

Listening

When entering the city we face atmospheres of everyday situations and discover various types of auditory modes. „Depending on the situation in which we are involved, we configure the surrounding one way or another: we can hear or listen, eavesdrop or heed, prick up our ears, notice or remark...“ write Jean-Paul Thibaud, the researcher of the Centre for Research on Sonic Space & Urban Environment (Cresson) from Grenoble (Thibaud 2).

Sound theorist Barry Truax comments on the significance of hearing and sound in our society as follows: “For many people in contemporary society, sound and hearing are simply taken-for-granted phenomena of little special significance to daily life, except as they occur in the forms of oppressively loud noise or technological innovation, as in the latest in audio and computer technology“ (Truax xi). The question he analysed in his book “Acoustic Communication” and which is important to ask in the context of the acoustic dimension of the city is how does the complex system as one, which sound creates between the people and their environment function. Truax suggests to refer to communication models and to pay attention to the mode of listening: “Listening habits may be acutely sensitive or distractedly indifferent, both interpret the acoustic environment to the mind, one with active involvement, the other with passive detachment. Moreover, listening habits create a relationship between the individual and the environment, whether interactive and open-ended, or oppressive and alienating.“ (Truax xii). He explains the difference on the basis of the varying patterns of the communication in each single case.

The scientists of Cresson point out that depending on the situation we encounter, we anticipate our surrounding in the various ways: “we can hear or listen, eavesdrop or heed, prick up our ears, notice or remark...“ (Thibaud 2). Furthermore they underline the fact that the activities of soundlistening cannot be considered without the one of soundmaking. As a result of their research they suggest four issues toward a praxeology of sound environment (Thibaud 1-5):

1. Difficulty of considering all kinds of sounds
2. Acknowledging the pragmatic dimension of sound
3. Reintroducing sound-making in everyday life
4. Making a definition of a domain of research that fully recognizes ordinary practices of sound.

In his book “Zum Gehör” Jean Luc Nancy introduces his thinking on sound, sense, and subjectivity. Nancy analyses sound in relation to the human body, as well as the difference between listening / hearing and seeing. He writes in his philosophical agiation: »Dem Blick nach verweist sich das Subjekt auf sich selbst als Objekt. Dem Hören nach verweist, sendet sich das Subjekt gewissermaßen in sich selbst, in sich selbst zurück« (Nancy 18). Following Nancy, between the visual and conceptual exists a strong relationship, while the sound carries out the form, broadens and expands it. »Bis in sein Erlöschen hinein dauert das Visuelle an, während das klangliche bis in seine Dauer hinein erscheint und erlischt« (Nancy

10). Nancy argues that every sensorial order enfolds its simple nature as well as tense, intent and anxious condition. In terms of the auditive, he speaks about »vernehmen« and »zuhören«, »horchen« and »lauschen«. So »vernehmen« would mean to try to understand, to intent a specific sense, which is not immediatly accessible (Nancy 12-13). The philosopher emphasizes that listening reveals sound as a structure of resonance, which becomes the reference for the subject and its sense.

In order to discuss the question of sound and sense in my lecture I would like to give a short introduction into the work "Zum Gehör" of Jean Luc Nancy.

Triax, Barry. *Acoustic Communication*. New Jersey: Ablex Publishing Corporation, 1984.

Thibaud, Jean-Paul. „The Acoustic Embodiment of Social Practice.“ Conference paper. „Stockholm, hey Listen!“. Stockholm: The Royal Swedish Academy of Musik, 1998. 17-22.

Nancy, Jean-Luc. *Zum Gehör*. Zürich und Berlin: diaphanes, 2010