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# Samples of a Place: Urban Field Recordings as a Sensitive Resource of Urban Cultural Heritage

**Abstract:** The paper focuses on various kinds of urban field recordings produced during research and artistic practices which apply auditory immersion in the qualitative analysis of places. Showing why and how urban field recordings might be used in locally guided placemaking practices, I propose to consider them as a sensitive resource of urban cultural heritage. A reflection on the sensitive quality of urban field recordings — a quality which stems from their susceptibility to the workings of time and their capability to transfer local affects — is realized in four parts. Part one posits the question of the relationship between urban sound and place, showing perspectives which arise from an application of listening in the qualitative analysis of places. Part two studies aspects of using, archiving, and sharing of field recordings produced within research, artistic and museum projects, accentuating the need to connect institutionally based practices with the promotion of audible culture in the process of establishing the notion of field recordings as a medium of urban heritage transmission. Part three proposes a shift from an interpretive to a performative approach in grasping the ontological status of urban field recordings, discussing them as samples of a place which are capable of transmitting local affects. Finally, part four recalls the idea of acousmatics to reflect upon the role of metadata in the reception of urban field recordings, which safeguards them from losing their cultural legibility. I argue that the lack of accompanying commentaries, which blurs the relation of recording with the place of sound sampling, does not erase the affective influence of the sound source transmitted by the sound sample. Such an observation leads to the conclusion that urban field recordings elude their framing in a single definition of heritage.

**Keywords:** immersive listening, qualitative analysis of places, recorded sound in use, media of urban heritage transmission, affect

## Introduction

In this article, I am primarily interested in the material products of artistic and research practices of auditory immersion aimed at exploring places. I propose that these field recordings should be perceived as a specific resource of cultural heritage of cities; one that is culturally active and capable of fostering com-

municative acts. By the resource of heritage<sup>1</sup> I mean heterogeneous and open collections of “cultural texts,”<sup>2</sup> whose creative updating in reception practices enables the transmission of knowledge about the past of places. I understand these culturally active heritage resources as sensitive — they are able to transmit rich, multi-sensory information about the culture(s) of a city, but at the same moment they are also very susceptible to time in their material and semiotic layers. Their recognition as a medium of lived cultural experience and their use in placemaking practices is therefore dependent on contextualization and broadly understood commentary work, which addresses both the material and immaterial dimensions of the recordings, without which these sensitive heritage resources quickly lose their readability. In the case of urban field recordings, the effect of time, which blurs the clarity of the recordings’ relationship with the context of production and the experience of specific subjects, does not, however, weaken the affective impact of the recorded sound. This is a specific quality of the sound texts of a culture, whose extraction through theoretical reflection requires combining interpretative and performative approaches to the ontological status of recorded urban sound. I consider these approaches not as contradictory, but complementary, which means that they converge in our understanding of how recorded urban sound may participate in the processes of cultural communication.

Starting with the above considerations, in the following paragraphs I will focus on problematizing the relationship between urban sound recorded on a material storage medium and the area from which it was collected in order to answer the question of how the affective content of a place transferred by recorded sound shapes the context of the reception of the recording. The task outlined in this way will involve: (a) discussing what is mediated by urban sound through reflection on the practice of listening to urban places; (b) analyzing selected aspects of using,

<sup>1</sup> The understanding of cultural heritage I have adopted assumes the need to combine its intangible and tangible aspects. In the considerations undertaken here, I emphasize the “functional” dimension of cultural heritage, which relates to the process of transferring knowledge and experiences that make up the culture of a given local community. I assume that the process of transmission of culture takes place not only in the domain of axiology, but also takes place each time through specific media and tools, which constitute the material infrastructure of culture, without which it cannot be transferred. See also J. Adamowski, K. Smyk, “Niematerialne dziedzictwo kulturowe — teoria i praktyka,” [in:] *Niematerialne dziedzictwo kulturowe. Źródła — wartości — ochrona*, eds. J. Adamowski, K. Smyk, Warszawa 2013, p. 10; M. Kytö, N. Remy, H. Uimonen, *European Acoustic Heritage*, Grenoble 2012, p. 63.

<sup>2</sup> I use the term “text of culture” in the sense suggested by the editors of the volume *Teksty kultury uczestnictwa (Texts of Participatory Culture)*, who in a reinterpretative reference to the findings of Stefan Żółkiewski (1988) propose to understand cultural texts as “all kinds of cultural products with semiotic potential,” including: “intentional works [...], less tangible [...] and very complex phenomena,” which “are expressed through basic media [...] such as words, images, spectacles, and are shaped by individual communication technologies.” *Teksty kultury uczestnictwa*, eds. A. Dąbrówka, M. Maryl, A. Wójtowicz, Warszawa 2016, p. 9. The approach to texts of culture I propose includes sound among the media through which these texts are expressed.

archiving, and sharing urban field recordings based on examples from artistic, research, and museum contexts; (c) problematizing field recording as a sample of a place; and (d) considering the situation of listening to urban field recordings disseminated online through the prism of the idea of “acousmatics.”<sup>3</sup>

## What Is Mediated by Urban Sound? Listening in the Qualitative Analysis of Places

Urban sound is interesting for urban research primarily because it has the ability to convey cultural and identity information about different locations, but also because it provides insight into their material qualities.<sup>4</sup> This is mainly due to the genesis of sound. It is not something independent of actions and practices, but rather a result of them. Sound in a city is produced through the activity of both human and non-human entities who are engaged in material and cultural processes. Initially, it is the practices of everyday life, material infrastructure, and the functional program of the space that create the sonic layer of the city and colour it in a certain way. At the same time, this sonic layer is a register in which the positions of objects in space and the relationships between the practices that structure the space are manifested, and which thus determine the uniqueness of individual locations.

Immersive listening practices introduced to the field of urban research, including soundwalking,<sup>5</sup> which refer to early situationist practices of drifting,<sup>6</sup> extend cultural approaches to the studies on urban places with a sensory, not just auditory, component. By combining aural exploration with movement in space, both research and immersive artistic practices help to bring out and problematize the subjective sensation of the city. They are a way of investigating the situation of the subject in the city, which can be considered a specific type of “aesthetic situation,” built on the relationship between the “creator, work, and recipient.”<sup>7</sup> The way in which the embodied subject experiences the urban space during a soundwalk is not a secondary issue in this case, but rather important auto-ethnographic qualitative information that can support the creation of vari-

<sup>3</sup> P. Schaeffer, *Treatise on Musical Objects: An Essay Across Disciplines*, trans. C. North, J. Dack, Oakland 2017.

<sup>4</sup> M. Kytö, N. Remy, H. Uimonen, op. cit., p. 9; R. Tańczuk, “Sonopolis. Klika uwag o dźwiękowych reprezentacjach miasta,” *Avant* 11, 2020, no. 3, p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> H. Westerkamp, “Soundwalking,” [https://www.hildegardwesterkamp.ca/writings/writingsby/?post\\_id=13&title=soundwalking](https://www.hildegardwesterkamp.ca/writings/writingsby/?post_id=13&title=soundwalking) (accessed 18.07.2021).

<sup>6</sup> A comprehensive discussion of walking as an artistic tactic introduced by situationists aimed at experiencing urban space is offered by A. Nacher, *Media lokacyjne. Ukryte życie obrazów*, Kraków 2016, pp. 118–121.

<sup>7</sup> M. Gołaszewska, *Zarys estetyki*, Warszawa 1984, p. 29.

ous types of sustainable design solutions for places and be used in local networks of cultural action.

Listening during soundwalks is a way of reaching the happening of life in places, of reaching what Anna Nacher, after Jeremy W. Crampton, called “ontogenesis” understood as a localized process of becoming.<sup>8</sup> Listening makes it possible to recognize the cultural code of places, which determines the historically contingent uniqueness of specific locations and invites questions about the temporal, and thus vulnerable, nature of places. Listening as a subjective strategy of experiencing and sensing the city does not respect arbitrarily defined spatial boundaries and divisions, but instead sets its own limits. It is a kind of analogue geolocation technology, which can be seen in relation to Lawrence English’s statement that “sound articulates space.”<sup>9</sup> Listening helps to recognize a place as a living, interactive, and ever-changing field of sensation that extends around and within the listening subject. It is a medium that gives a sensually accessible form to what the Greeks called “khôra,”<sup>10</sup> and what today should be associated with the dimension of “mythical,”<sup>11</sup> “spatial practices,”<sup>12</sup> constituting the topological environment which, by containing the subject, is also contained in the subject. The inclusion of sound and the accompanying listening practice in the qualitative analysis of places transforms the way urban space is perceived in research. Listening allows us to perceive urban space not only as a built environment external to the subject, but also as a multiplicity of places, which, following Jeff Malpas, are phenomena that “possesses a complex and differentiated structure made up of a set of interconnected and interdependent components — subject and object, space and time, self and other.”<sup>13</sup>

Listening, can initiate processes of what Aleksandra Kunce refers to as “rootedness” in a place deprived of its former function, which differs significantly from mainstream corporate practices of placemaking due to their grounding in cultural work.<sup>14</sup> Listening, on the one hand, allows us to perceive being rooted as a certain quality of the place of the “Other,” and on the other hand, it is a rooting practice itself, opening the self to a “dwelling.”<sup>15</sup> It incorporates the subject into a network of relations that constitutes a place and, by recognizing the compon-

<sup>8</sup> A. Nacher, op. cit., p. 10.

<sup>9</sup> “Lawrence English on Listening | Loop,” YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sCw1x4KjYhc> (accessed 3.05.2021).

<sup>10</sup> See A. Nacher, op. cit., p. 10.

<sup>11</sup> M. de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Berkeley–Los Angeles–London 1988, pp. 102–110.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 96.

<sup>13</sup> J. Malpas, *Place and Experience: A Philosophical Topography*, Cambridge 2004, p. 173.

<sup>14</sup> A. Kunce, “A Place that Invites Dwelling and Reconciliation Back: On the Anthropology of Post-Industrial Place,” [in:] *Post-Industrial Places as the Subject of Transdisciplinary Studies: From Design to Rootedness*, ed. A. Kunce, Gdańsk 2019, pp. 17–72.

<sup>15</sup> M. Heidegger, *Budować, mieszkać, myśleć*, trans. K. Michalski, Warszawa 1977.

ents of the soundscape — “soundmarks,” “signals,” “keynotes” and “archetypal sounds”<sup>16</sup> — allows for experiencing the hidden dimension of the cultural order. Listening leads to a merging of space in experience, so it can be said that it is a *sui generis* hermeneutic process. In addition, the “rooting” effect of listening means that it can be considered a sensorily mediated, subjective form of conversion of “non-places”<sup>17</sup> into places. Listening is a form of the imaginary production of places — similar to literature and design.<sup>18</sup>

## Media of Urban Heritage Transmission: Field Recordings in Research, Museum, and Artistic Practices — Field Recordings in the Community

The process of discovering places through the practice of listening is often accompanied by a technologically mediated recording of sounds present or incidentally appearing in a given location. Let us ask what they are and who uses the field recordings generated during research. The question about the ontological status of urban field recordings, issues related to their archiving and sharing, and matters regarding their possible use by local communities are relatively rarely undertaken on the basis of urban research that adopts the method of soundwalking. The methodological reflection presented by Nina Hällgren in her comprehensive work devoted to the ambience of the Stockholm district of Hornsgatan<sup>19</sup> can be given as an example here. The author emphasizes the need for reflection on “[q]uestions such as why the recording is made, by whom, and what purpose it is

<sup>16</sup> R.M. Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*, Rochester 1993, p. 9.

<sup>17</sup> M. Augé, *Nie-miejsca. Wprowadzenie do antropologii hipernowoczesności*, trans. R. Chymkowski, Warszawa 2011.

<sup>18</sup> See P. Paszek, “Invitation: Towards Another Experience of the Place,” [in:] *Post Industrial Lab: Practicing a Post-Industrial Place*, ed. A. Kunce, Gdańsk 2018, pp. 13–32. Paszek observes that initiating the process of the anamnesis of places situated on the margins of the official circulation of symbolic economy is associated with invoking the image of their future, preceded by a response to the invitation made by the “spirit of place” (p. 15). According to the author of “Invitation,” this may be due to the work of writing constituting the basis for an abandoned place. Using the spatial traces of Czechowice-Dziedzice’s industrial past, Paszek’s argument shows that the logic of writing can also permeate other practices of projecting the future — such as design. I believe that apart from “critical design” and “responsible design” indicated by Paszek, listening and the accompanying practices of recording can likewise be considered as a form of imaginary space production, similar to literature.

<sup>19</sup> N. Hällgren, *Designing with Urban Sound: Exploring Methods of Qualitative Sound Analysis of the Built Environment*, Licentiate Thesis in Architecture, Stockholm 2019, p. 67.

meant to serve in the study, as well as figuring out how to make use of the material after the recording is made, in an off-site context”<sup>20</sup> and writes about the possibility of using the recordings in two ways: as an inventory tool for the sonic phenomena of the district and as a “memory aid” used in the process of qualitative analysis of the collected field material.<sup>21</sup> Hällgren’s comments show that the production of recordings does not always have to be the main goal of urban sound research. Indeed, they supplement rather than dominate the acquired ethnographic material.<sup>22</sup> The approach to the process of producing field recordings presented by Hällgren does not differ significantly from the role that is assigned to recorded sound in other research projects devoted to urban sound. I think, however, that apart from the purely instrumental function that recordings can play in relation to the research process, they can also be assigned the function of facilitators of “communicative” and “cultural memory,”<sup>23</sup> which stimulate processes of cultural communication. Recognized as specific cultural texts or non-human actors of the production of communication channels between the participants of urban communities, urban sound recordings can form the basis of various types of bottom-up rooting practices. It is worth noting that such a modality of urban field recordings makes them culturally active, which is a feature of the media of heritage transmission.

In the age of rapid development of new communication technologies and the revival of nationalisms, interest in heritage is on the rise.<sup>24</sup> Nation states see heritage as a tool for consolidating communities around strong identity projects. Official understandings of heritage can, however, be contrasted with counter-hegemonic meanings, which refers not to national but urban identities. The latter are characterized by a combination of cosmopolitanism and locality, resulting from understanding of urban culture as a project based on diversity.<sup>25</sup> The understand-

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> I use the terms “communicative” and “cultural memory” in the sense proposed by Jan Assmann: “Contrary to informal and less structured communicative memory, cultural memory is distinguished by a more sacred, symbolic or even abstract character, which means that its creators can no longer be individual persons, their role must be taken over by organized institutions.” R. Traba, “Wstęp do wydania polskiego. Pamięć kulturowa — pamięć komunikatywna. Teoria i praktyka badawcza Jana Assmanna,” [in:] J. Assmann, *Pamięć kulturowa. Pismo, zapamiętywanie i polityczna tożsamość w cywilizacjach starożytnych*, trans. A. Kryczyńska-Pham, Warszawa 2008, p. 15.

<sup>24</sup> See, for example: *Food Heritage and Nationalism in Europe*, ed. I. Porciani, Abingdon–New York 2020; T. Winter, “Heritage and Nationalism: An Unbreachable Couple?,” [in:] *The Palgrave Handbook of Contemporary Heritage Research*, eds. E. Waterton, S. Watson, London–New York 2015, pp. 331–345; *Heritage and Social Media: Understanding Heritage in Participatory Culture*, ed. E. Giaccardi, New York 2012; A. Appadurai, *Fear of Small Numbers: An Essay on the Geography of Anger*, Durham 2006.

<sup>25</sup> M. Golka, “Wielokulturowość miasta,” [in:] *Pisanie miasta — czytanie miasta*, ed. A. Zeidler-Janiszewska, Poznań 1997, pp. 171–180.

ing of cultural heritage I have adopted fits within the framework of the discourse of heritage based on cultural memory. It unfolds not around a “historical” but rather a “memory” narrative about the past of the city.<sup>26</sup> I understand this type of heritage in relation to the definition of intangible cultural heritage published by UNESCO in 2003: “practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills — as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces”<sup>27</sup> identified by a given local community as distinctive and transmissive components of its situated cultural experience. In the case of cities, the “identity function”<sup>28</sup> of heritage concerns, above all, the transfer of knowledge and experiences related to everyday life, taking place in a specific historical and cultural, urban, architectural and socio-economic context, which aids the reflection on place identity and the recognition of the potentials associated with it. Cultural texts play an important role in this process. This is confirmed, *inter alia*, by the practice of animation and cultural education. The most interesting results of the animation and education processes are brought by those projects and workshop activities in which culture is creatively reflected upon by using various cultural texts for this purpose.<sup>29</sup>

In the case of urban sound recordings considered as a resource of heritage, the tangible and intangible dimensions are interwoven. The material medium on which the sound was recorded<sup>30</sup> is the starting point for a rooting narrative about a place. There is no doubt that the primary medium of the city’s sound identity is its material and cultural fabric. However, the fast pace of changes in urban environments means that our attention must also be concentrated on secondary media, which include recordings of urban sound. The recorded as well as remembered sound can participate in the process of transmitting embodied practical knowledge, initiate cultural processes, and help maintain their continuity, and foster intergenerational dialogue.<sup>31</sup> These processes often take place on the basis

<sup>26</sup> The need to distinguish between different discourses of heritage, i.e., those based on history and those based on cultural memory, are pointed out by Karolina Golinowska, *Paradoksy dziedzictwa. Postindustrialne przestrzenie w optyce kulturoznawczej*, Poznań 2021.

<sup>27</sup> *Text of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/convention> (accessed 17.07.2021).

<sup>28</sup> J. Adamowski, K. Smyk, op. cit., p. 12.

<sup>29</sup> For example, workshop activities that engaged the local community with the use of sound cultural texts — automotive, printing and tailoring workshops — were organized in the Museum of Municipal Engineering in Cracow as part of the international museum project *Work with Sounds*. M. Widzicka, “Work with Sounds. Muzealne archiwum dźwięków pracy,” *Audiosfera. Koncepcje — badania — praktyki* 1, 2016, no. 3, p. 94.

<sup>30</sup> Currently, many cultural institutions are drawing attention to the material aspect of sound heritage. For example, the British Library is running a project entitled *Unlocking Our Sound Heritage*, devoted to digitizing and sharing audio materials that are in the library’s collections. “Unlocking Our Sound Heritage,” British Library, <https://www.bl.uk/projects/unlocking-our-sound-heritage#> (accessed 19.06.2021).

<sup>31</sup> More on the aspects of “intergenerational transmission” and maintaining “cultural continuity” as constitutive of the functioning of heritage: K. Fouseki, M. Cassar, “What Is Heritage? Towards

of the exchange of everyday sound memories which, although seemingly banal, define the shape of the lived experience of interlocutors and include, for example, the story about the sounds of the practice of delivering crates filled with glass milk bottles placed on metal trolleys, characteristic of the soundscape of the Bydgoszcz city centre of the 1960s and 70s.<sup>32</sup> It is obvious that the value of these memories does not rely upon the identification of no longer existing sounds, but the recognition of a broader “structure of feeling,”<sup>33</sup> made up in part of remembered sounds.

The extraction of the “identity” and “cognitive” functions<sup>34</sup> of sound texts of culture which makes them useful for urban communities depends on a number of factors determining the scope and availability of such texts. In research projects, the relative lack of theoretical reflection on the possibility of using field recordings outside the context of the research process in which they are created — for example, as a resource available to local communities, the cultural sector, and creative industries — has a series of institutional, organizational, legal and cultural factors at its base.<sup>35</sup> Research institutions rarely collaborate with the local community to produce locally accessible audio databases for use by local actors: cultural educators, teachers, city activists and artists.<sup>36</sup> What is more, they are rarely curators of such collections, which would involve the combination of the processes

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a Cross-Cultural Lexicological Approach to the Conceptualisation of Heritage,” [in:] *The Limits of Heritage*, eds. K. Jagodzińska, J. Purchla, Kraków 2015, pp. 52–71.

<sup>32</sup> The story of the sounds accompanying the work of Bydgoszcz milk suppliers working on Dworcowa Street was kindly shared with me by Hanna Derdowska-Zimpel.

<sup>33</sup> I discussed the subject of Raymond Williams’s notion of “structure of feeling” in relation to the analysis of a post-industrial place in: J. Zimpel, “Category of Complexity in an Analysis of Post-Industrial Places,” [in:] *Post-Industrial Places as the Subject of Transdisciplinary Studies: From Design to Rootedness*, ed. A. Kunce, Gdańsk 2019, p. 174.

<sup>34</sup> The identity and cognitive function of cultural heritage is accentuated by J. Adamowski, K. Smyk, op. cit., p. 12.

<sup>35</sup> The factors in question were addressed in two research reports: *ARSC Guide to Audio Preservation*, eds. S. Brylowski, M. Lerman, R. Pike, K. Smith, <https://cmsimpact.org/code/fair-use-sound-recordings/> (accessed 23.06.2021); M. Kytö, N. Remy, H. Uimonen, op. cit. The former focuses mainly on institutional, organizational, and legal aspects of audio preservation. The latter emphasizes the issue of participation in the audible culture understood as the foundation of active protection of the acoustic heritage.

<sup>36</sup> In the Polish context an exception to this is the project *The Soundscape of Wrocław: Research on the Acoustic Environment of a Central European City* carried out by the Soundscape Research Studio at the University of Wrocław as part of a grant from the Ministry of Science and Higher Education. One of the aims of the project was to create documentation of the city’s sonic phenomena, archived in the form of a sound map, not strictly for research, but also for “teaching and popularizing” purposes, <http://pracownia.audiosfery.uni.wroc.pl/pracownia/projekty-badawcze/pejzaz-dzwiekowy-wroclawia/> (accessed 26.06.2021). Another initiative that is a manifestation of the movement towards sharing research materials (although in this case they are not only recordings of urban sound) is the Józef Burszta Digital Archive created by the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology of Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, <http://cyfrowearchiwum.amu.edu.pl/page/o-projekcie> (accessed 26.06.2021).

of producing an audio archive with the implementation of long-term strategies for audience development around initiatives related to urban sound. In order for urban field recordings created in the course of sound research to become a tool for the cultural work of creating places, it is necessary to combine practices related to the documentation of sound manifestations of urban culture with practices related to the promotion of the collection and inter-institutional networking.

Somewhat more attention to providing access to sonic documentation of places is paid in activities carried out by cultural institutions. The Lublin “Grodzka Gate NN Theatre” Centre’s project entitled *Opowieści o dzielnicach Lublina*<sup>37</sup> [Tales about the Districts of Lublin] could be given as an example here. The sound map of the city available on the project’s website includes both recordings of the current phenomena of the city’s soundscape, such as the traditional Lublin bugle call or the sounds of Litewski Square, sounds characteristic of craft workshops (tailors, glaziers, and locksmiths), and reconstructions of the sounds of the no longer existing Jewish quarters. It is also possible to access audio files with oral accounts of witnesses to history.<sup>38</sup>

Despite the growing interest in the sonic dimension of cities, which can be observed in the activities carried out by cultural institutions in this area, the accumulated resource of recordings is ephemeral and dispersed, rarely transformed into a coherent database, and primarily serves to document individual projects. This makes it difficult for the recordings to be used by the local community as a tool for discovering the potentials of places. The dispersion of urban field recordings may result from the fact that they are not recognized by research units and cultural institutions as a potentially valuable resource of heritage that could support local development. It is obvious that no collection of cultural texts can create a heritage resource by decree. It can, however, become one only when a certain value is “associated” with it in the social process.<sup>39</sup> The possibility of assigning a cognitive and dialogical value to urban sound recordings — as I proposed above, they may lead to knowledge about the lived past of places — emerges as an effect of reflect-

<sup>37</sup> The project *Opowieści o dzielnicach Lublina* [Tales about the Districts of Lublin] is mentioned by Martyna Kozak in her article on Polish sound maps: M. Kozak, “Mapy dźwiękowe w Polsce,” *Space and Form/Przestrzeń i Forma* 21, 2014, p. 327.

<sup>38</sup> *Opowieści o dzielnicach Lublina* [Tales about the Districts of Lublin], website: <http://teatrnn.pl/dzielnicelublina/> (accessed 17.06.2021).

<sup>39</sup> The concepts of heritage distinguish between two approaches to the issue of the value of its components. The first one qualifies an object as requiring protection due to its “intrinsic” value, the other assumes that the value of the heritage object is not intrinsic but “associational.” Cf. C. Koziol, “Ideology and Discourse in Heritage Policy: The Importance of Defining and Framing the Extent and Content of the Significant,” [in:] *Interpreting the Past: Future of Heritage. Changing Visions, Attitudes and Contexts in the 21st Century. Selected Papers from the Third En-ame International Colloquium, Monasterium PoortAckere, Ghent, Belgium, 21–24 March 2007*, Brussels 2007, p. 24.

ive participation in “audible culture.”<sup>40</sup> Only within its framework can recorded urban sound be identified by the local community as a useful tool that supports cultural communication.

The key role of audible culture in promoting the functional aspects of Europe’s “acoustic heritage” is accentuated in the project summary report *European Acoustic Heritage* by Meri Kytö, Nicolas Remy, and Heikki Uimonen.<sup>41</sup> The interest of these researchers is focused not on field recordings themselves, but comes from a more general reflection on sound, understood as the sphere of manifesting and studying the diversity of cultures and places. The concept of acoustic heritage proposed in the report fits within the framework established by the definition of intangible cultural heritage from the UNESCO Convention 2003.<sup>42</sup> It is also based on the distinction between “archived” and “living” heritage.<sup>43</sup> According to this concept, urban field recordings should be combined with the former, and sound phenomena unfolding *in situ* — with the latter. The distinction between archived and living heritage can be considered heuristically helpful, although somewhat too rigid in the context of the issue of animating participation in audible culture through the use of cultural sound texts. Soundwalking as part of research is usually accompanied by recordings, which means that when it comes into contact with a living acoustic heritage, a proto-archive specific to it is generated. As can be seen from the description of activities undertaken within the *European Acoustic Heritage* project presented in the report, they offer a more nuanced version of the initially adopted heuristic solution. The authors of the report emphasize, on the one hand, that the “definition of European acoustic heritage will not be a closed list of ‘good’ sounds,”<sup>44</sup> and thus living heritage results from the transience of sound events and the changing nature of the environmental systems that generate them, including cities. On the other hand, in defining acoustic heritage the authors seek to create “frameworks and platforms” for the exchange of European sound knowledge, the basis of which are to be “online tools, that offer anyone a chance to deposit one’s own heritage.”<sup>45</sup> The results of the project, which, as can be read in the report, were to be a *Soundscape Map* and *Soundscape TV*, go beyond the division into living and archived heritage, and instead create an infrastructure for their mutual oscillation, which constitutes the logic of audible culture. The *Soundscape Map* created by the Escoitar collective aims at gathering information collected by other European sound maps and enabling anyone interested to add new sounds.<sup>46</sup> Its creation was motivated by the assumption “that

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<sup>40</sup> M. Kytö, N. Remy, H. Uimonen, op. cit., p. 10.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., pp. 9–10.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 60.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 63.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 74.

sounds are deeply linked to their places of production.”<sup>47</sup> *Soundscape TV*, on the other hand, creates a platform for sharing sound experiences expressed in different national languages, which is guided by the assumption of a close relationship between sounds in culture and speech.<sup>48</sup> The forms of action proposed in the *European Acoustic Heritage* project are just a handful of examples that recognize the opportunities offered by the Internet and inter-institutional cooperation to develop an audible culture.<sup>49</sup>

Another initiative in which new technologies and social networking also create a starting point for the process of archiving sound cultural texts is the international museum project *Sounds of Changes*, which is devoted to the documentation of sound manifestations of the present day.<sup>50</sup> The archive was created in response to the increasing pace of social change: “Society is changing rapidly [...] With the help of project Sounds of Changes we wish to document a portion of this rapid change, namely the change in the acoustic landscape.”<sup>51</sup> Thus, it can be concluded that the archive is a response to the ephemeral experience of contemporary culture. An online platform for the project, which evolved from the previous venture, *Work with Sounds*, dedicated to the documentation of the sounds of machinery and technical devices,<sup>52</sup> collects sounds characteristic of various contexts of everyday life, such as office and home spaces, spaces annexed by practices related to defence, medicine, education, agriculture, and forestry, as well as spaces of civic protests. Recordings of everyday sounds available on the platform were created by participating museologists and are made available to all website visitors under a Creative Commons licence.<sup>53</sup> The method of sharing recordings adopted in the project made the archive’s resources a starting point for various, previously unforeseen, uses, including educational and artistic ones.<sup>54</sup> In relation to the previous assumptions, it can be said that the legal and organizational solutions adopted in the project contributed to the extraction of their culturally active potential — including the ability to generate various forms of social networking.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 76.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 65.

<sup>49</sup> It is worth noting, however, that access to the *Soundscape Map* and *Soundscape TV* was not possible online when writing this article. Such a situation shows the relative unsustainability of web-based undertakings. They are not as low-cost as they seem and depend on constant maintenance, which brings up the importance of converging such projects with more traditional practices of audio preservation and the need for reflection on the material basis of the web.

<sup>50</sup> M. Kaleta, *Projekt Sounds of Changes jako dokumentacja świata ginących rzeczy*, Bachelor’s thesis written under the supervision of Prof. Renata Tańczuk at the Institute of Cultural Studies of the University of Wrocław in 2020.

<sup>51</sup> A fragment of the description on the project website *Sounds of Changes*: <http://www.soundsofchanges.eu/> (accessed 26.06.2020).

<sup>52</sup> M. Widzicka, op. cit., p. 89.

<sup>53</sup> M. Kaleta, op. cit., p. 59.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

*Sounds of Changes* is a relatively new project. Its interface still follows the current web design trends. The portal is visually consistent and employs technologies needed for trouble-free playback of audio and video files. The collection is open, although, while the files can be downloaded by anyone, their placement in the archive requires a number of additional procedures, which is to ensure the appropriate quality of the objects making up the individual collections.<sup>55</sup> Each recording is accompanied by a short contextualizing note, which facilitates the reception of the recordings and connects them with their place of origin. Although *Sounds of Changes* is an example of a new-generation online sound archive and uses audience development tools, the idea of recording the world as it frantically slides into oblivion is worrisome. After all, just like their ephemeral sound, cities are also the domain of “flux”; to live in the flux of time means to open up again and again — not to the unchanging order of the archive, but to the productivity of repetition.<sup>56</sup>

The practices of using urban field recordings also include activist and artistic evaluations of urban infrastructure projects. Hildegard Westerkamp’s research in the mid-1990s on the soundscape of modernist Brasilia, combined with a workshop on acoustic ecology for city residents, is one, pioneering, example. The field recordings, collected during a series of recorded soundwalks, served as project material for a critical analysis of the urban context of the place, carried out by workshop participants with the use of compositional tools. Out of the seven musical compositions created in this way, an imaginatively processed vision of Brasilia’s soundscape emerged — a city without signals and soundmarks, shrouded in constant traffic noise and the crackle of cicadas.<sup>57</sup>

Urban sound recordings also serve as material for creating local cultural tourism routes which show the historical sounds of each location. Some of these are created using interactive technologies. As in the case of the NoTours app, they allow the traditional formula of the trail to be replaced with “geolocated soundwalking.”<sup>58</sup> The NoTours app, created by the multidisciplinary creative collective Escoitar.org, combines binaural and ambisonic recordings of environmental sound with specific places, thus creating a tool for a multidimensional, non-invasive exploration of the area based on the production of “sound narratives” which thematize

<sup>55</sup> M. Widzicka, op. cit., p. 93.

<sup>56</sup> I use the term “flux” in the sense proposed by J.D. Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics: Repetition, Deconstruction and the Hermeneutic Project*, Bloomington–Indianapolis 1987, p. 3: “Repetition thus is not the repetition of the same, Greek re-production, but a creative production which pushes ahead, which produces as it repeats, which produces what it repeats, which makes a life for itself in the midst of the difficulties of the flux.”

<sup>57</sup> H. Westerkamp, “Soundscape Brasilia in Context,” [https://www.hildegardwesterkamp.ca/writings/writingsby/?post\\_id=24&title=soundscape-brasilia-in-context](https://www.hildegardwesterkamp.ca/writings/writingsby/?post_id=24&title=soundscape-brasilia-in-context) (accessed 21.06.2021).

<sup>58</sup> M. Kytö, N. Remy, H. Uimonen, op. cit., pp. 19–20.

tize the experience of the place.<sup>59</sup> For example, in the *Precolombian Soundwalk* project that uses the app, the starting point was the recordings of traditional musical instruments characteristic of the Andes region where the activity was carried out.<sup>60</sup> The possibility of the interactive use of recordings by selecting them and combining them with sounds found *in situ* is intended to sensitize users to various layers of time accumulated in the visited locations.<sup>61</sup> The NoTours app shows that recordings can be a tool for highlighting those aspects of change and duration that are crucial for the emergence of the concept of a given place as a dynamic creation, susceptible to creative shaping.

The recorded urban sound can also be used alternatively to traditional monuments to commemorate the past of places, expose their identity and critically problematize the power relations that shape them. An overview of this type of undertaking is provided by Georg Klein's artistic interventions and is discussed by him in a separate text.<sup>62</sup> The first of Klein's sound interventions, *Ortsklang Marl Mitte*, designed for a train station in Marl — a city in the Ruhr valley — uses recordings of a choir of voices reciting phrases of wall inscriptions found in the space of the station's interior.<sup>63</sup> Loop readings are accompanied by recordings of sounds extracted from the tapped elements of the station infrastructure.<sup>64</sup> The recording produced in the project transposes graffiti into a sound message, and in doing so it strengthens and exposes the atmosphere of the place and transforms it into an "audiovisual sculpture"<sup>65</sup> that is not easy to apprehend and that is a conduit for the affects that contribute to the atmosphere of the place. Importantly, to create melodeclamative readings of the station graffiti, Klein invited young representatives of the local community, who thus gained the opportunity to confront the socio-cultural baggage of the place.<sup>66</sup>

In the Dresden project *meta.stases sound/light-installation*<sup>67</sup> Klein used the specific live sounds of an electric motor of a Tatra tram from the engine room of a vehicle driven along the rails, which were recorded and played simultaneously.<sup>68</sup> The sounds of the tram, transmitted by groups of micro-loudspeakers connected by cables located inside the tram car, were designed as a background for simultaneously reproduced messages referring to the style of voice advertise-

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> "noTours: Augmented Reality for Android," <http://www.notours.org/archives/1521> (accessed 21.06.2021).

<sup>61</sup> M. Kytö, N. Remy, H. Uimonen, op. cit., pp. 19–20.

<sup>62</sup> G. Klein, "SiteSounds: On Strategies of Sound Art in Public Space," *Organised Sound* 14, 2009, pp. 101–108.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 102.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> "Ortsklang Marl Mitte (2002)," Vimeo, <https://vimeo.com/27761297> (accessed 26.06.2021).

<sup>66</sup> G. Klein, op. cit., p. 102.

<sup>67</sup> "meta.stasen | meta.stases (2007)," Vimeo, <https://vimeo.com/28456266> (accessed: 23.06.2021).

<sup>68</sup> G. Klein, op. cit., p. 103.

ments, but this time critically addressing the subject of economic growth.<sup>69</sup> During the intervention, the overlapping sounds of the tram engine room and the voices of the presenters known to the inhabitants of Dresden from the media, were accompanied by a light installation introducing the effect of an unreal world.<sup>70</sup> For 10 days, the uncanny tram travelled on the route of Dresden's no. 8 tram line outside the scheduled timetable, which, according to the artist, was done to allow passengers to meet it at various, unpredictable times.<sup>71</sup> The introduction of the sound installation to the interior of the tram was aimed at reflecting and defamiliarizing seemingly unproblematic situations of everyday life.<sup>72</sup> This was achieved by relating the function of communication infrastructure, identified as shifting people and objects from place to place, to the neoliberal ideology of growth, which appropriated various areas of everyday life of city residents.<sup>73</sup> Klein sought to create an experience of transformed perception, which he called "an audiovisual space of alteration."<sup>74</sup>

The research and art project of the Turkish artist Banu Çiçek Tülü, in which a map has become the sound recording tool is another interesting example of the use of recorded urban sound. *The Minor Sonic Cartography and the Safe Space* is a project carried out during an artistic residency called *Sounds of Our Cities* in Roeselare, Belgium.<sup>75</sup> Tülü took up the problem of accessibility of city pavements, which, in theory, are shared and safe spaces, and in practice turn out to be places of exclusion of socially marginalized groups, manifested as various forms of sonic aggression: verbal taunts, car horns, the roar of engines.<sup>76</sup> The project's assumption is that the memories of pedestrians who experienced acoustic acts of violence in the pavement space, recorded by the artist, are to "return" to the places from which they emerged during soundwalking, in order to immerse themselves in them again, but this time in a different, processed form.<sup>77</sup> Tülü's project shows the possibility of mobilizing recordings in the process of negotiating the use of common spaces in the city.

It is worth noting that despite using different types of recordings, both Klein and Tülü employ quite a similar strategy of incorporating them in their activities. In both projects, the description and diagnosis of the place are based on repetition. One may wonder whether the invitation proposed by the artists to sound-mediated

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 104.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 103.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 104.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> "Sounds of Our Cities," Idensitat, <https://www.idensitat.net/en/current-projects/sounds-of-our-cities-3/1456-sounds-of-our-cities-open-call> (accessed 28.06.2021).

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

re-experiencing of events — which were written in the form of inscriptions on the wall in the case of *Ortsklang Marl Mitte*, and in the form of difficult memories in the case of *The Minor Sonic Cartography and the Safe Space* — can lead to the transformation of places. It should certainly be stated that they work well as concepts of confrontation with the affects that shape the place.

Even though a set of good practices of using urban field recordings by urban communities themselves to nurture their relationships with places are yet to be developed, I believe that an initial step in rising social consciousness on possible powers of the collections of recordings as media of urban heritage transmission has been already taken in various fields of practice. The reconstruction of such endeavours presented above allows me to conclude that urban field recordings may be considered as potentially useful media of urban heritage transmission. In the following paragraphs I will, however, argue that understanding urban field recordings as cultural texts does not exhaust the complicated nature of their ontological status, which also makes it very problematic to subsume them into a single definition of heritage.

## Urban Field Recording as a Sample of a Place

Recognized as the subject of cultural studies aiming at understanding the interpreted world, field recording is about more than just recording sonic phenomena. Renata Tańczuk observes that it is, like a sound map, an “interpretative approach to the city’s sound environment.”<sup>78</sup> At the same time, the researcher indicates the possibility of broadening the interpretative optics in sound research with approaches referring to “the modus of experience, which is pathic and related to preconceptual communication with the world, affectivity, and bodily sensations,” which includes Jean-Paul Thibaud’s concept of “urban ambience.”<sup>79</sup> In line with Tańczuk’s observations, I claim that treating the urban ambience not only as something that precedes the recording and is represented by it, but also as something that penetrates the recording and becomes its material component, can have a significant impact on the approach to the performativity of the recorded sound. The issue of the reception of urban field recordings cannot, in my opinion, be satisfactorily addressed only based on “representational”<sup>80</sup> paradigms, within which also Raymond Murray Schafer’s concept of a soundscape is situated. From the perspective of representational paradigms, based on which questions are asked about the conceptual filter through which phenomena are given to the subject (for

<sup>78</sup> R. Tańczuk, op. cit., p. 2.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., passim.

<sup>80</sup> See also A. Nacher, op. cit., pp. 7–34.

example, a soundscape is produced through a system of soundmarks, signals, keynotes, and archetypal sounds<sup>81</sup>), urban field recording is an artefact resembling Clifford Geertz's "thick description"<sup>82</sup> in terms of its structure. As a second-degree interpretation, it does not participate materially in the sound reality of the city, but is a record of someone's act of listening, a map of someone's going through what Michel de Certeau calls the place of the "Other."<sup>83</sup> The study of recordings carried out in an interpretative approach does not therefore start with the question about the properties of a set with a large number of elements — the question about recordings as a living network — but instead focuses on the interpretation of their class, which is by necessity selected and limited in number. When reflecting on urban field recordings as a sensitive heritage resource, it may be asked whether it is possible to move towards "non-representational,"<sup>84</sup> performative approaches. As Anna Nacher notes regarding research on images of the digital age, such material allows us to ask a question not about "what and how" images mean, but "how they work in the world."<sup>85</sup> If Nacher's observation also applies to sound recordings, we can see that going beyond the representationalist paradigm would concern the possibility of treating recordings as causative actors in the process of the imaginary production of space, taking place in variously proceeding and differently located reception practices. I assume that there is a material or permanent connection between the recorded sounds and the places where they arise. Thus, the recordings would constitute not only sound representations of the places where they were produced, but their material-affective "samples" — that is, culturally active material transferred to a digital medium. The situation of the reception of the recording would therefore be a situation of contact with the place from which the sound sample was taken, but not only via interpretation, but also via affect. In the process of producing a recording and by placing it online, certain aspects of the place are multiplied and "disseminated"<sup>86</sup> beyond the limits of the location defined by the geographic parameters.

In line with the concept of affect proposed by Ben Anderson, who derives it from non-representational<sup>87</sup> theories, affects are phenomena located outside the individual register, in the "pre- and trans-personal space" and they relate to "pre-cognitive background feeling."<sup>88</sup> Amanda Bailey and Mario DiGangi note that there is a "conceptual distinction between emotions, feelings that a subject is

<sup>81</sup> R.M. Schafer, op. cit., pp. 9–10.

<sup>82</sup> C. Geertz, *Interpretacja kultur. Wybrane eseje*, Kraków 2005.

<sup>83</sup> M. de Certeau, op. cit., p. xix.

<sup>84</sup> A. Nacher, op. cit., p. 10.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> J. Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. B. Johnson, London 1981.

<sup>87</sup> B. Anderson, "Affect," [in:] *Urban Theory: New Critical Perspectives*, eds. M. Jayne, K. Ward, London–New York 2017, p. 20.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

aware of and claims as his own, and affects, intensities that generate physiological and environmental effects beyond the boundaries of a singular subject.”<sup>89</sup> In the context of research on urban places, the issue of affect is related to the question of how places are felt by embodied subjects.<sup>90</sup> Anderson emphasizes that we cannot think of affect in isolation from other dimensions of urban space.<sup>91</sup> It is rather something that permeates and colours space in a certain way, which can be brought out by reference to the description of the “atmosphere” of places.<sup>92</sup> According to Anderson, the production of affect should be linked both to “trans-local” processes and to the dimension of everyday practices.<sup>93</sup>

The ability of sound to transfer the energy of affects, to shape the space in which it is played, and influence the body of the person in the decay field is emphasized by sound artist Lambros Pigounis in his project entitled *Micropolitics of Noise*.<sup>94</sup> Pigounis is primarily interested in the connection between sound energy and states of the body. He does not ask directly about the impact of the recorded sound, but about the sound with which the recipient comes into contact, in an encounter characteristic of the performing arts. Can the artist’s observations also be related to the situation of the reception of urban field recordings? “Sound is the vibration of air, which can be put into the same vibration again and again.”<sup>95</sup> This means that we can encounter the energy of actions and practices transmitted by acoustic waves, manifested as urban sound while listening to the recording. On this basis, it can be concluded that we are dealing with the transmission of the affective content of places not only in relation to the “here and now” of a performance or sound-walking, but also in relation to the “here and now” of listening to a field recording, even when its cultural significance is no longer legible.

There is no doubt that urban field recordings, which are also a dynamically developing current of sound art, do not comprise a homogeneous class of cultural artefacts. In addition to the recording technology used in their production, what distinguishes field recordings from one another are the material qualities of the recorded place, the situation in which they are located, and the aesthetic relation of the person recording the sound. As with other research practices, both

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<sup>89</sup> A. Bailey, M. DiGangi, “Introduction,” [in:] *Affect Theory and Early Modern Texts: Politics, Ecologies and Form*, eds. A. Bailey, M. DiGangi, New York 2017, pp. 1–2.

<sup>90</sup> B. Anderson, op. cit., p. 19.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> L. Pigounis, “Performing the Politics of Sound: Affective Mobilization and the Objectivity of Sonic Energy on the Human Body,” *Critical Stages/Scènes Critique* 16, 2017, <https://www.critical-stages.org/16/performing-the-politics-of-sound-affective-mobilization-and-the-objectivity-of-sonic-energy-on-the-human-body/> (accessed 2.06.2021)

<sup>95</sup> I would like to thank Waclaw Zimpel for this remark.

care and violence can mediate the auditory relation to a given place.<sup>96</sup> Despite the differences between field recordings resulting from the state of the recorded location — for example, recordings of everyday city life are different in terms of their affective content from the recordings from an area of armed conflict<sup>97</sup> — what allows them to be considered as samples of a place is their potential ability to initiate a process of place transformation in the perception of the listener, which may have different effects and undergo different valorizations. The transformation in question can apply to both the places of listening and the places from which the sound sample was taken. It can happen intentionally, for example through the practice of “deep listening,” which is based on maintaining readiness to creatively respond to sounds reaching the listener,<sup>98</sup> and unconsciously, when lack of auditory awareness is accompanied by sonic persuasion. A good example of the affective impact of a place is the situation of listening to the recording *Brokindsleden — The Sounds of Traffic* in which traffic noise that masks other sounds and stubbornly fills the space was recorded.<sup>99</sup> A lack of mindfulness when listening to this recording, which is highly probable due to its monotony, could negatively affect the well-being of the recipient, causing bodily reactions.

The possibility of changing the source place via conscious listening, aided by the tools of the composer’s workshop, such as remixing, is observable in the online undertaking *Cities and Memory*, a global collaborative sound project.<sup>100</sup> The platform collects recordings of urban sound from various places around the world and combines them with their subsequent memory variants created by the artists involved in the project. A person visiting the project website can see both the “raw” recording of a place selected on the map and its imaginatively processed version. The possibility of transforming raw city recordings enables the testing of alternative scenarios of places’ pasts and variants of the future, which brings out the cultural and therapeutic potential of working with recorded sound.

It is also worth emphasizing that the ability of recorded sound to influence the way in which space is experienced and to model the behaviour of individuals and groups is considered not only in sound art, but also in the activities of designers of public spaces. For example, as part of the quite controversial trend of design which Gordan Savičić and Selena Savić called “unpleasant design,” which is used in activities aimed at changing the ways of using areas of the city considered to be problematic, broadcasting of classical music recordings is being applied, whose

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<sup>96</sup> “Learning from Sound with Hildegard Westerkamp,” YouTube, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wiipOK7H\\_qY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wiipOK7H_qY) (accessed 10.04.2021).

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> P. Oliveros, *Deep Listening: A Composer’s Sound Practice*, New York 2005.

<sup>99</sup> “Brokindsleden — The Sounds of Traffic,” *Sounds of Changes*, <http://www.soundsofchanges.eu/sound/brokindsleden-the-sounds-of-traffic/> (accessed 27.06.2020).

<sup>100</sup> *Cities and Memory*, <https://citiesandmemory.com/> (accessed 21.04.2021).

presence in the air aims to reduce the perceived attractiveness of a given location in a relatively non-invasive manner in the eyes of specific groups of users.<sup>101</sup>

One important aspect of the reception of urban field recordings is the space of their display, which is nowadays largely on the Internet. Uploading recordings onto servers and accessing them through “clouds” and “streams,”<sup>102</sup> allows for faster circulation of recordings, and therefore also the circulation of places. The travelling of recordings through networks — which creates the possibility of immediate listening to, for example, the sounds of Minsk whilst situated in Jerusalem — enables the opening of a recorded place beyond its geographical location. The material nature of the relationship that connects recorded sound with the qualities of the area from which it was taken means that listening to a field recording can initiate the work of memory, colouring and directing it in a certain way by activating what Ewa Rewers, following Paul Ricoeur, calls an “affective trace,”<sup>103</sup> even if the recipient does not know the place where the sound was recorded. I believe that it is the material nature of the bond linking the recording with the place of its production and the ability of acoustic waves to transmit a specific event and its situational qualities that underlie the perceptual and existential phenomenon which Renata Tańczuk defines as a “sonic *punctum*,” pointing to its contingent, sudden and highly moving character.<sup>104</sup> The fact that field recordings can evoke certain states in the recipient, initiate imaginary travels in time, reorganize the biographical narrative of the subject, and transform the imaginary geometry of the city, results, in my opinion, from the ability of the recorded sound to transmit affect, which happens regardless of the work of interpretation that gives it meaning.

The understanding of urban field recordings not only as cultural texts, but also as samples of a place, is the second main reason for recognizing them as a sensitive resource of the cultural heritage of cities. In this case, the concept of sensitivity no longer refers only to the susceptibility of recordings to the workings of time, which obliterates the clarity of the information conveyed by them, and the related postulate of archiving and sharing recordings, but also to the ability of recorded sound to reproduce the affective qualities of places, which makes this heritage resource somewhat “unruly.”<sup>105</sup>

<sup>101</sup> G. Savičić, S. Savić, *Unpleasant Design*, <http://unpleasant.pravi.me> (accessed 18.12.2021).

<sup>102</sup> S. Nożyński, M. Okólski, “Muzyka bez nośnika? Powietrze, chmury, strumienie oraz cyfry, taśmy i winyle w walce o pierwosłuch bądź zapomnienie,” *Przegląd Kulturoznawczy* 1 (39), 2019, pp. 51–67.

<sup>103</sup> E. Rewers, “Zapomniane, wspomniane, zapomniane...,” *Poznańskie Studia Polonistyczne. Seria Literacka* 29, 2016, p. 58.

<sup>104</sup> R. Tańczuk, op. cit., pp. 9–10.

<sup>105</sup> B. Olsen, B. Pétursdóttir, “Unruly Heritage: Tracing Legacies in the Anthropocene,” *Arkaeologisk Forum* 35, 2016, pp. 38–45; see also M. Stobiecka, “Kłopotliwa materialność dziedzictwa przyszłości,” *Turystyka Kulturowa* 4, 2019, pp. 112–122.

## Reception of Urban Field Recordings: Between Acousmatics and Commentary

When trying to deepen the understanding of the relationship between a recording of an urban sound and the place where it was created, paradoxically, it is necessary to refer to the concept of “acousmatics.”<sup>106</sup> Pierre Schaeffer introduced the idea of acousmatics to contemporary music via the concept of the music he develops, the products of which are “sound objects.”<sup>107</sup> The author of the *Treatise on Musical Objects* observes that “the acousmatic system, generally speaking, symbolically forbids any relationship with the visible, touchable, measurable.”<sup>108</sup> When it comes to acousmatics, the reception of a recording is not a confrontation with the thing or the environment that produced the sound, but with an autotelic sound object that enjoys autonomy from the objective world of things. The ontological status of a sound is independent of its material basis. A sound is a kind of abstraction, and its reception is not related to the question of the process behind its emergence.<sup>109</sup>

While the suspension of the question about the source of sound, defining the acousmatic modus of listening, is inherent in Western musical culture of the 20th century, in reflection on urban field recordings informed by non-representational approaches, the key to determining their ontological status, social role, and performative impact is not by blurring, but rather exposing the relationship with the multi-sensory context of their production. This tendency is mainly expressed by metadata<sup>110</sup> practices, based on linking the field recordings available online with visual and textual material that directly connects them with anthropological field research. I believe that apart from the reference to the methodology of fieldwork, we can also consider these practices in relation to media research. In this case, the exposure of the context of producing the recording may, I believe, be associated with the phenomenon of narrativization of photography, which leads to the formation of specific objects with a heterogeneous media genealogy, which Marianna Michałowska calls “photo-text.”<sup>111</sup> According to Michałowska, a photo-text is “an intentionally created construction,” which combines a photographic image and a story.<sup>112</sup> On the one hand, it is a “tool for talking about the world”; on the other

<sup>106</sup> P. Schaeffer, op. cit.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., p. 65.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., pp. 64–69.

<sup>110</sup> The importance of metadata practices in building sound archives and developing auditory awareness in societies is emphasized in the project *European Acoustic Heritage*, M. Kytö, N. Remy, H. Uimonen, op. cit., pp. 59–60. This aspect is also accentuated by the authors of the *Works of Sounds* project and its continuation, *Sounds of Changes*, M. Widzicka, op. cit., p. 92.

<sup>111</sup> M. Michałowska, *Foto-teksty. Związki fotografii z narracją*, Poznań 2012.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

hand, it is “a method that allows us to recognize its meanings.”<sup>113</sup> Michałowska emphasizes the importance of memory as a concept that mediates photography and narration, which co-create the photo-text. As “narratives that make the events of the past intelligible,” photo-texts are the effects of memory work.<sup>114</sup> A collection of essays by Marcin Dymiter, *Notatki z terenu* [Field Notes], is an interesting example of secondary contextualization of field recordings, which would produce something that, in analogy to the concept of “photo-text,” we could perhaps define as audio-photo-text: “Hundekopf. You can actually see the nose and forehead. The head of a dog on the city map. Südkreuz, Westkreuz, Gesundbrunnen and Ostkreuz [...] The sounds and noise of city life only pop through the open door for a moment. Muffled hip-hop is coming from the earphones of the next passenger [...] Broken, incomplete voices and rhythms [...] For a moment, an image from the distant past of the S41/S42 glides by. Passage between East and West Berlin. A tall wall [...]”<sup>115</sup> Through the medium of writing and black and white photography, Dymiter recreates situations and subjective experiences accompanying the auditory mediated tracing of Berlin, Prague and other remembered and “invisible”<sup>116</sup> cities. Literary intervention creates a multi-sensory context for the reception of field recordings made by the artist, which can be found on the Bandcamp platform.

For many urban field recordings, such as those collected on the commercial Soundsnap platform, it is not always possible to find rich, authorial de-acousmatizing material, and they do not always accompany the production and sharing of recordings. The recorded sound object, which is not accompanied by a commentary which merges it with the embodied experience of the area, becomes a particularly sensitive, dislocated sound object, resembling an unfinished utterance in its functioning. It then acquires properties similar to Schaeffer’s “sound object,” the production context of which is unknown or sketchy and which cannot be subjected to cultural ramifications through the accompanying materials. However, comparing the field recording as an object of sound studies with a sound object constituting the subject of the philosophy of music requires some clarification. What structures the sound material in a raw field recording is not a specific musical form, as in the case of music, but a choreographic script that defines the sequence of the journey and the memory script. A field recording is therefore always a record of a real transition, incorporating the affective qualities of the area, which requires some form of elaboration in purpose to gain a functional quality of urban culture heritage media. If it is not accompanied by the work of a commentary, it becomes not

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>115</sup> M. Dymiter, *Notatki z terenu*, Gdańsk 2021, pp. 15–17.

<sup>116</sup> I. Calvino, *Niewidzialne miasta*, trans. A. Kreisberg, Warszawa 1975.

only a “sound object,” but an “object in search of a place,”<sup>117</sup> a ghost. Such an object fits into Bjonar Olsen and Bora Pétursdóttir’s definition of “unruly heritage,” which constitutes the legacy of our past practices that is not necessarily welcomed by us.<sup>118</sup> Considered not only as a valuable resource but also as an uncanny object, field recordings bring with themselves a destabilizing power, which makes them culturally dangerous, but also aesthetically productive. A confrontation with such an object breaks the sense of the familiarity and continuity of the lifeworld, and may initiate a reconfiguration of places which, as I claimed at the beginning following Jeff Malpas, are hybrid combinations of figures and backgrounds, phenomena that combine the subjective with the collective.

## Conclusion

Considered as sound texts of culture, urban field recordings can facilitate dialogue and cultural communication between members of urban communities, which provides the possibility of seeing them as media of urban heritage transmission. It is thus important to develop good practices of their documentation and sharing that can make them more accessible for urban residents and grassroots uses. Recognition of the semiotic potential of urban field recordings does not exhaust their complicated ontological status, which makes attempts to frame it within a single definition of heritage quite problematic. Due to the fact that urban field recordings preserve the affective properties of places on a material medium, their analysis cannot be limited to interpretative approaches, but also requires formulating questions about the performative impact of recorded sound on the reception context. Understood as samples of a place, recordings can transfer its “aesthetic energy”<sup>119</sup> through space and time, which, on the one hand, creates the possibility of their use in practices of placemaking, and, on the other hand, poses a threat related to the reproduction of unwanted affects. Listening to places and listening to field recordings is not the same. The former is accompanied by a bodily immersion in the multi-sensory milieu of the city, whilst the latter takes a fragment of an area known or unknown to the listener elsewhere. The recorded place’s properties thus influence the new listening context. Through the reception of field record-

<sup>117</sup> Here, I paraphrase the title of the exhibition *Rzeźba w poszukiwaniu miejsca* [Sculpture in Search of a Place] curated by Anna Maria Leśniewska, the Zachęta National Gallery of Art, 1 February–25 April 2021.

<sup>118</sup> B. Olsen, B. Pétursdóttir, op. cit., p. 39.

<sup>119</sup> W. Kazimińska-Jerzyk, “Aesthetic Energy of an Ordinary Place,” [in:] *Aesthetic Energy of the City: Experiencing Urban Art and Space*, eds. A. Gralińska-Taborek, W. Kazimińska-Jerzyk, Łódź 2016, pp. 67–81.

ings, the relational geometry of the *stratum*,<sup>120</sup> in which places, understood as systems of matter and meaning, are contained, is reconfigured. In auditory reception, aspects of the area where the recording was made are included in the place of listening.

Through the process of making urban field recordings available on the Internet and the reception practices characteristic of this context, the world of geographical locations, whose boundaries can be marked on a map, is reconfigured and mixed up in the listener's imagination. Recordings, as a sensitive resource of the cultural heritage of cities, create a sort of Tower of Babel of places. While the biblical Tower of Babel was a vertical structure, the Sound Babel is a network that emerged as a result of the development of new communication technologies. The process of moving and mixing places initiated by recordings and reception practices is possible as a result of blurring the boundaries between the materiality of the city and the materiality of the network.<sup>121</sup> Field recordings posted on the web, especially those without accompanying commentary, are objects whose updating in reception practices can strongly influence the perception of space and transform the imaginary positioning of the subject in the world.

The sensitive nature of this heritage resource results, on the one hand, in their susceptibility to the blurring effects of time, which is associated with the need to develop practices related to the archiving and sharing of sound recordings for the purpose of transmitting urban cultural knowledge, and, on the other hand, in the ability of the recordings to reproduce the affects present in the recorded locations. Further development of research on the affective impact of urban field recordings requires extending the findings of the qualitative analysis of places informed by interpretive and performative approaches to an ontological status of recorded urban sound to include questions that consider the digital contexts of their exposure and reception.

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<sup>120</sup> G. Deleuze, F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, London–New York 2004.

<sup>121</sup> An extended analysis of these processes can be found in: *Mobility: Media, Urban Practices and Students' Culture*, ed. M. Michałowska, Poznań 2017.

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