

FORMS OF FUTURE COEXISTENCE TOWARDS A MULTI-SPECIES SONIC ECOLOGY

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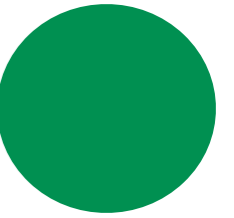
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FORMS OF FUTURE COEXISTENCE TOWARDS A MULTI-SPECIES SONIC ECOLOGY

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1. HOW TO LIVE A WORLD OF SUONDS TOGETHER
2. AFFECTS, ATMOSPHERES, AND AFFECTIVE ATMOSPHERES
3. LISTENING AS ATTUNING TO AFFECTIVE ATMOSPHERES
4. ATTUNEMENT AS URBAN POLICY ANALYSIS AND DESIGN TOOL





1. HOW TO LIVE A WORLD OF SUONDS TOGETHER

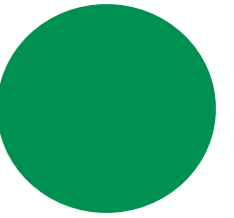
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How do we imagine a multi-species future coexistence?
What's the role of sounds and listening?

Going beyond anthropocentrism, I will discuss how to give prominence to the voices, cries and sounds emerging from the relationship between humans, non-humans and matter in order to outline the political possibility of a sonic ecology to come.

I start with the ISO definition of Soundscape, as it reflects the centrality of human experience, which I'm trying to challenge throughout this presentation.

Soundscape: "acoustic environment as perceived or experienced and/or understood by a person or people, in context" ISO 12913-1:2014



1. HOW TO LIVE A WORLD OF SUONDS TOGETHER

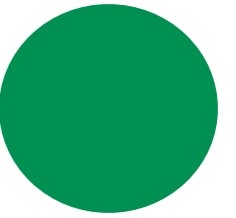
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Schafer's definition of acoustic ecology

"Ecology is the study of the relationship between living organisms and their environment. Acoustic ecology is therefore the study of sounds in relationship to **life** and **society**." (Schafer, 1977).

Sonic ecology has been later defined as "the interaction between the physical sound environment, the sound milieu of a socio-cultural community and the 'internal soundscape' of every individual." (Augoyard and Torgue, 2005)

Cobussen claims for "alternative ways of interaction between the environment, the human body and sound"; he points out that "the track towards a new sonic ecology is simultaneously a track towards a new social, political and ethical milieu" (Cobussen, 2016)



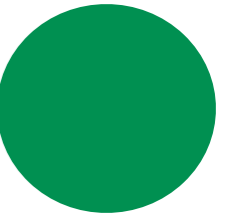
1. HOW TO LIVE A WORLD OF SUONDS TOGETHER

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Acknowledging the agency of non-humans and matter, Jane Bennett takes into account the “vitality of (non-human) bodies”

“By “vitality” I mean the capacity of things –edibles, commodities, storms, metals– not only to impede or block the will and designs of humans but also to **act as quasi agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own.**” (Bennett, 2010: viii, preface)

Following this perspective – which is also informed by non-representational theory and new materialism – urban ecologies are the result of “**complex material systems**’ in which the human body connects with other nonhuman bodies, such as architecture, artwork, traffic flows, infrastructure, etc.” (Groth and Samson 2013: 100)



1. HOW TO LIVE A WORLD OF SUONDS TOGETHER

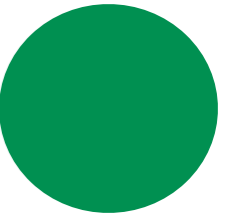
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Why this matters for a discussion on future sonic ecologies:

- Because we need to acknowledge that **sounds have agency** themselves
- Because sounds, as **connecting factors**, can foster multi-species “communication”

A sonic ecology attentive to the vitality of bodies (humans, non-humans, matter) needs to consider sounds and vibrations not just as passively part of the interaction between bodies, but also their agency, as they actively influence other bodies, their movements and “feelings”.

“Sound does not just connect things; it changes them.” (Kanngieser, 2015: 81)



1. HOW TO LIVE A WORLD OF SUONDS TOGETHER

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A discussion on multi-species sonic ecology needs to prioritize:

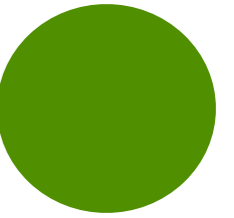
- (i) The “place” where “complex material systems” interact
 - > urban sonic atmosphere

- (ii) The “object” of interaction, that is how sonic and vibrational agencies act
 - > sounds and vibrations as affects

- (iii) The “tool” that potentially enables the interaction between bodies
 - > listening as attuning to affective atmosphere

- (iv) The “political demands” of each body of the “complex material system”
 - > political perspectives of a multi-species sonic ecology





2. AFFECTS, ATMOSPHERES, AND AFFECTIVE ATMOSPHERES

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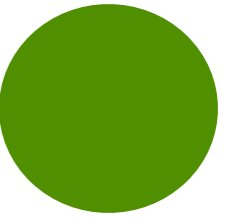
A first definition of atmosphere

“atmosphere as a concept and experience of the **in-betweenness of subject and object** in which the emotional and sensory experience are central.” (Bille, Bjerregaard and Sørensen, 2015: 32)

From atmosphere to affect

“from a theoretical point of view the notion of **ambiance** is not fundamentally different from the notion of atmosphere [...] It seems to be just a question of stressing particular aspects of subject-object relationships” (Thibaud, 2015: 40)

“**ambiance** tends to emphasize more the situated, the built and the social dimensions of sensory experience while **atmosphere is more affective**, aerial and political oriented.” (Thibaud, 2015: 40)



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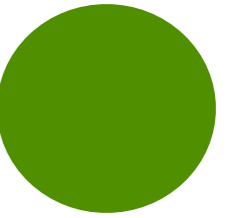
(ii)

From affect to sound – sound as affect

“Thus, affect is more than feeling or emotion. It is better thought of as forces that impinge on bodies, which may or may not be felt.

Sound, as physical vibration, is affective [...] It acts contagiously to modulate a dance floor, to repel bodies from alarms and sirens, or to innervate a wave of response during a vivid filmic scene.

The affective aspect of sound comes precisely from the relations, exchanges and movements between bodies and environments.” (Gallagher, Kanngieser and Prior, 2016: 8).



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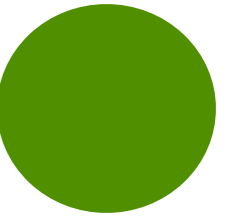
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(ii)

Sound plays a key role in shaping an affective atmosphere.

The centrality of sounds in shaping people's everyday experience introduces the notions of **affective atmosphere** as a product of the interaction and mutual influence between bodies (humans, non-humans, and matter).

“Affective atmospheres are a class of experience that occur before and alongside the formation of subjectivity, across human and non-human materialities, and in-between subject/object distinctions [...] As such, **atmospheres are the shared ground from which subjective states and their attendant feelings and emotions emerge.**” (Anderson, 2009: 78)



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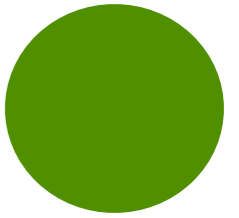
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Affective atmospheres and urban sonic ecology – towards “more porous forms of urban sentience”

“The intensity of affective atmospheres, and their socio-spatial capacities, moves our focus from the bounded human subject towards more porous forms of urban sentience. We contend with shifting constellations of affective subjectivities moving between the single and the multiple, and from the human to other forms of life and materiality.” (Gandy, 2017: 369)

Affective atmosphere and multi-species ecologies

“For the affective study of cities, the indication is a post-anthropocentric way of thinking about place as not only as fluid or in flux but also as expressive of material agency.” (Buser, 2014: 235)



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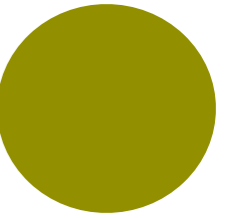
Considering urban sonic ecologies as deeply related to affective atmospheres, how affective atmosphere operates throughout humans' everyday life?

“Questions of security, entertainment and comfort thus converge into a single focus: **urban management** is no longer simply a matter of either disciplinary training or governmental subjection, but more precisely a matter of **engineering safe, comforting and entertaining atmospheres**” (Brighenti and Pavoni, 2017: 10)

For whom urban atmospheres are designed to be safe, comforting and entertaining? For which species? And among humans, for which social groups?

This lead us to reflect on the human-centered engineering of atmosphere through sound and vibrations, and among humans, on the centrality given to the most privileged, to those bodies who can afford to be exposed to safe and “undisturbed” environments.





3. LISTENING AS ATTUNING TO AFFECTIVE ATMOSPHERES

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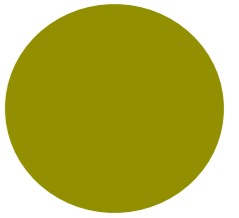
A multi-species sonic ecology invites to **experiment new forms of interaction between bodies.**

Giving that sounds and vibrations have agency and are connecting factors between bodies, they can enable an effective multi-species interaction. How to achieve such interaction?

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I explore the possibility of **listening as a form of attunement to affective atmosphere**

What is attunement? Attuning to what? And how?

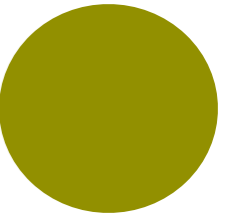


3. LISTENING AS ATTUNING TO AFFECTIVE ATMOSPHERES

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An overview of the notion of attunement

- According to Kant's philosophy > "attunement refers to a harmonious, free, **playful traversal across difference.**" (Brigstocke and Noorani, 2016: 2)
- From post-Kantian and Heidegger's view > "attunement is something like a **preconscious affect, mood, feeling, or atmosphere:** a form of joy, contentedness, bliss, sadness, melancholy, or anger that orients us in particular ways but does not raise itself into awareness." (2)
- According to Kathleen Stewart (2011) > "atmospheric attunements are a process of what Heidegger (1962) called worlding – **an intimate, compositional process of dwelling in spaces that bears, gestures, gestates, worlds.**" (445)

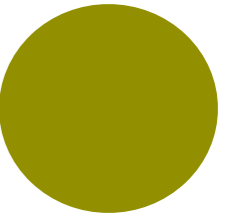


3. LISTENING AS ATTUNING TO AFFECTIVE ATMOSPHERES

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An overview of the notion of attunement

- From humanist psychology's literature > "Attunements are **embodied ways of tracking emotions or affects.**" (Brigstocke and Noorani, 2016: 2)
- This tradition has been further developed by researchers arguing that > "The **primary mode of communication between human and animal** is attunement, the mutual picking up of, and responding to, the subjective state of another creature" (Lasher, 1998: 130).



3. LISTENING AS ATTUNING TO AFFECTIVE ATMOSPHERES

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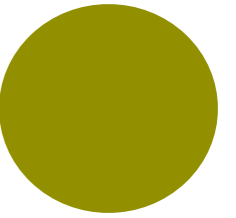
Brigstocke and Noorani (2016) advance the concept of Posthuman Attunements through creative listening > **“The concept of attunement speaks to subtle, affective modulations in the relations between different bodies.”** (1)

The authors question how to find forms of creative listening to **“new kinds of voices, including more-than-human life and forms of material agency”** (2)

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“What happens when we attempt to attune ourselves to forms of agency that do not possess a conventionally recognized voice to be amplified?” (1)

“What new intersections among research, invention, and political agency might emerge when voices have to be assembled rather than merely amplified, and when new methods of listening need to be invented?” (1)



3. LISTENING AS ATTUNING TO AFFECTIVE ATMOSPHERES

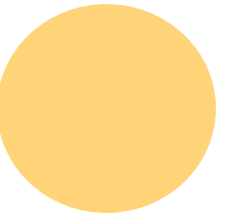
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Listening as attuning, by revealing the affective relation between bodies, can meaningfully drive a multi-species sonic ecology as a deeply political ecology.

“By using sound to explore political relations, matter might be brought into contact with ideology in ways that do not try to make them fit, or so that one might negate the other. Rather, it becomes possible to see how those political relations can help to **build new and creative terrains for human and more-than-human negotiations.**” (Kanngieser, 2015: 84)

“the politics and practices of forms of creative listening to more-than-human life and material agency [...] question **how nonhuman actors can make authoritative demands for human ethical and political response.**” (Brigstocke and Noorani, 2016: 2)

“**How would political responses to public problems change were we to take seriously the vitality of (nonhuman) bodies?**” (Bennett, 2010: viii)





4. ATTUNEMENT AS URBAN POLICY ANALYSIS AND DESIGN TOOL

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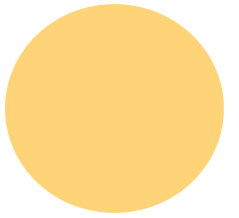
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What are the political perspectives of a multi-species sonic ecology?

Approaching the “political demands” of each body of the “complex material system” – building creative forms of more-than-human negotiations – what needs to be challenged here is **who and what deserves attention in the political discourse.**

As humans, what we can do is not waiting for other bodies to speak out for their rights, rather to attune to those bodies and reframe accordingly our political agenda.

This is why listening-as-attunement to more-than-human bodies need to enter the urban planning and policy design debate.



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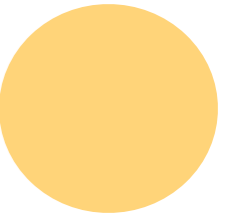
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In his “Listening: The social policy of everyday life”, Forester (1989) defines “critical” or “attentive” **listening as the ground for the building of relationships** – the exercise of empathy. Yet, these relationships are normally described as human-to-human (planner-to-citizen).

Speculating on the crucial difference between “hearing” as a passive act and “listening” as an active and political practice, Forester claims that:

“We cannot listen either to machines or to a chaos of noise, though we can hear both too well. To be able to listen, we must respect the life of the person speaking; without that we have only prejudice, stereotype, the racism and sexism that deny the lives of others – and we have no possibility of building a common world.” (117)

Claiming with Forester that “developing the ability to listen critically is a political necessity” (118), I consider the possibility of listening as an act of attunement to more-than-human bodies > **we can** listen to “machines or to a chaos of noise”



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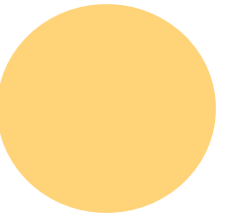
Attuning to what? Where to start?

I focus on the political possibility of **attuning to disturbing sounds and vibrations** as to enable a critical conversation on multi-species sonic ecology

Disturbing sounds do not necessarily exceed noise regulations, they rather refer to **unpleasant events and affective situations resulting uncanny, unhomely, unfamiliar.**

“Sound is not just about hearing and responding, or communicating. It is about **becoming aware of registers that are unfamiliar, inaccessible,** and maybe even monstrous; registers that are wholly indifferent to the play of human drama.” (Kanngieser, 2015: 81)

Trying to attune to a loud HVAC system we can ask: Why this is disturbing to me? For whom is it (if it is) disturbing other than me (human, non-human, matter)?



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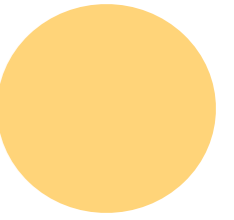
Why starting from disturbance?

Because it brings to the fore the political: it sets the stage for a **radical sonic coexistence** between human and more-than-human bodies.

By critically listening to disturbing sounds – exposing to disturbing atmospheres – humans are invited to acknowledge **sounds' cultural and affective impact** and are therefore encouraged to attune to otherness: to the unfamiliar, the uncanny.

A political multi-species sonic ecology **does not lead to a passive acceptance** of bodies' sonic expressions, rather it addresses **critical encounters** between bodies, aiming for a “critical and creative togetherness” (LaBelle, 2018: 5).

“The possibility of a **politics of sound** is the possibility of a **politics of the incomplete, the unfamiliar**, the unrecognizable and the unheard” (Voegelin, 2018: 35)



4. ATTUNEMENT AS URBAN POLICY ANALYSIS AND DESIGN TOOL

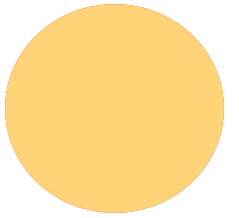
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Disturbing sounds and vibrations are central in a political multi-species sonic ecology because they **challenge the unspoken rules of social coexistence**, what Vannini et al. (2010) have described as the “sonic order”: an order to which humans align sonically through “sound acts”.

“An aligning sound act is a joint act that enables participants to order their soundscapes and **restore somatic order.**” (344)

How the sound-related unspoken rules of social coexistence (the sonic order) **frame the political agenda?** How to **reframe those rules by attuning** to disturbing bodies/sounds?

“No single standard for assessing disturbance is possible; disturbance matters in relation to how we live. This means **we need to pay attention to the assessments through which we know disturbance.**” (Tsing, 2015: 161)



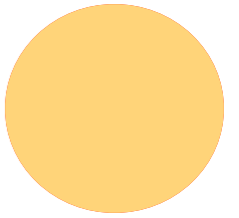
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Listening as attuning-to-disturbance can encourage an inclusive approach to urban policy analysis and design. Following this line, **listening becomes a training ground for the political imagination**

Attuning to sounds and vibrations (to affective atmospheres) that disturb the “sonic order”, we can **challenge the logic underpinning urban policy analysis and design** and accordingly include in the political discourse other bodies’ “voices”

“By using sound to explore political relations, matter might be brought into contact with ideology in ways that do not try to make them fit, or so that one might negate the other. Rather, it becomes possible to see how those political relations can help to build new and creative terrains for human and more-than-human negotiations.” (Kanngieser, 2015: 84)



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Forms of attunement.

“Singing in a silent spring: Birds respond to a half-century soundscape reversion during the COVID-19 shutdown” (Derryberry et al. 2020)

“Derryberry et al. found that **the reduction in traffic sound** in the San Francisco Bay Area of California to levels not seen for half a century **led to a shift in song frequency in white-crowned sparrows** (see the Perspective by Halfwerk). This shift was especially notable because **the frequency of human-produced traffic noise occurs within a range that interferes with the highest performance and most effective song**. Thus, our “quiet” allowed the birds to quickly fill the most effective song space.” (575)

What is the political demand of birds in such a context? How to negotiate our coexistence through more sensitive planning and policy design tools?



Thank you!

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