

Music and ecologies of sound.
Theoretical and practical projects for a listening of the world
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Vibratory Ecosophy - a new sono-acoustic approach

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- The terms "sound ecology" and "acoustic ecology" are often taken for synonyms but neither is satisfactory.
- It is time to end the split between the subjective world of sound, and the objective, measurable world of acoustic parameters, product of the dualism of modern epistemology, philosophy and aesthetic theories.
- The Galilean and Cartesian notions of "subject" and "object" are essentially retinian, and not applicable to sound.
- The problem of finding a new conceptual and methodological approach correlating the two into a complex continuity is central to a pluri-disciplinary understanding of the world. The concepts of organic complexity, qualitative science, and morphology are all brought into play by this approach.

- We find echoes of these ideas in the ecosophical concepts of Arne Næss and Felix Guattari, as well as the mesological research of Augustin Berque.
- An important marker for this problem is the question of "landscape" - a term that obliges us to think in terms of the synergy between nature and culture, polysensory and multimodal, and in terms of spatiotemporal and ecodynamic relationships. This will thus be the reference point on which I will develop my reflections on "vibratory ecosophy"

Landscape and the Retinian Dimension

- I consider landscape – and especially its sonic and acoustic aspects – to be a favoured entryway for any investigation about the world, because of its complexity and its topicality.
- My attempt to understand landscape (and through it, a relationship with the world) is based on a non-dualist, non-reductionist, and non-anthropocentric approach – one that is, in brief, organic and morphologic.
- My ambition (for the long term) is to be able to identify modes of organization of knowledge, or *praxis* (as coaction between theory and practice), capable of taking into account the notion of vibration with all of its physical and semantic characteristics, able to take sound as a cognitive, sensitive and perceptive model of reference – a sort of “epistemic sonic paradigm.”

- The vibratory ecosophy project is nothing less than an attempt to find a theoretical operating method that would be up to the level that sound, in fact, demands.
- Instead of, as we do today, collecting quantitative data and qualitative data separately, and attempting to cross connect them, my question is: Is it possible to relate sound to the world, and to hear/understand (same word in French) it in an organic fashion, as a dynamic integration of different modes of being in the world, understood in its intrinsic complexity.
- Every discipline needs to put its own tools and methodologies in place. In other words, there is not *one* method, but many, that are appropriate to the phenomena in question. Nevertheless, we might not that, in spite of everything, if we stay with the “sound ecology” versus “acoustic ecology” dichotomy, we remain victims of a vision that is surreptitiously tainted by a reductive positivism – a persistent dualism.

- It seems to me that a discipline that has been called by many names (which must be defined, and can be problematic) ought to seek out approaches and questions that are specific to it, that are intrinsic and determinant for the nature of sound and the sonic world.
- To understand what the sonic world has to tell us about landscape, we must first attempt to define landscape itself. Almo Farina has written that his is a subject of complexity, and that landscape cannot be defined with one single and unequivocal definition.
- There is a certain unanimity that the occidental concept of landscape, despite multiple facets and definitions, is primarily derived from the aesthetic domain, especially painting.
- According to Alain Roger and others, the development of a pictorial genre of landscape in the fifteenth century in Europe, gave us a vision of a structured whole, of an aesthetic contemplation, rather than a juxtaposition of separate visual elements. This is what created the landscape model, a model that owes much to the cultural codes of occidental civilisation.

- As Anne Cauquelin wrote in 2000, “it is today conceded that the idea of landscape and its perception comes from the presentation that was given it in occidental painting of the fifteenth century.”
- Augustin Berque asked, “Landscape – is it not that which is visible in the environment?” Berque considers that the landscape is a part of the territory that is *viewed* by humans. He thus prefers to centre his research on the notion of a “trajectorial” landscape, charged with overcoming the Cartesian dualism of subject/object. This seems to me to be necessary, even at the heart of our reflection.
- Hearing is a shared universe, shared between externalism and internalism – a common vibration, a resonance, in tune. One speak of compassion (from the latin : *cum patior*, « I suffer with » and Greek *συμπάθεια*, *sym patheia*, sympathy).

- Is the retinian dimension, which seems incontestably to have dominated our history, always the dominant in our conception of landscape? Is the concept of landscape exhausted with the “simple” vision that we have of a given territory?
- The European Landscape Convention (2000) defined landscape as “A part of the territory as perceived by populations, in which the character is the result of actions of nature and/or humans and their interrelations.” The term “perceive” plays a fundamental role. At first look, the historic a priori for the retinian would seem to no longer hold true, since “to perceive” means “to acquire knowledge through the senses” – plural.
- What meaning is really implied, from a cognitive and affective point of view, by the term “perceive?” What genre of experience does this suggest for we occidentals? What significance is implied by this “perception” of a given portion of the territory?

- Has our “screen civilization” – of which we get a real “glance” when we hear about the difficulties of visually impaired people to adapt – redrawn, or even erased, it retinian a prioris? For me, this remains an open question.
- We need to clarify the affective, perceptive, and conceptual status of the notion of perception, applied to landscape. For that, the notion of ecosophy can be useful.

Vibratory Ecosophy

- The concept of ecosophy came from Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess, who forged it in the early 1970's. The term was used again in 1989 by Felix Guattari, who shares with Naess the idea that we need a new “paradigm” that is at the same time epistemological, ethical, and aesthetic.
- I prefer this term as being more explicit than “ecology,” whose origins come from the notion of a “natural milieu” and is a word that has been emptied of meaning.
- Ecosophy, which calls in question a variety of ecologies – spiritual, social, and natural – sets us in a much larger sphere of reflection, at the centre of which is the relationship between nature and culture. This is more than a terminological debate – like the terms “acoustic ecology” and “sound ecology” these terms are symptomatic of different specific conceptions of the problem.

- This is not simply a question of euphony (“sound ecology” sounds “bad” in English, as does “*écologie acoustique*” in French). Above all, it’s about content. For my part, I think the reason why “sound ecology” has prevailed in France is related to the kinds of research the French have done on the subject – research that is anchored in the sound/space relationship in architecture and urban development.
- Albert Mayr recently recapitulated Barry Truax’s three analytical models:
 - *The Acoustic Environment* – “...envisages sound, and thus the acoustic environment, as a physical entity that can be studied and, more importantly, measured by the auditor.”
 - *Soundscape* – puts the auditor at the centre, and thus can be considered to be a subjective model.
 - *Acoustic Community* – of which Truax writes, “The approach that, to me, best allows the integration [of the first two models] is a communicative model, where acoustic communication is considered as a system in which one creates and exchanges information.”

- Clearly, Truax's central preoccupation is to find a way to identify common ground that can overcome the distinction, imposed by modernity, between objectivity and subjectivity.
- As I've previously stated, I believe both terms, "acoustic ecology" and "sound ecology" are unsatisfactory. Here's why.
- Beyond the already stated deficiency of the term "ecology," what is most important is that the notions of "acoustics" and "sound" speak directly to concepts of objectivity ("acoustics" – physical measurement of vibratory phenomena), and subjectivity ("sound" – as perceived). As previously stated, this is the dualist mode that we must overcome.

- The term “object” comes from scholastic Latin, “*objectum*,” – “that which is placed in front,” and “*objicere*” – “throw in front.” The term includes the “objective” from optics (a lens), a goal to be obtained, and an “impartial description.” It fits the retinian world perfectly, but is totally inadequate for the sonic universe, which is in the dimension of energy and time, and the ephemeral.
- The notion of “subject” comes from the same etymology (“*subjicere*”) and indicates the action of “placing below” or “putting underneath.”
- In short, the subject/object dichotomy drowns us in the *logothetical* essence of occidental thought, which “speaks of the world” by *observing it visually*, while radically – or even definitively – detaching the observer from the observed.

- The mechanistic Modernist paradigm is the ripest fruit of a discourse, constructed through retinian monosensoriality, that observes the “objective” behaviour of simple, inert objects. It was obviously a great accomplishment of thought, but one that takes a posture which is unadapted to the complexity of the world.
- Organic, complex thought is, by definition, polysensorial, multidimensional, and qualitative, and cannot be restricted by such a conception.
- Carmen Pardo has proposed the term “écou-logie.” As for me, I propose the notion of “vibratory ecosophy.”
- Vibration is both tactile and audio, visual and sensitive. It draws “objective” and “subjective” richness from the world of sounds. This term, as much physical as perceptual and affective, finds a significant ally in the holistic term, ecosophy.

- We know that semantic slips lead to slips in the real world. There is a clear rapport between sense and the senses, fundamental and founder, that ties the biological world to human autopoiesis.
- Biology and the life sciences have demonstrated that reflection about, and starting with, sound, can result in significant indications, and even models, from an ecosophical point of view. This should not allow us to forget the role that composers and musicians have historically played in raising consciousness about our sonic milieu, and the importance of sound for living beings.

- Aesthetic reflection has been the inspiration of much of the history of disciplines such as anthropology, ethnology, sociology, history, and many others.
- Transveral thinking, between an organic epistemology of complexity and an aesthetic paradigm, seems to require interdisciplinary, or even transdisciplinary work, as valuable for the natural sciences as it is for aesthetic disciplines and modes of expression.
- Now we must articulate the fields of investigation in a new approach, able to develop its own modes of questioning, emanating from, and produced by, the nature of sound and the sonic world.

Thank You