
Article:
Trowell, I.M. (2018) Spiel, patter or sound effect: Tracking the residual voice on the travelling fun fair. Journal of Interdisciplinary Voice Studies, 3 (1). pp. 7-20. ISSN: 2057-0341

https://doi.org/10.1386/jivs.3.1.7_1

Spiel, patter or sound effect: Tracking the residual voice on the travelling fun-fair

Abstract

Summary – The travelling fun-fair, emerging from trade and hiring fairs prior to the twentieth century, is a beguiling and uncharted realm of illusion, deception, thrill and adventure. It offers a glimpse of the improbable and impossible, and a taste or touch of the unattainable. There is an immediate and overwhelming polysensory overload; of visual, of sound, of light, of smell, of disorientation, of performance and serendipitous sociality. This article tracks the voice on the travelling fun-fair and asks whether the contemporary situation, examining two specific examples of voice, is a continuation or break with tradition. The voice is approached through a nested consideration of the overall experience, the cacophonous soundscape (music, scream, mechanical noise), and finally a totality of voices as an element within the soundscape. This phenomenological approach – from the point of view of the punter – is then balanced with a historical consideration of the showperson's voice. These two approaches are then combined to examine the continuity of cultural tradition.

Keywords

Travelling fun-fair, showpeople, spiel, popular culture, Dutch voice, sampling

Introduction

Emerging from, and displacing, a tradition of hiring and trading fairs, the British travelling fun-fair retains a strong presence and a certain interweaving of history and mythology in popular culture. The travelling fun-fair holds a distinctive allure in both its coming-to-be and in-itself. It is provided by a nomadic community who seemingly have their own separate domain of existence, working through the dead of night with a remarkable effort of organisation to assemble an array of vehicles and wagons. By the morning light activity is always well under way; teams of staff are unfolding and unpacking structures, some kind of marking out seems in evidence to make it all fit together *just so*. A characteristic of the British travelling fun-fair is the common occurrence of short duration events in quick succession, resulting in the beguiling sense of arriving out of thin air through the night, and dismantling and dispersing with equal speed and mystery.

Visitors to the travelling fun-fair share a suspension of disbelief evolving around the tensions of the improbable and impossible, shifting what might be thought acceptable and everyday into the realm of the transgressive, doubted and thrilling, and pulling out the unimaginable into the realm of the sensory (or near-enough-sensory). It offers a glimpse of the improbable and impossible, and a taste or touch of the unattainable. The travelling fun-fair disorients in an excess of sounds, smells, tastes, lights, visual imagery, rootedness, social conventions and performativity. As Toulmin states, it is 'mysterious, dangerous, a venue in which emotions are unguarded, experiences intense, and a break from the routine of everyday life' (Toulmin 2003: 61).

In any week there are up to 150 travelling fun-fairs set up across the UK, with each event lasting anything from a single day to a couple of weeks. The season traditionally runs from February (Valentine's Day marking the start of King's Lynn Mart Fair) through to November (the season ending with the charter fair at Loughborough). In recent years the limit points of this period have been extended both ways, with a number of newly founded Valentine's fairs usurping the status of King's

Lynn as the official start, and a number of extended bonfire fairs pushing towards the end of November, alongside Long Eaton Chestnut Fair which falls in the last week of November. With the current fashion for Christmas lights switch-ons and Christmas and New Year fairs, the season is now no longer a season as such, more a continuous occurrence.

The travelling fun-fair occupies, transforms and repurposes a regularised space within the urban nexus, either a continuous plot such as a green space or a car park, or a loose network of discrete locations within a city centre stretching out in a rhizomatic fashion within the urban scape, refashioning dead zones and interstices of the urban epidermis with a new thrill of lights, sounds, smells and anticipation. As Walker (2015) shows, the borders of the city-centre fairground are porous and shifting. In other instances, the travelling fun-fair lingers on the outer zones away from the centres; urban grasslands, commons and large out of town expanses such as business parks and retail centres. The contemporary travelling fun-fair will vary in size depending upon its historical importance and established population of customers, though a set structure permeates such that each will consist of larger rides (adult rides), smaller rides (juvenile rides), side and round stalls offering a variety of games, supplemented by food stalls (sweet and savoury) and a smattering of hawkers selling balloons and associated cheap trinkets known as 'swag'. It disrupts both the allocated functions of spaces (consumption, commuting, parking) and the rhythms of normality associated with those spaces (opening/closing, parking by micro-divisions of the hour).

The regulations determining when and where a travelling fun-fair can occur are determined by, and set out in, historical charters, with lessee rights generally managed by the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain, whose members - showpeople - provide attractions that move from place to place. Showpeople are central to developing and presenting the travelling fun-fair experience, their practices and skills evolve to shape the look and feel, the sound and smell, and the overall affect. Responding to cultural trends and advances in technology, the travelling fun-fair adopts and changes on a number of fronts – visual appearance, soundscape, affective environment, nuances of social function. Within the complex and cacophonous soundscape sits the voice of the showperson. In past eras this voice had a direct function in 'spieling' the contents of each show; the voice was prominent, distinctive and it told a tale in a certain manner. As the make-up of the travelling fun-fair evolves the voice of the showperson has drifted to the periphery and changed in both function and style. This article tracks the change of the voice through a historical consideration of the changing travelling fun-fair, and considers the current manifestation of two distinctive new voices on the contemporary British travelling fun-fair. It asks whether this can be considered as a continuation of, or a break with, tradition.

Overview of travelling fun-fair soundscape

The voice on the travelling fun-fair is nested within two wider systems of tumult that form a conditioning of how the voice is heard and interpreted; the totalising structure of all sensory effects. As indicated in the introduction, at the outermost level the travelling fun-fair is encountered as a polysensory excess where aspects such as smell, sight, illumination and taste are amplified and overlaid in both homogenous ways (many smells at once) and heterogenous ways (many smells with many lights with many sounds etc). It is outside the scope of this article to present detailed historical, ethnographical or environmental evidence on the precise nature and impact of this

polysensory assault, however, a more detailed analysis of the specific soundscape will prove useful since the voice forms an aspect of this soundscape.

Schafer (1994) introduces the idea of the soundscape, equating it to the perceivable acoustic environment. Truax (2001), as part of the World Soundscape Project, develops the definition as 'the totality of all sounds within a location with an emphasis on the relationship between individual's or society's perception of, understanding of and interaction with the sonic environment'. Furthermore, a note of caution is added such that 'the study of soundscapes is challenging because it is also necessary to consider the context of the soundscape, rather than simply evaluating its different acoustical qualities' (Cain et al. 2013: 232). Soundscape studies generally evolve in an altruistic manner to identify aspects of noise or discomfort, attempting to isolate such sounds and address their possible nullification through various strategies. In contrast to this, the travelling fun-fair creates a deliberately noisy and complex soundscape, legitimised and celebrated as part of the total experience. It presents an intriguing soundscape and invites a careful unpacking.

The soundscape consists of an overlay between three key groupings.[1] Firstly, there are various sources of sound including pop and dance music amplified through the sound systems associated with the rides, the exaggerated noise of machinery such as the hiss of hydraulics and the rattle of metal against metal, a panoply of amplified special effects ranging from repurposed air raid sirens, horns, hooters and bells, and increasingly electronic and digital sound sample boxes, and the human voice as shouting and orchestrated screaming (from the point of view of the 'punters') and an aspect of calling and narration (from the showpeople). These sounds are constantly backgrounded by the hubbub of raised voices in excited conversation. Secondly, the source sounds are then experienced in a number of distinct translating modes - as accumulation towards homogenous cacophony (music heard with other music as a kind of soundclash for example), as combination towards heterogeneous cacophony (different source sounds together) and as 'sound-in-motion' whilst being hurled in all directions on a speeding and twisting ride. In addition, there is also a collective factor that translates experiencing of the sound, as music is listened to in the midst of large groups provoking responses such as clapping of hands and stamping of feet within a group mentality, collectivising what is known as 'entrainment' (DeNora 2000: 78), the body's natural responses to rhythmic sounds. Finally, there are synaesthetic aspects, a particular sense (in this case, sound) experienced through a different set of senses (visual artwork and proprioceptive motion of rides).

The soundscape of the travelling fun-fair has a historical basis with noise prominent in the nineteenth century as the occasion shifted from a purpose of trade to pure pleasure. Duncan Dallas references Charles Dickens *Hard Times* and the stentorian character Mr Gradgrind approaching the fairground: 'He had reached the neutral ground upon the outskirts of the town, which was neither town nor country, and yet was either spoiled, when his ears were invaded by the sound of music' (Dallas 1971: 3). The 1825 fair at Greenwich is recalled as a 'never to be forgotten orgy of noise' (Walvin 1984: 164), whilst William Howitt's 1844 *The Rural Life of England* describes an 'unintermitted din' at Nottingham Goose Fair.

[1] This proposal of the soundscape structure and content stems from my current PhD research into the British travelling fun-fair undertaken at the University of Sheffield, School of Architecture.

Toulmin quotes from an undated scrapbook in the collection at the National Fairground and Circus Archive, describing the coming of the heavy fairground machinery in the early 1900s:

> Noise, great noise, loud noise, rough noise, harsh noise, shrill noise, overall, noise. The noise of young men laughing, of old men grunting; the noise of young maidens shrieking, of old maidens sobbing; the noise of roundabouts, of steam engines, or flip-flaps, or toboggans, of sirens, of rattles, of everything and of all things. Noise! Noise! Noise!!! (Toulmin 2003: 13)

Finally, the disparaging din of Nottingham Goose Fair is revisited by J.B. Priestley on his tour of England:

> The brazen voices of the showmen, now made more hideous and gargantuan than ever by the amplifiers and loudspeakers, battered our hearing, which could not pluck words out of those terrifying noises. The mechanical organs blared in batteries, so closely ranged that the ear could never detect a single tune: all it heard was the endless grinding symphony. (Priestley 1934: 148)

The historical voice of the showperson

As the above examples show, the travelling fun-fair was – and remains – a noisy place, and the voice of the showperson is both a part of the noise and has to fight against the general noise (and the noise of other showpeople) to make itself audible and meaningful. In this section I will outline the historical changes on the travelling fun-fair and plot the diachronic trajectory of the showperson's voice to the contemporary era.

The travelling fun-fair emerged from a long-standing tradition of fairs granted for the purpose of trading, hiring or celebrating the seasonal events around agriculture, with showpeople attaching themselves to the site-specific festivity to offer attractions and distractions. These events are well documented in the Early Modern period, and their transition to pleasure events emerges through a double articulation of industrial modernisation stretching through the nineteenth century. Transportation, refrigerated storage, and newly mechanised modes of working meant that hiring and trading became more hidden and mundane aspects of everyday life. In addition, the interior content of the fairground – previously occupied by trading tents – gave way to newly emerging pleasure machinery as agricultural engineers applied their ingenuity in expanding areas.[2] The early travelling fun-fair within the wider trading and hiring fair was principally built upon shows and games in its role for the provision of entertainment, and a shared soundscape of hawking of goods, services and shows would dominate. Full documentation of this earlier soundscape is outside the scope of this article, but it indicates a common strand between the voice of the showperson and the voice of the hawker of goods.[3]

[2] For a general history of the British travelling fun-fair see Braithwaite (1968), Cameron (1998), Dallas (1971), Starsmore (1975), Toulmin (2003) and Weedon and Ward (1981). Braithwaite (1975) documents the technology transfer between agriculture and the travelling fun-fair.

[3] Henry Mahew's important work *London Labour and the London Poor* provides a contemporaneous account of the cacophonous costermonger environment, with contemporary soundscape studies such as the London

The proliferation of mechanical devices that define the travelling fun-fair in the twentieth century and beyond was the result of this industrial revolution and production of innovative machinery, causing a shift in the make-up of the attractions. Using the basic tenets of structuralism we can label this as a syntagmatic shift in that a new element of structure was introduced into the whole, rather than the routine paradigmatic changes that occur as part of the constant reinvention and quest for novelty. Thus, up until the 1860s, changes were based upon new shows replacing old shows, new games replacing old games, etc. With the development of the mechanical ride the stalls and games were slowly shifted to the peripheries of both physical layout and importance. This move towards thrill machines and the 'technological sublime' (Nye 1996) saw the showperson's voice marginalised and minimised, persisting and possibly re-emerging in strange formats that will form the focus of this article. But first it is necessary to historically locate and extract the showperson's voice.

Documenting at the time immediately prior to the show's waning and disappearance, Dallas (1971: 138) declares 'anything that takes place in a booth and attracts a crowd on a fairground is a show', and lists various ways in which attention can be garnered alongside regular methods such as lavish decoration in either sumptuous gold or revealing portraiture.[4] A show might include dancers, musicians and performers on the public-facing platform, the showperson might allow a tantalising excerpt of the what goes on inside the show to be relayed on the platform on a raised plinth, however the principal method of attracting attention would be through the use of voice. Games and shows required a good 'spieler' to attract a crowd and this would be achieved through a prominent voice relaying the beginnings of an alluring 'tale' or the ability to spot a situation or particular person in the crowd and project a bit of instantaneous banter and wit – to practice the 'art of the spiel' (Toulmin 2003: 43). The aim for a showperson is to turn a crowd into an audience and then 'hold the audience with patter' (Brown 2001: 12). It is then necessary to convert the majority of that audience into paying punters, and then finally to ensure that these paying punters are satisfied punters in the common scenario whereby the promise of the tale that drew them in is not necessarily played out as expected. With craft and guile a showperson can guide people through each stage of the process such that any disappointment in what is seen is counterbalanced by the performance of the showperson.

The travelling fun-fair show evolved through exhibitions of human feats, spectral ghosts, freak animals (the largest, the smallest, the deformed, the fantastic), human oddities, exotic savages, the gory and grotesque, the saucy and smutty, the daring and dangerous. Key themes and modes of presentation overlapped and were often rekindled, with the show-line on the fairground consisting of many shows cheek-by-jowl such that repetition was rife. If a showperson presented a novelty that took good money it would quickly be copied, and the task of staying ahead of the field and presenting something truly unique was nigh on impossible. Instead, uniqueness was hinted at through persuasive and imaginative stories and contextualisation. Each exhibit would have a back-story relaying exotic provenance, and would be endowed with a number of promises for the paying punter ('your life will never be the same again' or some such exclamation). This practice is known as

---

Sound Study documenting the remnants of this tradition. See http://www.soundsurvey.org.uk/index.php/survey/historical_ec/economic1/184/. Accessed 10 March 2017.

[4] Weedon and Ward (1981: 119-135) documents the visual and structural tradition of the travelling fun-fair show.

'telling the tale' (Brown 2001: 56), and would consist in combining a performance of what is said and how it is said. Thus, the showperson's voice emerges as a distinctive sound relaying a distinctive script of quips, hooks and fantastical imagery – an act of pure fabulation. In the words of Dallas 'any amount of double-entente and gross exaggeration is considered permissible to lure the crowd into the booth' (Dallas 1971: 138).

Whilst there are numerous written works by showpeople adding to the description of shows and the recording of the content of the telling of the tale, it is only Dallas who pries into the voice itself. His findings are brief and almost perfunctory, as if coming up against a brick-wall: 'attracting a crowd comes so easily and unself-consciously to the spieler that none of them can explain how it is done. There is no barker's apprenticeship' (Dallas 1971: 139). This suggests a process of enculturation rather than a deliberate process of acquisition, and it is my argument that a similar mode of enculturation informs the current voice on the travelling fun-fair. But the contemporary voice does not spiel in front of a show, since the shows have all but vanished. As Dallas completed his work for publication in 1971 he was already aware of this withering away. The 1970s would see a residual hardcore of shows at major events such as Nottingham Goose Fair and Newcastle-upon-Tyne Hoppings, sitting on the fringes of an abundance of thrill rides. As Dallas notes: 'all too often nowadays the spiel is tape-recorded and played back through an amplifier to an uninterested public, while the bored showman sits at the cash-desk' (Dallas 1971: 142). Different voices have emerged, but first we have to plot the rapid development of travelling fun-fair rides.

The changing environment

Steam roundabouts emerged in the 1860s, falling in with agricultural innovation from the likes of Frederick Savage of King's Lynn who transformed the travelling fun-fair (Braithwaite 1975). Rapid development followed in the twentieth century with the change from steam power to electricity bringing in significant structural and aesthetic developments of rides (Braithwaite 1968, Starsmore 1975, Weedon and Ward 1981). The need for a showperson's voice is brought into question, as these new rides essentially speak for themselves in terms of offering thrills of movement in the pursuit of either simulation (galloping horses, rocket-ships, motorbikes) or pure adrenalin.[5] A crowd will gather to watch a ride in motion and then decide whether to have a go themselves, with the travelling fun-fair increasingly becoming the realm of the bravest or of those with the strongest stomach. In addition, a ride is adorned with flashing lights and painted up in bright colours that resonate with the icons and fashions of popular culture and subcultures, augmented by up to date music blaring from prominent sound-systems. A showperson will generally compete with a similar ride by offering a potentially greater atmosphere through particular choices of music. This submersion into an enclosed and autonomous atmosphere is summarised by Stephen Walker from his observation of the Waltzer at Loughborough Fair:

> As the evening wears on the ride closes in on itself, closes itself off from its surroundings while attracting a predominantly under-18 audience with the promise (and delivery) of pseudo-transgressive hardcore techno music and a rave

[5] Interestingly, it is suggested that the spirit of showmanship lives on in the innovation and engineering of the rides themselves (Starsmore 1975: 95).

> environment that they would not otherwise (well, legally, or with parental consent) be able to access. (Walker 2013: 57)

The operator of an enclosed ride such as the Waltzer has a tenuous link to traditional spiel as he or she will narrate and energise the riding experience by interjecting with stock phrases in the form of a DJ or mc. The voice here functions in a similar way to an interactive nightclub environment where instructions to express glee or desires are relayed and subsequently followed ('scream if you want to go faster' etc).[6]

The general open air thrill rides do not have the intimacy of a Waltzer ride and so the possibility of creating a new voice of the showperson that fuses the ride motion with the music is not a viable consideration. There are, however, two generic voices that permeate the modern travelling fun-fair. A showperson on a ride such as the Twist will have something closer to a 'patter' rather than a spiel, and this patter repeats throughout the duration of the fair. Secondly, there is rapid uptake of recorded voices and samples activated from sound-boxes essentially serving the same purpose as the patter – to regulate the flow on and off rides and to add a minimal amount of extra entertainment whilst the ride is in motion. It is to these two contemporary voices that I now turn, and draw upon fieldwork and ethnographic studies.

Contemporary voice 1 – the ride operator

A ride needs to make money by attracting punters, either new customers or repeat riders. Different travelling fun-fairs have different levels of popularity based up a combination of traditional background (such as Nottingham Goose Fair), proximity to busy urban areas, a relative authenticity in terms of no other travelling fun-fairs within a certain distance (within a certain time) or – on occasions – discrete audiences such as a travelling fun-fair positioned in a music festival or similar style event. In addition, there is a rhythm of footfall and activity that may occur within a 24 hour period (more busy in the evening if the audience is predominantly teenagers) or work within a longer time-frame (a week long fair might have a particular day which is most popular). A ride standing idle will obviously make no money, and often the best advert for a thrill ride is for punters to see it in operation. In periods of relative calm and depleted crowd numbers on the ground there is a balance to be achieved between a ride standing idle and a ride in operation with only a handful of punters, such that the takings for that particular period of operation barely cover the cost of sending the ride round. It is here where a showperson will use a microphone and deliver patter to achieve a number of things; to attract punters onto the ride, to attract a crowd of potential punters around the ride, and to keep those punters who have elected to go on the ride and are seated ready to go in a state of excitement and anticipation. The aim is to attract enough punters onto the ride such that it is more commercially viable to send it round, but to do this in a time-frame such that those who have decided to ride do not become bored, or those that have decided to watch (and possibly ride in the next cycle) do not become restless and go and watch something else.

The showperson's patter does not tell a story such as associated with a show, but it does tell a type of fiction in that it gives the impression to the onlooker who might be thinking of riding that he or she needs to act fast to secure a place. The operator of Armstrong's Twist at Loughborough Fair

[6] See Trowell (2017a) for a detailed analysis of the Waltzer in operation and the complex structure of the different instructions and communications in play.

(November 2016) was trying to maintain a flow of punters during a quiet part of the late Saturday afternoon between the family period of mid-afternoon and the teenage period of darkness. They were using patter to give the impression that the ride was just about to start, but this was not the case:

‘Come-on-step-this-way-you’re-just-in-time’

‘Any-more-riders-now-it’s-another-fast-ride-this-time-let’s-go’

This conveyance of urgency extends also to busy periods when a showperson will look to fill a ride to capacity before sending it round. Evans’ Twist at King’s Lynn Mart Fair (February 2017) was drawing a large crowd of punters on the traditional half-price day and they were clearly trying to get a full complement of riders each time. Here a different script is used that evokes a similar sense of urgency:

‘One-blue-car-one-blue-car-round-the-back-last-one’

‘Empty-cars-come-on-girls-lets-go’

The patter delivered when the ride is in motion also depends upon how busy things are. The Twist at Loughborough was struggling to attract a crowd and the operator resorted to narrating an additional commentary onto the ride, keeping herself active throughout the duration and altering the pronunciation of words to mimic the ride itself:

‘here-we-go-hoooold-on-tight’

‘okaaaaay-let’s-go-faster-lets-do-it-one-more-time-hold-on-tight’

‘okaaaaay-top-speeeed-hold-on-tight’

Meanwhile, at King’s Lynn, the riders were not given an on-ride narration as punters were clearly gathering at the perimeter barriers of the ride each time the ride set off in motion with a good number of riders. The operator was involved with collecting cash from the attendants and keeping things in smooth order. Here interjection only occurred as the current ride cycle came to an end and the words were meant more to alert and prime the watching crowd than to add to the experience of those already riding:

‘next-ride-coming-up-next-ride-coming-up’

I have tried to indicate above a sense of the delivery or use of the voice beyond the message conveyed. The annotation of hyphens indicates a paratactic delivery in which words are spoken in a continuous string without gaps between potential phrases. When taken in isolated consideration this adds to the nonsensical and somewhat dissimulative content of the words, but the delivery of the words in this manner becomes part of the travelling fun-fair fabric. Whilst I have tried to indicate where certain words are extended in an onomatopoeic fashion (such as speeeed) it also evident that intonations such as might be associated with a showperson of the past telling the story of an exotic attraction are wholly avoided. The delivery of the patter on the ride is flat and constant, falling between a hint of boredom and the drone of a daytime radio presenter on a local station. Most interestingly, this manner of spoken delivery is used throughout all British travelling fun-fairs such

that regional accent is annihilated and a kind of generic 'BBC voice' is adopted. This becomes most evident when a showperson interrupts their patter to send an instruction over the microphone to one of the workers (or 'gaff-lads') and instantly slips into their normal (regional) voice. This convergent voice sounds strange, which may remind us of Deleuze's imaginary projections towards a possible voice in the cinema:

> Perhaps in a different cinematic genre, in certain adventure films, subjects themselves disappear. In this case the rapid voices become atonal and accentless, horizontal, looking for the shortest route, voices which are already blank in the same sense as blank weapons, replicas each of which could just as well be uttered by someone else. (Deleuze 1989: 232)

The patter of a ride operator is different to the spiel of a showperson, but somehow a unique and strange voice emerges on the travelling fun-fair. In a similar manner to Dallas suggesting there is no handbook for learning to spiel, the new voice is just acquired through enculturation – it seems to come naturally. At the same time it blends seamlessly into the polysensory oddness of the event, joining the second voice of the contemporary travelling fun-fair: the ubiquitous Dutchman.

Contemporary voice 2 – the recorded Dutchman

A 'Dutch' influence emerged in the British travelling fun-fair at the end of the twentieth century, though its apparent geographical classification was only noticed by, and subsequently named by, the self-identifying group of fairground enthusiasts.[7] Dutch and Italian engineered and manufactured rides grew in popularity and eventually usurped British made rides on the home soil, and, as is common with country-specific considerations of the travelling fun-fair, certain nuances and styles were carried across – in this instance a distinctive style of decorative painting. Subsequently, a pair of Dutch artists provided a fresh impetus to British fairground art, and these artists – Sven and Wul – were often referred to as a kind of single persona; 'the Dutchman'. At the same time the use of sound-boxes became popular with the Belgian company Disco Smash leading the market.[8] Sound-boxes are simple sampling devices coupled with effects that allow a number of phrases, music samples and general samples to be played before, during and after a ride. The samples are utilised in a variety of innovative ways, and the leading showpeople who come up with novel sounds and uses of those sounds are quickly copied to create a convergent and ubiquitous soundscape portion. Common sounds include music samples such as James Brown's funky exclamation of 'I feel good' relayed as the passengers disembark, a snippet that sings 'we're flying high, we're flying up into the sky' to add to the ride whilst in motion, popular film catchphrases from the likes of Austin Powers, plus a number of technologically voiced countdowns to enhance anticipation of the ride as it begins the process of movement and lift-off. In addition, a number of what might be considered environmental sounds are interjected with regularity. These include a prominent array of hooters and klaxons connoting both frivolity (beep-beep) and pure force (truck and train air horns), and also a popular noise of amplified rushing air to give the ride an enhanced impression of speed.

---

[7] See Trowell (2017b) for a discussion of fairground enthusiasts and other sociological formations around the British travelling fun-fair.

[8] See http://www.discosmash.com/. Accessed 10 March 2017.

Within these musical, film-based and environmental samples there was added a recorded voice that mitigated the flow of the ride in terms of both encouragement on and off the ride ('come and ride the Twister', 'thank you for riding the Extreme') and administration for the duration of the ride ('buy your tokens at the cash desk for the next ride', 'small children must wear seatbelts', 'press safety bars to exit the ride'). This voice appeared to be in a strong and distinctive Dutch accent, and so added another Dutch element to the travelling fun-fair, and the introduction of another 'Dutchman' to nestle alongside the aforementioned painters with the single identity. Again, fairground enthusiasts – particularly the dedicated subset who concern themselves with making scale models of the travelling fun-fair – find a particular interest in this new voice phenomenon.[9]

The Dutchman is actually a Flemish speaking Belgian, who works on a contractual basis for Disco Smash. His regular job is a day-time radio presenter and this explains the somewhat characterful and professional nature of his voice that, once transmitted to a non-Flemish-speaking audience, sounds particularly entertaining and different. The answer to the question as to why British showpeople insist on having an over-the-top Dutch (Flemish) voice on the travelling fun-fair is not easily attained. Disco Smash offer a service of using native actors to voice a showperson's specific spoken sample requests, and countries with equally strong travelling fun-fair traditions such as Germany, France and Spain use a voice that is clearly from their own country.[10] It is thought that a British showperson bought a ride from Continental Europe that had a pre-existing sound-box and range of samples in a (native) Flemish voice, and the novelty of the sound of this voice took hold as a typical motif. The identity of 'patient zero' seems to be lost in the proliferating activities of recent history. At the same time, when interviewing showpeople about their use of the Dutch voice, a common answer is that it is used because everyone else uses it.

We can query how this voice might be perceived on two levels. Firstly, we can try to situate the Dutch / Flemish voice in a current of popular culture to see if any obvious contextualisation has evolved that might persist to the contemporary era. Secondly, it is necessary to speak to fairground enthusiasts and punters and find out whether they are able to discern the voice and if that is the case, whether the voice has certain connotations or affective characteristics.

Identifying popular cultural manifestations of the voice of the 'other' in contemporary times involves a trawl through the realms of film, television and popular music. The foreign accent is stereotyped as both a certain sound and also a certain approach to the mangling of English words and sentences. Obvious examples include recent comedies such as *'Allo 'Allo!*, and Andrew Sachs' character Manuel, a berated and battered Spanish waiter in the 1970s comedy series *Fawlty Towers*, which involves a poor grasp of English and heavy accent played for laughs.[11] The foreign voice utilised for comedy effect would quickly permeate the school playgrounds and secrete itself into numerous jokes.

The Dutch voice seems to have evaded this broad stereotyping in films and television, and furthermore didn't feature in the numerous accents that accompanied various dark children's dramas and eerie cartoons imported from Eastern Europe for British television in the 1970s. A

---

[9] See for example https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DGm9tBMW71E. Accessed 10 March 2017.

[10] Telephone interview with Joris at Disco Smash, 18 February 2017.

[11] The Spanish voice emerges and vanishes with an element of slipperiness; Sachs was a native German, and the Spanish adaptation of *Fawlty Towers* switched the Manuel character to an Italian native. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fawlty_Towers#Manuel. Accessed 10 March 2017.

prominent Dutch voice did break into British popular culture in 1978, with Pierre Kartner's character Father Abraham and his pop music endeavours with the smurfs. Interestingly Kartner is described as having a background in carnival singing and his successful hits with the smurfs involved a simple call-and-response structure where he posed a number of short questions in his Dutch voice to be met with quick and sometimes caustic responses from the smurfs. His 1978 hit 'The Smurf Song' then spawned a best-selling parody record by British comedy group The Barron Knights entitled 'A Taste of Aggro' which based itself on a montage of three recent hit records. The call-and-response of this record involved one of the musicians attempting a Dutch accent in the guise of Father Abraham, with the smurfs replaced by a gang of rough-sounding cockney criminals which further pastiches the record 'Borstal Breakout' by punk band Sham 69. So here we have an Englishman searching for laughs by pretending to be a Dutchman attempting to speak English. A later manifestation of the Dutch voice would come in 1986, with the hit record 'Holiday Rap' by MC Miker 'G' and Deejay Sven. This record, sampling a previous hit by Madonna, also played for comedy value with the two singers adorned in garish tracksuits and sporting exaggerated 80s hairstyles and moustaches. Again, the spoken delivery is short and punchy, mimicking the Father Abraham voice and looking forward to the travelling fun-fair voice.

Two recent manifestations of the voice in popular culture are more likely to have connected resonance on the travelling fun-fair. The film *Austin Powers in Goldmember* (2002) features an exaggerated Dutch villain, and the earlier movies in the franchise had already made an impact onto the sampling selection – particularly the elongated 'yeah baby' spoken by the protagonist as a signature phrase. The second instance comes from a strange source, with the ex-England manager Steve McClaren accommodating a Dutch accent for interviews (in English) whilst managing the Dutch football club Twente between 2008 and 2010. Though quite likely he was playing for effect, the short interviews and underlying Dutch accent became something of a motif, and the autofill functions of search engines such as Google still suggest 'Steve McClaren Dutch accent' as a top query destination as soon as the words 'Steve McClaren' are entered.

In interviews with fans and visitors to the travelling fun-fair there is a consensus that the recorded voice is definitely Dutch, with a number of respondents adding that it has a machine-like or computerised quality. Opinions on the affective or connotational aspects of the voice are less convergent, with some respondents picking up on certain phrases that exaggerate the Dutch delivery. Stewart is a regular visitor to travelling fun-fairs around Scotland and has noted the rise in the new pre-recorded voice:

> The English used is a bit dodgy too on some of them. "Shooper shensation in this moving machine" being a particular bugbear of mine. Maybe it's done deliberately to attract attention in much the same way as words were sometimes deliberately misspelt on slogans in the past, or written upside down.

Older fairground fans tend to agree that the sampled voice indicates something lost, with a number of respondents recalling regional accents on some of the 1970s fairgrounds. Phil is a regular visitor to modern travelling fun-fairs, and contrasts back to his experiences of the 1970s:

> I think it sounds a bit odd on a British fairground, and prefer to hear our regional accents. I can remember my first visit to Goose Fair and the Brummie twang of the

> Harris's! These automated voices are certainly used a lot these days, and I'm not sure if it's an attempt to make the fairground sound more European or exotic.[12]

Finally, an interesting moment occurred in my research whilst visiting Hull Fair in October 2016. Two of the respondents were dedicated fairground fans visiting this large event from the Netherlands, and they both expressed emotions verging on horror at the proliferation of sampled Dutch voices emerging from every ride.

Conclusion

Scott A. Lukas studies the American theme park and documents what he considers as spiel from rider operators and crowd entertainers. Here we have a highly-constructed delivery that operates (and occasionally steps over) the rigid and pre-planned regime of experience in the theme park, a regime that is pulling in the same direction without competition for custom in a bounded space:

> The spiel utilized both content (such as the discussion of different aspects of the ride or themed area), and delivery, (including performative speech, fake accents, and variation in tone, pitch and speed of voice). (Lukas 2007: 190)

Speaking to some showpeople who have one eye on the sense of tradition, there is a small but strong feeling that this art of spiel is vanishing from the travelling fun-fair; the recorded voice – Flemish / Dutch or otherwise – is both indicative of and contributing to a dying tradition of the art of showmanship through spoken word and the manipulation of voice. This might be the case, but at the same time as something is potentially lost then something else particular is reinforced and expanded. This concerns the unique and enchanting polysensory nature of the travelling fun-fair; to be able to stand still for one moment and be assaulted by a barrage of strange sounds tweaked, amplified and compacted together. Neither of the two new voices are directly maintaining the art of the spiel, but they are both adding to the distinctiveness and uniqueness of the travelling fun-fair soundscape. The paratactic droning patter of the ride operator and the exaggerated and deliberately clumsy directives and exclamations of the Dutch voice have both developed as a device manipulated by showpeople. It is ingenuity under the necessity of creating an entertaining and disorienting difference; arguably a principal tenet of showmanship. Whilst the true spieling showperson exists in the residual side-lines on the fairground – particularly with stalls and games such the pick[13] - it is my feeling that this is not a lost art and, if required, it would quickly come back as part of the showperson's enculturation. But for now we have a very different voice on our travelling fun-fairs, a voice that is distinctive and will no doubt evolve into something else as the travelling fun-fair pitches battle with the widening environment of popular culture.

Acknowledgements

[12] Harris is a local Birmingham show-family.

[13] A pick stall is simply a direct lottery where numbers are drawn and are either considered on their own or added together to make a total such that a number is hopefully matched to a prize. A pick stall operator tends to prowl the front channel of their show and embody the old art of the spiel by fixing on passing members of the public or making an amusing impromptu commentary as a punter attempts to win.

I am very grateful to Dr Roel Vismans, Reader in Dutch and Head, School of Languages and Cultures at the University of Sheffield, for the analysis of the Dutch voice on the travelling fun-fair, and for discussion on cultural impact.

References

Braithwaite, D. (1968), *Fairground Architecture*, London: Hugh Evelyn.

—— (1975), *Savage of King's Lynn: Inventor of Machines and Merry-go-rounds*, Cambridge: Patrick Stephens.

Brown, F. (2001), *Fairground Strollers and Showfolk*, Taunton: Ronda Books.

Cain, R., Jennings, P., Poxon, J. (2013), 'The development and application of the emotional dimensions of a soundscape', *Applied Acoustics*, 74, pp. 232-9.

Cameron, D. K. (1998), *The English Fair*, Stroud, Gloucestershire: Sutton.

Dallas, D. (1971), *The Travelling People*, London: Macmillan.

Deleuze, G. (1989), *Cinema 2: The Time Image*, London: Athlone Press.

DeNora, T. (2000), *Music in Everyday Life,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lukas, S. A. (2007), How the theme park gets its power: Lived theming, social control, and the themed worker self', in S. Lukas (ed), *The Themed Space: Locating Culture, Nature and Self*, Plymouth: Lexington Books, pp. 183-206.

Nye, D. E. (1996), *American Technological Sublime*, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press.

Priestley, J.B. (1934), *English Journey*, London: Heinemann.

Schafer, R. M. (1994) *The Soundscape: The Tuning of the World*, Rochester, VT: Destiny Books.

Starsmore, I. (1975), *English Fairs*, London: Thames and Hudson.

Toulmin, V. (2003), *Pleasurelands*, Hastings: The Projection Box.

Trowell, I. (2017a), forthcoming Atmosphere Creator chapter, details to follow

—— (2017b), forthcoming Photographies article, details to follow

Truax, B. (2001), *Acoustic Communication*, Westport, CT: Ablex Publishing.

Walker, S. (2013), 'Centre or periphery? The architecture of the travelling street fair', in R. Morrow (ed), *Peripheries*, Oxford: Routledge, pp. 54-66.

—— (2015), 'Illusory objects and fairground architecture', *The Journal of Architecture*, 20:2, pp. 309-54

Walvin, J. (1984), *English Urban Life 1776-1851*, London: Hutchinson.

Weedon, G. and Ward, R. (1981), *Fairground Art*, London: White Mouse Editions.