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## THE FIELDWORK PLAYLIST EDITORIAL

This Fieldwork Playlist emerges from a conference of the same name at Goldsmiths back in 2013. The idea was a simple one: ‘For our fieldwork playlist, each contributor will pick one song and recount the story of how that song came to hold significance in relation to their research encounters and experience’ (Fieldwork Playlist Blog 2013). In its broadest sense this is not an original idea—this is a cover version or a remix. The idea for an autobiographical glimpse of an individual through musical choices can be encountered on radio shows and popular books—and others use the same framework to explore people through films, books or objects they hold dear. In the UK, Desert Island Discs has been running on BBC Radio 4 since 1942 and 76 years later the format is alive and well, and its continued insights into participants’ lives is testimony to the autobiographical possibilities the format teases out. Nick Hornby’s *31 Songs* (2007) shows how the idea can be pushed further if you give the songs and experience connected to them a little more space to breathe. Here we are tweaking the formula to use it for more anthropologically oriented insights into participants’ experiences in relation to fieldwork—or to be more precise for the purpose of this collection—ethnographic fieldwork and its close relatives.

Each of the papers here explores the evocative nature of music in relation to the experience of social science fieldwork. Here, each author has selected a song as a starting point to consider their experience in the field and surrounding research pathways. Music

is woven into the fabric of the social world of the field, our location in it, our collection and interpretation of data and the writing up process. It is written into the lives of the interlocutors with whom we work, foregrounded or backgrounded, its absence as much a statement as its presence. Contributing to the Playlist called for researchers to reflect on music’s influence on the arc of the research process, and why it should be at the heart of reflecting on the sensory world that generates insights, experiences and the connections that allow us to make assertions about social life. While the song/evocation format may be common in popular media, this is not the case academically, giving contributors an opportunity to engage with experiences and stories that otherwise go undiscussed. The resulting papers echo the punchy, 15-minute conference presentations, with bite-size 2,000-ish word texts—taking advantage of *Suomen Antropologi*’s openness to unconventional formats—and can be read as a curated whole or in pieces if the reader wants to dip in and out of the playlist one song at a time.

The importance of the collection lies in the use of musical soundscapes to trace researchers’ experience and obtain insights into the production of knowledge within fieldwork. In the germination of the project, music proved to be a powerful trigger for talking about research, almost immediately inspiring recollections of life/music intersections. The ubiquity of the format outside of academia is due to the cross-contextual role music plays in people’s lives during fieldwork, relating both to

the time spent researching and the moments in between. Contributions span research in Bolivia, Ghana, Guatemala, Jamaica, Japan, Malaysia, Namibia, Nicaragua, South Africa and the UK. Musically speaking, the playlist is equally eclectic and includes 1980s' American rock, Malaysian pop, reggae and dancehall, country, soul, Japanese vocaloid and Mayan evangelical music. Hopefully some sense of the eclectic nature of the music comes across here through the text—but if as a reader you feel the urge to accompany reading with playback of the songs being discussed via Youtube, Spotify or another medium of your choosing (all but one of the songs is readily available), the sonic diversity adds something very distinct to the experience. Elsewhere in academia there is probably space for a musical sommelier, picking the perfect album to accompany ethnographies (does *The Interpretation of Culture* sync up with 'Dark Side of the Moon'? Is *Coming of Age in Second Life* enhanced by Daft Punk's 'Discovery'?) but here there are obvious choices, making it is easier to recreate an approximation of these soundscapes (Rice 2003) from the field.

For many of the participants in this playlist, the soundscapes were not necessarily their primary concerns. Yet the affective nature of music infiltrated and shaped experiences in the field, nonetheless. As an aesthetic and narrative medium, music has the power to foster a sense of place and space, to draw attention to individual and collective voices and creativity, and to spark a range of interpretations and hearings in the listener. The way in which music is understood and interpreted is shaped not only by music itself, but by changing historical, geographical, political, economic, social and cultural contexts. Music thus combines acts of creativity, performance, listening, interpretation and reflection, acts which can occur simultaneously and asynchronously, crossing temporal and geographical

boundaries. For Small (1998), this complex, interconnected set of relationships is termed musicking:

I have proposed this definition: *to music is to take part, in any capacity, in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practicing, by providing material for performance (what is called composing) or by dancing.* (Small 1998: 9)

Musicking in its broadest of senses is active even if the participant is passive. It is affective, even if the music has the opposite effect to that which was desired at the time of creation: muzak can make you angry or calm, sombre music can feed collective effervescence (Durkheim 2008 [1915]). The 'performance of the Saint Matthew Passion or the Ninth Symphony or "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer" arouses in some a powerful and joyful emotional response while in others it induces only boredom and irritation' (Small 1998: 12). If you choose to listen to the music described in each paper, you will likely be musicked in a very different way to those experiences described by the author.

Moreover, while music has an impact on us, we also act on music. Music acts on and through us but, in so doing, is changed as it passes through. Many of the songs in this volume are dealt with as both objects in themselves—carrying meanings that are translatable across people, genres and subjectivities—and active agents in bringing new meanings to people's lives. Music is generated as much by what audiences bring to the work as by what the work contains. In this sense, we find it useful to think of these songs in terms of 'affect,' that is:

the varied, surging capacities to affect and to be affected that give everyday life the

quality of a continual motion of relations, scenes, contingencies, and emergencies. They're things that happen. They happen in impulses, sensations, expectations, daydreams, encounters, and habits of relating, in strategies and their failure, in forms of persuasion, contagion, and compulsion, in modes of attention, attachment, and agency, and in publics and social worlds of all kinds that catch people up in something that feels like *something*. (Stewart 2007: 2)

It is often music's ability to catch you unawares, to evoke a feeling or sensation that you had not foreseen. In spite of Bob Marley's lyrics in 'Trench Town Rock'—'one good thing about music, when it hits you, you feel no pain'—songs often do carry immense personal significance and emotional weight. This volume therefore emerges from recognising music's everyday affective impulses in our lives. Concentrating on one song from fieldwork and looking at how it brought meanings—in some cases separate from those contained in the lyrics—opens a space for thinking about the researcher's role of being open in order to be affected by, and to affect, their fieldwork contexts.

For Erlmann (2004) it is music's role in augmenting and defining how people get to know each other that is critical. By focusing on song as a key node of interaction or understanding, this playlist demonstrates how music can hold together social relations between interlocutors, mediate experiences with the wider world in a powerfully embodied way and precisely pinpoint embodied moments in which researchers reach a point of understanding or even escape from the overwhelmingness of fieldwork's disorientation. Music can amplify or generate the conditions necessary for a sense of connection. It can just as powerfully do the same in a way that amplifies disconnect or alienation.

Insofar as meaning emerges through engagement, learning how we listen (both what we bring to the sounds and how they act on us) is a fundamental social science technique. That, like any instrument or tool, requires consistent honing and retuning. In *The Art of Listening* (2007), Back demonstrates that sociology (though the same could be said of many social sciences) is a listener's art. By this, he means that it is necessary for academics to move beyond passive hearing, or waiting to speak, and towards a more engaged relationship with those with whom they are working. In order to achieve this, it is necessary to reflect on how our senses are attuned and what they filter out. Through emphasising the importance of something that can sometimes seem trivial compared to grandiose accounts of fieldwork experiences, this volume gestures towards paying attention to the myriad smaller encounters and personal insights that shape fieldwork and our ways of hearing.

The portability of music across time and space, a result of the commodification of sound recordings in the early twentieth century, underpins the playlist outlined here. The music and experiences described in this anthropological playlist are not all concerned with music 'of the field' or music as the focus of the research. Some of the music discussed here intersected with, or unexpectedly entered into, the anthropological scene. Other music stems from the personal histories and musical interests of the researchers, music the researcher may have brought with them, music they may have discovered while away, music they brought home with them, music offered by those who shared their time in the field. Music's portability is inextricably connected to the idea of a playlist, a mode of music listening, a type of musicking, that stems from the development of home mixtapes in the 1980s. Mixtapes, and the more

modern digital playlist, provided opportunities to curate musical soundscapes for travel or to accompany events and activities, Mixtapes also offered the opportunity to transmit affective messages through carefully selected and ordered assemblages of tracks. The fieldwork playlists presented here acknowledge both the portability of music and the ability of a playlist to tell a story, providing an insight not only into what music might mean in the field, but also a sense of what it feels like to undertake fieldwork. Like the mixtape created to tell your school friends you loved them (or that you wanted to break up with them), the fieldwork playlist also has the potential to tell us something about the fieldwork experience, and perhaps even anthropology.

One song missing from the playlist here is 'Feelings' by Morris Alpert. This was the song chosen by Professor Stephen Nugent, without whom the conference would probably not have happened and this collection would likely not exist. As well as presenting a paper on the day, Steve also provided the funding for the event through his role as the Head of the Anthropology Department at Goldsmiths. On the morning of the conference he went to bat for us all as a double-booked room led to a stand-off with a very rude man. Anthropology, music, a bit of a barney and a drily funny yet insightful paper on the Amazon seems a very fitting way to remember Steve who sadly passed away on November 13th, 2018. Along the way Steve 'musicked' many of us—whether it was through the blues and soul that could be heard coming from his office whenever he was in, his handing over a USB full of new music to sample, his documentary on electric guitars or his co-writing of Ian Dury's first album, *New Boots and Panties* (1977), in his life prior to academia. Summarising a panel he convened during the Fieldwork Playlist conference, Steve spoke of

song as a form of documentary, one that could speak to a range of audiences in unexpected ways. By way of including his contribution, even if only in a very partial way, the abstract for Steve's paper was:

'Feelings': Morris Alpert

The song *Feelings* by Morris Albert (released 1974) is memorable for several reasons, not least its inclusion in a CNN poll of the worst songs of all time. Here, however, attention is drawn to its role in helping to dissolve the equation of space and culture that still prevails in anthropological discourse. That equation is not in itself de facto inappropriate, but it can lead to a rendering of the socio-historical space that is highly questionable, not to say abjectly mis-representative.

Amazonia, part of the globalization process that commenced 500 years ago, is still resolutely factored out of modernity landscapes on the grounds of its primordial naturalism.

*Feelings* is but one example of the shaky premises upon which Amazonia is marked out as anthropological space, a space long sub-divided into authentic Indian space and parboiled peasant space according to the anthropological division of labour. My account of *Feelings* is definitely from the par-boiled end of things and will be elaborated with reference to patterns of consumption of popular music as well as cinema by a provincial population whose cultural frame of reference goes far beyond the stipulated place and culture relationships.

In these few words, some of the tone and spirit of the paper is captured, even if much of the content is missing. The lack of its inclusion is

a loss to the eclectic sonic journey through which this playlist winds, parboiled or not.

A playlist is always a story of sorts, and so we turn now to Kieran Fenby-Hulse's curation of this diverse assortment of musical offerings, opening a window onto the fieldwork experience in all its strange ordinariness and what this might offer to our knowledge of music's key role in social life.

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