

Personal Reflections: Barbara Alge

Walks

11 November 2010, with Frances Wilkins

Tour harbour, KTV and centre: HMT → harbour → KTV → city centre

13 November 2010, with FW, Daniel Wilke, Michael Wins and Jacob Przemus

Tour Altstadt and centre: HMT → Petridamm → Petrikirche → Neuer Markt → Kröpeliner Straße → Kröpeliner Tor Center → Breite Straße → Galeria Kaufhof

21 November 2010, alone

Tour KTV, centre and harbour: Margaretenplatz KTV → Rosengarten → Petrikirche → harbour → KTV

25 November 2010, with FW

Tour Bahnhofsviertel and Südstadt: HMT → Neuer Markt → Hauptbahnhof → Goetheplatz → Lindenpark → Albert-Einstein-Straße → back by tram to Neuer Markt

26 November 2010, with FW

Tour Warnemünde Rostock → Warnemünde (Duo Ossenkopp)

30 November 2010, with FW

Tour centre: HMT → Neuer Markt → Marienkirche → Kröpeliner Strasse → Universitätsplatz

12 December 2010, BA and FW

Tour harbour: Stadthafen, Theater im Stadthafen (Breitling)

31 December 2010, with FW

Tour Altstadt and harbour: Petrikeller Altstadt → Doberaner Platz → harbour

22 January 2011, with FW

Tour centre to Gartenstadt via Hansa-Viertel: Galeria Kaufhof Breite Strasse → Ostseestadion → Zoo

Self-awareness

When Frances Wilkins and I did our first recording at the harbour (Kempowski-Ufer) on 11 November 2010 and started to just listen, I asked myself why people do not take the time to escape day-to-day life and work more often in order to listen to what is happening around them. The act of listening has a meditative effect and makes us more aware of the places we inhabit. Especially during the first recording I sensed this transformation within myself. I also became aware of just how much sound we made as human beings. When we were recording the cell phone had to be switched off, we could not sniff, cough, talk, laugh etc. I really enjoyed working in fresh air, and the listening and walking enabled me to feel closer to the city. The soundscape project definitely helped me to feel more at home in Rostock.

However, one needs to be able to switch one's focus on surrounding sounds on and off. After the sound walks it took me quite a long time to re-adapt to filtered hearing – and it actually made me aware of the fact that my listening was usually filtered. Although we

are under the influx of many sounds, we can not constantly receive and perceive all of them, as it would finally make us mad.

Something that came to my mind when recording the electric door at the Südstadt library on 25 November 2010, was that the electric door and other industrial sounds need human beings to move them, walk through, open, close, etc. in order to make them sound. So in a way they are making us aware of the existence of human beings too.

City Centre

In our team fieldwork on 13 November 2010 we observed an increase in noise level between Altstadt and Kröpeliner Tor, and that people are in the city centre for a purpose. There are more people, loud foot steps, and many conversations taking place; further to that the energy especially around the Kröpeliner Tor Center (KTC) was much more tense than in other parts of the city. We were especially amazed by the noise level on the first floor of the KTC shopping mall. As there are many cafés situated in a circle, one can hear cups, Kebap carving, and other cooking and eating sounds at the same time. We thought that people might recognize the recording because there were few places in Rostock with so many sounds taking place at the same time. Because of the exposure to overlapping sounds, it was actually difficult to focus or identify specific sounds and we felt the pressure surrounding us. Michael Wins also commented on the terrible acoustics on the first floor of the shopping mall which reflected the sounds in all directions. On other floors of the KTC we heard more typical mall sound, and music coming from the radio.

Around the Fountain of Life Joy at Universitätsplatz one can hear the sound of birds more clearly than on Kröpeliner Straße as there is also a small park. I could even distinguish the sound of the birds landing around the fountain. The fountain itself is however silent in the winter. Michael Wins found the sound around this fountain much warmer than on Neuer Markt or Kröpeliner Tor and Daniel Wilke stated that this was because we were a short distance away from the main pedestrian area. This experience actually made us aware of the stressful sound exposure in shopping areas and the importance of parks and other natural places in cities as a means of relaxing and cleaning our listening. We were astonished by such a quiet place in the middle of the shopping street.

Altstadt

For the Altstadt, Jacob Przemus identified in our team fieldwork on 13 November 2010 a typical cobblestone sound. The car wheels on the cobblestone sounded very smooth and reminded us of percussion. I personally think that the Altstadt in winter is mostly shaped by church sounds.

Südstadt

In the Albert-Einstein-Straße one meets many foreign students and listens to foreign languages. On 25 November 2010 Frances Wilkins and I caught the attention of a Bangladeshi student with our microphone. We started a conversation with him and learned a little about his motivation for studying in Germany. There is also a mosque in Südstadt, but unfortunately there were no mosque sounds to be heard either outside or inside the building. A really interesting sound in Südstadt was the opening and closing of the electric door of the Informatikzentrum as well as of the university library. Sounds that identified the students' lives in Südstadt were also the sound of the coffee machine in the library and the issuing of books at the library desk. The issuing, however,

happened much less than expected and could not actually be distinguished from supermarket check-out sounds. All in all, we were surprised that the university area in Südstadt was so quiet, calm, and peaceful. I must add that Südstadt is not the only university area in Rostock and that we did not make recordings of other university areas such as in the KTV district and city centre.

Kröpeliner Tor Vorstadt (KTV)

KTV is the district where I pass most of my time in Rostock. When I think about sound in KTV the following key words come to my mind: Kebap carving and wrapping, the sound of finishing a Mango Lassi, migrant music events at the Waldemarhof, the sound of the Heiliggeistkirche bells, and the sound of school children. This district is known for its vivid nightlife, especially around Doberaner Platz. On 11 November 2010 Frances and I also recorded the sound of the Thursday market on Doberaner Platz and the cobblestone workers in Borwinstraße.

Hansa-Viertel and Gartenstadt

The Hansa-Viertel district is popular for its sports venues, among them the Ostseestadion where Frances and I witnessed the sounds of a football game on 22 January 2011. Other sports places in Hansa-Viertel include the ice skating rink and the Neptune swimming pool. Although one might think that the sounds of zoos might be the same all over the world, you might hear on our zoo recordings that there are sounds helping to identify the Rostock zoo in the Gartenstadt district: one hears a tram passing by near the goats' area, and on another recording one hears the sound of football fans screaming from far away whilst in the foreground are the sounds of birds and monkeys.

Harbour

I personally was quite surprised about the amount of industrial sounds heard at the harbour when doing our first recording on 11 November 2010, because Rostock had so far seemed a quiet city to me.

Parks

Especially when coming from the traffic culmination point at Götheplatz, we appreciated the ear cleaning place, Lindenpark, where we escaped the lo-fi traffic sound on 25 November 2011. The tension of Götheplatz fell away as we listened to the natural sounds of birds and dogs. There are sounds that help distinguish the different parks. For example, the Rosengarten includes a small river and the sound of ducks.

Rostock's musical identity

We recorded the Duo Ossenkopp at their CD launch in Warnemünde Alte Vogtei on 26 November 2010, because this country-music-duo often play for private and public festivities in Rostock. They promote Low German and included the "Mecklenburglied" in their concert, a song with which people from Rostock identify themselves.

The best known musical genre in Rostock is shanty singing, usually in male voice choirs. One such shanty choir, named the Breitling, we recorded on 10 December 2010 in the Theater im Stadthafen. We were surprised that most of their repertoire was in English and that Low German was only used in the announcement. The Breitling sang Christmas songs in English and German on that day, and musical instruments used by the choir were accordion, banjo, two acoustical guitars, an electrical bass, trombone, bagpipe, and percussion instruments. The Breitling choir are also used for promoting Rostock's oldest maritime pub, the "Zur Kogge", a pub and restaurant with many

objects from the sailing past. In “Zur Kogge” as well as in other pubs in Rostock one finds “Schifferklaviere” (a local expression for accordions) as decorations. As accordion is also the most common instrument among street musicians in Rostock, it is definitely part of the city’s musical identity.

When Frances and I asked street musician Juris from Latvia to play something which he thought to express Rostock on 11 November 2010, he played “We are the Champions” from Queen, “Life is Life” from the Austrian rockband Opus and “Itsy Bitsy Teenie Weenie”, a 1960 hit from the group Club Honolulu. The irony in this musical choice was interesting, especially as it was a cold winter day. We understood this choice as Juris’ personal statement.

Although traditional local and sailing songs as well as the accordion are taken as Rostock musical emblems one encounters many musical genres in the city. Musical sounds around the HMT in Altstadt and on Wednesday evenings one can often witness the sound of rock music rehearsals in an industry hall at Fischereihafen, Alter Hafen Nord.

Rostock, a multicultural city?

We found some sounds which give Rostock a multicultural identity: on 11 November 2010 Frances and I recorded Greek music coming from a restaurant at the harbour (Warnowufer), we recorded the Happy Birthday song in Spanish sung by a school class and heard in front of Borwin school, and listened to foreign languages around Südstadt university library. As we witnessed one day in the restaurant Likörfabrik, it can happen that music from different countries is played spontaneously. This is why we included a recording of the spontaneous Latin American music taking place after the Latin Social Night in the migrants’ center Waldemarhof on 20 November 2010. Brazilian music and Latin American world music such as Salsa are quite en vogue, especially among younger people in Rostock. The group Farofa pra Dois, led by a Brazilian and a German musician, is invited to play at many local festivals, and on 20 November 2010 I attended the Brazilian evening in Café Momo where live Capoeira was being performed and Brazilian Funk and Samba sounding from the loudspeakers.

As already mentioned, we could not record any mosque sounds in Südstadt, and this mosque was not comparable to other European mosques where Muslims congregate and discuss in front of the building. In Rostock, the mosque is an old converted house in a hidden place.

Not sounding sound objects

In the Albert-Einstein-Straße on 25 November 2010 Frances and I came across “broken sounds” or “sounds that do not sound any more”: a broken television and a vacuum cleaner. The accordions used as decoration in pubs can be included in the category of “not sounding sound objects”. On 22 January 2011 Frances and I waited for the carillon at the Universitätsplatz to sound at 12 am. However, exactly that day no person showed up to play the carillon, because it is usually played every Saturday at that time. Instead of recording the sound of the carillon we took the opportunity to study the carillon’s construction.

Festive soundscapes

Football games

Rostock soundscapes differ considerably on festive days and day-to-day, as well as at night and day. Especially on days with football games in the Ostseestadion in the Hansa district, football fans can be heard in the streets all over the city, but mainly in the city

centre. In our team fieldwork on 13 November 2010 we came across such roaring football fans in Kröpeliner Straße. Interestingly, they stopped their slightly aggressive and loud behaviour when seeing our camera.

On 22 January 2011 Frances and I recorded the sounds of a football game directly in front of the Ostseestadion. What surprised me the most was my excitement when hearing so many people shouting together “Tor” (goal), although we were not even in the stadium.

Christmas market and New Year

On 25 November 2010 the soundscape of the city also changed because of the Christmas market which stayed until 28 December and as a smaller version until 2 January 2011. The main sounds of the Christmas market were the pop and Christmas music coming from the loudspeakers of the fairground, the sounds of the stage and of the big wheel on Neuer Markt, the industrial sounds especially at food and drink stands, and the sounds of games such as shooting or, at the historical market, the throwing of axes. The historical Christmas market in the Kloostergarten offered a completely different soundscape from the regular Christmas market with its fire shows and “medieval” music which in fact was Balkan brass and other imagined “gypsy” music, music of folk groups such as for example the Swedish band Hedningarna as well as bagpipe music. We recorded further medieval sounds at the Petrikeller restaurant in the Altstadt district on New Year’s Eve, another important festive day in this soundscapes project. Fireworks and fire bangers were recorded at Doberaner Platz and at the harbour on the same evening.

Night life

Rostock’s night life was mostly recorded in the KTV district where I became aware of the increasing noise level of this district on Friday and Saturday nights. By turning my focus to sounds, I realized how many garbage bins were blown up especially around New Year’s Eve, how loud people could roar and shout, what an aggressive atmosphere this created and how much the noise level at night started to disturb me. On 22 November 2010 I was even able to record a group of drunken men singing and playing the accordion marching along the Margaretenstraße at 3 am. On 19 December 2010 I recorded a group of people waiting for a taxi at 1 am. The noise level of this group of women and men was interestingly high, and all that could be heard was nonsense talking. On 8 January 2011 I recorded – together with the sound of rain dropping from the roof of my balcony – a group of people roaring to music in a party at night. As my building as well as the party’s building look out onto the same inner yard, the sound was intensified by an echo.

Bells

Bells are time markers, be it the church bells which announce hours and mass times, or be it bell ringing coming from the inside of school buildings. In our team fieldwork, Frances and I noted that we both had different focuses as I was much more what we called “bell-observant”. The church bells which influence my life the most are the ones from Heiliggeistkirche, especially at Sundays 9.30, 10 and 11 am. In order to send specific signals, the bells from Heiliggeistkirche do not always sound in the same way. Our team fieldwork on 13 November 2010 showed that not all church bells ring every hour. We actually stood there wanting to record the bells of Petrikerche in the Altstadt district, but heard other church bells ringing at 11 am. On Friday, 31 December 2010, around 3 pm, I witnessed that at the Petrikerche in fact the church bells placed in front

of the church were rung by a man. In the Petrikerche one can admire a huge church bell placed on the floor and not sounding any more. A characteristic sound of the city centre is the carillon at the Universitätsplatz ringing every Saturday at 12 am and a characteristic sound for Rostock is the ticking sound of the astronomical clock in the Marienkirche (city centre), as well as this clock's performance every full hour.

Street musicians

Can the origin of street musicians tell us something about the city they are playing in? Most street musicians we recorded in the context of this project were from Eastern Europe, mainly Latvia and Slovakia. The reason for this could be related to Rostock's geographical proximity to these countries or because Eastern Germany maintains close relations with the Eastern block. In Vienna, for example, street musicians are more likely from the Balkans and Hungary. Street musicians can tell something about a city's history and are part of the city's cultural life.

In the team fieldwork on 13 November 2010 the HMT students did not just train their listening skills, but also their social skills. Michael Wins and Daniel Wilke seemed quite happy about being so close to the street musician Wladimir from Slovakia. It was a new experience for them. Daniel told Wladimir that he was a guitarist himself and Wladimir immediately gave him his guitar. The funny part of the whole situation was that Wladimir kept on recording with the Zoom Flashrecorder. Michael started singing to Daniel's guitar playing and the hierarchy between researcher and researched was abandoned. Daniel realized that because of his participatory method, he gained much more information than expected.

In situations where we could not communicate with street musicians in a common language, I tried to take over the conversation using gesticulation and a mix of all the languages I knew. The most important here was to show interest. In the case of the Roma musicians from Kosice (Slovakia) we even got to know their name for the tambourine. Our students noted that these Roma musicians changed the atmosphere of the city centre in that it became livelier. Although people passing by on the street did not seem to pay much attention to street musicians, some pedestrian showed their appreciation by giving money to them.

Permission and permission form

... and so did we: to all street musicians who gave us permission to record them we gave 2 Euro. Before starting the recording we asked for their permission and they signed our permission form. It was interesting to see people's reaction towards these permission forms. Whereas in establishments such as restaurants or at the Christmas market people seemed threatened by these forms, all of the street musicians from Eastern Europe were willing to sign them. For them, the form was a sign of real interest. Wladimir, the guitarist and singer from Slovakia who was recorded by the team on 13 November 2010, and also Juris the trumpet and accordion player at Universitätsplatz on 11 November 2010, even reacted as if they were giving autographs.

With the Duo Ossenkopp I contacted them one day before the concert by telephone and asked for their permission. They did not sign the form, but were pleased about our recording of their CD launch in Warnemünde. The Breitling shanty choir were informed of our recording by one of their members, a man playing percussion in the choir, and whom we met in front of the door before the concert started. For the recording at the Latin Social Night in the Waldemarhof, we were given permission by Ruben Cadenas.

I sometimes felt uncomfortable about recording cars on the street, because there was one man who wanted Frances and I to cut his car out of the video. From then on I

realized how much one invaded the privacy of people recording them in their car, even though the car was not the primary subject of the recording. In the Christmas market we tried not to record specific people, but more likely the general ambience of which street musicians and sounds made by certain people were part.

In the Hauptbahnhof Frances and I were told by the police to ask for recording permission from the German Railway management. After getting in contact with the Rostock railway management, I finally sent a letter via email to the section responsible for “Drehgenehmigungen” at the German Railway in Berlin, but as I did not receive an answer, we finally decided to only use audio recordings from the Hauptbahnhof.

Music in establishments

Especially when listening to the Viennese waltz sound in the Chocolaterie at the harbour (Warnowufer), I thought about the use of certain music in certain establishments. The classical music gave the Chocolaterie a luxurious touch whereas the Greek music heard in front of the Greek restaurant at the harbour created a warm Greek, nearly holiday-feeling atmosphere. To me, the classical music gave me the feeling of being in a café in Vienna, a place that I know very well. In the Petrikeller restaurant in the Altstadt people can listen to live bagpipe and other music creating a medieval atmosphere, whereas guests at the Indian restaurant at Doberaner Platz (KTV) are exposed to Indian Bollywood music. At the restaurant “Zur Kogge” a live musician sings and plays maritime songs on Friday and Saturday evenings between April and January and two times per year the shanty choir Breitling performs there (personal communication of waitress in “Zur Kogge” on 15 January 2011).

Although most shopping malls have a certain mall sound, our field work team on 13 November 2010 observed that the romantic, peaceful, subtle pop background music mostly interpreted by singers (Pop, R’n’B, Soul) in Kröpeliner Tor Center (KTC) was much louder than in Galeria Kaufhof where we could hardly hear it. The purpose of such music is to get shoppers in the mood for buying things. In KTC Michael Wins stated that as soon as he discerned music in a shopping mall he became focussed on it and he did not hear the rest of the background noises any more – such as that of the overlapping gastronomy sounds for example.

In Kröpeliner Straße one wonders at the loud techno music coming from the “Olymp&Hades” shop where the noise level culminates directly in front of the shop. One guesses that instead a clothes shop inside the building of “O&H” there could be a discotheque. The type of music might attract young people, but old people might feel very disturbed by this music even if only passing by the shop. We considered that the shop could sell Hip Hop style clothes, but if we did not know it was a clothes shop then it could also be a music store. In fact, I have never entered that store and can not tell you what kind of clothes they sell

In the shopping mall Galeria Kaufhof Daniel Wilke observed that although there were many shoppers too, the mall seemed quieter and that this could be because of more sound absorbing surfaces and also because the ceiling was lower than in the KTC mall. Frances Wilkins stated that it sounded more elegant in Galeria Kaufhof and that this could be related to the kinds of products sold there. On 22 January 2011 Frances and I recorded a pianist playing live in the 2nd floor of Galeria Kaufhof where clothes of more exclusive labels are sold. The live music overlapped with the calm pop ambience music which could be heard loudest at the dressing room of the shop.

The kind of music and sound we are exposed to in establishments has indeed an impact on our shopping behaviour and suggests to us whether products might be expensive or cheap.

Final statement: travelling through sound

The same way the sound in the Chocolaterie brought me to Vienna, the sound recordings on this website might help some of you travelling to Rostock without having to pay for the journey and some of you might want to wish to hear the sound of places of which you have certain memories - with this in mind I wish you a marvellous journey!