MOBILITIES AND SOUND

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Abstract

The soundscapes of mobility in post-Soviet cities and the meanings they produce are a rich and as yet underexplored field. Employing ethnographic fieldwork on the mobility of the elderly, public transit activism and urban infrastructures in Belarus and Ukraine, the article focuses on post-socialist soundscapes of stationary and moving cars, night racing, trams, trolleybuses, marshrutkas and electronic voices in the metro. Individual and collective practices of the production of and resistance to sounds, as well as the acoustic communities that emerge or fail to emerge in connection to these practices are indicative of transformations in post-socialist cities, such as the growth of inequality in exposure to pollution, promotion of national identities through human-voiced soundscapes of public transport and the trend towards the sensorial encapsulation of private space. Such transformations, however problematic they are for post-Soviet cities, can be diagnosed as a «sensibilization of property», and suggest new ways to think about ownership and communality when conceived acoustically.

Keywords: noise, public transport, acoustic community, privatization, sensibilization of property.

Post-Soviet Soundscapes of Mobility: Notes on the Evolution of the Acoustic Profile of Privacy

This essay argues that the investigation of soundscapes[1] of mobility in post-Soviet cities and the meanings they produce is a

[1] Shafer's term «soundscape» is used without explanation in many works, probably due to the fact that most of the sound we study is still largely undescribed and not conceptualized. Instead of an utterly broad use of the term, I tend to follow Kelman in his criticism of the prescriptive notion of soundscape (Kelman, 2010) and diverge from the earlier tradition of its use. In this text, soundscape refers to the social settings in which sound is placed, the relations around sound, and the meanings produced by sound. It is thus probably much closer to what Corbin calls «auditory landscape» (Corbin, 1998). In traffic, transport, and mobility studies, sound still remains a dimension without a consistent terminology. This is why I do not

rich and as yet underexplored field for analysis. Amongst key features of the post-Soviet context might be numbered shifts in property relations, a proliferation of digital portable technologies, and the co-existence of materialities from different historical periods – industrial and digital, socialist and post-socialist or neo-liberal. These various elements are perceivable with particular intensity in post-Soviet soundscapes of mobility: indeed, my argument in this article is that post-Soviet mobility can usefully be conceived of as a sonic display of social change. Although the post-Soviet chronotope has attracted the attention of many researchers, its acoustic dimension has mostly been left out of focus, while Western research that does focus on sound has paid little attention to the region. This text, therefore, investigates transformations of property, publicness, and ownership in a post-Soviet city through the sounds of traffic and the social construction of the noise of mobility.

Mobility, post-socialist property, and the senses

The study of post-socialist mobility soundscapes finds itself at the intersection of domains that have only recent begun to come into contact with one another. Urban planners and medics have traditionally included sounds of mobility among the concerns they deal with, but this is done mostly or exclusively in terms of the quantitative characteristics of road traffic noise (Seto, 2007, p. 24; Calixto et al., 2003). Social studies of urban sound, on the other hand, discuss traffic noise as a keynote sound of the city today (Adams et al., 2006), and open up a qualitative dimension to exposure to sound in the city, via a transition from the concept of «noise pollution» to the notion of soundscape (Raimbault and Dubois, 2005). Mobility scholars, who were earlier preoccupied with the sense of speed and the visual imagery of mobility cultures, have begun to deal with soundscapes mostly in the context of private vehicles (Bull, 2001; Bull, 2004; Bijsterveld, 2010; Krebs, 2011; LaBelle 2008). Only in a few cases have scholars of post-socialism dealt with sensibility related topics – interestingly, in a non-European context – accentuating the contrast between a socialist sensorial deficiency and a post-socialist sensory excess (Farquhar 2002; Thuan 2004). With a focus primarily on food, sex, or consumption, these works do not investigate the acoustic aspect of city life after socialism. Neither do scholars of post-socialist mobilities, who thus far tend to strive to build a regionally contextualized framework through case studies (Burrell and Hörschelmann, eds., 2014). The study of mobility soundscapes constitutes an invitation to bridge all the above-mentioned areas of studies, and offers an empirical field that both utilizes their insights and might offer an opportunity to develop them further.

Thus, I will consider mobility as an acoustically meaningful phenomenon, with meanings that are deeply informed by cultural factors.

have sufficient courage to use the concept of acousteme – as «a system of knowing in and through sound» (Eisenberg, 2010). The acoustemology of mobility soundscapes, probably, is a project still to come.

In particular, I argue that in the post-Soviet context mobility sounds should be considered in terms of a *sensibilization* of property – as part of a general sensibilization of urban life (Thibaud, 2003). Sensibilization – as a process of investing affective meaning into everyday details of life and, within a neoliberal context, of making them subject to commoditization – means that sound and other senses have a renewed significance for determining public order. As a result, current occularocentric notions of private and public space, grounded in a vision-based idea of territory and its qualities, are increasingly inadequate to describe recent transformations of public and private. In speaking about the role of sounds in the contemporary evolution of space, Georgina Born suggests a need for nothing less than a «critical phenomenology of musical / sonic publicness and privacy» (Born, 2013, p. 24). She develops an idea about the spatialized nature of sound (which is «both spatial and social») in order to argue that at the beginning of the 21st century, «music and sound, catalysed by their social and technological mediation, engender […] a profusion of modes of publicness and privacy» (ibid, p. 26). LaBelle's notion of *acoustic territories* may also be of use here (LaBelle, 2010). Acoustic territories are different in their intensity, temporality, and social distribution from those perceived only visually or through the physical proximity of bodies. In a post-Soviet city, the acoustic dimension of mobility might create not only territories, but also fractures or overlays between them. One might think, for example, either about wastelands of no one's noise or private bubbles of quietness superseded by exterior sound. I would argue that through tracking disrupted auditory landscapes we can get a new angle of analysis on social processes in the region.

The change in property relations is one of the most dramatic transformations marking the post-socialist context, taking multiple territorial and visual forms. Judit Bodnar and Virag Molnar, for example, through research of gated communities in Budapest have argued for the appearance of gating and seclusion as markers of privatization in a post-socialist capital city (Bodnar and Molnar, 2010). Two more aspects of the process of privatization, both drawn from the work on post-socialism by Verdery (1998), may also be relevant for reflection in terms of sound. The first is that constituted by the challenges of the privatization of formerly impartible collective property: particularly, in carving this into appropriate parts for individual ownership. Thinking this insight through in acoustic terms, the privacy of sound spaces may also be shaped to some degree by the specifics of Soviet collective architecture, the various generations of which vary substantially in their sound-proofing capacities.[2] The second is the link between identity (in the first instance, an ethnonational one) and ownership: after socialism, rather than simply being the purview of the state, the idea of the nation becomes a significant element in the reconfiguration of property. In sonic terms, the emergence of the

[2] Values of ability to keep sound out those structures on the post-socialist real estate market is an interesting aspect that I had to omit here for space consideration.

nation also plays a role in a post-socialist reconfiguring of private and public.

Thus, drawing on the above-cited work on sensibilization, privatization, and sonic publicness, I propose to explore relations between sound, property, and mobility in order to better understand post-Soviet urban change and spatial reconfigurations. That is to say, the sound of traffic is one of the ways to re-think property relations in today's post-soviet city, through asking how we build a sense of private and public, and how we hear dispossession and belonging.

Post-Soviet sound spaces

This essay is not based on a purposefully designed empirical research of sound; instead, it employs notes from the fieldwork on the mobility of the elderly, public transit activism, and urban infrastructures that I conducted between 2010 and 2017. My observations were accumulated in multiple locations while travelling between my study institute in Germany and sites of my ethnographic fieldwork in Ukraine and Romania, as well as while staying at relatives' and friends' places in Belarus, Russia, and Moldova. They nonetheless remain simply a partial view with regard to post-socialist soundscapes, which are of such a diverse variety that any generalizations must be made with caution. This text will focus on two locations over the timespan of the last decade: Minsk, Belarus, and Mariupol, Ukraine, and I will secondarily draw on a few other examples from Ukraine. My engagement with the two places was very different. Mariupol was a place where I stayed regularly till 2005 and worked as an ethnographer in 2011-2013, with visits to other Ukrainian cities made in following years; Minsk was a destination for private and working visits, where I used to spend about a week every two months from 2015 to 2017. In regard to mobility and transportation, these two places have some significant similarities that distinguish them from most of their neighbors. Public transit in both locations has remained important for many, but has lacked modernization and promotion. Municipal buses, trolleybuses, and trams compete with small-capacity privately-owned shared taxis (marshrutkas), and tramways and trolleybuses are widely used. Motorization is still low in comparison to Western Europe, however car ownership grows rapidly and remains prestigious in both cultures. One more significant factor for mobility practices in Belarus and Ukraine is bilingualism, official in Belarus and real in Ukraine, whereby the presence of the Russian language may produce additional meanings. I will draw on field observations, interviews, and materials from online-media and forums discussing traffic noise and noise conflicts.

The text will build on such empirical cases as: the private noise of a car vs. the public noise of a tram; the sonic exhibitionism of bikers and street racers; and the role of portable individual soundscapes in mobile spaces. Noise, in the vein of Theodor Adorno and Jacques Attali, will be understood not so much as an acoustic characteristic of sound, but as a political construct of selective rejection (Adorno, 1999, pp. 1-14;

Attali, 1985): «a sound out of place» (Bailey 1996, p.50). First, I will describe post-socialist mobility as a convergence of different types of mobility noises, from those of individual petrol-driven vehicles to those of rusting electric vehicles of public transport. Though these noises originate from contradicting socio-political realms, they together contribute to the amplification of the urban soundscape. There is a constant process of mobility noise problematization in post-Soviet cities that is often performed through a relative prioritization of «better» and «worse» noises. Social actors establish hierarchies of noises and identify sounds as unbearable or tolerable, immoral or legitimate. Second, I will show that privatization, motorization, and Nimby sentiments are important for urban negotiations around sounds of mobility. While sound itself is a problem for non-critical cartographic visions of property, movement adds further challenges to the description of acoustic processes, since moving objects make spatial relations even more elusive for the eye of a cartographer. Thirdly, in this text I will deal with the human-voiced soundscape of public transport as an object of management and appropriation by business and official actors.

The noisy soundscape of mobility

New mobilities arrive to the post-Soviet city hand-in-hand with new noises. For the most part, the soundscape of mobility is largely comprised of sound located outside the domain of what dominant cultural ideas of noise and music would define as musicality. For an abstract «ordinary ear», transport is one of the noisiest phenomena in the city, responsible for up to 80% of urban noise.[3] The ever-expanding transportation systems for aircraft, railways, and highways make a significant contribution to the ubiquity of noise (Miller, 2003). The increase of mobility – due to changes in urban morphology (for instance, the burgeoning of malls at urban peripheries), employment patterns, and the car ownership rate – is one of the key transformations underway in post-socialist cities. New patterns, trajectories, and rhythms of commuting, new transit modes and their interactions manifest themselves through hum and buzz, horns and beeps, roaring and rattle, and through electronic announcements and analogue conversations between mobile subjects. Social theoreticians understand mobility as a new form of contemporary sociality «beyond societies», that includes an extremely broad range of phenomena, ideas, practices, and actors (Urry, 2000; Sheller, Urry, 2003). From another perspective, patterns of mobility are framed by, and themselves enable, dominant economic relations and ideologies: particularly, the developments in the modal composition (that is, the share of particular modes of transit within the total amount of trips) of transport in particular places at particular times is deeply informed by current discourses on public good and private rights, and on property, prestige, and rationality. One can hear the results of economic decisions through specific changes in noise dominants. The re-construction of a

[3] See for example (Guidelines for Road Traffic Noise Abatement)

tramway line with the use of a noise-reducing rubber pad is costly and might be less effective for political promotion than the acquisition of a new tram or erecting a noise barrier around a highway: a new tram or a sound barrier will be visible to many, both those on the street and those in their cars, while reducing noise on a tramway line is noticeable, principally, only for those who live near it. The acoustic dimension of mobility practices is usually not the principal focus, receiving attention only as a side effect of other processes constituting mobility.

Post-socialist mobility soundscapes are, therefore, emerging at the intersection of a proliferation of private automobiles, libertarian trends in the region, spatial transformations of cities in transition, and technological change. Also, they bear the impress of material path-dependency – just like many other aspects of life in cities after socialism: while old trams might share streets with newer marshrutkas and cars, they all might be using an outworn – and thus increasingly noisy, infrastructure built in the Soviet era.

Noise, inequality, and space

Post-Soviet cities place their inhabitants in sonic environments that, although situated in close proximity, are increasingly differentiated. Thus, figures on noise referring to entire territories are very limited in their ability to offer meaningful information about individual exposures to sound. The social stratification of exposure to noise, to which mobility is just one contributing factor, is a concern in the social study of soundscape. Silence, which earlier was conceptualized as a common good (Franklin, 1994), becomes a privilege of a few for which one has to pay (Droumeva, 2004). One might also suppose, on the basis of various recent works of historical acoustic research (see, for instance, Bailey, 1996; Payer, 2007; Vaillant, 2003; Mansell, 2016), that the city has been noisy at least since the 19th century, and that it is only recently that silence has started to be commoditized.

Precise quantitative data on noise exposure, therefore, would only partly recount the actual experiences of urban dwellers. Audible traces of mobility can be perceived and understood as noise not only physically, but also sociologically, through the social relations around them: in other words, through the discussions, conflicts, and self-defense tactics that noises generate. Declaring something noise is the common way to problematize experiences of hearing. However, notions of what is noise are culturally diverse and interrelated with other ideas. So, through a consideration of which mobility sounds are called noise, we can also better understand the social positions underlying socially stratified mobilities.

Not infrequently, identifying something as noise is a result of negotiation between several parties. For while noise is defined by a normative framework, for instance in making noise formally punishable by a fine, most legislative acts avoid giving quantitative characteristics to that noise. Instead, they prefer to list commonly found audible sources of

irritation, always with a clause that, in order to be considered as punishable, their use must «result in nuisance». Furthermore, legislation principally targets immobile objects located in residential areas, but largely ignores vehicles moving outdoors.[4] The process of negotiating noise can be informed by perceptions and evaluations of sound that are inseparable from, or at least highly influenced by, perceptions of its source. According to Catherine Guastavino, an ideal soundscape contains more human and nature sounds than those of machines (Guastavino, 2006), but the situation of mobility is often invoked as a sub-differentiation within the latter category. Moreover, particular elements of soundscape can become negative signs of being «out-of-date», while some kinds of «contemporary» noise will be even pleasant for particular groups.[5]

The spatial structures of mobility noise have the specific feature that the production of mobility noise might be spatially distinct from the hearing of it: in other words, territories shared through presence of bodies may differ in shape from those shared through hearing. For while passengers in old trams manufactured in Soviet times are exposed to the noises of rusty carriages, car drivers mostly hear the radio inside their comfortable vehicles, and do not hear the hum of the avenue and the roaring motors of their car-driving mates. Listening to noise can thus be related to a state of *immobility* – of being devoid of access to desired regimes of movement: the main listeners of car noise are those who have to wait for a bus or tram at the stop, often for many minutes. If the mobility of some finds itself in a dialectical relationship with the stasis of others, then listening to silence or music in one's own space might be connected to noise experiences outside that space. Moreover, auditory experiences are coupled to changes in habits of listening. From a constructionist perspective, not only problematizing, but also hearing noise can be approached as culturally determined: human senses are historically changeable, so that human sensorial reactions to the same audial events might mutate in tune with social context (Crary, 2001).

The sound of mobility and relations between public and private

Below, I would like to place three common acoustically intensive situations of post-socialist mobilities – a car alarm ringing, tramway noise, and night street-racing – into a broader context of a cultural shift towards privatization. Along with the familiar audial traces of rail transport, there is a growing audial body in the post-socialist city – the sounds of private cars. If skyline destruction, densification, mall-ization, and the intensification of surface interfaces of city space are to be named among the main visual markers of post-socialist urbanity, then the motorization of the soundscape can be compared to them in its ubiquity in

[4] http://samsebeyurist.by/spravochnaya-informatsiya/razmery-shtrafov/shtraf-za-shum [Accessed 29.04.2018]

[5] For instance, the sounds of Harley Davidson bikes roaring, when coupled with a pop concert near his place of residence, made a British research participant quite enthusiastic (Adams et al., 2006, p. 2393)

audio terms. Growing motorization in post-socialism alone has added ca 74 dB with every engine – and rates of car ownership across Eastern Europe have anything from doubled to quadrupled in the years between 1985 and 2004 (Hirt, Stanilov. 2009, p. 45), a trend which has only continued since.[6] Traffic noise in Belarusian and Ukrainian cities is born out of a particular materiality: of car models, type of road surface, and weather conditions. The 1990s were rich in second-hand cars in dubious condition, so that many tunes originated from the machines themselves failing to function properly.[7] In the early post-Perestroika period also, new or newly bought private cars often met the mismanaged surfaces of non-asphalted or bumpy roads. Streets sometimes covered with concrete slabs caused cars to produce a recognizable clatter when crossing the junction between two of them. Probably, we can expect that newer technologies of constructing quieter roads[8] are developed in the West and reach Belarus and Ukraine with a certain delay. However, the material condition of Ukrainian roads is most often explained by social factors, rather than by the physical characteristics of the asphalt used. Critics note a crucial decrease in quality due to corruption at different stages of road construction, wherein «none of the participants in the process are interested in having good roads».[9] In this sense, the noisiness of the road is also an audible trace of particular social phenomena.

Minsk media quite regularly write on the topic of noise from cars, occasionally interviewing residents about their life with road, bicycle, and other kinds of mobility noise. Respondents manifest varying opinions. Some use the term «sound violence» and link noise at night to reduced work efficiency, and even to domestic violence among «sleepy» and «irritated» citizens.[10] In this overall context, the noise of the highway is an acoustic imprint of complicated property relations around infrastructure: as a physical object, a highway doesn't belong to anyone, but as a soundscape it penetrates private properties. That said, highway noise is not personalized: the human ear is not able to pick a particular bike or car out of the general street orchestra, while the relevant authorities (in Belarus – the sanitary and epidemiological services) do not have the legal or technical capabilities to do so. This in effect means that one can make noise on Belarusian roads unpunished.[11] This turns highways and avenues into no-one's territories of noise. This experience is exacerbated in Minsk since, on the one hand, Minsk experiences the active construc-

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6 A somewhat bigger number – 85 dB – is indicated at: https://citiquiet.com/all-about-decibels-protect-your-ears/.

7 Interestingly, noises made by car incented car enthusiasts to develop their vocabulary for speaking about sound. See: http://mycarmakesnoise.com.

8 For instance, usage porous materials so that the pavement would absorb some of the noise (Bernhard and Wayson, 2004; Davis, 2006).

9 «Никто из участников процесса не заинтересован в том, чтобы они были хорошими» (my translation – A.V.): https://ibigdan.livejournal.com/18461931.html [Accessed 29.04.2018].

10 http://ont.by/programs/programs/kontyry/topics/00107682 [Accessed 29.04.2018].

11 Ibid.

tion of new highways and intersections and, on the other, new apartment blocks are built ever nearer to existing thoroughfares.

The immobile automobile soundscape

Curiously enough, a mobile vehicle, which actually tends to stay still for 95 % of the time (Shoup, 1997), can also be noisy when immobile. One of the key sound traces of car presence in the post-Soviet city is an activated car alarm. A loud trill, siren, or claxon in the middle of the night wakes up local residents or hinders them from falling asleep. The improper setting of the sensor of an alarm system might cause its activation in the case of every lightest vibration, be that a car passing by, dogs barking, a thunderstorm, or the activation of the alarm system in the car next door. Sometimes, the pre-set sound of an alarm system is the same for several cars in one parking space, so that all owners have to check whose car has been affected. The victims of the noise include those without a car, and the heated debate around such alarms evokes notions of intrusion, damage, and responsibility for one's own property.[12] Such episodes of audio alarm activation interestingly demonstrate how sociality is mediated by sonic waves, rather than by visible borders. In Plato's *Republic*, a city-state was spatially defined by the vicinity within which an orator's voice could be heard, a reference later employed by R. Murray Schafer to introduce the term «acoustic community», as a community «defined advantageously along acoustic lines» (Schafer, 1977, pp. 214-225). Neighbors in block apartments can occasionally, for example when provoked by a car alarm, constitute such a community, notwithstanding the rules of housing estates that usually protect them from verbal and visual contact with each other. In this vein, taking sound into account poses new challenges to understanding privatization, a phenomenon that previously has been primarily considered in its visual and architectural dimensions. Audio phenomena re-shape urban streets and backyards in a different way than we see them on Google Maps, a sonic challenge to privatization that is particularly relevant in the specific aural conditions of the block housing widely found in post-socialist cities.

The awkward situation of a nocturnal car alarm also brings to the fore the temporal dimension of mobility`s acoustic traces. In different urban places, rhythms of mobility orchestrate unequal vulnerabilities against noise. People living near a tramway loop will be aware of the hours when the tramway line is in operation, and those living near a tram depot will hear them for the longest time within every 24 hour cycle. Some places, like areas near railway stations, might be filled with the noises of freight traffic at night and passenger trains in the day. Night noise is a particular public concern and a target of severe criticism in the case of public transport. For instance, in Germany it has led to the prohibition of night flights – *Nachtflugverbot*. The neoliberal problematization of noise often directly targets the night as the time when office

[12] https://forum.onliner.by/viewtopic.php?t=1090872 [Accessed 29.04.2018].

workers and company managers are supposed to be sleeping (Kusiak, 2013, Rosenberg, 2016). However, the early or late noise of vehicles can also be generated for the public good: early morning and late evening trams carry people home from their workplaces or leisure locations, and vice-versa. But, whereas the sound of one car is not discernible within a constant hum on a highway or a busy avenue, a tram departure constitutes a singular acoustic event. While there is no addressee for dissatisfaction from a flow of private cars, there is, even at night, a public transit authority at which irritation can be directed. As I will show further in the text, on the example of a case from Druzhkivka, Ukraine, this puts electric public transport and its users in a specific social position.

Racers: sonic exhibitionism

Noisy mobility (sub)cultures such as night racers, bikers, and car drivers using mighty subwoofers to rock the space around them are a relatively new phenomenon for post-Soviet urban space. Roaring by without a silencer has acquired a subcultural status of a sign of coolness, a kind of noisy teenager exhibitionism (Vaaranen, Wieloch, 2002). Pragmatically, the roar of street racing is different from the «ancillary» noises of car alarm or tramcar that are produced as a side-effect of satisfying everyday needs: what we are dealing with here is the willingly amplified sound of mobility for the sake simply of underlining mobility by increasing its sound. It is also different in that, unlike the case of the hapless car-owner whose alarm is going off in the backyard, contacting the racer is quite a problem. This is not just a question of the inherent mobility of the racer: in urban rumors, night racers are described as criminals and/or children of the rich and powerful. As one might have predicted, the conflict between a beautiful view from a window and constant highway noise, or between «best location» and «windows shuddering because of bikers» causes lots of complaints and discontent. Some people indeed install double-glazed windows and open them rarely, so that «noise would not engulf the silence of the home».[13]

The latter example indicates that the dominant mood is not so much that of a libertarian fight against noise, but rather a sense of perplexity which often prevents angry urbanites from direct action. Direct action might require networking – something that would go beyond usual contacts with flatmates and friends. The challenge is all the greater given that even maintaining social ties with staircase neighbors has become much less typical over recent decades. Direct action against road noise requires the formation of some other type of community than those proposed by social media, spaces of consumption, or workplaces. Barry Truax introduces «acoustic communities» to define a system, no matter what the geographical range, within which acoustic information is exchanged (Truax, 2001). Such a definition of «acoustic community» seems stronger than the one given by Schafer, since it implies not only hearing together, but a social interaction enabled and/or caused by such

[13] https://news.tut.by/society/568647.html [Accessed 29.04.2018].

hearing. These stronger and weaker definitions of «acoustic community» are used interchangeably in different case studies. Vincent Andrisani, for example, employs the stronger version to describe the community making impact of both utilitarian and idle communication in the less motorized and digitalized post-socialist city of Havana (Andrisani, 2012). In the multi-story apartment blocks of post-Soviet sleeping areas, where the shared use of spaces is minimal, sound becomes an obstinate reminder of the proximity of others: hence, while being in one sense an acoustic community of hearing nightracers, the residents of an apartment block fail to form an acoustic community in its stronger sense, in other words through a practice of coming together to react to these sounds. It is not surprising that inter-sensual collisions (for example, those between the territories occupied by a car and by the sound it produces) in post-soviet landscapes result in a confusing ambiguity: a popular vocabulary for speaking about auditory territories and the interfaces between public and private is only emerging.

Of greater interest is the fact that the criticism of noise is opposed, not infrequently, by opinions that justify and normalize the audial presence of traffic: «*a humming noise (гул)*[14] *is the fair fee for the location*»[15]; «*There is nothing critical in having some background hum, especially given that the city is not small. Minsk is growing, thus the amount of cars is growing: this is normal nowadays*».[16] Residents of the city center develop new habits of listening and revise the meaning of the street soundscape in their home: «*At first, the avenue seemed a bit too noisy, of course, but with time we got used to it. In the summer, when bikers ride down the avenue, the windows literally shudder. But it is, on the contrary, fun – you know, movement and all that*».[17] Finally, the presence of «kings of noise» – to use the epithet that the media give to bikers – on the main boulevards is justified by the fact that Minsk «*lacks places where they could obtain their adrenaline rush and improve their skills. That's why they come*».[18] Here, a new «critical phenomenology of musical / sonic publicness and privacy» is born together with new lifestyles, personal trajectories, and a growing desire to live in the city center.

Trams: soundscapes of rust

Electric trams are heard on post-Soviet streets in accompaniment with the private diesel engines of motorization. Trams were inherited in large amounts from socialist times when they constituted a sign of urban modernity; but in the post-socialist era urban electric transport, suffering from a lack of investment, has mostly fallen into disrepair.

14 While preparing this text, I was repeatedly challenged with the difficulty of translating terms defining sounds, since such translation generally cannot be verified by an image or verbal or textual description.

15 https://news.tut.by/society/568647.html.

16 https://news.tut.by/society/568647.html.

17 Ibid.

18 http://naviny.by/article/20170811/1502442227-koroli-shuma-na-dorogah-smozhet-li-gai-pristrunit-baykerov [Accessed 29.04.2018].

When improperly maintained, tram infrastructure can indeed cause serious noise and vibrations, making nearby buildings shudder. Rusty vehicles on worn-out, crumpled rails squeak and skid at rail junctions, intersections, and turns. The heavy carriage of the tram itself may function as a resonator, so that those sitting in the tram hear even more noise. The tram soundscape is audial evidence of how state coordination in the public transit sphere has faded away and the enterprises serving different parts of the infrastructure have lost synchronization. «*The main indicator of a "clapped-out" tramcar is the sound originating from weakly bolted or loosely fixed elements, for example, doors clapping together during the ride, the vibration of window-panes, the vibration of seats badly bolted to the floor*», a colleague from Kyiv told me. This expert and fan of transport in his early thirties unwittingly conceptualized the disruption of transport infrastructure in audible terms.

It is not only the change in the condition of the rails and the carriages, but a change in attitudes that redefines the audial status of the tramway in urban discourse. One of the examples of a sensual shift is the claim that tramways are noisy *per se* and, for this reason, should probably be removed. We can witness a specific range of new intonations addressed to a technology that has been in place for several decades: from a fairly Nimbyist tone of wanting the tramways out of «our street», through a curiosity about how soon renovation is going to happen, to a total rethinking of the meaning of a tram, now conceived of as a «beast» due to its sonic properties. Despite the fact that tramlines are not that common in Belarusian cities, their noise is still occasionally mentioned as an inconvenience for those living on a tramway street: «*It is long overdue that [trams] should be replaced by trolleybuses, and besides this will make life on the road easier for car drivers. Moreover, there will be less noise for locals*».[19] One can suppose that such lamentations are rarely, if ever, articulated by users of public transport. Especially telling here is the case in Druzhkivka, Ukraine, where a tramway line to the Porcelain Plant was re-introduced in 2013, after the rails had been left unused for ten years. Residents of houses along the line of the reintroduced service complained about the terrible noise and asked for a speed limit to be set for trams on this section of track.[20] Finally, the authorities were obliged to establish a limit of 5 km/h. Here, the speed limitation – a disadvantage for tram passengers – has been set not due to security requirements, but for the sake of someone's audial comfort. Unlike highway or avenue «petrol» noise, the electric layer of the mobility soundscape consists of distinct elements that are connected to a particular device (a tram) and a particular sound event (the movement of a tram). Moreover, all tramways are concentrated in a few tram parks and their owner is identifiable – not like in the case of a depersonalized traffic jam (who owns a traffic jam?). The Druzhkivka case shows a collision between attempts to

[19] https://auto.onliner.by/2017/09/04/minsk-1102 comment from 04.09.2017 at 12:15. [Accessed 29.04.2018].

[20] http://donbass.ua/news/region/2013/10/04/gorozhane-tak-otvykli-ot-tramvaja-chto-teper-on-ih-razdrazhaet.html [Accessed 29.04.2018].

protect two common goods – mobility and silence. This time, the solution privileged those who apparently were not in need of the cheapest and least prestigious mode of travel, which in this context is a tramway.

Making tramway noise a problem resonates with another local circumstance: the most numerous group of tram users are older adults. In negotiations on what is noisy, claiming that something is done in vain or unnecessarily can be an important argument – paving the way for public condemnation. In my research on the mobility of elderly city residents in Ukraine, I encountered expressions of dissatisfaction at pensioners going somewhere during rush hour. Their mobility was thus perceived as senseless noise not only in acoustic terms, but also in contrast to the «sound» of the «normal» mobilities of workers and the young.

An analytical and political challenge to a loud car or a loud tram is possible through a conceptualization of sound as a violation of property rights. This adds a new dimension to relations between car-owners and those who don't have their own car but also legally reside in the same, acoustically shared neighborhood. If silence can be a legitimate part of property rights, then which conditions can constitute an exception to these rights? Should the noise of a car be tolerated differently than the noise of activities like playing or partying? How can the presence of noise in the city be part of a social pact? The answers to these questions in a post-Soviet city are frequently contested, and such contestations are significant in mediating how the collision of ideas about communal and private is played out in a given social setting.

Portable private soundscapes and learning not to hear

Often unable to influence the aggressive soundscape around them, urban dwellers develop different tactics in order to resist and to control their sonic experiences. Most often, they try to escape undesired noise by using headphones, even if these are not connected to any device. Michael Bull has presented an impressive ethnography of portable music player and headphone use for managing everyday urban experiences (Bull, 2000). Among other observations, he proposes the idea that headphones do not simply exclude their user from their acoustic surroundings, but rather allow them to regulate their degree of inclusion and to modify less pleasant situations. So vehicles become inhabited not only by the technical sounds of movement, but also by private portable soundscapes originating from the personal devices of the driver and passengers. Portable gadgets in vehicles can make a public soundscape very musical and ignite some kind of elementary sociality through the recognition of melodies from walkmans, players, and iPhones. However, more often such portable private soundscapes are utilized as a means to delineate, to separate the self, and to defend oneself from outside influences. Travelling a lot, I also utilized my private portable soundscape, which for me probably fulfilled some of the functions of home. As countries, stations and language areas passed kaleidoscopically by, this element of stability – several albums in my player that I listened to

for years – helped me to retain at least some portable contingency in a fragmented life.

For individuals, the sounds of personal gadgets – not only the songs on a player, but also ringtones and notifications about incoming messages – function to cohere everyday life; but in a publicly shared space they might become a subject of sonic etiquette. Most post-Soviet passengers would be able to recall a loud conversation on the phone in the small space of a marshrutka, or a haunting ringtone from a cellphone that was unluckily buried somewhere at the bottom of some luggage and thus was hard to reach amidst a tightly-packed crowd of passengers. Sodcasting – playing loud music in public places through the trebling loudspeakers of smartphones[21] – is another case along a similar line, causing reproaches from older adults. Interestingly, in Mariupol, only particular parts of my long trolleybus trip from the remote outskirts to the downtown (or back), were accompanied with sodcasting. High-pitch lo-fi broadcasting was «legitimate» only in the peripheral sleeping area of Livoberezhzhia, but not in the city center. This means that both mobile and static spaces carried meaning for young sodcasters, as they clearly distinguished the degree to which they could count different parts of the city as «theirs».

In some cases, the right to create a private soundspace is eliminated by corporate structures. In the 2000s, it was prohibited to walk in headphones on the territory of the largest steelworks in Mariupol – because this allegedly increased the risks from freight traffic moving around the territory of the plant. On the one hand, this was done in the name of protecting workers' safety, which is a legitimate concern on the part of the factory owners. On the other, workers were thus deprived by corporate legislation of the right to protect themselves from the sounds of trucks, train horns, and ringing signals at level crossings over rail tracks, which all, every so often, made themselves heard above the monotonous humming of the steelmaking facilities.

Some of the discussions around private and semi-private soundscapes in public transit echo political concerns and put these into direct contact with questions of private rights and the common good. One example is the controversy around Russian chanson – a specific genre of Russian-language gangster songs – in marshrutkas in the Ukrainian city of Rivne. Earlier, it seemed to be no problem when drivers, as the hosts of these spaces, would typically listen to a genre of music that, in effect, marked the asymmetrical nature of the semi-privateness of the vehicle. This changed when chanson started to be perceived as a marker of an enemy Russian culture and, therefore, as violating individuals' private rights. This controversy thus led to the audioscape of marshrutkas becoming defined as a matter of public concern.

[21] See more on the phenomenon in (Marshall, 2014, p. 43).

Individual soundscapes and age inequality

The proliferation of semi-private, individual-isolative, and abandoned public soundscapes all seem to affect the elderly more than the young. This made me think more about the sound dimension of the realms I studied – about uneasy old lives amidst ageing urban infrastructures in Ukraine. Young people seemed rarely to be involved in acoustic communication in public transit. This age-group tend to utilize time on the move for other occupations – for instance, online socialization. The unequal degree of involvement in the shared sonic atmosphere of a vehicle is illustrative of the social effects of technological change. Sodcasters, cellphone talkers, and chanson fans, as well as vendors, beggars, and musicians in a tram are all much more noticeable for those who do not use headphones to cover their ears or portable digital gadgets to distract their eyes. In contrast to the audio-cocooning tactics of youngsters, for elderly passengers in cities like Kostyantynivka and Mariupol the tramway was a public space to meet others for a chat and to listen to them. Furthermore, these elderly passengers do not possess the technology for creating their own audio-spaces, and therefore remain permanently in a public acoustic zone.

In Ukrainian cities, older passengers demonstrated the skill of not hearing the loudly rattling tram while hearing each other. A friend of mine, on the other hand, who encountered this environment for the first time, could hardly hear a word in these vehicles. I apparently managed to not hear the tram when interviewing a ticket-seller at her workplace in Mariupol. Unheard during interviews and field recordings, the rattling of the tram on worn-out rails turned out to be the stand out sound at the stage of the transcribing of the material: the interview was buried in noise. In a single tram, some people can share an acoustic public space, while others feel sensorily excluded, or voluntarily exclude themselves or limit their social involvement. This tension emerges both when one wants not to hear others or a blasting tram – and also when one wants to hear people`s voices against the wall of the «skirr» of rusty grindings and rattlings.

Electronic voices and commuter identities in a post-Soviet city

The concluding topic I want to touch on is that of pre-recorded human voices in public transport, a topic that has more to do with the symbolic re-appropriation of keynote sounds than with the distribution of acoustic territories. In the digital era, pre-recorded voices have already proliferated across post-Soviet spaces of transit. Once only present in the metro, today they appear in surface public transport in many cities as well. If earlier the trolleybus driver had to use her own voice to announce the station, now the function is delegated to digital jingles that the driver activates by simply pushing a button. A pre-recorded version replaces the discordant diversity of drivers' voices that used to announce stops. The sociological design of electronic voices and what they say

thus acquires additional capacities. In another context, Nina Power has shown how recorded female voices in announcements can be engaged in maintaining control and soft coercion (Power, 2013). In Belarusian and Ukrainian trams, trolleybuses, and buses, electronic voices translate not only control, but also collective identity.

In Minsk, the surface public transit infrastructure has been equipped with automatic electronic announcements since 2012. Significantly for the local context, the announcements were in the Belarusian language. The first Belarusization of electronic speech happened in the metro, which had previously featured announcements in a mixture of Belarusian and Russian. In the course of preparations for the 2014 Ice Hockey World Championships held in Minsk, electronic announcements were introduced in buses, trolleybuses, and trams. Unlike the drivers, who often announced stops in Russian or trasianka, a mixed speech with elements of both Belarusian and Russian, the electronic voice spoke standard Belarusian. Also, from about 2016, the international airport in Minsk added announcements in Belarusian – just before the country introduced five day visa-free entry for citizens of ca 80 countries. Though along with Russian an official state language, Belarusian had been fairly marginal throughout the first 15 years of Alexander Lukashenko being in power, before slightly gaining in visibility in public space during the 2010s. Still, for many, public transportation became the first space where they started to hear the native language of Belarus on a daily basis. As the first city environment to start the re-normalization of Belarusian oral speech, transport was later followed by advertisements in hypermarkets. Interestingly, commercial advertisements in the metro are still made in Russian, in a faster tempo and a busier tone, delicately switching the register and utilizing language as a resource in engaging economies of attention.

These acoustic innovations can be analyzed in the context of emerging nation (or nationalist) branding – an element of commercial nationalism in post-socialist Europe (Volcic, Andrejevic, 2011). In parallel, they refer us to the symbolic functions played by transport infrastructure in the construction of urban and social identities and communities. These reinforce the state`s presence and the construction of new identities in the post-socialist city through audible, and not just visual and textual means. Metalized voices from loudspeakers invoke gloomy recollections of power and propaganda – be they of Nazi Germany or, recently, on the border between Northern and Southern Korea.[22] Occasionally, ticket inspectors also approach passengers in Belarusian, although after that communication tends to occur in Russian. In Belarus today, the native language still remains quite marginal and in vehicles may perform a fairly decorative function: in one of the frequent surveys asking Belarusians, «Would you like to hear Belarusian language more often?», a respondent answered, «What I hear in public transport is sufficient».

[22] https://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/22/world/asia/north-korea-attack-on-south-triggered-by-propaganda-loudspeakers.html [Accessed 29.04.2018].

Electronic voices in Belarusian and their analogues in Russian currently seem a rather mundane combination. However, such acoustic moves acquire stronger meaning in the case of today's Ukraine. In some cities of Eastern Ukraine, where stops were for a long time announced only in Russian, the post-Maidan period has brought Ukrainianization. If the Belarusian voice in Minsk transport is usually perceived neutrally, opinions in Mariupol are rather split: «*They don't speak Ukrainian in Mariupol. You can hear Greek more often here. If I were a commuter in Ternopil, it would be normal, but for Mariupol it's just making fun (издевательство) of the locals*».[23] In Minsk, however, discontent did arise when the international airport removed announcements in Belarusian and introduced them in Chinese. This resulted in a petition for the re-introduction of the state's native language at the main airport of Belarus.[24]

Remarkably, in the case of Minsk it seems that signs of nation-branding might be concurrent with internationalization through the introduction of English. As Pavel Niakhayeu recalled, English announcements were:

First introduced before the World Hockey Championship in 2014 - and cancelled soon afterwards. I think these announcements changed the perception of the city for many people – and many have missed the «Mind the doors, please!" since. This winter, English was reintroduced – along with the introduction of a 5-day visa-free travel period for foreigners. Also central routes buses (the #100 at least) now air English audio-guide comments for passengers – about notable buildings, places, figures and events.

In the media and in urban gossip, announcements in the metro in Belarusian and English resonated with discussions on the tourist-friendliness of the capital city; for locals, meanwhile, they provoke a sense of alienation and a questioning of the familiar city, as if being in it for the first time. Moreover, the bilingualism of transport seemed to inaugurate an atmosphere of Europeanization – a new atmosphere that was particularly significant given the long debated issue of the ambiguous course navigated by the Belarusian state.

Audible language policies can bring about a re-appropriation and feeling of social inclusion for some, and a sense of dispossession and exclusion for others. In marshrutkas driven by their owners or by employees of private companies, ownership and semi-privacy was manifested through the soundscape. In the Rivne oblast, legislators intervened into the semi-private marshrutka through a policy that targeted sound. In vehicles in Minsk, meanwhile, the municipal transit authority has replaced individual voices with a single standardized voice. In these processes of regulation and standardization, there are parallels between

[23] Comment by user ььь from 25 Apr. 2017 г., 20:50:41 https://www.0629.com.ua/news/1632282 [Accessed 29.04.2018].

[24] https://petitions.by/petitions/1270 [Accessed 29.04.2018].

the language management of acoustic territories and nationalization as a process reconfiguring private rights and senses of collective belonging.

Conclusions

Soundscapes of transport, traffic, and mobility both create new tensions in post-Soviet cities and make explicit existing ones. They reveal gaps between the experiences of different generations co-existing in post-socialist cities, as well as tensions between the libertarian aspirations of an emerging middle class and persisting high expectations of urban infrastructure. Car noise is growing against a backdrop of the decay of electric mobility: this is a vicious circle, as motorization is further reinforced by the deterioration of public transport. One noise variety is generated by the interaction of diesel-powered engines on imperfect asphalt, another by rusty vehicles on battered rails. Both coexist in urban streets, overlapping and competing with one another, and equally exemplifying the significance of cultural factors in the dynamics of attention to noise. On a macro-economic level, the sound of petrol mobility echoes with dependencies on oil-import; unhindered car noise then becomes the audible metaphor of «carbon democracy» (Mitchell, 2011). Some of the remarkable transformations in the region owe a lot to a global context of soundscape change: for example, the rise and fall of a ringtone-dominated soundscape (Gopinath 2005). Inequality in access to portable technologies of sound leaves different age groups with unequal possibilities of «privatizing» their auditory experiences. Spaces of commuting have become an arena in which such inequalities are performed: while some can successfully insulate themselves and consequentially lose interest in combatting noise, others may remain in a minority in their endeavor to problematize it.

Cars, trams, bikes, electronic voices, smartphones, and portable players contribute to the production of new assemblages of private and public. For cities in Ukraine and Belarus, the acoustic dimension of private-ness may reveal specific sensibilities (as in the case of the language of announcements), vulnerabilities (for example, for the elderly), or acceptance (as regards noise on a central avenue). The instability and flexibility in the ways people interpret traffic soundscapes point to an in-betweenness and to the absence of an established vocabulary to judge what is «mine», «someone else's» and/or «common». Such in-betweenness, to my mind, can also produce a positive value – as an openness to think about property, ownership, and communality in new ways when conceived acoustically. Altogether, the cultural life of post-Soviet mobility soundscapes echoes the temporal complexity of the cities themselves. In Minsk, Mariupol, and other cities of the region, tensions between the socialist past and the neo-liberal present do not seem to be disappearing – instead, they reproduce a noisy uncertainty or, to put it more positively, the audible intrigue of the post-socialist future.

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