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While Taking My Dog for A Walk – A Sound Diary

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(Translated from Portuguese by Jorge de La Barre)

Abstract

A two-month long sound diary.

18 February, 2021

At the end of the Sociology of Music class in which the text “Sonorities and Cities” (Mendonça) was discussed, when it was proposed to register a sound diary, I took my dog for a walk and to make its needs, as usual. While walking through the empty streets of the sub-suburban neighborhood of Muda, in the countryside of Greater Tijuca, I tried to pay attention to the several sounds that make up its soundscape, having for the first time in mind the concepts rescued by Mendonça.

At first, I paid attention to the intermittent sounds of some cars, then I noticed the timid sounds that usually go unnoticed, unconsciously muffled. Of these sounds, the one that most caught my attention was the sound of barking dogs, birds chirping, and even some cicadas, which usually sound on hot days. Then, I noticed as I reached the street corner, that other sounds began to blend into noises, with the passing of some cars, one of them with a relatively loud radio, clashing with the hum of a power box. Another sound, while paying closer attention, I was able to notice the noise of some water cisterns.

19 February, 2021

I woke up to a noise that sounded like a grinder or a saw, echoing among the buildings. It sounded like it was coming from a construction, site on the other side of my block.

Then, the noises from the construction site next to my villa intensified, echoing the friction of cutting machines and some hammering.

At night, I took my dog to do its needs, and the rhythmic mix between car and motorcycle engines became clear; they were mostly from the app deliverers as far as I could observe.

I missed the absence of one specific “noise”: the vociferation and the blaring speakers that used to occur late at night, at the famous *Bar Nevada*, known locally as “Bar da Marlene,” and also, at the “Bar do Espanhol,” on the corner of my street, where young people used to gather before the pandemic to drink, play pool, and venture into karaoke.

Today, only Marlene's Bar was in operation, and had only a few quiet customers.

On the contrary, when I approached "Bar Cotidiano," which is closer to the middle of the street, in a manner respectful of social distancing (it is worth mentioning), I found an agglomeration of bodies and voices.

21 February, 2021

This afternoon, the neighborhood was taken over by shouts in unison. Three times so far, *Flamengo* fans have had the pleasure of celebrating goals against the *Internacional* team in their sonic expression, composed of shouts and fireworks.

Between goals, almost absolute silence, except for a few vehicles, and birds, such as *Bem-te-vis* (Great kiskadees), singing.

22 February, 2021

The rain was part of the composition of the neighborhood's soundscape this afternoon, and even though it was noisy, it was possible to hear the sounds of the labors of both construction sites near the building where I live, both at times of greater intensity of heavy drops punishing the roofs, and during dry periods.

Lately, it also seems to me that some "noises" previously muffled by my unconsciousness are coming to the surface, with my listening exercises. As I write now at dawn, a particularly annoying noise is practically piercing my eardrums in a subtle way – something similar to the noise my century-old air conditioner makes, but I am not sure of the source.

23 February, 2021

Once again, while taking my dog for a walk, I took the opportunity to listen to the soundscape of the surroundings where I live.

What caught my attention this time were the noises of gates closing and alarms, sounding to warn the residents of the buildings and villas that they had not closed. Another sound, however, was more usual – but

noisier: the movement of automobiles, probably because it was “rush hour;” it created a certain monotony of sound in the landscape.

Later in the evening, as I had expected, there was a more peculiar sound event. The celebration for the exit of one of the participants of the reality show “Big Brother Brasil,” which was similar to the goals previously reported here, with screams and fireworks echoing through the neighborhood.

24 February, 2021

Once again, I listened to the sounds around, while walking my dog through the residential streets on the outskirts of my block. As I passed near a more hidden bar, which I only became aware of a few days ago, I noticed two people talking in front of it; I heard a song, a *farró pé-de-serra*. I went to the end of the street of the bar and came back, to find an *iFood* delivery man, humming the same *farró* that was still playing there.

Another sound that was very present in my perception on this day, was the blaring of televisions coming from some houses and apartments; and their transmissions varied between soap operas and TV news.

25 February, 2021

Ironically, the only time I paid attention to the outside sounds on this day was during class; among the characteristic sounds of pigeons sheltering under the overlapping tiles of the building next door, the cacophony was also composed by conversations in neighboring apartments, along with the sound of cars driving home – taking into account the time (around 7 pm).

Then, it was still possible to hear voices, indistinguishable from each other – of fans enraptured by the victory of *Flamengo* in the Brazilian Championship final, also marked by fireworks.

26 February, 2021

Around 3 pm, I needed to go to the market near my home (the market is two blocks away). When I got my groceries and positioned myself at the

checkout, the attendant asked me if I had my CPF (taxpayer number) registered. When I answered no, she turned to a co-worker and said: “You see? Nobody registers the CPF, why ask?” A pertinent question in my conception, by the way.

27 February, 2021

I missed listening to something when I took my dog out (I never mentioned his name here, but just for the record, his name is Remela). So, I decided to open the Spotify application on my smartphone, looking for an album, when I came across a release by the band Menores Atos, of a live recording recorded at a concert they had performed in São Paulo, at Centro Cultural São Paulo, playing some singles like “Pressa,” and some tracks from two of their studio albums, like “Doiszero,” “Sobre Cafés e Você,” and “Serenó.”

Throughout the album I remembered almost automatically of a show by this band, at Circo Voador in December 2019, because of the vociferous cheering of the audience present at the recording.

One of the most beautiful soundscapes I have ever experienced, but which transcends the pure sound experience – not to give way to a sensory experience contemplating the “visual,” but by conforming a multidimensional experience felt by the body with warmth and movements; the exchange of hugs with friends and strangers and, of course, sonically speaking, the unbridled screaming of vocal cords, engaged in bursting out, reverberating the songs played. A broad space of abandonment of stress and embrace, which conveys a sense of belonging.

1 March, 2021

Another day without much sound, apart from cars and motorcycles passing by on the streets, some birds singing in the morning, dogs barking in the early evening, and a noisy air-conditioner in the early morning of March 2.

Curiously, some neighbor has just turned on a stereo, playing some hip-hop-sounding music (in the middle of the night).

2 March, 2021

When I went out for a walk with my dog, between 8 and 8:30am, I immediately heard a song coming from the neighboring apartment, something that happened two more times along the way. The first song was a pop with a very 80's sound, while the second was a classical instrumental, very erudite, and the third, in fact, was not possible to identify because, as I approached, the music ended and I noticed the noises of a radio station's programming.

In addition, I could hear voices of people talking, children playing and some babies crying.

Near the top of one of the communities near my building, a guy was sending an audio message saying that he would continue to make his "beats," ending the conversation with: "We're on, daddy."

4 March, 2021

I awoke another day to the rhythmic sounds of hammering and chainsaws. Shortly after, the distinctive noise of a broom, which at least sounded a lot like palm fiber, reverberated from outside into my apartment.

During the walk with Remela, I could barely hear any distinguishable sounds from the cars, only some air-conditioning sounds and music coming from the two bars on the corner near my house.

At dawn to the 5th of March, a peculiar, but at the same time familiar sound event for most people from Tijuca, took over the streets in an unexpected way: about one hundred motorcycles revving their engines in a mass of noise as intense as it was shapeless and disturbing, in the famous "dawn rumble."

8 March, 2021

As I prepared my lunch, a series of sounds coming from the construction site facing the kitchen window, made up a chaotic soundscape. Between crunching and screeching, the freight elevator creaked in its gears, and

heavy objects were thrown, landing suddenly on surfaces, resounding as such, while the reverse alarm of a truck rang, and cars whizzed by on the street. So many sounds formed a large orchestra, in rhythm with the exotic tempos of percussion performed by hammering.

9 March, 2021

I passed by a building when I was, as usual when doing such eavesdropping, walking with my dog, and heard the sound of tools apparently being used for maintenance and further on, I came across the sound of a harmonica being blown in an unpretentious manner. Walking a little further, the sound of a broom being dragged over the sidewalk came to my ears, followed by the voice of a person talking on a cell phone, and iron gates being slammed.

10 March, 2021

In the early afternoon, strong winds skirted the buildings, carrying dead leaves from the sidewalks, shaking trees, and causing wind chimes to resound.

11 March, 2021

Amidst the noise event of the traffic back home, cars and motorcycles revved their engines, and occasional passing cars let out the sounds of their radios, broadcasting music and news.

On a nearby side street, quieter, I could hear across the road the noise of a card machine. Further ahead, an air-conditioner was doing its noisy work, while its timid drips sounded as they fell on a puddle clearly formed by the drip.

The opening of some gates caught my attention by reproducing the metallic sound characteristic of electronic locks.

The bar, which is more hidden near the corner of my building, was open today, even with the limitations imposed on the functioning of establishments by the city government; but unlike the previous days, on which I had recorded noise activities in the place, silence predominated.

12 March, 2021

This evening, I passed another bar in the back street. Some gentlemen were arguing and one of them said: "This is man to man talk," while in the background some pop music was playing, and a phone was ringing.

Then, in the side street in front of my apartment, I overheard a conversation in a language that seemed to be Arabic (and maybe it was, because some Arabs who sell snacks in the classic street food carts live nearby).

14 and 15 March, 2021

In these two days, a different event took me completely out of my routine: the recording of a live session with my band "Antiética" (Unethical.) An exhausting work of repetition and stress that is worth mentioning here, because of the intensity of the sound. Between tests to adjust the volumes so we could listen to each other and perform the songs; the improvised sounds between one song and the other recorded; not to mention, the sound repetitions; my ears buzzed and relieved themselves due to the contrast with this same intensity of sound mass.

It is also interesting to note how the massive reproduction of the same sound becomes something similar to an unconscious echo, something that, by making a little effort, can be perceived, in a similar way to the disregard of everyday noises that we ignore, because of their constant reproduction but, in its opposite extreme, because this sound repeats itself endlessly.

16 March, 2021

On another afternoon walk with my dog, I came across the noise of a saw cutting down a tree.

In another street further away, I heard a phone ringing, and then, a little girl said to Remela: "Hello, dog!", then growling at him. On the same street, on the corner with the street of my building, I could hear a young man singing, unpretentiously: "Lalaia-lalaia-laia-laia."

17 March, 2021

Cars passing by at a slow pace, the horn of the guy selling bread, a sound car announcing a pasta store (pizzas, buns, calzones...), the noise of bicycles on a less busy street, and the sound of a synthesizer coming from some sound device in the condominium in front of my villa/building.

18 March, 2021

Passing by the back street, I heard a man speaking on the phone in a prophetic tone: "Damn, damn diabetes... You are going to redo the exams and you are cured... You are going to say a powerful prayer... It has already been cured... Okay, honey, you can call anytime... Amen, glory to God." Further ahead, on the same street, some women chatting on a balcony were making conversation noises.

22 March, 2021

Elevator door creaking, cistern working, cars periodically passing by, barking echoing in the distance, trees and wind chimes swaying to the beat of the air currents, noise of running sewage, *fórró* on the stereo: the composition of a chaotic soundscape.

23 March, 2021

Once again, the cacophony of traffic, hidden unconsciously; suddenly it is drawn into the conscious plane at the beginning of the auscultation exercise (another walk with Remela). It was possible to hear some radio and television sets, among the periodic passing cars, including one coming from inside a closed upholstery store, located on one of the back streets.

24 March, 2021

From my room, I hear the rhythmic beats of a hammer marking an abstract tempo against the background of the loud sound of a stereo with strong bass that reproduces a national Trap song, among animal noises

(birds and dogs), and the usual wind chimes that occasionally sound with the breeze. Shortly after, the sound reproduced by the stereo stops, and a whistle sounds.

Afterword: Playing Music in the Pandemic

During the process of writing a diary based on listening to the ambient and their sound composition in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, a distressing silence came to me that led me to rethink the theme of my final undergraduate monograph project.

What I missed was, and still is, the experience in the independent music circuit, mainly rock and hardcore, in the city of Rio de Janeiro – something I haven't experienced since February 2020. The silence that distressed me, and still distresses me to some extent, is the absence of sounds that were, for me and for so many others, a form of relief from the stress of everyday life – besides being a professional activity for many (I include myself here, as I occupy the vocals and guitars of a hardcore band called *Antiética* since 2017), and a form of mobilization and socialization. This intimacy with the scene provoked a series of questions in me, such as: what happened to the underground rock scene in Rio during this period? Are the artists of the scene still producing? If yes: how? If no: why? How are these artists surviving? What about the event producers, and the venues (bars, studios, etc.)? How have these agents been surviving, with the limitations found for the realization of live shows?

These questions, in turn, led me to discuss with my advisor (Jorge de La Barre), the possibility of initiating research about the activities of these bands during the last year. Later on, yet with some gathered material, I conducted a series of interviews with bands and producers, in order to gain a better understanding of the situation.

The experience of reporting the sound diary has been crucial for the reflection and development of the monograph – for having allowed me to think about the social microstructure of these music venues, through the absence of regular sound dynamics during the pandemic. The silence generated by the cancellation of several concerts and musical productions since March of last year, has encouraged a series of unprecedented situations. For example, the reallocation of musical making to virtual locus of coexistence, through live streams.

It is noticeable, a research field that opens to a listening of soundscapes, from the pandemic and its impacts both on the voids left behind, and the new fills and sound reconfigurations in different places.

Note: This piece was developed during the Sociology of Music class of first semester of 2021 taught by Jorge de La Barre at Fluminense Federal University. Almost a year into the pandemic, during the week of Carnaval which, for obvious health and safety reasons, had been cancelled in Rio de Janeiro and everywhere else in Brazil, the idea of writing sound reports was launched, in “remote mode.”

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