Creating a digital soundmap

Amy DeRogatis and Isaac Weiner:

Giving it a good listen

DeRogatis and Weiner say that, given the diversity inherent in religious pluralism, the project team’s definition of “religious sound” is also wide-ranging. It includes most any sound that can provide spiritual context or value, from a prayer, to the sounds of a Jewish Seder, a Catholic Mass, or church bells. For me, the soundmap project is a logical extension.”

Disputes about public sound and public noise. So, things like the Islamic call to prayer and church bells. For me, they are connected in some way to religion and/or spirituality. By helping to understand how certain religious practices actually come to be audible, we believe we can provide different perspectives on American religious practices that can be heard in the Midwest.

The soundmap project will archive its recordings at OSU’s library. After the map launches next spring, there will be museum installations and traveling exhibitions. Listeners will be able to upload their own recordings as well, and the researchers eventually hope to develop a smartphone app and a teaching template that can be used at any stage of research into religious practices.

“The public-facing component, the website, will enable users not only to listen to sounds, but combine and use them,” says DeRogatis. “In addition to creating a searchable map, the team plans to create a teaching platform that will be used by teachers and professors in their classrooms and online instruction. In four years, we hope to create an online mapping platform that will also function as a valuable research tool and pedagogical resource. The public-facing component will be a powerful interpretive tool to explore the complicated nature of religion in the Midwest.”

Weiner agrees, saying, “Until now, most research on religion in Midwestern cities has focused on religious diversity in coastal cities and other industrial urban areas. But there is a lot going on here that is different and unique. We hope that the soundmap project will not only fill a void in the study of Midwestern religions, but it will also invite new ways of thinking about religion. As that occurs, new sounds can shape communities.”

The religious soundmap will be of interest to multiple disciplines, including religious studies, digital humanities, American studies, history, and public policy. The project is filling a void in the study of Midwestern religions and the soundmap project provides excellent practice.”

“Many religious studies students have had minimal exposure to what constitutes religious practices, specifically as that occurs, new sounds can shape communities.”

DeRogatis, a professor of religious studies, says that, initially, the project will only include faculty and students from MSU and OSU in the areas of religious studies and the soundmap project provides excellent practice.”