



Afterword

Will Straw

It is an honour for me to contribute a few words to the end of this very interesting book on music and the night. For the invitation to do so, I am grateful to Geoff Stahl, my friend and colleague for over a quarter-century, whose ongoing reflections on the culture of night have been richly stimulating.

As I began writing this Afterword, I set down before me three large-sized, glossy books which each celebrate the nightlife of a single city. Although all of these volumes are based on exhaustive research, none is scholarly in a traditional sense. *Vivir la noche: Historias en la ciudad de Mexico* (Sagahon 2014) is a book of essays and pictures about Mexico City nightlife from the 1950s onward, with a particular emphasis on the 1970s and 1980s. *Rio Cultura da Noite: uma história de noite carioca* (Feijó and Wagner 2014) deals with Rio de Janeiro in a more historically expansive fashion, reaching back to the early days of Brazil's colonial period and then, like so many of these books, moving through the twentieth century decade by decade. The most elaborate of these volumes *Paris la Nuit: Chroniques nocturnes* (AWG/Armengaud 2013) was

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released in conjunction with the exhibit of the same name held at the Pavillon de l’Arsenal in Paris in 2013, but it is more than a simple catalogue of the exhibition. Alongside the expected archival photographs and personal reminiscences, it is full of innovative maps and statistical charts tracing the spaces of night-time activity in Paris across much of the twentieth century.

Together, these books are symptoms of the remarkable, international growth of interest in the urban night over the last decade, a phenomenon to which I will return shortly. Their most striking (if unsurprising) feature is how much the experience of the night in each city is defined in relationship to music. The principal focus of *Vivir la Noche* is the world of Mexico City’s downtown cabarets and dance halls, and its most common images are of the dancers—usually women—whose lives and work have become emblematic of this scene.¹ *Rio Cultural da Noite* is packed with advertisements for music venues and dance clubs, pictures of album covers, photographs of dancing crowds (or couples) and images of performing musicians. *Paris la Nuit* is more sociological in its orientation, but its mapping of places of working-class leisure cannot help but focus on social clubs and outdoor parks in which dancing and listening to music were key activities.

We are confronted, in these books, with the familiar paradox of popular music history—that the effervescence of a nightlife in which music was central is reconstructed using media (the printed word and image) in which music is not to be heard. The music which was the backdrop to these experiences of night is easily available, of course, on Spotify playlists and YouTube compilations. Nevertheless, this does not resolve the strangeness of histories of the night which unfold across silent images of people listening to music and dancing. At the same time, something else becomes clear as one examines these books. While there are countless volumes devoted to the histories of theatres or movie houses in cities, and others focused on the literary or visual art scenes which have given such cities distinction, a focus on musical life clearly offers a more robust and tantalizing image of a city’s urbanity, of the liveliness of its public culture. Indeed, more than literature, cinema or the visual arts, the musical life commemorated in urban histories seems to capture those processes we associate with the development of the contemporary city: the implementation of new technologies (like electric lighting), struggles for the liberation of women and sexual minorities, and the emergence of new public spaces in which social barriers are (albeit temporarily and

incompletely) rendered permeable. If none of these books offer (or identify) themselves as histories of musical culture, they nevertheless install music as the cultural pivot around which the multiple dimensions of the urban night seem to turn.

Just as the musical character of urban nightlife is so often taken for granted, so the “nightness” of music, at least for those who study it, has often seemed so obvious as to not warrant attention. While the most celebrated instances of musical performance and consumption (the concert and the dance club event) typically take place in the night, analysis of these occasions typically comes to be about the delineation of a space rather than the occupation of a swath of time. This has also been the case, it must be admitted, for other cultural forms and practices. The viewing of films (in movie houses and domestic spaces) has largely been a nocturnal activity, for at least a half-century, but a sense of movie-going as belonging to an experience of night has received only passing attention in histories of cinema and media. Likewise, the daytime character of most art gallery or museum exhibitions became the object of focused attention only when late-night openings and *nuits blanches* emerged from the recognition that this *diurnality* of the gallery or museum might be a problem.

A new interest in music and its relationship to the night (of which this volume is the most fully realized confirmation) are part of a broader, ascendant interest in music’s relationship to cities.² If cinema was once the medium deemed most expressive of the modern city’s experiential features (both being marked, it was argued, by an experience of speed, unease and the fragmentation of attention) (e.g. Singer 2001), it is tempting to suggest that music has displaced the cinema in this respect. This has happened, perhaps, because the defining experiences of the city are more and more those of the contested urban night rather than the stimuli and congestion of the daytime metropolis. In a variety of ways, the modernist daytime city of sensory overload has given way, in the preoccupations of urban activism at least, and to the contemporary, nighttime city of identitarian struggle. Just as a significant scholarly literature on the “cinematic city” emerged in the 1990s and 2000s, drawn to the ways in which cinema was emblematic of early twentieth-century social change, so the new interest in “musical cities” responds to transformations of urban life which have made the state of music a key index of the city’s present-day capacity for tolerance, inclusiveness and the resolution of conflict.

URBAN MUSIC AND VISIBILITY

If music is now at the centre of the most vital and meaningful urban cultural politics, this is at least partly an effect of music's association with night. Music in the night poses, in acute fashion, the question of the city's capacity to harbour forms of expression and experience which extend our sense of what is possible and tolerable. The night, as Sarah Raine's essay in this volume suggests, is a time of refuge, when music may flourish in "hidden and dark places" (Raine 2018, xx). In this, the experiential qualities of night-time music in cities participate in that vast intertext which, in the words of the French cultural historian Dominique Kalifa, joins together criminality, vice, obscurity and other dimensions of city life which perpetuate its unreadability. This unreadability has long stood as a resistant force against a modernist architecture and city planning seeking to render the city transparent and legible (Kalifa 1995, 107). More recently, the proliferation of Raine's "hidden and dark places" of music confounds the efforts of city administrations to enclose music within the controlled spaces of the festival or commercial nightlife zone. In the ways in which it is both hidden and ubiquitous, music, like the night itself, supports our sense of the city as inexhaustible, endlessly producing new margins and places of assembly.

At the same time, however, the cultures of music are central to those processes by which, in cities, collective energies move in and out of the realm of visibility. In his account of the gay night-time scenes of Manila, Bobby Benedicto speaks of those moments in which a scene emerges into visibility, when "collective sensibilities seem to pulse in plain sight" (Benedicto 2014, 4), producing a world that "leaks out through the 'infinity of openings' that have made the city diffuse, porous, and 'over-exposed'" (ibid.). Benedicto's reference to pulse brings us to a sense of rhythm which finds one of its expressive forms in music, but the broader logic here is one of shifting relationships between the visible and the invisible, between flashes of collective solidarity and retreats into obscurity. The montage of modern cinema seems to capture this dimension of urbanity much less effectively than does the experience of night-time musical culture, with its flashes of illumination and proliferation of shadowy margins. At the same time, in its ongoing appropriation of the abandoned spaces of industrial capitalism and commerce, music, more than any other cultural form, is able to bind the ghostliness of spatial ruins to the haunting atmospherics which have settled, over a long history, upon the night.

NIGHT STUDIES

An academic field that we might call “night studies” has taken clear form only in the last decade. At first glance, this claim may appear preposterous, not only because the night has always been with us, but because countless studies of night-time human and social phenomena, from sleeping to the provision of night-time amenities (like public transportation) have been carried out for over a century. Nevertheless, it became legitimate to speak of something like “night studies” at a point in the last ten years when engagements with the night across several disciplines began to form an inter-citational field in which works acknowledged and built upon each other, producing a sense of momentum which one may observe across the social sciences and humanities.

By 2000, one could point to a small set of landmark, book-length works on the night, each of which set out to establish the interest of the night on its own terms. In their introduction to this volume, Geoff Stahl and Giacomo Bottà point to Joachim Schlör’s *Nights in the Big City*, Wolfgang Schivelbusch’s *Disenchanted Night: The Industrialization of Light in the Nineteenth Century* and Bryan Palmer’s *Cultures of Darkness: Night Travels in the History of Transgression*. In these key works, of considerable scale and ambition, the shifting status of the night was of interest principally as an index of transitions to a modernity which each of these authors defined in distinctive fashion.

Almost two decades later, we live amidst an explosion of writings on the night. These include wide-ranging, book-length accounts of the night (e.g. Gwiazdzinski 2016; Shaw 2018), but the evidence of an emergent field is just as evident in the proliferation of focused, disciplinary work. A sampling of writings from the past five years shows the attention paid to the night by historians (Sagahon 2014; Willemin 2014; Yon 2013; de Baeque 2015); geographers (Edensor 2013; Shaw 2014); sociologists (Ocejo 2014; Nofre 2013); archaeologists (Gonlin and Nowell 2018); specialists in media, art and culture (Bronfen 2013; Kerlouégan 2013; Sharma 2014; Straw 2015; Valance 2015); scholars of architecture and design (AWP/Armengaud 2013; Tureli 2015); and interdisciplinary groups of scholars and professionals and activists (Colaboratorio 2014; Montandon et al. 2018; Nofre and Eldridge 2018). *Scapegoat*, *Intermédialités*, *Cultures et conflits*, *Le magasin du dixième siècle*, *Socialter*, the *Journal of Alpine Research* and *Articulo: Journal of Urban Research* are among the many English and

French language periodicals which, since 2015, have published special issues devoted to the culture of night.

MUSIC AND NIGHT STUDIES

The place of music within this body of published work has grown over time. A great deal of the writing on night in the disciplines of geography and urban planning has its roots in the political struggles over a politics of time which emerged in Western European countries—most notably France and Italy—in the 1980s and 1990s (for one account, see Diamanti 2017). The dominant concerns of these politics were with the availability of night-time services (such as public transport and access to government services) for single mothers, factory workers and others whose mobility was reduced by social status and circumstances. Music (and other cultural forms) moved to the centre of such treatments of the night only later, as a result of two interrelated but distinct developments.

One of these developments was the growing recognition of the importance to cities of their night-time economies, of forms of commercial and entrepreneurial activity often overlooked in standard accounts of a city's economic life (see, for an early example, the arguments advanced in Lovatt et al. 1994). In what is by now a well-known development, the new recognition of night-time economies converged, in the 1990s, with broader discourses embracing the notion of creative and cultural cities. This embrace fuelled a vast corpus of municipal cultural plans and studies in which the need for cities to invest in their night-time cultural offerings was made explicit. Symptomatically, many of these calls for cities to invest in their night-time culture assigned music a minor role. Music, it was felt, was already active in the night, and the energies of city administrations were often directed towards “diversifying” their night, overcoming its exclusive association with the youthful audience for music. This involved moving other cultural experiences, such as museum or gallery attendance, past their normal early-evening barriers and into those parts of the 24-hour cycle in which they might fuel restaurant-going and other forms of night-time sociability.

The second development transforming the status of music in the urban night has come to temper the first. Investments in the cultural life of cities, across much of the world, have gone hand in hand

with a gentrification marked by rising real estate prices for inner-city dwellings. This has had multiple effects on the cultures of music: the transformation of music venues into businesses with greater perceived profitability (like condos or restaurants), the expulsion of musicians who could no longer afford downtown residences, and the movement, into inner cities, of young families and other populations for whom loud noise and sociable groups gathered on streets are deemed a nuisance.

Two of the most comprehensive studies of recent gentrification, both published in 2014—Anne Clerval’s book on the Oberkampf district in Paris and Richard E. Ocejo analysis of downtown New York City—trace patterns of inner-city settlement by new populations whose values often clash with those of long-standing communities of cultural expression. In each of these cases, the noise of establishments offering music has become the key source of tension and the focus of repeated judicial intervention. Of particular interest is the way in which claims about the traditional character of a neighbourhood function for each side in the disputes over night-time noise and nuisance. Club owners in both the Parisian and New York cases claim that their neighbourhoods have traditionally been zones of night-time musical activity, and that the residential gentrifiers are intruders who are disrupting this historical character. In turn, new residents point to the long-standing status of each neighbourhood as a place for families and a restricted sociability; it is the club owners and others who bring music, then, whose alleged invasiveness is disrupting this historical condition.

Over the last decade, in cities like Toronto and Berlin, the notion of a “musical city” has been transformed. If, not so long ago, the term was mobilized in the effort to convince cities to acknowledge the prominent role of music in their economic and cultural lives, it is now brandished, with greater urgency, within struggles to protect music against those forces (typically subsumed under the term “gentrification”) which threaten music’s continued vitality. These struggles are almost entirely about the night and about the sorts of night which a city will tolerate. Will it be one in which new residents of inner cities may sleep undisturbed, in which music is limited to the ambience of mid-evening restaurants and cocktail bars? Or one in which the long-standing occupation of space by the purveyors and consumers of music grants them precedence over the “agents of change” who might wish to constrain that use.³

THE URBANIZATION OF MUSIC

Music's new centrality to struggles over the character of the urban night is part of what I would call a broader "urbanization" of music and its politics. Fifteen years ago, arguably, many of the key discussions about music had to do with the continued usefulness of even thinking about place and geography. Debates over the globalization of music, or concerning the new, digital virtuality of scenes and fandoms deflected, at least partially, the concern with locality that took shape within the spatial turn of popular music studies in the 1990s.

In 2018, however, the ongoing growth of urban music councils, the activity of city-focused groups like Sound Diplomacy and the broader mobilization of musical communities against gentrification have reinvigorated an interest in music's relationship to locality. Musical communities find their political purpose in resolving issues of accessibility and inclusiveness, and in fighting for their right to develop and maintain spaces of music-focused assembly. In these developments, the night has become a key terrain and focus of music's politics. The ubiquity of calls for "night mayors" or "night czars" to protect the nocturnal culture of cities is among the many signs of this shift (e.g. Straw 2018).

The "urbanization" of music has brought with it, I would argue, significant changes in the ways in which the politics of popular music are conceived. Thirty years ago, the discussions at conferences of popular music scholars tended to be focused on the capacity of musical forms to maintain their authenticity over time, in the face of such forces as music industry commercialism, media attention or generic hybridization. Political judgements of musical practices were focused on their capacity to perpetuate or betray tradition, or on the ways in which particular innovations were symptoms of complacency or radical ruptures of form.

If music's politics are now "urbanized", this is because they are principally concerned with winning the right to occupy space within the geographical and identitarian spaces of the city. These have reinvigorated a musical politics which, otherwise, risked floundering amidst a declining consensus as to what might constitute radical formal innovation in music. An urbanized musical politics is one concerned with the place of music within the social diversities and political divisions that mark the contemporary city.

We find confirmed here, albeit in more expansive form, the claim of the curator/critic Nicolas Bourriaud, to the effect that an urban cultural politics are principally a politics of proximity and of the

encounter—rather than of formal rupture or the critique of forms deemed mainstream (Bourriaud 2006, 160). The night has become the terrain on which these newly configured politics express themselves most forcefully. The musical night, more than most occasions of urban life, poses the question of what it means to share space in ways that permit the fullest expression of identitarian possibility. It is difficult to imagine more vital and powerful political invocations of music than those like the #Iwillgoout movement in India (Taneja 2017), in which young women working in the tech sector fight for their right to go to clubs in safety when their shifts are over. A musical politics, in this sense, are part of what Armengaud calls the larger night-time politics of liberty (AWG/Armengaud 2013, 10), in which the right to the city is expressed more pointedly as the right of particular populations to occupy the night.

NOTES

1. See, for example, the recent documentary film *Beauties of the Night/Bellas de noche* (dir.: María José Cuevas, 2016) in which several cabaret dancers of the 1970s and 1980s are interviewed and their lives recounted.
2. This interest is evident in the number of conferences devoted to “Musical Cities” in recent years, in the emergence of organizations like Sound Diplomacy, which brings together urban actors of all kinds to reconsider the place of music in urban life, and in recent collections of scholarship like the Brazilian volume *Cidades Musicais: Comunicação, Territorialidade e Política* (Sanmartin Fernandes and Herschmann 2018).
3. For a description of the “Agent of Change” principle, see Music Venue Trust, “What is ‘Agent of Change’... and Why Is It Important?”, <http://musicvenue trust.com/2014/09/what-is-agent-of-change-and-why-is-it-important/>. Accessed July 6, 2018.

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