

Sounding the City

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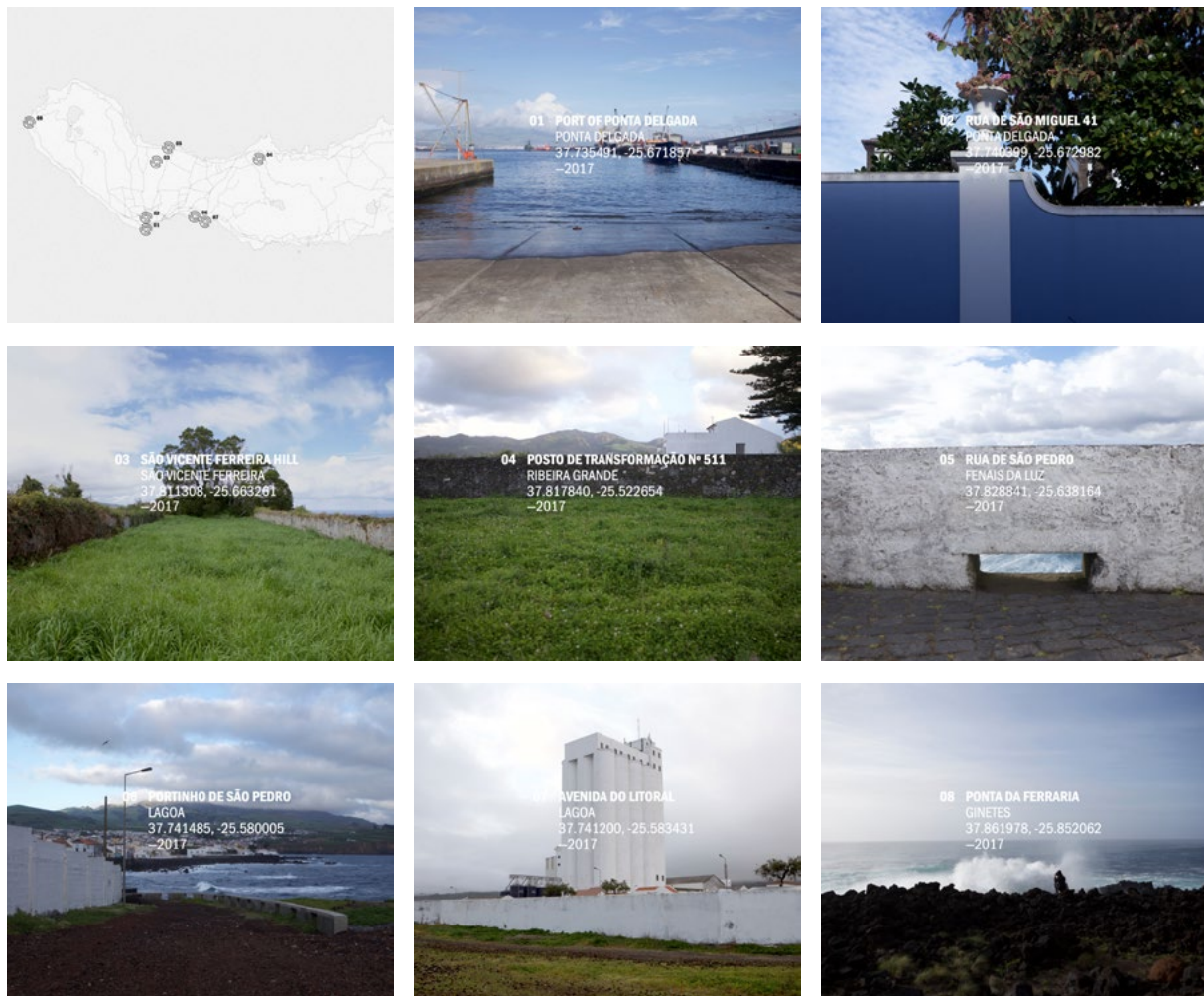
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There is a musicality to the sounds of a city: the lingering resonance of a church bell, the subterranean rumble of an approaching train, the cacophony of cyclists, cars, trucks and trains in transit, and the gentle, pulsating drone that emanates from streetlights, power lines and ventilation ducts. These sounds create a meditative counterpoint to the intermittent rhythms of the urban soundscape.

Sounding the City is an online exhibition dedicated to capturing urban environments and re-imagining their soundscapes through site-specific installations and acoustic interventions. These installations emerge from their surroundings and occur in the environments themselves. They invite our ears to focus on the music of the places we find ourselves in, and draw our gaze towards characteristics of urban environments that might otherwise go unnoticed. These interventions aim to transcend our everyday experience of space by blurring the perceptual lines between what is natural and what has been introduced into the environment.

On our walks through the city we discovered places that are undergoing significant change. Most are neglected or in-between spaces, and they may vanish in the near future. As we direct our attention to their uniqueness, their sounds and their resonances with past and future are transformed into memorable experiences. In a sense, our work is a living archive where these spaces can live on in our collective memory, even as they disappear from sight.



During our two-week residency, we created the second instalment of *Sounding the City*. We spent the first week exploring places and sounds within São Miguel and revisiting certain environments. We chose eight locations to capture through field recording, video, and photo. For each location, we created a composition that highlighted on the musical qualities of the soundscape. During the second week, we realized two site-specific installations, which were both active during the *Invisible Places* Symposium.

Since most of our work focuses on the urban soundscape, we were naturally drawn to the larger municipalities of São Miguel: Ponta Delgada, Ribeira Grande and Lagoa. Within these cities, we searched for locations that had distinct sounds and unique acoustics. Some of these sounds included: electrical hums, ventilation, church bells, and the wind and the sea in combination with the urban soundscape. Through field recording and spectral analysis, we searched for harmonies and rhythms within these sounds to create musical accompaniments that blended with the environments.

As we were drawn to more vast and solitary environments along the fringe (shoreline) of these cities, the sound of the sea became a common thread through each of the eight locations. From these places, it was possible to hear the sounds of the city in combination

with the natural soundscape. We often positioned ourselves in between the city and nature to make balanced recordings of these soundscapes. We were particularly inspired by how natural sounds were shaped by the built environment and vis versa.

For instance:

In Ribeira Grande, a steady hum emanated from a nearby power station, while gusts of wind diffused through the surrounding stone walls.

Along Rua de São Pedro, the sound of the sea filtered through the walls and houses that lined the north shore.

On a street corner near the Conceição Palace in Ponta Delgada, an electrical hum resonated in the distance. Water runoff reverberated quietly from within nearby aqueducts.

Installations

Two installations were set up for 24 hours during the Symposium. The first installation *02 Rua de São Miguel 41* took place on a residential street in Ponta Delgada. This street was positioned uphill from the port, and so it was possible hear sounds from a great distance. Two speaker cones fastened to a window amplified the frequencies of an electrical hum and other distant sounds. We were unable to locate the origin of the hum, but it resonated at this location and was audible each time we visited. The sound of running water reverberated within the aqueducts below and offered a nice vantage point for listening to our installation and the distant hum.

The second installation *04 Posto de Transformação No. 511* took place alongside a residual space in Ribeira Grande. An electrical hum emanated from a power station on site. A speaker inside of a plastic pipe revealed the harmonics within the hum. We found it particularly interesting to find a listening point between the power station and the speaker.

