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**The Motoboy of São Paulo and the Necessary Noise for Survival  
and Work Efficiency**

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“The act of traveling incorporates not only the physical component of movement through space and time but also other perceptual dimensions, from sensorial – such as hearing and seeing – to behavioral and psychological ones. Within the daily commute realm in large cities, there is a rich component of visual and sonic perceptions. Different regions of a city and times of day provide unique experiences to a person on the move in the urban space.”

**Nicolau Centola**, *Rail Transport Soundscapes: Journeys in the Urban Space of São Paulo – Introduction excerpt*.<sup>1</sup>

## **Introduction**

My thesis is the product of a combination of three central arguments. Despite the complaints of a significant part of São Paulo’s population, I argue that, for Motoboys, honking and the noise issued from modified exhaust pipes are a matter of survival and work efficiency. I argue that motoboys have a unique solid dialect permeated with distinctive accents, slang, and idioms. They also have a political voice as a unified category that permits collective thinking and fighting for workers’ rights. Apart from the four main pillars of Hip Hop (DJ, MC, Break Dance, and Graffiti), I argue that, in São Paulo, motoboys are the fifth element of this philosophy. Furthermore, and summarizing my thesis, I argue that a motoboy culture built on *modus operandi*, sound, voice, and music exists, and its origins are in the city of São Paulo. This paper will exclusively discuss my first argument, honking, and the use of open exhaust as a matter of survival and work efficiency. I anticipate further research and writing about my other described arguments in the future.

With a population close to 22 million inhabitants (21,734,682 Greater SP-IBGE, 2019<sup>2 3</sup>), the metropolitan region of São Paulo (39 municipalities) is immersed in ubiquitous human and non-human sounds from the most various sources. Despite several anti-noise laws and legislations, sounds from those countless sources still give São Paulo idiosyncratic identity (Psiu - Programa de Silêncio Urbano - Lei 16.402, 3/23/2016)<sup>4</sup>. Moreover, in São Paulo, the presence of urban sounds is fundamental as language or code, and therefore, essential to assist and improve the communication of its population.

Following my midterm presentation entitled *Sounds of São Paulo - a study of identity and communication through urban sounds*, where I exhibited five unique sounds typical of that metropolis, this final paper is exclusively dedicated to the motoboys of São Paulo. My research is inspired and founded by an interdisciplinary amalgamation of sources related to sound studies, music, anthropology, linguistics, geography, history, sociology, philosophy, health sciences, media, and urban studies. The crucial importance of aurality as a critical element of communication and identity and a particular definition of soundscape applied to São Paulo are also addressed in this paper. Among many accessed sources, I highlight the books and articles read for MUS-542 and MUS-599, dissertations and articles by Brazilian scholars, online news and blogs, documentaries, YouTube videos, and interviews. It is quite interesting to notice that the number of researches producing innovative scholarship, albeit considerable, lacks direct specificity linking motoboys with music and culture. Instead, most studies examine labor, noise, masculinity, linguistics, health issues, transport, and urban disturbance.

The interdisciplinary subjects contained in this study are divided into eight sections or chapters, plus a conclusion. Within these eight chapters, I will include in the arguments the creation of the *corridor* (the fictitious additional lane between traffic lanes where the motoboys ride), honking, modified exhaust pipes, legislation, the physical and phenomenological presence of motoboys in traffic, identity, voice, stereotype, pride, solidarity, and prejudice. In a future continuation of this paper, I will tackle the motoboy's voice as a united professional category, protests, strikes, anti-fascist couriers, *uberization*, and working rights loss. Moreover, safety, accidents, hearing loss, stress, lack of sleep, the COVID-19 pandemic, and other health issues will be examined. I will also talk about motoboys and music: Rap, HipHop, Soul, and Funk (several MCs pay tributes to motoboys; several motoboys are MCs and DJs). Some songs' lyrics talk about the motoboy's daily life, tasks, stress, struggles, and dreams. Finally, I will discuss collective thinking, motoboy culture, and the media vehicles responsible for promoting it.

## **I - Soundscape**

Urban noise has been considered a substantial source of environmental pollution throughout civilization. Since 1972, noise emission regulations exist in the United States<sup>5</sup>, and since 1980, the

World Health Organization (WHO) has addressed the problem of community noise globally<sup>6</sup>. Acoustical environmental quality in urban areas is susceptible to the overall existence of noise. One of the noticeable primary sources of noise is road traffic, which can pollute the urban soundscape, upsetting its population<sup>7</sup>. The population of large metropolises, like São Paulo, is vulnerable to the loss of environmental quality based on the increased and uncontrolled noise pollution<sup>8</sup>. Nevertheless, what constitutes noise and, therefore, pollution to some, can have a significant different meaning to others. The subjectiveness of noise depends on each individual's interconnection with place, activity, and time<sup>9</sup>. In São Paulo, the diversity of views in this regard is directly associated with its socio-economic heterogeneousness and culture.

With the founding of the World Soundscape Project in the late 1960s and the publishing of *The Soundscape - Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World* in 1977, R. Murray Schafer initiated a movement defending the improvement of urban soundscape conditions and thus, human health. Schafer argued that noise control, in conjunction with the reeducation of hearing, could effectively combat the harmful and undesirable causes and consequences of noise pollution. Instead of interpreting the concept of soundscape as an alternative to noise criticism, perhaps not considering all noises as negative, and taking into account how humans interact with the environment in a cultural context, Schafer introduced controversial regulatory theories that divided the field into sympathizers and opponents. Contrary to Schafer, this paper aligns with the academic current that endorses soundscape always in cultural context, concentrating on the importance, significance, and consideration of sounds, comprehension, impact, and intuitive consequences.

While Schafer describes urban noise as evil (or enemy) and a consequence of the decay of social and moral values, I argue that there are different reasons why specific communities and urban areas are noisy and unhealthy. It is fundamental to analyze such areas geopolitically and sociologically. Schafer bypasses such analysis in favor of his idealization of a perfect but heavily controlled soundscape (Schafer, 1977, p.90-91). For Schafer, urban and industrial soundscapes became polluted, vulgar, and sick, like a cacophony, and “human beings do not know how to listen anymore.” He continues by affirming that if the acoustic environment treatment is abandoned, it could result in “universal deafness” (Schafer, 1977, p.89-90). The hi-fi versus lo-fi soundscape

classification, merely based on sounds' levels and characteristics, is relatively subjective, exposing personal preference to ones and apparent prejudice against others.

My idea of soundscape and the way I relate it to São Paulo is derived from the proposals and definitions by Marie Thompson and Emily Thompson. For Marie Thompson, noise no longer causes damage, annoyance, and frustration. Noise can be positive, constructive, and necessary. Noise has affective powers in the sensation, feelings, and behaviors of the whole body. To some, noise can obviously disrupt, annoy, or even hurt, but it can simultaneously create a sense of belonging, safety, and nostalgia to others (Thompson M., 2017, p.10). Marie Thompson proposes a different soundscape concept, a “shift from Schafer’s aesthetic moralism to a Spinozist ethics of noise and silence.” The change would focus on a dynamic, musical, subjective, and transcendental understanding of sound and noise, breaking totally with the ‘Schaferian’ binaries: good versus bad, positive versus negative, wanted versus unwanted, beneficial versus harmful effects (Thompson M., 2017, p.5/6). Emily Thompson also redefines soundscape, diverging from Schafer’s widespread use. “A soundscape, like a landscape, ultimately has more to do with civilization than with nature, and as such, it is constantly under construction and always undergoing change” (Thompson E., 2004, p. 2).

Furthermore, the idea of manipulating soundscape with “Acoustic Design” or “Acoustic Ecology” can threaten the natural evolution of urban cultures and technologies. Techniques and methods of cultural influence, even if deeply studied and approved first, could fail when introduced in societies as “intelligent recommendations” (Schafer, 1977, p.4) for improvement of soundscapes and behaviors of its inhabitants (Thompson M., 2017, p.91). The control of aesthetic, moral, political, and well-being values, as a combo, by a government or series of laws, especially when idealized and chosen by just a few favored citizens, can be a sign of an authoritarian or dictatorial ideology.

Concluding this chapter, I introduce two paradoxical Schaeferian concepts that should be associated with São Paulo. First, the idealization of a perfect but heavily controlled soundscape, as well as any form of ‘Ear Cleaning’ method (Schafer, 1977, p.221), would not work if applied to São Paulo because of the compelling and heterogenous socio-economic features of its population. Second, in São Paulo, sounds signify deeply and are directly associated with their

sources, most of the time, which would grant it an anti-schizophrenia environment (Schafer, 1977, p.88-91).

## **II - Motoboy/Motogirl in São Paulo**

“To become a motoboy, attentiveness is crucial. You need to belong ahead of time.” “...streets are the habitat of motoboys...honking in the corridor is not only a matter of asking permission to pass; it is a shout of freedom.”

**Eliezer Muniz dos Santos** (philosopher and ex-motoboy)

Starting with a brief historical and demographic overview: motoboys are an evolution of the ‘office boys,’ the employees responsible for bureaucratic or administrative errands and courier services inside and between companies. The presence of ‘office boys’ in companies was ubiquitous since the Brazilian economy’s opening to foreign investments in the 1950s. It continued through the massive implementation of globalized neoliberalism in the 1990s, a tendency that continues to these days<sup>10</sup>.

Motoboys started to substitute the ‘office boys’ in the mid-1980s when the chaotic traffic and unreliable public transportation in São Paulo fomented the necessity to make transactions, business, and deliveries feasible, quicker, and more efficient (Miranda; Fialho, 2014, p.4). Nowadays, there are 280,000 motoboys in São Paulo, although sources augment this number to 500,000. They are mostly men, although the percentage of motogirls has increased consistently throughout the years. Motogirls were only 0,5% in 2003, and in 2020 they are 8% of the total motorcycle couriers in São Paulo. Nevertheless, it is still a predominantly masculine occupation. The typical motoboy/motogirl is between 20 and 35 years old, has a high school education fully or partially completed, and work an average of 44 hours a week. During the COVID-19 pandemic, this last number increased up to 84 hours a week. In São Paulo, motoboys have their union since 1991, but the profession was only regulated nationally in 2009 (law 12.009, 07/29/2009). Lastly, 51.5% of all traffic accidents with injuries or death involve motorcycles. In 2018, 366 was the total number of deaths caused by motorcycle accidents, one per day in São Paulo. That is, in fact, a decrease from 440 in 2014 and 512 in 2011 (Silva, 2009, p.46-7).<sup>11 12 13 14</sup>

Understanding the city of São Paulo is essential for us to locate the motoboys in its context. As the largest and wealthiest metropolis in Brazil, São Paulo also presents specific social burdens such as income inequality, which generates collective exclusion of some and others' inclusion. Economic inequality directly affects the motoboys, limiting their possible social paths and largely pre-determining their professional options (Avlasevicius; Mutaf; Neto, Augusto, 2019, p.4). Motoboys spend the large majority of working days in traffic. It is as if the streets and avenues were their "office" and place of social interaction with other citizens (Avlasevicius; Mutaf; Neto, 2019, p.7). The explanation behind the speed and rushed pace of motoboys lies in their work's remuneration method. Most motoboys get paid by the number of deliveries completed. Because of the low fee earned for each delivery made, motoboys are continually attempting to accomplish the maximum possible number of deliveries daily. Time is money, literally. For this reason, motoboys are prompt and eager to do whatever it takes to circumvent the hurdles inflicted by São Paulo's traffic (Miranda, 2016, p.69).

The working tool of motoboys is the motorcycle. The great majority of motoboys own or rent their motorcycles. It is rare to find companies these days that still own and provide vehicles to the hired motoboys. In reality, most motoboys are not official employees of the companies they work for; they are an outsourced independent workforce. In order to comply with their work duties and scheduled tasks, motoboys ride above the speed limit in the corridor, the fictitious additional lane between road lanes or cars, honking continuously, ignoring traffic laws, and turning a blind eye to other drivers and pedestrians. While this particular conduct is widespread, albeit not universal, São Paulo's population stigmatize the popular image of motoboys, stereotyping the whole class. In contrast, the same stigmatization will bond motoboys together as a category, creating unity and solidarity amongst themselves, consolidating their identity. Moreover, it is this unity that grants motoboys resistance and the capability to share the urban space with other participants and competitors (Avlasevicius; Mutaf; Neto, Augusto, 2019, p.7-8).

Motoboys carry absolutely everything they can fit within their motorbikes, from documents, letters, and money to medication, food, and even building materials. They became a steady presence of the urban landscape and soundscape. Motoboys are essential to the economy of São Paulo; nowadays, the city no longer functions without them. "São Paulo only stops when motoboys strike" (Gilberto Dimenstein, *Motoboys: Vida Loca*, 2003). Additionally, motoboys are not only

the kings of the corridor, they are key players of the neoliberal urban economy and its outsourcing process (*uberization*).

The economy in São Paulo, since the last three decades of the twentieth century, has transitioned from industrial to an outsourced arrangement of new services, similar to other global metropolises in all continents. “The former office-boys are no longer dependent on their own shoes, buses, or any other form of public transportation to accomplish their daily tasks.” Compared to ‘office boys,’ motoboys are faster, prompter, and nimbler, working on demand and, simultaneously, liberating companies from more extensive staff and payrolls. The motoboy occupation has become an attractive option for those unemployed or without specialized professional credentials and those determined to earn more than one minimum wage per month (53% of motoboys in São Paulo earn 2 to 5 times the minimum wage - IBOPE-CET<sup>15</sup>). Also, since the mid-1980s, nearly all companies making use of delivery services recognized the fundamental benefits of the promptness and flexibility of the motorcycle in São Paulo’s traffic. Therefore, the motorcycle was converted into a utility vehicle (Avlaseviciu, Mutaf, Neto, 2019, p.10).

Because of the aggressive driving manners coupled with excessive honking and the inflated loud blasts coming from the modified exhaust pipes of their motorcycles, motoboys have been targets of much criticism, day after day, since the occupation was first introduced. Nowadays, during the COVID-19 pandemic, motoboys are finally being appreciated and having their merit recognized by society, not only in São Paulo but all over the Brazilian territory. Due to the disruption in various social sectors, the closing of countless commercial establishments, and because of the need for social distancing, Motoboys are highly in demand now more than ever.

### **III - Honking and Open Exhaust Pipes**

As a result of the combination between the fast expansion of their occupation and its energetic nature permeated by urgency and imminent risk, motoboys came to be the focuses of constant criticism, polemics, and clashes in São Paulo’s traffic. Between cars, buses, trucks, and pedestrians, motoboys balance on two wheels, zigzagging, honking consistently, and blasting their exhaust pipes, regardless of traffic flow and weather conditions, through the streets and avenues of the vast metropolis. This abnormal coexisting conduct, bypassing basic traffic laws, is how



motoboys precisely establish their territory on the roads of São Paulo. The corridor is their standard domain and the pathway to keeping all sorts of deliveries accomplished punctually (Silva, 2009, p.145).

It is interesting to notice that this generalized behavior enacted by most motoboys emerges not from the demand for physical space in traffic but, instead, from the unavoidable necessity to get going. Nevertheless, other drivers and pedestrians perceive motoboys as a powerful physical presence in the corridors of streets and avenues first and foremost, and not as the alternative flowing solution to traffic stagnation. Additionally, primarily because of their riding behavior, motoboys become stigmatized in other localities away from traffic where the deliveries are picked up and completed. That is the case in commercial buildings (lobby and concierge), homes, bank branches, notary offices, elevators, and other common areas in public or private institutions. In São Paulo, besides the stereotyped traffic conduct label, motoboys are inappropriately biased according to their occupation, social class, and skin color. This normative filter imposed by society will work as feedback and play an essential role in establishing the motoboy's identity and pride (Silva, 2009, p.164).

Ricardo Barbosa da Silva, in his Master's dissertation in human geography from Universidade de São Paulo (Silva, 2009, p.207), says:

“The strange and so stigmatized presence of motoboys in traffic prioritized to automobiles end up producing their particular modus operandi, codes, and language. The behavior of these workers raises feelings that vary, diametrically, from anger to social curiosity.”

While consulting Thiago Drumond de Moraes' Ph.D. dissertation entitled *Collective of Work and Occupation of the Motoboys: Professional Category, Operational Knowledge, and Labor Risks* (my translation into English), I came across three psychology articles written by Damien Cru and Christophe Dejours about collectivity, work risks, prudence, and prevention of accidents. For the authors, as a result of the inaccuracy existent in specific jobs and considering all the acknowledged risks of accidents identified, workers take advantage of personal resources, based on their aptitudes, looking for physical, instrumental, and temporal solutions that would protect them from the risks of accidents. The individual performance and adaptation to risky labor

conditions can then be potentially transferred and incorporated to the *modus operandi* of other similar workers, becoming a collective tradition and legacy of the occupation eventually. Consciously or not, the most effective strategies develop into a collective, instinctive, and widespread feature of particular jobs. It is critical to mention that the evolution of the *modus operandi*, with novel implementations, is only achieved through cohesive obtained knowledge and real execution (Cru; Dejours, 1987).

A further study by Thiago D. de Moraes with Milton R. C. de Athayde entitled *Dimensions of Collective in Motoboy's Work Activity* (Moraes; Athayde, 2014) explores the safety of motoboys beyond what is called by the authors the “looking ahead strategy.” The “looking ahead strategy” involves extra attributes on top of the attention already paid to traffic. Indeed, safety, according to this strategy, rest on the motoboy’s ability to anticipate all kinds of traffic actions and positions around them to decide instantly the safest place to be and the best set of movements to follow. Motoboys, to anticipate the traffic flow around them, rely on all possible detectable signs. Motoboys swear they can identify, through the side mirrors of other cars, the direction where other drivers are looking at and, depending on the kind of look, whether or not those drivers would get in their way. Moreover, motoboys claim that by force of habit, this practice is secure and sustainable.

The more recent tactic, called “to make oneself seen,” can be directly associated with the knowledge of prudence described above by Cru (Cru, 1987). Widely adopted nowadays, the “make oneself seen” strategy transfers a great deal of perception, understanding of vulnerability, and ultimately the responsibility to the other drivers’ hands. This way, motoboys share with other traffic players, or we might as well say, impose, the significance of their safety. In other words, the other drivers’ perceptions and actions come to be accountable for ensuring the safety (and efficiency) of the motoboys. It is noteworthy mentioning the duality of roles in this case, where there is no supporting part. Motoboys are the flowing protagonists while the other drivers get the safety leading roles. Perceiving the motoboys’ presence and understanding their *modus operandi* developed into a norm. Lastly, both strategies, “looking ahead” and “make oneself seen,” intuitive and tactic respectively, disclose the existence of a collective workforce benefiting motoboys (Moraes; Athayde, 2014, p.335-36).

The two fundamental strategies that motoboys employ to protect themselves from accidents imply perception, visual, and acoustic. However, in the “looking ahead strategy,” what is at stake is the motoboy’s actions; in the “make oneself seen,” there is a positionality shift of subject: the motoboys’ gaze predicting future is substituted by motoboys that must be seen immediately. If other drivers see them, the motoboys feel more comfortable knowing that safety will not be guaranteed by themselves only. The safety and protection of motoboys from the risks of riding motorcycles in urban traffic depends on other drivers. Hence, to be noticed, motoboys approach the corridor honking, staying longer next to the cars, honking again and again, until they feel safe to get ahead of the vehicles, escaping the blind spot of the side mirrors (Moraes, 2008, p.311-12).

In *The Auditory Dimension*, Don Ihde explains how presence is a matter of overlapping both visual and auditory fields. What is mute in the auditory field can be widely seen in the visual; what is invisible in the visual field can be thoroughly heard in the auditory. Ihde also calls attention to the pairing of sound and movement, a visual inference, creating a more substantial “synthetized” experience, but “with the ‘overlapping’ of sight and sound there remains the ‘excess’ of sight over sound in the realm of the mute object” (Ihde, 2007, p.51). Ihde, additionally, explains the “invisible presence” of objects, how listening can make present something invisible, analogous to how something mute can be visually represented, and how amplified listening can reveal and give a convincing existence to what was previously silent (Ihde, 2007, p.54-55).

Another procedure described by Cru (1987b) and present among motoboys in traffic is the “rule of free passage.” Moraes and Athayde observed two particular situations where motoboys effectively employ this rule. The first deals with how motoboys themselves organize the traffic flow inside the corridors of urban roads. During a fieldwork ethnographic experience, one of the motoboys, upon hearing the honking of another who seemed to be in a greater urgency, gave him free passage. When questioned, the motoboy giving passage explained that this pragmatic reaction, perhaps heuristic, is a standard guideline among the category. Another typical and predictable reaction, said the same motoboy, is to speed up so the colleague asking for passage can keep flowing free. The questioned motoboy also explains that hearing the honking of another motoboy asking for passage can indicate that the former’s speed was too slow for that particular corridor. It

serves as a speed reality check. The second situation, where the “rule of free passage” is observed, was described by a few other motoboys as a game or friendly dispute among themselves. Honking, initially to make a colleague get out of the way, can trigger and install a competition to see who can go faster. Speeding up when someone asks for passage can become a “who is more powerful” game played by many, sustaining the occupation’s implied masculinity and virility. Furthermore, the established speed up dispute may also function as ludic or useful as a venting strategy to alleviate work tension acquired daily. According to some motoboys, this practice seems to make quotidian work more tolerable and pleasurable, even increasing the risk of accidents (Moraes; Athayde, 2014, p.337-38).

The two most essential components of the *modus operandi* of motoboys are acoustic: the continuous honking and the unmistakable sound coming from their motorcycle’s modified exhaust pipes. Hence, sounds from two different motorcycle sources amplify the motoboy’s generalized behavior, stereotype, and bias. The honking and exhaust roar are differently identified and understood respectively by motoboys and other traffic players in São Paulo. While for automobile, bus and truck drivers, pedestrians, and traffic agents, those sounds are annoying, superfluous, and overall irresponsible, for the motoboys, they are essential as a matter of survival and work efficiency, simply put. Even within the same urban soundscape, its perception is cultural, reflecting inhabitants’ identities as individuals or social groups. Traffic is filled with sounds and codes that are specific to each social group. Honking and engine sound can be aggressive or natural, depending on location, culture, and individual judgment (Torres, Kozel, 2010, p.127). Georgina Born talks about background sounds quickly becoming significant, center stage, even crucial. Sometimes those former background sounds are non-human and have the potential to convert into affectionate and companion to everyday life (in Steintrage; Chow, 2018, p.188).

#### **IV - Honking According to the Brazilian Law**

The Brazilian Traffic Code (CTB) has specific regulations under law 9.503 regarding honking from 1997<sup>16</sup>. Article 41 says that the driver can only honk briefly under the following conditions: To alert other drivers and pedestrians with the intent to avoid accidents. Outside urban areas, to alert another driver when there is intent to pass.

In urban areas, it is only permitted to honk when there is an apparent risk of accidents. When honking is made in any other circumstance, CTB anticipates penalties. Article 227 describes when penalties can be applied: When the situation does not imply the risk of an accident; when honking is prolonged and consecutive, independent of reason; honking anywhere between 10 pm and 6 am; honking at expressly prohibited locations and times (indicated by signs); honking differently than the pre-established norms; a resolution by the Contran (National Traffic Council) also prohibits horns with sounds similar to emergency vehicle sirens.

São Paulo's CET<sup>i</sup> (Traffic Engineering Company) says that the honking inspection does not differentiate custom sounds from the original factory horn. Traffic legislation in Brazil also makes no restrictions on the type of melody or the horn's duration, only on the sound volume level, which should vary between 93 and 104 decibels<sup>17</sup>. The violation is considered light, and the penalty is a fee of R\$88,38 (U\$17) plus three points applied to the drivers' license. Although permitted by law to ride in the corridor since 1997<sup>18</sup>, motoboys are subjected to honking traffic tickets if violating articles 41 or 227. However, motoboys have the pervasive argument that honking is employed exclusively because of the always imminent risk of accidents, therefore, having an excuse in case fined.

In 1997, the CTB formally legalized riding motorcycles and scooters in the corridor between road lanes. Recently, in October of 2020, the CTB reviewed several traffic laws and regulations, including Article 56, which guaranteed to ride in the corridor as legal conduct. The reviewed project creates additional rules for using the corridors by motorcyclists: riding in the corridor is not prohibited, and therefore the rider cannot be fined; the flow of vehicles must be stopped or

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<sup>i</sup> The CET is a municipal company responsible for traffic administration and with police powers to fine offenders. The Municipal Guard can also apply traffic violation fines. In checkpoints or roadblocks, the state military police can also apply similar fines. The amount collected in fines reverts to the treasury of the municipality. The law also stipulates that the amount collected must be exclusively spent in the same municipality's traffic administration area. DETRAN is the normative, counseling, and coordinating state institution subordinated to the National Traffic System. All the other organs that deal with traffic, like the CET, are subordinated to DETRAN. DETRAN does not apply fines, nor does it receive the money; it is merely an administrative state entity.

<http://www.cetsp.com.br/>

<https://www.detransp.gov.br/>

[http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil\\_03/Leis/L9503.htm](http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/Leis/L9503.htm)

very slow; the passage through the corridor must be made at reduced speed and compatible with the safety of pedestrians, cyclists, and other vehicles; when there are more than two lanes on the road, the motorcycle may only pass between the two left-most lanes - unless one is an exclusive bus lane. The review also prohibits the passage between the sidewalk and vehicles on the side lane. The project, additionally, allows exclusive lanes for motorcycles ahead of vehicles and before traffic lights<sup>19 20</sup>. Whoever rides a motorcycle in disagreement with the review conditions will commit a serious infraction with a fine of R\$ 195.23 (U\$37) and 5 points on the drivers' license.

In an article written for *Folha de São Paulo*<sup>21</sup>, the largest newspaper in Brazil, in June 2003, the journalist Sérgio Dávila interviews Rodrigo, a 23-year-old motoboy who, just like his colleagues, honks the horn of his bike at a rate of thirty times a minute. Rodrigo guarantees that it is the only possible “dialogue” with the other cars: “Without honking, the Mad Dog (slang for motoboys in Brazil) doesn't survive.” Rodrigo also reiterates that the nastiest enemy of motoboys is the cell phone used by other traffic drivers. Hence, for some motoboys, their honking habits are an educational act towards drivers using their cell phones in traffic, instead of an explicit disturbance subjected to fines.

The frequency of honking, for motoboys, is also directly associated with their stress level. According to Moraes, one of the studied motoboys, upon realizing he made a mistake while performing a task (he had delivered the wrong document at a particular location), had honked his horn, from that moment on, more often. The motoboy said he was upset with himself for having wavered, becoming more stressed out. Thus, he needed the cars to make way for him because he was in a tremendous hurry to make up for his fault. It became evident that the error was not so much a problem despite his disappointment and having lost time and money. However, more important than preventing the error, solving the arisen problem turned out to be the matter, and therefore, the customer's satisfaction (Moraes, 2008, p.268-69).

## **V - The Exhaust Pipe Modification**

According to Article 230, item VII, of the Brazilian Traffic Code (CTB), driving any vehicle modified from its original characteristics (building or color) constitutes a serious infraction, punishable by: a fine of R\$ 195.23 (U\$37); vehicle withholding for readjusting and regularization;

five points on the drivers' license. Item XI of the same Article 230 states that riding a motorcycle with a defective, inoperative, or purposely modified engine muffler is also considered a severe infraction, with the same punishments as item VII<sup>22</sup>.

It is a common practice among motoboys to modify their motorcycles with the so-called 'open exhaust.' Motorcycle owners remove parts of the pipe that help to muffle engine loudness. Consequently, each acceleration produces intense sound levels, capable of being heard and felt (it vibrates through the vehicles) even on busy avenues, as their volume and quality are frequently more roaring than those of buses and trucks. Although prohibited, this practice has been carried out by motoboys for years. The main argument is that, when making loud noises associated with vibration, drivers notice better the presence of nearby motoboys, therefore reducing the chances of accidents<sup>23</sup>. In São Paulo, there is a street downtown, Rua General Osório, devoted almost exclusively to the commerce and maintenance of motorcycles, accessories, parts, clothing, and overall expertise in that niche. However, Rua General Osório is not the only exclusive place specialized in the maintenance of motorcycles in São Paulo. Each peripheral neighborhood in São Paulo has motorcycle body shops and accessory stores. In the downtown area, Rua General Osório became famous as the "motorcycle street." Although not allowed to perform exhaust modifications, those shops can sell the necessary parts needed. Since exhaust pipe alterations are illegal, they are usually done covertly.<sup>24 25</sup>

Motoboys and their motorcycles are recurrent targets concerning noise. They are frequently criticized for the use of open or altered exhaust pipes. At times, it is a legal issue, demanding proper inspection of motorcycles and penalties for offenders. The CET and other public safety agents are unanimous, admitting the difficulty of enforcing inspections – due to lack of personnel and scarcity of decibel meters, which is necessary to prove that an exhaust emits sounds beyond the permitted limit. Motoboys, in turn, argue that the loud sound from modified exhausts arises as a safety measure, allowing their presence to be perceived by drivers at a distance, even when inside their vehicles with closed windows and radio/music turned on. The vibrating roar from open exhaust pipes also serves as a warning to drivers when motoboys approach and pass through their blind spots.

In the article entitled *Os Motoboys na Pandemia* (07/24/2020)<sup>26</sup>, anthropologist Carlos Valpassos explains this heated debate opposing the right to silence to a device and method that increase the security of a vulnerable category: “I do not like excessive noises, but in this debate, I tend to side with those who may lose a leg and not with those who need to turn up the TV.” I subscribe to Valpassos’ point of view. Attorney Júlio César Lopes responds to a biased article written by another attorney, Beatricee Karla Lopes, lashing the motoboys for altering their exhausts<sup>27</sup>. “I defend motoboys with modified, sporty, or open exhaust pipes because, contrary to what a majority of complainers think, they are not exactly meant to draw attention. Instead, they signal through sound the approach of motorcycles, for distracted pedestrians, children, etcetera. Also, for drivers of other larger vehicles to perceive that motoboys are nearby, avoiding then accidents.”

In addition, many customers await the motoboys to arrive at the destination to find their wallets, take the money or credit cards, and finally pay for the delivery. This looseness on the part of the customers creates more significant delays and frustration for the motoboys, who literally understand time as money. This negligence is another motive for installing open exhaust pipes on their motorcycles; to ensure that customers can hear motorcycles’ approach in advance, speeding up the delivery and payment processes.

## **VI - Boycott to Loud Motoboys**

Since the COVID-19 pandemic preceding years, food and other delivery apps such as iFood, LOGGI, Rappi, and Uber Eats have been running solid campaigns to increase the number of orders in São Paulo as well as in numerous other cities in Brazil. As motoboys make most deliveries, these campaigns’ success leads to more trips on motorcycles and more complaints about noise. With the consequent increase of deliveries made by motoboys, a somewhat odd and prejudiced movement started to emerge in different municipalities of São Paulo, including the capital. The movement, not cohesive, is mostly the existence of several small informal sub-groups of friends and neighbors who, through instant message apps, organize themselves, determined to boycott food deliveries made by motoboys on motorcycles with open exhaust pipes<sup>28</sup>. The vigilante motto is: “We refuse to accept the food if a motoboy makes the delivery on a loud motorcycle.” Some of these groups have more than 500 members, communicating mostly via WhatsApp, exchanging



information and evidence about restaurants and food companies that employ motoboys whose motorcycles make too much noise. Furthermore, this is where the vigilante patrol crosses the line again; in my opinion, they take note of, write down, and share the license plate information of the motoboys considered noisy. My concept of vigilante here is not at all of a neighborhood hero or fighter for higher justice; it is instead of a vindicator, a punisher, a person who takes the law into her/his own hands in retaliation.

One anonymous member of a vigilante group says: “We know that they are barbaric in traffic, and the food ordered doesn’t always arrive in good condition. Unfortunately, we only realize that when the food is unpacked after the motoboy had already left...and since the PM (military police) is not confiscating noisy motorcycles, we understand that it is our duty to try to reduce this inconvenience, especially on weekends. It only takes people to start refusing deliveries and sending food back, that restaurants and iFood itself will take some action in that matter.”<sup>29</sup>

Another testimonial: “Nowadays, the comfort of having food delivered home is attractive, however, there is a downside to it, and it is only getting worse. The loud noise that motoboys make during their delivery routes. Most of them modify the exhaust and ride at high speeds through the streets of São Paulo. Well, I want to see action by Rappi on reducing the noise of its motoboys, improving their personnel, inspecting the motorcycles, whatever is necessary. Until then, I will no longer place orders using the app, including competitors.” Anonymous<sup>30</sup> (24/09/20).

One anonymous blogger on [blog.saipos.com](http://blog.saipos.com)<sup>31</sup> mentions the butterfly effect, linking individual deliveries to each applied discount voucher sent by the food apps. Each delivery is presumed to be made by a motoboy whose motorcycle has an open exhaust, hence, generating noise that will disturb the concentration and sleep of those on the way. The blogger concludes by suggesting to food delivery companies and apps vetoing loud motorcycles: “They would do cities and their customers a big favor, especially those who live near busy roads.”

I conclude this chapter with a boycott petition written by Luciano Busch:

“Imagine you are resting home, with your family, your newborn child, a grandfather who needs to repose, or even a sick person. Suddenly, several honking noises are heard on your street, in hospital areas, and wherever else. That’s just motoboys delivering food, material goods, etcetera. These avid couriers, who only want to make their deliveries as quickly as possible, eager to make money (more and more) during the day, at night, and even at dawn, already arrive at the destination address honking their horns. Sometimes the honking goes through the whole street in the hope of whoever made the request would appear. They never get tired of honking their horns and HONKING, without thinking of the others across the street, who just want to rest, make their babies sleep, or take care of those in need. These asphalt professionals and their noisy motorcycles should, in addition to complying with the laws, be more polite and empathetic to others. The HORN was developed and placed on vehicles to alert others. IT IS NOT A BUZZER OR INTERCOM; IT DOESN’T HAVE INTELLIGENCE TO SCREAM CUSTOMER NAMES. Getting off the bike and ringing the bells/intercom, in addition to contributing to good coexistence, is very good for your health. This campaign is to ask companies that hire motoboys to deliver their products, to exercise their role in guiding them not to honk...AND YOU, WHO WANT TO PARTICIPATE TOO, TRY NOT TO ORDER FROM COMPANIES WHOSE MOTOBOYS DO NOT RESPECT THE OTHER.” (upper case words kept as the original text in Portuguese)

Luciano Busch<sup>32</sup> (n.d., two years ago) - A petition to boycott iFood, Rappi, LOGGI, Delivery, and Uber Eats.

## **VII - Honking Language According to a Car Driver and a Motoboy – Two Distinct Explanations**

Upon researching the habit of honking in several online news sources and blogs, I came across two isolated and distinct explanations, in separate websites, about the motoboy’s honking language; one description by a car driver and another by a motoboy.

Joel Leite, a journalist, radio host, blogger, and columnist, describes five different honking ways employed by motoboys in a biased article for Uol.com.br entitled *Uma Buzina Para Cada Recalque*<sup>33</sup>(*A different honk for each insecurity*). Leite, who graduated in semiotics and

environmental studies, writes mostly about the automobile world, venturing to discuss politics, economy, media, society, environmental issues, and even gastronomy. The absolute predilection for automobiles to the detriment of motorcycles is evident in this article. It is quite interesting to notice that the words ‘defensive’ and ‘safety’ were never used in any of his definitions, which, most likely, shows either the lack of knowledge of popular culture, disdain for the lives of motoboys, or pure class discrimination. I do not have a crystal ball nor have enough information yet to prove my argument, but I suspect that he is a fan, if not a follower of R. M. Schafer.

Ivan Legal is a motoboy and one of the writers of the blog *Que Trampo*<sup>34</sup>. It is evident to me, at least in Portuguese, the different tone, sense of humor, identification, and solidarity of Ivan with the other motoboys he observed honking. Also, when he calls himself a parrot trying to learn and repeat the honking styles of other motoboys, it is the perfect example of the occupation’s collective tradition applied to the *modus operandi* of other similar workers (Cru; Dejours, 1987). Furthermore, like Joel, Ivan addresses car drivers but with the intention of lecturing them to pay proper attention to each kind of honking performed by motoboys. The target here is the safety and work efficiency of motoboys, not their behavior per se. Another curiosity is the use of comedy by Ivan instead of the sarcasm used by Joel.

**Joel Leite (Car Driver) writes:**

“As if the rigging that most motoboys do in the streets were not enough, constantly disrespecting traffic laws, they torture us with the ubiquitous annoying honking. Another day I was stopped in traffic on 23 de Maio Avenue, and I evaluated the types of honking motoboys executed around me. Each one has its own meaning. One alert, another curse, a third one demands you to get out of their way.”

Leite, then, defines one by one:

“Preventive horn: The brief touch. Everything is in order, but the motoboy honks to alert the driver who might eventually decide to change lanes not to do so. It means: I’m here, huh? Don’t get in front of me.”

“Swearing or Cursing: A long honk, the one where the biker rests his finger on the button. It doesn’t work to alert to anything. He’s just cursing you when the situation is already defined. The car has already changed lanes without any risks. Still, the motoboy did not like it because he eventually had to slow down. Then, he curses through honking.”

“Warning: Here comes the pack. This honking is made with short and intermittent touches, continuously. It is the most irritating of all. That’s when a bunch of motoboys comes, one after the other, down the corridor. Only the leader honks, warning that the cars must move away, leaving a wider space for them to pass.”

“By osmosis: There is no traffic, no car is signaling its blinkers, there is not even the slightest imminent risk, yet the motoboy honks not to lose the habit.”

**Ivan Legal (Motoboy) writes:**

“In another long and pleasant journey from Zona Leste to Morumbi on top of my faithful 125cc companion, I noticed a communication phenomenon: the honking language. In times of Twitter, Facebook, iPad, and so many other ways to replace smoke signals, the human on a motorcycle developed several ways of saying “get out of the way Motherf@PS%@.” Just like a parrot on two wheels, I try to learn and repeat. My fluency in honking still seems a long way off, but I want to translate some signals for you, my friend, in a car, so you’re able to react and respond to each kind of honking correctly.

“Long honking: this has the effect (at least on the biker’s mind) of a cannon shot. The motoboy wants to remove a car closing the corridor and hit all the other cars around it. So, “GET THE F\*\*\*\*CK OUT.”

“Two short beeps: this is a friendly honking, does not transmit any anger; it is just a warning that motoboys are passing by. Like, “Oops, look, I’m here.”

“Several short and insistent beeps: this is not really any powerful curse. The motoboy is just really afraid of being cut off but doesn’t want to slow down either. So, it means: I’m here ... I’m still ... I’m still here.”

“Several short beeps followed by an insistent long one: in this case, the brother motoboy even tried not to yell at anyone, but as it didn’t really work out, it had to be forceful. Translating honking by honking: “get out, get out, get out, GET THE F\*CK OUT !!!!!”

“Endless short beeps throughout the entire route: this is the professional type, any day or time, the motoboy puts the headphones inside the helmet, gets the delivery address and f\*ck it, nonstop honking.”

“Strong acceleration: at last, this one is not honking, but it scares as much. The acceleration is not for you, driver; they serve to remove the myth that all bikers are united. In practice, it means: “get out of my corridor stopper!!”

## **VIII - Language, Voice, and Identity – Towards the Continuation of This Paper – Bibliographic Inspiration**

The voice of motoboys in São Paulo can be somehow expressed through their honking and exhaust pipe sounds. It is a language of safety and professionalism that becomes an identity, unfortunately not always perceived nor understood by others. I analyze the importance of their voice in comparison to how Walter J. Ong, Jacques Derrida, and J. L. Austin discuss the essentiality of orality. Ong mentions how we take for granted the originality and trueness of orality compared to literacy (Ong, 2002, p.1). For Derrida, language cannot and will not be merely transferred into writing. The writing lacks breath, voice, sound, and hearing as necessary components of translating orality accurately. The dangers of substituting speech for the wrong kind of writing would jeopardize the proper translation of spoken language (Derrida, 1998, p.10). Austin brings to our attention the significance of utterances, how they belong to orality and are not always associated with straight forward meaning nor traditional grammar (Austin, 1962, p.3). Utterances are not

intended to describe, nor are true or false, and they are otherwise vocal performances or actions served to inform (Austin, 1962, p.5-6).

The voice, like speech, is the way for someone to hear and understand oneself. It is also a manner to keep the signified's ideal essence close to words, internally and externally. The "phoneme is the most ideal sign," it is "the soul of language" (Derrida, 2012, p.496-97). In sum, the three philosophers raise awareness of spoken language and sound as fundamental features to comprehension and communication. Derrida reiterates the cruciality of sound and hearing associated with language comprehension. For motoboys, their communication comes in the form of honking and exhaust blasts, which can be interpreted as their spoken language, speech, and utterances, meant to be heard first and understood by all. It is a trade, giving up quietness in favor of the safety and efficiency of the category that keeps São Paulo and numerous other Brazilian cities running, even during the COVID-19 pandemic. Considering the chaotic traffic and the deficient public transport system, it is a fair trade.

In *Dirty Ears*, Lee Veeraraghavan explains how Indigenous voice and sound are interpreted as noise by conservative entities and sectors of the Canadian government (Veeraraghavan, 2017, p.3). The same can be said to the sounds produced by motoboys while riding their motorcycles, considered noise and not tolerated by many drivers, pedestrians, and residents. In this case, for the motoboys, "noise becomes a political statement about the right to occupy, to be heard, and to demand inclusion" (Cardoso, 2019, p.98). Therefore, inspired by Veeraraghavan but substituting 'indigenous populations' for 'motoboys,' and 'settlers' for 'drivers, pedestrians, and residents,' one of the primary weapons of resistance, undeniably, are protests in the form of voice, sound, and noise, unintelligible to some drivers, pedestrians, and residents (Veeraraghavan, 2017, p.75/76).

Acousmatic listening can generate bias, racial discrimination, musical or speech hierarchy, exposing the existence of idealized voices based on stigma, prejudice, and racialized culture (Chow, 2018, p.136). I argue that to fully understand the *modus operandi* of motoboys, together with the compulsory and most necessary emanated sounds from their motorcycles, as life and work efficiency, it is crucial to acknowledge that sounds belong to their sources and should not be detached when critically evaluating them. That is what I called anti-schizophonia, a bond of source

with sound as an understood entity. In other words, it is not enough to hear the sounds of São Paulo by themselves; it is crucial to perceive the presence of their sources as a necessity to understand the urban soundscape comprehensively.

In *Hungry Listening*, Dylan Robinson recommends fully comprehending indigenous sounds by adopting a different reasoning approach based on other epistemological structures and values than Western standards. It demands another positionality (Robinson, 2020, p.74-77). Let us substitute indigenous sounds with sounds produced by motoboys in São Paulo. This substitution also works for any sound by other minority or subaltern group under criticism from the more powerful and dominant society sectors. Furthermore, recognizing the sounds emitted by motoboys in traffic and fully absorbing their meaning requires a pause, as also proposed by Nina Eidsheim in *The Race of Sound* and suggested by Robinson at times in his book (Robinson, 2020, p.141 p.158-9). Eidsheim suggests that we pause and listen to how we listen, in a “self-reflexive” manner, different from the usually identity-oriented established routine, hence, rejecting the most automatic “cult of fidelity” (p.180-183). In São Paulo, the “cult of fidelity” refers to an idealized soundscape, an environment without the sounds understood as loud and unpleasant by many.

Additionally, in *Aurality*, Ana Maria Ochoa Gautier proposes the idea of participation, recognizing the ‘other,’ and alternative forms of the collective. The result, “acoustic assemblages,” would be an amalgamation of multiple ways to produce and listen to sound, all considered to have a powerful voice (Ochoa Gautier, 2015, p.22). Interpreting Gautier’s proposal in the context of traffic in São Paulo, motoboys are the ‘other,’ and their collective “acoustic assemblages” will facilitate their voices to be heard until eventually, and hopefully, becoming acknowledged and powerful.

Nina Eidsheim also mentions the importance of the voice associated with social and cultural backgrounds as identity (Eidsheim, 2018). Ana Maria Ochoa Gautier praises culture, art, and folklore (intellectual or illiterate) via speech, sound, and voice. Hearing and listening – aurality – as key sensorial elements to civilizations’ foundations, including their politics and culture. Gautier advocates the retelling of official national histories by including a different approach to hearing, different from the way adopted by the Eurocentric elites (Ochoa Gautier, 2015). I argue that this different hearing approach must be applied to contemporary affairs involving dominant and

subaltern groups, not only retelling official histories. It is essential to put that practice in the present, while histories are still being made.

Stefan Helmreich and Michele Friedner in *Sound Studies Meets Deaf Studies* (Helmreich; Friedner, 2012, p.7) discuss the impact of cochlear implants and the introduction of hearing to deaf people. While some people defend this practice as a rescue and perhaps liberation of permanent deafness, others criticize this technology by assuring it would diminish sign language to the point of jeopardizing Deaf culture and Deaf society, even putting them on the verge of extinction. Assuming the safety of motoboys is guaranteed by means other than honking or open exhaust pipes, I question if the same would occur to their culture. If the acoustic components of their *modus operandi* dramatically change, diminishing the importance of sound in their identities, how would it impact their culture?

Finally, In *Blackpentecostal Breath: The Aesthetics of Possibility*, Ashon Crawley defends the collective oral and performative acts present in Blackpentecostal traditions as a mode of resistance not only to intolerance and racism but to the Western theological-philosophical doctrines likewise (Crawley, 2016, p.7). Breathing collective, as a performance, raises awareness to presence, resistance, and black causes (Crawley, 2016, p.39-42). I endorse Crawley's view of collectiveness as resistance, the fundamental substance for motoboys in raising awareness of their presence and importance, ultimately emphasizing their causes.

## **IX - Conclusion**

“From the symbolic nature of the motorcycle, the myth of the outlaw rebel is born, kicking his own image in the side-view mirrors of the competing vehicles in the increasingly narrow spaces of the city streets. Professionals who risk their lives daily carrying documents, values, trades, correspondence, and other paraphernalia of our bureaucratic daily life are then grouped into a category created in absentia, as always happens in this everyday construction called society. The one who escapes categorization becomes a caricature. Moreover, the caricature is an image affected by the created character, despite the person.”

**Augusto Stiel** - *No Espelho Retrovisor* (in Abad, 2007, p.3 – my translation into English)



Honking is a constant presence in the heavy traffic of São Paulo. Whether to rush drivers and pedestrians when the light turns green for vehicles or as a defense mechanism of motoboys, warning others of their presence in the corridors, honking is also presented as a sign of irritation with traffic jams or as a way of thanking another driver for cordially giving passage. Besides, honking and the so-called ‘buzinaços,’ or collective honking, are present in celebrations and protests, expressing joy or outrage.

The Brazilian Traffic Code (CTB) stipulates the use of the horn briefly, with just a short touch, as a warning signal to avoid accidents. However, honking ends up being extensively used throughout São Paulo for other purposes, indicating, in a way, its drivers’ moods and feelings. Anthropologist Roberto DaMatta explains honking as the impersonal communication between strangers, through their vehicles, within urban environments<sup>35</sup>. Despite its occasional use to express positive feelings, honking is vastly understood as a negative doing and as environmental pollution by most Paulistanos. Most of the time, what is behind honking is the irritation, stress, and rush drivers feel while immersed in São Paulo’s heavy and sluggish traffic.

Situations of heavy traffic in São Paulo are scenarios of blended vehicle sounds, mixing engine roars, honking, ambulance sirens, alert traffic beeps, and human voices shouting and complaining frequently. However, immersed in this acoustic confusion, it is possible to hear rushing motorcycles crossing the streets and avenues, speeding up distinctively and honking adamantly in a symphony (or cacophony) of short and shrilling beeps. Those sounds are the result of the typical *modus operandi* of motoboys. Motoboys ride in the corridor between rows of cars placed on two separate traffic lanes as their exclusive lane. Thus, honking functions to warn drivers that a motorcycle is passing, thus avoiding accidents caused by the sudden change of lanes by inattentive car drivers. In the urban soundscape of São Paulo, vehicle sound idiosyncrasies do exist but are mostly diffused within the uninterrupted traffic growl. However, inside this continuous rumble, it became thoroughly feasible to identify the ephemeral presence of motoboys. That is in many ways, and according to motoboys themselves, mission accomplished. (do Vale, 2015, p.139).

In *Aurality*, Ana Maria Ochoa Gautier talks about the importance of voice, having a voice, and being understood by voice to shift the Eurocentric idea of personhood (Ochoa Gautier, 2015). In

São Paulo, the notion of personhood is imposed by the middle, upper-middle, and upper-class ideologies. As members of the lower and working classes, and as pieces of urban traffic that were never seen nor heard, motoboys learned, empirically and strategically, methods to circumvent invisibility. The solution adopted was through clear, loud, and unmistakable sound. Besides, motoboys retribute the world around them with feedback from all the criticisms received, portraying the delinquents on two wheels whom nothing obey nor respect.

Bikers honking in traffic corridors rarely get fined. However, this practice is prohibited. They claim to honk to get attention and not be cut off by other drivers. Nevertheless, whoever adopts this measure indeed disregards that an infraction, according to the Brazilian Traffic Code (CTB), liable for a fine of R\$ 88.38 plus three points in their license, is being committed. When motoboys admit honking as omnipresence in their *modus operandi*, or that they honk for any pretext, they put themselves in a position violating item II of article 227, therefore, implying guiltiness in their act. Furthermore, motoboys explain that the vast majority of their honking, if not its entirety, is related to their defense and the defense of others, including pedestrians, which implies Article 41 of the CTB (honking when facing imminent risk of accident, with the intent to prevent accidents). Therefore, honking is necessary, not a simple desire (Frascarelli, 2012, p.73-74).

The CTB only establishes the traffic circulation laws and order. The management, monitoring, reprimanding, and fines are in the hands of the Traffic Engineering Company (CET), which can be explained as the traffic police. There are also other traffic institutions in Brazil: DETRAN (Transit Department), which is a state administrative branch of the two federal institutions, CONTRAN (National Transit Council) and DENATRAN (National Transit Department).

However, once again, the law goes unnoticed even by CET agents who deliberately do not apply fines. This overlook leads me to believe that the penalty is not imposed by law, only in rare exceptions. CET agents, following superior guidelines, rarely fine motoboys who honk outside the standards accepted by law. The explanation is not recorded for complex hierarchical and bureaucratic reasons, suggesting that CET's blind eye turning happens in favor of more effective circulation of vehicles avoiding worse traffic jams, in this case involving motorcycles specifically. As a consequence of a more effective traffic flow, all deliveries of the most varied products

throughout the city can be accomplished faster, thereby generating more significant benefits for the consuming population, the economy, and the neoliberal capitalism in São Paulo.

We notice a resistance from other drivers in São Paulo in recognizing hearing the motoboys' sounds to acknowledge their presence and their modus operandi survival base. It is common for automobile drivers to encapsulate themselves in their cars, purposely rolling the windows up completely, turning the air conditioning on, and having music played to distract them from all the outside honking and exhaust pipe blasts. I argue that this sound cancellation method while employing other sounds is a form of "Orphic Media," a term coined by Mack Hagood and the central theme of *Hush: Media and Sonic Self Control*. The expression signifies "fighting sound with sound" (Hagood, 2019, p. 16) and is inspired by the Greek myth of Orpheus, his voyage with the Argonauts, and the task of resisting the Sirens' enchanted singing with his lyre sounds. The sounds coming from Orpheus' lyre – functioning as orphic media – win against the Siren's lethal voices. Hagood takes the Greek myth of Orpheus and applies it to contemporary societies, investigating ways to inflict control through sound-producing devices and technologies. *Hush* is centered in narratives of "Orphic Media" as strategies to overwhelm and alter unwanted sounds, transforming them into others or even into silence. Individual portable devices, like gadgets, tools, apparatuses, and noise-canceling headphones, have the potential to mold the personal soundscapes around us, re-shaping our perception of space and social participation. In the traffic of São Paulo, the hermetically closed automobiles filled with loud music or talk radio can be interpreted as one of these "Orphic Media" devices, purposely silencing the outside motoboys. In other words, drivers combat the unwanted and distracting sounds of motoboys, albeit crucial to the latter's survival, playing music/radio inside their cars. In question here is the deliberate silencing of the noticed other through the use of apparatuses, or as Hagood puts, "separating things that you do not want from things that you want" (Hagood, 2019, p.183). Hagood also suggests a clear presence of racial and economic boundaries, perhaps even segregation, in the purposeful use of noise-canceling gadgets (Hagood, 2019, p.217-19), which can also be applied to the context of motoboys versus car drivers in the traffic of São Paulo.

Food delivery services during the COVID-19 pandemic have increased significantly. The prominence of motoboys in São Paulo's streets since March 2020 has been largely increased and

acknowledged by the population. Nowadays, motoboys are saluted as true heroes by most Paulistanos, certainly not the same impression nor behavior as before the arrival of the coronavirus. Social distancing and isolation reduced the number of automobiles circulating throughout São Paulo, which, coupled with the augmented number of motoboys making deliveries, resulted in a more evident resonance of motorcycle engine sounds heard in specific areas. As an immediate reaction, residents in several neighborhoods, particularly those living in condominiums and residential areas, began to complain about the exhaust noise heard every time a motoboy entered or exited their private communities. Consequently, some of those residents initiated a crusade to boycott food delivery companies hiring “noisy” motoboys, mainly through instant message groups like WhatsApp.

Motoboys, since the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic, have been exposing themselves daily, bringing food to those who can afford to stay or work from home. As if the exposure to the virus was not enough, motoboys are demanded to do it in silence. Those residents requesting quietness reject acknowledging the importance of the open exhaust as an instrument of protection for the motoboys. Through this kind of movement, the egotistical attitude of some clearly demonstrates the inequalities of Brazilian society: “while some risk their lives running to deliver food, others complain that they are not receiving it in silence” (Valpassos, folha1.com.br, 2020).

“The country has not stopped. It is riding on 2 wheels.” - Honda campaign supporting the motoboys during the coronavirus pandemic #valorizeOentregador

## **Appendix**

### **Testimonials from Motoboys Compiled Throughout this Research**

“You need to be defensive. You need to defend yourself all the time. Be quick, decisive, but please defend yourself. You need to calculate ... yes, while you are riding here, you have to be aware that a lot may be happening ahead. Something up ahead can happen. Look ahead. And don't forget all the details around you. Always defend yourself. And remember, do not speed up in vain because a child not necessarily will cross at the crosswalk over there.”

**Anonymous motoboy** (Moraes, 2008, p.290)

“I only speed up if I feel that I really can. I try to look at the sidewalks. Sometimes, you will pass a bus or a truck, and you don't see if someone on the sidewalk will cross over there. So you better stop, man. Stop, and honk. Go slowly then.”

**Anonymous motoboy** (Moraes, 2008, p.290)

“For you to be safe in traffic, you have to make yourself seen. A good defensive drive must include ‘the other’ in the story. Don't count solely on you, or rather, don't depend only on what ‘I know’ or ‘I am.’ If I intend to guarantee my life, I must ensure that others pay attention to me!”

**Anonymous motoboy** (Moraes, 2008, p.311)

“All those sons of b\*tches on their cell phones, you know?... on WhatsApp...driving and on WhatsApp...man!?!?... almost driving the car to the river... you know? Then I honk so they realize the sh\*t they are doing and understand that they are not only on WhatsApp...they are actually driving in traffic... right? And, and, and ... that the car is going to the river... and they get mad at me for doing so...”

**Motoka Cachorro** (Frascartelli, 2017, p.181)

“I was coming from Guarulhos one day, ... then a guy in an armored car cut me off, ... but he cut me off really bad. I held on to the brake and locked the corridor. I left the corridor and honked! But man, I swear to you, I didn’t curse, I didn’t even look to the side, I just honked and went on my way. Suddenly, many meters ahead, when I looked to the side, I just saw the same car, and the guy threw me out of the road on the concrete blocks. I rolled over and everything...the only image I have was of the guy who was a passenger poking his head out and laughing. Because of a honk! Imagine if that guy kills me just because of a honk? I had a total loss on my CG; it wasn’t even fifteen days old... it cost me more than half the bike’s value to fix it. You go out to work, and just because of a honking, you lose two, three months of salary fixing your bike, because you depend on it.”

**Rodrigo** (Guimarães, 2019, p.131-32)

“Bro, what do you get for cutting the motoboy off? Let us get through. The motoboy just wants to pass. Everyone gives passage to ambulances; it is an obligation; it is the person’s life there. It’s the same thing with a motoboy; let the motoboy pass! If you don’t knock the motoboy down, you may not even need the ambulance. Let the guys go through! Signal! If it weren’t to be fast [delivering by motorcycle], we would go by car or send it through SEDEX (express mail). We depend on it! Then you go through the corridor, and the bus driver immediately cuts you off, curses your mother ... such an unnecessary thing. There’s no way ... What do you earn doing it? What’s the advantage? Let me pass; I am not here to harm you.”

**Danilo** (Guimarães, 2019, p.106)

“In traffic, the real danger is among people using cell phones in their ears. That’s what causes a lot of accidents in São Paulo. I’ve seen drivers doing everything in traffic, eating, talking, texting, reading a book. Sometimes when you are in traffic and see a car drifting out or zigzagging, you know that the person is on the cell phone.”

**Rodrigo** (Guimarães, 2019, p.126-27)

“...nowadays people look at their cell phones a lot, and the car drifts off to the side or the other lane. We see this a lot, but a lot! My husband has already fallen because of a driver on a cell phone. I don't take my finger off the horn, we don't do it to confront, but to alert, because we see that the driver is distracted, touching the radio, on the cell phone...”

**Ana** (Guimarães, 2019, p.126)

“Because I'm fed up with motorcycles, fed up with traffic. So, I prefer to live my life in the countryside, understand? Get out from here for a while, forget the honking, the roar of the engine, I want a peaceful place.”

**Nicolas** (Guimarães, 2019, p.100)

“They complain about our honking but forget that using the cell phone while driving is a serious violation! It is simple: if you don't want to be honked at, drive for us all, not only for yourself.”

**Walter Silva** (UOL, 05/01/2017)<sup>36</sup>

“People honk a lot, especially us motoboys. If we don't honk, they end up cutting us off, and accidents happen. We also honk when a friend passes by to greet. When we see a beautiful girl too, the motoboy always beeps to check if she smiles back. But, if you wake up to a stressed day, you will be honking for everyone and so on.”

**Douglas Camargo** (UOL, 05/01/2017)<sup>37</sup>

“You can't leave your horn broken at all. Not only us motoboys make mistakes in traffic. Everyone is stupid. Drivers, pedestrians, buses ... honking gets us protected.”

**Ronando Simão da Costa** (O Estado de S. Paulo 03/14/2007)<sup>38</sup>

“We get paid by delivery, we need to survive, and besides, if we delay in one place and arrive on another with cold food, many will complain.”

**Anonymous motoboy** (Guia Medianeira 09/08/2020 )<sup>39</sup>

“Here’s the deal, you all, I work as a motoboy for four years...only who’s a motoboy knows what we have to go through daily in our job. We motoboys no longer stand the ignorance of certain customers who depend on our services and keep attacking us...man, this is too much already. You guys like to judge us as if we were less than nothing, but you guys also don’t see your own mistakes. For example, you guys say we ride fast and such...you don’t see that we ride fast just so your delivery doesn’t get delayed...many customers wait to look for their wallets and cards when the motoboy arrives at their door...and do not realize that those minutes that we keep waiting for you to look for your wallet or card, delay the other customers’ deliveries. Then, to catch up with the wasted time, we have to accelerate and speed up a lot.

Another thing that we are sick of is this continuous complaining of you guys regarding the noise from the sporty exhaust on our bikes...I use the sporty exhaust on my bike and know how great it is in traffic...because the blast noise frees us from many drivers’ cut-offs, believe me, the exhaust noise saves our lives...only a father like me knows what it is like to leave the house and fear for your life...to give a hug on my son in the morning and pray that I can come home safe and sound at the end of the night so I can hug him again.

Stop judging us, stop complaining...we are taking risks daily to bring your snack, your hot pizza, in the comfort of your homes...we endure the sun, cold weather, rain, and anything else we have to undergo to guarantee the sustenance for our families. When the stores closed because of CORONA VIRUS, we went on, in the streets, with our bikes, at risk of contracting this disease...and 90% of the customers I deliver to don’t wear masks, they don’t care for our health. When I do all those deliveries, I smell a rat because I don’t know where they’ve been all day, and I’m not a soothsayer to know who may or may not have the virus. Please appreciate the MOTOBOYS; in the end, all professions are essential... God bless all MOTOBOYS in Brazil. We



are all together in it crazy dogs...(I added sporadic periods, commas, and ellipsis; the author did not use any punctuation).

**Rafa Padilha** (Guia Medianeira 09/08/2020)<sup>40</sup>

“When the motoboy installs an exhaust pipe like that, it is not for anyone to find beautiful nor for people to like. It is because, in traffic, there are a lot of rascals who do not respect the motoboy who is in a hurry. It’s nice to eat that warm sandwich, right? I want to see if they think it’s also nice to be in our skin, working to deliver someone else’s food!!!”

**Jeferson Linhar** (Guia Medianeira 09/08/2020)<sup>41</sup>

“They complain about the noise of the motorcycle, but when the motoboy arrives at their door, many times the customers pretend not to see, do not answer the doorbell. The motoboy has to return to the restaurant or keep riding clueless around the given address. Motoboys then hear complaints that the delivery is late or that the food is cold, but hey, why didn’t you wait at the door? Why did you give us the wrong address? Why didn’t you specify the need for change? Please appreciate us a little bit, even with our noisy exhaust pipes...your order will always arrive, even under rain, while you stay comfortably inside the house. Those who work in sales and with delivery hear so many complaints, but nobody complaining understands our real situation.”

**Thaynara David de Paula** (Guia Medianeira 09/08/2020)<sup>42</sup>

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