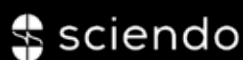


Article

# The Silences of Skåne: Sonic Representations of Space and Place in the *Wallander* Novels and Films



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## ABSTRACT

The depiction of regional surroundings and natural conditions have often been seen as providing a sense of melancholy in Nordic noir, the distinctive form of crime fiction from the Nordic region, but also as a means to reflect the psychology of the characters and the socially critical themes of the narratives. In this regard, the Wallander novels, written by Henning Mankell (1948–2015), and also films and television series based on Mankell's literature have often been given as prime examples. Thus far, however, sounds have not been taken into consideration in the matter. Sounds are an important factor in creating spatial experience and a sense of place in film, television, and literature. This article takes a comparative look at *Wallander* films and literature to examine sounds in the representation of Skåne, the main location of *Wallander*. It finds that characteristic regional sounds – especially silence, considered here a soundscape and a subjective spatial experience – play an important role in the *Wallander* novels but less so in the films, which leads to notable differences regarding the representation of Skåne and the characterisation of the main protagonist, Kurt Wallander, but also affects the narrative structure of the films.

**KEYWORDS:** Nordic noir, soundscape, Kurt Wallander, adaptation studies, acoustemology

## INTRODUCTION

Created by the Swedish author and playwright Henning Mankell (1948–2015), Kurt Wallander is one of the most famous figures in Nordic noir, the distinctive form of crime fiction from the Nordic countries, in both literary and audiovisual formats. He is a melancholic, moody, and pessimistic police inspector, an ageing, divorced man with health problems and bad eating and drinking habits. He has one daughter, Linda, and a problematic relationship with his

father, an elderly painter who has never approved of his son becoming a policeman. He lives and works in Ystad in the province of Skåne, by the sea on the southernmost coast of Sweden. He investigates murders (the crime is always murder) that – especially in the novels – lead him to mull over existential and moral questions as well as to contemplate the present condition and the future of Sweden.

It has often been pointed out that, in Nordic noir, the depiction of Nordic

landscapes and natural conditions is a central aesthetic feature (see, for example, Waade & Jensen 2013: 191; Eichner & Mikos 2016: 19). Such discussions also tend to emphasise that the landscapes symbolically reflect the story content as well as the psychological disposition of the protagonist, and *Wallander*, in both literary and audiovisual form, has often been considered in this regard (see, for example, Reijnders 2009: 172; McCorristine 2011: 81; Creeber 2015: 26). However, in their discussions on space and place in *Wallander* (and in Nordic noir in general), scholars have so far considered them as solely visual phenomena. However, in film and television, as in life, sounds are an essential constituent in forming spatial experience and a sense of place. But, although it remains a less well-established fact, so they are also in literature.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, this article asks: (a) how do sounds partake in the experience of space and place in the *Wallander* novels and films and (b) what is their narrative significance in this regard? Additionally, with especially the influence of sounds considered, this article asks: (c) how the representation of Skåne in the *Wallander* novels and films corresponds with the actual geographical place, and (d) is there aesthetic continuity from one narrative and expressive form to another in this case? Moreover, I re-evaluate how the *Wallander* films fit the general conception of audiovisual Nordic noir in light of the above research questions.

Kurt Wallander has appeared in a total of twelve novels written by Mankell between 1991 and 2009 and in two Swedish film/television series, one based on the novels (*Wallander*, 1995–2007; starring Rolf Lassgård) and one with two episodes based on the novels and others on short stories written by Mankell exclusively for the production (*Wallander*, 2005–2013;

starring Krister Henriksson). A British television series was also made (*Wallander*, 2008–2016), a “‘re-imagining’ for British and American audiences” (Peacock 2011: 37), with Kenneth Branagh in the title role.<sup>2</sup> In this study, I focus on the first season of the second Swedish series – a choice made for both theoretical and pragmatic reasons. As I also examine *Wallander* in the context of Nordic noir, which I understand here as a primarily Nordic form of expression as well as a form of Nordic self-expression,<sup>3</sup> this rules out the British *Wallander* series, which, as Anne Marit Waade observes, presents “a ‘Swedishness’ constructed according to a particular British point of view” (2011: 48). Of the two Swedish series, I chose the second one, as it is the one usually associated with the rise of audiovisual Nordic noir, but – as there are a total of thirty-two episodes – to keep the workload feasible, I chose to focus only on the first season. Of the novels, for reasons explained below, I concentrate on the fifth novel of the series, *Sidetracked* (1999; Swedish original *Villospår*, 1995).

My methodological framework consists of various interlocking qualitative orientations and approaches. Firstly, I *close read* the literal and audiovisual texts, by which I mean critical and reflective analysis that aims to “elucidate the aesthetic experiences and attendant cultural meanings of the objects, events, or performances that are its principal focus” (Richardson 2016b: 112), in this case, sounds as constituents in the perception and experience of space and place by the audio-viewer/reader and by Kurt Wallander himself. On the whole, my approach can be called *acoustemological*. Coined by anthropologist Steven Feld, acoustemology “conjoins ‘acoustics’ and ‘epistemology’ to theorize sound as a way of knowing. In doing so, it inquires into what is knowable, and

1 In recent decades, several scholars have discussed sounds in the representation of space and place in literature (see, for example, Adams 1989; Picker 2003; Halliday 2013; Frattarola 2018; Chowdury 2020), but, to my knowledge, other studies that compare particular literary works and their audiovisual adaptations in this regard have not yet been done.

2 In 2020, also *Young Wallander* was released on Netflix, a series set in present-day Malmö but with a younger version of Wallander (portrayed by Adam Pålsson).

3 In academic literature, Nordic noir has been understood in a variety of ways: a style, a brand, and a genre, an international but also a particularly Nordic phenomenon, often depending on the given research aims and questions.

how it becomes known, through sounding and listening” (Feld 2015: 12).

Acoustemology is a central concept in soundscape studies (Chieng & Chan 2021), a research field engaged mainly in the study of real-world sound environments (see, for example, Järviuoma & Wagstaff 2002; Kytö et al. 2012). However, as also Marie-Laure Ryan points out, not only real-world environments but also literary and cinematic storyworlds invite *cognitive mapping*, that is, the formation of an internal representation of the external environment in the mind of an individual (2018: 239), and while arguing that sounds “make space” also in literary works, Julie Beth Napolin succinctly remarks that “where there is ‘world,’ there is an acoustical relation to space and place” (2020: 18). Therefore, Feld’s observation that experiences of the environment “can always be grounded in an acoustic relation” (1996: 97) applies also to literary and audiovisual worlds, both of which – although literary representations of sounds are not auditory phenomena – can be “listened to” and approached acoustemologically.<sup>4</sup>

There is an additional dimension to represented places, however. As Kim Toft Hansen and Anne Marit Waade point out, the meaning of place in a cinematic context is a combination of the real-world place (filming location), its representation, and the place as imagined by the audience (2017: 41). Especially in a socially critical crime drama such as *Wallander* the connections between the real-world Skåne and its storyworld representations must also be considered. This means adopting aspects also from *location studies*, the methodological framework devised by Hansen and Waade for studying the various issues related to the complex matter of locations in audiovisual media (ibid.: 53–76), only augmenting it to include also sounds as a factor and applying it to not only the *Wallander* films but also the literary works.

However, to be able to evaluate the connections between the representation and the represented and also how the sounds of the geographical place may have informed or influenced the representation of Skåne in *Wallander* novels and films, it was necessary to also experience the soundscapes of Skåne first-hand. Therefore, between 4–9 June 2022, I travelled to Skåne together with professional film sound designer and recordist Janne Jankeri. For close analysis and to act as our main guide on this excursion, I chose the novel *Sidetracked*, as it is set at the end of June and the beginning of July, closest to the time of year when our visit to Skåne took place. For this reason, the observations regarding the *Wallander* novels presented here are mainly from this particular book, but they could just as well be from any of the others, as Mankell’s literary style remains largely the same throughout the cycle. During these four days (and also nights) of our excursion, we listened to the soundscapes of Ystad and the surrounding countryside and made recordings that I could return to if necessary – comparable to *soundwalking*, an empirical method in, again, soundscape studies that emphasises the experience of acoustic environments, originally devised by acoustic ecologist R. Murray Schafer (1977: 212–213). We visited several locations appearing in *Sidetracked* but also many other randomly chosen places around the southern parts of Skåne. Also, our apartment during our stay was at Mariagatan 12, in central Ystad, which is next door to Wallander’s home address in the novels, Mariagatan 10 (in the first season of the second *Wallander* series, Mariagatan 11C, on the opposite side of the street, is used as Wallander’s home building).

This article proceeds as follows. First, in the next two sections, I will present close readings of the *Wallander* novels and films, in that order, with also insight from the Skåne “soundwalk” as well as other geographical and historical aspects pertaining to Skåne outside the storyworld of *Wallander*. Then, in the following section, I will present a comparative analysis of the

4 Other studies on film sound with an acoustemological approach already exist, but they are yet rare (see MacDonald 2013; Have 2018).

two and discuss my observations in light of prior Nordic noir research. The last section is reserved for concluding remarks.

### THE SILENCES OF THE WALLANDER NOVELS

He lies still in the darkness and listens. His wife's breathing at his side is so faint that he can scarcely hear it. [...] Why did I wake up? he asks himself. Usually I sleep till 5.30. I've done that for more than 40 years. Why did I wake up now? He listens to the darkness and suddenly he is wide awake. Something is different. Something has changed. [...] He listens intently to the darkness. The horse, he thinks. She's not neighing. That's why I woke up. Normally the mare whinnies at night. [...] Carefully he gets up from the creaky bed. [...] He can feel his left knee aching as he crosses the wooden floor to the window. [...] He looks out into the winter night. It's 7 January 1990, and no snow has fallen in Skåne this winter. The lamp outside the kitchen door casts its glow across the yard, the bare chestnut tree, and the fields beyond. He squints towards the neighbouring farm where the Lövgrens live [...] He listens to the darkness. The bed creaks behind him. [...] All these years, he has cast an occasional glance at his neighbour's window. Now something looks different. [...] A window that has always been closed at night is open. And the mare hasn't whinnied at all (Mankell 2002: 1–3).

This excerpt from the beginning of *Faceless Killers* (Swedish original *Mördare utan ansikte*, 1991), the first *Wallander* novel, is a poignant example of how “silence can be the loudest of noises, just as black [...] can be the brightest of colors,” to quote film director Alberto Cavalcanti (1985: 111). But first and foremost, the excerpt

exemplifies one central argument of this article, that silence is a soundscape. In everyday language, silence is understood as the opposite of sound – “complete quietness or stillness; an absence of all sound or noise,” according to the OED.<sup>5</sup> But such understanding misses what is essential about silence. According to film sound theorist Michel Chion, “silence is never a neutral emptiness. It is the negative of sound we've heard beforehand or imagined; it is the product of a contrast” (1994: 57). In other words, silence comes from sounds you could imagine to a space not being there or sounds that used to be there – or should be there – not being there anymore. Thus, silence is brought about from one's personal relationship to a given space. But perhaps even more importantly, as composer John Cage once pointed out: “There is no such thing as an empty space or an empty time. There is always something to see, something to hear. In fact, try as we may to make silence, we cannot” (1961: 8). Complete silence does not occur naturally on this planet, so silence too consists of sounds. And different spaces are silent in different ways. Thus, silence is a type of soundscape. There is always some space and time that we experience as silent due to certain sonic characteristics. Thus, it is more accurate to consider silence not as “an absence of sound” but as a type of subjective spatial experience. Béla Balázs also noted that “the experience of silence is essentially a space experience” (1986: 118). Of this also speaks the fact that silence is immeasurable; you can measure quietness, you can measure the amplitude of sound-waves, but you cannot measure silence because it connotes a personal experience, a personal relationship to space and place. This is also an essential aspect of the *Wallander* novels.

It is noteworthy that the very first thing that Mankell chooses to tell us about Skåne is its silence, which undoubtedly is one of its defining characteristics. Although

5 See *Oxford English Dictionary*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/4455164617>.

Skåne takes up only three per cent of Sweden's land area and is home to 1,4 million people, about a million of these people live in the metropolitan areas of Malmö and Helsingborg alone. There are also several smaller towns as well, like Ystad, many of them with populations of 10–40 thousand, and so, in terms of people, Skåne is quite empty. As mostly agricultural area already since medieval times, most of the trees in the southern parts of Skåne were cut down ages ago. Also, the agricultural reform in which each farm was assigned its own fields, known as the Great Partition (*storskifte* in Swedish, *isojako* in Finnish), was carried out in Skåne already in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, creating the vast empty plains dotted with farmsteads and small villages of a few dozen houses, and with narrow roads crisscrossing between them, that still exist today. In terms of sound, this means few sound sources, far apart, and with plenty of room for sound waves to travel undisturbed. For example, it is possible to hear a single car for minutes, driving somewhere between the fields, unseen. With flat, open plains, moisture and wind from the surrounding seas (Skåne is a roughly square-shaped area with the sea on three sides) travel easily through the area, and especially when there are crops on the fields, precipitation and wind rustling the vegetation can create a quiet hum or a drone, audible in the otherwise still environment.

There are over 400 parishes in Skåne,<sup>6</sup> most of them very small, practically always with a white-washed medieval church and a small village – or just a few houses – around it. That is also where the remaining small concentrations of trees likely are, trees for birds to nest in, and in the mating season, many smaller birds can be heard, but their sounds do not travel that far. However, the birds that can be heard from afar and year around are the “screeching flocks of crows” (Mankell 2002: 60). In fact, it is not a crow but a rook (*Corvus frugilegus*, *råka* in Swedish), but it sounds much the same,

and perhaps the most emblematic sound of Skåne is the rook cawing somewhere in the distance. Ninety per cent of all the rooks in Sweden, about 45 000 pairs, live in Skåne. Skåne is also south enough for them not to migrate, so their sound can be heard throughout the year.<sup>7</sup> They begin their day an hour before the dawn and continue an hour or so after the dusk.<sup>8</sup>

As in the above excerpt, the *Wallander* novels undoubtedly convey a strong sense of place and space. But it is noteworthy that Mankell rarely stops to describe in detail the visual aspects of places – to paint pictures, landscapes, as it were.<sup>9</sup> Instead, the author often evokes the landscape through descriptions of the sonic environment. With those little quiet sounds, for example, the wife's breathing and the creaks of the bed, Mankell highlights how quiet it is, and the sound of the horse *not neighing* is the soundscape that expands the diegetic<sup>10</sup> space from a little bedroom to the presence of the whole Skåne countryside. The reader is guided to imagine the silence, how it sounds and what it feels like to hear it. Arguably, due to our experiences of the encompassing nature of sounds, this also can provide the reader with a more profound experience of participation, of “being there,” and less so of being an outside observer. Sounds play an important role in what Steven Feld calls “the sense and sensuality of emplacement” (1996: 97) and in the experience of space-time. Feld writes: “[S]pace indexes the distribution of sounds, and time indexes the motion of sounds. Yet acoustic time is always

7 The other populous nonmigratory bird is the jackdaw (*Corvus monedula*), but with a higher yapping sound it is less sonorous.

8 <https://tomelilla.se/byggaboochmiljo/miljoochhallbarhet/miljoochklimat/viltvardochskydds jakt/rakor.2049.html>

9 In this article, the term “landscape” is not understood in the traditional sense as a landscape painting or a painting-like view seen from afar, but as it is defined by the European Landscape Convention: “an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors” (cited in Antrop 2013: 18). What is also important in this definition is that it uses the word “perception” as opposed to “vision.”

10 I use the term “diegetic” here as it is understood in audiovisual studies, that is, pertaining to the storyworld.

6 <http://socknar.se/landskap/skane>

spatialized; sounds are sensed as connecting points up and down, in and out, echo and reverb, point-source and diffuse. And acoustic space is likewise temporalized; sounds are heard moving, locating, placing points in time” (ibid.: 97–98). And the one particular sonic aspect in the novels that arises as predominant is silence. In *Sidetracked*, for example, there are dozens of instances where Mankell explicitly points out how silent a situation is, often accentuating it with a singular sound coming from somewhere in the distance, unseen, which simultaneously expands the radius of the experienced space from the close-by all the way to the sound source. As discussed above, such a sound does not cancel the silence but, on the contrary, makes it perceptible by articulating the absence of other sounds. The key to understanding the landscapes of Skåne in the *Wallander* novels is that these silences are an integral part of the landscapes the author paints. They give it space, distance, and character, but they are also the connective tissue between the persona of Kurt Wallander and the world he inhabits.

The silence of Skåne is very important to Wallander. In fact, you could say that he loves it. But this relationship is ambivalent. It is the source of his feelings of isolation, loneliness, and melancholy, his “metaphysical loneliness,” to use the concept by philosopher Lars Svendsen, “where one believes oneself doomed to be perpetually lonely, cut off from others because the world is structured so that we are all ultimately left to our own devices” (2017: 20). But the same silence is also something that he needs. This comes across well in the next two quotes:

Everything was quiet at the police station when he arrived. It was during this early, lonely hour, when the weary graveyard shift was on its way home and it was still too early for the daytime staff, that Wallander liked to walk down the corridor to his office. Life took on quite a special meaning in

this early morning solitude. [...] Rydberg, his old friend and mentor, had been the same way. Everyone has small but extremely personal sacred moments, Rydberg had told him once (Mankell 1999: 290).

Later, Wallander has such a moment:

At some point he had stood by the shore at night and listened to the sounds of the thousands of invisible migrating birds that already had begun their journey southward. It had been a moment of great loneliness, but also of great beauty, and of knowing for certain that something was now over and something else would follow (1995: 420).<sup>11</sup>

Moreover, silence is important not just to Wallander personally, but also professionally. Naturally, he needs it to concentrate and to think, and he has his go-to places to find it – for example, his favourite bench on the pier in Ystad marina for smaller boats, the one by the red Sea Rescue Shack (which, incidentally, is today painted white). But silence is also a source of information to him; it tells him things. The next quote from *Sidetracked* explains Wallander’s idea of listening to the silence as a forensic tool:

Cops had to be able to listen, and do it at least as well as they had supposedly mastered the difficult art of questioning. Cops always had to listen for hidden meanings and motives that might not be obvious. They had to be able to listen for the invisible impressions left by perpetrators. [...] Something is always left behind after a crime is committed, something that was not seen and could not

11 For some reason a large part of Mankell’s writing has been omitted from the epilogue of *Sidetracked*, the English translation of *Villospår*, including these sentences. This is my own translation from the Swedish original.

be detected by the brushes of the technicians. An experienced detective should be able to listen his way to what it was. The perpetrator may not have forgotten his shoes, but maybe he did leave his thoughts behind (1999: 305).

Earlier in the novel, Wallander has already put this idea into practice as he enters a crime scene with his colleague, Ann-Britt Höglund: “When they were standing in the entryway listening to the silence, Wallander had told Höglund to take off her shoes. Now they padded soundlessly through the big villa, which seemed to grow larger with each step they took” (1999: 52). So, Wallander is fully aware that you do not get the full picture just by looking at the world around you. Presumably Mankell knew this, too, as he created a police inspector who listens to the world around him, who listens to silence. From these excerpts, it is clear that to Wallander, silence is anything but “absence.” To him, it is a crucial aspect of observing and perceiving the world, but also a personal way of being in the world.

There is also another kind of silence that occurs often in the *Wallander* novels: people not speaking to each other. There is a fair amount of dialogue in these novels, but it also often happens that people just stay quiet, not saying anything, sometimes for long periods of time – even though in literature it can pass in a line or two. Scholars have recognised a similar aesthetic trait in audiovisual Nordic noir as well. Glen Creeber speaks of “long moments of stillness” (2015: 25), and Tobias Hochscherf and Heidi Philipsen mention “studied moments of reflection” as characteristic of Nordic noir (2017: 17). As Jaakko Seppälä convincingly argues, such silences are related to audiovisual Nordic noir’s affinity with the minimalism of Nordic modernist art cinema, films by such directors as Carl Theodor Dreyer, Ingmar Bergman, Aki Kaurismäki, Roy Andersson, and Ruben Östlund (2020: 259–264). But in Kaurismäki’s films, for example, the sparse dialogue has often

been interpreted also as expressing Finnishness, the Finnish national character, or the characteristics of Finnish speech culture (Kivimäki 2010: 34; Richardson 2016a: 485). It is an oft-stated view – not unsupported by academic research – that Nordic people are not the most talkative. This applies to Finns especially but to Swedes as well (see, for example, Tulviste et al.: 2003). Writing on Finnish speech culture, Richard J. Wilkins and Pekka Isotalus could just as well be describing Kurt Wallander, as they note that Finns “appreciate silence and they also need it. They cannot be described as talkative or especially willing to communicate” (2009: 13). Thus, it is safe to say, this particular silence in Nordic noir is not only an expression of modernist orientation but also of a Nordic cultural feature, and in the *Wallander* novels – as a regional element – part of the larger sonic landscape.

### SPACE AND PLACE IN THE WALLANDER FILMS

The first season of the second *Wallander* series (2005–2006) consists of altogether thirteen films, each lasting approximately ninety minutes. The first film, *Innan frosten* (2005; dir. Kjell-Åke Andersson), is based on the novel by the same name and the others on previously unpublished stories written by Mankell. Therefore, they all can be considered film adaptations, as they are either based on an existing novel or the author’s own additions to the existing *Wallander* literature. Although the characters and their dynamics develop throughout the season, the films are separate entities with their own story arcs. Moreover, the season also has five different directors. Because of this, there is some variance in the audiovisual style, which, on the whole, remains fairly consistent throughout the season.

Several scholars have written about landscapes in *Wallander* in a way that is suggestive of an extensive use of landscape imagery. But as scholars often conflate the novels with the films and also different series (see, for example, Reijnders 2009; Creeber 2015: 26; Saunders 2021: 64), these

observations cannot be considered valid, particularly in regard to the first season of the second *Wallander* series. Indeed, the consistent use of extreme wide shots of regional surroundings is not an aesthetic feature of *Wallander* in this particular season. Transitions between different locations, where such imagery is often placed, are not always used, and when they are, they are often short – a quick shot of a car driving somewhere on a country road, for example. Also, the diegetic space in interior and exterior scenes typically consists of a visually restricted, relatively small area. But almost invariably, also in interior scenes, the films apply the common technique of using *acousmatic* sounds, sounds that do not have a visible source (Chion 1994: 71),<sup>12</sup> and they create a larger diegetic space than that which is seen. The sounds perceived as coming in from unseen sources cause the perceived space to spread out towards them, and the character of this unseen space depends on the amount and quality of those sounds.

In *Wallander*, such sounds often expand the diegetic space quite far from the visual situation, and usually – being in line with the actual soundscapes of Ystad and southern Skåne – there are only few *acousmatic* sounds present in a scene, perhaps only one or two. Moreover, this is also fairly systematically done with sounds that are typical to the region. What is also distinctive about these *acousmatic* sounds in *Wallander* is that the sound sources are almost never eventually shown, that is, *deacousmatised* (Chion 1994:72). For example, the bells of the five level crossings by the railway that passes by Ystad from its coastal side indicate that trains are arriving and departing, but we do not see them; the sound of the bells of Saint Mary's Church in the old town, playing their distinctive melody, is not followed by a shot of the church; the rook (usually not in flocks, but singular) always cawing somewhere in the distance

in scenes outside Ystad (although, in reality, they are heard in Ystad as well) are only present as sonic beings, never seen (once or twice, clearly unintentionally, a flock flies over or is visible in the background, thus necessitating that also the sound is put in). Moreover, the sound design very rarely employs any expressive techniques, that is, allegorical sounds, psychologically motivated *nondiegetic* sound effects, or subjective *diegetic* sounds (tinnitus or heart-beat, for example). In short, the sound design of the series can be described as “realistic.”

This “realism” also entails that scenes are often quiet, but most importantly to the issue at hand, they are rarely silent in the sense discussed above, that is, the quietness seldom becomes an essential experiential aspect.<sup>13</sup> There are several reasons for this. Most commonly, in scenes that could exemplify the silence of the *diegetic* situation, the dialogue, which there is plenty of, or the musical score is there to mask it. Also, in exterior scenes, the sound of the wind often takes precedence over the few other sounds in an otherwise quiet situation. It is also noteworthy that at times, although not often, a low rumble in scenes situated in central Ystad seems a bit overstated in terms of realism, as if the harbour were closer than it is in reality,<sup>14</sup> or as if there were a more populous urban area somewhere unseen with traffic to match.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, occasionally the sounds of passenger airplanes seem unnaturally loud, as Sturup Airport, the main airport of Malmö, is thirty kilometres away from Ystad. But

12 Also the term *off-screen* could be used here, although it is misleading. As Christian Metz observes, “a sound in itself is never ‘off’: either it is audible or it doesn't exist” (1985: 157).

13 For clarification, as silence is in this article considered a subjective experience, it differs from how the term is commonly used in the context of film sound. Claudia Gorbman calls the absence of music and dialogue, but not of all sounds, *diegetic* silence and absence of all sounds *nondiegetic* silence (1987: 18–19). Paul Théberge, in turn, names the absence of all *diegetic* sounds *diegetic* silence (2008: 57).

14 For its size, Ystad has a large port. With 3500 ship calls every year, it is the fifth largest port in Sweden (Port of Ystad 2024). However, on our excursion, we did not hear the sounds of the port within the town.

15 Ystad has an area of roughly ten square kilometres and a population of roughly 20 000. Ystad municipality, in turn, is thirty-five times larger than the town and with roughly 30 000 inhabitants. From this ratio alone, one can gather that, in reality, Ystad and its surroundings do not have large amounts of motorised traffic.

perhaps most importantly, in its first season, the series seldom applies *point-of-audition* sounds, and even more rarely *subjective* point-of-audition sounds through which we hear as and what a character in the story hears – and especially how Kurt Wallander experiences his predominantly quiet surroundings.

A rare example of the contrary can be found in *Täckmanteln* (2005; dir. Anders Engström), the ninth film of the series, in a scene where Wallander meets a nun walking on a gravel road between fields (17:39 onwards). It is early autumn, and the fields are bare after the harvest. The two persons are shown first in a full shot and then, from afar, in an extreme wide shot, as they start walking slowly down the road. The soundscape is notably quiet, consisting of a few acousmatic sounds, some a bit closer, some very distant: the rook and some other singular birds, a dog barking far away, and a cow (apparently, there is a farm somewhere). But we also hear things from the perspective of Wallander and the nun, their quiet conversation and the gravel under their feet as they walk. In this scene, the experience of silence is achieved – and emphasised – in several ways. Firstly, the distant sounds remain acousmatic after the shift to the extreme wide shot, which further emphasises the distance of these sound sources. Secondly, we experience the quiet soundscape simultaneously from two different positions far away from each other, from that of the audience and that of Wallander and the nun; thirdly, having these two points of audition indicates that also the space between these two positions is quiet; fourthly, being able to hear clearly from afar the minute details of their intimate interaction, the quietness of their voices and the rustle under their feet, enhances the experience of silence in the scene as a whole.

Music can be mixed to be spacious, but also static musical textures, such as drones, can be used to evoke a sense of space and place (Torvinen & Välimäki 2019). The music in *Wallander*, however, is not characterised by a particularly spacious

mix. In the main theme, for example, the wistful melody in F-minor is played softly by a classical guitar – plucked with the skin of the fingertips instead of nails – and closely miked, giving the music a very intimate feel. But various drones, from synth pads or a string ensemble, are a staple of the score. However, their main purpose in the series is to create suspense and anticipation, not to signify space. Again, an example of a sound technique not typically used in *Wallander* is found in the fifth film, *Arfikanen* (2005; dir. Stephan Apelgren). There is one twelve-second long, slowly panning shot of Wallander walking a dog on a beach (0:24:57 onwards), with the seashore as a backdrop. We hear a softly played C5 chord drone from the strings with slow, improvisatory textures from a piano in C-minor. The static music corresponds with the horizon in the shot, and when a few seconds later, while the music continues, we are shown a nine-second-long shot of a street in Ystad's old town, the music extends the landscape, as it were, to the shot of the street, tying the two together on a phenomenological level. But, as mentioned, this is only one instance of such use of music and scenery, lasting twenty seconds or so, in a ninety-minute film.

As can be gathered from the short audiovisual analysis above, although some aspects of the soundtrack are essential in fleshing out the landscapes of Skåne in the *Wallander* films, sounds are not used to specifically foreground Kurt Wallander's relation to space and place. Perhaps most prominently, he is not allowed his solitary moments of silence in the films. Arguably, this has some significant repercussions on central narrative issues, including the portrayal of Kurt Wallander's character. In the following, to highlight some of these issues and also to re-evaluate how the *Wallander* films are situated in the Nordic noir canon, I will attempt to interpret the differences between the *Wallander* films and novels but also between the films and other Nordic noir series, more precisely *The Killing* (*Forbrydelsen*, Denmark 2007–2012) and *The Bridge* (*Bron/Broen*, Sweden/Denmark,

2011–2018), the two series that have been described as “the best examples of what Nordic noir is” (Seppälä 2020: 257–258).

### COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

As established above, in both *Wallander* films and literature, sounds influence how spaces and places are experienced. In the films, sounds are frequently – or even constantly – used to expand and characterise the diegetic space “beyond the frame.” However, scenes such as the one from *Täckmanteln* described above, where the audience is given – through sounds – the opportunity to be in that place, are rare. This is also a major difference between the films and the novels. But the most significant difference between them regarding sounds in the representation of space and place is, again, that silence is not given narrative import, as it is not depicted as being crucial to Kurt Wallander in a professional and/or personal sense. In the first season, Wallander does not rely on his hearing or listen to the silences of the crime scenes, although, in *Sidetracked*, he declares it as one of his essential forensic tools, and although Wallander is occasionally seen alone in the series, on a beach, for example, this does not readily give the impression that he draws insight or solace from his surroundings and the Skåne landscape, as he does in the novels.<sup>16</sup> Arguably, in an audiovisual context, this would require giving the audience opportunities to experience them as well. But, in the first season, Wallander is not given many personal moments of solitude. And the ones he has are rarely moments of silence, at least not in a way that also the audience could perceive them as such.

This, then, leads also to a notably different portrayal of Wallander’s persona in

the films. The melancholy is still there, as is his stubbornness, proneness to drinking, and so on, but as he is not shown to often seek solitude and silence, he is depicted as less introverted than the novels make him out to be. He is also presented as more talkative. Thus, although Wallander is considered one of the key examples of what Glen Creeber calls the “morose detectives” of Nordic noir (2015: 21), at least in the first season of *Wallander*, he is perhaps not the best example after all. He is certainly not as morose as inspector Sarah Lund, the main protagonist of *The Killing*. She is depicted as an exceedingly withdrawn person, which has an influence on how the series sounds, but which sounds also help to mediate. Contrary to Kurt Wallander of the films, Lund is not too keen on engaging in dialogue with others or explaining what she intends to do and why. She is also found not listening to others as her attention is turned elsewhere. In such instances, we also typically hear a particular musical theme, a *leitmotif*, sometimes coupled with a nondiegetic sound effect, that also overpowers the diegetic sounds, including the voices of other characters, and guides the audience’s attention to the psychology of the main protagonist. We do not hear things from Lund’s perspective as such, but we do hear sounds that draw our attention to her subjective experience. The *Wallander* films, in turn, rarely use any such sonic devices – musical or otherwise.

Scholars often point out that Nordic noir is fundamentally a socially critical form of crime fiction, and some also note that this is evident in the visual style of Nordic noir series as well (see, for example, Hansen & Waade 2017: 82–83). Giving *The Killing* and *The Bridge* as primary examples, Emily Gray describes it followingly:

[T]he streets of Copenhagen and Malmö become dystopian labyrinths of despair where it is often raining, always autumn or winter and more often than not, night-time. The viewer is drawn in to the gloomy worlds that are

16 Gunhild Agger argues that, in such scenes, “[t]he sea functions as an emotional foil, enhancing the sensation of the ever-present element that will remain when the criminals, investigators and audiences are all dead” (2016: 144). However, in *Wallander*, the shots of the sea alone do not allow such interpretations, but combining them with melancholy music with fragile melodies (see, for example, the montage sequence in *Den svaga punkten* (2006; dir. Jonas Grimås), beginning approximately at 0:33:45.

inhabited by the Nordic Noir protagonists and see their inner worlds reflected within the murky underworlds that they inhabit. [...] Nordic Noir deploys shadow, darkness and location as allegorical devices that illustrate the moral, political and psychological darkness that accompany the murders under investigation and the protagonists take us with them on a journey to the murkiest depths of the human psyche (Gray 2014: 77).

Without a doubt, *Wallander* is a socially critical series concerned with various issues related to the condition of the Nordic society. In its first season, however, it does not deliver dramatic chiaroscuros, striking extreme wide shots and camera angles, or distinctive colour schemes, like *The Killing* and *The Bridge* do, but the two series also use their soundtracks to express the psychological and societal aspects Gray speaks of in a way that the *Wallander* films do not.

As I argue elsewhere, in the first season of *The Killing*, the notably Orientalist features of the soundtrack guide the audience to attach their own notions concerning immigration in Denmark to the narrative of the series, thus opening it outwards to the social realities outside the story-world (Huttunen 2022). *The Bridge*, in turn, employs an ambiguous narrative strategy that depends on the audience projecting their own ideas of life and society to make sense of things. An essential constituent in this is the soundtrack, largely responsible for the distinctive liminal atmosphere of the series – one of its key aspects being diegetic silence, the removal of all diegetic sounds from a scene, sometimes even the dialogue (see Huttunen 2025, forthcoming). Thus, these two series effectively direct the audience to engage in what Anahid Kassabian (2001) has named *affiliating identification*. However, this is not a salient feature in the *Wallander* films, and not only because it does not employ similar elaborate schemes involving music and sound design, but

because it is relatively fast-paced and dialogue-heavy – contrary to what has sometimes been said about it (see, for example, Creeber 2015: 25). Therefore, it does not contain many “studied moments of reflection” and “long moments of stillness,” especially such that would allow the depicted surroundings – the Skåne landscapes – to take on meanings projected onto them by the audience.

Ever since the latter half of the nineteenth century, there has been a tendency in Nordic arts to assign a sense of melancholy as a natural condition of the Nordic region (Waade 2017: 382–383). Nordic noir has generally been seen as continuing this tradition (ibid.), and evidently, the *Wallander* novels fit the description. Shane McCorristine calls the strong symbolical connection drawn in the *Wallander* novels between the protagonist’s psychological disposition and outlook on the society and the regional landscapes and climate conditions an “exaggerated interlinking of landscape and psychology, personhood and place” (2011: 81). This is undoubtedly so, but as is argued here, especially due to two factors. Firstly, Mankell makes silence, that is, experiencing the characteristic soundscape of Skåne, crucial to Wallander. It is his way of connecting with the world as a person and as a police officer. Secondly, as Lawrence Kramer succinctly states, “[s]ounds encircle us as sights confront us” (2018: 86), and due to Mankell’s ability to use sonic aspects in evoking the locations in the story, leading to an encompassing spatial experience, the reader is transported, as it were, to the same space Wallander is in and to experience things from his point of audition, thus further enhancing the sense that the landscape, or place, has special importance in the narrative.

However, there is no such “exaggerated interlinking” discernible in the first season of *Wallander*, and this, too, is due to two reasons, both already mentioned. Firstly, whether they are establishing shots, point-of-view shots, or “autonomous landscapes” – that is, not “subservient to characters, events and action” (Lefebvre

2011: 64), landscape imagery can be imbued with meaning by the audience, but it requires time and opportunities. In *The Bridge*, for example, a characteristic feature of the series is recurring extreme wide shots showing the urban surroundings of Malmö and Copenhagen, each lasting several seconds and often coming in pairs and usually accompanied by the aforementioned diegetic silence, arguably with the very intention of providing the opportunity to project ideas onto them (see Huttunen 2024, forthcoming). But as mentioned, this is not the case with the *Wallander* films. Secondly, and perhaps most importantly for the topic at hand, the audience is not given similar access to Wallander's subjective experiences of the Skåne landscape as in the novels – via point-of-audition sounds, for example, but especially through his deeply personal relationship with silence. And so, there are fewer opportunities for the audience to wonder what he might be thinking and to bring in their preconceptions as interpretative tools to draw connections between the landscape, Wallander's psychology, and the socially critical narrative.

## CONCLUSION

Films and literature are undoubtedly two very different things, but here I have attempted to evaluate some of their possible differences and similarities, especially regarding how the perception and experience of the surroundings in the storyworld – and therefore also the story – is conditioned by experiences of auditory phenomena. In films, sounds are used to create a three-dimensional space but also to characterise it, to provide it with meaning and make it a place, and also in the first season of the second *Wallander* series, sounds are used to flesh out the Skåne landscape. But the same technique can also be observed in the *Wallander* novels – or perhaps we should call it *similar* because of the different medium. Indeed, landscapes are multisensory phenomena, and so they are also heard, not only seen, and as this may be more readily acknowledged with films,

here I have sought to demonstrate the as yet less well-established fact that this holds true also with literature. Arguably, the *Wallander* novels are good examples of this, as Henning Mankell effectively evokes the experience of space and place through the characteristic soundscapes of Skåne.

However, reading scholarly literature on *Wallander* films and novels, one may get the impression that the two are very much cut from the same cloth, as it were. But although they both have sounds as an integral part of the landscape and some similarities in how the landscapes of Skåne are represented with them, there are also notable differences regarding the meanings the landscapes are given – or are not given – with sounds. This also leads to the conclusion that, at least in this respect, the *Wallander* novels and films are perhaps not that similar after all. As this study shows, silence – which is here established as a soundscape and a subjective spatial experience – is a central factor in the *Wallander* novels but is treated very differently in the films and also given far less narrative weight. This, then, can be seen as having notable repercussions regarding the representation of the central location, the narrative structure of the films, and also the characterisation of the main protagonist.

In this article, I have also reconsidered the *Wallander* films as Nordic noir in light of the issues pertinent to this study. Given Nordic noir's affinity for "exaggerated interlinking" between landscape, psychology, and social commentary, and considering the extent of Kurt Wallander's worry, anxiety, and pessimism in the novels, it is perhaps surprising that these aspects have not significantly translated to the audiovisual style of the *Wallander* films, to a darker or gloomier expression. It is not lively by any means, but neither does it fit Gray's description of a typical Nordic noir aesthetic. On the whole, one could say that, in its first season, the audiovisual style of *Wallander* seems purposefully unspectacular – at least when compared to series such as *The Killing* and *The Bridge*. That is not to

say that the *Wallander* films are not dark or gloomy, only that their gloom is of a more prosaic kind and achieved more through their dark and socially critical subject matter than their audiovisual style, and also Kurt Wallander's less morose depiction can well be seen as fitting this more matter-of-fact aesthetic. Indeed, opting for a more unimpressive audiovisual style, as it were, does not necessarily seem that out of place with the character of Kurt Wallander either, as it suits the mundane gloom brought by the fate that befell him; he did, after all, dream of becoming nothing less than an opera impresario when he was younger but became a policeman instead, in a small town amidst the fields, the "screeching flocks of crows", and "[t]he clay that sticks to the soles of your shoes" (Mankell 2002, 60).

As a final note, a few words on sound-walking as a research method for adaptation studies. In some of the epilogues of the *Wallander* novels, Henning Mankell points out that he takes artistic license in presenting places, and this became evident when I visited some of the locations of *Sidetacked* (from Gustav Wetterstedt's home, there would be no direct access to the beach where he is killed, and the sea is not visible from the fields where Dolores Maria Santana burns herself to death, for example), but after experiencing them first-hand, it is my understanding that he describes the soundscapes of Skåne quite accurately (although I have my doubts about the many night birds at Mariagatan). Conversely, due to my soundwalks, I was able to observe that the films do take more artistic license in this regard. But I feel that the biggest benefit was that my own sound-based experiences of space and place in Skåne provided a common ground, something I could measure against two experientially very different media, and a means to approach similarly two phenomena that are not directly commensurate: film soundtracks and literary descriptions of sounds.

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