Standing out from the Crowd. Vocal and Sound Techniques for Catching Peoples' Attention in an Indian Bus Stand

Christine Guillebaud

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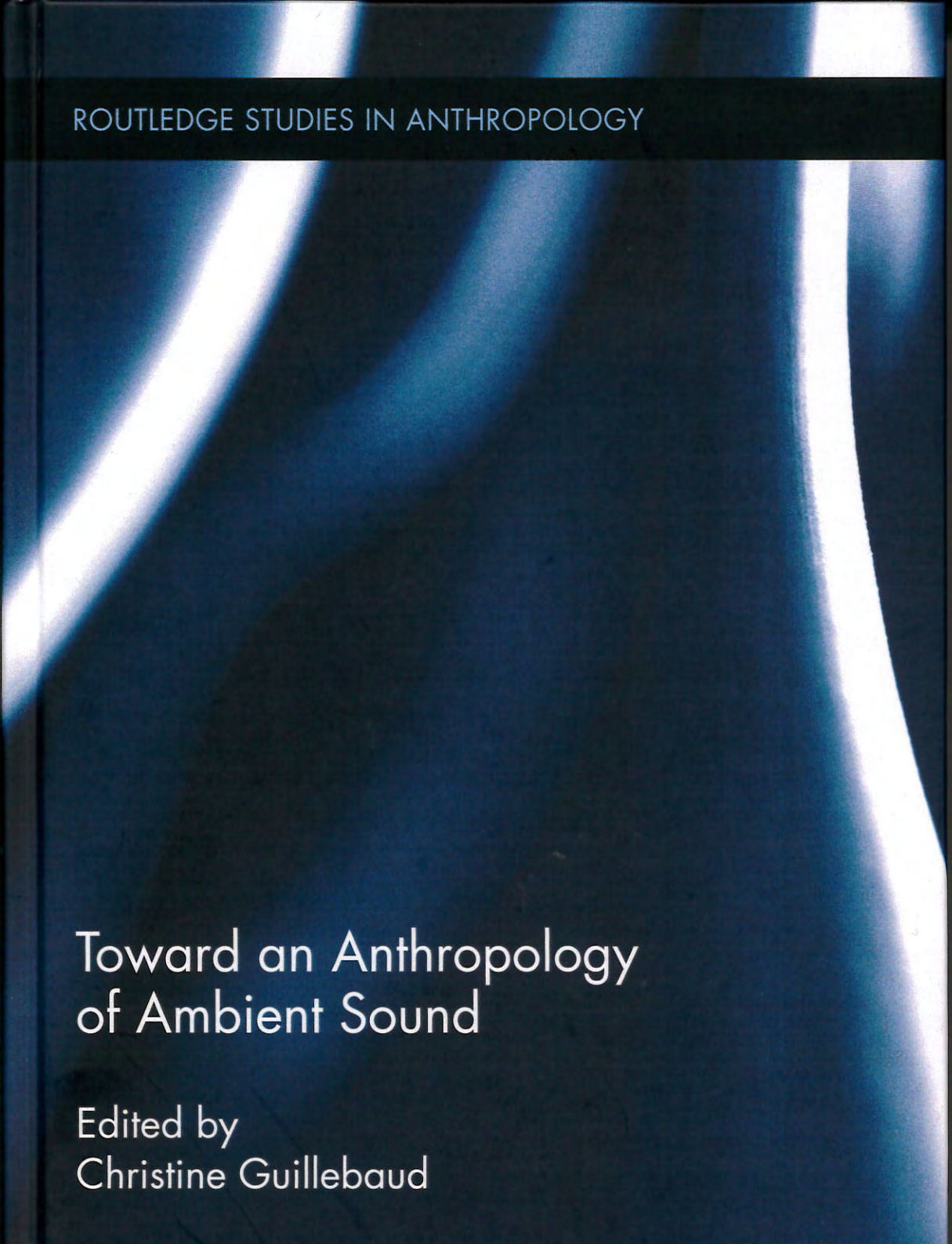

Toward an Anthropology of Ambient Sound

Edited by
Christine Guillebaud

Toward an Anthropology of Ambient Sound

This volume approaches the issue of ambient sound through the ethnographic exploration of different cultural contexts including Italy, India, Egypt, France, Ethiopia, Scotland, Spain, Portugal, and Japan. It examines social, religious, and aesthetic conceptions of sound environments, what types of action or agency are attributed to them, and what bodies of knowledge exist concerning them. Contributors shed new light on these sensory environments by focusing not only on their form and internal dynamics, but also on their wider social and cultural environment. The multimedia documents of this volume may be consulted at the address: milson.fr/routledge_media

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4 Standing Out From the Crowd

Vocal and Sound Techniques for Catching People's Attention in an Indian Bus Stand

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With their unclear boundaries, Indian cities are often perceived as places where the observer can quickly become disoriented. Indeed, the limits between public and private activities are often difficult to discern (Appadurai 1987), the boundaries between street and sidewalk are porous with dense circulation both on the roads and in the crowds, and a constant stream of the most heterogenous daily activities (Gandhi and Lotte 2012). Many anthropologists have underlined the elusive nature of this urban space, particularly that of the old cities "where the vast majority of Indians still lived were simply seen as unhygienic, opaque, and dangerous" (Gandhi 2011: 206). The sound space does not escape this chaotic representation. Indian megacities are among the "noisiest" in the world. There, as elsewhere, decibel readings are scrupulously carried out according to regional, national, and international standards. Even though the notion of "pollution" may seem legitimate in a public health perspective and for the improvement of the quality of city dwellers' daily lives, for the anthropological study at hand, it presents some problems. On the local level, a physical decibel reading carried out at a traffic intersection, a hospital, or at a school hardly reveals anything about the way in which inhabitants and users listen to or use these spaces. It also fails in fully revealing the ways in which ambient sounds are perceived, or about how to evaluate and appreciate the sensory environment. The notion of "pollution" arbitrarily places thousands of daily commercial and ritual activities on a same level of acoustic reality, although their sound characteristics are difficult to compare. Our research consists of observing (and recording) these fragments of daily life in different public spaces (markets, temples, train/bus stations). In focusing on their sensory dimensions, listening to and observing these places *in situ* is one of the goals that this study aims to reinstate.[1] Different vocal and sound techniques are produced in these spaces to create effects that are perceived by the inhabitants, clients, and passers-by or generally to attract their attention; or even to shape "ambiances"[2] that impose specific listening postures on these same listeners. The present chapter focuses on the example of a bus station, considering it as a relatively autonomous *milieu*. By *milieu*, we mean a composite world made up of sounds produced, perceived, and listened to, both intentionally and otherwise. This simple

definition—centered on the idea that experienced "sound worlds"[3] exist—is also inscribed in a wider anthropological undertaking. We indeed consider the bus station as a site for what is commonly referred to as everyday public interactions (Goffman 1973 [1959]), which involves different procedures for sound perception as well as singular ways to divide space. I have chosen to focus on the example of the Saktan Tampuran Bus Stand[4] located to the north of Trichur, a city of the southern Indian state of Kerala. The choice of this particular station is primarily due to the fact that I have been there many times and have traveled to, from, and through there for many years.[5] But also, as a "bus station", this place seemed relatively typical, in the sense that its architectural, human, and acoustic characteristics are commonly found in most of the stations throughout the country. I consider this site as an exemplary case of a sound *milieu* and not as a culturally isolated space.

The Bus Station: A Sound Space and Its Listening Scales

At the bus station, as a space of mobility and circulation, travellers find themselves immediately thrust into a dense sound environment. The multiple events occurring at once give the impression of a vast chaos of sound. The observer is struck by the amount of (sound) events and the resulting saturation, even moreso because the spatial configuration of the station seems to be on the contrary particularly well defined.

- **Document 1:** A morning at Saktan Tampuran Bus Stand (Trichur, Kerala). Video [04'53"]. Image: Christine Guillebaud, 2008.

Following the stream of passengers, a central platform can be seen along which several dozen buses are parked awaiting their departure. These vehicles are not parked there randomly, but have each taken a space reserved for each one of the destinations. Among them is the town of Guruvayur, a holy place with its celebrated Krishna temple, Guruvayurappan, a very sought-after destination notably during the festival periods that rhythm the Hindu calendar. There is also Shoranur, a town where many transfers are made to northern districts. And Kuntakulam, the urban center with its different traditional factories. Many workers go there every day. In the Saktan Tampuran station, there are also many permanently installed small businesses, teashops, and groceries aligned in the middle of the platform. They mark the circulation space of travellers moving along in two opposite directions. The platform functions as an intermediary space reserved for passengers waiting to board.

The video montage shown here reunites different shots. I had the chance to film different areas of the platform: within a stream of pedestrians moving or among a group standing, sometimes focusing on certain interactions, notably involving ticket collectors stationed at the back of the vehicles. To my surprise, the image reveals little about the extreme sound saturation that characterizes the place. The sound space is a concentration of sounds of traffic,

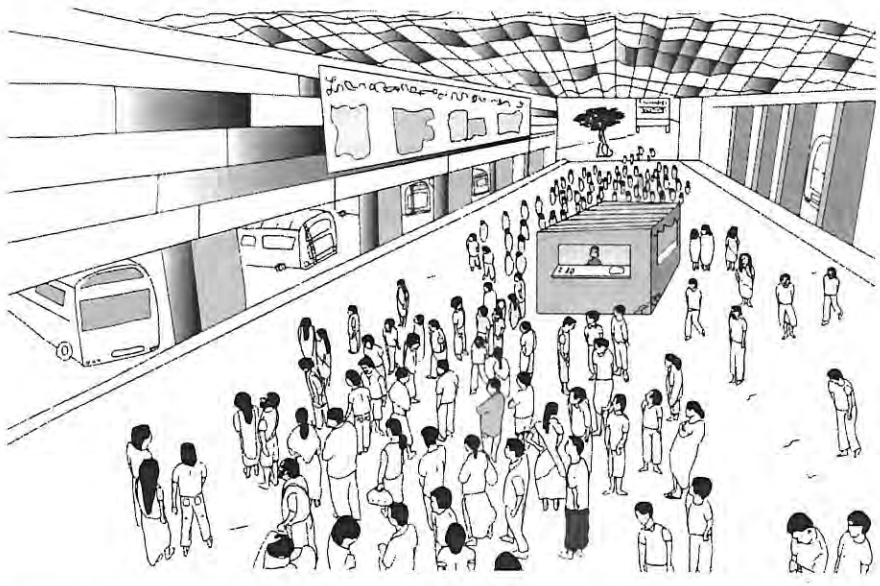

Figure 4.1 Saktan Tampuran Bus Stand (Trichur, Kerala, India). Digital tablet drawing based on field video (Ch. Guillebaud).
Artist: Inès Dobelle.

motors, and the multiple harangues of the ticket collectors. The first impression of this sound space is one of extreme discord between the stream of passengers and the different recorded sound actions. There is no coordinated and global logic of the sound space here but rather different listening scales that are mainly organized around the ticket collectors. Each of these "criers" stands at the foot of his bus. This outwardly oriented posture precisely favors communication interaction with the out-bound pedestrians. The ticket collector's function is to first attract and invite the travellers to take their place on the bus. It is only once the bus is full that this ticket collector may proceed to selling the tickets on the bus by moving about in the aisles.

The Crier: The Man Who Captures More Than He Informs

Upon listening to these cries for the first time, one might think that these criers' calls are informative; in other words, that they are simple announcements. In this way, their function would be similar to that of the vocal announcements diffused via microphone and loudspeakers (or pre-recorded announcements) as is the case in many bus and railway stations around the world. However, here nothing else is associated to these voices. There are no display boards, no timetables, and no space centralizing information. There

are as many criers as there are destinations and just as many buses ready to depart. These differences are essential: the entirely acoustic nature of the announcements and the multiplicity of the sound sources imply equally multiple perception modalities and localization of these voices.

From a semantic point of view, the voices of these criers always indicate the destination—the name of a town. However, the striking feature of these calls is more the sound form rather than their statement itself. It is not surprising then that there is quite a variety in the ways to call and harangue and the acoustic choices used individually by the criers. They set themselves apart in this sound *milieu* marked by high intensity and saturation. Rather than choosing semantic clarity, articulation, and intelligibility, these criers voluntarily shorten the names of the towns and cities. The holy city of "Guruvayur" becomes "Guruyur", Kuntakulam is heard as "Kulam", and the city of Trichur becomes "Chur". The contraction of these terms is combined with a prosodic principle of constant repetition and a melodic and tonal coloration that amplifies the phenomenon of personalization. Due to the simultaneous cries of the collectors and therefore the extreme multiplicity, words' meaning is somewhat blurred in favor of specific sound effects.

With this type of sound production, one could wonder whether the term "announcement" is truly relevant as each crier must produce his own singular way to capture the attention of the clients. If the collectors reasoned in terms of announcements, there would be no need to make any public call as the geographic placement of their bus already indicates the destination of big cities, as well as the sign on the vehicles. Also, an "announcement" implies a certain element of schedule and time; it indicates the time of departure and generally the place where the passengers should go to take the bus. This previsional nature would generally favor the punctuality of the departure. In many countries, one sole and unique loudly broadcast voice (when this voice is diffused uniformly in a same space) is often used for this purpose. This voice relates information expressed in a future tense—the train or bus "will leave" at such a time from such a platform; it coordinates pre-scheduled actions to which travellers are invited to comply. In an Indian bus station, on the contrary, time is conjugated in the present. Time is *immediate*. Voice information is transmitted when passengers are already on the move; it is indeed not used to invite the passengers to move. Also, the acoustic propagation of these voices can only be heard in a limited area (they are not amplified) and in a dense sound space where they do not monopolize the full attention of the passengers. With his call, the crier condenses three types of information at the same time. He indicates *in situ* 1) the destination (semantically identifiable), 2) the bus's location (by the fact that he is next to his vehicle), and 3) the imminent departure (by capturing the attention of the potential client).

The criers cannot be considered as guides who indicate the itinerary or help pedestrians in moving about the station, as each destination has its limited zone within the station. This partly explains why the criers remain close to their buses. As soon as the passengers hear and follow the crier's call,

Figure 4.2 Ticket collectors. Saktan Tampuran Bus Stand (Trichur, Kerala, India). Digital tablet drawing based on field video (Ch. Guillebaud).

Artist: Inès Dobelle.

they penetrate into his acoustic sphere and have only but a few steps to take before boarding the bus. The collector's task is therefore not to give general and programmed information, but to capture the clients' attention within a very short lapse of time, a sort of *sound-action instant* before boarding.

The collectors also combine characteristic gestures with these calls. With their arm raised in the air and their hand cupped inward toward the bus, they call the travellers to come toward *their* bus rather than to the neighboring buses. The goal here is to fill the vehicle, as it will leave only as soon as it is full.

Passengers' Perception Modalities

Now, if we consider the point of view of the client (the listener), the general organization of the bus station is well known. Each space in the station is dedicated to a particular destination and because this placement is rarely

Figure 4.3 Bus departing. Saktan Tampuran Bus Stand (Trichur, Kerala, India). Digital Tablet drawing based on field video (Ch. Guillebaud).

Artist: Inès Dobelle

Figure 4.3 (Continued)

modified, travel habits become ingrained. If everyone knows the destinations and the corresponding platforms, one could wonder why the collectors need to harangue the passengers in such an active fashion. Their action coincides with a very precise moment of the passengers' attention: the moment when passengers visually perceive the collector (lateral vision) and acoustically distinguish his projected voice—that is, just before they get on the bus. The collector thus focuses all of his action on the furtive glance and the attention that the pedestrian pays (or not) to his sound call. Informal interviews that I was able to conduct with collectors confirmed this observation. For the most part, the call is nothing other than a way to make a "time announcement", an expression said in English[6] by the collectors to describe their work. Contrary to a call that would be performed in a less marked sound environment, such as that of a street vendor in a residential neighborhood (Guillebaud 2011), there is no factor of surprise behind the call of the station crier, but rather a dual principle of attraction and recognition. In this context, the client is literally immersed in multiple sound spheres, which impel him to listen in certain ways. The multiple sound projection acts upon his perceptive sphere and drives him almost simultaneously toward one vehicle or another.

The principle of a multitude of *salient voices*, rather than a sole announcement, leads to a great variety of *in situ* negotiations. This principle finds an echo in the visual logic of the buses. The colors, motifs, drawings of deities, and ornaments all distinguish each vehicle and contribute to a certain visual competition (See Video 1: time code 03'30"). The fact that the voices are precisely not organized according to a monopolistic principle allows us to grasp the fragmented organization of the sound space that is not governed randomly but rather according to the logic of *multiple attraction*

The Crowd: Flow and Positions

The spatial element of attraction can be observed in the criers' use of their bodies. Even though they stand at the back of the bus, they are always placed omnidirectionally (they pivot), whereas the pedestrians follow the progression determined by the structure of the central platform. Rarely do these pedestrians turn around, nor do they change direction or itinerary once in the station. In reality, there is little hesitation, and the waiting time for the passengers is often short, limiting stationary postures. The teashops and the grocers are the only spaces on the platform where individuals can be observed waiting. In the same way, the passengers who travel in small groups (families, work colleagues, students, etc.) have a tendency to stop more readily, but this time remains very limited. A continuous flow is customary. It is indeed the station's architectural and acoustic organization that conditions this mobility.

Another important element linked to this must be taken into account. There is no space reserved for queuing or for passenger order. The stops in the station are temporary and the ways to get on the bus subject to few rules. The passengers get on board when they present themselves before the bus, and the departures happen as the vehicles fill. It is often common to think that great affluence could be seen as an inextricable source of waiting, or even delay for passengers, but in the situation described above there is another logic at hand; the continuous flow of departures and the competition between the buses favor a certain fluidity in the crowds. In this perspective, the sonorous and antimonopolistic way to manage the affluence here makes observing this place through organized figures less effective. For example, if waiting lines were imposed in such an acoustic economy, the sought-after fluidity would be hampered. In a recent article on "The Culture of the Queue in India", Ajay Gandhi summarizes the queue's defining feature:

> It is a teleological and universal form; requires bodily self-containment; demands synchronicity with others; and inculcates a detached, disciplinary sense of place.
>
> (Gandhi 2013: 5)

The author justly underlines the quasi-emblematic nature of the queue in contemporary Indian institutions, as a manner to "normalize" crowds (and their bodies). The "massified queues" imposed for example in the metro of the Indian capital city of New Delhi exemplifies the way in which public authorities impress their "institutional authority, such as that of the state, moulds public sociality into passive seriality" (Gandhi 2013: 3).

The absence of waiting lines in the bus station strongly contrasts with the example of the above-mentioned metro. It is clearly characteristic of the private management methods of the bus companies that operate here.

Here, the daily road traffic linked to this public place is not predominantly managed by the State. The business competition here imposes a decentralized management of the crowd. However, the absence of synchronicity and apparent discipline (to use the terms in the definition presented above) does not equate with chaos and confusion. The logics that we have identified thus far appear here in all their singularity:

1) Acoustic salience of the voices
2) Triple semanticism (destination, localization, departure)
3) Multiple attraction
4) Sound-action instants
5) Principle of flows

An Auto-Regulated Sound Space?

While the specific and private economic framework sheds light on these sound practices, it is not sufficient to simply explicate them. Indeed, as we have mentioned, the sound space of the bus station is not conceived of as a global entity. Rather, it unfolds in a multitude of listening scales centered around individuals and their mutual interactions. In this way, our example falls within the scope of modes of collective coordination and what is commonly called "theories of emergence". In a remarkable study of the figures of road traffic at an "intersection without stoplights" in Bombay, Emmanuel Grimaud (2013) recalls the analytical relevancy of this notion:

> Generally designating the appearance of new characteristics and behaviors beyond a certain degree of complexity, the notion of *emergence* has acquired varied meanings and has given rise to very different uses, whether in physics, biology, artificial intelligence, or in philosophy. [. . .] it has engendered research in each of these domains that can lead to a different consideration of the articulation between the individual and the collective, the creativity of the interactions as well as the manner in which the complexity is envisaged. Approaching things from the point of view of emergence means insisting upon the self-organized nature of the figures of traffic and questioning modalities and (driving) behavior that emerge to a certain degree from the density and the heterogeneity which would not appear if the drivers had been confronted with more homogeneous conditions.
>
> (Grimaud 2010: 3)

It is interesting to point out the discrepancy between the collective forms of auto-regulation and those which, on the contrary, are conditioned by a very significant regulation or homogenization of behavior. If the question of

passenger flow is considered, the example of the Delhi metro illustrates yet again an obvious contrast with road traffic. Certain authors, such as Rashmi Sadana, see in the metro the archetype of "modern disciplinary institution" (Sadana 2013: 81). It implies material barriers (security check, ticket booth, and automated entry), explicit rules and reglementations (displays for users), modes of management of bodies (waiting lines), encompassing new forms of sensory and spatial experience (with air-conditioned comfort and automated hi-tech surveillance), which are associated with values of safety and order (Sadana 2013: 81). Concerning bus transport, this same author writes:

> Similar codes of behaviour can be found on the city buses, but the feel of them is quite different; they are more intimate in a physical sense, the space is more constricted, and people routinely speak to one another, often to cajole, scold, harass, or flirt. The key figure on the bus is the ticket collector. He does not only take money, give out tickets, and return change; he manages the crowd, and with a slap of his hand on the side of the bus he cues the driver on when to start moving. He shouts at people, telling them what to do, and how to behave, admonishing them for "acting like children" or "holding everyone up". He both surveys and manages the crowd. And at the bus stops other riders give you information about which lines go where and which are good lines; there is a continual sharing of information and advice, a well as collective grief over late buses or non-existent ones.
>
> (Sadana 2013: 82)

The description is centered on the managerial function of the ticket collector and pinpoints the underlying common public opinion that the crowd is by nature undisciplined and in order to be ordered would need an outside agent responsible for its organization and management (here the ticket collector) or specific technical arrangements (as for the metro). In order to fully capture the relevance of this idea, one significant dimension remains to be considered: the eminent sensorial nature of the interactions (not only concerning language). As we have tried to show, vocal calls are central to the function of the ticket collector. From the strict acoustic perspective, they also contribute to the emergence of complex sound forms that go beyond the individual action of the collector and do not result from the simple addition of individual interventions of several criers. In this way, they make the sound space emerge with its organization that is for the most part auto-regulated. It would be false to consider these criers as simple "conductors" (in the orchestral sense) of the sound space acting in an isolated and independent manner from the others. The principle of competition implies collective coordination and ensures the fluidity of the crowd's movements. The comparison of flows

of people within the bus station and in the metro does remain useful for us here. It seems that the first presents a double singularity. On the one hand, it relies upon the "nothing automatic" and the "everything humanly vocalized",[7] and on the other hand, it presents the agents as demonstrating their capacity to regulate the crowd flows *in situ*, without explicitly announced rules, nor those interiorized by all. Their action is fundamentally inscribed within the implicit that is proper to acoustic perception. Finally, this management capacity operates itself at different levels (between different criers, between one crier and a passenger, between different criers and several passengers), which can generate a certain complexity in the sound organization that should not be hastenly reduced to chaos. In the sound *milieu* of the station, the individual and the collective sometimes adjust to one another and at other times ignore each other, making the voices an element that marks the space in an ever partial way.

About the Voices in the Station: Many Ways to Attract Attention

Up until this point, I have shown that the competitive logic is the motor behind the vocal performance of the criers: the more prominent the voice within this environment, the more the crier exercises attraction. It seems that many commercial activities in the station operate according to a similar logic. Although independent from the transport activity, the lottery booths installed in a quasi-permanent way in and around the station share the same sound space. Let us now use the following video excerpt to analyze this activity.

The Lottery Business

- **Document 2:** The Lottery car. Saktan Tampuran Bus Stand (Trichur, Kerala, India). Video [03.'16"]. Image: Christine Guillebaud, 2008.

The lottery at the Saktan station is set up in an old Ambassador (a particular type of car best known because it has been traditionally used in India as a taxi). Permanently parked just a few meters from the particularly noisy platform, in addition to being used by another business, the car also contributes to the sound environment thanks to an amplification system of very basic technology. A radio-cassette player is linked to a speaker placed on the roof of the car. The sound installation requires sustained efforts on the part of the lottery salesman. Sitting in the backseat of the car, the salesman ensures the continuous broadcast by flipping the tape, as the cassette format obliges, every 30 minutes (See Video at 2'01"). But what type of sounds is he broadcasting? The lottery announcements are entirely vocal but differ considerably from the bus stand criers' calls, mainly due to the way in which

they are produced. To distinguish them in the public space, the announcements are prerecorded and then systematically accelerated. This work is done beforehand, by an engineer locally known as "Mister John", a Christian[8] who resides a few kilometers from the Saktan Tampuran Bus Stand. His work consists in pre-recording the announcements, modifying the speed, then copying them onto cassettes. These are then distributed throughout the lottery network in the main towns of the state. As the sole supplier for the voice of the lottery, he has the monopoly on the Kerala regional state lottery market.

In this type of centralized production, the voice is also prepared according to pre-defined acoustic parameters and identically reproduced at every selling point. In accelerating the ordinary voice, Mr. John draws the listeners' attention to the high-frequency spectrum, but does not alter the intelligibility of the announcement itself. In other words, the announcement conserves its initial semantic content. The technical procedure is combined with other parameters previously defined in the vocal announcement. The speaker uses a particular prosody, based on the repetition of certain key words (such as "the luck for ten rupees, *go, go go*!") inciting potential players to step up and take their chance. As I observed and experienced on site as well as in the laboratory, this unusual enunciation also modifies the daily listening posture of the passers-by.

Little Laboratory for Acceleration

What does the acceleration of such a statement imply? For Mr. John, with whom I spoke, the "artificial touch" or "technical touch" added to the announcement is an effective way to capture the attention of the passers-by. In general, in our cultural environment, we are used to different types of acoustic accelerations to which, each at different levels, we attribute meaning or even different emotions. However, as for the most part of the sounds we hear daily, we rarely pay attention to the effects that these produce on our perception. In order to analyze this point, we have undertaken an experiment (in collaboration with Vincent Rioux),[9] in order to determine the precise acceleration level used by Mr. John. Thanks to the Supercollider program,[10] we have attempted to artificially detect the parameters of the lottery voice by inverting the work initially done by the sound engineer. From the lottery sound recording, here are the deceleration-reacceleration stages that we have traced.

- **Document 3:** Successive stages of deceleration and reacceleration based on the lottery sound recording [01'21"].

The pattern underlines the four main stages of the experiment: 1) a progressive deceleration until a very slow speed (that is, below the recorded speed); 2) a reacceleration until the level that we estimated as that of the original

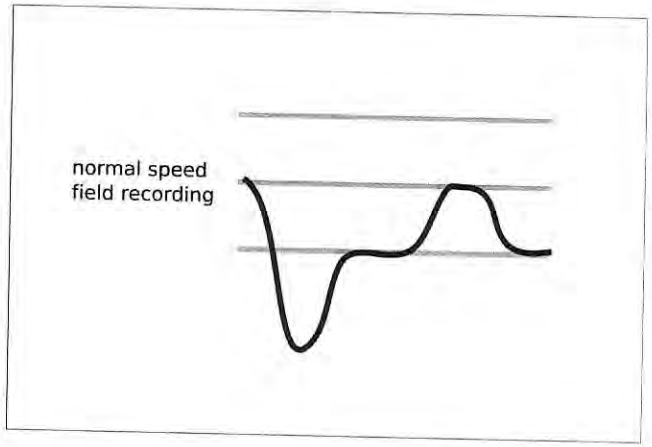

Figure 4.4 The Lottery Voice. Definition of three thresholds of elocution speed: High, "normal", low (Experiment 1).

elocution (that of the speaker at a natural speed), 3) a reacceleration until a reference level (that of the initial recording), 4) a deceleration until a level identified in stage 2 (the speaker at his natural speed).

This simple experiment reveals the supposed "original" vocal speed that Mr. John had accelerated up to 20 percent. The engineer had indeed precisely chosen a level that ensured the listeners' complete understanding of the message (the semantic value is therefore one of the retained criteria). This experiment also unveiled the play on perspective of two sound strata: the sounds surrounding the car on the one hand, and the artificial voice on the other. They force the listener to double his/her aural attention. To understand this play on perspective, a very brief allusion to the cinema will be of use. Scientific accelerations are indeed very common when filming natural phenomena that occur over a span of time. Accelerated images of germination or plant development come to mind, which enable us to perceive natural phenomena that partially elude human observation. In these types of films, it is necessary to adapt our "human" perception of time to the movement of the plants and to accelerate the images. Everyone can recall that in this type of cinema, such a temporal change also transforms the elements perceived in the images. Observing the accelerated germination of a plant also implies that the nearby environment—the insects, birds, mammals, etc.—radically disappears from our field of vision. Pursuing the comparison with the acoustic realm, it is thus very likely that the perception of a voice on two sound layers (time dimensions) also relies on the same paradox. Even if we have not obtained the explicit confirmation from Mr. John, it seems that the use of acceleration aims to provoke such an effect on auditory perception.

His choice to accelerate the recording by 20 percent is also essential. This is obviously controlled by the engineer: the voice must be clear, intelligible, and devoid of any other component that could appear "artificial", as he indeed expressed. We know that, depending on the acceleration level, our interpretation of a statement can considerably vary due to the emotional tone that we attribute to it. It is common to associate an average level of acceleration to a comic tone, as is the case, for example, with cartoons that often use this effect.

- **Document 4:** Extract from a "Work Song" from *Cinderella*, Walt Disney. Video [01'21"].

In this excerpt, Cinderella's mice friends are hastily preparing the dress that the heroine will wear to the ball. If these little characters seem affectionate and funny, it is because their accelerated voices contribute to the sought-after comic effect.

If we now consider the upper acceleration level, the voice loses its intelligibility, and the comic effect is also affected. The "fast-forward" technique is an exemplary case. It is generally used by sound engineers to locate sound pieces or cuts in long recordings. We have also applied this to the lottery voice recordings for the purposes of demonstration.

- **Document 5:** Accelerated voice with "comic" effect followed by the "fast-forward" technique, experiment based on the lottery sound recording [00'47"].

Following the same stages found in Document 3, but this time starting with the acceleration, it is clear that there is a loss of complete intelligibility

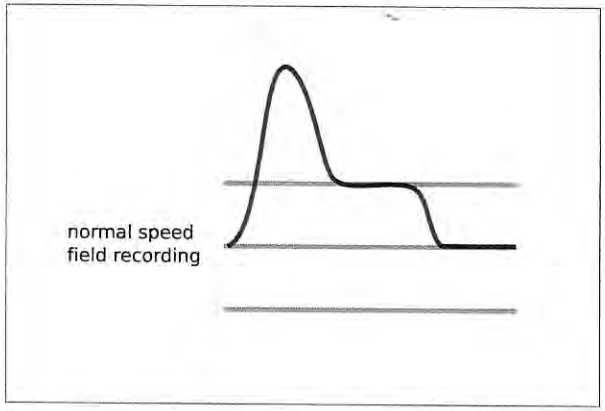

Figure 4.5 The Lottery Voice. Definition of three thresholds of elocution speed: High, "normal", low (Experiment 2).

and that this leads to "segmented" perception: the listener only distinguishes silences or the variations creating blocks of sound. In contrast with the preceding accelerations, we attribute but little meaning (or emotion) to extreme acceleration most likely because the initial vocal character is no longer recognizable.

Testing Mr. John's vocal arrangement, first by slowing it down and then by speeding it up, shows that this specialist's work is at an intermediary level between the comic and the outrageous. Accelerating the segment creates a tonal effect at the limit of the human voice (the "artificial" effect), which remains nevertheless recognizable for the listeners in the sense that it preserves the semantic content of the statement.

A final element must be taken into account to describe the lottery voice. It was remarkable to us that Mr. John insisted upon the "technical" dimension of this voice, rendering the effect almost un-"natural" in the process. When comparing this to the use of other public voices in the world, such as announcements broadcast in stations or other public transport hubs, the same argument for "artificiality" is put forth to describe the recorded voices. However, in most cases this carries a negative connotation. This is particularly the case with transport announcements in France, such as in the railway stations (SNCF) or in the Parisian metro network (RATP).[11] Quick referral to the press releases indeed reveals a completely different point of view.

Artificial Versus Natural Voices

- **Document 6:** Excerpt from a radio broadcast (France Info).

At the SNCF, for example, a feminine voice, that of former radio hostess Simone Hérault, has dominated the French rail network for thirty years. In the past, these announcements were entirely recorded in a studio. Today, they are made using a computer program that composes announcements with words and phrases that were pre-recorded by the speaker using different intonations. Despite using a "natural" voice, this technical development has given way to a parallel debate on the "human" nature of the announcements within the transport network and their effect on the users, or even on their travel experience. Appreciations and comments about the vocal quality of Simone Herault's voice can be read and heard:

> Among the best-known off-voices of France, there is one that is never off track. For 30 years, Simone Hérault has been informing travellers from all over. Announcements with a sweet-sounding, almost motherly voice.
> (*France info*)

"My voice is the sound logo of the SNCF" she likes to say. With 40 days of recording a year, this former FIP radio hostess has brought change to these messages "by removing the railway jargon" and at the request of the stations

or the region, by making the announcements "more user-friendly" or more personal:

> [. . .] I mainly record words digitally, town names and timetables using ascending and descending intonations that technicians at the SNCF's audiovisual center later put together according to the requests and needs of the different train stations [. . .]. The travellers could have a thousand reasons to hate me when I announce delays or cancellations, so I always try to have a smile in my voice and to send out positive vibes!
>
> (*Le Parisien* Jan. 25, 2014)

> Simone Hérault seems nice. She is! . . . her hostess voice really fits her. "My voice is naturally cheerful and reassuring", she says.
>
> (*Sud-Ouest*)

From these different excerpts emerges a similar theme: her capacity to soothe and to foster a certain friendliness in the travelling experience. In this way it is not surprising that in the digital production process a "naturally" recorded feminine voice was retained. The Parisian metro network has also pursued such quality where the above mentioned descriptors converge with those previously described. According to Song Phanekham, head of Visual and Sound Identity for the RATP:

> Just like with colors, each line has its voice. [. . .] The system is put into place with the renewal of the trains [. . .] The voices must be calm, soothing and articulate.
>
> (*Metronews*)

Other press reviews insist more readily upon the fundamentally "human" quality of the voice, which legitimates the transporters' choice to de-automatize the public announcements and to thus reduce their "artificiality". The musician-composer, Rodolphe Burger, in charge of the project of the vocal announcements broadcast in the Parisian tram explains:

> In the stations, it will be more about landscape, or what we call soundscape. For the tram announcements, we are intervening on something that already exists but which is uniquely functional. But now, we are replacing robotized voices with the voices of the users.

But what are human voices supposed to convey that simple automated announcements could not? The inherent diversity of the natural voice, which appears as a basic principle of the sound composition, provides a first element of response to this question:

> Beyond the music, the innovativeness of the project lies in the information for passengers. Indeed, the names of the stops are not always pronounced by the same voice, but by several! While respecting the sound design adopted by the RATP, voice "couples" are used for each station. These voices are those of common people. It is a way to pay homage to the people who live in the city. From 7 to 77 years of age, unknown or famous, feminine or masculine, with or without an accent . . .
>
> (*ratp.fr*)

This search for the common is also expressed in a similar way by the composer of the tram announcements:

> I wanted all sorts of voices. Sound images of the population—explained the musician. Men, women, young people, old people, unknown people and famous people. And all sorts of accents.
>
> (*20 minutes* journal)

Second, a collective dimension is attributed to the dailiness of the voices (and their inherent diversity), that of the "urban community":

> Beyond a musical jingle, Rodolphe Burger aimed to mark a difference from the habitual monotonous tone of the RATP: "The voice that we will hear is not the voice of an administrative authority delivering information or a signal at a technical level. It is the voice of the people, the common voice."
>
> (*quoi.info*)

> This is cancelled by the technocratic approach to information transmission. The disembodied voices that are generally used cause the "aura", or the breathing, of the names to disappear. When "real" voices are used, the point to which the aura of the name comes back and resonates and how this changes the horizon of the "urban community" are striking.
>
> (*vacarme.org*)

Finally, the collective imagination of the voice is reinforced by the principle of sound territorialization put into place according to the neighborhoods the line runs through. Once again, Rodolphe Burger has stated:

> In Montreuil,[12] along the tramline, there is a significant Malian population. I recorded several of the inhabitants' voices, but also tourists from around the globe.
>
> (*vacarme.org 20 minutes* journal)

A similar example, that of the announcement broadcast in the "Ella Fitzgerald" station, confirms this care to adequate linguistic origin and territorial

- **Document 7:** Parisian Tram announcement (Line 3b). "Ella Fitzgerald—Grands Moulins de Pantin" Station.

Recited by the singer Jane Birkin, the announcement was also recorded using a male voice with a British accent.

> It provokes a deflecting effect, a tiny invitation to dream and travel. The usual approach to sound signaling in public places, which is generally purely functional, is reversed. Here, the effect of the "real voices" is striking: the stations sound like places, and the litany of the stations becomes the text of the city. Moreover, the random variation of the different voices makes each journey unique (one can never, in the strictest sense, take the same trip).
>
> (*vacarme.org*)

Conclusion

The ethnography of the sound space of the Indian station first illustrates that in a competitive context it is finally the contrasted occupation of the different strata of the sound spectrum that effectively creates social interaction. The examples of the criers' voices as well as the voice of the lottery are to be seen as complex practices of sound manipulation where the desire for prominence is not only operated through parameters of intensity but rather of tone, prosody, and time structure. In this sound environment that is so distinctively unique in density, the acoustic events are organized at different scales, while relying on auditive acuity serving economic stakes and allowing efficient management of the crowd on a daily basis. By comparing these public voices in their temporality and their spatiality, we have remarked that sound does not create anything in and of itself (ontologically) but rather has the potential to generate action and co-action that sets apart the experience of the travelers. The approach that we have used is therefore in line with the present efforts of social science researchers to address the perception/action dyad in particular through the category of affordance (Thibaud 2010, 2011, Pecqueux 2012).[13]

> speaking "of affordance of events", implies not only situating oneself within a general frame where perception means situated accomplishment—veritable action—but more so measuring how certain events do much more than simply attract our attention. Indeed, they impose themselves on our present activities, that is, provoke a reorganization of our activity from the avoidance of an obstacle (such as after hearing a horn) to more subtle and less mechanical reorganizations.
>
> (Pecqueux 2012: 222)

The example of the sound environment of the Indian bus station can be easily placed among the "less mechanical" forms of action (and reaction). It relies upon multiple forms of attention on the part of the travelers and weaves together perceptive focals that are produced both by the sounds and reconfigured according to the effects of the different events. There is nonetheless one additional dimension that seems to escape the category of affordance: the auto-generated nature of the sound productions (that we have identified in this chapter thanks to the notion of emergence). The sound forms regulate themselves *in situ* beyond the sole and individual intervention of each producer of sound, and yet, do not result from the simple addition of these.

At this stage of the analysis, we would like to suggest that it is necessary to identify at least two types of affordance: the first, that we shall call "simple", is of a monopolistic order, as is the case with voices in centralized stations; the second, that we shall call "complex", unfurls itself according to diverse and yet simultaneous channels and is in part auto-generated.

It is likely that new ethnographies should be carried out in other public spaces in order to hone the criteria of this distinction between "simple" and "complex" affordance (see Table 4.1); or even to open the way toward the consideration of other types of affordance. In the meantime, the study of the Indian bus station furnishes a wider empirical foundation for future work that will focus more generally on the modalities of daily attention in what is today commonly called "city mobility-places" (Hennion 2012).[14] Finally, with the central place that this study gives to vocal production (and creation), it should also spark larger diversification in fieldwork conducted classically by vocal anthropology (Feld *et al.* 2004, Le Breton 2011). If the intrinsically emotional dimension of the voice justly deserves targeted studies in the artistic and ritual spheres, daily city life remains a topic to be explored, in the sense that natural and artificial voices contribute differently to our ordinary ways to interact, to behave in a crowd or even to appropriate territories.

Table 4.1 Two types of affordances.

Simple Affordance	*Complex Affordance*
Acoustic Salience: monopolistic	Acoustic Salience: multiple
Univocal Sound Layers	Sound layers in perspective (cf. Lottery voice)
Individual focalization	Auto-generated collective forms

Notes

1 This research has been developed through the MILSON program (Pour une anthropologie des MILieux SONores/For an anthropology of sound environments) that I have had the honor of directing since 2011 with the support of the

Lyssen Foundation. For further information, see the program website: http://milson.fr, and Guillebaud (2012).

2 For an archeology of the notion, see notably Thibaud (2012).

3 "Sound worlds" is a more specific ethnomusicological expression used by Canzio (1992).

4 Ancient ruler of the kingdom of Cochin (eighteenth century).

5 Ethnomusicologist by training, I have conducted research in this region of India for nearly two decades.

6 Malayalam is the language spoken in Kerala. However, in everyday life, a certain number of expressions are specifically said in English, generally when the speakers wish to convey a certain element of modernity linked to what they are saying (as is the case here) or when it carries a certain emotional charge.

7 If the two means of transport cohabitate in the city, the way in which they respectively manage crowds does not result simply from a technological development but rather according to very distinct modus operandi.

8 The population of the state of Kerala is composed of about 55 percent Hindu, 26,5 percent Muslim, and 18,5 percent Christian. *Census of India*, 2011. http://www.census2011.co.in/data/religion/state/32-kerala.html

9 Acoustician and computer scientist, member of the research group, and also a contributor to the present volume.

10 About this language and its use in other contexts, refer to Vincent Rioux's contribution in this volume.

11 I have chosen these French examples because they are from the country where I live.

12 Town located east of Paris in the Seine-St-Denis department.

13 Term initially forged in psychology of visual perception by James J. Gibson (1979). For a synthesis of the notion and an analysis of its relevancy for sound events, see Thibaud (2010) and Pecqueux (2012: 215–21).

14 Places defined as "habitual, regular, central, dense, integrated in the urban rhythm of work and leisure; they are incorporated in an ordinary mobility space (even if hustled)" (Hennion 2012: 175).

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