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Lockdown listening: sensing the urban seaside environment through pandemic times

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Introduction

The English urban seaside is a distinct landscape that has undergone waves of re-imaginings from gentry resort to mass tourism through decline to nostalgic regeneration. It holds a conspicuous yet complex temporal and sensorial position in the national imagination. As described by Steele & Jarratt (2019:1), the "shoreline has proven a blank canvas, onto which several meanings have been drawn over time". These meanings constitute seaside narratives that draw to varying degrees on ideas of nostalgia, restoration, wellness, pleasure, marginality and liminality. These narratives often make use of our senses, conjuring up the squawk of seagulls and hubbub of children playing on the beach, the taste of salty chips, the scrub of sand on our skin and intermingling smells of suntan lotion and seaweed. This 'seasideness' therefore offers fertile ground for exploring the complex interplay between sensing, place, and time.

Coastal liquidity (Burdsey, 2016) helps us interrogate seaside temporalities with their contested pasts, messy and unfinished presents, and uncertain futures. This liquidity is ever salient as we grapple with the disruption of the pandemic. Competing media and policy narratives swing between fear-mongering images of 'irresponsible' masses on beaches to heralding a 'staycation' boom. For seaside residents living through fluctuating covid-induced constraints, sensory environmental relationships have been heightened by restrictions on mobility. How do these disruptions frame, mediate and affect residents' temporal experiences of place? How do resident-environment sensory relationships blur and challenge a sense of pre/during/post-pandemic times?

This chapter will explore these questions using doctoral research[1] carried out with urban seaside residents on the UK south coast as the nation moved out of spring lockdown and then back into autumnal restrictions in 2020 (for UK lockdowns summary, see Brown & Kirk-Wade, 2021). Firstly, it will review existing literatures that contextualise the urban seaside

environment. Secondly, it will briefly outline the 'lockdown listening' method that guided residents to undertake listening walks and listening-at-home activities in Worthing, Brighton and St-Leonards-on-Sea. Thirdly, it will share findings by focusing on the absent, imagined and returning sounds identified by seaside residents. These sounds spark reflections that entwine with existing seaside narratives as residents try to make sense of 'the pandemic times', opening up interpretative possibilities for understanding sensory temporalities.

The urban seaside environment

The English seaside is frequently positioned "on the edge", physically, geographically and socio-politically (Burdsey, 2016:18; Millington, 2005; Shields, 1991). This is echoed academically, where the seaside does not constitute a recognised or coherent disciplinary area (Gray, 2014). Literatures mainly herald from cultural history (Walton, 2000), sociology and human geography (Burdsey, 2016; Gilchrist et al., 2014; Shields, 1991) and tourism studies (Agarwal et al., 2018; Beatty and Fothergill, 2004; Jarratt and Gammon, 2016). All refer to the physical and environmental characteristics of the seaside, namely the proximity of the sea and 'a beach with resort' as an urban feature that distinguishes the 'seaside' from 'coastal' (Burdsey, 2016:46-50).

Threaded through academic, policy and media literatures are seaside narratives commonly clustered around heritage, tourism and regeneration, which compete, borrow and overlap with each other. Whilst each have their own tempos and rhythms, these narratives often focus on a 'seasideness' of the past, that needs to be either preserved, commodified, or revived for the present and future. For example, Ward's (2018:129) study in Margate argues that its urban re-branding project codifies a particular representation of space, 'the original seaside'. The well-documented and rehearsed 'original seaside' storyline starts with a fishing village that was developed in the eighteenth century into a spa resort for the gentry (Walton, 2000). Becoming increasingly fashionable, the built infrastructure was transformed with railway networks and industrialisation bringing mass tourism (ibid). But as the twentieth century progressed, international holidays became more accessible, domestic tastes changed and the story shifted into one of decline (ibid). Poverty, precarity and deprivation then marked the seaside as a cheap place with empty bed and breakfasts into which local authorities could relocate many under their care (Millington, 2005; Smith, 2012; Ward, 2015). Coastal regeneration has since tried to herald its revival, accompanied by arts-led initiatives and gentrification (Lees and McKiernan, 2012; Shah, 2011; Ward, 2018).

Within, through and alongside this historic timeline, seaside narratives differently configure themes, including nostalgia, restoration, wellness, pleasure, marginality and liminality. Steele and Jarratt (2019) for example examine the distinctive place identity of nostalgia and wellness produced by the interaction between the seaside's natural and built environment. In contrast, Lees and McKiernan (2012) detail a tale of seaside decline, identifying tension between policymaker claims of successful arts-led regeneration and the sense of abandonment and social exclusion felt by residents. Brydon et al. (2019) argue that a

sanitised historic seaside tale has been heavily curated, neglecting a plurality of meanings, especially residential experiences. Such tensions between top-down and everyday place-making are echoed by Järviluoma's (2017:191) critique of the heritage industry's conservative need for one shared story over disparate narratives.

To make sense of these narratives, the plurality of meanings and temporalities encompassed by the urban seaside environment, I propose using Burdsey's (2016:19) concept of coastal liquidity.

> Coastal liquidity underscores the manner in which spaces, places, community formations identities, seasons, demographics, inter-cultural relations, political trends, landscapes, seascapes, the built and "natural" environment, tourist infrastructure, and regeneration processes are all themselves dynamic and indefinite.

Burdsey (ibid) employs "the idea of coastal liquidity to challenge and write against static portrayals of the seaside" that risk fixing it to a particular time period or separating from other geographical environments. The concept is developed from seaside-based research investigating race, unpicking how static views, if left unchallenged, "'fix' particular types of racialised bodies within and outside it" (ibid). Crucially, it can help us to think temporally through "an acknowledgement of the contested pasts, the messy and unfinished presents, and the uncertain futures of seaside and coastal places" (ibid:20).

Allowing for seaside plurality and degrees of fluidity/fixity, coastal liquidity can also help us grapple with the reverberations and ruptures of the global pandemic. Phrases such as 'in pandemic times' or 'in the covid era' have become increasingly common, used to denote how we are living through a distinct epoch. Bryant and Knight (2019:2) note that individual experiences of time can be scaled up to collective perception, creating a "sense of living within a period that has a particular temporality with a set of orientations". 'Pandemic times' can therefore be considered a "vernacular timespace", described as a time of uncertainty and crisis (ibid). Coastal liquidity keeps us open to the messy fluidity of this present and how uncertain futures might play out at the seaside:

> Some people, places, and processes can be more fluid, viscous and mobile than others. Those with less coastal liquidity are more likely to be "fixed" or "stuck" in space and/or time. (Burdsey, 2016:20)

By considering this potential messy fluidity, we are more adept at listening to how seaside narratives are fluctuating 'in pandemic times'.

Initial media coverage saw contrasting stories that re-configure existing narratives of pleasure and therapeutic escape. 'Pandemic tourism' in 2020 was portrayed as over-tourism with masses crowding the beaches. Fearmongering raised the spectre of the beach as a 'super-spreader', though this was later rebuffed (Bland, 2021; Chapman, 2021). Yet at the same time, media stories about people escaping dense cities to buy up coastal retreats

abounded (Jenne, 2021; Joyner, 2021). Alongside, policy and some media stories focused on covid's uneven impacts on coastal communities, chiming with narratives of decline and marginality (Davenport et al., 2020). These have more recently started aligning, fixing the seaside into a more coherent story of hard-hit coastal communities rebounding through a 'staycation boom' that continues the revive and regenerate narrative (Chapman, 2021; Elks, 2021).

It is important to interrogate how these top-down narratives inform and frame collective and individual experiences of past, present and future seasides. However, exploring residents' sensory relationships opens up a different way into understanding its place identity and temporalities. The next section will therefore look at how listening practices, within an embodied and emplaced multisensory approach, stimulate reflections that draw on, challenge and blur seaside narratives.

Lockdown listening and sensory relationships

Although many seaside literatures draw on the senses to evoke 'seasideness', few explicitly generate knowledge through the sensorium. Obrado Pons (2009) is one example of haptic geographies using touch to explore sandcastles and sunbathing, thereby opening up the pleasure narrative from ocular-centric, romantic 'Edenic' accounts of the beach. The findings used in this chapter are taken from research that instead foregrounds listening as a method. This research project developed a socio-sonic-mobile methodology that could respond to the pandemic conditions to investigate residential experiences of urban seaside gentrification and displacement injustices (Prosser, 2022). A brief overview of this methodology will be provided, followed by an explanation of how listening-generated material has been conceived for analysis and producing knowledge.

This tripartite methodology draws on a range of mobile (Fincham et al., 2010; Kinney, 2017; Murray and Järviluoma, 2019) and sound methods (Behrendt, 2018; Drever, 2013; Gallagher and Prior, 2014; Westerkamp, 1997). Making a covid-induced digital pivot, seaside residents were supported remotely to undertake individual listening walks or listening-at-home activities. As part of a participatory ethos, participants chose where to listen in their homes or their walking routes within the parameters of their neighbourhoods, located close to the seafront. Twenty-two residents participated living along the Sussex coast in Brighton, Worthing and St Leonards-on-Sea. After their silent listening experience, participants re-traced their steps or re-sat to capture their observations and reflections. Roughly half chose to describe these to me over the phone whilst they walked, which I recorded; the other half chose to record these on their own, using a variety of media (audio/visual recordings, notes and drawings). This listening-generated material formed the basis for online or telephone follow-up interviews.

Positioned within an embodied and emplaced sensory approach, this method has similarities with sensobiographic walking (Järviluoma, 2017) and urban ambiance studies commented walks (Thibaud, 2013). However, the researcher was positioned in an extreme and unintended 'ex situ' positionality due to covid restrictions, which is different from more commonly situated ethnographic approaches. As a remote researcher, I used prompts to stimulate participants' observations about their listening experience but also other sensations, including emotions and memories. During more restrictive early lockdowns experienced in many parts of the world, some heralded "a sensory revolution" (McCann and Tullett, 2021). There was increasing interest in 'lockdown listening' as people grappled with changing soundscapes alongside altered behaviours and perceptions (Lenzi et al., 2021; Mitchell et al., 2021). This project's particular form of 'lockdown listening' created a nuanced and in-depth opportunity to capture a slice of these changing sensory environmental relationships at the English seaside in 2020.

There was a treasure trove of material captured by this 'lockdown listening' method, amounting to 10 commented walk audio recordings, 17 participant recorded audio recordings, 235 participant photos, 53 participant video recordings, 22 pages of drawings and 5 pages of notes. To analyse and interpret all of this, I build on Anderson and Rennie's (2016) idea of field recordings as "self-reflexive narratives". Anderson and Rennie (2016:222) draw on the narrative turn in social sciences to critique and expand on sound art processes, which have traditionally viewed field recordings as "authentic, impartial and neutral documents":

> Field recordings can be subjective, expressive, meaningful and personal to the recordist, rather than purely objective documents of sound environments. (ibid)

Anderson and Rennie (ibid) create narrated audio recordings as part of a conversation exchange to make sound art. By making explicit that field recordings are narratives, the audio become documents of their makers, which they argue is an alternative form of knowledge (ibid:224).

Several of the participants' audio recordings fit Anderson and Rennie's (2016) style of narrated audio. While other participants' multi-media may not exactly fit this format, it can still be framed as such. For example, one participant, Joan[2], captured environmental sounds in audio recordings but her commentary accompanies as drawings and written notes. Another resident, Mary-Jane, made notes every minute on sounds she could hear seated at her window with her commentary threading throughout. Furthermore, all commented phone recorded walks captured an exchange that mingles participants' listening commentary, my prompts and the background environmental sounds. The striking range of participant approaches to 'lockdown listening' in their neighbourhoods are part of their self-questioning and self-positioning within their changing neighbourhoods. Some listeners were

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[2] All participants' names are pseudonyms.

surprised by what they could or could not hear, the tension between their visual and aural sensations, and their underlying sensory assumptions about their neighbourhoods. Some found listening transformative, whilst others found it difficult, struggling to engage with sounds over other stimuli or conversely finding it too intense.

The seaside narratives reviewed earlier are often told from the outside, usually a tourist perspective (Brydon et al., 2019:209). Exploring seaside residents' self-reflexive narratives produced by a sensory practice therefore offers a different perspective of the everyday and mundane. Their self-reflexive narratives represent processes of remembering/forgetting the past, experiencing the present and imagining possible futures. Findings from this research will be discussed in the next section focused on three types of 'sound sparks' that help us attend to temporal dimensions: absent, imagined and returning sounds.

Absent, imagined and returning sounds

As participants listened to their neighbourhoods, each attempted to make sense of the changing seaside, sensorially heightened by the early 'pandemic times'. One resonance across the listening material is the identifiable 'sound sparks' that prompted emotions, memories and stories. These form part of the self-reflexive narratives that can be analysed to understand sensory environment relationships. Absent, imagined and returning sounds particularly help us explore the temporal dimensions of 'lockdown listening'. I will discuss a range of these sound types before moving into more in-depth discussion of temporal dimensions and seaside narratives in the next section.

Absent sounds

Absent sounds are sounds that participants either anticipated hearing but found not there or observed that they would normally hear at a particular location. Silent attentive listening often brings about 'sound surprises', celebrated by soundwalk practitioners as a virtue of the method (Drever, 2013; Westerkamp, 2017). The expectation to hear specific sounds expressed by many participants denotes a degree of familiarity with being in and moving through the neighbourhood. But it also taps into residents' relationships to the seaside and how they think it should sound. Participants chose their walking routes as a way of showing me around their neighbourhood, sometimes taking on the role of a tour guide with a degree of anticipated listening.

One St Leonards resident, Logan, explained that he chose places that were "local for local people, if you don't know where it goes, you wouldn't know it" (Interview 17). As he moved to one listening spot on his mobility scooter, he recorded his surprise:

> Funny, it's only 70 yards from the sea, but because of Marine Court right in front of us, can't hear it. It's quite displaced. (Listening Walk 17)

Later Logan photographed Marine Court from the promenade, considering it a significant visual and architectural landmark built to look like a cruise ship (Interview 17). However aurally it acts as a barrier to the sea and creates a sense of sound displacement.

The absence of sea sounds is identifiable in other participants' listening experiences. Many expressed frustration at not hearing the sea on traffic-dominated seafront roads. Jane, a Brighton resident, observed how her enjoyment of the seafront changed depending on what senses she focused on:

> But actually, sort of that day, when I was specifically listening, it made me realise that actually the sea, it definitely isn't as enjoyable from a sound point of view as it is from a visual sense. (Interview 1)

Sea sounds in these instances are made absent by something else. In Logan's case, the building displaces the sea sounds, but for Jane traffic instead masks it. These 'sound surprises' show how participants expect certain sounds as part of their sensory relationship with the seaside. When absent, it is noteworthy, often prompting an emotional response and unsettling their understanding of the seaside neighbourhood.

Other absent sounds identified by participants were attributed to the lockdown. One Worthing resident, Desdemona noted the absence of music in her listening walk:

> But normally when we walk past the swimming pool, you can always hear music coming from the gym or exercise classes. And that's really noticeably not there, because all of that's closed at the moment. And I've done quite a bit of noticing sounds that aren't there. (Listening Walk 10)

She goes onto laughingly describe how she would be "usually walking past with my partner and we do some stupid dance, cos they're doing Zumba" (Listening Walk 10). These are absent sounds that mark the place personally for Desdemona but also signify the rupture of lockdown restrictions on everyday neighbourhood usages and mobilities. She reflects that "the whole sort of sounds landscape, sound condition, whatever, was really, been quite distinctive during lockdown".

Some residents observed how the 'usual' human sounds in public spaces were replaced by different ones during lockdown. As Jordan, who grew up along the Sussex coast, expressed:

> So it's an interesting time to do this experiment because there have been different sounds and it has been quieter, as if we've gone, it felt like, the very beginning of lockdown it felt like the 1980s again, it felt really, it felt like we'd gone back in time. (Interview 12)

Jordan also described how a seafront park soundscape had changed due to homeless people congregating, "bless them, they don't have anybody else, so they weren't socially distancing at all, because that's their bubble" (Interview 12). Rafael, another Worthing resident, also

described how a park had changed because of people drinking and socialising outside: "rather than being a lovely place to be, has now become a place where people, you know, are shouting and screaming" (Interview 3).

These example absent sounds show how this sensory practice elicits in-depth residential reflections on seaside neighbourhoods in the messy present of the 'pandemic times'. In anticipating or missing particular sounds, participants expressed their expectations of what their seaside neighbourhoods should sounds like, tapping into seaside narratives which will be examined in the later discussion section.

Imagined sounds

Imagined sounds are sounds that residents conjured up in a specific location, often as part of wondering what it would have sounded like there at a different time. These are different from expected absent sounds because participants may not have ever heard those sounds or sound-sources at that location and may be completely fictional. They were often used by participants as a sensorial route into telling a story or memory, connecting vividly into personal and collective narratives. These sounds were much less commonly noted but, although few, they constitute a particularly interesting interplay between sensing, place and time.

Two Worthing residents both discussed imaginary sounds that drew on historical narratives of the seaside. Dr X, a resident who had moved down from London in her fifties, expressed wonder in her audio recording:

> Ah look at it, it's beautiful, imagine its hey-day, elegant ladies, can hear it now, carriages, genteel chatter, no swearing of course. Fabulous, look at it. Ahh, don't like the look of this. What's over there? The monstrosity they put up there. (Listening Walk 11)

Dr X was listening at the Beach House park next to a Regency-style villa. Opened publicly in the 1920s, the park is described by the local authorities as "Worthing's Premier Park" replete with bowling green and pavilion (Adur and Worthing Council, 2022). Dr X contrasts this seaside attraction with a new luxury apartment tower being built nearby, "the monstrosity". In the interview, she later describes the valiant efforts of the local preservation society to conserve the historic built environment and fight against this new-build. Dr X clearly values this Regency past, taking pleasure in imagining how the "genteel" classes would have sounded in the park.

Desdemona, a historian who also moved to Worthing in recent years but from Brighton, combines actual and imagined sounds to discuss a different working-class history. Whilst walking on the beach, she notes the sounds of a mechanised hauling system boats, which sparks a story about the local fishing community. Although she initially names this an "enduring sound", she quickly qualifies this and starts imagining how this industry might have sounded different in the past without such mechanisation. Desdemona goes onto

recount how she volunteered for a local history project called *The Last Fisherman Standing,* premised on the last full-time working fisherman retiring in 2015. She used her skills to meet new people and get involved in her new home when she had recently moved. These examples of imagined historic sounds show how both residents place value on seaside histories in their relationships to the seaside. They focus on different parts of the seaside timeline, but both evoke the sounds of the past. For Desdemona, it represents a significant experience of getting to know her new town, for Dr X such sensorial imaginings bring joy.

Some other residents engaged in a degree of imaginary listening. But in these cases, participants intentionally invented a fantasy sound-source causing the sound they could hear. Rafael noted scaffolding on his walk, but instead described the sounds of boats: "as the wind rushes through it, it sounds a bit like a quay or a harbour, sounds like lots of sails" (Listening Walk 3). In his interview, he later explains how he enjoys imagining that something else is causing the sounds:

> The sound of the scaffolding opposite is delightful. I really like it. It does sound like I live near a quay or regatta or something. (Listening Walk 3)

This form of imaginary listening does not necessarily draw from the past but it signifies a particular imagining of living by the seaside. Quays and regattas have an upper- and middle-class association as opposed to the working-class livelihoods represented by Desdemona's fishing story. These imagined sounds also tap into what residents think the seaside ought to sound like, sharing a characteristic with absent sounds.

Returning sounds

Returning sounds are sounds that participants observed they were able to start hearing again after being absent during the strictest spring lockdown. These sounds are the most specific to 'lockdown listening' as residents tried to make sense of 'the pandemic times'. There are variations in what participants perceived had stopped sounding during strict lockdown and which they chose to reflect on. 'Returning' gives the impression of the environment going back to the 'the before times', another pandemic "vernacular timescape" (Bryant & Knight, 2019). However, participant reflections encompassed a temporal and affective range, from welcoming back sounds through to sonic anticipation of uncertain futures.

The re-introduction of construction sounds, in particular scaffolding, was a striking and frequently discussed returning sound. As stated by Brighton resident Tim:

> What is very noticeable now is all the scaffolding and the builders are back. For a while there was hardly any of that, which is very unusual… You know, it's a noisy business putting up scaffolding. The whole seafront is all, the buildings are about 200 years old so it's not surprising they need a lot of work. (Listening Walk 5)

Participant descriptions of scaffolding poles clanging, clamps being drilled and scaffolders calling out to each other commonly went hand-in-hand with observations about constant neighbourhood renovation. Several commented on how jarring these sounds appeared after a period of relative quietness. Llewellyn, a Brighton resident listening at home, found the sound frustrating but also commented:

> I suppose it's a sign that people are back to normal and work is continuing despite the coronavirus. (Listening-at-home activity 4)

Whilst there was new awareness of building works post-lockdown, most residents observed this was a common part of their neighbourhood soundscape. Like Tim, they ascribed this to the salty wind conditions requiring extra up-keep of the Regency architecture. Others also attributed constant renovation to gentrification, both DIY pioneer homeowners and landlords upgrading to exploit a profitable rental market. The construction sounds of bigger redevelopment projects, such as "the monstrosity" noted by Dr X, were also observed to be returning. However, there was less certainty about how these would unfold during and post-pandemic.

All participants noted how the sound of traffic dominated the listening activities, which was another type of returning sound. As described earlier, participants were often surprised by how much the traffic masked other sounds. Jordan found it difficult to listen on the seafront road because traffic had "been dubbed over everything else" (Interview 12). Several participants recounted how the traffic had been stopped during early lockdown. In Brighton, Jane explained how cars continued to be banned in the lower seafront promenade to allow for better social distancing, resulting in a battle to make this permanent (Interview 1). She welcomed this debate and felt the impact of cars strongly:

> You know from the walk I did with the sound, it's quite a heavy traffic area round here. And, you know, that's not always very pleasant, when we live here, you know cos of the car fumes, cos of the sound and everything. And erm obviously the natural habitat. (Interview 1)

Many residents expressed anti-car rhetoric. The use of walking methods may have attracted participants with a pedestrian preference. However, the stark absence of traffic followed by its return also appears to have heightened these sentiments. As shown in Jane's reflections:

> But, if you think when people are told, only get in your car if you really, really have to, you have to work, you have to get some food. And it makes, and then suddenly the streets are really, really clear. It makes you think then are those journeys really necessary?

The pandemic rupture prompted residents to think about future neighbourhood mobilities, opening up different imaginings during the early pandemic times.

Returning sounds therefore let us hear the ways the pandemic heightened residents' sensory relationships to their neighbourhood environments in the present as well as re-think future possibilities. The next section will further interrogate such temporal dimensions, putting residents' self-reflexive narratives into dialogue with existing seaside narratives.

Self-reflexive narratives on pasts, presents and futures

Absent, imagined and returning sounds offer a distinct way into examining residential sensory relationships. This last section will draw out the temporal dimensions identified in these 'sound sparks', examining how participants were grappling with 'the pandemic times' from early summer into autumn 2020. All discussed the pandemic disruption in detail, some in more temporally explicit ways. For example, Desdemona commented, "time under Covid is doing strange, stretchy and contracty things" (Interview 10). This disruption frames, mediates and affects existing coastal liquidity at these urban seaside sites, with different degrees of stretchy fluidity and entanglement with existing seaside narratives (Burdsey, 2016). Absent, imagined and returning sounds can be mapped against the contested pasts, messy and unfinished presents, and uncertain futures to which coastal liquidity makes us attend. However, in doing so linear temporal distinctions are challenged and blurred, making audible the complex ways in which the pandemic has affected residents' temporal and sensorial experiences of place.

Absent sounds: messy and unfinished presents?

Absent sounds are expected as part of everyday soundscapes therefore they most closely align with messy and unfinished presents. However, as already discussed, the sensory relationships that can be unravelled from such sounds look to the past and affect future imaginings. In the examples identified the majority of absent sounds represent a challenge to something that participants would normally find enjoyable living by the seaside. For Jane, she enjoys the sea-view but by focusing on listening her enjoyment is challenged and she is made conscious of urban sounds. In her interview, Jane explains how important nature is to her, which taps into restorative and wellness themes of the seaside. However, the disconnect between the sea-view and the sea road sounds reveals tension between the natural and urban environment. This adds a different angle to understandings of the interaction between the natural and built environment producing 'seasideness'. Discussion usually draws on a tourist perspective and focuses on seaside buildings of the past (Steele and Jarratt, 2019). The ship-like Marine Court, captured by Logan fits the *Seaside Moderne* architecture more commonly discussed as restorative (ibid). Yet, from a residential perspective the built environment can be expanded to the mundanity of roads.

Jane also identifies as an activist, including involvement in climate change campaigns. Anti-car discussions permeate the interview, prompted by the absent sea sounds and also the

returning sounds of traffic. She attributes increased and different types of car usage to more affluent people moving into the area, explaining "you notice it by the cars" (Interview 1). When asked if the pandemic might affect future car mobilities, she answered uncertainly, "I hope so, but I just don't see, I just don't really see that". This example details some of the messiness of present sensory experiences of the seaside that challenge more fixed narratives of the seaside, both personal and collective. But it also threads into uncertain futures, which for Jane include concerns over ongoing gentrification at the neighbourhood level and climate change at the global.

The other absent sounds identified above are more specific to the pandemic disruption and messiness of the lockdown present. Desdemona's missing music appears to trigger a sense of nostalgia for a more joyful care-free way of navigating public space with her partner pre-pandemic. Jordan's reflection that early lockdown "felt like the 1980s again" also evokes this emotional state (Interview 12). Nostalgia abounds in seaside narratives, often understood as a reconnection to the past or different perception of time, reflecting a "dissatisfaction with the present" (Steele and Jarratt, 2019:4). Although this is a nostalgia for a very recent past, it chimes with a pandemic vernacular timescape that creates a distinct 'before times'. Jordan and Rafael's discussions grapple with public space soundscapes by contrasting the current with this recent past. Although their observations of street drinkers and the homeless community chimes with a less nostalgic seaside past, linking instead into seaside narratives of decline and marginality. Absent sounds therefore present a different way of understanding the seaside, which challenge and blur existing narratives and reveal the messy way they might be experienced, sensed and related to in the present.

Imagined sounds: contested pasts?

The two main imagined sounds discussed earlier draw on historic pasts: the first, an upper-class Regency resort, and the second, a lost working-class fishing industry. These contrasting class histories immediately indicate their contested nature, signifying how these types of sounds might map onto contested pasts. However, both utilise this history to heighten their current sensory relationships to their neighbourhoods. Shared seaside heritage helps them understand the present changing environment and anticipated futures.

Dr X's enjoyment of the Regency history chimes again with the restorative and nostalgia themes. Desdemona's old fishing industry sounds and community efforts to document it pluralise this seaside historic narrative. However, both quickly bring these into the present. For Desdemona it represents a significant part of her relationship to Worthing as a historian and a newcomer. Dr X also contrasts Regency sounds with present redevelopments of the seafront and the need for preserving this heritage. Dr X goes into detailed discussion in her interview about how "the monstrosity" luxury new-build is out of place at the seaside. She associates "shiny white towers" instead with London, dramatically describing them as "an ode to everything that's wrong with our current political system" (Interview 11).

Prioritising historic buildings and viewing redevelopment as out of place fixes Worthing spatially and temporally. Dr X expresses future fears of seaside gentrification, desiring a different urban trajectory. However, the pandemic potentially gives a future reprieve to the spectre of new-build gentrification. She muses that:

> As we're about to go into a recession, I don't see how any of this building's going to… I think there'll just sit on the land for a long time. (Interview 11)

In contrast, Rafael's imaginings about the sounds of scaffolding represent a different way of relating to and narrating changes to the built environment. Rafael was the only participant who liked this new-build for being "a practical and pragmatic solution to a difficult [housing] problem" (Interview 3). He taps into the regenerate narrative, viewing the sound of construction as a defining aspect of urban living: "part of living in a town is that it's never finished" (Interview 3). As part of residents' relationships to the seaside, these imagined sounds therefore strongly relate to contested pasts but reveal the complex ways they entwine with unfinished presents and uncertain futures.

Returning sounds: uncertain futures?

Although returning sounds are those coming back from the past and entangled with the present, predominantly these sounds sparked reflections on possible future trajectories of urban seaside neighbourhoods. For residents, construction sounds signified a return to constant renovation, a classic gentrification feature. The distinct coming together of Regency buildings requiring upkeep against salty winds shows another different built/nature environment interaction than usually noted in seaside literatures (Steele and Jarratt, 2019). Tim and Llewellyn both explained the grade-listed regulations surrounding the constant upkeep of their own Regency flats. These policies are part of a heritage narrative that views historic buildings as a tourist and place-branded commodity. However, the jarring nature of construction sounds commented on by residents show the heritage and tourism impacts on residents' everyday sensory experiences.

As already discussed, construction immediately brings up reflections on the future, whether fears over losing the seaside of the past and present (Dr X) or representing the seemingly natural trajectory of urban redevelopment (Rafael). Constant changes to the built environment and Rafael's description of town living strikingly embody the unfinished present. But for some the pandemic disruption appears to have opened up the possibility of a different type of future. At the time of her interview, Dr X felt that a recession was inevitable, which would break the current wave of gentrification-related construction (Interview 11). Other participants also wondered how public-private partnership redevelopments might progress post-pandemic. As commented by Mary-Jane:

> I mean now after all this situation, I imagine councils will have absolutely no money for them to do anything. We're going to have completely rethink all sorts of things, aren't we? (Interview 6).

This uncertainty expressed by participants mixes different future orientations, including speculation, potentiality and hope (Bryant & Knight, 2019).

The anti-car rhetoric connected to the return of dominating traffic sounds also prompted future speculation. For example, Barney had turned back from his planned seafront walk due to the overwhelming sensory discomfort produced by traffic in Brighton (Listening Walk 18). This prompted him to imagine his neighbourhood differently:

> Do we really need so much private car ownership here? And, you know, I just think it would be great to just stop private cars, just invading all these residential parts of the city. It would take a lot of change and a lot of effort, a lot of hard upset and shenanigans for that to be achieved. But I would be, I'd be so much happier living in a place where traffic, the noise, the pollution, were lowered. (Interview 18)

The returning traffic sounds therefore disturb the pleasure and wellness narratives of existing seaside narratives. But they also ignite a rethink of possible and desirable futures. These future rethinks bring in consideration of mobility, environmental, climate, housing and urban justice. For Dr X, she hopes the new-build gentrification that she fears cascading down from London will be paused, even if only temporary whilst land-banking takes place. For Barney, although acknowledging the "upset and shenanigans", he dares to imagine a safer, less polluted, and quieter environment within which he could have a happier life.

Returning sounds therefore entangle past, present, and future as participants grapple with having experienced a shift in their sensory-environmental relationships. The "strange, stretchy and contracty things" that the pandemic has done to time (Desdemona, Interview 10) presents an opportunity for participants to reflect on and rethink the future of their seaside neighbourhoods. These are narrated with different degrees of hope and cynicism. For example, when asked if the pandemic would bring about less car usage and pollution, Jane responded: "I hope so, but I just don't see, I just don't really see that" (Interview 1). Whether this change plays out or not, these temporal disruptions challenge dominant seaside narratives that do not commonly engage with residential concerns or issues of urban justice.

Conclusion

This chapter has brought together the urban seaside environment with an embodied and emplaced sensory practice to explore the complex interplay between sensing, time, and place. The English urban seaside environment entangles a plurality of meanings including different policy and media narratives that have been challenged by the global pandemic

disruption. Tourism, heritage and regeneration narratives often focus on the outsider viewpoint, therefore this research project offers a different understanding through residents' aural perceptions. I argue that the concept of coastal liquidity can help us better attend to plural perceptions, tuning into differing degrees of fluidity/fixity (Burdsey, 2016). 'Lockdown listening' has generated nuanced and in-depth material, which can be framed as "self-reflexive narratives" (Anderson and Tullis, 2016). Using this framework, I have examined three types of sounds that participants identified in their listening activities. Absent, imagined and returning sounds sparked emotional responses, memories and stories, which encompass complex temporalities. These temporalities have been mapped against the contested pasts, messy and unfinished presents, and uncertain futures offered by the coastal liquidity conceptualisation.

Through this mapping, it has become apparent that there is a high degree of fluidity in the ways participants engage with time in their sensory environmental relationships. Residents draw on different historic pasts as they grapple with the messiness of the present and imagine the future. Some conform with existing seaside narratives whilst others blur and challenge more fixed notions of the seaside. But all continually move between different time states. Historic and more immediate pasts are used to relate and engage with the present seaside environment. The unfinished present sparks speculation of possible futures. Whilst the present environment also ignites sensory imaginings of the past. These findings therefore expand the notion of coastal liquidity by revealing the non-linear experience of time in residential seaside sensory relationships. 'The pandemic times' have created a momentary shift in the way residents move through, sense and relate to the seaside, raising questions about how these relationships will continue to unfold during and eventually post-pandemic.

(6,427 words)

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