

SO! Amplifies: Think About Sound App and Map

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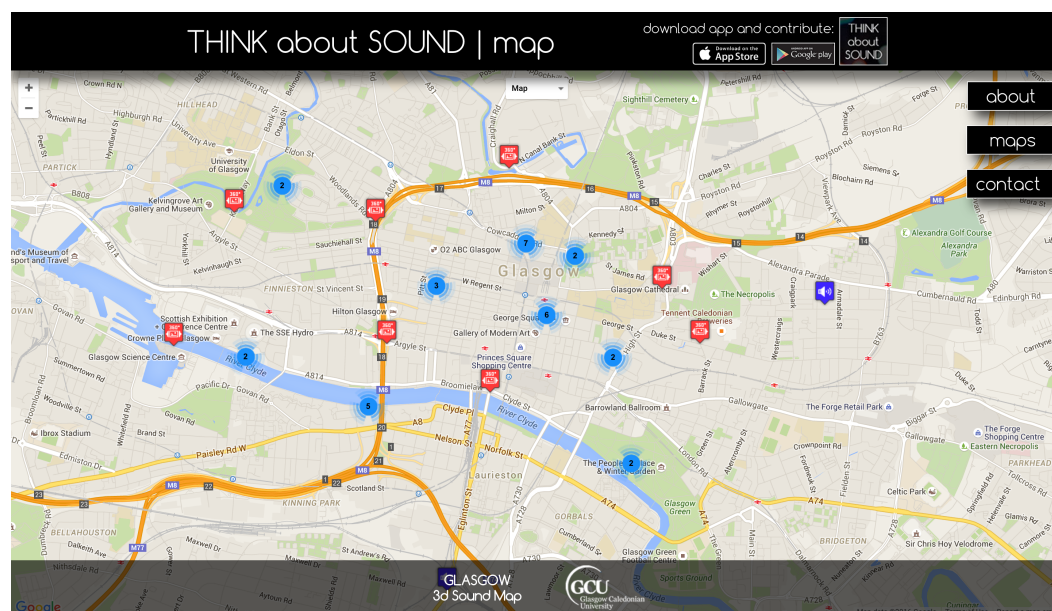
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Abstract

SO! Amplifies. . . a highly-curated, rolling mini-post series by which we editors hip you to cultural makers and organizations doing work we really really dig. You're welcome! — What is it about the environmental soundscape which makes us 'tune-in' or 'tune-out' to particular sounds?

Keywords

Music (Subfield), Acoustic Ecology, Aesthetics, Digital Humanities, Digital Media, Field Recording



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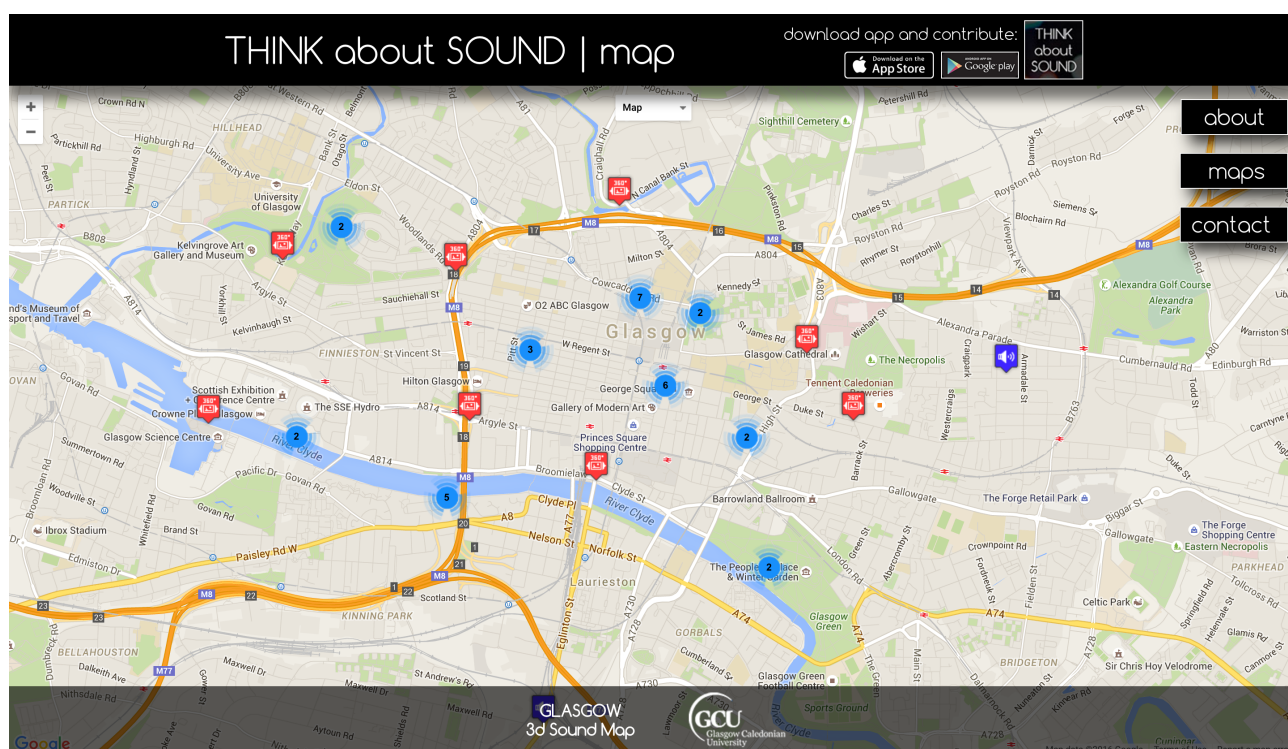
What is it about the environmental soundscape which makes us 'tune-in' or 'tune-out' to particular sounds? Do we as humans tend to seek out quiet zones for our acoustic pleasure or are there those among us who find urban soundscapes a more comforting prospect? Researchers at [Glasgow Caledonian University](#) in the UK have developed a mobile phone application to allow the personalized assessment of such questions regarding environmental soundscapes. I developed the free *Think About Sound* interactive map—downloadable [as a mobile app](#) and viewable online—to allow users to experience various locations in Glasgow by using 3D audio recordings and panoramic visuals.



Think About Sound is a novel tool which shifts the traditional paradigm of environmental soundscape assessment using an experience sampling methodology. Over the last decade, smart phone ownership has increased immeasurably; I applied the technology here in order to allow local, in-situ soundscape assessment as participants go about their daily routine. Based on the [Adobe PhoneGap Build platform](#), the application has been developed using HTML, CSS, and JavaScript, employing jQuery Mobile to provide a simple and clean navigational structure to the user. Crowdsourcing data in this way has enormous potential to create rich and diverse data sets, where both qualitative and quantitative descriptions of environmental surroundings can be gathered in a flexible and non-invasive way.

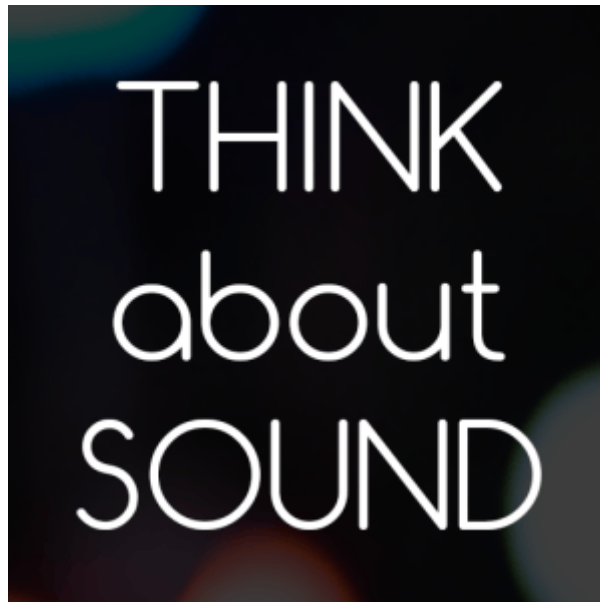
By using a self-reporting methodology, Think About Sound removes the listener from traditional laboratory-based soundscape evaluation and locates them in real world experiences as they go about their day-to-day activities. The application aims to find out the various types of sound encountered as users understand them, asking how users feel before and after a recorded sound event and enabling them to describe the circumstances in which they heard the sound event. Think About Sound also asks listeners to provide semantic descriptors for the sound, toward the ultimate aim of creating more sophisticated environmental sound maps which communicate both location-specific sound information and the subjective effect of sound upon the listener.

To further enrich the experience, data sent from the application can be viewed online at <http://www.thinkaboutsound.co.uk/> with an accompanying map where the public can view and audition submissions using the familiar Google map format. You will also find links to download the app in multiple formats.



I hoped that by collecting data in this way and to this scale, that I can obtain and share a greater understanding of how we perceive soundscapes. The next steps for the project includes the development of audio technology to analyze sound recordings, automatically predicting annoyance, valence (the emotional value associated with a stimulus), and the arousal features of environmental sounds for particular users.

While locale remains important, this research has far more reaching implications beyond my local region. Submissions on an international level can help us to understand how we perceive our environmental soundscapes, help shape local noise policy, and provide others with an understanding of sounds in their local area. What I want from you, the reader, is your help via contributions to this worldwide soundscape project. Stop for a minute and take in your sonic surroundings. What can you hear? How does it make you feel? Comfort? Anxiety? . . Stop for a minute, listen and think about sound.



Adam Craig is a Ph.D researcher studying at Glasgow Caledonian University in the UK within the School of Engineering and Built Environment. After obtaining a first class honours in his undergraduate Audio Technology degree in 2011, Adam went on to embark on a Ph.D concentrating his research on using advanced audio technology for the creation of environmental sound maps. He is currently a member of the AudioLab Research team at GCU and is a member of the Institute of Acoustics and the Audio Engineering Society. Out with his academic research, Adam teaches sound engineering to high-school students at a community based service within his local education authority, and at West College Scotland.



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