

En Pausa - Prefacio

Reflexión - JL Maire

In a forest in the Lazio region, researchers analyzed sonograms collected from recordings of the choral singing of birds of different species. At dawn and at dusk, the songs of finches, kinglets, nuthatches, chickadees, and woodpeckers all share the same frequency field, and the singers adjust their performances so as not to produce cacophony. The fact that the birds overlap their songs, which could be avoided by singing when the others are silent, demonstrates a listening and interpretation coordination learned over a long period of time. The collective singing, which spreads out as if it were a score of relays and repetitions, is also a sonic expression of relations of vicinity and collective listening. As Vinciane Despret explains, the territory created by this polyphony creates modes of attention to one's own song and to others', and becomes an animated, lively, and inhabited space. The bird communities in these woods live with a specific and different mode of listening that is redefined every day, but learnt collaboratively. Listening implies a medium for sound to resonate and an attention that responds to this resonance.

So how can we talk about this activity that we call listening, as distinct from simply hearing? Our ways of listening, or types of listening, the terms that we use when referring to this sense, and the set of (culturally formed) bodily and sensory dispositions that we adopt in this practice have developed in parallel to our own cultural tradition and to the creation of sound technologies.

To think about listening is, for this reason, not to forget the diversity of ways of listening described by ethnomusicology, each of them modulated in a given historical context and directed to specific sound and musical practices. We can thus talk, among others, about the weary and exhausted listening of the performers and listeners of the traditional al-Ghina al-San'ani songs of Yemen; the melancholic listening of the neyzen (ney performers of Turkey), in which the music can be defined as the spiritual relationship between two notes, and in which to listen is to accept the pain of separation as a means of annulling the self; the abyssal and inaudible listening of the Apùap/kamyurá, the Shipibo-konibo or the Kísêdjê/Suyá, among many other Amazonian communities, for whom certain ritual musics essential to the community are transmitted by animals, plants or ancestors; or the corporeally and mentally transformative listening (bhāva) when directed to a feeling or emotion (rasa) in the context of traditional Hindustani music.

In our tradition of thought there's a specific form of listening called "the art of listening", which constitutes the support and maintenance of Western musical aesthetics. It emerged at the end of the eighteenth century in Europe and was gradually implemented in concert halls and tested in the emerging home environment of the bourgeoisie. It meant (and still means) a mode of listening that attempted to seek full attention, the elimination of any distraction, and to submerge the listener in inner communion with the work. Educated and instructed for this purpose, the listener would use all his cognitive and emotional capacities to understand, reduce, and structure a work offered, moreover, as the intention of a composer; all the while, he should silence any bodily reaction or social interaction. The "art of listening" was aesthetically linked to an idea of music as immateriality, a monosensorial and introverted

activity. The listener, in short, had to be ever ready to exercise abstraction and objectification.

But attentive listening to a sound or a musical manifestation is not a narrow exercise of objectification, as intended in this modality, nor does it have anything to do with calculation or with an attitude of the subject directed towards judging and unraveling a sound body. Listening is fundamentally unrepeatable, or, as Jean-Luc Nancy reminds us, it is essentially without guarantee, it tends towards a possible meaning, not towards that which it is about to mean, but rather towards that which violates signification.

For this reason, listening, far from being monosensorial, always surpasses the register of auditory perception. The idea of a sound body that only spreads when emitting a sound does not account for its extension in vibrations, those of the sound body that relate it to itself and put it out of itself. As Michel Chion indicates, music/sound covibrates with us. The resonance is, then, simultaneously that of the resonating sound body and that of our body (hearer and hearing) which cannot stop listening. The subject that is constituted in listening is a subject that emerges from this resonance, and not one that stays, silently, in one's own immediacy. It is a subject that resonates or a resonant subject.

This concept of resonance allows questioning those aesthetic theories that set music in the realm of the immaterial, given that sound matter does not cease to persist in its materiality: it is voluminous and it fills space. The binary structure of the materiality of things and the immateriality of signs (fundamental in modern occidental thought) is then dissolved, according to Veit Erlmann's texts, thanks to this notion of resonance. It would be a matter, then, of conceiving listening as something simultaneous between a "self" (with all the chains of memories, knowledge, sensations) and "a world" (the place of resonance), both agreeing in the resonance of each other (like the tuning, unstable sometimes, of two sympathetic strings).

Some of the sound practices of the 20th century and many of the contemporary ones could be described as an effort to recover something like resonant listening, where resonance and space, collective listening, and physicality are given special attention and care. This is the case of composer Pauline Oliveros' deep listening, which seeks to amplify our attention by questioning what we hear and the way in which we hear it, through a practice which also consists of not rejecting what bothers us or what seems to us irrelevant from a sonic point of view. A path, thus, in which with every step we guide our listening to the inclusion of everything that happens in our sound space.

Other sound practices can be read as attempts to recover emotion for listening. Not an emotion in the "emotional" sense of psychology, but in the sense that shows the way in which the subjectivity of the subject is put into question: a way to keep losing ground or to stand above the emptiness.

From this point, arises the possibility of inhabiting the space that opens up through listening. In the concerts of Swiss composer and clarinetist Jürg Frey, for example, the performer finds himself in extreme listening attention—he is also a listener himself in a state of "permeability". This is not what we usually call an interpretation, but the possibility of

experiencing a "here I am", I am alive with sound and I decide to stay so and to engage with what is happening.

To engage means to be willing to be moved by music/sound. In traditional Sufi music, the word tarab denotes a meaning related to "commotion" and, by extension, to musical vibration and emotion. To be moved by the space that is left by music/sound is not the same as to simply being carried away for its duration. It is to occupy that space, to listen in order to set places free (a space, as in the music of the Wandelweiser collective, where listeners can find their own time). In short, a place and a time in which there can be a community. This word, community, is part of a large number of musical collectives that were created since the 60s and 70s, but it appears time and again reinforced in the speech of some contemporary performers and composers. In them, listening is the constantly formulated and reformulated medium where a community could possibly emerge from. The recording titled *The Tamburas of Pandit Pran Nath* by La Monte Young and Marian Zazeela, published in the late 90s and recently reissued, not only shows the unrepeatable exercise of tuning, but the opportunity to enter a community of listening learned and transmitted over centuries. A community of listening, in this sense, does not have an origin to go back to, nor an ending to be forever suspended in: it names the place of resonance where one is no longer identical to oneself, where one is exposed to music/sound, where there emerges the other that can be listened to.