The Dark Side of the Moon as an Urban Landscape

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"Soundscape" is a term we've all grown familiar with in a general sense. But to R. Murray Schafer, it had very specific and powerful meanings. Schafer's understanding of the term was synoptic – it encompassed all the sounds in any acoustic environment, be it a radio program, city, forest, or musical composition.[1] It is therefore insufficient to remark on the fact that a given sonic experience embodies a distinctive soundscape – they all do! What's much more interesting are the precise ways we understand and interact with a soundscape – the how and why of its nature.

Schafer's landmark book on the subject is, in large part, devoted to explaining the methods of soundscape analysis. In this sense it is a practical manual – he provides many examples of how one might go about making sense of a soundscape, regardless of its nature. He is not shy to point out, however, that his motivations are neither purely scientific nor scholarly. There is a deep political agenda at work – Schafer viewed the ever-expanding influence of mechanized urban life with disdain, blaming it for a general degradation of both quality of life and listening habits in modern society. Careful consideration of the urban soundscape was therefore meant to draw attention to detrimental forces at work. Responsible sound-conscious legislation, grass-root efforts to beautify our aural surroundings, and the propagation of "ear cleaning," Schafer's brand of retraining peoples' listening habits, are among his explicit goals.

Popular music, undeniably a component of the urban soundscape, receives some attention. Suffice it to say that it does not seem to be Schafer's cup of tea.[2] But neither is he completely dismissive; it is music, after all. In fact, it is music with some particularly exciting properties. He asserts that popular music is the current holder of "the Sacred Noise,"[3] a sound typified by expressions of religious ecstasy, that, through theft or fiat, has changed hands many times over the years. Moreover, pop music's emphasis of low-frequency sound causes "the listener [to seem] immersed in it."[4] Headphone listening takes the effect to its

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[1] R. Murray Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World* (Rochester: Destiny Books, 1994), 7.

[2] E.g., "Thus, the 'good vibes' of the sixties, which promised an alternative life style, traveled a well-known road, which finally led from Leeds to Liverpool; for what was happening was that the new counterculture, typified by Beatlemania, was actually stealing the Sacred Noise from the camp of the industrialists and setting it up in the hearts and communes of the hippies." Schafer, 115.

[3] Schafer, 115.

[4] Schafer, 116.

extreme by creating "the ultimate private acoustic space."[5] Likening the experience to that of chanting *Om*, he suggests a headphone listener "is no longer surrounded by a sphere of moving elements. He *is* the sphere. He is the universe."[6]

Since countless listeners have reported similar feelings in response to *The Dark Side of the Moon*, the album's candidacy for soundscape analysis is readily apparent.[7] In undertaking the task, I recognize that this is another of many attempts at making sense of the album's large-scale form. For the sake of time, I'll only mention two particularly relevant precedents. In *The Space Between the Notes*, Sheila Whiteley situates the album within a countercultural context, but also emphasizes the experiential components of its contents.[8] Kevin Holm-Hudson has done so as well, but through the lens of film theory.[9] Both of these studies privilege aspects of the musical surface more so than underlying tonal or temporal structures, and I intend to do the same. But by working with the methods of soundscape analysis, I will more greatly stress the role of space in the album. Spatial immersion was part of the band's *modus operandi* from the beginning.[10] *Dark Side* began its life as a live performance, engineered to transport audience members to some other place. To accomplish this, they developed a style that privileged breadth of sound and experience. Traditional forms, packed dense with information, couldn't do this. So instead came the idea to let the music breathe slowly, thereby allowing listeners to sink into it rather than worry about what was happening from moment to moment.

At the core of Pink Floyd's new sound, which the studio made even more potent, was the pervasive and steady presence of the band's voices and instruments. Table 1 provides an overview of the sonic actors on *Dark Side of the Moon*. You'll notice that the full group is present on every track but one. (More on that later). What is not as obvious is the fact that the sonic presentation of the band is remarkably consistent. The production staff, led by Alan Parsons and Chris Thomas, did an extraordinary job of rendering a sense of stability despite the band's penchant for dynamic sound and spatial effects.

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[5] Schafer, 118.

[6] Schafer, 119.

[7] E.g., Nigel Williamson's observation that "after Syd [Barrett] had gone, the music became more kind of soundscapes than songs." "Set Controls for the Heart of the Sun," *Pink Floyd: The Making of the Dark Side of the Moon*, directed by Matthew Longfellow (London: Eagle Rock Entertainment Ltd., 2003), DVD.

[8] Sheila Whiteley, *The Space Between the Notes: Rock and the Counter-Culture* (London: Routledge, 1992).

[9] Kevin J. Holm-Hudson, " 'Worked out within the grooves': the sound and structure of *The Dark Side of the Moon*," in *'Speak to Me': The Legacy of Pink Floyd's* The Dark Side of the Moon, ed. Russell Reising (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 69-88.

[10] David Fricke: "it was always about leaving space." "Us and Them," *Pink Floyd: The Making of the Dark Side of the Moon*.

One result of this ubiquitous and predictable presence is a change in function for the band. Ostensibly their sound should be the center of attention, and their contributions should be responsible for creating a large-scale sense of formal direction. But from the perspective of soundscape analysis, I argue that they are not. At least not all the time. One of Schafer's central concepts in soundscape analysis is that of the "keynote sound." These are sounds that

> "do not have to be listened to consciously; they are overheard but cannot be overlooked, for keynote sounds become listening habits in spite of themselves…Even though keynote sounds may not always be heard consciously, the fact that they are ubiquitously there suggests the possibility of a deep and pervasive influence on our behavior and moods. The keynote sounds of a given place are important because they help to outline the character of men living among them."[11]

While the keynote sounds of an urban environment might be the hum of electricity, traffic, and industry, I suggest that in the soundscape of *Dark Side* it is the band that supplies them. Like city sounds, those of the band are continuous and evolving; they can be focused upon or ignored; and they characterize the acoustic foundation of the environment.[12]

Framing the band in this way requires us to search for formal markers elsewhere; if their sounds are at the hierarchical level of keynote, it correspondingly deemphasizes the importance of the traditionally essential parameters they convey, such as harmony, text, and meter. Such aspects of the music are still important for defining the nature of the local environment, but privileging sound in the abstract means using it as the arbiter of formal structure.

Aside from the sounds of Pink Floyd themselves, there is a small population of other sonic actors on the album. Table 1 also names these, but I would like to direct your attention to figure 1b, located on page 4 of the handout. This timbral timeline of the album's B-side graphically justifies the keynote status of the band sound, but also demonstrates the careful foregrounding of other sounds. In order, we are introduced to sound effects, the tenor saxophone, female backing vocals, and the synthesizer (I'll briefly touch on speech later. And though I say "introduced," fear not: we'll return to the A-side in a bit). Each of these sounds is temporally, spatially, and acoustically isolated from the band, lending them unique aural significance and attracting attention. As their prominence is asserted, they attain the status of soundmarks – Schafer's aural-equivalent to the landmark. For example, the synthesizer's prominent placement in "Any

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[11] Schafer, 9.

[12] For the sake of time, I will here omit a discussion about lo-fi and hi-fi soundscapes. As in the city, the volume and density of information provided by the band reasonably implies a lo-fi soundscape.

Colour You Like" is almost completely responsible for establishing the aural identity of that song. Trying to discuss the aural experience of it without acknowledgement of the synthesizer would, in visual terms, be akin to describing the old Vegas strip without using the word "neon." And imagine what the experience of this song would be like had the synthesizer parts been played by the more familiar sounds of David Gilmour's guitars or Richard Wright's organ. With no separation between "Any Colour You Like" and the adjacent tracks of "Us and Them" and "Brain Damage," a significant degree of aural distinctiveness would be lost. Shaugn O'Donnell's analysis of the song as a dramatization of the album's structural dominant would, indeed, be its sole functional purpose.[13] But, given its overt timbral reference to "On the Run," the third track on the A-side, I contend that the song marks a significant formal event in the journey of the album – a major point of return. Revisiting the synthesizer at this point explicitly joins these two tracks across the divides of time and space. In this sense it is far more than a conveyor of dominant function. It is also an aural recapitulation, finally contextualizing one of the album's most disruptive sonic moments within a now thoroughly established environment.

Such moments, and the nature of soundmarks in general, bring with them important spatial implications. Soundmarks are tied to both space and place. They originate from specific locations in an environment, and establish spheres of influence. Schafer calls them "community sounds,"[14] and sound scholars such as Andrew Eisenberg have demonstrated the centripetal nature of soundmarks in specific real-world environments.[15] Aided by production parameters, such as reverb, mix, and panning, it is possible to locate ourselves in relation to soundmarks with remarkable precision as the album progresses. Figure 2b attempts to map the listening experience of the album's B-side accordingly. In Schafer's terms, we might dub this diagram a sound map, or aerial sonograph – one of the main tools of soundscape analysis. I should mention that the map reflects my own subjective reading of the space. Soundscape analysis allows for this, with Schafer going so far as to say that "*all visual projections of sounds are arbitrary and fictitious*."[16] Given the virtual nature of *Dark Side*'s landscape, some creative interpretation of the album's space is necessary. It also proves very handy for some of the album's more challenging sonic moments.

As implied by the timeline and sonograph, the B-side of *Dark Side* is spatially, and therefore formally straight-forward. Soundmarks are encountered in order, with examples of overlap that are easily

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[13] Shaugn O'Donnell, " 'On the path': tracing tonal coherence in *The Dark Side of the Moon*," in *'Speak to Me': The Legacy of Pink Floyd's* The Dark Side of the Moon, ed. Russell Reising (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 97.
[14] Schafer, 10.
[15] Andrew J. Eisenberg, "Islam, Sound, and Space: Acoustemology and Muslim Citizenship on the Kenyon Coast," in *Music, Sound, and Space: Transformations of Public and Private Experience*, ed. Georgina Born (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 186-202.
[16] Schafer, 127.

reconcilable in space. The A-side, however, is problematic. Consider figure 1a. "On the Run" is notable for containing the only significant dropout of band sounds on the album. Even the running high-hat sounds, though represented as such on the timeline, are rendered by synthesizers (I have included them on the figures in acknowledgement of their aural similarity to the real thing, and the fact that the high-hat sounds were consistently played by Nick Mason during what was known as "The Travel Section" during the album's pre-recording live phase.)[17] While keynote sounds are permitted to evolve, it is distressing for them to disappear altogether. The implication is that we are not occupying the same space we had been previously. But since *The Dark Side of the Moon* is a complete physical unit, the space of "On the Run" is a patch through which we must necessarily move before we can rejoin familiar ground. Paradoxically, it is part of the whole. On figure 2a, the aerial sonograph of the A-side, I have attempted to represent this passage as existing outside of normal space – a distinctly non-Euclidean perturbation to an otherwise unproblematic environment.

Aside from the anomaly of "On the Run," though, the life of the A-side is not particularly dissimilar from that of the B-side. Indeed, it is reasonable to question the value of aerial sonography at this point – both figures 2a and 2b are effectively spatialized timelines. But record sides usually don't grow alone, and in the case of *The Dark Side of the Moon*, they are intimately paired. With the sole exception of the saxophone, there is a one-to-one correlation between the soundmarks of the A- and B-sides. Spatially, this suggests that the complete album comprises a single landscape. It is an integral whole, full of spatial and sonic self-reference.

Figure 3 attempts to spatially reconcile the environment implied by the album's aural unity. Now, the journey from moment to moment appears much less linear. The frequent recurrence of women's voices on both sides of the album, for example, suggests multiple returns to a distinct part of the map – formal returns after several intervening trips. That each visit is musically different makes sense – people and sounds change, after all. One of the album's most critical crossings, that of "The Great Gig in the Sky," brings with it a profoundly close encounter with Clare Torry. Sheila Whiteley asserted that her wordless vocals "[raise] questions concerning the tensions between sexual/religious ecstasy, the fear of dying and the seduction of eternity."[18] And how does it do that? "Through an erotic exploration of sonic space."[19] This suggests one of

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[17] E.g., "Pink Floyd – The Dark Side of the Moon – Live 1972," YouTube, accessed October 28, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=owoUUU1fmgY.

[18] Sheila Whiteley, "Prismatic passion: the enigma of the 'The Great Gig in the Sky,' " in *'Speak to Me': The Legacy of Pink Floyd's* The Dark Side of the Moon, ed. Russell Reising (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 143.

[19] Ibid.

two immersions within a neighborhood defined by women's voices, the other being the concluding pair of "Brain Damage" and "Eclipse," where at last the singers pronounce actual words.

"On the Run," meanwhile, retains its irrational position, hovering somewhere outside the space of the album like a wormhole. A wormhole with a shadow, though. We get close to it again during "Any Colour You Like," close enough to feel an affinity for the space, but this time the band keeps us securely grounded.

The arrows included on this diagram relay the path through which we are led over the course of the album. In effect, we can now understand the large-scale form of the album as a soundwalk through this thriving urban environment. The Floyd thus performed two critical roles: they fabricated the space, but also act as our guides through it. Listening to the album in full means following their lead over a curated journey that, through repetition, reinforces the unique identity of the album's space and generates a compelling overall experience. Returning to soundmarks not only means returning to a place, but also engaging the memory as we make note of connections to past and future experiences. It is in this way that the album's form is developed over time – with each sonic encounter, we get a better sense of the environment and our relationship with it. Critical formal moments become those of maximal sonic awareness, either through forced perspective or cognitive resonance. The sudden cut of all reverb after the first guitar solo in "Money," for example, might represent a kind of caesura – a pause in the walk to ponder cracks in the pavement. Or consider the ultimate acoustic apotheoses of "Brain Damage" and "Eclipse." The whole album, our grand tour of the Dark Side's landscape, finally brings us to this moment of maximal acoustic information and reference. It is the climactic arrival, like emerging from the Tube into a bright Piccadilly Circus, packed with fellow travelers, after a long day of wandering.

These are events *Dark Side* is always prepared to give us – listening to the album from start to finish is merely one particularly effective way of experiencing them. Extracting a song or side, for example, or replaying a moment in the mind are completely acceptable practices. They simply represent quicker trips. Though I'd venture a guess that most listeners familiar with the album might have a hard time *not* thinking about how any given excerpt relates to the whole. That, I believe, is the ultimate strength of soundscape analysis. It validates individual perspectives and listening priorities while alluding to the album's communal properties and demonstrating what binds it all together.

Before my time is up, I'd like to consider the particularly unique perspective of album architect Roger Waters. For him, the patch of grass off which loonies are kept in "Brain Damage" was a real place – a lawn in Cambridge, which is still festooned with cautionary signs in multiple languages.[20] Spaces and places

[20] "Brain Damage Bonus," *Pink Floyd: The Making of the Dark Side of the Moon.*

were integral to the development of his ideas about the album. I haven't mentioned specific lyrics or the album's concept in this paper, and I won't start now. But I'll offer this one explanation by Waters:

> "There are a number of things that impinge upon an individual that color his view of existence. There are pressures that are capable of pushing you in one direction or another, and these are some of them, and whether they push you towards sanity, death, empathy, greed, whatever, there's something about the Newtonian view of that physics that might be interesting, and it may be that it could be that this is what this record is about."[21]

Though he was using it as a metaphor, I find his invocation of physics highly enticing. Newton was primarily interested in the way things interact *in space*. An urban environment is one where people and technology interact with each other through the mediating forces of culture, politics, and economics. With its emphatic interrogations of all these ideas, *The Dark Side of the Moon* is an urban landscape *par excellence*; one where each of us, as citizens, has the opportunity to experience it in whatever way we like. And, as in any great city, there is a multitude of voices represented! We hear them sporadically, sometimes clearly, sometimes not, but always acting as reminders of our shared experience on this planet. It is not a coincidence that heartbeats[22] gradually usher us in at the start, and allow for a gentle egress at the album's end. If we are each introspective universes while listening to this album, then it is only natural for the space to both inflate from and collapse onto this universal keynote of humanity.

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[21] "Echoes," *Pink Floyd: The Making of the Dark Side of the Moon.*

[22] Actually Nick Mason's bass drum.

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Track	Length	Core band sounds	Other significant sounds
Speak to Me	1:15	Only percussion	Effects, synth, speech
Breathe	2:44	Full band	None
On the Run	3:33	Only percussion, occasional distorted guitar	Synth-driven, with effects and speech
Time	7:07	Full band; begins with album's only gap in band sound	Effects, female backing vocals
The Great Gig in the Sky	4:44	Full band; mostly keys and bass	Female lead vocals, speech
Money	6:32	Full band	Last effects, saxophone, speech
Us and Them	7:41	Full band	Saxophone, female backing vocals, speech
Any Colour You Like	3:26	Full band, except vocals	Synth-driven
Brain Damage	3:51	Full band	Female backing vocals (with lyrics!), speech, synth
Eclipse	2:05	Full band	Female backing vocals, speech

Table 1: The tracks of *The Dark Side of the Moon* and their principal sonic markers.

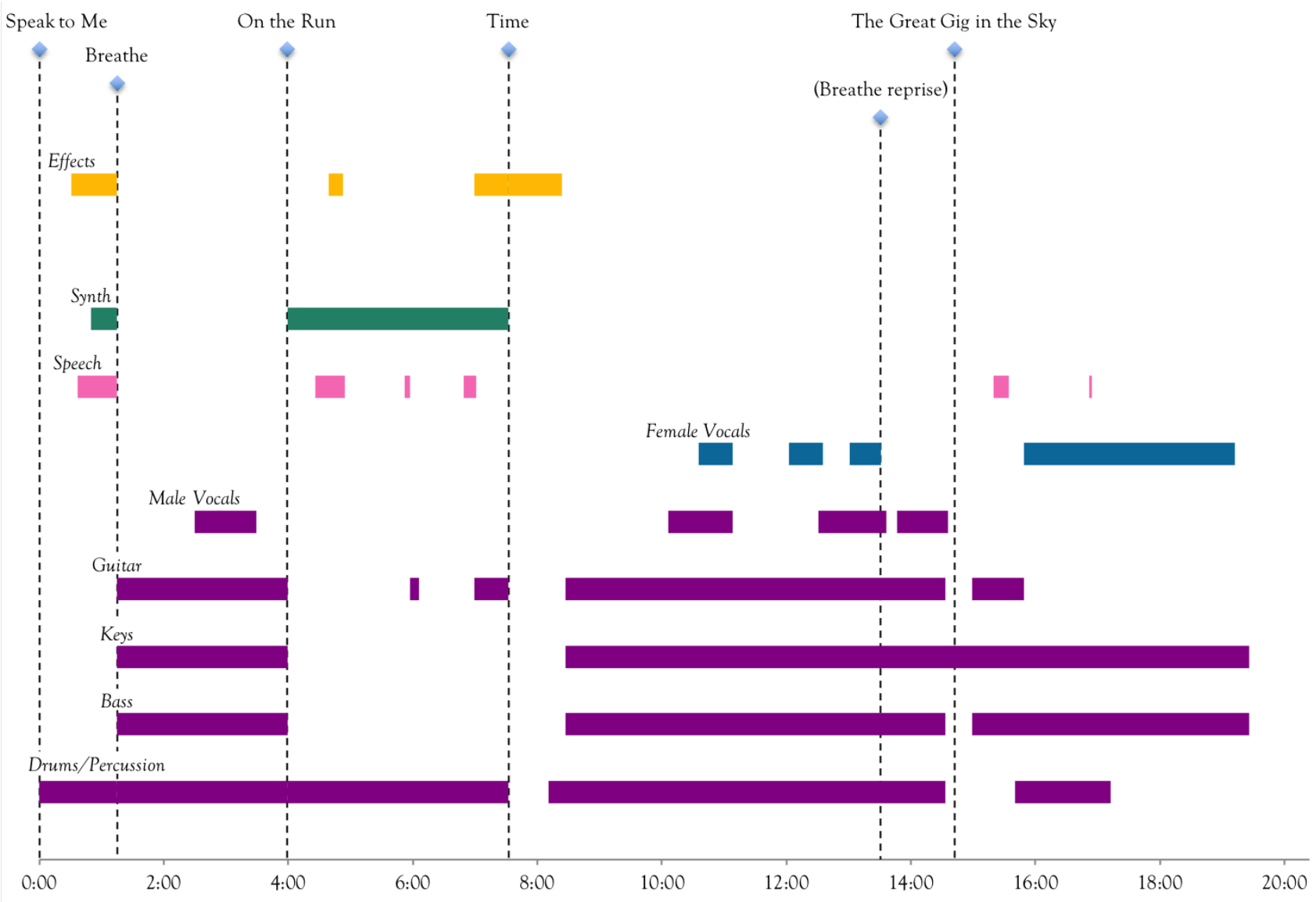

Figure 1a: sound event timeline for side A of *The Dark Side of the Moon*. Gaps less than ca. 10 seconds are shown as continuous. No distinction is made between different instruments within the same family (e.g., piano vs. organ) or multiple tracks of the same instrument.

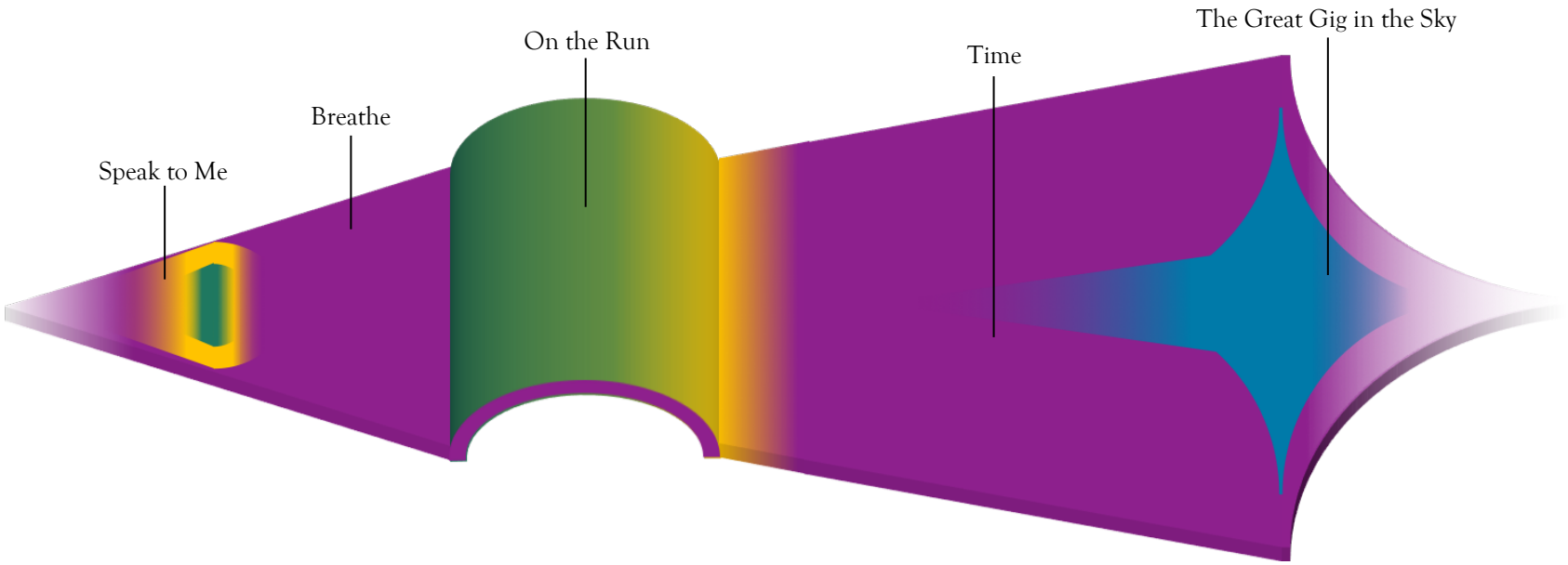

Figure 2a: aerial sonograph (sound map) of *Dark Side's* A-side. Colors correspond to those associated with timbres in figure 1. Speech clips have been omitted for the sake of visual simplicity.

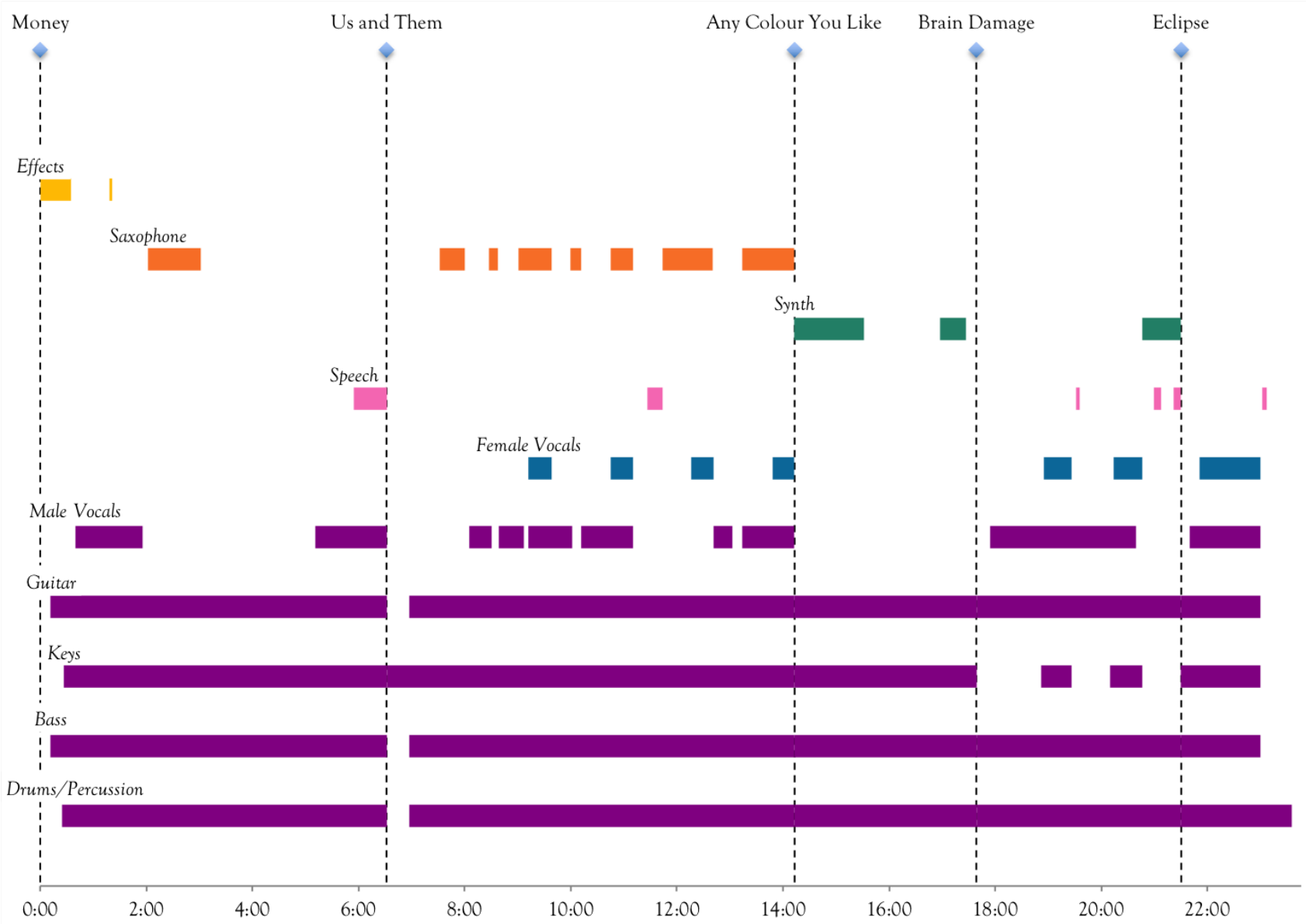

Figure 1b: sound event timeline for side B of *The Dark Side of the Moon*. Temporal and acoustic conditions are identical to those used in Figure 1.

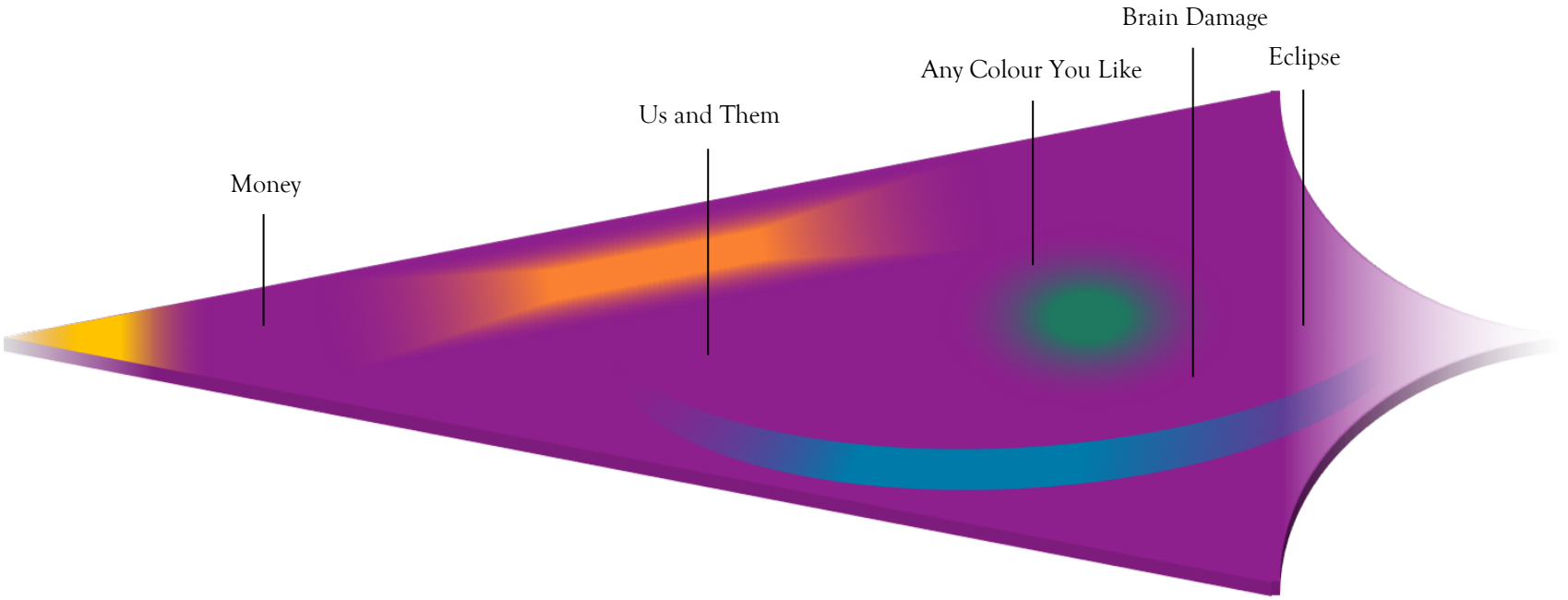

Figure 2b: aerial sonograph (sound map) of *Dark Side's* B-side. Colors and conditions are identical to those of figure 2a.

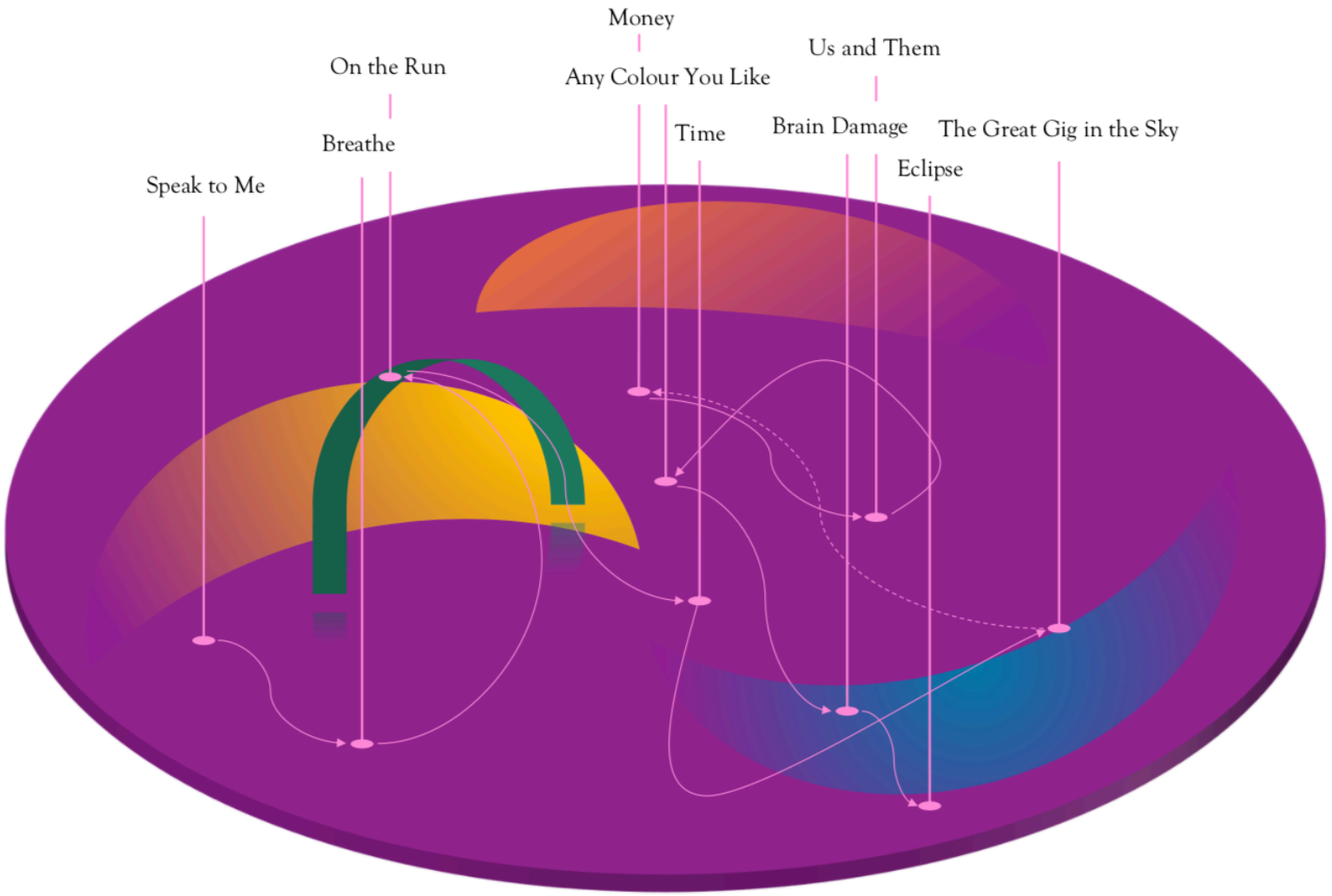

Figure 3: aerial sonograph of the complete album. Colors are as above, though pink is used here purely for labeling (not for speech). Arrows indicate a soundwalk trajectory through the album according to running order. A dashed arrow is used to indicate the side break between "The Great Gig in the Sky" and "Money."

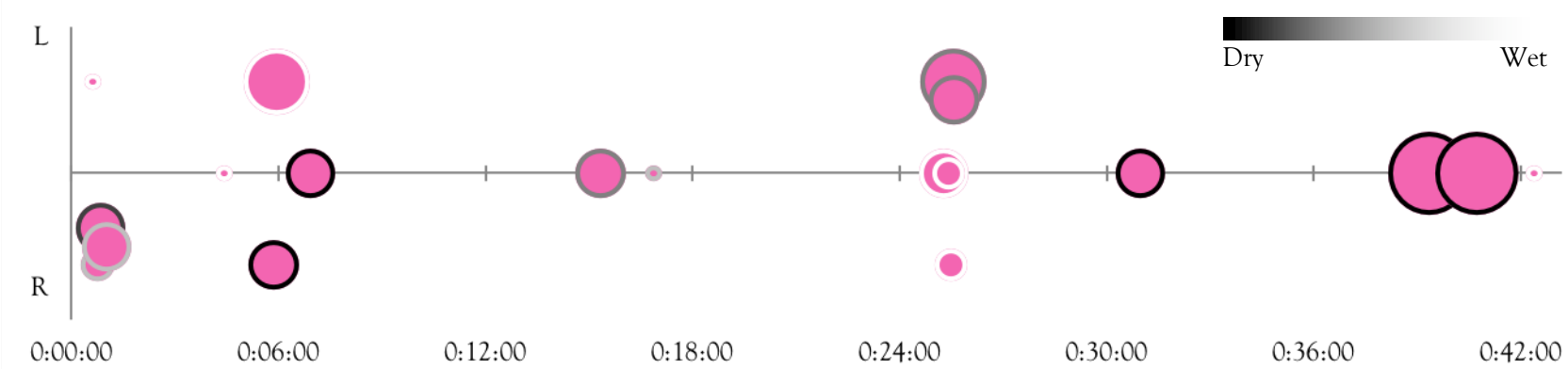

Figure 4: approximate spatial distribution of spoken word excerpts. Times correspond to the beginning of each excerpt. Bubble size and outline shading convey relative volume and applied reverb, respectively. This gives a quasi-objective mapping of each excerpt's placement in three-dimensional space.

Male Vocals	David Gilmour*	Female Vocals	Clare Torry ("Great Gig in the Sky")
	Richard Wright*		Doris Troy
	Roger Waters*		Lesley Duncan
Guitars	David Gilmour*		Liza Strike
Keyboards	Richard Wright*		Barry St. John
Bass	Roger Waters*	Speech	Various denizens of Abbey Road
Drums/Percussion	Nick Mason*	Production	Alan Parsons
Synthesizers/Effects	Pink Floyd		Peter James
Saxophone	Dick Parry		Chris Thomas

Table 2: main album personnel. Asterisks indicate members of the band.

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