

The Devolution of a Sonic Community Ritual

Robin Daniel Z. Rivera

University of the Philippines Diliman

ABSTRACT

This paper will deal with the changing soundscape of a particular community in the University of the Philippines Diliman Campus, focusing on the weekly Monday morning flag raising ceremony. The paper will compare how it was celebrated in the past, using earwitness accounts, to how it has been rendered more recently based on a soundscape recording taken in February of 2013. As ritual, flag-raising has devolved over the years. This can be traced to the increase in the level of keynote sounds in and around the campus, the malfunctioning and lack of coordination in the use of the sound devices deployed in the original ritual, and the changes in the soundscapes that index the campus community.

Keywords: Sound, soundscape, earwitness, community, ritual

INTRODUCTION

The Industrial Revolution produced a wide repertoire of man-made sounds. The proliferation of both fixed and moving machines have filled the environment with escalating loud, droning sounds that often eclipse natural and human sounds. The rise of electronic sound reinforcement systems has also added even louder elements to the environment. In *The New Soundscape*,¹ R. Murray Schafer reported a group of his music students estimating the breakdown of the categories of sound in the sonic environment of late-1960s Ontario, Canada as 6% coming from “natural sounds,” 26% from “human sounds,” and 68% from “sounds of tools and technology.” But whatever the blend of natural and technological sounds, communities have created various strategies that combine these to serve as signs and signals that communicate human activities. The sounds of man-made weapons, sirens, bells, drums, and cymbals have been used for various purposes as indications of rituals and states of emergencies.

When most people think about the University of the Philippines Diliman (UP Diliman) campus, they think about what it looks like. There are countless photographs and videos that have documented this over the years. These include the landscape and infrastructure, as well as celebratory and ritual events. My own perception of the campus is formed not only by the images, but the sounds as well. Unfortunately, there are few, if any, sound recordings that have been specifically made to document the campus's sonic environment and events. In January 2013, I began a project to document the soundscapes² of the campus.

The impetus for this came from two directions. First, I've always wanted to be an earwitness³ to the sounds in the campus and felt it was important to recapture my memories of the soundscape over the past 50 or so years. I was born in 1958, during which my family had just moved into a new home a short distance from UP Diliman. Much of my days were spent on campus, and I consciously listened to the sounds therein. As a toddler, I tagged along with my mother who was a faculty member. In 1963, I entered kindergarten at the UP Elementary School, and continued my UP education until I finished a Bachelor's degree in 1980. I eventually came back to the campus as a lecturer in 1985, was appointed as full-time faculty member in 1987, and have worked on campus since then. As a sound recordist and researcher, I had conducted sound surveys in a number of places in the Philippines, but never in UP Diliman. So I felt it was high time I made an effort to study the community in which I had spent much of my life.

Second, I felt it was important to make sound recordings of current soundscapes in the campus to serve as references for future studies. Two modes of observation were conducted. First, two-channel stereo digital audio recordings were made. One setup was fixed, using a pair of small-diaphragm condenser omni-directional microphones (Rode NT-55) arranged in a "spaced omni" array with the two microphones one meter apart. The microphones' output was fed into a digital audio interface (M-Audio Fast Track C400), which was then fed into a MacBook Pro computer using Audacity digital audio software. Using this fixed setup, the recordings were taken from the window of my office in the second floor of the Faculty Center on the south side of the Academic Oval, overlooking the Lagoon. The second setup was portable. It used a hand-held digital audio recorder (Sony TCD-M50), which featured two internal omni-directional electret-condenser microphones. This setup was used for fixed and moving recordings outside of my Faculty Center office. The recordings of both setups were done in 24 bit/ 96 kHz resolution digital audio formats (.aiff or .wav). Also, during the sessions, I would alternate between listening through headphones and with my own ears, so I was an earwitness not only via the recordings, but via the natural soundscape as well.

This paper will focus on the changing soundscape of one particular regular sonic event in the UP Diliman Campus: the weekly Monday morning flag raising ceremony. It will discuss the sonic components of the ceremony through the years, namely: 1) the general ambience of the campus, 2) recurring sound objects, 3) soundmarks, 4) personal earwitness recollections of the way this event was celebrated in the past, and 5) an audio recording from 7:35am to 8:33am as well as an earwitness account from 7:00am to 8:45am from one specific day, Monday, 4 February 2013.

FRAMEWORK

There are two concepts that guided the study. The first is the concept of the “acoustic community.” Truax defines an acoustic community as:

. . . Any soundscape in which acoustic information plays a pervasive role in the lives of the inhabitants (no matter how the commonality of such people is understood). Therefore, the boundary of the community is arbitrary and may be as small as a room of people, a home or building, or as large as an urban community, a broadcast area, or any other system of electroacoustic communication. . . . Our definition of the acoustic community means that acoustic cues and signals constantly keep the community in touch with what is going on from day to day within it. Such a system is “information rich” in terms of sound, and therefore sound plays a significant role in defining the community spatially, temporally in terms of daily and seasonal cycles, as well as socially and culturally in terms of shared activities, rituals and dominant institutions. The community is linked and defined by its sounds. To an outsider they may appear exotic or go unnoticed, but to the inhabitants they convey useful information about both individual and community life. (66)

The UP Diliman community is composed of several overlapping groups. First there is the academic community composed of faculty and students. Second are the non-academic employees who perform administrative functions. Third are the residents, composed of academic and non-academic employees, students, and “outsiders” who live on campus. At the center of the campus lies the Academic Oval. In the original campus plan, all the major academic and administrative buildings were situated in the periphery of this area. Most activities that invoke the entire community are held within, such as the general commencement exercises, the Lantern Parade, the UP Fair, and the flag raising ceremony. In ideal conditions, it is possible to hear sounds from such activities in and around the Academic Oval. This makes it not just a geographic, but an acoustic center of community ceremonies.

The second concept is “ritual.” Barnard and Spencer surveyed the field of anthropology for theoretical approaches to rituals.

According to most theories, ritual either involves different forms of action from everyday life, or at least different purposes. For example, in Christian ritual, the act of ingesting bread during holy communion is different from eating bread at any other time. The difference relates to the meaning attached to the ritual act, which is suggested by the use of symbols. (738)

There are several rituals that are conducted at various times and intervals in the University of the Philippines. The most frequently practiced government-sponsored ritual is probably the flag raising ceremony, which is designed to honor official national symbols. The ceremony involves two types of "objects." First, there are visual objects such as the flags, coat of arms, and seals. Second, there are sound objects, such as music and recitations. Republic Act No. 8491: "An Act Prescribing the Code of the National Flag, Anthem, Motto, Coat-Of-Arms and Other Heraldic Items and Devices of the Philippines" specifies the manner in which flag ceremonies should be celebrated in the Philippines. Sections 18 to 22 of the Act states:

"Conduct of Flag Raising Ceremony

SECTION 18. All government offices and educational institutions shall henceforth observe the flag-raising ceremony every Monday morning and the flag lowering ceremony every Friday afternoon. The ceremony shall be simple and dignified and shall include the playing or singing of the Philippine National Anthem.

SECTION 19. The office of the President upon the recommendation of the Institute shall issue rules and regulations for the proper conduct of the flag ceremony.

SECTION 20. The observance of the flag ceremony in official or civic gatherings shall be simple and dignified and shall include the playing or singing of the anthem in its original Filipino lyrics and march tempo.

SECTION 21. During the flag-raising ceremony, the assembly shall stand in formation facing the flag. At the moment the first note of the anthem is heard, everyone in the premises shall come to attention; moving vehicles shall stop. All persons present shall face their right palms over their chests, those with hats shall uncover, while those in military, scouting, security guard, and citizens military training uniforms shall give salute prescribed by their regulations, which salute shall be completed upon the last note of the anthem. The assembly shall sing the Philippine national anthem, accompanied by a band, if available, and at the first note, the flag shall be raised briskly. The same procedure shall be observed when the flag is passing in review or in parade.

SECTION 22. During the flag lowering, the flag shall be lowered solemnly and slowly so that the flag shall be down the mast at the sound of the last note of the anthem. Those in the assembly shall observe the same deportment or shall observe the same behavior as for the flag-raising ceremony."

I will use these two concepts, “acoustic community” and “ritual,” to problematize what I will refer to as “sonic community rituals,” which refer to symbolic social activities that are performed, understood, and shared by a community using sounds.

THE ANATOMY OF THE SONIC COMMUNITY RITUAL

The Sonic Environment

I will consider three categories of sound in the environment: ambience, recurring sound objects, and soundmarks. Ambience is defined as “. . . comprised of many small sounds, near and far, which generally are heard as a composite, not individually” (Truax). The “keynote” of a soundscape is defined as sounds that “are heard by a particular society continuously or frequently enough to form a background against which other sounds are perceived” (Truax). There are two major sources of the keynote in UP Diliman. The first comes from the stream of motorized vehicles travelling on roads surrounding the campus, including Commonwealth Avenue to the north, Katipunan Avenue to the east, and C.P. Garcia Avenue to the south. Commonwealth Avenue started off with two lanes in the 1950s, and has grown to over ten lanes since then. Katipunan Avenue also started off with two lanes in the 1950s and now has six lanes. C.P. Garcia Avenue also originally had two lanes in the 1970s and has since expanded to four lanes. Vehicular traffic has increased since the 1960s, not just in quantity but in quality as well as an increasing number of heavy trucks and large utility vehicles now traverse these roads. In 2013, the average noise level coming from this stream of vehicles is about 50 dB SPL,⁴ from the middle of the Academic Oval. Another type of sound in the keynote comes from weather disturbances like rain and air movements such as wind. While the keynote is often interrupted and/or masked by a variety of sound objects, there are countless instances where it is either clearly audible or contributes to the overall soundscape of the campus.

A second element of the UP soundscape comes from recurring sound objects, which are defined as the “the smallest self-contained element of a soundscape” (Truax). The loudest and most ubiquitous recurring sounds objects in the Academic Oval come from jeepneys. They are the main form of public transportation on campus, traversing 75% of the length of the academic oval. Most jeepneys are equipped with surplus diesel engines, which have a characteristic clanky mechanical sound familiar to most Filipinos. The sound level of a passing jeepney at full-throttle can peak to as high as 80 dB SPL at five meters away from the road. Other recurring sound objects include cars, motorcycles, human utterances, sudden air movements, atmospheric phenomenon such as thunder, and assorted animal and insect sounds. While these sounds are discrete when they occur in close proximity to the listener,

these sounds are usually perceived as integral components of the overall ambience of the campus over large distances.

A third element are soundmarks. These are defined as “a term derived from ‘landmark’ used in soundscape studies to refer to a community sound which is unique, or possesses qualities which make it specially regarded or noticed by the people in that community” (Truax). There is one enduring soundmark in the UP Diliman campus—the Carillon. It is located in the North-West quadrant of the Academic Oval, between the University Theater and the UP Film Center. It was first completed in 1952. By the 1970s, the Carillon was suffering from damage, a loss of sonic projection, and malfunctioning mechanisms. There were at least two attempts to repair the bells, in the late 1970s and the early 1980s, but the same problems ensued, so the Carillon was played sparingly in these decades. The most recent major restoration project was started in 2005 and completed in time for the UP centennial in 2008. The Carillon is used for two main functions: First, it plays every hour to indicate the time. Second, it plays the national anthem and UP Naming Mahal at 8 a.m. on Mondays for flag raising ceremonies and at 5 p.m. on Fridays for flag retreat. Lastly, it plays a selection of music for about thirty minutes before and after 8 a.m. in the morning and 5 p.m. in the afternoon every day. The current Carillon can be played either manually or through an automated system (“Carillon”). Recently, I have noticed that some bells do not work when the Carillon is played by the automated system. This is noticeable when certain notes are lacking in melodies.

Earwitness Recollections

I clearly remember the sequence of sounds during the flag raising ceremonies in UP on Monday mornings in the 1960s. The first component was a siren that was situated somewhere in the southwest side of the campus and was used to tell time, issue storm warnings, and provide alerts for other emergencies. This could be clearly heard throughout the academic oval. The siren would go off at about 7:30 a.m, signaling policemen stationed in all intersections around the Academic Oval to blow their whistles to stop vehicular traffic. Shortly after, a 105mm howitzer situated atop a knoll along the West-bound lane of the University Avenue would fire a blank. This then triggered the Carillon to play the national anthem. After this, the police officers would blow their whistles again to resume traffic and the Carillon would play the school song, then called “UP Beloved.” The balance of these sounds depended on where one was in the campus in proximity to these sound sources at a specific time. As a child, I experienced this ceremony in a variety of locations. I remember being in the firing line of the howitzer, at the foot of Carillon, and next to a policeman blowing his whistle. When I was studying in UP

Elementary School behind the College of Education building on the southeast side of the Academic Oval, I remember how these sounds, specially the howitzer, could still be clearly heard from the driveway of the UP Elementary School where we held our own flag raising ceremony. The flag lowering ceremony on Friday afternoons was similar, with the added attraction of a mini concert by the carillonneur that lasted about an hour.

By the 1970s, many of these components of the ritual had retreated. The howitzer was reportedly destroyed in a fire at the Department of Military Science and Tactics (DMST) building where it was stored sometime in 1969. Also, by this time, the Carillon's deterioration left an increasing number of bells either dulled or inoperable and the UP police force ceased to stop traffic. By the early 1970s, the sounds of the main campus could no longer be heard from the remote UP High School complex along Katipunan Avenue where I spent the early part of the decade. Little changed by the time I came back to the main campus as a college student. I remember sporadic efforts in the 1980s to stop traffic while the Carillon played the national anthem and UP Naming Mahal, but without the siren and the howitzer, few people beyond the then reduced reach of the Carillon knew for sure what was going on.

The closest thing to a sonic ritual recommenced in the 1990s when I was an instructor in the College of Arts and Letters. The College of Social Sciences and Philosophy in Palma Hall began setting up a sound system in the lobby of the second floor facing the academic oval on Monday mornings, which would play the national anthem at 8 a.m. while they raised the flag in front of the building. The Carillon would play the same anthems at about the same time but, in spite of some repairs, the projection of the bells' sound was still not as potent as it was in the 1960s. After the major restoration of the Carillon in the mid-2000s, the projection of the bells improved. It would play the national anthem every 8 a.m. on Mondays, and 5 p.m. on Fridays, and some people on foot in the vicinity of the academic oval would actually stop in their tracks in deference to the national anthem. But there is no other sonic fanfare to accompany this and, because there are some classes in Diliman on Monday mornings, few students and faculty actually got to hear it.

The Recording

A few years ago, the administration decided that there would be no classes on Mondays, reserving it for faculty meetings and graduate classes. Regular undergraduate classes were scheduled for Tuesdays to Fridays. I arrived on campus before 7 a.m. on Monday, 4 February 2013. I positioned the portable recorder near the sewer pipes beneath A. Roces Ave., where a small drop in the stream made the

gentle sounds of water falling. It provided a steady keynote which was topped by the occasional sounds of passing motor vehicles, aircraft flying overhead, birds, and people conversing. I began recording at 7:35 a.m.

For the first four minutes of the recording, the sounds of water streaming through the sewer pipe and various light motorized vehicles passing A. Roces Ave. are clearly heard. At about 03m:58s, the Carillon began playing “Kapantay ay Langit” and ended at 07m:44s. At 08m:50s, a marching band playing became audible. It was apparently leading a small parade marching westward along the north side of Osmeña Ave., also known as the Academic Oval. At 11m:05s, a large payloader was heard travelling northward along A. Roces Ave. and then crossed Osmeña Ave. by 11m:30s at about the same time the band had reached the same intersection. The band achieved its maximum loudness by 11m:40s, as it reached the area in front of the UP Diliman Tennis Club courts. A jet aircraft was heard flying overhead from 12m:00s until 13m:30s. The sound of the band gradually faded out until it became inaudible by 15m:40s. Ten minutes before 8 a.m., the band, which by now was in the amphitheater, played the national anthem and UP Naming Mahal. I also heard people speaking through a sound reinforcement system, but the words were unintelligible. At 20m:59s, the Carillon played eight bells, signaling 8 a.m. However, based on my quartz watch synchronized to UP Diliman Time, the time was approximately 7:56 a.m.⁵ That was the last I heard of the Carillon for the rest of the recording session. Another jet became audible at about 26m:00s and faded out by about 28m:00s. At about 42m:50s to 44m:00s, a recording of a choral version of the national anthem could be heard faintly, coming from a sound system from Palma Hall. This was followed immediately by a choral version of “U.P. Naming Mahal,” which ended at 46m:20s. The recording was stopped at 48m:40s, at about 8:33 a.m., when I figured all the festivities around the campus were done. As I made my way back to my car in the Faculty Center, I observed the band leading a small parade of what I saw were foreign students and organizations through the south side of the academic oval towards Palma Hall.

ANALYSIS

In the 1960s, Monday morning flag raising ceremonies in the UP Diliman campus were an organized, choreographed event. The main sonic objects of the siren, police whistles, howitzer, and Carillon could be heard throughout the Academic Oval and its surrounding areas. It is safe to say that all these instruments were explicitly designed to create sounds that could carry over great distances without electronic

sound reinforcement. In addition, the reach of these acoustic sounds was also assisted by the fact that the keynote was lower in that decade. Every sound served both a logistical and symbolic function. The whole event could then truly be called a sonic community ritual.

By the 1970s, the ritual fell apart. The absence of the siren eliminated the initial preparatory signal. The demise of the howitzer eliminated a dominant sonic signal that the ceremony was under way. And, finally, the deterioration of the Carillon precluded community participation in hearing and singing along with the national anthem and UP Beloved.

The restoration of the Carillon in the 2000s may have reestablished its role as a campus soundmark, but it no longer draws as much immediate attention nor does it have the same dominating sonic power and reach as the other elements of the old flag raising ceremony. The playback of recordings of the national anthem and UP Naming Mahal on medium-powered sound reinforcement systems in individual buildings has not helped either, as they are not synchronized with those in other buildings and their sound is limited to short distances. Flag ceremonies became fragmented, with individual units such as the administration building (Quezon Hall), the College of Social Sciences and Philosophy (Palma Hall), and the UP Integrated School celebrating in isolation.

There are two contemporary technologies that could bring people together for flag ceremonies. The first comes in the form of current high-powerful sound reinforcement systems. Unfortunately, the cost of a fixed, permanent point-source system that could cover the entire Academic Oval alone is prohibitive, while a temporary system would take too much time and effort to set up regularly. The second would be broadcast and/or streaming digital systems. These systems are touted as being able to provide real-time communications globally. However, the end-user devices associated with these systems are usually small, personal devices such as personal computers, tablets, and cellphones, which may not impart the majestic scale and spectacle of a major community event. There has been no concerted effort by the community to use this technology to synchronize the celebration of routine events such as flag ceremonies.

Outside of these technological systems, the only acoustic entity loud enough to be heard throughout the academic oval are the UP Pep Squad Drummers. In a subsequent recording by this author during the UP Diliman General Commencement at the UP Ampitheater, the Pep Squad Drummers were much louder than the UP

Band and were heard clearly from as far as the Palma Hall Annex. But this group is yet to be deployed for weekly flag ceremonies.

I have long felt that the devolution of this sonic community ritual has had a profound effect on the UP Diliman community. No event, sonic or otherwise, has since been organized to bring the entire community together every week. It is tempting to say that the loss of such rituals runs parallel with what I perceive as the fragmentation of the UP Diliman academic community into isolated, specialized academic disciplines, and administrative units. In addition, the contemporary soundscape has seen the escalating proliferation of loud, sterile sounds that dull the senses and make sound objects more difficult to hear over large distances. This has led to a lack of sensitivity to the keynote, recurring sound objects, and soundmarks that are not only supposed to serve as important signs of social activity, but impart meaning when constituted into sonic rituals. Rituals articulate the beliefs, ideologies, philosophies, and aspirations of a society. They provide venues in which individuals can bind themselves into a community. Each community must find ways to articulate them sonically. The devolution of flag raising ceremonies in UP Diliman means one less venue in which the community may celebrate its existence.

ENDNOTES

¹ See page six of *The New Soundscape* by R. Murray Schafer.

² Soundscape, meaning an environment of sound (or sonic environment) with emphasis on the way it is perceived and understood by an individual or by a society. It thus depends on the relationship between the individual and any such environment. See Truax.

³ Earwitness - the author of verbal or written descriptions of sounds, usually those of the past. Collections of earwitness accounts form one of the few sources of historical SOUNDSCAPE documentation. earwitness.html, from Handbook of Acoustic Ecology, 2nd edition. CD-ROM version 1.1 (Cambridge Street Publishing, 1999).

⁴ Measured with a Radio Shack Analog Sound Level Meter, "A" weighting, on various days of October 2013.

WORKS CITED

Barnard, Alan and Jonathan Spencer, eds. *Encyclopedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology*. London: Routledge, 2002. Print.

"Carillon." *iskWiki!* Diliman Interactive Learning Center. 3 October 2013. Web. 31 October 2013.

"Republic Act No. 8491." *Official Gazette*. Republic of the Philippines. 12 February 1998. Web. 31 October 2013.

Rivera, Robin Daniel Z. 130204_01 lagoon. Diliman, Quezon City, 4 February 2013. WAV file.

Schafer, R. Murray. *The New Soundscape*. Ontario: BMI Canada Limited, 1969. Print.

Truax, Barry, ed. *Handbook of Acoustic Ecology*. 2nd ed. Cambridge Street Publishing, 1999. Print.

Truax, Barry. *Acoustic Communication*. 2nd ed. Westport, Connecticut: Ablex Publishing, 2001. Print.

Robin Daniel Z. Rivera <makinao@gmail.com> is an Associate Professor at the Department of Art Studies at the University of the Philippines in Diliman. He has an A.B. in Broadcast Communication from the University of the Philippines Diliman, an M.A. in Communication from the Ateneo de Manila University, and a Ph.D. in Philippine Studies from the University of the Philippines Diliman. He is also a professional musician and sound/music recording practitioner, and has produced recordings by the U.P. Cherubim and Seraphim, Elena Mirano, KONTRAGAPI, Eraserheads, Dong Abay, Sugarfree, Peryodiko, and Bullet Dumas.