

Hear hear

An acoustemological manifesto

Sound is a powerful element of reality for most people and consequently an important topic for a number of scholarly disciplines. Currently, researchers from sociology, economics, politology, anthropology, media studies, musicology, architecture and aesthetic studies are thus focusing on concepts like *soundscape*s (Schafer 1977; 'environments of sound' or historico-geographical soundscapes) and *auditive culture* to explore such diverse phenomena as sound pollution, tinnitus, use of sound in media, product development, sales situations, recreation, fitness, torture, warfare, art, and music.

We regard this tendency as a major current within different theoretical movements in which reality is investigated as a 'world of sound' and experience as an 'experience through sound'. We therefore think it is necessary to develop an adequate and coherent *acoustemology* that can qualify a fundamental understanding of sound and acoustic practice. Following the music technologist Steven Feld, we view acoustemology as theory of the cognitive potential of sound/audibility. Acoustemology is an auditive cognitive theory/theory of knowledge or theory of what and how we experience through sound, through listening and other auditive practices – currently and historically, collectively and with respect to the individual human being, as well as in constant interaction with our other senses.

This fundamental research should both strengthen and offer an alternative to the visual paradigm that has dominated ideas of knowledge and perception since the Enlightenment. This paradigm primarily views meanings/significations as supported by signs. Sound's potential for meaning/signification cannot, however, be understood as supported by signs and fixed in a system that can be perceived outside the particular situation. Likewise, traditional research in acoustics, in which sound is studied as a physical phenomenon, has aimed at objectifying sound and a general perspective on sound, while the 'new' research initiatives outlined above are characterized by sound being investigated in situations in which the listening subject (mentally and physically) is always already inscribed. With this acoustemological project we wish to emphasise this starting point by accentuating a pragmatic or constructivist conception of sound. From the perspective of

acoustemology, sound is always situated, something that manifests itself to an experiencing subject. Sound is determined intentionally as something that resonates people: sounds both come from and penetrate bodies and consciousness. This ability to once assimilate, express and reflect sound is a basic human tool for orientation in the world.

We acknowledge the common assumption made by researchers that the auditive mode has made a comeback or become exaggerated as a general human mode of experience in tandem with the increased production of sound in industrial, communication and information society in late modernity, not least as a result of digitalisation. The studies of soundscapes that have resulted from this idea nevertheless lack the above-mentioned incorporation of listeners and sound producers. Furthermore, we believe that sound experiences and soundscapes or soundspaces, which are less geographically bound, must be understood as ways to listen oneself into place in the world, ways to give voice to and thus determine certain situations and certain conditions, ways to situate oneself acoustically. Studies of soundscapes offer new understandings of places and times, as these are always also constituted acoustically.

Contemporaneous cultural conditions demonstrate a particular need for acoustemology: with the current possibilities for reproducing, storing, manipulating and distributing sound offered by technology and media, a new orality or secondary orality (Ong, Lindhardt) has been made possible after the long predominance of the culture of writing. A theoretical reflection of this orality nevertheless requires greater understanding of the acoustic practices that (according to an anthropological understanding of culture) constitute the auditive cultures' systems of knowledge, identities, and norms in the new orality.

In the twentieth century, the distinction between sound and music has become blurred, as is evident in compositional music (Schaeffer, Stockhausen, Cage), in popular music (electronica, noise rock) and in film music and TV sound, so that it only makes sense to maintain actual distinctions between the two concepts in regard to institutions (e.g. in a definition of the music industry, music funding, the music profession etc). New Musicology has for instance attempted to expand the field of music from a musicological standpoint by accentuating music as a sonorous phenomenon – contrary to a traditional orientation toward the written notation of music. In contrast, we insist on basing our acoustemological project on sound. Music is part of sound, in that sound, music and aesthetics resonate together in an interdependent formation, as occurs in the practices of auditive culture. We therefore raise the question of whether music constitutes a specific kind of acoustic activity, and, if so, what this says about auditive culture.

The distintegration of the borderline between sound and music is also evident in contemporary art and in *sound art*, which is becoming increasingly important in the art world. We see this preoccupation with sound in the art institution as one way of accepting, dealing with and understanding the growing pervasiveness of sound in society. This acceptance takes place partly through an expansion of the limits of the aesthetics of sound, and partly through an aesthetic-artistic examination of ourselves as listeners and as producers of or as acting with sound. This aesthetically based modelling of our perception and reception experiments with how we cope with sound inside and outside art, and this acoustic aestheticization can be regarded as a possible survival strategy in late modern knowledge and experience society.

Although we study sound from the perspectives of a number of scholarly disciplines and focus on different themes (from tinnitus to product development), it is our goal to present a coherent perspective on this entire field through acoustemology. Acoustemology is an inclusive field in an interdisciplinary sense, while at the same time the fundamental interest in sound and cognitive theory of listening gives rise to a number of questions that reach into more specific individual scientific disciplines and empirically oriented studies:

- What is the experiential framework of listening and auditive culture, how is the world constituted (identity, locality, sociality, culture etc) through acoustic practice?
- What can we know, i.e., which types of knowledge, identity and meaning are made possible through acoustic practice – are there any limits to sound taken as an experiential framework and as cognition?
- What is an acoustic experience? Can it be described? And if so, how?
- What is the correlation between listening and other sensory modalities, the body, sociality, materiality, technology and media – sound taken as a cognitive paradigm isolated removed from actual resonating sound (writing, image etc)
- How can the historical processes of change undergone by auditive cultures and soundscapes (soundspaces) be described?

- In what sense does acoustic practice appear to be conventional or normative? How does acoustic practice, in connection with other sensory modalities, open up to articulations of value, aesthetics, ethics and morals in culture?
- How can transgressions of traditional distinctions between sound, music and art be understood in relation to auditive culture in a social perspective?

These (and other) questions must be investigated and reflected on if acoustemology is going to be able outline a coherent and adequate conceptual framework that can develop and qualify the already established interdisciplinary research field. Acoustemology should above all appear adequate in relation to the negotiations that we think will result from the currently increasingly attention to sound and listening in a wide range of areas: noise pollution and work environments, the use of sound for the purpose of sales and behaviour regulation (recreation, terror) will create an increasing need for a fundamental and more comprehensive understanding of acoustic practice, and qualifying a process like this is an important task of acoustemology.

Concrete acoustemological research projects are outlined below.

Mediated acoustemology

This project will examine the role played by media and their different *mediacy* in acoustic experience and knowledge. In this connection it will be relevant to consider the concept of *mobility*, both as physical mobility with the new media technologies and as the mobility of digitalised sound between media. Another perspective on this issue will be the thesis that the emotional is ‘medialized’ via the media’s musico-acoustic staging.

Sound as mediality

Sound as an expressive dimension is found in several forms of expression: advertisements, film, speech, music etc. The study of this dimension requires knowledge of sound that goes beyond ‘Musicology’ in a narrow sense. At the same time, the very field of art from which musicology developed concerns sound in the sense of *mediality*. To qualify this knowledge of sound, this project explores how sound constitutes its own specific cultural potential for meaning

Acoustic discourses: Remarks on the forms of ontology and knowledge of sound and listening

By exploring the phenomenon of acoustic discourse, this project seeks to qualify the discursification that follows the current awareness of sound and acoustic experiences. Reflecting on, exchanging and evaluating acoustic phenomena involves different acoustic discourses, while at the same time these illustrate positions and power struggles within auditive culture. In addition to studying these, this project will discuss sound and listening in respect to sound designers and music producers, among others.

That sound of music! Culturally constituting and coping with sound as music

The aim of this project is to make use of acoustic theory/acoustemology to inquire into how the discrete Western concept of 'music' is constituted and coped with as a distinct phenomenon of auditive culture. How do we distinguish between and give meaning to sound as music and music as sound in contemporary and historical contexts of production and use? And why?

Sound and contemporary art: sound at the museum

Whereas politicians might attempt to limit escalating social problems with sound/noise, this project will explore our possibility to cope aesthetically with society's unlimited sound (soundscapes). In contemporary art, sound is being explored as artistic material in distinctive ways. It is the aim of this project to analyse and theorise about the expansion of the limits of sound aesthetics in artistic-aesthetic practice and in the way audiences experience and act in relation to sound, in particular in respect to the way museum guests interact with sound at museums.

Desire, sound and food

This project will explore the acoustic staging of food and meals in a broad sense. Along with other senses, sound contributes to transforming our experience of food, and it can also serve as a substitute for other senses. This can be observed, for instance, in food programmes on TV, where the sound track is not only detected by our sense of hearing, but also becomes part of a cross-sensory interaction (synaesthesia). Sound is thus a critical mediator in the aestheticization of everyday life.