Shifting Sounds

Textualization and Dramatization of Urban Soundscapes

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1. Sound Ways in the Museum

In 2007, the *Aboa Vetus & Ars Nova Museum* in Turku, Finland did something remarkable. It organized an exhibition on the history of the medieval town of Arboa Vetus which hardly made use of images, while also very few artefacts were put on display. The exhibition, entitled »Sound Ways«, was largely built around sound and text. As such it re-enacted the acoustic environment of Arboa Vetus by playing recordings, or »acoustic images« as the curators called them, in the rather dark museum basement harbouring the rudimentary remains of the town's excavations. These recordings presented six medieval characters: a blacksmith, a fisherman's wife, a cathedral schoolmaster, a maid of a merchant's house and a mother superior. Rather than being played over headphones, the recordings automatically started to sound as soon as visitors entered a particular area of the exhibition. To prevent a cacophony of sounds these spaces were separated from each other through sound isolating felt.[1]

In looking back on this exhibition, the curators explained that they aimed to find a solution for an issue we would like to label as the »museum authenticity problem«.[2] For some, this problem refers to the seeming contradiction between, on the one hand, the academic claim that historical authenticity is constructed by the observer rather than »inherent or intrinsic to the person or practice or object« presented and, on the other hand, the firm belief of the wider public to simply experience authenticity through these presentations, for instance by listening to early music played with historical

1 Aboa Vetus & Ars Nova Museum 2007.

2 Lehto-Vahtera 2010, Muhonen 2010.

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accuracy.[3] What the Sound Ways' curators had in mind, however, was the problem that museums aim to bring their visitors into *direct* contact with the past by showing them »authentic objects«, while for all sorts of reasons these objects have increasingly become *untouchable*. They have not only been glass-cased due to issues of security and preservation, but in many instances they are also presented in a highly aestheticizing manner: as objects in splendid isolation that have to express their »aura« as well as the genius of their makers. Yet this practice also distances the object from the visitor: it is behind glass, in the spotlight, on stage and not to be touched.

One potential way around preservation and security issues is to visually mediate the object by using photos, copies or internet presentations – these can be touched without harming the original in any way. Yet such strategies exactly remove the objects' aura, even more so if the original object involves sound, such as that of bells or gramophones. »Auratizing« or »re-auratizing« the experience of past objects and surroundings, here in its double meaning of making things *aura*ble and *audi*ble, could be a more sustainable solution to this problem.[4] Given that we are used to rely in part on our ears when it comes to deriving information about spaces and objects, sounds – recorded or natural – have a quite powerful »material« and »tactile« dimension. They may create the feeling that the sounding object is close to you even if it is not there, or that you are really immersed in a particular space even though the sounds it generates were recorded.[5] And if a sounding object *is* in fact present in the museum, it does not necessarily need to be touched by the visitor to make it sound, thus rendering it audibly tangible.

This was precisely what Sound Ways wanted to accomplish. For example, this exhibition gave visitors a feel of parchment by playing the *sound* of parchment when they turned a page of a fake medieval tome. In addition, the exhibition sought to convey the meaning of sound by explaining how in the medieval era people attributed magical forces to particular sounds. Finally, the makers of the exhibition helped the contemporary visitor to empathize with his medieval forerunner by presenting auditory characters, people coming to life through a reconstruction of their sounds, and making use of audiographs – a consistent acoustic profiling through voice and accent (see Chapter One), even though the Sound Ways' curators did not actually use these terms when writing about their exhibition.

3 Titon 2008.

4 For an explanation of Walter Benjamin's notions of »aura« and »reauratisiering«, see Leschke 2003, 172. Using slightly different wordings and arguments than we use here, Andreas Fickers identified the museum authenticity problem and some of its solutions in Fickers 2012.

5 About the tactile dimension of sound and its effects in the museum context: Marsh 1998, 55.

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Sound Ways was highly original in its approach. The use of sound in museums as such was not, however. Over the past three decades, the sonic realm has become an increasingly important aspect of exhibitions, in the form of »narrative, music and ambience«.[6] The use of audio guides, podcasts and sound walks, for instance, has become highly common (see Holger Schulze's contribution to this volume).[7] In addition, historical museums use recorded sound and music for creating a particular atmosphere, for recreating historical soundscapes (as in Sound Ways, or in the aural battle scene of World War I in the *Flanders Fields Museum* at Ieper, Belgium[8]), for collections of vanished sounds (on computer displays)[9] and for interactive, virtual soundscapes. The *Ruhr Museum* in Essen, for instance, has employed interactive sound by creating an area in which visitors can start recordings of particular mining industry-related sounds by positioning themselves on a particular spot under a sound shower.[10] Visitors stepping from one spot to another or coordinating how each of them is positioned thus build up their own soundscape composition of sounds associated with mines. In the exhibition *Sound Souvenirs* in Museum *Het Domein* in Sittard, the Netherlands, children were invited to do a sound memory game in which they had to find matching sounds by opening the drawers of a cabinet.[11] And *Das Haus der Musik* in Vienna offers visitors the option to create their own sound art compact disk by sampling and combining sounds recorded in urban and other settings.[12]

The use of sound in exhibitions comes with problems of its own, however. We already hinted at one particularly pressing problem: noise pollution in the museum. Listening with headphones may seem an appropriate answer, if some visitors would not complain about feeling »isolated […] from the museum environment«.[13] Another troubling issue pertains to the attention span of visitors and the time and serenity it takes to wait and listen; for this reason, the visitors of Sound Ways were invited to *lay down* for a couple of minutes. A more fundamental problem, identified by Mark M. Smith, is that the presentation of the sounds of the past in museum settings may be too straightforward. He mentions the example of an American cotton mill museum that stages early nineteenth-

6 Stocker 1994, 178.

7 About the use of podcasts in museums: Yasko 2006.

8 In Flanders Fields Museum.

9 Lane / Parry 2003.

10 Ruhrmuseum.

11 Museum Het Domain, 2007-08.

12 Haus der Musik.

13 Angliss 2005, 29.

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century industrial sound simply as »loud«. Such an approach will hardly convey »the full texture« of sounds or »the context in which people, especially those on the shop floor listened to « these sounds.[14] Contextualization is even more important when museum visitors listen to sound without any visual reference. As they immediately start guessing about what they listen to, they tend to hear what they are familiar with. Presenting sounds without telling what they meant to past listeners thus comes with the risk of historical inaccuracy, while telling what past listeners heard without presenting the sounds themselves may be disappointing in terms of the museum experience.
And yet many museums appear to adopt either the first option (sounds without much explanation) or the second one (explanation without much sound), as Holger Schulze has noted in his contribution to this volume. It is possible and interesting to do both, however, even though »connecting with the life of the senses in different historical periods« is »no easy task in view of the ephemeral nature of the sensate«, as David Howes has rightly claimed.[15] It is exactly for this reason that the staging of sound in text, radio or film, which in this chapter we illustrate through the example of urban sound, is potentially highly informative and enriching in museum contexts.

2. Capturing and Staging the Experience of Sound

Let us return for a moment to the stories on favourite sounds gathered by Rutger Zuyderfelt and those on unwanted sounds collected by the *Groningen anti-noise committee* – the stories presented in the introductory chapter to this volume. We identified the first set of stories as narratives that often staged sound by employing the auditory topos of the comforting sound, and the second as letters commonly using the auditory topos of the intrusive sound – including its stylistic characteristics such as rhythmic enumeration – to articulate particular experiences of urban sound.
Comforting or intrusive, what the stories have in common is that they were solicited by highlighting »novelty« in the experience of the urban sonic environment. Zuyderfelt invited people to listen to their sonic environments *as if their Ipods were broken*, and as if outdoor noises could sound like a recorded composition. The members of the anti-noise committee used their press reports to provoke responses from their fellow citizens, and they analyzed these responses in detail to further substantiate their conviction that city

14 Smith 2012, 39, 40.
15 Howes 2011, 63.

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life had recently transformed into a deafening experience. In both situations, the inviting actors aimed to heighten the public's auditory consciousness by making the sonic environment sound »strange« or »new«. Our thesis in this chapter is that this is exactly the narrative strategy often used in staging sound in historical text, radio and film – our cultural heritage of mediated sound.

Writers, radio-makers and filmmakers often deploy shifting plot situations as the backdrop against which to present and articulate »urban soundscapes«, here understood as both the sonic environments of city residents *and* the ways in which they make sense of the sounds they are surrounded with.[16] For example, the protagonist's arrival in a city unknown to him represents such conventional moment for the sonic display of the city in movies, radio plays and texts. At such »moment«, the sounds and the novelty of the setting intriguingly highlight each other: the sounds signify what is new and specific about the city to the protagonist, while simultaneously the narrative novelty of the situation makes the mundane sounds of everyday city life »audible« to protagonist and audience alike. This is not meant to suggest that there is no sound in the remainder of the play, movie or story; rather, this strategy presents makers with a chance to zoom in on the sonic characteristics of some urban environment at some point in time, or on how the protagonist perceives them.

This chapter, then, is not about »shifting sounds« in the sense of »sounds changing over time«, even though the reader will encounter many a modulated or vanished sound when reading our essay. Instead, it focuses on the narrative repertoires used in text, film and radio to articulate particular impressions of urban soundscapes. As we will show, intense and contrasting shifts in time and space help to capture and stage the specificities of soundscapes and their perception by the protagonists. In most cases it is quite challenging to capture fleeting sensory experiences tied to the past or present in words, images or sounds convincingly. A recent study on people's sensory experiences of family resemblances revealed that photo elicitation may stimulate respondents to talk about such experiences in a rich vocabulary, but the researchers also ran into many »epiphanal« stories of people struggling with the short-lived nature of their »sensory experiences. Several respondents indicated that they might have seen, heard or felt something at one point in their life very briefly, but that soon after they lost access to it again.[17] Similarly, artists struggle to capture the ephemeral nature of our sensory life. Even the artist-composer Luigi Russolo, a Futurist who aimed to transform and enrich classical music with the microtones and timbres akin to the urban sounds of his age –

16 We follow the definition of »soundscape« by Emily Thompson, see Thompson 2002, 1.

17 Mason / Davies 2009, 596-97.

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the early twentieth century – was heavily criticized for not adequately capturing the essence of urban sound. As a Dutch reviewer wrote about the sound of Russolo's new musical instruments, the *intonarumori*:

> Yet it remained a gray, opaque, chromatically up-and-down-whining rush. Nothing of the machine factory's majestic, dark-toned chanting. Nothing of the rhythmic *pointillé* of ship hammering, or a simple typewriter. Those searching for things to compare the auditory impressions with did not get any further than clearing one's throat, a dentist's drill, or, even worse, a potpourri of lavatory sounds […] The Futurists really seem to be on the wrong track with their naturalistic imitation of modern city noise, and are even surpassed by the popular jazz band that, with its overpowering hubbub-avalanche and panting rhythm, gives a much more convincing transposition of our modern, cinematic sensation-life![18]

This chapter will explore how others have tried to »catch« the fleeting auditory experiences of the city. It is about recurrent, conventional ways of staging urban sounds – ways in which stark narrative transitions in time and space function as key elements, even though we also employ the analytical tools presented in our introductory chapter: auditory topoi, keynote sounds, soundmarks, sonic icons, audiographs and acoustic profiling. Of course, our analysis of such narrative tools for staging sound is hardly exhaustive and cannot be anything but preliminary and exploratory at this point. As such our effort is confined to the sources collected for our earlier studies on staging sound in historical texts, radio plays and films (see Chapter One, footnote 21). Moreover, in this chapter we focus more on examples from text and film than from radio, because radio is the key topic of the third part of this volume. That said, we will show how writers, radio play makers and filmmakers have employed narrative shifts in time and location to present the sounds of the city in ways they considered relevant and convincing. We will discuss three of these narrative transitions in particular: arriving in the city, following the rhythm of the urban day and juxtaposing soundscapes in terms of either place (different neighbourhoods within a city) or time (past and contemporary soundscapes). After a brief, critical consideration of an issue easily overlooked when focusing on these narratives – the issue of adaptation to sound – we will return, in our conclusion, to our initial concern with how these narrative strategies for capturing the experience of sound can be informative to curators and others involved in making historical exhibitions which employ sound.

18 Anonymous 1921, 6.

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3. Arriving in the City

Arrival scenes are common in all sorts of media. One of the most famous *urban arrivals* in early film history is the opening scene of Phil Jutzi's *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1931), a film after Alfred Döblin's novel of the same title (1929). Protagonist Franz Biberkopf has just been released from prison, but his freedom does not only bring him joy: the sounds of the city beyond the walls of the prison frighten him. When he boards a tram headed for Alexanderplatz, we hear non-diegetic music that gradually merges with the sounds of the street: the noises of the tram engine, of road construction workers hitting stones without a clear rhythm, of tram bells incessantly ringing and cars suddenly sounding their horns. We see rapidly passing city scenes from the perspective of tram passenger Biberkopf. Simultaneously, the traffic sounds turn louder and louder, eventually overcrowding the music – resulting in what Jasper Aalbers has coined the »noisification of music«.[19] The scene reaches its climax when the protagonist jumps off the tram: the sounds and sights of the city are simply too much for him.

The traffic sounds invoke Biberkopf's nervousness, prompting him to leave the tram and to search for tranquillity in a courtyard. The shift in location from a presumably boring and silent prison to the noisy inner city articulates the trope of the intrusive sound, of noise the protagonist cannot immediately cope with, over-stimulated as his senses are. The next scene, which marks a shift from the noisy tram into the quiet courtyard does exactly the opposite: it brings in the trope of the comforting sound. Intriguingly, the traffic sounds express both the character of the city – a busy, frantic and threatening agent – and that of Franz Biberkopf's state of mind. As the German film historian Guntram Vogt put it:

> The transition from hectic traffic to the seclusion of an inner courtyard […] and the atmosphere of the metropolis allow for a striking expression of the character's psyche.[20]

Importantly, the above-described film scenes proved extremely hard to record. The microphones used at the time were so sensitive that it was impossible, for instance, to film the scene *and* to record the dialogue on location. For this reason, Alexanderplatz and its vicinity had to be rebuilt at the Babelsberg film studios.[21] The background sounds for

19 Aalbers 2012, forthcoming.

20 Vogt 2001, 29, Hake 2004.

21 Rehhahn 1996, 222, Vogt 2001, 252, Braunger 2008, 28.

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the scenes situated at or near Alexanderpatz came from original recordings of 1930s traffic.[22] Apparently, the prerecorded, »standard« sounds from studio catalogues were deemed of insufficient quality to fulfil the important functions of urban sounds in *Berlin Alexanderplatz*.

The use of urban sounds in the *Berlin Alexanderplatz* novel, film and radio play, including a comparison between these versions, warrant a study in its own right, which we undertake in our chapter on »Familiar Sounds«, this volume.[23] Here, however, it is relevant to show how »changing places« equally opens up the protagonist's ears in many of our other examples from film, allowing the audience to listen in to a particular take on urban sounds. As the protagonist enters a city, the film audience arrives there together with him, joining his first experience of the urban environment. The opening sequence of a lost version of *The 39 Steps* (1935) by Alfred Hitchcock, for example, is, as one critic argued

> a brilliant evocation of what a loud and busy city can be to a friendless outsider. We see a quick tumble of images from the city […] with a barrage of city noises.[24]

In such openings, the use of visual and sonic icons helps the audience to locate the scene almost instantly. In Hitchcock's thriller *Foreign Correspondent* (1940), an American journalist travels to London to cover a peace conference. Just prior to his arrival by train, visualized by the smoke and steam of a train entering a railway station, we see an image of the Clock Tower of Westminster Palace. We now know the scene is London. Yet we do not hear the Tower's Big Ben. Only two minutes later, when we watch the journalist in his hotel room, we hear its bell. While it sounds, the journalist does a little dance-improvisation involving an umbrella and a bowler hat: clearly, this is England. And just in case it has slipped our mind, the sound of the Big Ben reminds us that we have arrived at a particular place in England: London.

The four-toned chime of the Big Ben acts as an auditory landmark, a soundmark of London. By 1940, the shot of the Clock Tower had already transformed into a *visual* icon of London-in-film because the production company London Film used it as its logo from the early 1930s onward.[25] Similarly, the tower's chime developed into a *sonic* icon. In radio plays set in London for instance, such as *If you're glad, i'll be frank* (Tom Stoppard

22 Braunger 2008, 40.

23 See also Jelavich 2006.

24 Maurice Yacowar, quoted in Barr 1999, 20.

25 Brunsdon 2007, 12, 28.

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1966) and *The dog it was that died* (BBC 1982), the sound of the Big Ben was used as both a spatial reference and a reminder of the inevitable march of time.
In *Trainspotting* (Danny Boyle, 1996), to return to examples from film, the Scottish protagonist Renton, a former drug addict, arrives in London where he aims to start a new life. The city is introduced through shots of London as tourists know it, including, again, the Clock Tower, but we do not hear any urban sounds. Instead, the images are accompanied by the exciting pop music of Ice MC's *Think About The Way*. Although the music is non-diegetic, it succeeds in having the audience share Renton's experience of arriving in London, a city of big business and new opportunities – the trope of sensational sound. The film *London* (Patrick Keiller, 1994) similarly opens with an arrival in London, in this case of a man, a photographer on a cruise ship, returning home. The opening scene shows the ship passing the Tower Bridge, and we hear it sounding its horn. Such horns are the sonic icons of London East End, where the docks used to be. This gives the sound a nostalgic and melancholic quality – in line with the overall mood of the film – as it refers to activities that no longer exist.

Figure 2: Still of the film *London* (1994) by Patrick Keiller.

But what if the film's characters or the audience are not familiar with the geography and sounds of London? In *Out of the Clouds* (Basil Dearden, 1955), a romantic comedy, two travellers – one from Germany and the other from the United States – are stuck in London because the airport had been shut down due to bad weather. They spend the night in a London pub, and while standing on a balcony they hear the sounds of ship horns and church bells. The pub's female owner explains to them what they hear:

> Just you stand and listen to it though. [*Ship horns are audible at a distance*.] I often come out here and listen. Like a concert it is sometimes, the sounds of the ol' River. [*A church bell rings*.] That's St. Mary's Rotherhithe, she's always the first.

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> You'll hear all the others in a minute. Southwick and Bow and St. Paul's, and the City churches. [*Several church bells ring, one of them being the Big Ben, and a ship sounds its horn*.] There's a big'un coming up. That'll be the Dutchman I expect, always in on Fridays. [*A big rumble startles the tourists*.] That's just the barges banging together at their moorings; the wash of a big ship always sets them off.

There is a remarkable difference in how the various characters are shown to experience this scene. The English hostess enjoys the sounds of the city and the river as an agreeable concert: they are familiar sounds to her, which structure the flow of time. To the German and American tourists, however, the sounds are new, even startling. Only after the hostess has given these sounds a meaning and a location, these iconic London sounds create such a romantic atmosphere that as soon as she leaves to prepare for dinner, the tourists have their first passionate kiss.

Another interesting diversity in the meaning of the sounds of London to the protagonists is found in the opening scene of the radio production *On the town: London* (BBC, 1978). This radio portrait of London starts with twelve strokes of the Big Ben, and every interval between a chime is filled either by a recorded statement of what London means to an interviewed person or by a selection of sounds such as traffic noises, the murmuring of voices emanating from an anonymous crowd and the discrete sounds of birds in a park. While the statements between the chimes offer a great variety of views about London as a place loved or hated, pleasant or frightening, amusing or strange, the recurring sound of the Big Ben works as an acoustic and narrative frame, tying together the diverging characterizations of the metropolis by the protagonists.

As Annelies Jacobs has shown, travel narratives written by foreign visitors of late nineteenth-century Amsterdam similarly managed to open up the ears of their audiences by articulating how different the Dutch capital sounded from other European cities.[26] Much of the evidence about the sensory environment of early modern cities, Jill Steward and Alexander Cowan have claimed, »has come from outsiders, sensitive to material and cultural differences and eager to make comparisons«.[27] This was still true for the nineteenth century, when visitors listened to Amsterdam with fresh ears, much in the same way as a former Amsterdam resident who had moved to Groningen listened to his new town only to find its noise »striking«, unlike »perhaps the people who lived in Groningen all of their life and have grown more used to it«.[28] Travellers, it seems,

26 Jacobs 2013, forthcoming.

27 Steward / Cowan 2007, 3.

28 Archives Anti-Lawaai comité Groningen, 66.

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listen carefully and may observe sharply by comparing, consciously or not, the sounds of newly visited cities with the familiar sounds of their hometowns.

What did these travel writers have to tell about the urban sounds of Amsterdam in the late nineteenth century? Although visitors such as the Italian Edmondo de Amicis, the Portuguese Ramalho Ortigão, the British Charles W. Wood, the French Henry Harvard and the Belgian Charles de Coster gave lengthy descriptions of such divergent sounds as local voices, bells, carillons, horse hoofs, carriages, carts and handcarts on the city's cobblestones, they had much less to say about the sounds of industry – with the marked exception of the Amsterdam diamond industry. Ramalho Ortigão considered the »ear-deafening grinding« of cleaving diamonds »nerve racking« – »irritating every single pore of our skin«.[29]

Most of the descriptions by foreign visitors focused on street sounds, however, notably the sounds of transport and traffic, including pedestrians. About a typical Amsterdam street, Charles Wood said that it

> was very narrow […], had been paved with unequal stones, and reverberated intensely. A carriage that passed through it rattled with a violence as if it was a long artillery train.[30]

He had even worse noises to report about. At night, Wood felt not only disturbed by the many Amsterdam bells, but also by the nightly uproar of »loudly drunk men and women of the meanest kind«. In fact, these drunks »had voices as only the most uncivilized classes can have, or as only the Dutch posses«.[31] While he wondered about the sounds of Amsterdam at large, his fellow travel writer Charles de Coster tried to record in written words the characteristic sounds of one particular Amsterdam neighbourhood, the Jewish quarter: »It is hard to imagine the din and noise of the *Jodenbreestraat* if one has never actually heard it«, he claimed.

> All these small merchants cry, gesticulate, smile to attract customers, mention prices, sell, announce what they sell or buy and recommend its qualities. And what voices! These are nose and throat sounds in all keys. The small ones call in major scales and the big ones in minor. These qualified sellers use every sales trick imaginable. They attract attention by using rattles, castanets or by drumming on

29 Ortigão / Jong 1948 [1885], 150.

30 Wood / Baarslag 2002 [1878], 55.

31 Wood / Baarslag 2002 [1878], 54-55.

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> old pans. And there is another rattle, a very big one, the city rattle. A Jewish boy turns it with great sincerity. He even plays a military march with it. In this manner he informs the housewives about the near arrival of the closed car that fetches household refuge at every door. A humpbacked Jew has harnessed himself before a cart with peat. On the peat sits a little boy who mimics a trumpet and invitingly beckons to passers-by. […] [A] boy with warped legs walks in front of it and tries to sell his ware by clattering a box with nails. An organ plays *Mère Angot* and another plays the lamenting song of the *Leeuw van Nederland*, loudly sang along by a few men and a woman in rags.[32]

Before explaining the specific wording used to stage to street sounds of the Jewish quarter and other areas of Amsterdam, let us first point to two other types of sound outsiders considered characteristic of Amsterdam. What they considered downright remarkable were the sounds of cleaning. On Saturday, the maids of Amsterdam turned houses inside-out:

> In residential housing, storehouses, shops, offices, everywhere everything is overthrown, dusted down, beaten, brushed clean, with a diligence, a fury, a fanaticism that is close to delirium.[33]

Also surprising to them was the right of Amsterdam children to bang their drums as loud as they wanted near the Stock Exchange during the week of the fun fair. As tradition had it, an orphan boy had discovered a »gunpowder treachery« under the old Stock Exchange, and by way of reward had asked and been given the eternal right for young kids to bang drums during the fair. In practice, this right was abolished when the *Beurs of Berlage* (the new Stock Exchange building) came into use in 1903, yet until that time, as Amsterdam commentators wrote, the event sounded like »disharmonic and ear-deafening violence«.[34] It seemed to shock Wood even deeper:

> When I left the New Church that morning and crossed the Dam (the most important square in town) I was surprised to see the Stock Exchange full of boys, and to hear emanating from it the sound of joy and laughter, cries, hurrays, drums, trumpets, flutes and sharp pocket flutes, in a manner I had never observed before and would not have been able to imagine, and of a type I hope never to hear again. In

32 Coster / Janson 1998 [± 1879], 36-37.

33 Ortigão / Jong 1948 [1885], 36.

34 Gouw 1974 [1875], 63.

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Figure 3: Banging the Drums at the Amsterdam Stock Exchange.

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> a moment of absent-mindedness, I entered the Stock Exchange. Each and every corner of the building was chokingly filled with toddlers. Hundreds and hundreds screamed and yelled as loud as their Dutch voices could, drumming and blowing on ugly trumpets, ran like small devils, and clattered their little rattles behind the back of those incautious persons who dared to join them.[35]

As some of these quotes illustrate, observers tended to describe the sounds they heard in terms of musical language: not only did they give ample attention to the musical instruments used and songs produced on the streets, they also employed notions like »disharmonic«, »sounds in all keys«, »major«, »minor«. As Jacobs has convincingly argued, following Jonathan Sterne and Matthias Riege, this phenomenon was anything but a coincidence.[36] It expressed a way of thinking about sound that predominated until the late nineteenth century. In this line of thought, which started from Pythagoras' theory of harmony, music was thought to be fundamentally different from other kinds of sound: while music had regular or consonant sound waves, non-music had irregular or dissonant ones. In the 1860s, however, physicist Hermann von Helmholtz introduced new explanations for the rise of consonant and dissonant sounds, the by-effect of which was that music was no longer seen as principally *different* from speech and noise but considered to belong *with* speech and noise to one and the same domain of sound.[37] This also shifted scholars' priorities in *what* they aimed to examine. Prior to Helmholtz' insights the production of music – and thus the functioning of sources of music like the human voice, human mouth and musical instruments – were centre-stage. Afterwards, however, the effect and perception of music, and of sound at large, became much more important. In Jonathan Sterne's words:

> No longer themselves general categories of sound fit for theory construction, the mouth, the voice, music, and musical instruments would become specific contenders for audition in a whole world of sonic phenomena.[38]

It was the ear as such, and its ability to transform vibrations into audible signals, that became the central subject of research and the starting-point for new experiments and new sound technologies like the phonograph. Through the discussion of such sound

35 Wood / Baarslag 2002 [1878], 69.
36 Jacobs 2013, forthcoming.
37 Rieger 2003, 183-89.
38 Sterne 2003, 33.

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technologies in the general press and the public's experience with them, novel ways of thinking about sound would reach the general audience.[39] This involved a process that took many years, however. A quote from a Dutch newspaper article on the phonograph reveals the still deep-rooted distinction between music and non-music in the late 1870s. The phonograph, as the article explains,

> clearly returns each sound, of whatever character. It does not make a difference whether or not it is a musical note, the cough of an old man, the sweet twittering twinkle of a Patti, the loud bark of a dog, or the screams of a parrot; once it has once been written on the phonograph's tinfoil, it can be repeated as often as one wishes.[40]

It is within this context that we can understand why late nineteenth-century visitors arriving in Amsterdam had a special ear for the voices, bells and musical sources of sound audible on its streets. And within these categories, they clearly foregrounded the sounds they considered typical of Amsterdam (and different from what they were used to), such as those made by the drumming children, the hammering sounds of cleaning, and the reverberation of these sounds in the city's narrow streets. Moreover, their »period ear«[41] did not only imply that they were attuned to the (a-)musicality of sound; they were also quick to associate the less agreeable sounds with uncivilized behaviour or lower classes and cultures, as the quotes above illustrate.

So even though »arrival scenes« served as a common narrative strategy for writers, filmmakers and radio-makers to »capture« urban sounds, their »period ear« deeply influenced how they staged these sounds (and their take on the city) in more detail. Intriguingly, the rising interest in the issue of noise in the early twentieth century and the »noisification of music« by Futurists and avant-garde filmmakers had been preceded by an age which preferably reviewed sounds in terms of their musicality.

4. The Rhythm of Urban Life

So far, we have discussed shifts in locations, or change across *space*, as a narrative entrance into the staging of city sound or a protagonist's experience of particular urban

39 Rieger 2003, 193.

40 Anonymous 1878, 1.

41 Burstyn 1997.

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sounds. The use of shifts in *time* is another important element of repertoires for staging sound. In this section we will show how evocation of the rhythm of everyday urban life has served as a common strategy for capturing the sonic experience of city life and staging particular characteristics of individual cities.

A most emblematic example of this staging strategy in fact involves a *silent* movie: Walter Ruttman's *Berlin: Symphonie einer Grossstadt* (1927). This film, which is entirely devoted to capturing the rhythm of life in the metropolis, opens with a train that enters the city in the morning, after which it shows how Berlin is awakening, how its traffic gets moving and how its citizens are going to work in huge factories. Images of crowds, traffic and industrial activity are accompanied by an energizing as well as slightly chaotic music score composed by Edmund Meisel. At the beginning of the fourth act, however, the music suddenly halts: time for lunch. Construction workers leave the shop floor and sit down for sausages and beer. As two horses are being fed, the music turns into a slow and relaxing tune, followed by funny scenes of an elephant in the zoo, picking up nuts with its trunk, and a moving puppet in a baker's shop window. The incessant hustle and bustle of city life has shifted into a slower pace – if only briefly.

Only a few years later, in 1930, Ruttmann produced *Weekend*, a purely sonic portrait of Berlin (see also the Chapter »Sounds Familiar«, this volume). The radio play had six movements and expressed the rhythm of a Berlin weekend starting on a Saturday afternoon at the shop floor, through a night out and a pastoral Sunday, and ending with the city returning to work on Monday. Ruttmann gathered his sounds by driving around Berlin in a van with a hidden microphone, stopping at locations such as train stations, factories and busy streets to record the uninhibited rhythm of city life.[42] For Ruttmann, *Weekend* was a study in sound-montage, in which »sound was an end itself«.[43] In 1998, the Bavarian public broadcasting service initiated a *Weekend remix* competition, which resulted in six different creative appropriations of the play by sound artists from all over Europe.[44] The French sound artist trio *To Rococo Rot* produced a remix in which they replaced Ruttmann's recordings by newly recorded sounds of a Berlin weekend in 1998. By keeping up the rhythmic montage principles of the original, they were able to produce another striking expression of Berlin's rhythm of life, yet this time of the late twentieth century.

Authors of written accounts of everyday life in late nineteenth-century Amsterdam also exploited the rhythm of urban life as stepping stone for staging sound. In capturing this

42 Shapins 2008.

43 Jerzy Toeplitz im Gespräch mit Walter Ruttmann (1933), in: Wiadomsci Literackie (28), 499, reprinted in Goergen 1989, 90.

44 Ruttmann, DJ Spooky et al. 1998.

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rhythm, they evoked the density of urban life: the sheer number of people around and active at particular hotspots in the city – sensational sound once again. As the Frenchman Henry Havard claimed, the Kalverstraat, one of the main arteries of the Amsterdam business and shopping district, was »always full of life«, »no matter the time of the day«. Only »[b]etween 3 and 5 in the morning«, as he qualified his statement, »it may be quiet for a moment«.[45] To the Dutch chronicler Justus van Maurik, this was even true for Amsterdam at large. A city like Amsterdam, he claimed, »actually never gets entirely silent«. Even those living along the putatively quiet canals would always hear some distant sound, »reminding of the far-away murmur of the sea, weaker at some moment, stronger at another«.[46]

One frosty night, when the streets of Amsterdam were covered with snow, Van Maurik described what he heard while in bed. After »the old tower's clock« strikes twelve, he hears the distant sounds of other bells, a carriage and voices singing. This is followed by a carriage's wheels rattling on a bridge – it halts in front of the neighbours' home – and muffled voices, a door bell, the opening and closing of a coach door. After its leaving, the rattling of its wheels slowly dies down. Van Maurik falls asleep, but awakens before the clock struck six. Behind his house, in a narrow street,

> a knocker-up starts knocking, and he is making noise for two. This is where the craftsmen live, people who have to get up early.[47]

Next, he overhears farmers coming into town from all directions, first those with vegetables, who shortly afterwards are followed by again other types of cart that »rattle incessantly on bridges and streets«. Clearly, the »milk carts are back in the city«. By the time it is nine in the morning, »all city districts« are bustling with activity again, accompanied by occasional vendors' cries.[48]

Kalverstraat was particularly lively indeed. In 1875, an Amsterdam resident gave a detailed description of a typical day in this main shopping street:

> The first shift is that between 9 am and 1 pm. At that time, Kalverstraat is as calm and quiet as any other neighbourhood in town. First, one meets the children going to school […], devout Catholics going to church, gentlemen going to their office […].

45 Havard 1876, 461.

46 van Maurik ±1890, 217.

47 Knocker-ups could be hired to wake up those who had to start working early in the morning.

48 van Maurik ±1890, 1-9.

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Somewhat later, one finds the young ladies who do their shopping, strangers leaving their lodgings to see the capital's most remarkable sites, *commis-voyageurs* in a hurry, and organ-grinders turning against each other, playing the most ear-deafening music [...]. At noon, many a worker takes a break: the Jewish vendors with their carts with pears, apples, lemons or oranges; the fish vendors with their barrows; and the fishwives with their baskets full of living seafood. Things gradually come to a halt.
The second shift lasts from 1 to 6 pm. First there is a flow of distinguished gentlemen and young men who hurry towards the Stock Exchange, which starts at half past 1. Next, you see women of doubtful reputation, whose attitude and dress reveal them to belong to the »demimonde« […]. Now the *flâneurs* follow, with or without ladies; gentlemen who take their time to saunter up and down the street, take a halt in front of various shops, and, when they are on their own, take a rest from their fatigues in one or another coffee house, looking through the windows to watch, in turn, other *flâneurs* as well as *flâneuses*.
Subsequently the flow of Stock Exchange visitors turns up again, most often in groups of two or three men talking excitedly with each other about the day's stock rates. Some of them enter a coffee house; others move on with this genuine Amsterdam footstep that tells you: »time is money«. Yet one will find fewer of them before long: many, whose offices are along the route, have secured a place in one or another omnibus. The streets are now growing ever more crowded, notably with pedestrians hurrying back to their homes.
Between 5 and 7 pm *Kalverstraat* is nearly deserted. But soon those visiting the theatres, vaudeville or the people's palace start showing up: men and women, walking calmly or in haste, depending on whether they have reserved places or not. In their wake there are those who go for a walk, to catch a breath of fresh evening air or just for a stroll; the coffee houses get crowded.[49]

Actually, a year before this description was published, Kalverstraat was paved with asphalt, a novelty. Also unique at that time was that the city authorities only allowed traffic to move in one direction. The asphalt pavement was an experiment intended to reduce the noise of iron-mounted wheels on cobblestones, to raise the quality of the flaneur experience and to enhance the attraction of the shops. The new Kalverstraat sound had a downside, however. Because the police failed to enforce the obligatory use of bells for carts passing through, many people did not hear them approach anymore.[50]

49 Gouw 1974 [1875], 52-55.

50 Gouw 1974 [1875], 31.

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Looking back in 1938, the Dutch classicist and literary scholar Aegidius Willem Timmerman claimed that the past had been noisier than the present:

> If we briefly ignore the sounding of car horns, the grinding of music disks, the whining of loudspeakers, towns of the past used to be much noisier than today's towns. No asphalt, no rubber tires, no ban on loud vending, […] no fixed days for street organs or other musicians. Farmer carts without springs and lorries rattle-thundered on the rough round cobblestones, their sounds reverberating down the streets at two hundred meters' distance. From the early morning until the late evening, the cries of merchants selling […] cantaloupes and oranges resonated. […] Notably on Monday, throngs of drunks swarmed and swob through the city, arm in arm and screaming […]. The place was teeming with street organs and street musicians. […] You also heard the dustman rattling, hussars blaring, military music bands crossing the streets almost every day, rammers singing as the block fell, and the chinking of the chains.[51]

This commentary contradicts the common notion of city life growing ever noisier from the late nineteenth into the first half of the twentieth century, while it underlines how staging the nearly incessant sounds of city life by highlighting its rhythm was a convention in its own right. This passage also points to two other strategies for articulating a city's sonic realm: juxtaposition of present soundscapes with those of the past or future, and contrasting sounds among neighbourhoods within the same city, two topics we address in the section below.

5. Juxtaposing Soundscapes

»Way into the night«, the Italian traveler Edmondo De Amicis wrote in 1876, Kalverstraat

> swarms with men and women, gentlemen and ladies, in all kinds of mood, of all kinds of character; yet in just a few footsteps one leaves the illuminated street for the dark canals, between the motionless, idle ships, surrounded by a deep silence.[52]

51 Timmerman 1938, 257-58.

52 De Amicis et al. 1985 [1876], 196-97.

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He effectively contrasted the sound of Amsterdam's business and entertainment district with that of the upper class neighbourhoods along the canals – without actually describing the first. In just one sentence, he captured a hallmark of the Amsterdam soundscape that may still strike visitors today: the luxurious tranquility along the canals with their aristocratic houses found in the heart of a buzzing city.

Jasper Aalbers identified several similar scenes of sonic contrast in films set in London and Berlin, although *urban arrival* scenes in movies more often triggered a characteristic representation of city sounds than did shifts from one neighbourhood to another, at least in his corpus. One interesting example is the role of children's sounds. In scenes set in the poorer districts of London, we more frequently hear children playing outside than in the fancy districts. In *Steptoe & Son* (Cliff Owen, 1973), for instance, children's sounds make up an important part of the keynote of scenes situated in or near the homes of two of the lead characters, who run a messy scrap iron business. And in *Nil by Mouth* (Gary Oldman, 1997), children are audibly playing amidst the sober, concrete blocks of apartment buildings. In contrast, children are conspicuously absent from the fancy streets of *Notting Hill* (Roger Michell, 1999), *Four Weddings and a Funeral* (Mike Newell, 1994) and *Bridget Jones' Diary* (Sharon Maguire, 2001). This contrast is played out in *Wonderland* (Michael Winterbottom, 1999), where we clearly hear children's activities near the cheap apartment of protagonist Nadia, while such sounds are absent in the more distinguished district where her parents live. The sounds of children playing outside has thus become a *keynote icon*, or conventionalized part of the background sound of a particular location, of poor, lower-class areas, where children presumably spend less time on organized, educational activities under the supervision of adults than in upscale neighbourhoods. It is also a form of acoustic profiling (see Chapter One), this time not only through the staging of the sounds of language and voice, but also through the sounds of a neighbourhood's activity pattern.

It is important to note, however, that in many movie scenes which portray transitions from one location to another within the same city, filmmakers use background sound or its absence to characterize the state of mind of the protagonist as well as the sonic environment. After the opening scene of *Wonderland*, in which Nadia sneaks away from a disappointing blind date, she wanders through the streets of Soho (presented in fast motion). At the same time, all diegetic sounds gradually fade out, to be replaced by non-diegetic, comforting music which serves as a counterpoint to the shots of night clubs and busy traffic. By doing so, film director Michael Winterbottom makes the audience's attention shift from the urban setting to Nadia's mood and what *she* needs while moving through the city. Winterbottom repeats this strategy in a scene in which a character named Eddie panics after receiving the news he will become a father. While Eddie leaves his London house to take a drive on his motorcycle all night, we again

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see fast motion and hear how all urban noises are filtered out except for the sound of the motorcycle. Eventually, even this noise recedes and is masked by music. Film theorist Barbara Flückiger has argued this is an effective way to signify that characters are not in touch with reality:

> The disappearance of noises marks or indicates loss of reality. The subject, the character, seems disconnected from the acoustic surroundings and, thereby, from reality.[53]

It is a use of sound that composer and professor of post-production Stephen Deutch has coined »Heightened FX«: it fuses »literal sounds« (sounds which »encourage us to believe what we see«) and »emotive sounds« (sounds which »encourage us to feel something about what we are seeing«) into a »single gesture«.[54]

Aside from this use of urban sound, it is a common strategy to contrast the sonic character of individual neighbourhoods within a city. Films set in pre-unification Berlin, for instance, tend to contrast the relative silence of the border zone or Potsdamer Platz in East-Berlin with the dazzling energy of West-Berlin – silence and natural sounds signifying the sonic absence of metropolitan life, or, for that matter, the need to be silent in order to hide oneself.[55] And Liselotte Engster's 1972 sonic collage of Berlin, entitled *Berlin – laut und leise* (Berlin – aloud and quiet) expresses the contrast between the tranquillity of a park idyll and the noises produced by airplanes, trams and cars. It would be similarly interesting to unravel how particular groups of migrants in particular urban neighbourhoods are portrayed in terms of sound. Jennifer Stoever-Ackerman has done so in her analysis of *New York Times* articles, published in the 1950s, about Puerto Rican migrants and of Tony Schwartz' sonic portrait of Midtown New York (*Nueva York: A Tape documentary of Puerto Rican New Yorkers,* 1955). While *The New York Times* consistently created a contrast between loud, boisterous and noisy Puerto Ricans and quiet white middle class people, Tony Schwartz' radio portraits were sonically far richer in their interpretation of both sides of the »sonic color-line«.[56]

If the strategy of juxtaposing different *locations* within a city has been used to stage and capture urban sound, the same has been done by juxtaposing different *time periods*. We can find examples in Annelies Jacobs' study of diaries kept by Amsterdam

53 Flückiger 2001, 397.

54 Deutch 2007, 4.

55 Aalbers 2012, forthcoming.

56 Stoever-Ackerman 2010.

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residents during World War II. The sudden and dramatic change of the city's soundscape at the start of the war, with its intrusive sounds of airplanes, anti-aircraft gunfire and air-raid alarms, contributed to an atmosphere of fear and bewilderment, notably at night.[57] During the days and evenings, in contrast, the gradual disappearance of crowds and traffic – due to curfew, the confiscation of cars and bicycles, and the deportation of Jews – created an awkward silence. On May 18, 1940, one diary writer characterized Amsterdam as »very calm« and with »no traffic and no damage and very few Germans about«.[58] Another diarist wrote the following about the situation one week later:

> Virtually no cars anymore in the streets. The only transport still permitted is that of troops and groceries. City bus services have been discontinued or reduced. Doctors may no longer visit their patients by car.[59]

Fuel scarcity made private cars gradually vanish from the city's streets, while bicycle taxis were introduced to compensate for the loss. Similarly, horse-drawn carriages served as taxi. In 1940, after a visit to the Leidsche Plein Theater (»to forget our worries«), one diarist wrote:

> When we came out of it […] it was pitch dark under the trees of the Leidsche Plein. With the silhouettes of people, horses and carriages (that now replace the taxis), and the weak lights of arc lamps, bicycles and trams, the scene had an old-fashioned ring to it – previous century or so.[60]

The sound of the occupied city reminded residents of the old days. It was hardly a welcome silence, though. If the silence reminded the writer of the sound of the *past*, it did so as a metaphorical shift in time forced upon the city residents – as a sign of retrogression, rather than in any pleasant *nostalgic* way. As two other diarists put it:

> It is ever more striking how few people go to work in the city between 8 and 9 o'clock. But the trams are overcrowded, with countless people standing on the

57 Jacobs 2013 forthcoming.

58 Archives *Nederlands Instituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie* (NIOD) [Dutch Institute for War Documentation], no. 1082, Diary Edith Cox, May 18, 1940.

59 Archives NIOD, No. 1230, Diary C.J. van Buuren, May 25, 1940.

60 Archives NIOD, No. 1187, Diary Gerlof Verwey, September 5, 1940.

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footboards […]. The hundreds, or thousands, of bicycles are gone; inasmuch not confiscated by the German army, they are useless anyway for lack of tires.[61]

The city is calm, without trams; there is much bicycling and the thousands of those on reduced pay use their leisure time by bicycling to or from Hoorn in order to try and find something to eat. This goes on despite the constant checks and confiscation of bicycles.[62]

In 1943, diarist Mirjam Levie expressed the eeriness of this silence and its »backward« character very explicitly:

On Muntplein it is so quiet that there is no police anymore. You hardly see cars anymore in Amsterdam, only those of the German army and a few others. There are also fewer bicycles, and all this has made traffic so low that traffic police officers have absolutely become superfluous. […] But then the Jewish quarter, such as the Breestraat; it is deathly quiet there because many of the people were carried off. […]I wanted to tell you this because the city looks poor, deserted and dirty.[63]

In »Bombs«, a poem by Paul Rodenko written in Amsterdam during the war, it is not the evocation of the sounds of the *past* that expresses the negative experience of silence, but a reference to a modern spatial *future*. This is how Rodenko stages the threatening, fearful silence after the air-raid alarms have sounded:

De stad is stil.	The city is silent.
De straten	The streets
hebben zich verbreed.	have broadened.
Kangeroes kijken door de venstergaten.	Kangaroos are looking through the window gaps.
Een vrouw passeert.	A woman passes by.
De echo raapt gehaast	The echo hurriedly picks up
haar stappen op.	her footsteps.[64]

61 Archives NIOD, No. 1141, Diary C.A.L. Sander, February 4, 1943.

62 Archives NIOD, No. 1570, Diary Anton van Donkelaar, 30 October 1944.

63 Bolle 2003, 98.

64 Rodenko 1951, 14.

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As critic Kees Fens suggested, the woman's footsteps »renew« the silence.[65] But what interests us even more here is the reference to the »broadened«, more spacious streets. Although the poet uses this phrase in a figurative sense here, designing wider streets was in fact one of the interventions fostered by noise abatement societies to combat the problem of city noise in the 1930s. Modernizing urban space by straitening and broadening streets, so was the idea, would enhance a smooth flow of traffic and reduce the reverberation of noise in narrow streets with tall buildings.[66] In Amsterdam, this had been realized in several of the newer neighbourhoods, but in the 1940s it was still largely a modernist planning dream. In Rodenko's poem, the reference to a more spacious urban space highlights the silence. Simultaneously it may also anticipate, just like windows without glass, the near future within the realm of the poem itself. As the next stanza puts it: »Quietly three four bombs land onto the square / and three four houses slowly run up / their red flag« (*Geruisloos vallen drie vier bommen op het plein / en drie vier huizen hijsen traag / hun rode vlag*.).[67] The streets were broadened indeed, also in a literal sense.
The study by Jacobs of the Amsterdam war diaries equally demonstrates how contrasts between the interpretations of past, present and future sounds sharpened the experience of everyday life during the war. Sounds associated with the widespread problem of neighbourly noise in the pre-war years[68], for example, acquired new meanings during the war. City residents would listen in fearful anticipation for sounds that could mean bad news, such as the door bell, which was potentially a rather sinister sound, especially when rung at an odd time. In contrast, merely hearing familiar sounds from the house next-door was now often interpreted as a deeply comforting sound rather than a nuisance, for it meant that the neighbours were not yet arrested by the enemy. Such shifts in the meaning of sounds and modes of listening during the war provide us with new cues on how the war was experienced, as framed in part on the basis of earlier experiences. The diarists and the poet captured their sonic perceptions of a disrupting episode by comparing them with imaginary past and future soundscapes, just like radio and filmmakers sonically contrasted neighbourhoods to express their view on urban identities.

65 Fens 2007, 65.
66 Bijsterveld 2008.
67 Rodenko 1951, 14.
68 Bijsterveld 2003.

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6. Getting Used to Sound

So far, we have shown how those writing about the urban soundscapes they inhabited – temporarily as a visitor or as a longtime resident – or those presenting fictional city soundscapes in radio plays and films often used narrative transitions in time and space to foreground sounds articulating the urban experience. A focus on such transition comes with a methodological risk, however. One might easily forget about less prominent ways of staging sounds in texts, plays and movies, and thus actually reproduce the striking aspects of urban sound: the iconic sensory overload of the urban environment in its sensational or intrusive aspects, or city sounds in their reassuring and sinister roles, or urban sounds as the markers of particular locations in the metropolis. To counter this risk, we also considered how authors and protagonists »talk about« or »display« adaptation to urban sound.

In *Sensing Changes*, Joy Parr has recently presented her research of several mid-twentieth-century mega projects in Canada – such as the building of a military base, a nuclear power plant and a dam – and »the processes by which inhabitants adapted to the habitats the megaprojects had transformed«.[69]

> As inhabitants incorporated into their bodies the altered world beyond their skins, awarenesses they usually held beyond telling, as habit and reflex, became urgently speakable. In *Sensing Changes*, we encounter embodiment both as active adaptation to changed circumstances and as »the whispering of ghosts«, relicts of past successful adaptations to familiar worlds later remade, persisting as familiars, reminders of losses, and also sources of resilience and resources for rebuilding.[70]

In »Moving and Sound«, one of the chapters in *Sensing Changes*, Parr tells how the Ontario village Iroquois and the St. Lawrence River were remade as a consequence of the establishment of a big dam in the late 1950s. She shows that bodily techniques, which villagers had developed in their daily interaction with the old river and village, were of no use anymore in the newly constructed, barren districts. Walking became less common, gathering together around cars in front of shops became a mere memory, and the sounds of the river – the throbbing engines of ships, the slapping sounds that signalled rough days – did no longer make up the keynote of village life. The villagers' bodies had been »familiars of the river«, but these bodies turned lonely with the arrival of the dam,

69 Parr 2010, 1.

70 Parr 2010, 2.

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transforming the sensory knowledge of their former surroundings into the »embodied lostscapes« they became aware of once under threat.[71]

Again, we see how transitions made people aware of their everyday sensory experience of their environment, and how memories of these changes and of the way in which they dealt with them spurred them to make these experiences »speakable«, in the same way as breaches of conventions render the taken-for-granted visible. Yet how did historical actors, radio play writers and filmmakers express the phenomenon of adapting to sound, of simply accepting the sound of the urban environment as it was?

Jacobs' study of diaries by Amsterdam residents during World War II again provides several cues. As clarified above, the sounds of airplanes, anti-aircraft gunfire and air-raid alarms initially caused bewilderment among the Amsterdam population, most of whom had not experienced such sounds before. Yet the diaries also show how some people soon got used to these sounds, while others did not. On 20 May, C.J. van Buuren wrote that his wife still heard the airplanes at night, but that he managed to have a good night's sleep again. Only by the end of the month the same was true of his wife. In June he occasionally heard shootings, at times heavy or nearby, and later at a large distance. He no longer recorded the sounds he heard, nor did he write about airplanes; he merely referred to »activity in the air«. Over time, his choice of words started to underscore the repetitive nature of the air fights: »At night a constant drone of airplanes. Gunfire at a far distance« (9 July); »a few air strikes with accompanying noise« (24 July); and: »Next, the usual noise of airplane drone and gunfire; after half an hour, a repeat of the whole episode« (27 July).[72]

Whenever diarists experienced the war violence intensely, for instance because it came close, they paid much attention to sound. Airplanes proved to »roar« and »drone«, the alarm »howled« and the anti-aircraft gunfire »pounded«. Together these sources of sound would »boom«, particularly when they came so close that the sound could be felt or the house started quivering:

> This is the most awful night we have yet experienced. It has been so bad, so horrible that for the first time I was really scared, which doesn't happen easily. At half past 2 the 1st heavy bombs; directly followed by pounding fire, so heavy that we were shaking in bed. It lasted forever and its intensity kept increasing. […] Shell fragments dropped into the street; everything seemed to take place right above our heads. In between the anti-aircraft gunfire one could vaguely hear the drone of airplanes. Whether there were any fights in the skies over the city we don't know.

71 Parr 2010, 87, 3.

72 Archives NIOD, No. 1230, Diary C.J. van Buuren.

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> You could not come near the windows because of the risk. All was booming and banging. It was nerve-racking, and it lasted until after 4, without interruption.[73]

Yet adult diarists seemed to get used to the sounds of war later on, even if they continued to be aware of the danger:

> At 20.15 the gunfire aimed at airplanes coming over started, and it went on, with some brief interruptions, until 22.15. Two hours of booming and rumbling, but we hardly listen to it anymore. The radio plays on and we read a book, hardly noticing what goes on outside.[74]

Air-raid alarms, airplanes and gunfire were now referred to with metaphors such as »show«, »concert«, or »party«. As one diarist put it, one did not contribute to such »party«, to be sure, by falling asleep.[75] Furthermore, several diarists indicated that the sound of airplanes and alarm also prompted joy, because all the air activity suggested that allied forces were back again to fight the Germans:

> When there is an air-raid alarm, you hear cheering in the street right away: fortunately, they are back again!! No one is afraid. They won't get us, those krauts.[76]

The quotes thus display both sensory stress and processes of accommodation – as some people gradually learned to sleep through the anti-air raid sirens.
The diaries also show evidence, and heartbreakingly so, that children never quite adapted to the noise of war, perhaps because it was harder to them to give meaning to it or put it into perspective. Anne Frank, for instance, was almost eleven years old when the war broke out. She repeatedly indicated to be afraid of what she mostly referred to as »shooting«; in nights with shootings she would look for comfort at her father's side.[77] On 2 June 1944, when she and her relatives had been in hiding for nearly two years, she invented »a brand new anti-shooting recipe«.[78] It basically implied that in case of »hard poppers« one should run up and down a wooden stairs and, preferably also fall

73 Archives NIOD, No. 1151, Diary C.M.A. Bruijn-Barends, 6 July 1940.
74 Archives NIOD, No. 1230, Diary J.C.van Buuren, 27 January 1942.
75 Archives NIOD, No. 1230, Diary J.C.van Buuren, 27 March 1943.
76 Archives NIOD, No. 1151, Diary C.M.A. Bruijn-Barends, 23 June 1943.
77 Frank 2008 [1942-1944], 112.
78 Frank 2008 [1942-1944], 274.

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down cautiously a few times – just so one did not have to think about the shooting for a moment. The noise thus generated indoors reflected a child's imaginative effort to mask the dreadful noise of the shooting outside. Likewise, Gerlof Verwey underscored in his diary how his children continued to be afraid of the sounds of war, while he himself had gotten used to them, or, at least, that is what he pretended:

> Throughout the night a howling of the sirens and shooting – baby Ger crying all the time, Abje shaking in his bed, William with eyes open – the whole family awake. […] 8.30. Bombs falling, the siren howls. The gunfire is pounding. We get used to it. Strikingly we continue to work calmly, pretending that nothing is going on. A sense of fatality has grown stronger.[79]

Our other sources similarly display the complexity and subtlety in processes of adaptation to sound that had once been new. In his study of films, Jasper Aalbers found that adaptation to urban sound was not only expressed through storylines, as in Out of the Clouds on the German and American tourists in London, but also in changes in the character of the staged sounds and in the relationship between sounds onscreen and off-screen. An example is the remarkable role of traffic sound in films set in Berlin. A comparison of East-Berlin films made in the 1950s with those produced in the 1970s reveals that the relative presence of *unspecified* background sounds had increased: from 9.4 percent of all »urban sound events« (counted by Aalbers) in the 1950s films to 27.4 percent in the 1970s. In contrast, the relative presence of *distinct* traffic sounds decreased, from 45 percent in the 1950s to 34.1 percent in the 1970s, even though the share of distinct *car* sounds within these traffic sounds had slightly risen. As the actual increase of cars in the GDR had been much higher, going from 75,710 cars in 1950 to 1,159,778 in 1970[80], the staging of sound in the East-Berlin films seemed to present car sound as a nearly naturalized aspect of the key sounds of East-Berlin, and thus, in Aalbers' view, as something people had become used to. However, while distinct car sounds were onscreen in 70 percent of the cases in his Berlin sample of the 1970s, this was even 89 percent in his East-Berlin sample. This particular staging of sound, Aalbers argues, shows that the presence of cars had a less taken for granted status in his East-Berlin sample than in his Berlin sample at large, thus expressing the relative novelty of the car's predominance in East-Berlin after all. Even if the sound of cars increasingly coloured the keynote of East-Berlin, films displayed it more often on screen, thus presenting it as relatively »special«.

79 Archives NIOD, No. 1187, Diary Gerlof Verwey, 15 November 1940.

80 Deutsche Demokratische Republik 1975, 245.

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7. Conclusions

At the end of the 1970s, the well-known Dutch columnist Henk Hofland acknowledged that he loved to read about the »sounds of yesterday« because they made him feel deeply »nostalgic«. Recalling the sounds of the past gave him a »sense of unspeakable approval of life« similar to what he had felt as a young kid, lying in bed, and listening to an early morning horse tram driving into town.[81] His effusion reminds *us* of Rutger Zuyderfelt's »Take a closer listen«, discussed in our previous chapter, which radiates the same thirst for urban life through sound. Hofland, however, added a disclaimer – one which historians of sound are confronted with more often – suggesting that »a more or less systematic exploration« of this issue would show that such nostalgia for the sounds of yesterday was »nice but of little significance«.[82]

Without discrediting the role of sounds in eliciting nostalgia, this chapter has aimed to show that studying the sounds of the urban past and their media staging is relevant for presenting and articulating experiences of city life. A focus on sound, in other words, provides a fresh angle on the constructed identities of cities and their residents. Our argument reveals that authors and makers of texts, radio plays and films have deployed well-known topoi of urban sound, such as intrusive and sensational sound. We have also shown how across different media the same narrative tools were employed for capturing and staging sound: the urban arrival scene, showing the daily rhythm of urban life, juxtaposing the soundscapes of different neighbourhoods within one city, and contrasting the soundscapes of the present, past and future. As our argument demonstrates, these strategies have been deployed across the entire time period under study, from the late nineteenth until the early twenty-first century. At the same time, however, we elucidated the historicity of the wording or sounds that figure in these narrative conventions. For example, while the musicalization of sonic vocabularies was typical for works from the late nineteenth century, the noisification of music was characteristic for, though not fully confined to, works from the early twentieth century.

Moreover, in addition to conventions we tracked down less predictable representations of urban sound, such as the silence and silent episodes in the rhythm of urban life, the staging of adjustment to urban sound or the remarkable iconization of *keynote* sounds like the sounds of children playing outside, which may also be coined as the acoustic profiling of particular neighbourhoods. This means that the texts, plays and films we studied did not only reify existing representations of the city, but also opened up

81 Hofland 2010 [1978], 76.

82 Ibid.

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our ears to less traditional ones. This means that studying the representation of sound in media products of the past involves much more than reconstructing »lostscapes«, the past sensory experiences of vanished places, as Joy Parr aimed to do in *Sensing Changes*. Such effort is as much about the sounds and experiences »won«, like the sound of traffic on smooth asphalt or the wonderful sounds of neighbours still around in war-ridden Amsterdam of the early 1940s (instead of them having been arrested and removed by the enemy), as it is about sounds and experiences lost.

As regards the study of auditory topoi of mechanical sounds in literature, the basic concern in *Mechanical Sound* (see Chapter One) was to acquire a better understanding of how lay people dramatized sound when complaining of noise, and to understand why their ways of doing this often clashed with the ways of dramatizing sound required in formal legal settings, such as hearings in the context of nuisance law. In this chapter, however, we studied how writers, radio play writers and filmmakers used auditory topoi and other tools to open up *our* ears, thus forcing us take a closer listen where usually we refrain from doing so. It is in the *ways* in which they made us listen that we may find experiment and novelty. Capturing and staging the experience of urban sound may not automatically lead to convincing artistic renewal, as the critique of Russolo's art noise has revealed. Yet at times, struggling with capturing sound does lead to unexpected innovations.

Writers and the makers of radio plays and films have found new ways to stage the experience of urban sound: fleeting, fugitive, fragile and evanescent, like so many other sensory experiences. They did so by blending everyday sounds with music, or amplifying music at the expense of city sounds, or playing the background sounds of traffic while varying the extent to which they were seen onscreen and off-screen, to mention just a few examples. If we were looking for conventions, we harvested the unexpected in the same act. One type of intermediality, as will explain in more detail in Chapter Four, is taking up the formal characteristics of a particular medium within another, different medium.[83] The musicalization of noise and noisification of music are similar examples of mixing the characteristics of two »genres« in order to evoke a particular experience of the city.

Such innovations can be highly informative for museum curators as well. We started our chapter with the claim that the use of natural sound and sound recordings can be an interesting solution to the authenticity problem historical museums struggle with – bringing audiences close to past objects without enabling them to touch these objects – provided that presenting sound and explaining the complexities of its historical meanings go hand in hand. *Sound Ways*, the Finnish exhibition we opened this chapter with,

83 Rajewsky 2005.

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did so by combining sound and text, and by making use of a literary strategy: employing the audiograph. Other recent historical exhibitions and historical soundwalks combine sounds and sound effects with recorded narratives drawn from oral history interviews, thus adding context *and* authenticity through the reports of earwitnesses.[84] The cultural heritage of radio, film and text and the strategies of their makers for capturing sonic experiences can add interestingly to this palette. First, museum curators may well deploy the cultural heritage of radio, film and text as illustrations. *Weekend* may then serve as an example of a particular, rhythmic staging of experiencing the city in the 1930s.[85] Perhaps these curators will also find inspiration in the narrative strategies used by writers and makers of radio and film to capture the varied auditory experiences of the city. This especially helps them to cater those visitors who »hope to hear imaginative narrations playing into the gallery, mixed with beautifully crafted, ambient sound«.[86] Having museum visitors experience the sounds of the urban past through the stories of past visitors is one option, but one could also invite museum visitors to record their own initial sonic surprises when *arriving* in the city in which the museum is located, or ask them for their memories of such first encounters.[87] Moreover, a focus on the changing words used for sounds – for instance by creating compositions of such words – may give visitors an idea of vanished sounds (some words will refer to obsolete artefacts or practices) and of changing ways of evaluating such sounds, like the assessment of sound in terms of musicality versus acoustics. Staging the topoi of the intrusive, sensational, sinister and comforting sound with historical examples – such as fear of the sounds of wild animals in a lonely countryside versus the soothing buzz of cities announcing the presence of fellow citizens – will also help museum visitors to understand past experiences.

In addition, a focus on urban *rhythm* may allow one to evoke a day in the life of a city at some point in the past and provide a richer sound-image of urban life than the stereotype of the pastoral, quiet pre-industrial past versus the noisy post-industrial present. And, sonic *juxtaposition*, of areas or neighbourhoods within a city for instance, may make museum visitors aware of the differences in social conditions within specific urban settings. Over the years, authors, filmmakers and writers of radio plays have found various ways to express how people managed to adapt to and cope with shifting urban sounds, thus highlighting their meanings to different groups in shifting political and

84 See, for instance, Bryan / Vyner 2012 and Hutchison / Collins 2009.

85 See Technische Sammlungen Dresden.

86 Angliss 2005, 20.

87 The Memory Machine, an installation at the British Museum, recorded and played back oral memories provided by visitors about the British Museum and its collections. See Lane / Parry 2003, 9.

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socio-economic circumstances. By presenting such rich and original stagings of urban sound in exhibitions, museums can show that Hofland's nostalgia for the comforting sounds of his childhood represents only one way of listening to the past.

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