a policy of direct intervention (Cloonan, 1996). This, in part, reflected an initial perception that the parties did not pose a significant threat to the well-being of the local community and concerns that the safety of partygoers might be threatened by police attempts to enter venues once a party was underway (Ashwell, 1989a). The parties themselves were initially seen as relatively small and well organised (North, 1989) and, although noisy, there was little suggestion of violence—the absence of overt tensions reflecting the collective sense of the event, heightened by the effects of the music and the use of E. But the police were also handicapped by the limitations of their existing powers and techniques—which often related to their powers of control over fixed territories and defined types of spaces—in curbing the spatial unpredictability and dynamic of the parties.⁽²⁾

If the police were initially relatively limited in their response this perhaps served only to heighten the sense of grievance felt by the owners of industrial premises and by householders, the latter's perceptions of the parties being largely couched in terms of noise and nuisance. This opposition to the parties was widely reported in the local press (for example, Gourley, 1990; North, 1990a); indeed the local media were active players in the unfolding events. Hostile reporting and sensationalist headlines (for example, Ashwell, 1989b) consolidated opposition to the parties, and media coverage played a role in the recruitment of local politicians to the cause. Yet opinion was not presented in terms of simple divisions between 'us' (media, residents, police and local authorities) and 'them' (partygoers). The *Lancashire Evening Telegraph* not only printed letters from partygoers themselves, defending their actions (Dobson, 1990), but also included the opinions of residents who accepted the basic legitimacy of the partygoers' desire to enjoy themselves. Hence, there were suggestions as to how parties could be made less disruptive and brought within the framework of the law, rather than banned outright (*Lancashire Evening Telegraph* 1990b; Murray, 1989; North, 1990b).

Class and ethnicity also had a role in shaping events and reactions. Although British-born Asian young people form a significant proportion of the youth of Blackburn and many surrounding towns, few were found amongst the partygoers. Despite the welcoming philosophy of the events (particularly compared to licensed nightclubs in the area) and the claim that "you get people of all races and ages, from all types of background, just out for a good time" (Ofoluwa, 1989), certain sections of the population felt excluded. Thus, it was the white, male, working-class young who were overrepresented at the warehouse parties. Yet the disturbance caused by the parties also impacted most strongly on working-class areas and tensions between partygoers and those residents who were unlikely to find the parties relevant to their lifestyles—particularly the elderly and those with young families—sat alongside class-based perceptions of the residents' own powerlessness and inability to enlist the support of the authorities. Such feelings, especially apparent initially, were encapsulated in the words of one resident reported in the local media:

"I have complained to the police, but they say they can't do anything about it. If this happened in Mellor or Wilpshire [middle-class residential districts] it would soon be stopped. It should be stopped here, but because we're only in Shadsworth, no one bothers" (quoted in North, 1990a, page 1).

⁽²⁾ The police did, however, deploy powers that were introduced to stop 'flying pickets' during the 1984 Miners' Strike. Indeed at the national level, Chief Superintendent Ken Tappenden, the instigator of the Pay Party Unit based at Gravesend Police Station—which became the party intelligence unit for England and Wales as a whole—had previously received publicity for his leading role in the police action which prevented flying pickets entering the Kent coalfields (Collin, 1997, pages 100–101).

As the one fixed point in the fluid pattern of parties, the Shadsworth estate, which included the Sett End pub identified as the initial meeting point for partygoers, did, however, become a particular focus of reaction. A deputation of local residents met the Labour MP for Blackburn, Jack Straw, in January 1990 to enlist his support for their complaints about the noise disturbance (*Lancashire Evening Telegraph* 1990a, page 7). Straw's subsequent reported comments, unsurprisingly, reflect a construction of events and urban processes much more informed by legal notions of rights and transgressions than by an appreciation of the experiences of the partygoers or the special status of these events as ephemeral soundspaces. However, in explicitly criminalising the events it is significant that he identified the organisers as the real focus for concern, with the majority of partygoers being cast more as potential victims of exploitation rather than active participants. "Blackburn," Straw considered, "is not short of places for young people to enjoy themselves. To say there is nowhere to go is nonsense. It is just a foil by very greedy, very selfish criminals who disturb a neighbourhood and put the lives and safety of young people at risk in order to make money" (quoted in Perry, 1990, page 1).

Similar views were expressed by other local politicians and as part of a growing debate within the national political establishment, which emphasised the health and safety implications of the use of unlicensed premises and the attractions for organised crime of the allegedly substantial profits to be made from the organisation of parties and associated drug dealing (Hansard, 1990a). These were concerns that find some echoes in the later acknowledgement by organisers of the initial parties in Blackburn of the pressures they faced from the intervention of criminal gangs (Collin, 1997, page 163–164). Thus, by the early months of 1990, the Blackburn parties faced growing opposition on several fronts, with both more active policing of events and legislation to increase the penalties for those convicted of organising illegal parties. This reflected a common agenda of bringing space under legislative control and regulating behaviour within that space.

The first attempt to reassert territorial order was at the Red Parrot nightclub, the rendezvous for partygoers and a fixed point in the otherwise ephemeral geography of warehouse parties. In January 1990 Blackburn Borough Council revoked the club's late licence, thereby putting an end to the club itself as an acid house venue, but the police were unable to stop partygoers assembling in the vicinity of the adjoining Sett End pub (Richards and Slater, 1990, page 21). Although, in theory, also subject to control through the licensing system, the parties themselves required rather different police tactics. Thus the Lancashire force's effort to stop the parties, inevitably code-named 'Operation Alkaline', aimed to reassert control over broadly defined urban territories, rather than confront the dynamic of the TAZ directly by targeting particular premises. Thus for several weeks during February and March 1990 police tactics focused on the deployment of roadblocks to control the convoys. Initially efforts were made to prevent partygoers assembling on the Shadsworth estate, but on successive weekends in March access to Blackburn as a whole was restricted by police roadblocks, effectively preventing parties being held. Only once during this period did the police attempt the direct regulation of a party venue when the largest acid party ever held in East Lancashire was broken up on 24 February. The event, held at Nelson, was attended by some 7000–10 000 people and the police action, which involved around 200 officers (Collin, 1997, page 165), seems to have been intended as much as a warning to partygoers not to attend future events as it was an operation designed to catch the party organisers. Rather than attempting to prevent the party getting underway, the police held off their action until 7.30 AM—by which time the initial frenzy of dance and music had somewhat subsided, although the mass of partygoers still remained.

Overall, the episode perhaps served chiefly to emphasise the difference in mind-set of the authorities creating and enforcing the legal regulation of urban territory and the partygoing young whose striving to make new spaces for themselves tested urban rigidities. Partygoers themselves turned to the local press to protest their 'right to dance', and contrasted the original peaceful intent (if not the quiet) of the event populated by "young folk enjoying their taste in music and wanting to dance" with the sudden entrance of the police "armed to the teeth with helmets, shields, batons, sledgehammers" (Tate, 1990, page 10). The police were accused of precipitating panic through the use of smoke bombs, and of using unnecessary violence against people and property.

The police action took place against a background of Parliamentary effort to increase the penalties imposed on party organisers for their transgression of existing legislation relating to local authority licensing of events involving music and dancing. The new powers were introduced in the form of a Private Member's Bill, the Entertainments (Increased Penalties) Act, enacted by Parliament on 9 March 1990. The Bill's sponsor, Graham Bright MP, received advice from government and opposition sources, including David Waddington, a former Home Office minister and future Home Secretary, but also the MP for the Ribble Valley constituency which adjoins Blackburn. Bright's Bill, as he was anxious to point out, created no new criminal offence and conferred no additional powers on local councils as licensing authorities, or on the police and fire authorities. Rather, it aimed to reinforce the existing attempts to impose territorial control through licensing by dramatically increasing the penalties for those who organised unlicensed events, or who ignored the restrictions placed by licensing authorities upon the size of events. The maximum fines associated with breaches of the laws relating to licenses for music and dancing increased from £2000 to £20 000, with additional powers for imprisonment of up to six months. Even this was felt to be inadequate by some MPs; particularly vocal in the immediate aftermath of the police action in Nelson was the local MP, Ken Hargreaves, the Conservative member for Hyndburn. He called, unsuccessfully, for fines of up to £50 000 for party organisers in addition to imprisonment for up to six months. Hargreaves also noted the lobbying initiative taken by Hyndburn District Council in writing to all MPs to urge support for the principle underlying Bright's Bill, but also to argue that it be supplemented by greater police powers of entry to unlicensed premises and for the seizure of audio equipment at parties. Such measures were not discussed by Parliament, but the government followed up Bright's Bill by invoking powers under the 1988 Criminal Justice Act to give magistrates the authority to confiscate both equipment and proceedings from illegal parties (Hansard, 1990a; 1990b).

After the events at Nelson, the police gained the initiative in preventing the parties, and they did so effectively—with powers in place well before the passing of the 1994 Criminal Justice and Public Order Act [one of the targets of which was, once again, this type of party (Cloonan, 1996)]. No more warehouse parties have occurred in East Lancashire to date. Other parties were held in parts of the north west in the summer of 1990, such as the "Revenge" parties, so named to signify their reaction to the authorities and their stopping of the Blackburn parties. These parties, though, were based around Wigan and Warrington, were on a smaller scale than the Blackburn parties, and were often stopped before they could start.

The TAZ was, in fact, under attack from more than one direction. As official policing strove to restore 'order', the culture of acid house was appropriated by a new brand of 'corporate clubbing'—an attempt, perhaps, to instantiate an 'appropriate form' of 'transgression' on the part of those in a position of authority (Stallybrass and White, 1986). Indeed, house music had been commercially appropriated and its transgressive

potential diluted to such an extent that, by 1996, it formed part of a British Tourist Authority campaign to target the youth market. As Collin (1997, page 268) comments, "House ... had finally been made safe for tourists and casual consumers." Occasional outdoor parties still evade the legislative net in more peripheral rural locations, but the urban environment has been colonised by decidedly less transgressive forces. Leyshon et al (1995, page 424) note that "Moves to regulate or ban events such as raves work through a particular sense of what counts as a pleasant rural environment." This statement should perhaps be broadened, as the Blackburn case demonstrates, to include a particular sense of the *urban* environment too. The Blackburn parties (and others elsewhere) provided the prototype for new soundspaces which have since been incorporated into the planning regime in urban areas. Recast in this form, entrepreneurial initiative has yielded rich commercial rewards. There have been new dance nights, the opening of new clubs, and extensions of the licensing laws in established premises to recreate within controlled environments the events that took hold spontaneously in Blackburn over the months documented here. Such developments have, given their more strictly commercial rationale, occurred chiefly within the larger regional centres, including Manchester and Liverpool. Blackburn itself has seen no new clubs and no extension of licensing hours, despite the evident demand. In many ways, the new clubs and dance nights failed from the start to offer the same experience as the warehouse parties. Although they play the same music, the clubs do not provide the adventure of an unexpected location each weekend; nor do they offer, to anything like the same extent, the kind of transformative potential which gave to partygoers the collective role as composers of a new soundscape. Extended opening hours sometimes receive official sanction, but—despite the rhetoric of the '24-hour city' being promulgated by the local councils of a number of British cities—most of the new club nights outside London finish at 2 AM, unlike the warehouse parties which went right through the night. In short, events have been brought within the remit of the legislative system and have become subject to the endorsement of the local planning and licensing authorities. As a consequence, there is far less conflict with local residents. However, the way in which such events are now almost fully controlled has had the effect of stultifying the questioning of the local environment and people's daily routines that the transformation of Blackburn's warehouse spaces into sonorous spaces, detached from the world outside was, for a time, able to achieve.

Conclusions

The present discussion serves to draw attention to the problems and potentials of reevaluating the geographer's sense of place and space. In attempting (as urged by Cage) to hear the world more consciously and reflectively we possess the means to create more challenging geographies: first, in the initiative required to reexamine taken-for-granted conventions of the representation of place, both the popular and the academic; second, in the strains imposed by the qualities of sound—its potential boundlessness, its dynamic continuity, and the heterotopic layering of different sounds at a particular location—upon conventional systems of classifying and placing phenomena. But in confronting the complexities of encountering sound, in attempting to go beyond the mapping of fixed points in a soundscape, we are also accepting a wider challenge of monitoring and interpreting the dynamic of everyday life. Places, and the spaces within, are continuously being reshaped and remade; the dynamic of the life-world cannot adequately be represented by the schema of time geography in which individuals move across space–time between stations or locations which fulfil a full range of functional needs. The nature and function of those stations themselves change—at a pace that may reflect the cycle of day and night, the slower seasonal

rhythm of the year, or again a more linear process, be it growth and development, or ageing and decay. Indeed the same space may simultaneously perform different functions or assume a different character for particular individuals who visit it or pass through its vicinity. Amongst the multitude of stations there are those whose impermanence is apparent from the outset; the very being of such ephemeral spaces may be encapsulated in their impermanence and the ability it endows to support functions that would otherwise be precluded. This is the power of the TAZ; the liberation and transformation of space, the challenge in yet other senses to our conventional geographies.

There is thus an academic challenge to overcome the neglect of ephemeral spaces and the alternative ways of living that they suggest; to understand the construction of ephemeral spaces and the ways in which the dynamic of sound interacts with the dynamic of space; and therefore to encounter and examine the critical difference between the mental construction of a sonorous world on the basis of essentially static soundmarks, as against dynamic, impermanent, fuzzily bounded soundspaces. But in associating the creative potential of soundspaces with the political potential of the TAZ, we encounter other challenges to the lived realities of geographies which we have conventionally structured within the rigidities of modernist land-use planning and legally defined systems of property rights. The power of the TAZ to transcend societal and legal norms is both the basis for its liberatory potential and, typically, for its condemnation by mainstream society. Ephemeral spaces such as those of the Blackburn warehouse parties can be construed both as opportunity and as nuisance; the sound-space created being as permeable as it was powerful. The dynamic and fluid nature of sound renders it academically evasive and practically invasive. For some this might be an argument for a recourse to the stricter policing of sounds advocated by Schafer and the World Forum for Acoustic Ecology (WFAE). But the tensions inherent in the promotion and eventual extinction of the warehouse parties strike at the heart of the WFAE's apparently benign aim of improving acoustic quality and balance. In practice, such aims may conceal a more authoritarian intent to impose order upon 'ill-disciplined' soundscapes and soundspaces. Such a project is both dangerous in intent and impractical in execution; the 'common good' cannot be assured from such a standpoint of stultifying selfrighteousness. Only through the study of sound in place as encapsulated by Musil (an intertwined, scattering, splintering dynamic, which is indefinable yet distinctive) and the social and political tensions that sounds (within and beyond spaces; displaced; misplaced) may create, can we truly begin to understand the full potential of sonorous geographies. Tensions over the uses of space, over the creation and dissolution of spaces, and over the overlapping of differently bounded spaces are elements of geographical study to be more enthusiastically explored, not wished away. Hence Derrida's invocation to 'look at the holes', which ensures a sensitivity to the kind of differences and disjunctures that are simply forced from view if one tries, instead, to look at the whole. A part of this sensitivity surely involves senses other than vision, which open onto the dynamic disjuncture of place. It is this proposition that we hope we have at least begun to demonstrate in our discussion of the Blackburn warehouse parties.

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APPENDIX

1. Saturday 1 July, 1989; approximately 800 attend a party at an old cotton mill on Ciceley Lane, Blackburn. Event stopped by police. Four arrests for drug and public order offences.
2. Saturday 29 July; approximately 4000 attend "Blast Off" at Balderstones, near Blackburn.
3. Saturday 16 September; approximately 4000 attend "Live the Dream" at Tockholes, Blackburn.
4. Saturday 24 September; approximately 800 attend party in a disused slaughterhouse, Sumner St, Blackburn. Music went on until 8 AM, although by that time the numbers inside had dwindled to about 40. One person arrested for drugs offence.
5. Saturday 31 September; approximately 800 at Albion Mill, Albion St, Blackburn.
6. Saturday 7 October; approximately 800 at Northrop factory, Moss St, Blackburn. Ended shortly before 10 AM Sunday.
7. Saturday 14 October; approximately 500 attend party at Pump St, Blackburn. Ended shortly after 10 AM Sunday.
8. Saturday 21 October; approximately 500 at Glenfield Park, Blackburn.
9. Saturday 28 October; approximately 500 at Huncoat Industrial Estate, Hyndburn. Finished 10 AM Sunday.
10. Saturday 4 November; approximately 1000 at Fort St, Eanam, Blackburn. Eight arrests for drug and public order offences. Police broke up the party at 7 AM Sunday.
11. Saturday 11 November; approximately 1500 at GEC industrial complex, Clayton-le-Moors. No arrests. Finished 8 AM Sunday.
12. Saturday 18 November; approximately 1500 at Waterside Industrial Estate, Grane Road, Haslingden. No arrests. Finished 10.30 AM Sunday.
13. Saturday 2 December; approximately 2000 attend "Acid House Erupts" at Park Batteries site, Whitebirk estate, Blackburn. 8 arrests, four officers injured.
14. Saturday 9 December; approximately 2000 – 3000 at Balmoral Mill on Chadwick St, Near Royal Infirmary, Blackburn. Relatively peaceful, ended about 9 AM Sunday.
15. Saturday 16 December; approximately 3000 at Ewood Mills, Bolton Rd, Blackburn. Six arrests.
16. Christmas Eve; approximately 3000 at Whitebirk Industrial Estate. No arrests.
17. Boxing Day; approximately 2000 – 3000 at Whitebirk Industrial Estate. No arrests.
18. Saturday 30 December; approximately 5000 at Lancashire Fires Ltd, Whitebirk. No arrests.
19. New Years Eve; approximately 3000 at Ewood Mills, Bolton Rd, Blackburn. No arrests.
20. Saturday 6 January, 1990; approximately 3000 at Blackburn Cattle Market.
21. Saturday 13 January; approximately 5000 at Gladstone St, Blackburn.
22. Saturday 20 January; approximately 5000 at proposed Royal Mail Parcels warehouse. No arrests.
- 23(a). Saturday 27 January; approximately 800 at an industrial unit, Ordance St, Blackburn.
- 23(b). Saturday 27 January; approximately 1500 people at the former XL crisps factory in Waverledge Rd, Great Harwood.
- 24(a). Saturday 3 February; approximately 5000 people at Waterside Industrial Estate, Haslingden.

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- 24(b). Saturday 3 February; approximately 1000 at Ford St., East Lancashire Police Chief Bob Metcalfe warns that he wants an end to the parties within three months.
 - 25(a). Saturday 10 February; approximately 6000 at empty industrial units owned by Hyndburn Council, Altham Industrial Estate. 40 arrests. For the first time the partygoers are prevented from gathering on the Shadsworth estate.
 - 25(b). Saturday 10 February; approximately 5000 at Fogart Ltd, adjacent to Blackburn railway station. 2500 people still present at 9.30 AM Sunday.
 26. Saturday 24 February; between 7000 and 10 000 at Lomeshaye Industrial Estate, Nelson. Police break up the party. Many arrests; all cells at Nelson, Colne, and Burnley police stations said to be full.
Saturday 3 March; police roadblocks seal off Blackburn. 14 arrests.
Saturday 10 March; police roadblocks seal off Blackburn. No party; 20 arrests; mini-riot in Blackburn.
 27. Saturday 17 March; police roadblocks. Party attempted at Finnington Lane between Chorley and Blackburn. 21 arrests.
Saturday 24 March; police roadblocks. No party.
 28. Saturday 31 March; police roadblocks to stop a party in a house on Mile End Row, Revidge, Blackburn.

Source: derived from the *Lancashire Evening Telegraph*.