

## INVENTORY SPACE, INVENTED SPACE

**Frederico Augusto Vianna de Assis Pessoa**

Departamento de Comunicação Social, Faculdade de Filosofia e Ciências Humanas,  
Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte, Brazil

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### ABSTRACT

This article addresses the engendering of listening territories in the town of Belmonte (Brazil) and discusses how listening can be about a way of knowing the world which starts in the senses and dives into it deeply and intensely to bring to light insights that can guide our perceptions of an object in various aspects. Regarding a city, those aspects can go from its urban structure to the relationships between people who inhabit it. The text proposes an essay in which travelogues engage in dialogue with the openness to the sensations caused by the soundscapes and their reticular characteristics where affection, coexistence, differences, the relations between human and non-human beings, the geographies of economic power, different subjectivities and the multiplicity that characterises a city are manifested. It presupposes that to listen is to be attentive to the dynamic movement of the world and the ephemerality of the events and interweavings that occur in it to translate what affects us into words. Although the essay focuses on an approach to listening, it acknowledges the impossibility of separating the five senses in perception and their continuous action in the relations between human beings and the world, thus forming not only individual subjectivities and idiosyncrasies, but also shareable perspectives on being and acting in the shared space.

### KEYWORDS

city, listening, sound cartography, sound ethnography, sensory

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## ESPAÇO INVENTÁRIO, ESPAÇO INVENTADO

### RESUMO

Este artigo aborda a experiência de construção de territórios de escuta na cidade de Belmonte (Brasil), e discute como a escuta pode ser uma forma de conhecimento do mundo que parte do sensorial e nele mergulha intensamente, para trazer à tona *insights* que podem nortear compreensões sobre um objeto em diversos aspectos, no caso da cidade, desde sua estrutura urbana até as relações entre pessoas que a habitam. O texto propõe um ensaio em que os diários de viagem dialogam com a abertura para as sensações provocadas pelas paisagens sonoras e suas características reticulares onde o afeto, a convivência, as diferenças, as relações entre seres humanos e não-humanos, as geografias do poder econômico, as diferentes subjetividades, e a multiplicidade que caracteriza uma cidade se manifestam. O texto parte do princípio de que escutar é estar atento ao movimento dinâmico do mundo e à efemeridade dos acontecimentos e entrelaçamentos que nele ocorrem para traduzir o que nos afeta em palavras. Embora se centre em uma abordagem pela escuta, o ensaio reflete sobre a impossibilidade de separação entre os sentidos na percepção e sua atuação contínua nas relações seres humanos–mundo, constituindo não só subjetividades e idiosincrasias individuais, mas também perspectivas compartilháveis sobre o ser e estar no espaço comum.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE**

cartografia sonora, cidade, escuta, etnografia sonora, sensório

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This is how space begins, with words only, signs traced on the blank page. To describe space: to name it, to trace it, like those portolano-makers who saturated the coastlines with the names of harbours, the names of capes, the names of inlets, until in the end the land was only separated from the sea by a continuous ribbon of text. (Perec, 1974/2001, p. 33)

We could start this way: as we walk through the streets of Belmonte, we cannot fail to observe the houses that colour Dom Pedro II avenue from end to end with their wonderful architecture from the early 20th century. Standing at their doorsteps, people watch time flowing slowly while children play on the pavements and bicycles ride in the wind. The town had its golden age at the end of the 19th century, due to the large production of cocoa, its main commodity and the livelihood of its inhabitants at that time. One of its main avenues, the Rio Mar, crosses the town, bringing together the two sources of water that define the ways of life of those who inhabit Belmonte — the Jequitinhonha river and the Atlantic ocean.

We could start our journey about Belmonte with this diary, recollecting the travel memoirs of earlier centuries. Belmonte is a town located in the south of Bahia where I spent 20 days with my family, leaving a metropolis and taking refuge from the covid-19 in a place where nature is present in a closer and more intense way. I live in Belo Horizonte, a city of 2,500,000 people far from the sea, where nature is restricted to the parks delimited within the urban space and to a few trees that still survive the destructive eagerness of “progress” that has marked the path of the city since its foundation, about 120 years ago. Every city has a multiple and diverse soundscape<sup>1</sup> (Schafer, 1977/2001), but there are aspects that become almost ubiquitous, such as the traffic noise in Belo Horizonte.

Belmonte has about 25,000 inhabitants and has no buildings, except for the Forum, which stands out from the old houses that surround it, with its disruptive architecture. Belmonte is a coastal town, close to Santa Cruz de Cabrália, founded as a municipality in 1764, although it had its golden era thanks to the cocoa production, as we said, it has kept the dimensions and rhythms of a village. Or maybe it has resumed them at some point in its history and got used to it. From a distance, the sounds of the sea would be, for an unsuspecting foreigner like me, the essential sounds of Belmonte.

Large cities have long shown us the negative facets of the ways of life we have built in them, whether by individual choices or choices of public authorities to reconfigure

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<sup>1</sup> The concept of soundscape was established by the Canadian composer and educator Raymond Murray Schafer on his book *Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*, first published in 1977 (Schafer, 1977/2001). The soundscape is a set of sounds that happen in a certain place and, we could say, at a certain listening moment.

or maintain the public space, which fail to meet the basic demands of coexistence and communality that a city should meet<sup>2</sup>. With the advent of the covid-19 pandemic and the imperative to remain in isolation, cities have become even more inhospitable. The need to leave metropolises in search of smaller cities or areas closer to nature has become urgent for many. I am among those who were unable to remain in another location during the pandemic, but who sought, by all means, a temporary way out that would allow them to live other ways of life, even for a short time.

Leaving behind the intense sounds of Vale's locomotives that travel day and night under my windows, as well as the continuous traffic noise that grows exponentially in the city, I left, with my family, for Belmonte, a town we did not know and that we would meet with fresh and open ears. Thus, as a researcher and a sound artist, I would like to discuss our trip to Belmonte and the drawing of a sound map of this town that I could lay out through my foreign listening, a listening territory<sup>3</sup> that I gradually inhabited during my stay.

#### FOR A WRITING THAT HAS LISTENING AS A "METHOD"

How to translate listening into words? How to transform the unrepeatably, multi-faceted and subjective experience from a time and a space into a text? Aware that the written form can not capture the ephemeral, elusive and fluid phenomenon of sounds, the following essay seeks, *brush our ears* and make them vibrate through the weaving of words and phrases with their rhythms, cadences, tones and articulations — after all, words are sounds too. To be listening is to be immersed in the world as a sentient being, and there is no way to talk about listening without trying to retrieve this immersion (Feld, 2017; Schulze, 2018; Voegelin, 2010). Therefore, with listening being our guiding thread, we seek to present the intricate multiplicity of the world with its colours, shapes, smells, movements, flavours and its irreducible sensory diversity.

A move towards literature is part of the essay's methodology, bringing a way of encompassing life and our being in the world, a way that is above all aesthetic, since literature is a different way of choosing and weaving words together. We seek a dialogue between literary and sensory construction and rational reflection on what the experience of the world, mediated by listening, could bring us about a town.

This text is structured so as to seek to reflect the itinerary of sensations and thoughts that make up a listening territory and to unravel the threads and wefts involving its construction. A listening territory is the articulation of a myriad of sensations, experiences, memories, knowledge and meanings that affect the listener — an epistemological place which we inhabit with our ears, but that goes beyond them. This place, which we create based on our perceptions, our reflection, our previous histories and experiences, as well as

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<sup>2</sup> Issues such as income distribution, public transport, maintenance of green areas, conservation of rivers (clean-up and access), returning the streets to pedestrians, among many others should also be considered, but will not be addressed here.

<sup>3</sup> This concept was developed during my research on sound (Pessoa, 2017) and will be discussed later.

the different processes that capture us as we open our ears to the world, reflects a whole personal journey and is in constant transformation under the action of those same forces.

Each section of this essay addresses aspects of how Belmonte affected us during our journey: nature/human activity; the common/the private; politics/subjectivity; distancing/immersion; the movement/static. Although we list those pairs to illustrate the path we take in writing, we do not think of them as dichotomies, but as a mixture, in which those elements — and many others related to them — are diluted and intertwined into a fabric where micro-readings of aspects of the ordinary life in a town reveals its complexities through sound.

### NATURA NATURANS NATURA NATURATA

Sometimes, on a summer morning, after the usual bath, I would sit on my sunny doorway from dawn to dusk, rapt in a reverie, amidst the pines and hickories and sumac trees, in undisturbed solitude and stillness, while the birds around sang or fluttered noiselessly through the house. (Thoreau, 1854/2007, p. 47)

The trip to Belmonte began as a quest for proximity to nature and the abandonment of a life confined in a downtown apartment, even if only temporarily. Although we were foreigners and, in a way, tourists, we would stay in a borrowed house with a large garden and many plants: pink mango, ubá mango, sword mango, *pitanga*, *biri biri*, coconut, *mangaba*, bromeliads, hibiscus, and various ornamental plants. Thus, we would not be tied to the tourist circuit and we could build a closer relationship, at least we hoped, with the place we were visiting.

Very early on the first morning, we could hear the singing of a multitude of songbirds that established their dialogues in the garden trees and came to eat the fruit they could find there. Its wings, with different shapes, sizes and colours, produced sounds that blended with their singing and their departures and landings in the trees. Great kiskadees, southern lapwings, cardinals, doves, hummingbirds, smooth-billed ani and so many other species were frequent in that space. There was a complex interaction between the sounds of each lineage that seemed to complete each other, building a contrapuntal composition with multiple melodic lines, different rhythms and timbres. Throughout the day I could hear their sparse presence by the songs they emitted here and there in the garden. In addition to the birds, other sounds gradually meddled in this soundscape, expanding the sonic complexity that vibrated in that space. Flies, mosquitoes, fruit flies, different types of bees, wasps, beetles, crickets and cicadas. Cats — silent most of the time — and bats at night.

Sounds surround us, touch us, make us vibrate with them, affect us, provoke sensations and feelings and make us think. As we listen to the sounds of the world, we weave

webs of meaning that encompass us. This experience includes sensations, emotions, memory, imagination, reason, aesthetic perception, space, collectivity and language:

we hear through our muscles, nerves and tendons. Our body-box, strung tight, is covered head to toe with a tympanum. (...) Plunged, drowned, submerged, tossed about, lost in infinite repercussions and reverberations and making sense of them through the body. (Serres, 2008, p. 141)

But animals were not the only ones emitting sounds in the garden. There was the constant sound of the wind blowing in the various leaves of trees and shrubs. Its greatest intensity was perceived after sunset. It started as a breeze that subtly shook the leaves and grew stronger and louder until it reached, on some days, a gust that expanded the diversity of sounds caused by its friction against the plants. The wind provoked the fall of ripe fruits, mainly mangoes and *mangabas*. The fall of each mango was preceded by the breaking of its branch with a sharp crack, and soon afterwards, its thump on the ground was heard. Each thump seemed unique, sonically distinct: there was the material on which they fell — sand, grass, cement, wood, roots of other trees, dry leaves —; their weight, and whether they were whole or partially eaten by birds. The rustling, the crackling, the trilling, the chirruping, the cracking, the cooing, the chirping, the tweeting, the hissing, the humming, the peeping, the snap, the thud, the buzz, the rumour, the murmur. This sublime polyphony resonated in our bodies and made us feel we were cohabiting with non-human beings in a way that our city, Belo Horizonte, did not allow.

We used to spend hours in the garden eating our meals on a makeshift wooden table, under a mango tree, talking, swinging in the hammock that hung between two trees, playing with our 6-year-old son who explored every corner and discovered tiny events and their micro-sounds: the fruit flies, ants, beetles and other insects that consumed the fallen fruits in frenzy, the “giant” snails that came out at dusk and spread out in the yard in slow movements, the bats that sometimes flew close to ours heads and sometimes disappeared into the night beyond the walls, with their subtle and short locating noises, the green caterpillars that moved quickly and camouflaged themselves within the *biri biris*. There was life, there were sounds and there was silence<sup>4</sup>.

The sounds in that space materialized an anticipated experience of immersion and contact with other beings, an experience of openness and spaciousness in which countless forms of existence fit together, and pointed to an urban way of life in which we did not feel so distant from other ecosystems. Those sounds disclosed the need to transform our original urban environment — the metropolis — in order to make our bodies to feel in tune with what surrounds us, reducing distance and mediation. As Ailton Krenak (2019) says: “we have become alienated from this organism of which we are a part, the Earth” (p. 14).

<sup>4</sup> Silence is always a contingent experience, where the interruption of sound emissions in a context or the reduction of sudden sounds, throw us momentarily into a hiatus where other sounds appear, subtle or intense, more or less perceptible — there is no silence without sounds, as Cage (1973) used to say: “there is always something to see, something to hear. In fact, try as we may to make a silence, we cannot” (p. 8).

At the same time, the awareness of being in a garden questioned the idea of nature that vibrated in our tympanic bodies. The garden is the quintessential figure of a nature built by human technique and technology, part of the conception of the landscape idea (Cauquelin, 2000/2007). It is the frame that surrounds and defines the space to be perceived where one can cultivate and manage, govern nature — and thus, part of its sounds. The garden is an *invented nature* (von Hardenberg, 2013), which allows immersion and coexistence with beings of other species and phyla, with the tranquillity of being doubly at home. *City sounds*, although mostly of low intensity and partially blocked by trees and other plants in the garden, came to us sporadically and territorialized us in Belmonte: motorcycles on the surrounding streets, sounds of footsteps in the alley, voices walking nearby, among other noises that removed us from the idyllic experience and *grounded us*.

In my foreign view, there were two main avenues in Belmonte that were connected to the geography found by those who settled there more than 300 years ago: Beira Rio avenue and Rio Mar avenue. The first ran along the Jequitinhonha river and the second connected the first to the beach. The town, with its houses, shops, people, bicycles and squares, is clustered close to the Jequitinhonha — a river access that probably facilitated the initial movement of people and materials to and from the village. We soon realised that the sunset was taking place on the edge of the Jequitinhonha, and we spent several late afternoons listening to the boats travelling along the river and the birds populating the nearby trees with their melodies, as the sky turned red and the night came.

The engines propelled small boats carrying tourists who wanted to navigate the river and the mangroves and make the crossing to the neighbouring town, Canavieiras. The avenue had a central flower bed, with trees, benches and tables, where people could stay while watching the slow downward movement of the sun and the transversal movement of the boats. There were cars driving lazily along, with couples or families following nature through the window frame, in motion: “one effect of mobile technologies is to change the nature of vision (creating a) swiftly passing panorama, a sense of multi-dimensional rush and the fluid interconnections of places, peoples and possibilities” (Urry, 2001, p. 4). Those technologies are also forms of sound insulation (Labelle, 2010), since they are composed of acoustic materials and added benefits that allow the exclusion of sounds from the outside world, creating an acoustic *capsule* that crosses the space as if it were not in it. The tourists in Belmonte seemed to always find the moment for a short stop and a quick *flash*, but probably no pause for listening...

The dominant interaction between man and nature could be noticed again on Beira Rio avenue, where we could see the search for domestication and reconstruction of the space to make it *human* and provide delight to the passer-by, local or foreign. But we could also notice the unintentional mixing of the sounds of contemporary urban world, on a small scale in relation to a metropolis, to the sounds of non-human beings that already inhabited the place before man’s arrival as well as the sounds of non-human beings who started to inhabit it after human intervention.

As we follow Rio Mar avenue we reach Mar Moreno's beach. There are no beach shacks in Belmonte, just a pub at the end of the avenue. On the sand, there are ruins of houses that have been partially washed away by the sea, as well as houses that are likely to have the same fate in a decade. From the pub, at the end of the day and on weekends, comes a constant and intense soundtrack — otherwise there is no music. As we walk 50 meters to the right or to the left, the sounds of the pub fade away and those of the sea grow and dominate the soundscape. The waves break hard in the afternoon, with repeated, cyclical crashes. The foam fizzes, stretching over the sand which is gradually soaked, until almost the entire strip is covered by water at the sunset. As we see the ghost crabs, we can almost hear the sounds of their fast feet fleeing across the sand, as well as that of the mole crabs disappearing into their holes to the rhythm of the wave cycles. Our feet sink in the soft dry sand as well as in the wet sand by the sea, sounding our steps as they rub against the hard grains. We step on shells scattered on the edges of the wet sand and some break under our feet, with a characteristic snap. The wind shakes coconut tree leaves and their sharp vibrations take part in the composition of the beach soundscape we hear. To enter the sea is to dive into variations of tones that differentiate this environment from the mainland. The unique grunt of the forming waves, the foam of the surf breaking with its increasing hiss which becomes more and more acute until it disappears, in a temporal and natural filter of frequencies. Diving isolates the external sounds and surrounds us in vibrating waters, where the sounds of our bodies stand out and awaken us to their continuous clamour. A sort of momentary return to the origin when we floated encapsulated in the womb and the different tones that reached us were filtered and the sounds of our bodies were merged with those of other beings in a world still without differentiation between the interior and the exterior in a fluid rhythm without pauses.

Listening is a way of getting closer to the world, a search for understanding based on what happens and a quest to establish a relationship with the perceived that emphasizes the awareness of our being *in* the world, co-existing with the phenomena. It is not just a mode of reception, but a method of exploration in which what we hear is discovered, not just received (Voegelin, 2010). In our culture, the visual aspect of the experience has been emphasized for many centuries and it is reinforced in language, with visual metaphors that penetrate different fields of knowledge, or in the conceptual thought itself and in the valorisation of the gaze at the expense of other forms of perception, cultivating a certain *visualism* (Ihde, 2007) that has dominated the way we are affected by things and the meanings we build from those impressions.

Shifting our perception towards listening is a manner of expanding our way of receiving the things of the world and thinking about them (listening does not exclude visibility, nor any other senses, since it is part of the whole that is our perception, even if we are not aware of it). Feld (2017) proposes an epistemological shift through the concept of *acoustemology*:

acoustemology (...) asks how the physicality of sound is so instantly and forcefully present to experience and experiencers, to interpreters and

interpretations. (...) Engages acoustics at the plane of the audible — *akoustos* — to inquire into sounding as simultaneously social and material, an experiential nexus of sonic sensation. (p. 84)

The flow of listening, in its continuous unfolding and its rhythmic and temporal characteristics, calls for another writing, also open and fluid, that accounts for the movement of sensations, in addition to the movement of thought — and makes room for the personal character of perceptions. In this particular case, it takes the form of an *acoustemological travelogue*: “the core of any writing, researching and theorizing around sound [is] to unravel the sensory and imaginary impact of a specific *specimen* of organized sounds — in a characteristic and culturally as well as historically contextualized situation” (Schulze, 2019, p. 12).

The garden, the river and the beach are three forms of encounter between nature and the urban in Belmonte that are notably revealed in the sounds of those spaces. Those encounters and their sonorities stood out to my foreign perception and experience and they remind me the gardens, rivers and parks in my hometown but without the sea and the beaches, since it is not a coastal city. Each of these three places reveals a mode of articulation between the human and the natural as well as ways of occupying and distributing urban space.

The gardens are not only built spaces where *invented nature* lives, they denote specific social strata as well. Gardens belong to old properties extending for half a block or more, probably covering about 1,000 m<sup>2</sup>. Several similar houses punctuated the old avenues of Belmonte historic centre: renovated and private, identified with historic preservation plates, whose gardens are protected by high walls. Those houses and their wide areas, built at the dawn of the 20th century, are directly linked to the cocoa cycle of the 19th century, when the town flourished, but always update their place in the structure of social inequalities through the financial and housing market cycles. Coexisting with those spacious properties, there are numerous small constructions, crammed both on the edges of the historic centre and in the more distant areas of the town, where a good part of the population resides without access to the private nature and the soundscape that the gardens provide:

capitalism simultaneously differentiates (...) converting the principle of market choice into a mechanism for group differentiation. (...) Divisions such as those between cities and suburbs, between regions (...) are actively produced through the differentiating powers of capital accumulation and market structures. (Harvey, 2001/2005, p. 208)

For me, the Beira Rio avenue, on the banks of the Jequitinhonha river, was a space for tourists, coming from nearby or distant cities. The space was designed as a *panorama*, with a parapet along the entire bank of the river as well as a flower bed with wooden benches and tables at the centre of the avenue for the appreciation of the view and, in our case, for listening to the multitude of sounds present there. The avenue was invariably

empty with just a few cars passing along its length and capturing the view in photographs: the tourist “consumes the exoticism, the sand, the sea, and the landscapes (...) but he feels at home even when he is elsewhere (...) and organizes himself to reduce others to an image (Augé, 2007/2010, pp. 74–75).

The beach seemed to be a place where nature was democratically accessed, open to the local population, to potential tourists, to upper or lower class families. The beaches were empty most of the time, except for weekends and holidays, when families, young people, children, couples of all ages, occupied the beach equitably, bringing their games, toys, their food, their chairs, small devices of sound diffusion (mobile phones, speakers) and the sounds of their bodies and their voices. The absence of beach shacks expanded the mixture and strengthened an egalitarian occupation of space.

Thus, we can notice that sound spaces are constituted through the interaction between disparate elements and when we listen to them with responsive ears they can help us understand the actions and relationships established between humans and non-human beings, forms of social organization, wealth distribution and urban structure, as well as the pace and spatial disposition of those relations. Our perception, if really open to what comes to us, is inundated by the different sonorities that make up the spaces through which we circulate and from these sensations we constitute meanings that link the perceived to the individual, historical, social and cultural moment we are experiencing — we delineate a listening territory. A listening territory is the name I give to the sound dimension of the world, as well as the way it affects us and what we produce from that affection. It implies the subject conduct, his or her body and his or her thinking and how these three elements are involved in his or her listening to the world and in his or her understanding of what surrounds him or her — it is based on what comes from the senses and what crosses and forms his or her own subjectivity: the conceptual, historical, political and affective aspects of his or her existence.

### ACOUSTIC COMMUNITY

Every day, between 7 and 8 o'clock in the morning, we could hear the fishmonger circling the town, in the distance, taking turns, first to the right and then to the left of the house, until he would get closer and we listen to and watch him going through the alley, beside the stretch of the garden that we inhabited most of the day. His *song* was always “olha o peixe” (here comes the fish), with an emphatic extension of the “ei” (*ay*) sound, sometimes with the indication of the species he offered and with significant intensity, so that the sound would arrive before he reached those who listened. As he moved on a bicycle, his sound displacement was particularly interesting: we heard him draw the space of our surroundings, marking points of his path with his singing, in rapid movements that seemed erratic, labyrinthine, but perhaps they served some logic that we were unaware of.

An acoustic community (Truax, 1984) is defined by the sounds that spread through its geographical location and are shared by the ears of its inhabitants, a soundscape that characterizes communal aspects of life for that specific group, even partially. We could say that they are formed from shared listening territories, adding the subjective aspect of the sound perception and the meaning that comes from the exchange of experiences in the community. The concept is elastic, since it does not limit the dimensions of an acoustic community, which can go from a small space, like a house, to an entire community based on electroacoustic forms of communication, such as the radio: “our definition of the acoustic community means that acoustic cues and signals constantly keep the community in touch with what is going on from day to day within it” (Truax, 1984, p. 58).

At certain times and days, we could listen to the music that came from neighbouring areas and, as we walked through the streets, we came across shared forms of music listening that we realized to be a constant in the town. People sat in chairs comfortably placed in the sun, at the entrance to their houses, next to amplified speakers whose electric extension stretched through the front door, and listened to music at high volume sharing this particular listening situation while sipping their drinks. The conversation was limited by the intensity of the music, which not only cheered those who were sitting side by side but invaded the houses of an entire block around them. *Arrocha* was the preeminent style coming from those speakers which mostly favoured composers and songwriters from Bahia. When walking along some routes, our ears were often induced to make curious *mash-ups* of the songs emanating from the surroundings which momentarily overlapped in their dispute over the acoustic space.

The choices we make to sonically manifest ourselves demarcate ways of expressing ourselves and of claiming the common space. The sounds we make expand our territory, expand the limits of our bodies and place us in dialogue and/or dispute with other bodies, revealing the diffusion through sound waves of the political aspect of our existence. The power of sound is often associated with the power and dominance of a territory, since “the loudest sounds have always been associated with the most powerful forces in the world, whether they represented physical or political power” (Truax, 1984, p. 113). On the other hand, our sounds are also traces that we leave in the shared space of the acoustic community, an imprint that affirms us as individuals within the group.

The municipal market was located at the end of D. Pedro II avenue, on the banks of the Jequitinhonha river. I suppose it was a busy place sometime ago, with its stalls filled and occupied. However, currently, the market is closed and several of its internal stalls are empty and abandoned, as could be seen through its gates. Outside, facing a small grassy square, there was a bar. Every day the tables on the pavement were taken up by men drinking and listening to the music coming from the speakers of the bar and filling the square in front of it. The songs constantly scrutinized the beloved woman and disclosed the suffering, the betrayal, the lost love, curiously bringing the feminine presence to that male environment, although a feminine circumscribed by the masculine affection... Next to the market there is a small wharf officially built for the fishermen, as

signalled on the plate in front of it, where boats which make the crossing to Canavieiras and trips on the river are docked. I presume that the men who spent their days at the bar were waiting for visitors to sail their boats and in the meantime spent their unoccupied afternoons undulating to the sound of the loud music coming from the bar and the affections it evoked.

The town is divided in two by 23 de Maio avenue, the extension of BA 001 road and the entrance to Belmonte. To the north-west, the historic part of the town, to the south-east, the modern one. Almost all the commerce is on in this avenue: supermarkets, butchers, bakeries, clothing shops, bicycle shops, beverage distributors, greengrocer's, and many other suppliers of goods. Walking along this avenue is delving into the daily flow of the town's movement: countless bicycles parked along the pavements, people circulating and inside the shops, cars, delivery trucks and tricycles vie for available space. Here, on a small scale, the multi-sensory hubbub of the metropolises is mirrored with its easily exportable characteristics: the excess of placards, advertisements, banners and visual signs, the snores, crackles, squeals and rumours of the engines, the characteristic odour of gases from oil, the texture, the impermeability and the heat of the asphalt underfoot — this is the only paved road in the town — characteristics of the urban structure that dissolve in the global network, where spaces become more and more homogeneous (Harvey, 2001/2005).

Listening to aspects of the community — which include sharing, expression of subjectivity in the common space, exchanges, affective connections and ruptures — allows us to reach an understanding of the ways of living and sharing of the city space. Among them we find those that are part of the constitution of the peculiarities that differentiate one city from another and, at the same time, aspects that bring them together. Life in common is not only made by conducts that imply an effective action on the shared space, but also by the sound choices we make when inhabiting it.

## THE AGORA

Bars fill the Rio Mar avenue, an average of one per block, varying the offer: snacks, lunch, or just drinks. Every day, people met for ordinary conversations on their pavements, in pairs, trios or circles that gradually get excited and thereby intensify the sonic power of the “crowding”. The bars have become the space for the town's daily meetings — at least to my foreign perception — where the voices overlap, oppose, articulate themselves rhythmically, dance spatially and compose harmonies and dissonances. In many of them there was no music, especially during the day. Some, like the one at the end of the avenue, on the sea front, provided soundtracks for the meetings only at dusk.

The sounds of the voices reverberate on the walls of the built areas, amplify their volume and reflect in all directions, engulfing the surroundings with their vibrations responding to that *aural architecture* (Blessner & Salter, 2007). Beyond language and the significance constructed (in part) logically, argument and persuasion, information and

solicitation, slogan, jargon, slang, regionalisms, grammar, colloquial expressions, resides laugh, laughter, whispering, stammering, cries of pain, anger, pleasure, relief, interjections, crying, whistling, teeth grinding, tongue clicking: “before making sense, language makes noise. (...) Whoever speaks is also singing beneath the words spoken, is beating out rhythm beneath the song, is diving into the background noise underneath the rhythm” (Serres, 2008, p. 120). Inside the bars, the ties are unfastened and the rationality of the speech is dismantled, allowing the most disparate sounds, “adequate” or not, to be emitted without blockage, either by male or female mouths...

We spotted at least four squares in the region of the historic centre, where we stayed, all of them had gazebos, benches, lighting and signs of careful maintenance. Curiously, they were always empty. There were no people talking in the squares, nobody watching passers-by or enjoying the weather. Not even children appropriated these spaces, leaving them continuously lifeless, architectural conformations without the human presence that completes them and gives them meaning. Silence concealed itself in those places, waiting for the unsuspecting visitor, about to envelop him or her and request his or her stillness to listen to the wind and the sounds of the past that could be awakened by memory and imagination.

At the same time, a few blocks from the historic centre, on the riverside, young people playing football occupied the Matriz Church plaza; we could see one or another amateur athlete jogging, circling bicycles and gatherings in the bar in the centre of the square. The profusion of sounds in the plaza materialized the possibility of multiple occupations of the public space. There was no interaction between the groups, nor was there a subject to be discussed and decided at an assembly, but all those events registered a tacit claim for the right to the city through leisure and through the diversity of sound emissions.

As we learned from Lefebvre (2000), the design of the urban structure can favour modes of occupying space and these modes will be revealed through the disparate sounds that mingle in a harmony of differences (or dissonances) characteristic of the realization of sociality: “urban form – Mentally: simultaneity (of events, perceptions, and elements of a whole in the ‘real’). Socially: the encounter and the concentration of what exists around, in the environment (...) and consequently, urban society as privileged social site” (pp. 137–138).

On the central curb strip of Rio Mar avenue, in front of a gas station with the same name, there were two benches — one made of concrete and one made of wood. They were face to face, but about 5 to 6 meters apart. People were always around those benches talking to each other, especially in the mornings. The discussions covered numerous topics: the latest news, football, work, the weather, the government, and so forth. Although it was not an official circle of discussion and decision about collective life, but a space for exchanges that represent urban sociability and the maintenance of bonds in the midst of normally rigid work flows, there was room for advice and exhortations. They were masculine voices, with variations in timbre and intonation, rhythm, amplitude and

cadence, some with ageing signs, others with biological flaws, but all with a similar accent and reinforcing, even if unconsciously, the maintenance of authorized speech and friendship between men that cement the construction of gender in the public space.

Anne Carson (1995), in her text “The Genre of Sound”, addresses historical-cultural issues about the male perspectives of ancient (and current) cultures that gradually built the silencing of the sound of female voices as well as the use of their voice in public spaces. Women, in addition to having high-pitched voices (irritating, in the analysed perspective), were not able to exercise rational control of speech through *sophrosyne*, speaking more than they should and saying what they should not. Therefore, they would not be capable to engage in rational discussions in the eminently male political and decision-making spaces — male deep voices and their controlled and balanced discourse would be the hallmarks of the correct attitude in public life. Carson addresses other issues that are part of the construction of the silencing and patriarchal disqualification of the female voice and speech and its connection with sexuality, which reinforce their withdrawal from the public space. Listening to the male voices arguing in common spaces of Belmonte and not listening to the female voices in this micro-universe resonated Carson’s thinking in my ears.

The sounds can be considered violent, invasive, exclusive, disruptive and, at the same time, affective, welcoming, conciliatory. The dispute for the city also takes place through the sound occupation of spaces — sounds can be political in themselves. Listening allows us to discern the power of sounds in constructing alliances, delimiting territories, creating and maintaining hegemony, dominance and affirmation. Thus, the gradual weaving of a listening territory, in addition to being a process, is a procedure of unveiling aspects of the world that are expressed through sounds and that provoke thought by making the ears vibrate.

## ON THE ROAD

Belmonte is a small town, flat, with not many cars and a simple and geometric road system — few avenues, moderately wide streets, and narrow, perpendicular lanes. The town’s main means of transport is the bicycle — the dream of big cities and ecological transport solutions. Numerous bicycles circulate through the streets, in a myriad of colours, albeit with similar styles — there is no need for mountain, folding or retro bikes nor gears. A simple bicycle with a pillion and sometimes a basket on the front is enough. We soon found two bicycles in our house and started to take daily rides. Belmonte shows us that “people’s lives are not that compartmentalized — generally, the place where they live, work and have fun is just a short distance away” (Byrne, 2009/2011, p. 8).

Bicycles not only eased our ways through the streets but opened new doors for us to perceive, feel and think about the town we were in. Cycling through the roadways brought the noises of the bicycles, the conversations and the voices interrupted by the erratic movements of each cyclist, the sounds of the streets in spatial movements: approaching,

in *crescendos*, distancing, in *diminuendos*, the expansion of our listening territory and the discovery of new sounds and new forms of dynamic appreciation of these sounds. The bicycle does not isolate us from the encircling space, as cars and their sound insulation do. It allows us to be still immersed in the world while in motion — the tactile textures, colours, shapes, smells and sounds reach us and involve us throughout the journey: “on a bicycle, there are more exchanges and more correspondence. We surreptitiously slip through another geography, eminent and literally poetic” (Augé, 2008/2009, p. 66).

Gradually we were drawing new paths on our bicycles, discovering routes, lanes, alleys and streets, of stone or earth, designing Belmonte’s space in new shapes that brought fresh perceptions about the town. We discovered, on one of the tours, the Belmonte Roberto Cunha municipal airport. There was none of the sounds we would expect to hear near an airport. The track, at the bottom and to the left, was being slowly taken up by vegetation. The insects and birds that populated bushes and surrounding trees, together with the wind that swayed the leaves and one or another passer-by on the street made up the soundscape of that *non-place* (Augé, 1997).

There was a bog close by on the same avenue, towards the centre. As we approached it we could hear an infinity of frogs croaking in high-pitch. The croaking and its particular characteristics composed an open-air concert with an incredible spatialization of the frogs’ voices hidden under the tall grass and it was sonically opposed to the idea of urbanization that its neighbour, the airport, brought to the site.

Thanks to the mobility we gained with our bicycles, we could drift around most of the town, experiencing different spaces and the sounds of the ways of life that unfolded in it. The municipal market, the riverside, the squares, the church, the avenues and lanes, the abundant silences and sounds, the voices and the songs, the noises and the dialogues, the music in the air and in the body, a diversity of spaces that were gradually transformed into our territory — and into our listening territory.

The ways we move through cities define the way we listen to them and, at least partially, the ways in which we participate in the common life and how we understand it. If we had chosen the car as our means of transport and had decided to go only to beaches and restaurants, like the traditional tourist, we would have isolated ourselves from the rhythms and flows that make up the town and our understanding of it could turn out to be extremely superficial and limited. Walking and cycling allowed us to listen to Belmonte and let ourselves be overwhelmed by the multiplicity of aspects that were manifested through sound. Thus, we have built a perspective on the town from the sewing together of the sound fragments we heard throughout our stay and of the different meanings that are expressed in the everyday sounds of a town — slowly, articulating sensations and thinking, and allowing those sounds to be the starting point for our understanding of Belmonte.

## SLOW HOMECOMING

“As from when does somewhere become truly yours?”, asks Perec (1974/2001, p. 24). My 6-year-old son tells me that he lived in every place he visited: “when we lived” in Serra do Cipó, in Cumuruxatiba, in São Paulo, in Rio de Janeiro, in Tiradentes, in Ouro Preto, in Itatiaia, in Rio Piracicaba, in Catas Altas, in Cocais, in Belmonte, in Mariana...

When do the foreign eyes, ears, nose, mouth and body cease to be foreign? Does dwelling connect and submit only to time? Or does it concern the way we are, live, are affected and affect a place? Perhaps we have inhabited Belmonte and made it our territory, and not only visited the town, or perhaps this is just our wish... “Cities, like dreams, are made of desires and fears, even if the thread of their discourse is secret, their rules are absurd, their perspectives deceitful, and everything conceals something else” (Calvino, 1972/1990, p. 25).

A listening territory is also a sound map which is, at least in part, poetic. Therefore, it is always provisional, ephemeral, personal. We have tried to describe in words this provisional map, fleeting in sensations and memories, which points to the connections and flows involved in the listening territories we articulated during our stay in Belmonte and reflects the construction of this personal and idiosyncratic listening. As Schulze (2018) tells us:

in respect to (...) personal, biographical, cultural, as well as historical specificities in inclinations, preferences, and tastes, a certain alien might evolve an idiosyncrasy over time. Idiosyncrasies are symptoms of existence: they are signatures of life. (...) The sonic traces of such sensory idiosyncrasies are always specific in their endless variations, their almost unforeseeable turns, detours, and erratic pirouettes. (pp. 116–117)

Maps and cartographies are a set of marks and references that open the possibility of drawing new paths through lines of flight that can design new maps (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/2000). Listening is a multifaceted experience and, although we can categorize it to try to understand it, its simultaneous constitutive layers are always multiple. Listening to Belmonte resonated in us with several aspects of the ways of living that take place there: nature, urbanism, history, politics, leisure, social structure, among other themes and relationships. But it was *our* listening, one of so many possible others.

This listening territory reveals the importance of opening our ears as a form of research, entry and understanding of social relations and the urban structure that manifests them. It is not just a matter of letting yourself be carried away by the sounds, although this is necessary in this procedure. It is about opening ourselves to the sensory and letting the sensations guide our thought so it can articulate what we live to our reflection and to our understanding. It is not a matter of putting the ears in the place of the eyes — a listening instead of an observation, instead of a gaze —, but, as we try to indicate in this essay, to open our ears to the stimulus that comes from the world while we are immersed in it and to add what our listening captures to what the body, as a whole, perceives and thinks.

To return “slowly” from Belmonte to Belo Horizonte, in a journey divided into 2 days of travel, with about 8 hours each, in a *non-place* where we can only hear the roar of engines and the wind through the narrow openings of the car windows, with short pauses in diners where meals are practical and quick, accommodation in *non-places* which resemble countless others with their isolation from external sounds, air-conditioning noise, informative and friendly speeches within the necessary politeness to the consumer relationship, is a slow return to other aspects of the world and other ways of listening and its articulations. It is a return to the sensory dullness that the tourist structure, if we can call it that, guarantees to the traveller — the homogeneity and the reduction of difference and, with that, the weakening of the stimulus that comes from the experience.

At the same time, the composition of our listening territories in Belmonte directly impacts our perception of Belo Horizonte and its sounds. We always return with other ears and with another listening: “the continuously shifting sound dynamics [is a] characteristic of most soundscapes. (...) that fact alone demands continuous openness and flexibility in aural perception from us (...). What is stable and not shifting is the commitment to listening” (Westerkamp, 2019, p. 46).

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## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Frederico Augusto Vianna de Assis Pessoa holds a master degree and a PhD in arts/ image technology from the Federal University of Minas Gerais with a scholarship from Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado de Minas Gerais (FAPEMIG), and is a sound

artist. He is member of “ESCUTAS: Grupo de Pesquisa e Estudos em Sonoridades, Comunicação, Textualidades e Sociabilidade” (research group on sonorities, communication, textualities and sociability)

Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2856-6132>

Email: [fpessoa@ufmg.br](mailto:fpessoa@ufmg.br)

Address: Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, Brasil

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