

This is a preprint early version of the article Schwarz, Ori (2013) 'What Should Nature Sound Like? Techniques of engagement with nature sites and sonic preferences of Israeli visitors', Annals of Tourism Research 42: 382-401. The definitive version of this article is available online at: <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0160738313000492>

What Should Nature Sound Like?

Techniques of engagement with nature sites and sonic preferences of Israeli visitors

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Abstract:

Tourist experiences are not merely visual but multisensory. When considering the sounds of nature, tourists often have conflicting preferences regarding the appropriate and desired soundscape. The article explores these preferences and how they relate to different ways of engagement with nature, each having its own historical roots, agents and social meanings; each focused on different affordances of nature and demanding different prerequisites. Interviews with Israeli visitors of nature sites show that what they consider 'noise' depends on their social (class/ethnic) identification, but also on the mode of touristic engagement they employ. Thus, tourists who render themselves subject to nature's therapeutic, aesthetic or spiritual influence have very different sensitivity to human-made sounds than those who consider nature a stage for social or physical activity

Keywords

nature; quiet; music; social identity; tourist experience; senses

If suddenly people opened a barbecue in the middle of a green spot and shouted, it would kill me. I'd like to kill them (...) so out of place, all those who barbecue with Mizrahit (Middle-Eastern pop) music, it kills me. I just wanna go away. (23f, student, upper-middle class)

If it's a popular site and there's a group of pupils nearby who make a lot of noise, I find it awful; but if you stand near a waterfall and hear the noise of water, it contributes to the experience (70f, upper-middle class)

INTRODUCTION

Modern tourism is usually understood—by sociologists (Adler, 1989b; Urry 1990) and tourists alike—as visual consumption of places qua landscape. However, growing interest in tourism as an embodied activity evoked calls to explore how other senses, especially sound, inform tourist practices and experiences (Obrador-Pons, 2003; Waitt & Duffy, 2009). This article follows these calls by studying the diversity of preferences regarding the sonic ordering of nature sites. Perceived 'noise' impacts significantly on tourist satisfaction and dissatisfaction (Alegre & Garau, 2010), yet we know little about how tourists classify sounds as noise. As demonstrated below, the category of noise does not simply coincide with 'loud sounds' or even 'jarring sounds', but rather with 'sound out of place' (Bailey, 1996). Noise thus often resides in the ear of the listener (Coates, 2005).

This article explores which sounds are 'out of place' in nature sites for different kinds of tourists, and why. Tourists differ in their expectations and preferences regarding the ideal sonic order of nature sites: some seek 'natural silence'; others prefer personal hiking-soundtrack on their headphones; while still others reshape the whole soundscape with boom-boxes (Bell & Lyall, 2002:44). For some tourists encounters with loud tourists or music may ruin the tourist experience, whereas others are indifferent to these sounds, or even criticise silencing attempts. While evaluating engagement with nature and its sounds, tourists employ different ethical-normative frameworks and imperatives, including reverence to nature, considerateness, and

friendliness.

Whereas these differences in sensitivity could be explained away as psychological or even physiological interpersonal variance, sociocultural and historical enquiry may arguably yield more satisfying explanations, since the norms regarding which sounds are out of place where are historically and culturally specific. Thus, whereas conversations during classical concerts have been common and acceptable until well into the 19th century (Johnson, 1995; Sennett, 1977), today the slightest cough is often unbearable, yet this does not apply to most other musical genres. Similarly, the status of howling wolves shifted throughout the 20th century from 'noise' to 'natural quiet', whereas the sound of forests is no longer considered threatening silence, but rather lively, peaceful and pleasant (Coates, 2005). Culturally-specific sonic norms sometimes co-exist simultaneously: whereas Western tourists believe the Taj Mahal should be admired through silent contemplation, this is not the case for Indian tourists who do not stop talking, which for middle-class Britons qualifies them as 'crap tourists' (Edensor, 1998:126; 2002:96). Even within a single national culture and era sonic preferences vary across class and life-style lines (Author).

Based on interview data from Israel, I suggest that two factors are crucial in understanding nature tourists' sonic preferences. The first factor is *boundary work* (Lamont and Molnar, 2002). Whereas sonic preferences do not simply map onto class or ethnic identities, sonic practices and preferences in nature sites are associated with certain social identities and read as identity markers that mark group boundaries. The second dimension is *modes of engagement* that identify and exploit certain affordances of nature sites. Below I differentiate between four major modes of engagement employed by nature users. Following recent developments in cultural sociology, I concentrate on *how* people attend to and engage with things (and places) rather than *what* things and places they prefer (Author; Benzecry, 2011; Hennion, 2007). This strategy improves our understanding of variance in (sonic) preferences of nature users.

METHOD AND STRUCTURE

The analysis relies on in-depth interviews with 65 Israelis conducted over a 10-months period in 2010/2011 for a wider research on sound and society. Interviewees were recruited from five designated groups: affluent retirees, subscribers of a classical orchestra; middle-class married urbanites who moved to the countryside; residents of an ethnically-diverse working-class town; university students; and librarians. This non-representative sample is extremely diverse in ethnicity, age (20-80), class, status, education, lifestyle and residence. The project explores the relationships between embodied sonic sensitivities (preferences and reactions to sound of the socialized body); social identities and identifications; and discourses on noise. Nature was central to the project, since many interviewees were especially concerned about undesired sounds in nature sites.

Visiting nature reservations, national parks and forests is a common practice in Israel. During holidays, the media reports millions of visitors. This has historical reasons: schools and youth movements have encouraged hiking to strengthen Israeli-Jews' bond to their new homeland (Gurevitch, 2007). While this national dimension has since been marginalised, the centrality of nature hiking in Israeli culture persisted (Ben-David, 1997), while new patterns of backpacking abroad emerged (Noy, 2007). Thanks to the near-universality of nature tourism in Israel, I could direct questions on nature tourism to people not recruited for being nature users. The term 'nature users' is used below to denote people who visit nature sites (nature reservations, forests, trails) for leisure. This term was preferred over 'travellers' or 'nature tourists' since it highlights engagement with the materiality of nature sites.

In their accounts interviewees associated some sonic and other tourist practices with ethnicised or classed life-styles. Israel has a class structure and mobility regime typical of industrialised nations, although with slightly higher mobility levels (Goldthorpe et al., 1997). Class, ethnicity and cultural stereotypes are strongly associated with one another. Mizrahim (Jews of Asian/African descent) have suffered from education, employment and housing discriminatory policies; were viewed by early state establishment as uneducated population in need of Westernization (Shohat, 1988; Swirski, 1990); and are still underrepresented among the elites. While class, classed lifestyles and inequality (the levels of which are roughly as high as in the USA) are central for understanding Israeli society, the word 'class' itself is rarely used. Whenever interviewees are identified as members of a class, the attribution is mine. I did so only when the occupations of interviewees and their immediate relatives as well as their neighbourhood unanimously and clearly marked them as belonging to a certain class.

Interviews were used to produce data on (1.) how different tourists judge and evaluate sounds *in* nature and sounds *of* nature, and what cultural meanings they ascribe these sounds; (2.) how tourists engage with nature sites and what they expect to experience; and (3.) discourses on identities of selves and others. This facilitated the exploration of the connections between sonic preferences, tourist practices and identifications.

While interviews conducted in retrospect in urban settings (cafes/homes/offices) have obvious limitations, my interest in subjective perceptions, experiences, meanings, expectations and judgements ruled out external observations. Sound diaries (Duffy & Waitt, 2009), though a promising method, cannot be used to study attention to sounds, since the very documentary task given to participants would significantly transform their attentiveness to nature and its sounds. Interviews are most appropriate to collect data on corporeal sense experience as already socially meaningful, i.e. on the intersection of discursive frameworks and embodied sense experiences, and their interrelations. This proved helpful in understanding the sonic regulation of nature.

Interviewees were asked about their images of 'ideal' and 'catastrophic' vacations; their actual tourist practices and preferences, including accommodation and activities; their sonic practices while hiking (music listening, talking, singing, listening to nature); things and sounds they prefer not to meet in nature; and their opinion about the claim of some people that they need quiet to experience landscapes—a quasi-experiment in which interviewees could either identify with this judgement or criticise it, engaging in moral evaluation of sonic practices. Interviewees referred to multiple tourist practices: national and international tourism, short excursions and multiple-day tracks (as they were asked about both nature trips [*tiyulim*] and vacations [*nofesh*]). Very often interviewees concentrated on hiking, yet some interviewees mentioned different kinds of sites in a single interview, while others made general statements. Furthermore, the same ethic, interpretive and evaluative frameworks were employed to sounds in different kinds of sites and trips. Hence, the primary categories used for analysis were not sites-types but modes of engagement, which explained better differences in sonic preferences, styles and judgements.

Following the literature review are three sections dedicated to the findings on the sonic regulation of nature sites: first I discuss four main modes of embodied engagement with nature and how they shape sonic preferences of nature users. Then I discuss the general tendency to differentiate nature soundscape from mundane soundscapes. Finally I discuss the role of sonic preferences in boundary work, as statements in negotiation over social identities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Ocularcentric tourism scholarship has not paid sounds in nature the attention they deserve. Historical accounts refer to silence as another component in the romantic construction of nature as sublime in the 19th century (Coates, 2005; Nash, 1982). For Walter (1982), quiet has semiotic/symbolic value: since intensively toured sites become noisy, silence becomes indexical of a site's rarity, which is, its value as a positional good. Edensor (2000) goes further, suggesting that beyond mere rarity, engagement in solitary silent walking in the countryside (contrary to loud group rambling) has been constructed as a class marker of distinction. The semiotic stress of Walter and Edensor comes, however, at the expense of full acknowledgement of the experiential, sensuous dimension of quiet. As Bennett (2002) demonstrates, silence played an important role in Thoreau's use of nature for self-transformation. But what about contemporary nature users?

The search for analytical tools to explore this question may start with the extensive literature on the plurality of tourist experiences. Models that classify tourist experiences according to their existential depth (Cohen, 1979; Elands and Lengkeek, 2000) or psychological motivations—be they escapism, interest, recreation, hedonic pleasure or ontological security (Elands and Lengkeek, 2000; Wickens 2002)—can hardly tell us anything about sonic preferences. These categories are much too abstract and universal to be convincingly associated with concrete, culturally-specific practices and preferences. More promising is the tradition that studied the classed character of tourist styles. John Urry (1990) distinguished between two tourist 'gazes': the individualistic, sacralising 'romantic gaze' of middle-class tourists who seek semi-spiritual, authentic experiences; versus the 'collective gaze' of sociability-seeking working-class group-tourists. Yet, tourist styles are more than 'gazes': they are sets of embodied practices and sensuous orientations, including sonic orientations ignored by Urry. Furthermore, there are surely more than two such sets, which never map so neatly to class. However, the opposition of solitariness and sociability is crucial to the sonic shaping of nature experience. Edensor (2000) offered a more corporeal and practice-oriented attitude. For Edensor, different techniques of walking in the countryside don't simply *reflect* class: rather they are *status claims* that

embody meanings embedded in discourses on class. Indeed, whereas perfect correlations between social class and engagement in cultural practices are very rare (and cannot be found in my data), tourist styles are still 'classed' through association with classed identities.

Tourist practices mediate not only relations between people (e.g. identity claims) but also people's relations with non-humans—the sites themselves. A main component in tourist practices is tourists' ways of paying attention to and engaging with space and humans and non-humans within it. The Schuetzian sociological tradition studied 'finite provinces of meaning' (e.g. art consumption), distinguished from everyday 'practical attention' in their unique modes of attention and forms of spontaneity/engagement, sociality, self-experience, temporality and consciousness (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Schuetz & Luckmann, 1973). Structures of spontaneity, such as active preparation followed by passive absorption, may be shared by very different practices such as those of music aficionados, drug addicts (Gomart and Hennion, 1999) and (as shown below) nature tourists.

Yet, there is more than one mode of attention toward art or nature. Contemporary research demonstrates that sensuous experience of objects is culturally specific, since it is always mediated by particular techniques of engagement and paying attention to them (Author; Csordas, 1993; Hirschkind, 2001; Kesner, 2006). In tourism research Adler acknowledged the cultural and historical specificity of tourist 'styles' (1989a) shaped by the historical cultivation of sensuous attentiveness (1989b). Thrift (2007:56-74) studied the uniquely modern sensuous orientation towards 'slow' nature, an intense attention to present time that relies on contemplative modes of attention borrowed from the performance arts, new-age spirituality and therapies. However, even within modernity, different subjects employ multiple 'consumption techniques' while attending to the same objects (e.g. nature sites).

A 'consumption technique' is a sequence of actions conducted by a subject and directing the operation of her body, mind and sensuous attention while interacting with the object of consumption, in order to achieve a certain experience, feeling or understanding (Author). Different consumption techniques identify and use different affordances of nature sites (Gibson, 1979; Rantala, 2010). People are socialised to apply certain modes of attention under certain circumstances, and they hone these skills and sensibilities throughout their biographies of interactions with particular objects, which thus shape their subjectivity. Mastery of these embodied ways of engagement with objects—especially with sanctified objects that ennoble those who acknowledge their value, like Nature and high art—is often central to group identity- and boundary-work. In this tradition both public status/identity claims and the production of internal experience consist in *how* people engage with objects, e.g. nature sites (Author; Benzecry, 2011; Hennion, 2007) no less than in *what* objects are preferred (as in Bourdieu, 1984).

As demonstrated below, a single category like 'hiking' may aggregate different practices of engagement with and attending to nature that strive toward different goals or effects and set different ethical and practical demands. Below I ask not only what social meanings people ascribe different tourist techniques (the social semiotics of style) but also: what people expect to result from their encounters with nature sites? How they evaluate the success of these encounters? What sensual ambiances would enable or constrain successful consumption? Whereas in some techniques presented below quiet is necessary for successful consumption, in others it is irrelevant or undesired.

MODES OF ENGAGEMENTS

This section presents four modes of engagement with nature sites. These four categories were developed based on the accounts interviewees gave as to how they engage with people and places while visiting nature sites, what they enjoy and what disrupts their experience. While analytically helpful, this categorisation should not be taken as either exhaustive or realist. Since the article's aim is to make sense of the diversity of sonic preferences, categories were constructed while focussing on those components in the accounts that are related to production and evaluation of sound. Although modes of engagement may shape motivations and anticipations, they are not motivations themselves: people may be recruited to a practice in various ways (Shove 2007), often different from the criteria practitioners apply to assess the successfulness of consumption episodes.

The four modes presented below are: (1.) *Rendering the self subject to the influence of nature*, be it therapeutic, aesthetic or spiritual; (2.) *Using nature as a mediator* between the tourist and his/her interiority; (3.) *Nature as a stage for sociality*; and (4.) *Nature as a set of props for physical activity*. Although people may shift between these modes of engagement, it may be hard to employ them simultaneously, as some of

them imply contradicting orientations of attention and incompatible embodied ways of involvement with humans and non-humans (Obrador-Pons, 2003). Silencing of self and others is crucial for the first two modes, but adverse to the third and irrelevant at best to the fourth.

1. Absorbing Nature

The most noise-hostile interviewees usually described their travelling experience in terms of enjoying the therapeutic, aesthetic or spiritual powers of nature, strongly associated with the 'romantic gaze' (Urry, 1990). Nature can positively act on these nature users once they created the right conditions, which are often believed to include silence. Nature may heal, purify or move users, who report experiencing interior peacefulness or relaxation, sublimity or spirituality, a dream-like feeling of elevation from the mundane, oneness with the cosmos, freedom or beauty. Interviewees described these experiences as embodied, entailing transformations in their breath and posture or feelings of bodily liberation. Some of these interviewees explicitly described nature as 'sacred', but many others referred to it as sacred in the sociological sense: for them, non-natural (human or technological) objects and sounds may defile nature's purity. Interviewees repeatedly used the verb 'absorb': they wanted to 'absorb' nature into their bodies, and sonic distractions threatened to thwart this internalisation endeavour. Their engagement with nature may be compared to Gomart and Hennion's account of music connoisseurs and drug users who actively engage with nonhumans in order to then shift to passivity and be manipulated by them, preparing skilfully a situation in which they may be taken over (Gomart and Hennion, 1999). This constructed passivity is rarely incidental (Author; Hennion, 2007): it demands heightened, undistracted attention.

For Nurit (f41, classical musician), '[T]he sounds of nature are, maybe, actually, the sounds that have the best mental impact on me, more than any music, and music would ruin it'. While asked what she means by 'mental impact', she replied: 'Elevating the soul. Really making me breathe more easily, open up my lungs, really, I see the sea, or, and everything opens-up, or if I'm in the mountains, hearing the trees moving in the wind, it's like, it liberates the whole body'. Other interviewees experienced the effects of nature on themselves in rather spiritual terms: 'For me nature is a place of spirituality, I just love to listen to the birds, the sea, the nature, the water (...) even while just sitting, while walking, I love to absorb everything around me (...) It makes me happy; gives me peace of mind (...) happiness, and peacefulness, and cleanliness, like, I connect with nature' (f23, student, upper-middle-class). Still others compared hiking with meditation:

'The main noise is the noise in your head, that's why quiet places, where there is quiet, may echo unto your internal state, and create relaxation inside your head. My head. And if there's enough time, it actually works (...) The thoughts inside your head, this noise inside your head, it's a kind of separation, between you and the environment, or even between you and yourself. In quiet you may connect to yourself, to the environment, [you can] be aware, see the bird, the tree, the painting. In noise, you react'. (f44, occupational therapist).

These effects of nature sites are not merely *social* construction: for subjects familiar with these modes of engagement, the physical characteristics of nature, its unique landscape and soundscape (quiet that could 'echo'), are affordances for these desired effects.

'Absorbers' attended to nature with all their senses, including hearing: interviewees reported noticing and enjoying gusts of wind rustling the trees or the sound of twigs breaking under their feet. Listening to music that would block these sounds, even on headphones, is criticised for irreverence. Even while privileging vision, absorbers need silence to look at landscapes, just as 'serious' listening to 'serious' music demands closing one's eyes to focus attention on a single sense—a comparison actually made by one interviewee. This silencing enhances sacralisation, clearly distinguishing sacred objects of attention from profane, undesired 'background noises'. Paradoxically, this increased attention only makes these 'noises' more conspicuous (Ihde, 2007). For Nurit, quiet was necessary for natural sound to work on her body and soul. Hence, she ruled out listening to recorded music in nature sites. Other sounds she reported could thwart nature's desired effects were 'din of people. A mob, many people shouting, talking too loud'. This impacts her tourist practices: she reported putting much effort to visit sites off the beaten track or off-season. She felt best when—travelling in the Alps—she met only cows and goats.

Whereas non-representative samples preclude distributive claims, the data clearly indicates that absorbing nature is more common among high-status, highly-educated individuals, which are also more prone to be familiar with new-age spirituality or high-art consumption techniques. Whereas aesthetic experience is not a privilege of the elites (lower-class interviewees did report enjoying landscapes), it seems

that 'immersive body practices' (Thrift, 2007:57) are more prevalent (though not ubiquitous) among privileged groups. High-status individuals seem more prone to expect nature to act on them and to try to create conditions they perceived as required—including avoiding groups and self-silencing. The socialisation of their body, their anticipations and mastery of specific consumption techniques surely impact their subjective experience (cf. Author; Becker, 1953). Nature absorbers used the same language as art-lover interviewees who described successful museum visiting experiences. Nature absorbing is also comparable to 'serious' reading: a private, silent, autonomous technique of self-betterment (Bell & Lyall, 2002:34-35). While some interviewees employed absorptive consumption in a single context only, others demonstrated it across contexts, which may indicate their reliance on general dispositions—not merely discursive frameworks but actual embodied orientations. Thus, Nurit described successful art viewing experiences in the same language she used for hiking: 'a healing experience', 'extension of the heart', 'more oxygen in the body' and sudden disappearance of her nervousness and sadness.

This technique of silent, attentive 'good hiking' has deep roots in the 19th century. According to Bennett (2002), Henry David Thoreau offered a model of hiking as a 'technique-of-self' in Foucault's sense: a technique of embodied and spiritual self-transformation (Foucault, 1993). This model included introspection; keeping quiet; and 'microvisioning'—the direction of the gaze towards a single point and delving into its details, thus aestheticising the objects of gaze, rendering them sublime and wild, and turning them into awe-inspiring 'nature'. John Muir, the father of American national parks, promoted a similar attitude for different reasons. For Muir, urban civilisation threatened people's nerves, whereas the quiet of nature offered a safe haven. He insisted nature was not silent; it only seemed so to tourists who could not appropriately silence themselves to indulge in its natural, enjoyable sounds (Coates, 1995). For Thoreau and Muir, nature had the power to help people forge independent interiority and heal themselves from the damages of urban modernity and superficial sociability, if only they kept quiet and intensified their attention. Other contemporaries maintained that nature's silence enables commune with god (Nash, 1982:62).

Silent and attentive 'absorptive' hiking—and the cult of wilderness in general—were initially elitist scholarly pastimes, and nature sites visits are still much more common among educated whites (Edensor, 2000; Jarvis, 1997; Urry, 1990; Walker & Kiecolt, 1995), where the love of nature has become a cultural and moral litmus test. For Muir and his contemporaries the ability to aesthetically appreciate nature was not only a class-marker of gentility: it also marked moral and spiritual character, the capacity to elevate above materialism (e.g. Nash, 1982:158), similar to ennobling fine art consumption. Silence is part of this performed sacralisation of nature, which always entails self-ennoblement.

My interview data offers many 21st century manifestations of the same romantic belief in the power of walking in the nature, away from the city and society, to facilitate aesthetic contemplation; meditation; or psychotherapeutically valuable expression of the authentic self (Edensor, 2000). Still powerful as manifestation of legitimate culture, this model of 'good hiking' is far from being the only model around. Nature sites have other affordances that nature users—middle-class and working-class alike—exploit in various ways.

2. Nature as a Mediator

In the second mode of engagement nature users do not direct their attention outwards to let nature *transform* their interiority but rather *inwards*, in order to *explore* their interiority. In this process, nature sites play a role as mediator: interviewees believe nature helps them be 'in touch with [themselves]' (f44, occupational therapist), offering them a space they consider supportive of introspection and self-examination by isolating them from their everyday. This experience of authentic, reflexive self-exploration may also take place in pairs: by isolating the couple from the larger crowd and bracketing their time together from the everyday, it offers them intimacy. For some couples nature may support not only exploration of interiority but also communication of this self-understanding. By eliminating references to social roles and enabling full expression of 'pure' feelings, nature is 'the romantic decor par excellence' (Illouz, 1997:92).

Here any encounter with strangers is a nuisance, in particular sonic encounters, which violate the sensuous social isolation. Many interviewees reported engaging in solitary reflection and self-exploration or in heart-to-heart conversations with partners or soulmates in nature sites. Interviewees complained that music or loud nature users distracted them from these self-absorbed activities. As one respondent explained, quiet enabled 'listening to your own thoughts, to the sound that rises from the thoughts, from the silence' (f32, librarian). To function as a mediator, 'nature' must be purified from human and civilisational sounds.

3. *Nature as a Social Stage*

In this mode tourists engage with nature's affordance to accommodate social interaction, rather than its affordances and roles in technologies-of-self. Here nature is mainly not an object of contemplation, and may remain for the most part in the margins of consciousness (Gurwitsch, 1985). It is basically a pleasant, beautiful place where people sit (picnicking or barbecuing) or walk (rambling) in order to interact, talk and enjoy each other's presence. Thus, one interviewee suggested that while travelling with friends there is 'joking and relaxation and darbukas, and songs, and action', and 'you may bring the darbuka and sing while walking (...) and it all turns into a marching choir' (f23, bookstore clerk).

Similarly, a middle-aged interviewee contrasted museums, as sites of contemplation, with nature, which for her is a space of freedom: in museums quiet is required to create the right 'atmosphere, where you may think about something, view, calmly and quietly. When someone speaks loudly it disturbs. But with the landscape, it's the very opposite: you may play, you may make noise'. Here nature is not a consecrated contemplation object, but is still important: by offering a pleasant place, isolated from the everyday, the usage of which is free-of-charge, it facilitates sociability. Thus, a working-class interviewee told me that usually on weekends he enjoys nature sites with friends. Sometimes they hike, at other times they have a barbecue and listen to music, but usually they just 'make coffee, drink it, talk, if there's water [a stream, a spring, or the sea] you get into the water, and you get back' (m22, soldier). In the Israeli context, the construction of nature as a social stage partly relies on the youth movements' tradition, where hiking is usually accompanied by sociability and loud singing.

These common practices are often rejected by cultural elites. In the United Kingdom Edensor (2000) identified discursive continuity from the 19th century to our time: working-class fast-moving rambblers who engage in group sociability are described as bestial 'stampeding cattle', much inferior to the individual traveller who jars on the silence. The same aversion was shared by some Israeli 'absorptive' or 'mediating' interviewees, who try to avoid these 'human herds'.

Whereas Urry (1990) suggested that for the 'collective gaze' of working-class tourists tourist sites are more vital when populated by many other unfamiliar tourists, I want to stress a different sociability: the (often loud) social interaction among the group of acquaintances, friends or family, which for many interviewees is the main point of visiting nature sites. Whereas Edensor distinguished between travelling alone and together, I suggest we focus on patterns of engagement and social interaction rather than the number of co-travellers, since sociability is not an automatic reaction to hiking in a group—even in large groups some people immerse themselves in objects (museum exhibits; nature sites) rather than engage in sociability and vice versa.

Social travelling also restrains sonic behaviour, although in a different way. Interviewees who privileged this mode of engagement often described listening to music with headphones as inappropriate because it blocks communication, 'alienates', and gives others the impression they cannot address the music-listener, e.g.:

'It disturbs me when people (...) are connected to their music, and that's it, they don't communicate with the world. I don't like it. Like, on the one hand they're, like, the cool folks, but I don't like the quiet around, I rather like interaction between people, [I like it when] there are people, and talking, and laughing, and when it entails singing, which is an experience of everyone, not of one person alone' (Tami, f26, graduate student).

Her preferences put her in potential conflict with both quiet-seeking 'nature absorbers' and 'soundtrack travellers' who absorb themselves in nature and music simultaneously.

We have come a long way from the nature absorbers: here engagement with nature sites is practical and social, not contemplative and reclusive. Travelling is done by a group, as a group and for the group, and demands for silence or pretensions to sublimity may be mocked at or viewed as mere snobbery, as demonstrated below. Once nature sites are viewed as social spaces, disciplinary silencing of space becomes an obstacle.

4. *Nature as a Stadium*

A fourth way to engage with nature is through its physical properties, the challenges it poses to the user's body. While nature absorbers often consider slow pace beneficial for exploiting nature's spiritual efficacy (Thrift, 2000) and try to adapt themselves to the 'rhythm of nature', physical nature users usually *pace-up* movement. They employ highly masculinised consumption techniques, which in Israel are strongly associated with hegemonic masculinity—be it purposeful, fast and down-to-earth hiking comparable with military navigation trainings (Noy, 2007 terms this enmeshing of touristic and military registers '*mitouristism*') or playful, fun-seeking engagement mode, which is closer to that of the rollercoaster than that of the museum—two styles demonstrated respectively by the following excerpts:

[while hiking] you talk, and keep walking toward the destination. Now, during walking time, you just walk, you don't do much. When there's a camp or something, you put a tent and then there are all the things around it, like music and such'.

Interviewer: while you walk, are there things that make you stop?

'Well, if somebody fell'. (Igor, m21, physics and engineering student)

Beyond this sarcastic, down-to-earth reply, he added that he may also stop to get into a pond, or take photos. A more fun-seeking account was offered by another interviewee, who told me about biking trips with friends:

'Sometimes we were shouting. You know, when you, nothing special, we shouted to each other, [and we had] laughs, when we bike, when we try to climb it in an angle, [or] when you're going downhill and you scream 'WAHHHH', you brake, and like.. it's kind of fun. Yea' (m30, call-centre representative).

In both cases, nature users exploited affordances of the sites, physical characteristics such as steep slopes that enabled *mitouristic* or theme-park experience. In the latter case, engagement is both highly physical and highly social, and its pleasure and excitement involve unrestrained sonic expression.

This fast, strenuous movement through landscape—especially when accelerated by instruments such as bicycles and rafts—is diametrically opposed to the meditative slowness of the romantic, 'absorptive' mode. Some scholars view it as a shift from the 19th century static picturesque landscape to a late-modern dynamic, accelerated nature experience (Bell & Lyall, 2002). However, the tradition of travelling as a masculinity-test has roots already in the late 19th century (Edensor, 2000; Nash, 1982:145-156); whereas sporting activity in nature has roots in the 'back to nature' movement. In Israel, *mitouristic* hiking that engages with nature as a challenge is often shaped by, acquired in, and gains its meaning from combat army service (Noy, 2007). Sporty engagement with nature is still related to identification and identity claims, mainly in terms of gender and life-style identities. Most important for us is that this dynamic body is very different than the attentive body: while some absorbers moved carefully while listening to their own steps, which were comparable to the small, careful steps of museum visitors (Trondsen, 1976), strenuous sport activity usually entails big, fast movements—and often also loud sounds such as screams that both express and increase excitement ('WAHHHH').

DIFFERENTIATING THE SOUND OF NATURE

Though less strict than some nature absorbers, even social nature users were not indifferent to the soundscapes of the sites they visit. A common preference shared by many nature users across class, ethnicity and modes-of-engagement lines, was that nature sites remain distinct in soundscape from residential areas.

Whereas contemporary tourism literature acknowledges the continuities between tourism and non-tourist activities (Uriely, 2005), these continuities render the differentiation of tourist experience from non-tourist experiences a practical challenge for tourists: tourist spaces, moments and experiences must be differentiated from the world of the mundane in order to construct tourism's pleasure and value. By being purified from mundane civilisation sounds, nature gains value. Nature users often construct a nature/society opposition and identify with 'nature' (Ben-David 1997), while occasionally casting other nature users in the role of 'society'. The sonic differentiation of the 'natural' was a recurrent theme among interviewees from various backgrounds, e.g. 'if there suddenly comes a car with music it ruins everything. It ruins everything, [it ruins] all the quiet—you feel you're in the neighbourhood' (m30, working-class); another interviewee said that for her, music 'belongs to home'; hence not to nature. The value of the touristic endeavour relies on this sensuous differentiation. Conceiving of a place as 'nature' means constructing it as the opposite of civilisation. While the literature explored the historical-*discursive* construction of 'nature' as the opposite of human culture (e.g. Cronon, 1995), this dichotomy must be enforced by continuous *sensuous* purification of

nature sites from 'non-natural' features, including sonic features.

A typical appalled reaction of an interviewee who was asked whether she takes a music-player to hikes was: 'No! Definitely not! Civilisation is out, no way'. For the same reason mechanical/technological sounds (SUVs, mobiles) are often experienced as disturbing noises, whereas loud natural sounds (waterfalls, waves, wind, animals and even human-made pastoral artefacts like cow-bells) were described as pleasant. Technology itself is out of place as it undermines purification of 'the natural'. The degree, to which sounds are tolerated, reflects their assumed position on the nature-civilisation and harmony-noise continua. Yet interviewees drew the boundary differently, taking different stances on whether the sound of children voices is 'natural'; whether human conversation is as unnatural as engine sounds; and whether all musics are equally unnatural—stances that were also influenced by their preferred modes of engagement.

One interviewee tried bringing a radio to a long hike, but soon decided to leave it off : 'it feels a bit unnatural, I must say, when you sit in the middle of I don't know what—a park, near a stream—and then suddenly hear [mainstream radio], it's kind of.. you don't expect to hear it there'. However, music is not necessarily bad in nature: some interviewees distinguished between recorded music, considered out-of-place for symbolising technology and urban civilisation; and acceptable, technology-free live music. For them, singing or playing together is integral to the experience of hiking in a group. Others distinguished between different genres of music conceived as 'quiet' (e.g. classical music) or 'noisy' (e.g. trance music), regardless of volume. The latter are inappropriate in nature sites since nature is considered inherently quiet—even its loudest voices are considered 'natural quiet' (Coates, 2005). Thus, one interviewee found music in nature sites acceptable, as long as it was 'calm music, something classical (...) Jazz' rather than Arabic darbuka drums (f52, graphic designer).

Whereas most interviewees avoided listening to recorded music in nature sites, or restricted it to the periphery of the journey (e.g. evening camps), a small portion did, suggesting that by adding 'soundtrack' to natural visual images they may intensify their experience. This quasi-post-modern attitude is not interested in *purifying* the consecrated, 'authentic' experience of nature from foreign elements, but rather in *intensifying* experience as such. Those who practised it suggested that whereas music blocks aural attention to nature, it also blocks aural distractions by other nature-users. Rather than cleansing experience from non-natural sounds, they purify it from uncontrollable sounds, bringing hiking closer to cinematic total experience, as their vocabulary attests.

Like musical genres, some social groups were also identified as inherently loud. The excerpt that opened the article demonstrates well this common conflation of sound hierarchies with social hierarchies. The stereotype of loud lower-class Mizrahim, who practice 'Levantine' behaviour—listen to Mizrahit music, shout and barbecue in nature sites—was often mentioned as a noise nuisance 'so out of place'. Since 'uncivilised' loudness is a central component in the stereotypes of disadvantaged ethnic and class groups (Author), they are sometimes considered especially out-of-place in nature sites. This role of sound in boundary work is the topic of the next section.

SOCIAL DISTINCTION AND BEYOND

Bourdieu's classical model (1984) suggests that embodied habits and engagement in cultural practices function as semiotic identity markers and tokens of social value. My data shows that this also applies to sonic practices and sensitivities among nature users. Their role as signifiers of social difference emerged, for example, in the following excerpt:

Interviewer: Are there any sounds that if encountered while hiking would ruin [your trip], disturb you, or seem to you out-of-place?

'Yes. Also, I know this is something that all my family [share], whenever we hike and encounter, I don't know, someone, for example, who hikes with loud music, or [whenever we] walk past people who barbecue, yelling to each other—it hurts. It disturbs'. (Mickey, m26, industrial engineering student)

Mickey stressed that his disposition is not an individual tendency but a *collective* sensibility shared by his whole family, i.e. related to their collective identity and the way he was raised. As in the opening excerpt, sonic incivilities are associated with barbecue. This association relies on the 'ugly Israeli' stereotype as often presented in Israeli popular culture. Thus, Israel's most popular entertainment television show brought together in many sketches the travel guide Chizki, a quasi-incarnation of legitimate culture; and the vulgar

'ugly Israeli', a lower-class, lower-education Mizrahi. Whereas Chizki repeatedly implores the group to 'speak quietly' to avoid disturbing the nature's quiet and wildlife, the ugly Israeli remains loud and vulgar and destroys the sites he visits.

Seen from this perspective, loud behaviour in nature sites is reduced into a mere signifier of difference, the significance of which derives from its diacritical distinctive function. One middle-class Ashkenazi interviewee (f48, artist) collapsed two non-hegemonic ethnic groups together, saying she hates when people play 'some Russian rock or Mizrahit music' from their car radio by a brook, thus constructing her group as quiet compared to less civilised ethnic and class others. Furthermore, interviewees who stressed the importance of quiet while hiking also engaged in other self-differentiating, exclusionary consumption practices: they avoided large hotels (preferring intimate Bed and Breakfasts, rented houses or camping), tried to avoid meeting other Israelis while abroad, and preferred small, quiet, privately-owned boutique-shops and cafes over large chains—which further supports the distinction hypothesis. As Edensor (2000) suggested, choosing a particular travelling technique is often an identity- or status-claim. Silently hiking (and being appalled by boom-boxes or shouts) is thus a technique of social self-distinction.

Aversion to loud hiking among higher-status groups and the stigmatisation of loud nature-using practices associated with low-status groups are obviously related to power relation and social distinction. However, this is only part of the story. Tourism is not only signifiatory/semiotic but also hedonic; not merely about making social statements but also about embodied engagement with places that impacts on body and soul. These experiences are more than veils hiding the real motivation of social distinction stressed by Bourdieu (1984)—these actual effects of sensuous engagement with places may well have a *motivational force*, as acknowledged by contemporary cultural sociology.

The semiotic/distinctive and hedonic/attentive dimensions are not separate but intertwined, sometimes within a single statement. We hear this in Mickey's reply when he says this loud behaviour disturbed him 'not only since it interferes with listening to the other sounds, but simply because it takes the whole attention', and may distract one from one's thoughts. His belief in one's right for quiet and retreating to one's thoughts represents a highly modern (Sennett, 1977) and mainly middle-class (Author) habitus. Nature sites, as shown above, are especially appreciated by some users for their affordances (including relative quiet) that support such musing. Hence, sonic intrusions there may be less tolerated than elsewhere.

Whereas Mickey's discourse on loud others surely partakes in delineation of symbolic boundaries, it simultaneously relies on his mode of engagement with nature. Interviewees who criticised loudness in nature sites also claimed that undesired sounds distract them from indulging in their thoughts (i.e. thwarting nature's efficacy qua mediator); damage nature's spiritual effect (thwarting absorptive attention); or make nature feel like their neighbourhoods (thwarting purification). Beyond distinction, their preferences were shaped by these *practical engagements*.

Philosophers with ADD

Criticising loud nature users relies on a specific ethic of considerateness (not disturbing others) and sacralisation (paying sonic attention exclusively to nature). However, the sonic squeamishness of 'nature absorbers', who claim they need quiet to enjoy nature, is itself morally criticised, since its use as a weapon of social distinction is no sociological secret but a common knowledge shared by its victims.

For Tami, claiming you need quiet to enjoy a landscape seemed 'a bit philosophising (...) like, come on, really! Can't you experience it when there is noise?!' She criticised both silence-seeking nature absorbers and head-phone wearing soundtrack travellers on an ethical ground, both for not participating in social interaction and for snobbery. She would prefer people to avoid these separatist strategies and instead seize the opportunity for sociability. Sceptical about any real contribution of quiet or music to experience, she viewed these practices as mere social weapons of snobbery and distinction: self-identification with high culture ('philosophizing') and subcultural capital (being 'the cool folks') respectively.

This sceptical critique is similar to that of critical sociologists since Bourdieu (1984), who suspected that more than disinterested interest, aesthetic statements are instrumental in distinction strategies, status claims based on cultural capital. Here sensuous squeamishness and mastery of legitimate consumption techniques are viewed by actors themselves as social weapons, tokens of cultural capital. Igor explained he does not need quiet while facing a landscape or a painting, since 'I am not really a humanities person': he explained that noise does not prevent him from seeing physical objects, and that he never sees 'anything beyond it'. Here, claims for quiet are interpreted by their audience as claims to 'see beyond' the material, that

is, for intellectual or artistic tendencies. While not explicitly denying the existence of 'anything beyond', he makes clear it is other people's territory. His attitude to hiking remains militouristic and down-to-earth. Portraying quiet-seekers as philosophising humanists points to their social position and hints at their symbolic interest in seeking quiet: distinction and status claims.

A very different strategy is transvaluation (Wimmer, 2008). Whereas the first strategy aimed at unveiling the contribution of sonic preferences to the reproduction of social hierarchies, transvaluation strives to directly challenge these hierarchies. Diana (f23, cleaner) reacted with great hostility once asked about people who claim they need quiet to fully enjoy the view, claiming they 'should take Ritalin. No, really, let them take Ritalin, it would calm them down, it would open up their senses some more'.

This is a strategy of pathologisation: attentiveness is claimed to actually indicate abnormal hypersensitivity. For her, expecting others to stay quiet is 'unfair', since—as long as those making these claims do not suffer from ADD—they could probably enjoy nature anyway if they only tried, 'with music or without music'. Later, she suddenly starts talking about 'her', concretizing critique by imagining a female quiet-seeker. This is not surprising: according to my data, hushing others is stereotypically associated with women, especially older Ashkenazi women. Although the question did not refer to someone who actively tells others to be quiet, this is the scenario Diana imagined. She reacted angrily:

'Well, she wants quiet, all these people who ask for quiet while viewing something beautiful or any, so come on, put on earplugs and you won't need to hear what you've got to hear. And asking people to be quiet, you still won't hear what you've got to hear, since it's not you, it's against the world. There are other people who participate in.. situations, and if, let's say, you stand on something beautiful (sic!) and you hear ten more people chirping in your ear, so everybody will stand there and hear the same chirping, so you have an experience, maybe not the same experience you wanted to have, but you have an experience'.

People who want quiet are advised to either take Ritalin or use ear plugs. Their sense of entitlement to quiet and to the experience they planned to consume evokes a strong emotional reaction from this lower-class interviewee. Diana was outraged by the expectation (presented by middle-class interviewees) that loud lower-class nature users curb their loudness and be considerate. She herself often remains silent while hiking with her boyfriend, enjoying nature's soundscape. Yet, she considered silence expectations rude and unjustified, and criticised the attitude of nature absorbers as egocentric and spoiled.

This is a clear attempt at transvaluation: against traditions as old as the 19th century, she suggests that people who do not put any demands to the sonic behaviours of others are better than spoiled middle-class ladies, the demands of which she considers illegitimate and even pathologises. However, this attempt is not as idiosyncratic as it might seem: Chizki is likewise exposed at the end of each television sketch as a mentally ill person who needs silence to avoid psychotic attacks. In the show, viewers are invited to construct themselves as normative people and mock both the noisy 'ugly Israeli' and the hyper-sensitive psychotic representative of silent civilised order. As modes of engagement with nature and tourist consumption techniques are believed to be socially stratified, this mainstream show invites viewers to safely locate themselves in the middle by simultaneously criticising those below and above themselves.

The sonic regulation of nature is thus strongly related to classed identities and identification. The efficacy of sonic squeamishness as a weapon in boundary work is experienced even by its victims, who criticise it. However, it is not merely a social weapon but also the result of practical engagement with nature sites. Disregarding this dimension amounts to reducing non-humans to props and the sensuous somatic experience of non-humans to a mere illusion.

CONCLUSION

While usually caring about the soundscapes of nature sites, nature users often disagree about their regulation. This disagreement has two sources. First, sonic preferences are informed by modes of engagement and their practical prerequisites, as soundscapes may afford or restrict ways of engaging with nature sites and with people within them. Secondly, nature users use sonic practices and preferences as social markers of identification and distinction. This is most conspicuous when nature users criticise one another, making ethical claims regarding nature usage. Yet, sensuous experience is more than an illusion or pretext in the struggle for status: sounds (in combination with other material

features of nature sites) have effects on the bodies and minds of tourists and inform their encounters with others. Different modes of engagement with nature sites—as museums, enclaves of intimacy, new-age temples, stadia or social stages—pose different demands to the sensory regulation of space. Nature users care about these experiences, and prefer sonic ambiances that are compatible with their modes of engagement. Similarly, the construction of 'nature' is not merely a *discursive* construction: it must be constructed in materiality through the sensuous purification of nature sites from cultural contaminants in order to make tourist experience special, and hence valuable and pleasurable. The consumption of places is a sensuous, somatic, and yet highly-cultural achievement.

As demonstrated above, (1.) Sonic preferences shape general touristic preferences, e.g. visiting sites off-season to experience quiet; (2.) Tourist experiences are also sonic experiences, and some tourist styles demand particular sonic prerequisites; (3.) Conflicting sonic preferences may shape and be shaped by tensions between tourist groups; and (4.) Although sonic practices and modes of engagement with nature are informed by social identities and transposable dispositions, they also retain specificity that depends on the local history and sociology of tourist practices. For all these reasons, the sonic dimension of tourist experience deserves our attention. The sociology of tasting offers us some of the appropriate tools for the job.

Choosing highly diverse sample resulted in similarly diverse experiences and judgements and facilitated exploration of the diversity of sonic preferences among nature tourists. The framework outlined above tries to explain this diversity while acknowledging both the declarative/semiotic and the experiential/hedonic dimensions of tourist practices, and their interplay. However, further research in other national contexts and studies focused on specific populations may surely refine our understanding and help identify other modes of engagement. Furthermore, reifying consumption techniques and studying them seriously may help tourism scholars identify other practical demands these techniques set, beyond the sonic dimension. This theoretical framework, which recognises the somatic dimension of experience without denying its interrelation with discourse and identification, and which focuses on relatively stable cultural formations (rather than exclusively indulging in the poetics of emergence), may contribute significantly to further research into the diversity of tourist experiences and practices.

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