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PLACES AND THEIR VOICES: WHAT BECOMES PERCEPTIBLE THROUGH THE AUDIBLE

Sounds are part of the most natural sensory experience of the environment and the world around us. The article explores the modes of corporeal hearing and phonetic understanding of the world. Numerous (urban) places have their own characteristic soundscape. A specific dimension of movement is expressed in it. Sounds are not only *in* motion, they *are* movement. Thus, they are in a constant process of changing their faces. But sounds do not only touch upon a physical-acoustic understanding, they equally touch sensations and feelings, they feed atmospheres and communicate meanings. However, they are not "read" semiotically, but experienced holistically through bodily communication. The conscious ability to hear presupposes listening carefully (Hin-Hören). Even if the tonal experience is incommensurable with its literal explication, the practice of autopsying descriptions of situations is nevertheless a prerequisite for a sharpened self- and world-awareness.

Keywords: sounds, bodily communication, micrologies, situations, atmospheres, half-things, description of impressions.

Under the powerful influence of occidental natural philosophy and epistemology the five human senses are dominated by the eye. In the early modern period, the innovation of printing reaffirmed the eye as a guiding cultural and cosmopolitan sense. Among the "higher senses" it prevails, at least in the apprehension of material things. In contrast, the reception of divine truth is first and foremost due to (understanding) hearing (Jütte, 2000: 75), because the word of God or Allah is not seen, but heard, even if not in an acoustic sense, but as understanding. Until today, a hierarchy of the senses has been established that places the senses of smell, taste and touch below the eye and ear.

The following article is devoted to the question (primarily using the example of urban spaces) to which extent the audible reveals an essential part of the real world in addition to acoustic "data". This presupposes that what people hear

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with their ears is already alive in a larger framework of events and meaning at the moment of sensory perception. The aesthetics of sensuality is reflected in the realm of feelings. In other words: We experience what we hear from an integral context of meanings that are interwoven in a network of socially circulating and biographically learned feelings. Meanings that are based in feelings, however, go beyond such simple polarities as "beautiful" and "ugly" or "pleasant" and "unpleasant" and draw attention to the fact that affective world relations are extremely nuanced.

1. HOW WE PERCEIVE SOUNDS

What people experience atmospherically does not depend with its impressiveness on any specific sense. Only on an organic level is the auditory understanding of impressions the result of what the ear grasps. However, humans do not only hear with their material bodies but also with their felt bodies. All sensory impressions are synchronised into an integrated experience. In it, the captured impressions of the real sound are charged with feelings. Schmitz uses the term "felt-bodily communication" or "embodied communication" (Schmitz, 2011, chapter 4) to refer to such a sensory understanding of situations. Auditory experience requires neither intellectual analysis nor explicit articulation in literal speech in order to be understood (cf. also 6). Simultaneously, impressions evoke meanings almost immediately. They are linked to feelings through embodied communication via synaesthetic bridging qualities. Friedrich Nietzsche was aware of the relevance of felt-bodily perception in understanding the world. That is why he saw in the corporeality "a big sagacity, a plurality with one sense" (Nietzsche, 1998). On that note, David Espinet points out that "the sensual side of the eventfulness of hearing causes the felt body" (Espinet 2016: 215). Sensual hearing does not only concern the ear as an organ, but actually first and foremost the ear as a bridge to the world that opens up meaning. We have ears "because we may listen to the earth's song." (Ibid: 211) Acoustic listening is a pre-condition for sensitive and emotional listening with understanding. With our ears we can still hear the most incomprehensible – something we do not even understand. We still hear "empty" sound, in which there is only acoustic noise. Organic hearing ability is only the biological prerequisite for recognising, understanding, comprehending and not least empathic hearing. Only in world-enclosing listening does an existential and vital relationship to the world open up. Even though we hear squeaking trains and loud announcements from loudspeakers in the station, in a wider sense we already hear in the mixtures of these and other site-specific sounds a situationally understood place: a station. The specific sounds are already heard at the moment of perception as the phonetic correspondence of a place and are not first recorded acoustically, then thoughtfully processed and finally classified in mental models of understanding the world.

2. PLACES AND THEIR SPECIFIC SOUND

The motorway sounds different from the city street at the intersection, the station lobby different from the department stores' and the construction site different from the park. On a large scale, the phonetic world is even more differentiated. Thus, there are still manifold differences between the phonetic inside and outside of a building or a forest. The station sounds different from the track and from its shopping arcade. Finally, proximity and distance also colour the phonetic face of a place. By dynamically responding to the current events in an area, the tonal resonance of a place oscillates with the change of situations: how a place sounds is a mirror of its actuality, whose sensual reality includes visual impressions too. The nocturnal quiet of the large crossroads reflects the temporal situation of a city. The relative lack of noise, however, also includes the visual silence of slowed and diminished movements and the feeling of emptiness spreading through the surrounding space. In other words, the phonetic side of an atmosphere is fused by perception into a sensually holistic image of experience; this does not happen additively, but autopoietically; everyday language speaks here of a process occurring "by itself". Many places, however, not only have an ever-changing multifaceted sonic reality, but also their very own sound-characteristic face, like an "audio signature". The audible happening at the track of a logistics station differs in its peculiarity from the audibly hectic at the emergency entrance of a hospital. The freight wagons dragging over the iron rails and squealing with their brakes sound different from the ambulances coming to a sudden halt at the hospital's emergency driveway. Both soundscapes belong to their own places. They are not arbitrarily interchangeable. But the sound images that give a place its face also involve visual impressions that affect us. Perhaps in addition to a strange smell and, from a nonslip rubber surface, an irritating feeling under the feet. Since most urban "pronouncements" correspond to current situations, they cannot arbitrarily show themselves in ever new sensual mixtures. It is precisely the characteristic mixture that reveals this place in the here and now. Often enough, whole big cities have their own (urban) sound – different from other big cities, different from small towns and different from villages. Many even resound in an almost personal sound. Then this city stands out from any other in its sounds alone. At the scale of city districts, the synthesis of recurring events and audible profiles into melody-like patterns

becomes even clearer. Sonic murmurs, sounds and roars are "telling" in a way about the function of a place, its performative dynamics and its repetitive episodes. What is polyphonic nevertheless converges in a singular (in itself manifold) sound. Culturally peculiar spaces – such as traditionally Muslim cities or global cities in the Western world – appear in the image of a characteristic whole that has a visual as well as a soundscape reality. Such spatial images are rather felt atmospherically than merely heard with the ears alone. "An *atmosphere* in the sense meant here is the unbounded occupation of a surfaceless space in the region of what is experienced as present." (Schmitz, 2019: 94) Urban atmospheres can therefore also be understood as encompassing pneumatic rhythms of the urban, as site- and spacespecific chords of the sensual, as briefly timed chains of performative sequences. What is echoed in the auditory image of urban scenes is rounded off in a certain way by visual, tactile and olfactory impressions.

Among the city's voices, the loud ones are more likely expected than the quiet ones. This shows the traces of what people have learned to hear from a city. If the loud does indeed represent the heated centre of the everyday activity in the cities, it does not make the quiet disappear. Often, however, it weaves only very blandly through the gaps of the loud, so that it is overheard. All the more the quiet behind the loud challenges the improving ear. It is precisely the curves of loud and quiet in space and time that draw attention to the fact that the habitus of the city is quite different by day than by night. Brightness and darkness, however, correspond not only with more or less of what is visible, but also with the atmospheric qualities of the sound experience. The brightness of the day is combined with the loudness of the urban hustle and bustle and the darkness of the night with the morally dubious and disappearing behind dark corners. Urban atmospheres are multicoloured in their appearance and sensual experience. Within that, the (barely) audible forms changing impressions. And still the silence is "audible" in atmospheres. Among the urbanistic-atmospheric mixtures, the quiet ones all too often remain unnoticed. This is because urbanity is primarily identified by visual images. Already Georg Simmel identified the intellectual life of metropolitans by their level of excitement, a hypertrophy of their culture (Simmel, 1998: 132), consequently by atmospheric moments. Urbanity is not visible and not audible. It does not taste sweet or sour. And it is neither soft nor hard - at least not in an immediate sense. And yet it expresses itself in all senses with the change of urban situations, each in its own way. A more or less lively rhythm of the vibrant city can therefore also be felt rather than seen or heard. Cities express themselves in pulsating atmospheres in which visual, phonetic, tactile and gustatory impressions mix into sensual chords.

Urbanity only makes itself heard among other things (though often enough exceedingly loudly) – as the fold of a face rich in form and change.

3. SOUNDS ARE MIXTURES WITH AN OWN FACE

Singular sounds are absorbed by the plurality of other sounds – like the grinding of the tram on the rails or the engine noise of the seemingly endless passing cars. As soon as they no longer dominate the auditory field on their own (as something like phonetic "solitaires"), they disappear in a certain way into sound collages that reassemble themselves again and again. Tony Hiss writes about the moment of entering New York's Grand Central Terminal: "All the sounds that reached me seemed to have been fused a single sound." (Hiss, 1990: 7) The sounds in this place blend together to form their very own, even peculiar shapes that present themselves as something characteristic. Vladimir Jankélévitch also emphasises this moment of intermingling. Respectively, he writes (in a musicphilosophical context) about the undifferentiated whispering of a "vibrating cloud of mist in which the voice of air and the voice of water remain intermingled"¹. Because sounds are not static like objects, they can murmur and vibrate and so they change their faces as an expression of constant movement. To illustrate with a simple example: There is no such thing as "this" howling of one and the same fire engine, even when it is racing by. Even more: Because it passes by, the sound "travels" with the vehicle. Likewise, there is no such thing as the unpleasant buzz of a person's voice in general - if so, only because the mood of the speaking person is in motion, and likewise that of a hearing person. In everything we hear, subjective proximity and distance relationships play a determining role not only in spatial terms, but also in emotional terms.

In his story *The Burrow*, Franz Kafka describes noises he finds extremely strange. "I don't seem to be getting any nearer to the place where the noise is, it goes on always in the same thin note, with regular pauses, now a sort of whistling, but again like a kind of piping." (Kafka, 1995: 344) He hears something from somewhere, from a floating place. What touches him so pointedly remains blurred in its sounding and its location. This double movement almost drives him mad. He cannot fully understand what he hears. In other words, successful hearing is understanding hearing – and this is what he is denied.

¹ Own Translation ("vibrierenden Nebelwolke, in der die Stimme der Luft und die Stimme des Wassers miteinander vermischt bleiben"); Jankélévitch, 2021: 196.

Audible expressions present themselves in two modes of different epistemological scope: *acoustically* as something sounding and *phonetically* as something understood pictorially in a broader sense. Mostly one sees at least something of what sounds at the same time. Visually one sees with his eyes, acoustically one hears with his ears; but one understands in a simultaneous sense with "a big sagacity" (Nietzsche, 1998) of the felt body. The sounds that are virulent in a situation are not perceived with dumb ears in a stricter acoustic sense. Elias Canetti, for example, had not only heard the death cries of a slaughter camel at an Arab market as an expression of an animal cruelty. Rather, he had heard something of the atmospheric "stuff" of a culture in the roar and stomp of the animal: "The camel flinched and shrieked, now and then uttering a great roar; finally it leaped to its feet again, having by now knelt down, and tried to tug itself free, while the man pulled the rope tighter and tighter." (Canetti, 2012: 7). The sound of the market complemented what he could simultaneously see and smell. His hearing was towards-hearing and therefore a situation-related hearing. There were several points of transmission, according to David Espinet, through which the sensual listening passed into the understanding of what was heard through corporeality (Espinet, 2016: 211). Sounding stories form only one level of an image, making perceptible how people live in a culture in its multi-layeredness: in situations of atmospheric as well as emotional density that give an impression of how people live on local islands of their culture. With the change of the audible faces of a place resonates a whole dynamic of local and situational events. However, these faces are only drawn in limits by human actions. Friedrich Nietzsche already opposed the intellectualistic overvaluation of action: "you are being done at every moment!" (Nietzsche, 1911: 111) It is often a random occurrence, a sudden event or the unexpected and unusual that initiates a change of face. Even the change of weather can be followed by a radical change in auditory reality (e.g. when a rumbling thunderstorm or a crashing rainstorm causes the sudden disappearance of people from the streets). Erwin Straus says that the sudden "does not depend on the speed of the external changes, but solely on whether or not the context of meaning in the inner life story is preserved in the face of all change." (Straus, 1978: 25).

4. BEING ABLE TO LISTEN

Everyone has ears to hear. But that is not the only reason why we can listen with understanding. Sensitised listening, which focuses on capturing impressions, requires a strong willingness to listen for in-between tones. Such phenomenologically profiled attention is due to a double sharpening. It is not satisfied with registering surfaces, and it is not impressed by general outlines and quick glimpses. It is looking for the enlightenment of deep structures. It follows the bifurcations behind what at first only vaguely appears, no matter in which mode of sensuality. The progress of phenomenology is, in the words of Hermann Schmitz, to differentiate what is perceived by sharpening attention. "Progress consists in determining, in ever more detail, what is salient. Phenomenology is a learning process of refining one's attention and expanding one's horizon for possible assumptions." (Schmitz, 2019: 48).

Situation-oriented listening requires us to grasp meanings that resonate depending on the sound. The audible - as long as it does not disturb us, like the noises in Kafka's The Burrow - is grasped as something that is loaded with meanings from the outset. Such that we know and are familiar with, but also those that irritate, frighten and drive us crazy. When an impression goes askew against our embodied knowledge, it arouses aporetic attention. What is familiar is incorporated into established patterns of understanding the world abruptly. Thus, we hear the siren of a police car as a sign of a specific alarm that has its symbolic place in the complex situation of a city. Because of its significance, however, our attention is attracted in a different way than by the familiar and basically nonalarming wail of the siren sounding from the roof of the town hall every Sunday at noon. In contrast, the sound that has never been heard before triggers the questioning-listening noticing; its suddenness, with which it affects, blocks understanding and requires the step-by-step groping of orientation. The impulse for more and more precise listening is ultimately a need for certainty of orientation. This can be driven as much by anxiety as by fear or a burning interest. The sudden, as a "rejection of continuity of time-consciousness" (Bohrer, 1981: 43), is an epistemologically "dangerous moment" (ibid). Hermann Schmitz sees it as an "absolute moment" (Schmitz, 1990: 257) that attracts all attention. Therefore, the fire brigade and the police drive so noisily through the city streets.

5. THE LOCATION OF SOUNDS

Talking about the voices of places implies that sounds come from somewhere. This may be self-evident. And yet, even the attempt to locate them gets lost in a labyrinth. The exact location often fails because sounds waft, swim and change. In its essence, a sound is not like a pin in the wall. Franz Kafka speaks of "sources of noise" (Kafka, 1995: 350), "noise-spots" (ibid: 496) and at another time of "two noise centres" (ibid: 490)². However, this should not disguise the fact that these places are not places in an Euclidean sense, but embodied "circum-realities" (Dürckheim, 2005: 36) of the character of a region.

The spatial origin of sounds can be assessed differently at a smaller scale than at a micrological level. Thus, in the story The Sounds of the City by Alexej Remisow, the focus is not on audio scenes that could be concretely located here or there in space. Rather, they are sound-pictures in which the atmospheric tone of St. Petersburg at the beginning of the 20th century is echoed. Even when Remisow describes sounds such as the neighbour's rustling cough at night (behind the wall) (Remisow, 1996: 28-29), he is not concerned with what one can hear with one's ears in the narrower sense, but with auditory impressions of the political rhythm of St. Petersburg around 1900. For him the specific situation of the "Zeitgeist" is more important than the place. From the performative swing of the banal, he hears audible symbols of the socio-political situation in his city: lived scenes of sound that illustrate, on a micrological level, situationally fleeting faces of the city that have nothing at all to do with politics in the strict sense, such as the crying outburst of Agafja Petrowna, which is so shrill "as if she had three necks" (ibid: 32). Alexej Remisow's Petersburg is a city where "every window is an ear" (ibid: 40). For him, the changing soundscape of urban scenes expresses less the acoustic side of St. Petersburg than the current atmospheric image of a panoptic city in the political sense. Sounding places of the lived city are only settings of a larger, more profound theatre. What can be heard are mood protocols of the vital tone of a city in change.

The difficulty in precisely determining the location of a sound is not only due to its discontinuous dispersion, nor is it solely due to the fact that the essential location of a sound does not exist in mathematical space at all, but in an atmospheric one. It also has its reason in the semi-thing-like character of the sounds. "Half-things" distinguish themselves from full things as "their duration can be interrupted, that is, they come and go, without there being any point in asking what they did in the meantime" (Schmitz, 2019: 99). Sounds cannot be captured by perception like objects; they escape into the fleeting and floating, unlike anything that can be conceptually defined. Sounds impress with their potential to affect, floating in space more than being fixed in place. They are in motion like the wind – fleeting, different in identity, suddenly heard clearly and then washed out again, as

² When the English translation then comes to say "two noises" (ibid: 345), this is quite different from what Kafka means. Two centres are not two sounds, but two areas from which sounds come.

if a spirit hand had put a muffling cloak over them or poured all kinds of other sounds on top. Even a strong breeze is enough to shift what was just so loud to a place seemingly far away. The difficulty, in a double sense, of grasping sounds ultimately also gives rise to the necessity of describing them.

6. DESCRIBING SOUNDS

What one hears cannot be transferred "completely" and without the loss of feelings into sentences with a complementary meaning. There is a structural incommensurability between understanding hearing and its literal statement. Henri Bergson had already drawn attention to this. "Not only does language make us believe in the unchangeableness of our sensations, but it will sometime deceive us to the sensation felt." (Bergson, 1950: 131) Already in the mode of its sensuality, a sound heard is something different from a sentence spoken or written down about it. Unlike an object (like a weeping birch) that can be described in a linear sense (as a weeping birch), specific sounds (as multi-faceted auditory images) cannot be expressed in a comparable way differentiated into foreground and background. The example of the camel's cries in Canetti's story has clearly shown that sounds are situationally rooted and cannot be understood in themselves. They are framed by situations and cannot be explicated in a linear sense (dispensing with metaphors and the synaesthetic speech) in an experiential-identical sense: "There were incidents, images, sounds, the meaning of which is only now emerging; that words neither recorded nor edited; that are beyond words, deeper and more equivocal than words." (Canetti, 2012: 17) That is why we can also sense what cannot be heard in an acoustic sense – such as the silence between the phases of the loud: "You walk up and down and breathe in the silence." (Ibid : 26) Silence is also an impression in which the voices of a place exist. Such "mute" voices have a quasi-tactile character. We experience them as pneumatic "vital tones" (Dürckheim, 2005: 39) whose supposed emptiness is filled with a quasi-substance that absorbs the density of actual being.

The futuristic musician Luigi Russolo was not only interested in producing avant-garde music, but also in describing urban sounds. An almost obsessive relationship to soundscapes had driven him to do this. In this way, he drew attention to the almost unsolvable difficulty of putting into words a sound that undoubtedly comes from a very specific place. The "complex sounds of a moving train" (Russolo, 2000/2005: 35) are not as easy for a passenger to talk about from his or her perspective as they seem to be. The task suggests itself as an ordinary one, as if it did not bring with it any demands that exceed the self-evident. For a passenger,

the sound of a moving train is apparently nothing more than this ubiquitous noise. And yet it would be naïve to claim that one should be able to describe it firstly quite easily and secondly quite precisely in the essence of its sound. In fact, however, the explication of the sound of a train in motion – as of any moving object – demands a high level of sophistication. Along with the train, its moving sounds also have no definable location in mathematical space. Rather, they glide or fly through space. The sound eludes any denotative fixation because the description attempts to fix a becoming and, as it were, flowing impression. However, every moving thing (like the noisy half-thing that goes with it) is in a continuous state of change. Even if the phonetic character persists, the tonal faces change as a result of the movement from one moment to the next. Any attempt at description then quickly turns out to be squaring the circle (Hasse, 2022: Chapter 3). Even children are only moderately enthusiastic about standstill trains, while those that rush to a halt, brake loudly, hiss and spark. The place of a sound is a non-place. The "wandering place" of a moving train represents something essential of its moving situation. That is why its sound is also an attractor of a special kind.

Even if every micrological description (Hasse, 2017; 2018; 2020) of sound may result in a methodological squaring of the circle, it is nevertheless indispensable as a way of becoming aware of sensual experience. Only in the explication of a subjective impression can the moving be opened up for the benefit of listening attention. Only the laborious description can make one aware of the way in which a tone merges into a sound in the individual experience and this finally into a harmonic or enharmonic sound. Listening with understanding requires exercise. The pronunciation of the almost unpronounceable offers itself as its best form; the basic methodological problem of explicating the aesthetic with the tools of language had already been addressed by Vladimir Jankélévitch in a musicphilosophical context (Jankélévitch, 2021). The immanent methodological hurdles make meta-reflection on the possibilities and limits of any explication in literal speech a condition. Part of the autopsy of hearing is the analysis of its possibilities and limitations. The description, which is always only approximately successful, opens the way to the power of more precise noticing and thinking, which in the end sharpens self-awareness and awareness of the world.

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MESTA I NJIHOVI GLASOVI:

ŠTA POSTAJE OPAŽLJIVO KROZ ONO ŠTO SE ČUJE

Sažetak

Zvuci su deo najprirodnijeg čulnog iskustva u okruženju i svetu oko nas. U članku se istražuju načini korporealnog slušanja i fonetskog razumevanja sveta. Brojna (urbana) mesta imaju svoj karakterističan zvučni profil. U njima se ispoljava specifična dimenzija kretanja. Zvuci nisu samo *u* pokretu – oni sami *jesu* pokret. Dakle, oni se nalaze u konstantnom procesu promene svojih lica. Ali zvuci se ne dotiču samo fizičko-akustičkog razumevanja, oni se podjednako tiču oseta i osećanja, oni podstiču atmosfere i saopštavaju značenja. U svakom slučaju, oni se ne "čitaju" semiotički, već se iskušavaju holistički putem telesne komunikacije. Umeće da se čuju zvuci pretpostavlja našu sposobnost da ih pažljivo saslušamo (*Hin-Hören*). Čak i ako se tonski doživljaj ne poklapa s njegovom doslovnom eksplikacijom, praksa deskriptivne "autopsije" situacija je ipak preduslov za izoštrenu samosvest i svest o svetu.

Ključne reči: zvuci, telesna komunikacija, mikrologije, situacije, atmosfere, polustvari, opis utisaka.

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