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## **“Far back in American time”: culture, region, nation, Appalachia and the geography of voice.**

### **Abstract**

This paper develops a geography of voice in order to address the ways in which cultures, regions and nations are imagined, figured and defined. It adopts Connor’s (2000) notion of ‘vocalic space’ as a starting point from which to explore folk song collecting practices in Appalachia. It develops this in relation to Bauman and Briggs (2003) post-colonial critique of the status of language and speech in ethnographic theory. Historically the Appalachian region has received substantial ethnographic cultural study. Working with insights supplied by collecting activities and subsequent writings of two key collectors – Cecil Sharp (1859-1924) and Alan Lomax (1915-2002)– this paper offers a socio-material conception of voice key to its affective politics, whilst examining historical theorisations. These are firstly, derived from folklore and ethnography, later anthropology and sociology and secondly, articulated with regard to geographies of region and nation. These are then considered in relation to geographer James Duncan’s (1980, 1998) critique of the ‘superorganic’ as an explanation of regional cultural distinctiveness. It concludes by arguing that a geography of voice can contribute to critical approaches to regionalism. An understanding of how vocalic spaces are figured and assembled is key to explaining how culture can be translated through levels of abstraction in ways which can marginalise and disenfranchise the very peoples who are the subject of study.

**Key words:** vocalic space, music, region, culture, ethnography, Appalachia

### **INTRODUCTION**

In 1991, the American folk-music collector Alan Lomax (1915-2002) introduced a television documentary “Appalachian Journey”, which he had written and directed. Compiled from footage originally shot between 1978 and 1985 for the PBS American Patchwork series, this hour-long film traced the evolution and diversity of the musical cultures of Appalachia: a region which he asserted had a culture with roots that go “far back in American time”; a culture “growing for 200 or more years [that]... has become more and more important to all of us in America, and indeed to people all over the world” (Lomax, 1991). Lomax’s mission to gather the “voice of the people” (Gold and Revill 2006, Middleton 2006) followed, literally, a well-worn path. In his quest Lomax followed in a long line of others searching for authentic of regional voices. Amongst these was the English folk song collector Cecil Sharp (1859-1924) who collected Appalachian folk songs between 1916 and 1918.

Unlike Lomax, whose understandings of Appalachian culture centred on vocal hybridity and heterogeneity, Sharp sought to trace the roots of Appalachian music back to “cultural hearths” in the British Isles. In contrast to Lomax’s project for imagining a democratic and culturally diverse American future, Sharp’s mission was to uncover the lost voices of an authentic British past. In both cases the concept of voice as a set of embodied and political practices plays a pivotal role in figurations of Appalachia and by turn American and British nations.

Geographical investigations of music and sound have only recently turned to questions of voice (Kangieser 2011; Matless 2014; Revill 2016, 2017), with the idea of voice as a bridge between the sonic, the embodied and the expressive still posing a range of unanswered questions regarding the spatiality of sound’s physical and experiential properties. Nevertheless, progress is possible by understanding voice as a complex socio-material assemblage; a set of physical sound-producing processes bound into social relations and cultural associations (Connor, 2000). Voice, then, can variously be a marker of individuality, authorship, agency, authority and power, reflexive self-realisation and social reach.

Thus conceived, the works of Sharp and Lomax in Appalachia can provide a springboard for analysing the ways that “voice” is imagined and mobilised in figurations of regional culture. This paper shows how many of the tensions associated with the academic study of regional culture are deeply implicated in the way voice has been mobilised in political theory since the eighteenth century. Central to the argument are the works of the German Enlightenment theorist of folklore J.G. von Herder (1744-1803), whose politically nuanced conception of regional voice fed into twentieth and twenty-first century studies of regional culture and cultural geography. Here considerations of voice inform landmark criticisms of the treatment of regional culture in geography made by Duncan (1980; 1998). As such, this paper shows how the historical geography of voice has fused together notions of the polity, the spaces of democratic utterance and trait based conceptions of the region.

The ensuing paper contains six sections. The first draws on the example of Appalachia when considering cultural geography, polyvocality and the politics of regional voice. The second explores a socio-material geography of voice with reference to the spatial questions of expressivity and language that are central to the figuration of regions and regional identities. The third addresses Herder’s foundational work theorising voice, region and nation, noting its subsequent implications for regionally-based studies of culture. The fourth shows how this legacy is evident in Sharp and Lomax’s different responses to Appalachian folk music. The penultimate section’s discussion of

contrasting approaches to region, nation and regional culture leads on to Duncan's critique of the "superorganic" as an explanation of regional cultural distinctiveness. The conclusion argues for the centrality of a geography of voice in explaining how culture can be translated, through levels of abstraction, in ways that actually marginalise and disenfranchise the very peoples who are the subject of study.

### **VOICE, REGION AND APPALACHIA**

The notion of voice problematizes perceived separations between experience and meaning. As communicative utterance, voice draws together sound and language, affective expression and symbolically-structured interaction, both practically and conceptually. A focus on voice brings affective and reflexive together in assertions of local, regional and national sentiment and belonging. Theories of the individual, group identity and democratic process all share a conception of voice as a sovereign expression of feelings, wants, desires and interests. Thus, viewed collectively, voice operates as a signifier of presence, meaning and purpose at various geographical scales in ways that are widely accepted but often taken-for-granted. Studies of regional culture, especially folk and vernacular cultures, often conceive of voice as a marker of local and regional identity and authenticity in ways that speak to theorisations of culture areas within geography and elsewhere (Stokes et al 1997; Bell 1998; Bennett and Peterson 2004). Recently, Matless (2014) couched his cultural geography of England's Norfolk Broads region in terms of a geography of voice; adopting a sense of complex and contested polyvocality when addressing practices that which figure and define locality and landscape. In this context, multiple mobilisations of voice highlighted contrasting ways to define, delineate and articulate in regions and regional cultures.

Important perspectives in this regard come from the historical critique of voice in Eurocentric and Americentric ethnographic study supplied by Bauman and Briggs (2003). Drawing on the postcolonial analyses offered by writers such as Mingolo (2002), they show that figurations of voice-mediating constellations of language, individual and collective expression, culture and experience serve both to define place-specific and regional cultures and to hold them *in situ* as local knowledge *contra* the cosmopolitan theory and knowledge of the researcher. Their argument, which begins with Enlightenment science and concludes with modern North American anthropology, pays particular attention to the work of the Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744-1803) and the American anthropologist Franz Boas (1858-1942). Both these theorists, as seen below, were important touchstones for Sharp and Lomax.

Folk collectors arrived in Appalachia at a time when outsiders were effectively reinventing the region culturally, codifying its 'Otherness' as a land inhabited by a backward but independent people (Inscoc 2002: 371). In the crucial period (1870-1920), journalists, regional novelists, missionaries, educators, ethnographers, dialectologists and musicologists, amongst others, flocked to the Appalachian regions of Virginia, North Carolina, Kentucky, Tennessee, Georgia and Alabama. Their agendas varied, but commonly mixed the pejorative with condescending admiration (e.g. see Shapiro 1978; Batteau 1990; Haskell and Abramson, 2006). As Gold and Revill (2006) suggest, observers claimed to recognise two important characteristics. The first was a proud independence felt typical of the pioneering spirit that had populated the frontier. The second was identification of residual ways-of-life that supposedly linked these people with an ideologically-significant past, seeing their Anglo-Saxon or Scots-Irish roots as important hearths of the American nation. Voice is crucial to both formulations, first, as the creative expression of independence and, secondly, as the carrier for traces of residual originary cultures. It was possible, therefore, for the local writer Charles Morrow Wilson to assert in 1929 that the region was effectively a cultural outlier of Elizabethan England that had 'survived magnificently in these isolated Southern uplands' (quoted in McNeil 1989:206).

Such ways of representing Appalachia have had profound consequences for the ways in which the region has been represented. The figuration of Appalachia through a particular class-based inflection of European settlement to the exclusion of other voices and histories has led scholars to re-evaluate resulting orthodoxies of Appalachian history (Billings et al 2004:3-6). Key to this reassessment has been the figure of the 'hillbilly'; symbolic, on the one hand, of rural poverty and discrimination and, on the other, of positive values of white working-class resourcefulness and solidarity (Smith 2004). Hartigan (2004:62-63) argues that this embraces a fundamental misreading of the 'panoply of degrading imagery of mountaineers as in some way equivalent with racial discrimination.' It is suggested that this results in a double erasure of Black voices in the figuration of Appalachian regional culture: first, when white poverty is understood as a form of racial discrimination; and, secondly, when white-working class resourcefulness, which may embed commonsense notions of white superiority and practices of racial discrimination, is mobilised as a means of transcending stereotyped representations of working-class Appalachians.

Reworking histories of Appalachia in light of this powerful critique involves incorporating accounts of racial and ethnic heterogeneity, power, and privilege into analyses of Appalachian regional identity

and culture (Anglin 2004:73). Amongst issues arising here are the needs to destabilize Anglocentric narratives that emphasize cultural continuity between the British Isles and the southern mountains and to examine the diverse peoples who have inhabited Appalachia. In turn, this involves recognising the limitations of trait-based accounts of regions and regional cultures and instead embracing a critical regionalism able to recognise the contested nature of claims to regional specificity and the multiple spatial realms, from local to global, across which such figurations have agency (Thompson, 2012; also Hufford 2002).

Important issues emerge from this analysis for the study of folk-collecting in Appalachia, such that ethnomusicological studies have contributed both to the valorisation of a particular portrayal of white working-class culture and to the erasure of both Native- and African-Americans from the Appalachian soundscape. Thompson's (2006), in her account of the heterogeneity of Appalachian vernacular musical practices, makes an important contribution to the by showing how what are often considered traditional 'white' European musical practices – including the banjo, the fiddle-banjo combination, hambone percussion, the ballad tradition and call-and-response singing – can be better understood as standing at the creative intersection of African-American and white European settlement. Thompson (ibid) strongly argues that a century of ethnographic and ethnomusicological practice, which focused on delimiting and recovering a musical vernacular derived entirely from European sources, effectively silenced and suppressed the racially heterogeneous voices of Appalachian music.

### **LANGUAGE, SPEECH AND VOCALIC SPACE**

As part of his ground-breaking research on the history of sound, voice and auditory media, Steven Connor (2000:12) points to "the inalienable association between voice and space." He suggests that the voice takes up space in two senses: it inhabits and occupies space; and it also actively procures space for itself. The voice takes place in space, because the voice *is* space. Connor's aim, therefore, was to contribute towards "an as yet insufficiently elaborated subtheme of the history of the social production of space, namely the conception of 'vocalic space' – a term intended to highlight:

the ways in which differing conceptions of the voice and its powers are linked historically to different conceptions of the body's form, measure, and susceptibility, along with its dynamic articulations with its physical and social environments.

“Vocalic space” itself is understood as a socio-material assemblage mediating between the phenomenological body and its social and cultural contexts. As such, Connor is particularly concerned with the ways in which the voice is held both to operate in, and itself to articulate, different conceptions of spaces, as well as to enact the different relations between what he terms “the body, community, time, the worldly and the spiritual” (ibid).

This paper’s approach to voice derives from Revill (2017). Working with Connor’s formulation in relation to Dolar (2006) and other theorists, Revill characterises vocalic space through three sets of spatial effects – trajectory, acousmatism, and touch at a distance – as part of a critical postphenomenology (Augoyard and Torgue 2005; Revill 2016). A ‘critical postphenomenology’ is understood here as a concern with the historical specificity of socio-material experience in the context of its potential to shape, afford and limit possibility as part of a ‘politics of the sensible’ (Rancière, 2004: 12-13). *Trajectory* relates closely to Deleuze’s conception of rhythmic arcs (Deleuze and Guattari 1988). It can be understood as the capacity of sound to travel through materials and media unevenly and relationally transforming and decaying as it moves. *Acousmatism*, following Dolar (2006), describes how the production of voice is hidden from cognition creating a conceptual gap between the source of sound and its sonic referents. In terms of voice, this always places in question the origins and intentions of any utterance (Peters 1999). *Touch at a distance* suggests the tactile qualities of sound as vibration resonating within and between bodies creating what Schafer (1994:11) conceives as an intimacy and sociality to voice, sometimes spatially and temporally removed from the sources of sound. Taken together these spatial properties of voice, derived from its material practice, call into question relationships between speech and language. This is because the characteristics of sonic utterance as event and, simultaneously, medium and message problematize any simple sense of sound as a passive carrier for meaningful content.

Humanistic and ethnographic geographers, as exemplified by those engaged in geographical studies of music (Anderson 2004; Wood and Smith 2004; Anderson et al 2005; Wood et al 2007; Simpson 2009, Duffy and Waitt 2011; Wood 2012; Duffy and Waitt 2013) attribute high value to the perceived power of voice as oral testimonies to deliver rich accounts of tacit knowledge, affective and embodied experience. Political geographers have long recognised the power of voice as part of democratic process and its capacity to gather crowds and constituencies across time and space through oratory and broadcasting (Gibson 1998; Jackiewicz and Craine 2009; Pinkerton and Dodds 2009). However, only recently as part of the more widespread development of sound or sonic

studies across the social sciences and humanities have geographers started to explore how voice and voices act as processes and events producing effects and outcomes at a variety of spatio-temporal scales (Kangieser 2011; Waitt et al 2014; Revill 2016).

The concept of voice has both material and cultural dimensions; qualities central to the spatiality of voice and the making of vocalic space. Weidman (2015:232) argues that whilst the material-sonic experience of voice – learning to gurgle, laugh, scream, speak, sing and to listen to others doing so – seem natural and universal, such experiences occur within culturally and historically specific contexts. Thus conceived, the sonic and material experiences of voice are never independent of the cultural meanings attributed to sound, to the body and particularly to the voice itself. Weidman argues that these aspects of voice are often treated differently in academic analyses. Where the sonic-material dimensions of voice are treated as carrier or context, the cultural-communicative dimensions of authorship and authority are taken as having intrinsic and universal value (ibid:233). Yet lessons from the rapidly-evolving discipline of sound studies suggest that neither the material nor cultural dimensions of voice should lie outside critical interrogation (Augoyard and Torgue 2005; Sterne 2011; Born 2013). Both contribute to distinctive geographies that together produce voice as a powerful set of affordances, processes and practices connecting people, place and politics (Revill 2016).

Though sounds may be diffuse and pervasive, reverberating, resounding, creating complex senses of echo and decay, voices are often experienced as singular, directional and focused. From their discussion of the “cocktail party effect”, Augoyard and Torgue (2005:75) suggest that voices provide points of active focussed listening, allowing the brain to distinguish particular sounds from the general hubbub and focus attention on them to the exclusion of others. At the same time, the ear might be understood as a substantially passive receptor: its 360° field of reception ensuring that sounds in general encompass us whilst simultaneously allowing particular sounds to reverberate deep inside our heads (Gold 1980:54-5). Voices speak to us across time activating and animating memory at the same time as problematizing space. As individual utterance, voice is a spatio-temporally transformative event. Labelle (2010) draws on Deleuzian thinking to understand these as arcs of rhythmic movement, or trajectories, linking two points in time (Revill 2013:339; 2017:53). The qualities of differentiation and aggregation associated with the processual sonic qualities of voice generate both difference and transgression through movement. Like a game of “Chinese whispers”, a rumour moving through a crowd or a manifesto broadcast to the world, vocal events unevenly gather support and opposition, actors, agents and resources, new and reinforced meanings



as they travel and transform (Revill 2016:248). Songs, shouts, cries or indeed radio or other broadcast and networked media gather and connect, creating constituencies, audiences, assemblies and publics spatially and temporally, both proximately and at a distance (Waitt et al 2014; Pinkerton and Dodds 2009).

According to Rée (2000), the associative qualities of the sounding voice are best explained by the practice of language. Though language in modern western cultures seems to lie silent on the page and sound in the form of music apparently embodies an expressivity which lies beyond words and symbolic representation, this division would not necessarily make sense at other times and places (Ingold 2007:7; Scruton 1997:17). Significantly, Walter Ong (1982:17) argues that the effects of our familiarity with writing run so deep that it is difficult to imagine how speech would be experienced by people inhabiting a world of what he calls “primary orality”, among whom writing is completely unknown. For Ong it was print rather than writing per se that resulted in the objectification of written text and the separation of sound from the worldly meanings of words (Ong 1982:119-21; Ingold 2007:27), but separations can only be fragile and contingent. For example, the relationships between language and sound in song constantly remind us of the performative interdependence of language and speech. Song in particular became a major focus for collectors such as Sharp and Lomax when seeking out the authentic voice of people and place (Bendix 1997). However, the complex relationship between language and speech in conceptions of voice is important for cultural theory because the ways that this is mapped out police the perceived boundaries between, on the one hand, expression and creativity and, on the other, structuring codes and rules. Bauman and Briggs (2003) highlight this as a key site of contestation since the various ways in which this can be figured allows researchers and theorists to represent the creative utterances of indigenous and local peoples as the product of rule-bound behaviour rather than reflexive creativity.

Sounds carry words while seemingly remaining independent of them; writing seems to be both developmentally more “advanced” than orality while simultaneously giving privileged access to the sonic expressivity which it seems both to surpass and erase. The idea of “voice” embraces these ambiguities and the multiple histories which they trace. As Mladen Dolar (2006:31) suggests:

[T]he voice appears to be the locus of true expression, the place where what cannot be said can nevertheless be conveyed. The voice is endowed with profundity by not meaning anything, it appears to mean more than mere words, it becomes the bearer of some unfathomable originary meaning which, supposedly got lost with language.

Dolar argues that voice seemingly maintains the link with nature, while also transcending language and its associated cultural and symbolic barriers. However, such formulations have important spatio-temporal specificity. Rée (2000:64) argues that eighteenth-century thought endorsed the longstanding link in western religious thought between spirituality and the voice as an expression of the deepest truths and universal laws. In this context it was Johann Gottfried von Herder, the German theorist most closely associated with the conceptualisation of folk culture and its geographical specificity in relation to regional culture, who developed the most sophisticated place for voice as expressing the spiritual essence of a people living in place.

### THE HERDERIAN TRADITION

In classical philosophy, the relationship between sound and language was understood most frequently as a problem of rationality. In turn, this mapped on to a distinctly political conception of voice and vocalic space. Aristotle, for example, argued that humans are more political than other creatures, contrasting the human gift for persuasive speech [logos] connected to “opinion”, “account” and “reason” with the “mere voice [*phone*] ... an indication of pleasure or pain, ... therefore found in other animals” (Aristotle 2001 1253a:7-18). From early modern times, the model of the speaking subject assumed by Rousseau and John Locke embodied notions of voice as presence, authenticity, agency, rationality, will and self that have clear origins in these earlier formulations (Weidman 2015:234).

This model treats the sonic-material aspects of voice as secondary and potentially disruptive to the sovereignty of the subject. Though this cannot simply be taken as a clear-cut separation between unreflected emotion and rationality (Dolar 2006), the cleavage that lies at the heart of this formulation has profoundly shaped thinking about voice to the present. Drawing principally on Locke, Bauman and Briggs (2003: 59-69; also Peters 2005:110-14) suggest that the major trajectory of Enlightenment thought worked towards an increasingly rational and pure version of language separate from the brute expressions of *phone* (raw sound). By the same token, the developing notion of a common political or civic space of political debate preserved and refined a space for the “animal” expressions of sound so long as this could be held in check as a purified and regulated form of discourse. Peters (1999:27), for instance, recognises precisely this set of processes in the standards for socially meaningful social communication laid down by John Stewart Mill in *On Liberty* (1859). Yet as Bauman and Briggs (2003) show, the increasing self-reflexivity of nationhood built into

processes of state-building also created a space for the phonic in the traces of memory by which collective national histories were constructed to support the projects of statehood. Thus, the collecting of oral traditions and folk culture became centrally embedded in processes of nation-building at the very moment that this work contributed further layers of complexity regarding the concept of voice as a central tenet of political participation in the nation state (Bendix 1997).

Theoretical constructs linking folk music to language, place, region, and national identity date back to the publication of Herder's two volumes of folk songs *Stimmen der Völker in Liedern* (1778, 1779; later 1880) – commonly regarded as foundational for folk music collection in the service of nation-building within European nation-states and subsequently, through the migration of people and ideas, within the United States (e.g. Skultans, 1998; Francmanis, 2002). However, the political context within which Herder wrote suggests an attempt to justify cosmopolitan and ecumenical politics rather than narrow nationalism. Germany was then a collection of states, highly unequal in terms of size and power (Breuilly 1994: 105). Born in Mohrungen (East Prussia), Herder passionately believed that small states had the right to self-determination. He objected especially to large, impersonal “machine” states such as the Prussia of Frederick the Great, which he saw as the artificial product of war and conquest. He advocated the replacement of militaristic and centralised states by loosely-federated local governments with minimum instruments of force (Forster 2001). In this regard, the vitality and specificities of voice provide a powerful democratising force. For Herder, the uniquely human quality of language is the basis of shared culture and, by implication, shared identification with place and people. Language was conceived as inherently social and can be learned only in a community, with each community developing its own unique mode of thought through language. Thus, language is not simply a particular way of expressing universal values; rather it is the manifestation of unique values, ideas and practices specific to place, culture and community. Hence language is mapped on to voice as authentic and democratically produced communal sentiment. “Authentic” government, therefore, can take place only through the medium of a particular community-bound language and culture (Breuilly 1994:105-7). Herder's conception of a highly vocal world composed of distinctively articulate nations and regions was thus one of difference, diversity, multi-culturalism and mutual respect.

His focus on language as natural mode of expression and as social foundation of culture had important implications for the ways in which voice becomes a means of figuring peoples, places, regions and nations. The idea that speech is a precondition and not just as expression of human consciousness enabled early theorists like Herder, who linked folk culture and national identity, to

open a gap between language and speech and between reflexive communication and “primitive” vocalisation whilst retaining the raw “natural” expressive energy of the former to lend strength and legitimacy to the dispassionate rationalities of civilisation (Bauman and Briggs 2003:168-175; Rée 2000:66). Bohlman (1988, 2002) argues that Herder contributed two ideas of enormous influence. The first was that folksong was as natural a form of communication as speech and that speech and song shared the same origins (Bohlman 2002:40; Bauman and Briggs 2003:172). The second was that if folk music was a natural and unconscious expression, then the *Volksggeist* (folk spirit) was explicable only as an expression of nature (Bohlman, 1988:6). Though the idea of language created a clear separation between humans and nature, it also enabled theorists to express this as a hierarchy in which some peoples and their cultural practices could be placed closer to “nature” and tradition-bound expression than more modern (mostly western) others. Such “natural” modes of cultural expression could be contrasted with those deemed less superstitious, more sophisticated, logical and reflexive.

This implied that the makers of local culture can be simultaneously held responsible for making culture, yet equally dismissed as expressive and creative subjects in their own right because they merely carry out cultural practices which lie beyond their understanding and control. This developmental approach, essentially based in social Darwinism, had further implications for the patterning and regionalisation of culture. It supported the argument that there are leads and lags in the spatial patterning of culture such that remnants and outliers of older and less “developed” cultural forms – so-called “survivals in culture” – could be found in isolated regions of even the most advanced nations (Boyes 1993). Hence collectors of folk music journeyed to remote rural areas in search of the authentic voices of a national past. Many who read Herder dismissed ideas of equality and difference, only seeing instead claims for the superiority of German culture in his work (Bluestein, 1972:11). Herder never applied the political-geographical designation “German” to his eighteenth-century concept of folk song but his successors routinely did, thereby conflating universalist and particularist national aspirations. Herder’s “anti-Enlightenment” celebration of cultural specificity, therefore, could be appropriated to support arguments that either asserted cultural purity and superiority or cultural diversity and equality (Filene 2000; Gold and Revill 2006; Gold et al 2016:169). Bohlman (2010:10) calls Herder a “free floating signifier”, whilst Young (1995:42) notes an ambivalence that explains how he managed to appear both liberal and proto-fascist. In this way notions of voice became entwined, on the one hand, with ideas of social Darwinism, levels of progress, authenticity and cultural purity and, on the other, with notions of democratic representation and cultural pluralism.

### SHARP AND LOMAX IN APPALACHIA

Between 1916 and 1918 Cecil Sharp, the leading English folk-music collector of his generation (Colls and Heathman 2017), made three collecting trips to the Appalachians. He initially came to the USA in 1914 as folk-dance consultant for Harley Granville-Barker's New York production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, but became immersed in debate about American folk culture through giving lectures, by helping to organise American branches of the English Folk Song and Dance Society (which he had founded in 1911), and through his developing network of contacts. Prominent among these was Olive Dame Campbell, a peripatetic worker on social education projects for the Russell Sage Foundation who had assembled over 200 ballads and songs in the course of her travels in the Appalachians between 1907 and 1915 (Yates, 2003). Excited by her "songcatching" (Williams 2012) and encouraged by contemporary thinking in American folk music circles that accorded with the Social Darwinist theories of cultural development to which he subscribed, Sharp concluded that the southern Appalachians might contain the "lost" folk music of his own country (Gold and Revill 2006).

Accompanied by Maud Karpeles, later recognised as a significant collector in her own right (Gregory 2000), Sharp based the first of his trips on Asheville (North Carolina). Starting in late July 1916, they collected in neighbouring Madison County, in Tennessee and Kentucky, finishing in Virginia in mid-September. Returning in 1917, they made a series of trips from April onwards. Punctuated by Sharp's poor health, these centred on North Carolina and the mountainous counties of Tennessee and Kentucky, finishing at Jackson (Kentucky) in October. Finally from April 1918, Sharp and Karpeles collected in North Carolina and the hill country of Shenandoah, Rockingham and Nelson counties in Virginia, before finishing in the coal mining districts of West Virginia in October. A total of 52 weeks spent in the field yielded 1,612 tunes, including variants, from 281 singers, altogether representing about 500 different songs. Understandably focusing on the much sought-after ballads, which were mostly but not exclusively unaccompanied, the first tranche was published under the joint authorship of Sharp and Olive Dame Campbell (1917) as *English Folk Songs from the Southern Appalachians*. A two-volume set with the same title and edited by Maud Karpeles, containing 273 songs with 968 tunes, was published some years later (Peters 2018: 19; also Strangways and Karpeles 1933; Karpeles 1967).

Sharp was never slow to reach conclusions. In a letter written early in the first trip (13 August 1916: cited in Yates 2003), he clearly believed he had found traces of British and particularly English culture amongst these people:

The people are just English of the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century. They speak English, look English, and their manners are old-fashioned English. Heaps of words and expressions they use habitually in ordinary conversation are obsolete, and have been in England a long time. I find them very easy to get on with, and have no difficulty in making them sing and show their enthusiasm for their songs.

Other residents of the Appalachians were overlooked or disparaged. On 31 July 1917, for example, Karpeles wrote in her diary (Yates 2003) that they received a recommendation to visit a backwater in North Carolina known as Watson's Cove:

We arrived at a cove and got sight of log cabins that seemed just what we wanted. Called at one. A musical 'Good Morning', turned round and behold he was a negro. We had struck a negro settlement. Nothing for it but to toil back again.

Sharp did collect amongst the black American communities on a few occasions although, when doing so, he primarily found merit by asserting the music's whiteness. For instance, on encountering Mrs Sinda Walker at Hyden (North Carolina) in August 1917, he wrote:

Mrs Walker is a coloured "lady", the first coloured person who has sung to me. She sang exactly the same way as the typical mountain woman with perhaps more "dwelling" on her notes. She is really more white than black, but is accounted black and, if proof were needed, she takes in laundry which no white woman in these parts would do. (VWML n.d.)

There is frequently a palpable sense that Sharp and Karpeles interpreted Appalachia as arcadia and its folk musicians as unselfconsciously expressing the people's close relationship to nature. A letter from Sharp (13 August 1916: cited in Yates 2003) alluded to the Hensley family with whom he had spent three days. Sharp's attention had focused on Emma, their thirteen-year-old daughter who, according to Karpeles (1967:157), was a "singer of beautiful, Madonna-like appearance". Sharp learned that Emma was "crazy to go to school" and paid the fees for her to attend, even though he was doubtful whether school was the best place for her or whether she would be able to resign herself to the loss of liberty. He was quietly overjoyed when she ran away after a day and returned home. "I am filled with admiration for her", Cecil Sharp wrote to his wife. "She is just unique; and it

seems awful, nothing less than barbaric, to spoil her and turn her into an ordinary respectable half-educated American girl" (Yates 2003).

Sharp and Karpeles, however, struggled to achieve consistency when coming to terms with what, despite their assurances of feeling and *being* at home, remained for them a strange environment occupied by an unfamiliar society. Their writings often reveal the condescending colonial perspective of explorers when confronting what they regarded as primitive customs (e.g. Karpeles 1967:149). Yet, there was also a strong critique of modernity in their thinking:

The people were mostly illiterate and had no money – serious shortcomings in the eyes of American city dwellers – but though they had none of the advantages of civilisation they had a culture which was as much a tradition as the songs they sang. "A case of arrested development?" Cecil Sharp replied to the facile critic, "I should prefer to call it a case of arrested degeneration".

By implication that 'arrested degeneration' stood in contradistinction to the state of contemporary urban America, with its technological sophistication. Over time Sharp clearly moved away from interpreting the music and people of Appalachia as authenticated by "survivals in culture" to a more complex ideological mapping. Here, voice is understood as a precious natural vitality embodied as an authentic creative force. This apparently universal quality of humans living in a state of nature might even reinvigorate the moral fibre of specific nation states. For example, Sharp commented in August 1916 that:

Although the people are so English they have their American quality (in) that they are freer than the English peasant. They own their own land and have done so for three or four generations, so that there is none of the servility which unhappily is one of the characteristics of the English peasant. With that praise I should say that they are just exactly what the English peasant was one hundred or more years ago. (Yates 1999)

The ease with which Sharp could initially dismiss the overwhelming evidence of cultural difference in favour of a perceived thread of kinship is striking. He was in search of and claimed to have found an Appalachia that was in, but not of, the American South.

This contrasts with the experience of Alan Lomax, whose career mirrored that of Sharp in terms of its impact on the world of folk music collecting. Born in Austin (Texas) in 1915, Lomax was, in the words of his British counterpart Ewan MacColl (2009:261), “a folklorist, collector, cultural anthropologist and innovator and a seminal force in the realm of ideas”. He collected folk songs in the Appalachians on various occasions: first, when accompanying his father John A. Lomax on field visits in the 1930s when developing the Archive of Folksong for the Library of Congress; and later particularly during the years 1959-65 (see Collins 2004). Like Sharp, Alan Lomax went to the Appalachians in search of a national identity but in his case that identity was American rather than British. Unlike Sharp, Lomax readily recognised Appalachian music’s heterogeneity, writing to his father in 1932 (Szwed 2010:35) that:

I think now that unless I go red, I should like to look at the folk-songs of this country along with you and on some research in the field from the point of view of sociology and anthropology. ...

Why not, for instance, study the relations between the content of the Kentucky mountain songs and the mores, popular in that district, the geographical isolation of the folk, the way they carried over the attitude in the English ballads has affected the ideology of the mountaineers. Why not do the same for the negroes in different parts of the country?

Alan Lomax here recognises that there is far more to Appalachian folk music than simple survivals from seventeenth and eighteenth-century Europe. Rather he suggests a more ambitious study of folk music cultures, drawing inspiration from Appalachian folk music as a vital and emergent set of traditions forged through multiple currents of history and geography. As such he seems to be saying: “What if we could look at Black American cultures drawing on the way that cultural/historical complexity had produced the distinctiveness of Appalachian culture”.

Clearly aware of Sharp’s work, Lomax’s writing often seems to be in counterpoint and generally at odds with his predecessor. In the liner notes to *Southern Journey: Ballads and Breakdowns Songs From The Southern Mountains Volume 2*, for instance, Lomax (1997) says:

Collectors have gathered scores of ballads dating back to the late Middle Ages from mountain singers. These ancient ballads served to link the pioneers with their British homeland and to keep alive ancient patterns of emotion and poetry which beautified their lives. The country singers, how-ever, did not regard them as historical documents, but as



dramas which exemplified traits of character, both for good and for evil, that they perceived in themselves and their neighbours... Folk singers seldom make distinctions between old and new ballads, or indeed between lyric songs, comic pieces and the ballads so cherished by scholars.

Rather than trying to strip folk songs back to their "European roots," Lomax was more interested in the extent to which such music represents the specifically new experiences of people living in America. In the "Preface" to *Our Singing Country* (Lomax et al 1941:63) he argues:

The American singer has been concerned with themes close to his everyday experience, with the emotions of ordinary men and women who were fighting for freedom and for a living in a violent new world. His songs have been strongly rooted in his life and have functioned there as enzymes to assist in the digestion of hardship, solitude, violence, hunger, and honest comradeship of democracy.

Later in *America Sings the Saga of America*, Lomax claims that Appalachian folk music was the first *British* folk music because it fused English, Irish, Scottish and Welsh traditions. Appalachia, he maintained, had democratised British music by purging its aristocratic and medieval tone, thereby creating a purer, politically and socially progressive hybrid form; positive evidence for the democratic qualities of the American "melting pot" at work. In "Getting to Know Folk Music" Lomax (1961: 206) states:

American folk songs are, above all else, American. They are a mixture of English, Scottish, Irish, French and African influence stirred together in a way that could happen only in this magnificently heterogeneous country.

For Lomax, the heterogeneity of Appalachian folk music was a starting point for a project centrally concerned with developing a politicised conception of the American nation. Though associating with colleagues who had strong left-wing sympathies, he identified his politics with those of the New Deal. In this respect, folk music was not just a conduit by which the people might speak to the centre; it was also a means by which the USA could discover its own democratic identity (Gold et al 2016:170-1).

Hence although commencing collecting only several decades apart, there is a stark contrast between Lomax and Sharp. Though Lomax like Sharp focused on collecting in the Southern Mountains of Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee and Kentucky, the way that Lomax worked with the complex cultural texturing of the region is instructive. While Sharp actively avoided, ignored and discarded the music of African-Americans, Lomax actively sought opportunities to record it when and however they arose. During their field recording trip to Virginia in August 1959 Shirley Collins (2004:70-71) recalled: 'Alan's arrangement to meet James Porter 'a black promoter who was to take us to some black churches', an excursion that invoked a degree of mistrust and hostility from the communities visited. Collins (ibid) says: 'I could understand why people would be wary of white strangers... but it was dispiriting'. Whilst on the same trip and undeterred by the previous experience she also remembers that 'although in Virginia we were concentrating on white mountain music' they encountered a gang of African-Americans working on the railroad near Salem. Not wishing to let the opportunity pass, Lomax asked them if they still sang work songs and recorded some material on the spot (ibid:79).

Similarly, while Sharp sought to recover an apparently lost past in the traces of what he regarded as increasingly degenerate and rapidly changing cultural practices, Lomax embraced the heterogeneity of the music he found and celebrated the emergence of new cultural forms. Both approaches had their own sense of spatiality and spatial priorities. Sharp was concerned with recovering links with a European source region and with privileging the purity of cultural forms associated with places distant in space and time. Lomax's concern was to find ways to manage a patchwork assemblage of cultural practices, influences and dynamics, and to accommodate them within a heterogeneously constituted set of overlapping spaces stretching into the future. Whereas Sharp searched for "survivals in culture" to locate and define a historically isolated outlier of English culture, Lomax was well aware of the hybrid and heterogeneous nature of Appalachian music. He did not believe this posed a threat to the integrity of American national identity but rather could be a primary building block for a democracy built on the idea of the melting pot.

Both Sharp and Lomax have been criticised for the rigidity and dogmatism of their underlying philosophies and classificatory systems, but equally both believed that the authentic voice of the region, in the form of a vibrant and lively folk culture, able to reinvigorate respective national cultures and counteract the dominance of what were believed to be degenerate and decaying commercial cultures. In doing so each adopts versions of trait-based regionalism to help construct a conception of Appalachia through a model of the disadvantaged white working-class (Thompson

2012). This is largely a consequence of their particular conceptions of voice in relation to region. The increasing difficulty that Sharp experiences in coming to terms with the heterogeneity of Appalachian folk culture and its troubling generative, rather than simply residual, qualities are for him only understandable in terms of poverty and disadvantage. By the end of his Appalachian trips, these characteristics are refigured as the attributes of stoic independence familiar today in figurations of the 'hillbilly'.

Lomax is clearly concerned with the voices of African Americans and the productive heterogeneity of cultural plurality in Appalachia. Yet he too understood Appalachia as primarily a source for white working-class culture. Partly this is because Lomax builds, however critically on the work of previous collectors such as Sharp. However, where Sharp displays a degree of condescension, Lomax adopts the figure of the disenfranchised white-working class as a starting point for a political programme involving African Americans which might borrow strength and impetus from the figure of the 'hillbilly'. As he wrote to his father in 1932: 'the attitude in the English ballads has affected the ideology of the mountaineers. Why not do the same for the negroes in different parts of the country?' A sense of Appalachian music as a fusion of Native American and African American with European culture comes across most strongly in Lomax's TV programme *Appalachian Journey* (1991). However, even here absence of a clear narrative of social segregation and inequality results in a story of cultural erasure which gathers, organises and subsumes others to the story of white working-class struggle as the master narrative of Appalachian culture.

### **REGION, CULTURE AND VOCALIC SPACE**

The foregoing analysis shows that Sharp regards voice as a connection with the past, working through processes of cultural purification to access distant source regions and reconstruct historical places. For Lomax, by contrast, voice is a connection to the future, making, mixing and remaking local cultures in the name of the nation and encouraging better understanding of the place in which difference is shared and celebrated. Though these two projects might seem mutually incompatible, they share a conceptual core in their valorisation of voice as means of expressing democratic process articulated in its place specificity and distinctive regional culture. For Sharp, the Herderian model of regional culture, particularity expressed through voice, was bound up with the notion of "survivals in culture". This opened up the prospect of equating traditional performances and beliefs found, for example, in contemporary or historical Britain with formally similar activities taking place elsewhere and at other times. This conception of regional culture isolated and localised distinctive regional

voices whilst concurrently abstracting their formal content as a source of causal connection between regional and national contexts.

For his part, Lomax saw the role played by voice in defining regional culture as being bound into the polyvocality of the melting pot as a celebration of American cultural difference. Here he drew on the multicultural aspects of the Herderian legacy concerning regional culture. The active qualities of voice immediately suggest something lively and dynamic, with many folk collectors including Sharp and Lomax actively seeking something vital from folk song in order to support particular ideas concerning people, history, place, region and nation. To this extent both Sharp and Lomax are stoutly defended by their supporters as genuine and well-intentioned believers in the creative power of folk culture as practiced by individual people living in specific localities. Writing in 1968, Lomax provides sustained support for a trait-based culture area theory derived ultimately from Herder and argues forcibly in favour of the global classification and codification of folk music styles. He argues this against the backdrop of a world in which stylistic plurality is perceived to be under threat from the transnational forces of cultural homogenisation. Commenting favourably on a range of “potent” “cross-fertilisations”, such as jazz and Latin American dance, Lomax (1968: 5) says:

... healthy cultural development depends upon the survival of the world pool of cultural style in all their variety... Each of these communication structures, now being swept off the board, may be capable of seeding a whole new cultural development

At this point his conception of regional culture, with its concern for an ecologically vital, cultural pluralism and cosmopolitanism, seemingly owes a significant debt to the thought and writings of Franz Boas whose thinking, in turn, owed much to Herder. Lomax attempted to meet Boas in 1935 (Szwed 2010:85-86) and some of the ideas of documenting dance, gesture and body movement used in his later “Cantometrics” project derive from work Boas undertook with the Russian anthropologist Julia Averkeiva (ibid:328). Further theoretical influences came from another anthropological collaborator, Conrad Arensburg (1972:6; Arensburg and Kimball 1981). Arensburg believed that anthropology is a natural science based on the empirical study of human interaction. Lomax argued strongly for the cultural specificity of regional, local and national musical styles, with his exposure to applied anthropology and transactional analysis enabling him to move beyond the apparent limits of locally-generated cultural meanings and to bridge cultures by finding cross-cultural unity in interactional processes at higher levels of organisational complexity than that of musical events themselves. This conception of culture implies the emergence of culture from the specifics of

individual creative practice at increasingly higher levels of abstraction and spatial agglomeration (Gold et al 2016).

In different ways and with contrasting endpoints Sharp and Lomax both cling to conceptions of culture and creativity that rely on abstract processes operating beyond the level of individual consciousness and which consider culture as some form of autonomous realm. When identifying the clear influence of Boas on Lomax, significantly Bauman and Briggs (2000:289-93) criticise Boas' conception of voice for separating language from culture in a way that language becomes something of a fixed reference point; supposedly acting as an autonomous authentic presence unconsciously carrying and reproducing regional and local cultures in spite of the multiple creative practices of everyday spoken usage.

There are clear resonances here with Duncan's analysis of the superorganic in geographical culture area theory (Duncan 1980, 1998; Mitchell 2000:33-34). Duncan characterised the superorganic as a mode of explanation which reifies the notion of culture, assigning it ontological status and causative power. He argues that in this theory, culture "is viewed as an entity above man, not reducible to the actions of individuals", but "mysteriously responding to laws of its own" (Duncan 1980:181). As such, he argues against structuralist approaches including base-superstructure models derived from Marx (Duncan 1998) and in favour of a humanistic perspective that is sensitive to individual agency and creativity. Duncan (1980:191) says: "[u]nder the rule of the superorganic typical values or norms are posited as the mechanism by which a transcendental object becomes translated into a form that can be internalized by individuals."

It is easy to read the reified construct of "voice" as figured by Bauman and Briggs (2003) in terms of language as an example of the sort of transcendent objectification freighted with supernatural powers critiqued by Duncan. There are, for instance, interesting historical resonances between Duncan's critique and work that Lomax (1968) carried out in connection with his "Cantometrics" project. Duncan (1980:182-4) attributes the development of this form of thinking within cultural geography to the anthropologists Alfred Kroeber and Robert Lewis. Kroeber's work was certainly known to Lomax and influential for Murdoch's ethnographic atlas on which Lomax founded much of his later work (Gold et al 2016:173). In this context, unpacking the notion of voice and showing how it works variously to create a pure and autonomous conception of culture from the multiplicities of individual creative practice could further assist deciphering the black box of supernatural cultural force as a driver for regional cultural specificity.

Central to the ways that such cultural spaces have been imagined and became fundamental in the work of both Herder and Boas is the idea of language as a cultural practice binding together and defining peoples into groups and nations. As seen above, language is a key but not unproblematic constituent of voice. On the one hand, voice proves problematic for the purposes of cultural codification because it is an infinitely mutable medium for individual expression. On the other hand, the way that the term can be made to combine conceptions of language and speech, individual and collective utterance consolidated both in objectified versions of culture and subjectified notions of expression, intension and experience, render voice a powerful medium for defining peoples into bounded conceptions of region and nation. Voice, like its co-constituent language, becomes a significant tool for purification, simplifying and homogenising the heterogeneous materials, practices and knowledge that constitute it. Of prime importance here is the value given to song as an expression of authentic local, regional and national voices in theory derived from Herder. As Bendix (1997:142), song holds a special place in the history of both European American and African American folklore. The ballad especially has preoccupied collectors and theorists over centuries, with Francis Child's definitive five volume collection, published 1882-98, acting as a benchmark for the authentication of both past and future ballad finds. For Bendix (1997) shows, the sung word confers an "affective power" that makes the ballad so powerful as a repository of value regarding identity, history and heritage. In different ways and to varying degrees Sharp and Lomax followed folkloristic convention and were particularly concerned with the authoritative power of the ballad.

For Alan Lomax the phonograph, pioneered in work with his father for the Library of Congress, became centrally important for overcoming regional and local difference by forging a national conversation made of distinctive individual rather than collective voices. As he recalled using the recorder whilst making a field recording trip during 1933, the phonograph "meant that for the first time there was a way to stick a pipeline right down into the heart of the folks where they were and let them come on like they felt" (Filene 2000:56). Notably, the phonograph is described as a "pipe" a substantially passive conduit which connects the sound of voice not with a perceived source of logic and rationality but with the perceived source of emotion – "straight from the heart". Given the phonograph's direct, democratically expressive and affective place in Lomax's thinking, it is hardly surprising that he also remembered an encounter at Tennessee State Prison recorded for *Our Singing Country* (1941). After having recorded his piece for the machine, an African-American inmate finished by saying "Well, I guess when they hear that there in the White House, them big men sho goin' do something for this po'nigger" (Cohen 2003:65). Alan Lomax claims this moment convinced

him that recording individual voices could be a force for democracy and cultural pluralism. It is little wonder that Filene (2000) highlights the contrast between the Lomaxes' *American Ballads and Folk Songs* published in 1934 and *Our Singing Country* (1941) as signifying both a transition towards the supreme authority of recorded sound in marking cultural distinctiveness in ethnomusicology and a move away from a search for origins and authoritative versions towards the preciousness of individual performance.

In this context Dolar (2006:72-3) picks out singing, the component of voice so valued by folk collectors, as his exemplar for the contradictory and ambiguous status of voice. Voice ties language to the body, but the nature of this connection is paradoxical: *the voice does not belong to either*. It is not reducible to linguistics, or to the body. The voice detaches itself from the body and leaves it behind, but it cannot simply be returned to the body and situated within it.

The voice as the bearer of a deeper sense, of some profound message, is a structural illusion, the core of a fantasy that the singing voice might cure the wound inflicted by culture, restore the loss that we suffered by the assumption of the symbolic order. This deceptive promise disavows the fact that the voice owes its fascination to this wound, and that its allegedly miraculous force stems from its being situated in this gap.

Perhaps we might understand the contrasting versions of regional culture for Sharp and Lomax as the product of vocalic spaces, which elaborate from differing takes on "the gap" opened up by sound between language and the body that Dolar identifies as a "structural illusion". In this sense, it is sound's inherent dislocation which allows such diverse understandings as those represented by Sharp and Lomax. Key to the gap that Dolar finds between body and sound is the notion of acousmatism. The acousmatic voice is simply a voice whose source one cannot determine, whose origin cannot be identified, or cannot be placed (Chion 1999, Revill 2016:249-50). Voices are given material presence as vibrations produced by a larynx buried deep in the throat; speaking is only evident in the opening and closing of the mouth, an act only partly and contingently related to the production of sound. Sounds themselves begin to die away as soon as they are uttered. For Dolar voice is always "in search of an origin, in search of a body", always without a satisfactory resting place, without tangible points of contact or anchor in the body. Conceived thus, the gap opened up by voice between language and speech, sounding bodies and listening intelligence, expressive wild nature and reflexive rationalising culture enables the processes and practices by which multiple voices can be reduced to voice and then be reimagined and reconfigured, localised and regionalised

in line with multiple national and academic ideologies. This is a process of purification, co-option and realignment that, following Bauman and Briggs, has allowed folk music to be figured as an authentic marker of regional belonging as in the example of Cecil Sharp, or to be co-opted for a universalising abstract cosmopolitanism in the case of Alan Lomax.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has argued that the geography of voice has an important part to play in understanding and critiquing the ways that local specificity in culture and cultural practice is used to figure and conceptualise regions and nations. Drawing on insights from Bauman and Briggs (2003) grounded in post-colonial theory, it has used the contrasting conclusions drawn by the twentieth century folk collectors Cecil Sharp and Alan Lomax with regard to Appalachian culture to explore how contradictions and unresolved complexities concerning conceptions of voice in folk culture enable diverse ways of figuring and representing regions, nations and peoples. The tensions and complexities which produce these contrasting versions of region and nation can be traced back through early twentieth and nineteenth century thinking to the foundational work on culture, region and nation by the eighteenth century German theorist Johann Gottfried von Herder.

Herder's work became an important starting point for theories of nation and national belonging and for ethnographic and folkloristic regional culture theories that have occupied an important place in anthropology, ethnography and geography. Conceptions of regional culture derived differently from Herder by Sharp and Lomax place culture as an abstract category with a high degree of autonomy. There are resonances here with Duncan's critique of the "superorganic" in the study of regional culture. The paper has suggested that a geography of voice might contribute to a critical regionalism by helping us unpack some of the processes that transform and translate the qualities of individual and regional distinctiveness into universalised, abstract and autonomous categories or traits. It has shown how an historically located conception of the geography of voice has bound together figurations of people and polity, spaces of democratic utterance and debate, and place-bound conceptions of the region in ways that have proved influential for academic studies down to the present. In this study, relationships between sound and language have been seen to be key to processes both of cultural abstraction and the silencing of polyvocality. In terms of a geography of voice, it has shown how the distinctive socio-material properties of the sonic in relation to historically specific figurations of voice can help disturb formulations of abstraction and scale grounded in taken-for-granted conceptions of voice and the sonic. These historically and geographically specific processes are important to understanding key dimensions of the affective



politics of voice and for developing a post-colonial critique of voice in relation to culture, place and region. Thus, the paper might be understood as a contribution to a critical postphenomenology of the sonic concerned with the spatio-temporally specific qualities of experience (Revill 2016; 2017).

It was argued that the geography of voice can play an important role in mediating relationships between landscape, region, and culture (see Matless 2014). Nevertheless, the nature of voice as a set of socio-material practices and processes and what might constitute a geography of voice grounded in the characteristic practices and processes of vocalic spaces and spatialities remain significantly under-theorised. The relationships between voice and the body, expressive trajectories of utterance and linguistic structuring, the dislocating qualities of acousmatism and the intimacy and immediacy of 'touch at a distance' are all key issues for a geography of voice able to recognise its active political role in the figuration of regions. Voice shares with landscape – also a concept of key importance in cultural figurations of regionality – the quality of being something held in tension between realms designated as material, cultural, affective and reflexive. Voice operates as a signifier of presence, meaning and purpose at a variety of geographical scales in ways that tie region, place and people together through expressions of common history, experience and understanding. At the same time, it is subject to processes of labelling, objectification and acts of ventriloquism operating at different spatial scales and which assign voices contingently to third parties, specific agents and publics. So often taken unproblematically as a marker of authenticity and place specificity, this paper shows how attention to voice in geography brings to prominence some of the uneasy relations by which competing and contrasting conceptions of people, place and region are held together and given presence.

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