4 I just can't get you out of my head

How music triggers the imagination

Leonieke Bolderman

Introduction

Sound is an indelible part of how we construct and perceive reality. According to cultural geographer Tuan, without sound, “space itself contracts, for our experience of space is greatly extended by the auditory sense which provides information of the world beyond the visual field” (Tuan, 1974: 9). Concrete, sensory experiences of space and place play a central role in processes of imagining. Defined in the introduction of this volume narrowly as “the mental visualization of things that are not present” (*Introduction*: 3) and more broadly as “the capacity to create mental constructions of places where one is not present at that moment” (*Introduction*: 17), the current conceptualization of the imagination puts emphasis on the visual. This is not surprising, since the prominence of the visual chimes with a long tradition of foregrounding visual culture in studies of human meaning making, also referred to as the “visual fallacy” prevalent in cultural and media studies (Couldry, 2015).

In line with a call to explore how visual and auditory cultures illuminate each other (cf. Bolderman & Reijnders, 2019; Keightley & Pickering, 2006), in this chapter, I explore the role of sound and, in its wake, music, in conceptualizing the content and importance of the imagination. Based on an analysis of 52 interviews carried out in the context of a research project on music tourism, music is shown to be a particularly efficient mediator of cognitive, affective, and embodied ways of imagining. In this way, music offers an especially fruitful way of analysing how the affective and embodied dimensions of imagining enrich the cognitive. Thus, I conclude that expanding our conceptualization of the imagination to include other senses and media is an effective way to take the goal of a non-mediacentric approach to media studies (*Introduction*: 4) a step further.

Conceptualizing the imagination through music

In line with how the imagination is defined in the introduction of this book, I conceive of the imagination as a universal phenomenon that allows every

human being to create mental constructions of places where one is not present at that moment in time. Concrete, sensory experiences of space and place play a central role in processes of imagining, creating an intrinsic paradox: imagining concerns both the absent and the present; it connects perception with the imaginary. Moreover, the imaginary capacities of human beings provide the world with “an affective texture” (Lennon, 2015: 18), offering patterns, images, and forms to experience the world. As stated in the introduction of this book, this makes the imagination a fundamental part of our consciousness – a fundamental part of how we experience dimensions of time and place (*Introduction*: 9).

Music is an imaginative practice and as such provides ways to make sense of our experience of “being in the world”. As has been voiced in the field of ethnomusicology, music works by providing metaphors for how the world is imagined, lived, and felt (Cohen, 2007; Feld & Basso, 1996; Hudson, 2006; Kong, 1995). Demonstrating the power of the imagination through music, these metaphors become part of shared cultural narratives, thereby “stimulating a sense of identity, preserving and transmitting cultural memory, transporting listeners to imaginary places and providing a map of meaning” (cf. Cohen, 2007).

Andy Bennett provides an example of this process in a study on the Canterbury sound (Bennett, 2002). Bennett refers to shared imaginary worlds as “musical mythscapes”: spaces that are “mythologized as in some way informing the essential spirit of a body of live and recorded music”. Places become connected to the music in the imagination of the fans as “standing for” something essential in the music, providing “a point of reference” for sociability that functions as a unifying element for the fan community and a catalyst for channelling meanings attached to the music (both personal and collective).

Bennett shows the role of the media in the power of such globally circulating imaginaries as stories about music and place circulate in the media and are appropriated by fans, allowing the mythological place as imaginary to thrive. For this chapter, it is interesting to think about how music as an intangible medium is part of this process. Moreover, the question arises how these globally circulating imaginaries and metaphors become invested with affective meaning. In this chapter, I argue that an answer to these questions can be found by looking more closely at the relation between music and imaginative practices.

In my own previous work on this topic (Bolderman, 2020; Bolderman & Reijnders, 2019), I identify two ways in which music stimulates the imagination and invests imaginary worlds with affective meaning, connecting cognitive and affective dimensions of imagining. Building on work by music philosophers Nicholas Cook (1990) and Thomas Walton (1994), music first of all stimulates the imagination cognitively. Listeners create a full image of what it is they are listening to through filling out the gaps of meaning between sounds, images, and words – what Cook (1990) calls an “interpretive position”. This cognitive dimension of the imagination involves music’s

paratexts (cf. Genette, 1997), which can be linguistic (lyrics, sleeve notes, etcetera) or visual (music videos, album covers, etcetera).

Besides this interpretative cognitive position, music also evokes a different kind of imagining: that of experience. Most of the time, the listener is not concerned with music's interpretative meaning but with its effect. Walton (1994) argues that what the listener imagines when listening to music is not a visual perspective but the experience of mental states like feelings and emotions. This means that, as opposed to, for example, painting or literature, the music itself is not the prop of imagining, but the experience when we listen to it is what sparks our imagination. In semiotic approaches to music, this has been observed as well: in Saussurian terms, music is not a system of signs but a system of signifiers without signifieds (Turino, 2008).

As I argue, imagining is *both* an interpretative and experiential practice: imagining through music combines what one “sees” based on music's paratexts and how one “feels” through listening to music (Bolderman & Reijnders, 2019). Elaborating on this previous work, I argue in this chapter that music combines the interpretive and the experiential in a *particularly embodied way*, mediating between cognition and affect. Music therefore is a medium for bridging and mediating these interlinked dimensions of the imagination.

A key step in this argumentation is the idea that music works in this embodied way through the medium of sound. Sounds, being vibrating air, have a tangibility that can be experienced through other senses than vision – sound and, in its wake, music, can be felt. As put forward by several scholars (Cohen, 2007; DeNora, 2000; Hesmondhalgh, 2013; Turino, 2008), it is through these sonic qualities that music offers an embodied experience. Rhythms and melodies envelop and penetrate the listener; the listener can literally feel the music, offering the listener the possibility for “entrainment”: to align emotions and moods with the rhythm or “feel” of the music (DeNora, 2000). As Turino explains in relation to belonging, this way, music provides an experience *of* whatever meaning is attached instead of *about* that meaning: “language provides propositions about belonging, music is the feeling or direct experience of belonging” (Turino, 2008: 241). In relation to the imagination, this has two consequences.

First, it means music can transport people in time and space in real time, for example, during a concert. Through the tactile quality of music, coming to the listener as well as travelling *into* the listener (Cohen, 2007: 181; Waitt & Duffy, 2009), music creates its own time, space, and motion as a temporal medium, which makes places more intensely lived and tangible (Cohen, 2007; Hesmondhalgh, 2013; Smith, 2000; Waitt & Duffy, 2009). In the words of Stokes: “a musical event evokes and organizes collective memories and present experiences of place with an intensity, power and simplicity unmatched by any other social activity” (Stokes, 1997: 3). Especially music's rhythmic quality and temporal unfolding are seen to play a major role in inducing these states of flow and even trance (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; DeNora, 2000; Turino, 2008).

Second, music mediates between a personal, affective level of experience and a cultural, shared level of meaning and identity. Listening together to music in real time can create a collective social identification, frequently called a sense of “communitas” in reference to Turner’s anthropological work on rituals (Hesmondhalgh, 2013). Waitt and Duffy describe how people who listen to music together are taken on an embodied “aural journey” of music together (Waitt & Duffy, 2009), while Hesmondhalgh points out that people who experience the same thing at the same time report experiencing a sense of belonging to a community (Hesmondhalgh, 2013).

Therefore, music mediates between cognitive, culturally shared dimensions of experience, described, for example, in Bennett’s musical mythscapes, with affective dimensions of experience. Music does so in a particularly embodied way. This leads me to argue in this chapter that the imagination should be defined as being cognitive, affective, *and* embodied, conceptualizing these dimensions as being strongly connected and interrelated, between which music mediates. In order to bring empirical flesh to this theoretical idea, I will discuss this conceptualization of the imagination through an explorative interview study on music tourism, in which the musical imagination of 52 interviewed tourists played a central role.

Methodology

The research for this chapter has been conducted in the context of the *Locating Imagination. An Interdisciplinary Perspective on Film, Literary and Music Tourism* research project, conducted between February 2013 and 2017 at Erasmus University Rotterdam, supported by the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (grant number PR-11-77). It builds upon the findings of three case studies that focused on the ways in which tourists construct narratives of music and place (Bolderman, 2020; Bolderman & Reijnders, 2017, 2019; Reijnders et al., 2015).

Designed from a grounded theory perspective (Charmaz, 2006), the analysis in this chapter follows on from 52 semi-structured interviews with music tourists in Europe. Twenty-one of the interviews were conducted face to face, while the others were Skype interviews. Generally, the interviews lasted about an hour. The interviews focused on the role of music in everyday life and the preparation, on-site experiences, and returning home after music-related holidays the interviewees engaged in. In the selection of respondents, I sought a balance between tourists who self-identified as fans and those who voiced a more casual engagement with music; I included a diverse array of music genres; and I researched diverse kinds of music tourism, ranging from walking tours and museum visits to music workshops and concert travel.

The analysis started with open coding (Charmaz, 2006), meaning that I read and re-read the transcript at hand to get a good feel for it and then would proceed with attaching codes freely. After the initial open coding phase, a process of selective coding followed (Charmaz, 2006) through which

connections between and within categories and subcategories were made. At this stage, some codes and subcategories were resolved, while others emerged more comprehensively across the transcripts. I then moved towards identifying preliminary theories, collapsing categories into overarching themes through an iterative process of moving back and forth between the data, the research question, and the literature. Throughout the analysis, citations and examples from the interviews will be used to exemplify the main findings; interviewees have been anonymized.

How music stimulates the imagination in practice: cognition, affect, and embodiment

When Tara hears the song “Bad” by U2, something happens. She starts nodding, tapping her foot to the beat, and soon she will start singing along to the lyrics of the song. As a lifelong U2 fan, her behaviour is not limited to listening to the song on the radio. Tara travels frequently to U2 concerts, and during the interview, she recounted that when she hears the song live, something special happens. In her own words: “when I hear that it just knocks me senseless, if you talk to me during that song, you won’t even get a response. . . . I get transported to a different planet, I get transported to planet Bono” (Tara, 43, British). U2 music, and this song in particular, has a special power to transport Tara in her imagination, taking her somewhere else.

Tara is not alone in this. All respondents who were interviewed for this project talked about the ways the music they like to listen to stimulated their imagination. Sometimes this was a particular song or composition by a favourite band or composer, such as getting transported to “planet Wagner” through listening to the Ring cycle or getting lost on “planet ABBA” through listening to “Dancing Queen”. Other cases involved making music, in which participants described getting into moments of flow, being transported to a different dimension; listening to music while on a morning commute creating a personalized music bubble; or imagining the pleasurable experiences ahead while putting together a playlist for going on holiday.

It was not the case that all interviewees were transported to imaginary worlds all the time, nor to such an extent as in the account of Tara. Quite the opposite: the interviewees talked about consciously creating and entering imaginary worlds by listening to or engaging with music but also about consciously engaging with their environment by *not* listening to music. In all cases, though, the interviewees considered music a valuable part of their lives, permeating and soundtracking their everyday lives and dreams, evoking complex images in which time and place, perception and imagination converged.

The cognitive dimension: how imaginary worlds are built through music

What was the role of cognition in creating and engaging with these complex imaginary worlds through music? First of all, the caveat must be made that

even though music can evoke complex and powerful, detailed imaginary worlds, music could also evoke a more blurry, loose idea of an imaginary place, a “sense of place” that was not always visual. As explained by Bowen (1997) in a study on the Jimmy Buffet song “Margaritaville”, the song leads some fans to imagine a concrete place somewhere in Key West, Florida, while others consider Margaritaville a state of mind, an intangible imaginary place removed from everyday life. This duality also surfaced during the interviews for this study:

With some music you have a very strong visual image of a place, for example that album by Jewel we talked about. With Bachata and Salsa, it is more a feeling of a place, and less visual images.

(Naima, 34, owner of a start-up)

During the interviews, it became clear that visual images were not the most prominent way music stimulated the imagination. Mood was the single most important theme to emerge, evoking a sense of place. As Naima explained, it was about having a certain feeling towards a broader idea of place, for example, a city, region, or country.

What this quote also shows is that music listening, in whatever situation, was a rich source of worldbuilding. In other interviews, music making (either individually or in groups) and engaging in music-related practices, such as travelling to concerts, engaging in fan activities, or playlist making, all triggered processes in which the interviewees imagined places and situations beyond their perceived reality. Jaap described how listening to a Bruce Springsteen song summoned a particular image in his mind:

That song by Bruce Springsteen . . . when I close my eyes, I am sitting at the cabin again, the ambiance, the fun . . . it's night time, we're all there . . . it was Jolien's birthday, so it had to have been the 8th of August . . . we're having cocktails, with little umbrellas in them, there was a camp fire, there was a pool you could jump into in the middle of night.

(Jaap, 35, call centre employee)

Jaap saw a very specific scene in front of him. He described the moment during a holiday with friends when they celebrated a birthday. Music in this memory functioned as a powerful hook, evoking a complex image in which time, place, and memory converged. In these visual imaginations, place was not the centre of attention – Jaap emphasized this as well – but place and music were part of an imagination that revolved around something else: social relations and memory. Adding to the point made by Reijnders (2016), location is an important part of memories of beloved stories, and, as I suggest based on these interviews, location also matters to memories of beloved music.

Going more in depth comparing beloved stories to music, the question arises how exactly music was connected to locations. This question is

interesting since there is not always a written text or an image to music that shows a location – as emphasized in the theory section, both readers and music listeners fill up the blank spaces between the lines to complete the mental pictures in their minds. The visual, tangible worlds evoked by music in the interviews could be connected to reality in four ways, which I have described elsewhere in more detail (Bolderman & Reijnders, 2019). Music mediates between real and imagined locations through its sounds – an interviewee, for example, connected specific drums in a song to his honeymoon location in Sri Lanka. Lyrics and images could evoke particular places, such as a song in Italian evoking images of Italy. The biography of the musician or band was a third powerful mediator of imagined worlds, and, finally, the places where music was produced, made, or consumed functioned as anchors to music-related imaginings – legendary venues or recording studios were mentioned frequently or memories of festival experiences. What I would like to stress here is that these four mediations are not unique to music, since the birthplace of the author of a novel can also stimulate imagining in the same way a famous cinema can be an inspiring, stimulating location for the imagination. However, since music is also sound, besides possibly text and image, it provides a refocusing on processes of imagining through other media.

The worlds evoked through and with music are not necessarily related to the factual features and content of the music, although in the case of lyrics, places sung about of course featured more prominently in the imaginations of the interviewees. When an interviewee, for example, listened to instrumental music which included a didgeridoo, obvious connections to Australia were made, confirming how cultural schemata permeate imaginary worlds (cf. Reijnders, 2016) also in the case of music. Even so, returning to the quote by Jaap, Bruce Springsteen did not sing specifically about France, the country Jaap was celebrating his holiday in at the time. It was the personal memory of Jaap that was connected to the music and was evoked by the song.

According to Malpas (1999), visual imaginations are influenced by the experiences we have: they draw on our sensory input. What surfaced from the interviews for this project was that the interviewees had three main sources of sensory input to create visual imaginations. The most important source for interviewees was their own personal sensory experience of place, accessed through memory. A second source was the pictures and imaginaries accessed through family or friends. Images shown by family or friends, for instance, holiday snapshots, often created “inherited memories” (Keightley & Pickering, 2012), connecting music to the place in the picture, even if the interviewee had never actually been there:

Unfortunately, I have never been to Kenya, but when I listen to this music, I experience Kenya. My parents have been there, and they have told me about it, and it's almost as if you connect that memory to the

experience of the music. And thereby place yourself back in time as it were, as if you were there yourself.

(Paul, 50, marketing manager)

The intrinsic paradox of the imagination comes to the fore in this quote, as Paul experienced a place that he was not in at that moment, a place that he actually had never been to and experienced himself. This imagined experience shows a play with memory, with time and space, playing with the boundary between perception and reality. The experience described by Paul comes close to how Svetlana Boym defines reflective nostalgia: feeling nostalgic for a reality that was never lived but feels familiar regardless (Boym, 2001).

Nostalgia especially played an important role in the third source of visual imagery the interviewees drew on to fill in their imagined worlds: the media. The interviews showed that mediated images filled in the gaps when music had no specific visual based on personal or inherited experience. As Liselotte explained:

Music sometimes gives me a nostalgic feeling . . . it is a longing for the past, without the past. . . . I mentioned that when talking about Paris: I only know Paris the way it is now. But the way you see it in old movies, the way it is romanticised, it imprints a certain image in your head, and when I'm there, I search for some sort of recognition in those old images.

(Liselotte, 26, student)

Liselotte referred in this quote to how she made her own imaginary based on mediated images, imprinting “a certain image in your head”. This process seems to correspond to the concept of “musical mythscapes” as posited by Bennett (2002), in which mediated connections and images between music and place are taken up by audiences and appropriated into new and more elaborated personal imaginary worlds. In this case, Liselotte does not create an idea about an entire body of music or music genre, but it worked the other way around for her: she built a specific imaginary place-image based on mediated images, evoked by music. As Bennett (2002) points out, these mythical locations are not trivial but can become symbolic places, reference points for sociability and identity. What became clear from the interviews of this study is that it is in the symbolic meaning of imagined places that the connection with the affective dimension of imagining can be found.

Affective dimension: how imaginary worlds become affective worlds

Whether clearly visualized or more free floating, the importance of a sense of place through music – attaching mood and affect to these imaginary worlds – puts us on the path of exploring what I have called in the theory section the experiential aspect of imagining through music. In a study on

holiday playlists, I have uncovered the process underlying this affective attachment to imaginary worlds (Bolderman & Reijnders, 2019). Alicia described the process very clearly:

Where the band comes from gets linked to the feeling the music evokes, and then that place also evokes that feeling in me.

(Alicia, 26, secretary)

In this quote, Alicia describes how she transposed the feeling of listening to her idea of place, infusing her “musical mythscape” with personal feeling. This process of turning cognitive worlds into affective worlds happened throughout the interviews and has already surfaced in previous quotes. Liselotte, for example, felt nostalgic when listening to certain music and connected that feeling to Paris; other interviewees talked about “peaceful Scandinavia” or “depressed England” – as referred to in the theoretical section, music offers metaphors for experiencing the world, and throughout the interviews, the stories of the interviewees were built on a specific type of metaphor when discussing imaginary worlds – a hypallage (Bolderman & Reijnders, 2019) – injecting personal feelings evoked by listening to an idea of place.

These affective dimensions of imaginary worlds were meaningful to the interviewees because the worlds evoked by music were often connected to meaningful moments in the interviewees’ lives. Music itself is a powerful technology of identity, a tool to tell the story of self (DeNora, 2000), and this was present throughout the interviews (as also described specifically for music tourists in Bolderman & Reijnders, 2017). Interviewees described music as the “wallpaper to their life” (Peter, 37, tour guide), as representing who they are (“music is who I am”, Philip, 30, account manager), and certain songs and musicians helped them through transitional moments in life (cf. Van Dijck, 2006), such as dealing with parents divorcing, moving out, getting married, having children, dealing with death and bereavement, and so on and so forth.

The way music stimulated the imagination was most often by conjuring up memories of these formative moments, for example, when Philip recounted how he shared music while on his exchange year to Japan, a formative trip and, in hindsight, with its own soundtrack that immediately transports Paul back to a specific square in Japan whenever he puts the music on. Another example is Jaap’s memory of France, sharing a holiday with friends, cementing the bonds tying the friend group together. These memories are moments in which place, music, and personal identity meet, imbuing both place and music with personal meaning, creating a music-related form of what Tuan calls “topophilia”: the emotional attachment to place that is central to human experience (Tuan, 1974). Reijnders speaks in this respect of “souls-capes”: “symbolic environments which individuals identify themselves with, and where, in a lost moment, the soul wanders around happily” (Reijnders,

2016: 683). Moreover, what we see here is how the cognitive, narrative layer of imagining becomes entwined with and imbued with affect – they cannot be seen separately from each other.

Embodied dimension: how musical imaginary worlds are lived

During the interviews, the physicality of the connection between music and imagining surfaced as a central aspect of imagining without being explicitly asked for. The embodied dimensions of music and of imagining seem central to its experience. For many respondents, experiencing music physically stimulated the imagination. Tara described very poignantly how she was transported to “planet Bono” while listening to the song during a concert, and many respondents described how they would turn on specific music when they wanted to think about certain moments and memories. This could be specific moments to sit down and listen, but what returned quite often was, for example, how interviewees would put on their holiday playlist while cleaning the house, temporarily being transported to their holiday space of mind while undertaking a mundane, quite physical activity.

Conversely, imagining musical imaginary worlds stimulated the engagement with and the experience of listening to music. As the interviews were conducted in the context of a research project on music tourism, the majority of interviewees gave examples of how having visited a certain music-related location changed or deepened their listening experience of the music upon return. As described in the introduction of this volume, media tourism is a way to engage with the imagination physically. This certainly turned out to be the case for the interviews conducted during this project, even if a part of those interviews were not focussed specifically on the act of music tourism (Bolderman & Reijnders, 2019).

The physical aspects of music were present in processes of imagining in different ways, elsewhere described as ranging from an experience of immersion to absorption (Bolderman & Reijnders, 2017). Research on immersive imaginative experiences refers often to the notion of “being there” (Waysdorf, 2017), “co-presence” (Urry & Larsen, 2011), or “liveness” (Auslander, 2008; Chapters 13 and 14 in this volume) to describe the value of this experience to audiences. Specifically in relation to music, various ways in which music can be present and forms a physical part of experience have been analysed, such as through experiences of absorption (DeNora, 2000; Hesmondhalgh, 2013; Malbon, 1999; Turino, 2008). In this case, two ways musical embodiment played a role surfaced: the already extensively discussed experiences of being absorbed by live music, forming an immersive experience in time, and second, being immersed in the sonic landscapes or soundscapes of a place, which offered an immersive experience in place.

First, many respondents talked about the special experience of hearing and attending live music events, either on holiday or in everyday life. A specific part of the study focussed on music workshops, where making music in a group also caused these moments of absorption and brought interviewees an experience of “flow”:

When you’re playing music with a group of people . . . , there is just such a mental buzz, in a room. It’s probably nothing you can see, but you can feel it. . . . You express yourself, but it’s more than just expressing yourself, it is following on from what other people are doing, so they’re expressing themselves and then you fit in with that and . . . collectively, you’re doing something . . . and it’s very in the moment.

(Madison, 56, IT consultant)

As Madison explains here, she experienced a mental buzz, which transported the players and created a sense of connection as well. In this way, making music together, experiencing sounds together, can be a way of connecting between personal imaginary worlds and shared experiences of those worlds, making the imagination social. In the words of Simon Frith: “Music constructs our sense of identity through the direct experiences it offers of the body, time and sociability, experiences which enable us to place ourselves in imaginative cultural narratives” (Frith, 1996: 124).

What is especially interesting in the way Madison described her experience is the final remark: “it’s very in the moment”. As Frith also alludes to, the process of imagining involves the experience of time – and, in moments of immersion and absorption, of the dissolving of a sense of time. In his work on dance music, Malbon (1999) refers to this as the “oceanic feeling” music offers, in which personal identity is temporarily suspended. In her work on Beatles tourism, Sara Cohen (2007) similarly describes how hearing music during Beatles week formed an immersive space for tourists by creating a sense of direct, unmediated, non-cognitive experience in which music seemed to create its own time, space, and motion through music’s texture and tactile sound, its physical presence. We can conclude that immersive experiences such as Madison’s made the imagined world not just a reflexive, cognitive endeavour but a felt, lived, and affective experience, effectively connecting these layers of the imagination.

The second way music’s sonic dimension contributed to immersive imaginative experiences was through its presence in the local soundscape. David, for example, mentioned how he realized during a trip to the German city of Bayreuth that the libretto of Wagner operas was not an artificial art language but actual spoken language surrounding him during his visit, giving a new dimension to his listening experience. Other interviewees talked about how they often listen to local radio while on holiday, immersing themselves in local places through knowing local hits and music genres. Finally, many

interviewees mentioned how they did not need actual music played to still hear music in their mind – a very visceral experience of musically imagining. As recounted by Ricardo (24, student):

When you walk through that landscape, you hear the sounds around you: the water in the creek, the buzzing of the bees, and actually the silence, and the wind, so that is part of what you perceive. If you plug in [your earphones] in that moment, that part of perceiving the environment is missing. Of course, the music replaces it, but you miss the complete picture of experiencing that moment. But: if you perceive and experience that moment with all your senses, and then add music from memory . . . it's like adding a layer, it's like a sixth sense.

Ricardo explained how he likes to experience the local soundscape by listening to nature, and he then “adds” music from memory – by hearing it play in his head imaginatively. Other interviewees remarked on this power of music as well, adding an imaginative layer over reality. Some talked about consciously creating playlists and adding music to their world, either as a way to add a layer of meaning or by creating a personal musical bubble to retreat in. For others, the experience was not always voluntary: Philip, for example, talked about hearing a U2 song play in his mind when exiting the Dublin airport, as he saw the flats the song is about – an example of involuntary musical imagery, hearing music that is not there (Bolderman & Reijnders, 2017). In this way, music can be seen as an imaginative tool for experiencing the world around you in different ways, aided by current mobile technology.

Meike (29, psychologist) summarized the two ways music stimulates the imagination quite poignantly:

It's the idea of the modern pilgrimage, because you have a purpose. Whether that is because you're a fan of the music, or you have an entire world in your mind . . . you want to go there. Because it's a nice goal to have. When you do a roadtrip, it's more about combining the experience with the music, to complete that experience as it were.

Meike in this quote described how music helped her to fantasize about locations, turning these into detailed imaginary worlds (“or you have an entire world in your mind”) that subsequently stimulated a need to explore these worlds physically (“you want to go there”). At the same time, music helped Meike to connect to the landscape while on the road, adding to her experience of reality (“to complete that experience as it were”), helping her to immerse into her environment, just like Ricardo described.

What we see in these quotes is how the imagination is both a way of evoking what is not there and conjuring up “entire worlds” – what we have called the narrow definition of imagining in the introduction of this edited volume – while imagining is also about filling in the blanks of experiencing

the world around you, of completing an idea and experience of being in the world – the Kantian tradition of conceptualizing the imagination more broadly, as the capacity for giving meaning to the experience, the precondition of functioning as a perceptual being (cf. Lennon, 2015). What makes the difference seems to be the situation and the matching function of music, calling attention to music's specific characteristics as a medium. Music can be like a book or painting, something to be pondered over, forming the start of developing elaborate imaginary worlds. Music, experienced in its unfolding over time, can also be a tool to set the mood and atmosphere of a place, used more instrumentally to enchant the physical world with that which is not present.

Conclusion

In the wilderness of Alaska stands an abandoned bus. In the bus, a notebook contains messages of people who have visited the bus over time. One message reads: Setting forth in the universe/Out here realigned/A planet out of sight/Nature drunk and high/Oh I'm free/I'm free . . . The bus is the Magical Mystery Bus that plays a central role in the novel and subsequent movie *Into the Wild*. The lines in the notebook are part of the lyrics to the song "Setting Out" by Eddie Vedder, who wrote and performed the famous and successful soundtrack to the movie. The Magical Mystery Bus is an example of the attraction of imaginary worlds, as well as an example of the interplay of different media in creating and stimulating worldbuilding.

The Magical Mystery Bus is also a great example of the possible implications of the attraction of imaginary worlds. The novel, film, and soundtrack have each been huge commercial successes, alluding to the economic gains of stimulating the imagination – economic potential the literary, movie, and music industries play into. The bus itself has stimulated quite some media tourism, despite its hard-to-reach location in the wilderness of Denali National Park. The popularity of the bus and the dangers of reaching it finally prompted the local authorities to remove the bus from the wilderness in spring 2020. As this example shows, while the tourism industry and city marketers increasingly play into the potential of mediated narratives of place, local communities hold more ambiguous attitudes toward the sometimes-sudden increase in tourism flows. Thus, imaginary worlds have the power to transform people, communities, and industries.

Despite these important and ambiguous implications and consequences, the research on imaginary worldbuilding and related experiences is at its start. This edited volume is a contribution to further the understanding of the processes involved, and I would like to repeat the call voiced in the introduction to this volume: the wide-ranging consequences of imaginary worldbuilding make it imperative that we understand the underlying mechanisms and processes that make these worlds so powerful. How is the imagination

stimulated, and how do audiences build and experience these worlds? Only by starting with these basic questions on the micro level of individual audiences can we get ahead in analysing and understanding what happens on the meso and macro levels of industries and societies.

These questions are especially relevant in the age of media convergence (Jenkins, 2004). With the rise of transmedia worlds and franchises, the focus of media industries, audiences, and scholars is increasingly shifting to ever-expanding narrative universes, encompassing vastly diverging places, activities, experiences, and media. In this particular context, it is even more important to shift the focus to go beyond an analysis of the visual: how do media collide, how do they reinforce each other, how do new transmedia worlds remediate older ways of narrating and showing worlds of the imagination?

In this chapter, I have attempted to make a start with this endeavour by looking into one specific medium beyond vision: sound, and its wake, music. Through an analysis of 52 interviews with music listeners, I have shown the role of cognition in building musical imaginary worlds, how these worlds become affective worlds through music, and, finally, the way this process is necessarily embodied. Through the qualitative nature of this research project, I have been able to discuss in detail what specific role music's characteristics play in these processes.

First of all, music is able to evoke powerful imaginary universes, temporarily transporting listeners and audience members to a different "planet". Music seems to mediate between experience and imagination in four ways: through sound, through text and image, through biography of the artists, and through place. Sometimes this results in very vividly visual and specific imaginations, but more often, the interviewees talked about music conjuring up atmospheric ideas of places, influenced by cultural schemata of tropical paradise or nostalgic inner city. In all cases, musical imaginary worlds were based on memories, consisting of personal experiences; inherited memories from family and friends; or mediated memories installed by films, documentaries, and other images and photographs. During the interviews, this link with memory suggested the presence of a reflective nostalgia (Boym, 2001), which makes sense when compared to a narrow definition of imagining: to conjure up in the imagination that which is not physically there. This confirms that music indeed is able to stimulate the imagination through the general process of imagining described elsewhere (Lennon, 2015; Reijnders, 2016; Introduction to this volume), *and* that there are medium-specific connections to be made with regard to music (cf. Bolderman & Reijnders, 2019).

Second, the analysis has shown that music plays a particular role in adding affective texture to experiences, showing the experiential side of imagining at play. The interviews showed how the process works in practice: listeners connect the feeling of listening to their imaginary of place. This allowed them to set the mood or influence the atmosphere of places, and, more importantly, this process explains how cognitive imaginary worlds are transformed into affective worlds. Moreover, the interviews consistently

showed why elaborate imaginary worlds are so meaningful to the interviewees: they are symbolic of identity, both personal and collective. This finding is quite innovative, as it shows how cognition and affect are entwined in the imagination and why imaginary worlds are so powerful. Music allows a clear angle to explore these processes, because it channels, quite clearly and viscerally, a “sense of place”.

Third and final, I have shown that music stimulates imagining in a particularly visceral and embodied way. Music as a sonic medium plays an important role in immersive experiences, as music is experienced in its unfolding over time. This specific sense of immersion through music emerged in two ways during the interviews, immersing interviewees in both time and place. With relation to temporal immersion, music offered a sense of absorption during live events, attending concerts, for example, or making music together. This immersive experience could be so intense, it has been analysed quite extensively in other research as an experience of absorption or flow. Dissolving a sense of time and identity, this experience was abundantly present during the interviews.

In relation to place, music offered an experience of immersion through its presence in local soundscapes, for example, by being present as local radio, as spoken language, and as sound environment. Interviewees also talked about actively seeking out this kind of immersion by layering music over their experience of the world. This could be done by adding music from memory, as musical imagery – hearing music in your mind – or by adding music to travel through playlists, setting the mood and atmosphere of place. This way, music united the experience of “being in the world”, connecting to a broader definition of the imagination as the capacity to experience the environment.

In this chapter, I have shown that music is a focused and clear example of how the imagination works in practice, in both narrow and broader conceptualizations, adding to the fundamental understanding of this phenomenon. I have also argued that it is of value to look beyond the visual, especially if imagining is to be conceptualized as a broader mental capacity for understanding, a prerequisite for thinking and sensing the world around – more senses than the visual should be present in the analysis, if we accept that the imagination is based on our *multisensory* experience of reality. Even so, I do not ignore the importance of images and visual media in current media culture – Western culture, at least, is a culture of the image. Since the media are *audio-visual* media, this chapter has been about redressing an imbalance, putting the visual in its place. A lot of research still remains to be done in the area of imagining, research that highlights and explores the mutual work between audiences and media in enchanting the world with something beyond sight.

Bibliography

Auslander, P. (2008). *Liveness: Performance in a mediatized culture*, 2nd ed. London: Routledge.

- Bennett, A. (2002). Music, media and urban mythscapes: A study of the 'Canterbury Sound'. *Media, Culture and Society* 24: 87–100.
- Bolderman, S.L. (2020). *Contemporary music tourism: A theory of musical topophilia*. London: Routledge.
- Bolderman, S.L. & Reijnders, S.L. (2017). Have you found what you're looking for? Analysing tourist experiences of Wagner's Bayreuth, ABBA's Stockholm and U2's Dublin. *Tourist Studies* 17(2): 164–181.
- Bolderman, S.L. & Reijnders, S.L. (2019). Sharing songs on Hirakata Square: On playlists and place attachment in contemporary music listening. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367549419847110>.
- Bowen, D.S. (1997). Lookin' for Margaritaville: Place and imagination in Jimmy Buffett's songs. *Journal of Cultural Geography* 16(2): 99–108.
- Boym, S. (2001). *The future of nostalgia*. New York: Basic Books.
- Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis*. London: Sage.
- Cohen, S. (2007). *Decline, renewal and the city in popular music culture: Beyond the Beatles*. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing.
- Cook, N. (1990). *Music, imagination, and culture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Couldry, N. (2015). *Listening beyond the echoes: Media, ethics and agency in an uncertain world*. London: Routledge.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1990). *Flow: The psychology of optimal experience*. New York: Harper Collins.
- DeNora, T. (2000). *Music in everyday life*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Feld, S. & Basso, K. (1996). *Senses of place*. Santa Fe: School of American Research Press.
- Frith, S. (1996). *Performing rites: On the value of popular music*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Genette, G. (1997). *Paratexts: Thresholds of interpretation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hesmondhalgh, D. (2013). *Why music matters*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Hudson, R. (2006). Regions and place: Music, identity and place. *Progress in Human Geography* 30(5): 626–634.
- Jenkins, H. (2004). The cultural logic of media convergence. *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 7(1): 33–43.
- Keightley, E. & Pickering, M. (2006). For the record: Popular music and photography as technologies of memory. *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 9(2): 149–165.
- Keightley, E. & Pickering, M. (2012). *The mnemonic imagination: Remembering as creative practice*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kong, L. (1995). Popular music in geographical analysis. *Progress in Human Geography* 19(2): 183–198.
- Lennon, K. (2015). *Imagination and the imaginary*. London: Routledge.
- Malbon, B. (1999). *Clubbing: Dancing, ecstasy and vitality*. London: Routledge.
- Malpas, J. (1999). *Place and experience: A philosophical topography*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Plate, L. (2006). Walking in Virginia Woolf's footsteps: Performing cultural memory. *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 9(1): 101–120.
- Reijnders, S.L. (2016). Stories that move: Fiction, imagination, tourism. *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 19(6): 672–689.

- Reijnders, S.L., Bolderman, S.L., van Es, N. & Waysdorf, A. (2015). Locating imagination: An interdisciplinary perspective on literary, film, and music tourism. *Tourism Analysis* 20(3): 333–339.
- Smith, S.J. (2000). Performing the sound world. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 18(5): 615–637.
- Stokes, M. (1997). *Ethnicity, identity and music: The musical construction of place*, 2nd ed. Oxford: Berg.
- Tuan, Y. (1974). *Topophilia: A study of environmental perception, attitudes, and values*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Turino, T. (2008). *Music as social life: The politics of participation*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Urry, J. & Larsen, J. (2011). *The tourist gaze 3.0*, 3rd ed. Los Angeles: Sage.
- Van Dijck, J. (2006). Record and hold: Popular music between personal and collective memory. *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 23(5): 357–374.
- Waitt, G. & Duffy, M. (2009). Listening and tourism studies. *Annals of Tourism Research* 37(2): 457–477.
- Walton, K. (1994). Listening with imagination: Is music representational? *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 52(1): 47–61.
- Waysdorf, A. (2017). *Placing fandom: Film tourism in contemporary society*. PhD dissertation. Rotterdam: Erasmus University Rotterdam.