

Room for Noise in Soviet Sound Recording

MATTHEW KENDALL

When he was nearing the end of his life, Viktor Shklovskii recorded an oral interview that was recently digitized and published by the Moscow oral history project (<http://www.oralhistory.ru>). During the audio encoding process, Shklovskii's voice and the contents of the interview were badly distorted. This article frames noise as an important force that impacts not only how sound documents become authoritative archival evidence, but also indexically points to the context of their creation. To do so, I compare the role that sound plays in Shklovskii's own writing with the history of the Soviet state's archival preservation of sound, a variety of amateur sound recording projects, and mainstream discussions of audio quality and sound recording in the Soviet press. Ultimately, I argue that for audio researchers, making room for noise allows us to see the emancipatory gesture embedded within amateur tape recording itself: the ambiguous noise that seemingly marred unpolished recordings can instead be heard as a sonic alternative to official narratives.

Sounding Plastic: The “Great Career” of the Flexidisc in Socialist Poland

ANDREA BOHLMAN

This essay asks what archival sound objects—in this case a vast stockpile of bootleg music recordings—can tell us about cultures of listening and the cultivation of intimacy through sound under state socialism. It combines ethnographic and historical methodologies to analyze a format for popular music that circulated through an alternative economy in the People's Republic of Poland from the 1950s through the 1980s: the “sound postcard” (*pocztówka dźwiękowa*). These flimsy, often colorful, plastic rectangles contained copies of mainstream western, Polish, and Soviet popular musics on seven-minute records, sold hand-to-hand at markets and kiosks. In the twenty-first century, these polyethylene flexidiscs circulate as socialist ephemera with a nostalgic thrill, cherished for their obsolescence and provocative visual design reconstruct, but dismissed as poor fidelity transfers. I treat this archive as material history that contains aural traces allowing us to access socialities, affective experiences, and labor relations.

Lenin in the Groove

GABRIELLE CORNISH

This essay takes a media historical approach to interrogate celebrations of Vladimir Lenin's centenary in the Soviet Union, during which both the state recording company Melodiya and the monthly journal *Krugozor*, an educational magazine with companion recordings, reevaluated the relative merits

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and shortcomings of sound recordings in spreading socialist ideology. The need to create recorded materials for domestic audiences as well as socialist and capitalist countries around the world prompted a series of debates over how best to memorialize Lenin's voice and re-historicize the sonic environment of his time. Lenin's voice carried with it substantial historical, political, and cultural power. But his earliest recordings—those made during his lifetime—were of poor quality and even poorer intelligibility. As such, attempts to restore and remaster Lenin's voice necessarily involved the Soviet imagination, especially as the generation of those who knew him personally aged (and died). This tension—between creation and preservation, between artifice and authenticity—would preoccupy sound engineers and producers in the years leading to the centennial. Using archival sources alongside LPs and flexidiscs, this essay traces the connections between voice, format, and mythology across the Soviet epoch and proposes a new understanding of socialist realism in audio media.

An Artistic Challenge to the Culture of Forgetting in Serbia: Audiovisual Discontinuity in Ognjen Glavonić's *Depth 2*

DRAGANA OBRADOVIĆ

This article examines audio-visual discontinuity in Ognjen Glavonić's 2015 documentary *Depth 2* and argues that this approach to sound and screen allows the audience to engage with the difficult topic of war crimes in a novel manner in order to address a failure in cultural memory in Serbian society. The documentary explores war crimes committed against Kosovo Albanian civilians by Serbian state forces and paramilitaries in the spring of 1999. *Depth 2* cinematically recontextualizes recorded testimonies of both survivors and perpetrators from the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), defamiliarizing the archive by anonymizing the source material and by removing the synchrony between voice and image. The lack of concordance between voice and screen is a key aesthetic strategy through which the film comments on pressing ethical, political, and historical issues in Serbian society.

A "Common Enterprise"? The Role of Utility Infrastructure in the Divided City of Teschen, 1920-1938

ZORA PISKAČOVÁ

Teschen Silesia after the First World War is typically portrayed as a region of ethnic conflict and national rivalry. Focusing on gas, electricity, and water infrastructures of the divided city of Teschen, now Polish Cieszyn and Czech Český Těšín, this article shifts the focus from nationalist discourses of animosity and upheaval to stabilization and local cross-border cooperation. In examining the cities' conjoined utility networks' management as well as their partial reorientation towards domestic suppliers, it demonstrates that local interests and economic pragmatism often trumped national antagonism. Moreover, by allowing municipal politics to take central stage, the article shows that small town leaders on the periphery were not only obedient servants of

their respective central governments. While the Polish and Czechoslovak nation-states attempted to curb transnational municipal dependency and thus erase all remnants of the Habsburg regime, small town leaders often acted as administrators first and nationalists second.

Cold War Networks and the Scholarly Byt: How Russian Formalism Became an American Thing

LIDIA TRIPICCIONE

This article centers on one key episode in the reception of Russian formalism in western academia, the 1955 publication of Victor Erlich's acclaimed *Russian Formalism. History. Doctrine*. The article discusses the appearance of the monograph in the young field of Slavic Studies through novel lenses and conceptualizes the monograph as the result of the activity of a network of heterogeneous actors that contributed to the formation and publication of the book. Methodologically, I develop the concept of the scholarly byt by hybridizing Boris Eikhenbaum's *literaturnyi byt* and Bruno Latour's Actor-Network-Theory. Finally, I suggest that the methodological framework developed in the article could be productively applied to further the study of Russian formalism reception.

Liberating Consumption, Urban Communities, and Women's Activism during Late Stalinism

NATALIIA LAAS

In the first post-war decade, Stalinist authorities resumed pre-war practices of voluntary gatherings of store patrons in large cities. Such meetings, called "consumer conferences," constituted embryonic manifestations of proletarian governance that municipal officials considered ideologically safe to employ in a period when Kremlin elites increased their crackdown measures against the wartime liberalization initiatives. Drawing on people's insider knowledge of local communities, city authorities aimed to gather economic information about consumer needs to improve the retail system. Yet, urban working-class women, the most committed conference participants, saw stores more than as simply places of consumption: the store contributed to the local community's safety, hygiene, health, emotional comfort, and mutual trust. Consumer conferences therefore turned into a forum for women's activism as female urbanites used customer gatherings to carve out part of a state-curated public space in which they exercised a measure of control over their neighborhoods' well-being.