



UNESCO MÜZİK ŞEHİRİ KIRŞEHİR ULUSLARARASI MÜZİK SEMPOZYUMU

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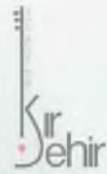
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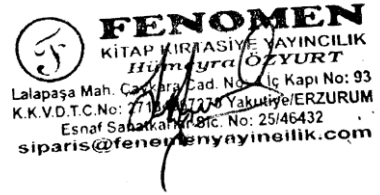
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1. Yabancı dilde yayınlanan eserler

MUSIC CULTURE AND URBAN LIFE. BUILD AND INHABIT THE CITY FROM THE SOUND

Müzik Kültürü ve Kent Hayatı. Şehri Ses ile İnşa Et ve Yaşa

Javier Ares Yebra

ABSTRACT

The experience of art always comes with a utopian tension. The source of this tension is the binary dimension of artistic work: while reflecting on the world, it also speaks to us about non-actualized possibilities. In the case of music, its degree of abstraction, multiple textualities, and the indefinite nature of sound itself, favor the construction of a thought based on what reality could be, and not so much about what it is. Listening to music allows us to open and access possible worlds in everyday life.

From a critical perspective which begins with the assessment of existing societies in general as unsustainable community models, this text explores the functions and creative possibilities of music and acoustic signals in various contexts of the city. To do this, an interpretation of reality as a plurality of worlds and sound cultures is proposed. In this sense, listening emerges as an act of creation and, at the same time, of ethical-political, plural, and participatory commitment, which decisively influences how we build communities and inhabit our space-time reality. Thus, the ways of listening and inhabiting combine as transformative actions from which to reconfigure the sound as a commonplace and, with it, open new horizons in everyday life.

Keywords: Music, Sound, City, Culture, Identity, Technology.

INTRODUCTION

Some data from a 2018 report prepared by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, reveal that:

55% of the world's population live in cities, and this number is expected to increase in the coming years, up to 68% in 2050.

The urban population has increased exponentially: from 750 million people in 1950 to 4.200 in 2018.

There are 43 “mega cities” in the world more than 10 million population. At the head is Tokyo, with more than 37 million people (Istanbul, for example, has currently around 15 million).

Without considering different works, origins, or research fields, we can deduce that communication and demography will be essential in the coming

years. We have multiple and powerful reasons to rethink sound and music, but we also do listen as an action in a deep sense: international conflicts, migratory flows, climate change, the crisis of the productive model, among others. It is necessary and urgent to consider these elements as part of a political agenda, to build and define common places, transform relationships and everyday spaces.

In a context saturated with acoustic signals, alarms, jingles, ringtones, sound claims or brand songs, in which the reproduction of music at any time and place is already a global phenomenon, the intellectual challenge of thinking today about sound has markedly intensified. In response to this massive diffusion, which indicates a tendency or need to fill the entire space with sounds, with no place for silence, the experience of sound is a fundamental element of mediation in the processes of communication and construction of identities (cultural, personal, gender, national, etc.).

In this text, I propose to analyze the capacity of sound and music to influence urban ways of living and the construction of sustainable spaces and communities. This involves our understanding of reality as a plurality of sound and music cultures. I intend to explore the functions and creative possibilities of music and acoustic signals in several contexts of the city, showing how music, sound, and silence, allow us to open processes and configuration codes in the space.

I will make an approach to the role that sound plays and the general presence of music in everyday life. The focus on everyday life has led to the opening of new perspectives on social reality with its own nuances from various fields, among which historical research stands out: from the articulation of everyday life as “private life” in Georges Duby (1987), to the “practice” of everyday life in Michel de Certeau (1984), among others. Nowadays, time of crisis, uncertainties, discontinuities and uprooting, the emphasis on everyday life can be interpreted as a response to the need to give some meaning to the world and to the experience of an increasingly accelerated time. In this text, the concept-framework of everyday life is proposed to refer to the space-time reconfiguration that marks the event from what we usually call “day by day”.

On the other hand, I will distinguish *sound*, a particular way of narrating the world, from *sonority*, the set of forms and modes from which the sound is configured. Likewise, instead of thinking about what music does to us, I propose to explore what we do with music and how we use acoustic signals to

elaborate meaningful discourses, adopting an anthropological perspective that helps us to approach its uses and functions.

Of course, I do not intend to exhaust the methodological discussion and the different theoretical problems that this orientation raises in these pages. Although written text somehow already includes the experience of sound and constitutes a form of recording of reality before the invention of the first means of sound recording and reproduction, it causes an “eclipse effect” on sound, the spoken word, based on the fact that it is written as a representation of graphic speech through signs. Therefore, I do not aspire to “leave something resolved”. I will try to expose some of the functions that music and sound fulfill in the framework of current societies. To this end, I propose some key actions to interpret the sound of everyday life: listen and inhabit.

What reason (psychological, anthropological) leads us to repeatedly listen to a piece of music? What –and how many– actions do we carry out today while “listening to” music? (Is this musical time monochronic or polychronic?). By reproducing melodies in very different circumstances and scenarios, we become part of every situation. With the *uses* of music I will refer to the different ways in which it is used, to the exercise or habitual practice of it. And I will understand by *functions* the reasons for these uses, the broader purposes they serve.

Precisely due to the multiplicity of reasons to consider (historical, cultural, anthropological, or social, to name a few), it is especially complex to analyze the functions of music today. It is not the object of this work to carry out an exhaustive taxonomy, anyway, I will highlight the communicative function of sound as an element of self-identification and the development of music as a sound discourse.

Whether or not it is a true universal, this function of music has gained importance with the blurring of cultural boundaries and the need to defend them. Perhaps the twentieth century is particular in many ways. The possibilities of communication between cultural groups are increased – communication is virtually imposed. The fact that most people can no longer conveniently display their uniqueness through dress, social structure, material culture, or even through location, language, or religion, has expanded the role of music as distinctive ethnicity. Cultural units, nations, minorities, even age groups, social classes and educational strata, all identify themselves through their adherence to specific repertoires and styles of music. While other means of identification have become less effective, music is becoming more and more accentuated. (Nettl, 1985: 165).

Does the constant overexposure to sound –whether deliberate or not– have some kind of relationship with the desire to print an audible meaning to the experience of everyday life? In this regard, Mar Augé states that what is new is not that the world does not have, or has little, or less meaning, but that we explicitly and intensely experience the daily need to give it some (1995). What role does music play in responding to that need? In relation to the relevance of its communicative function, does it denote a change in the anthropological assessment of the musical phenomenon or, rather, does it have to do with a reconfiguration of the entire life of societies subject to an accumulation of spectacles (Debord, 1994)?

While this accumulation enhances the communicative function of music and acoustic signals, space-time reconstruction is perceived as a feature of “modern” life. For Peter Conrad, modernity has to do with the acceleration of time, while Thomas H. Eriksen directly argues that modernity is speed (both cited in Rosa, 2010). Paradigms of modern times, speed, and acceleration influence the emergence of new forms of musical reception and “consumption”, since they decisively affect cognitive processes and, in particular, how we perceive time (Wajcman, 2016).

From social relations to communications, technology, or production, all areas of daily life are affected by or subjected to acceleration. Societies speed up, and waiting time –one of the modern forms of time– increases with daily habits. When we wait, we make time, not space. The space of that waiting refers to those *non-places* (Augé, 1995) in which we “make” that time, where the possibilities of active listening are reduced to the moments that remain an action or task already carried out and another that is to be done. The increase in anonymous, waiting, or passing spaces, responds to the measures of those times and, ultimately, to the demands of a fast-paced world.

In addition to valuing the increase of music in everyday life as a characteristic of current societies (Rosa, 2010), it is pertinent to address the musical phenomenon as a “constellation of mediations” (Born, 2011). Where is a musical work? Where does the music exist? From its mediated nature, I propose the notion of *multiple instances* to refer to its different simultaneous forms: the idea of the composer, the score (notation), the concert (performance), the recording (re-production), the context, and the perception by the listener (listening). So, reading the phenomenon of music as a constellation of mediations is to examine music via its multiple “texts”. From this point of view, with its different instances, music is nothing more than pure

mediation. In this sense, musical traditions and cultures are reconstructed precisely from these mediations (Ares Yebra, 2020: 35).

On the other hand, I assume that music and technology are present in the imagination of all social groups, regardless of access and the type of use (elemental or sophisticated). From there, I suggest that in order to understand the uses of music, it is necessary to analyze the uses of communication technologies, since the former is fundamentally replicated through the latter. Therefore, sound production, recording, and reproduction systems are determining aspects of the processes of mediation, reception, and musical communication (Born, 2005). In turn, sound studies must follow the contributions made by other fields, such as technology or communication, to articulate and refine their own perspective in dialogue, and not in a separate form (Sterne, 2012). In this way, sound arts and technologies are combined as fundamental phenomena of current cultures and societies.

The massive use of digital communication systems has given rise to a kind of arthritis of social relations, particularly perceptible in the exercise of “self-resonant” individualism that characterizes anonymous confluence spaces of waiting individuals, especially the ones in transit. The proliferation of these spaces has to do with a transformation of life experiences and daily itineraries mediated by new technological devices, such as headphones, which amplify the tendency to be alone and distance ourselves from, what I will call, the “world-environment” which is promoting a more visual than the verbal type of interaction by allowing us to move from the public to the private sphere. Thus, sound experiences are increasingly linked to a configuration that favors “self-resonance”. Individuals progressively isolate themselves from what is close, what is physically close, and their resonance with what is around them weakens. The landscape seems to fade. Speed and acceleration are also imposed on transportation, displacement, and trajectories, making difficult to preserve the geographical references, and jeopardizing the maximum peripatetic of *method is the path*.

Self-resonance, defined as vibration and self-folding, reproduces an excessively individualistic way of being in the world as a consequence of the growing hostility of the environment, acceleration, noise, and musical hyper-reproducibility, which permanently flood the spaces.

Musical cultures reveal their importance in the construction of identities, and encourage the configuration of a transnational network of relationships and meanings. In this way, the meaning associated with a musical work or an acoustic signal, is determined by our interpretation in a

specific cultural framework. It is especially complex to analyze the functions of music today, because there are many questions to consider. Although classification is not the object of this work, it is necessary to highlight the importance of the *communicative function* of sound as an element of self-identification.

The importance of listening

In his essay *Listening* (2007), Jean Luc-Nancy proposes a key distinction as a product of the tension between the *audible* and the *intelligible*, or the *sonorous* and the *logical*: meaning is heard, while the truth is understood. If *understanding* refers to understanding the meaning (whether in a figurative sense or in what we call proper meaning: hearing a siren, a bird or a drum, it is already understanding on each occasion, at least, the sketch of a situation, of a context, if not of a text), *listening* is to be tended towards a possible meaning and, consequently, not immediately accessible.

Based on Salomé Voegelin (2021) who interprets *listening* not as a merely physiological fact, but as an act of relationship with the world and the exploration of its sound possibilities from art and everyday life, I propose there are various forms of listen that, in turn, are generators of particular relationships. Listening allows us to adapt to the environment through an anthropological mechanism that empowers us to transform what we listen to something of the everyday life, until we assimilate and normalize our relationship with it. Listening is also a way of looking, of delving into what is found through its resonances, a kind of device to create understanding through empathy, promoting a transcendental social fact such as identification with another state of mind and the creation of affective bonds.

The creative possibilities of sound enable a discussion about the possibilities of the political. That is why the ear is presented as something in dispute, historically conditioned, and culturally determined. The history of power –understood here as something that is exercised; a strategy, and not a property (Foucault)– it unfolds through control mechanisms that impose the need to be heard.

Taking into consideration the work of Suzzane Cusick (2006 and 2013) on music as an instrument of torture, recent research continues mapping this field of study that articulates sound, power, and violence, revealing the use and institutionalization of music as part of the “new technologies of terror” that emerged during the Cold War (Papaeti, 2020).

To implement any type of power relationship, certain means are needed. It is evident that the transformations in strategies and in the exercise of power

have been accompanied by the development of sound technologies. Thus, the sound is socially constituted as a mean which enables interrogate and, in a broad sense, question the political and aesthetic organization; a significant model to experience and think contemporaneity in a holistic sense. It has the ability to create conditions that favor the construction of personal and collective knowledge. It gives us the possibility of intervening poetically, of doing things in space, questioning, precisely, the limits between public and private space.

To the extent that it supposes a fundamental adaptive action for the social development of existence, listening implies taking a position in the face of certain perceived relationships. For example, when an alarm sounds in a house or a store, a norm is made visible that tries to make us part of one of the “civilizing” principles *par excellence*, that private property. Instead, the summarization of public property is more related to the limitation and social organization of movements: warning of the proximity of public transport, the closing time of a museum, or the airspace of a territory. These acoustic images bring about relationships with a whole field of derived principles, such as exclusion or security. Sound becomes a source of political information, protection of rights, and maintenance of a *status quo*. And it is through this sonorous discourse that these principles are renewed.

Likewise, I must refer to the institutionalized absence of sound, in other words, to the political administration of silence, a fundamental discursive strategy for coexistence in certain neighborhoods and gated communities (“it is forbidden to make noise after 11:00 p.m.”). But it can also symbolize the expression of collective condolence, for example, when a minute of silence is requested and observed in a public show on the occasion of a recent tragedy. On the other hand, in a “classical” music concert (without the possibility of entering here into disquisitions about this denomination), cultural and social management of silence is produced that ends up configuring it as a communication situation. Providing silence is a social action that is necessary for the music to start playing and to be able to listen. Silence and music “are revealed as a public good, produced and stored collectively” (Ares Yebra, 2020: 37).

The proposed examples show the creative possibilities of sound and silence to open processes and configure codes in the space. Therefore, it is pertinent to address sound technologies as political technologies, paying attention to the power relations that they establish in the urban sphere and, especially, to the role they play in the “territorialization” of the public and the

private, with derived unequal social effects of technological development itself.

There are multiple and powerful reasons in the current situation – international conflicts, migratory flows, climate change, the crisis of the productive model– to claim to listen with a deep sense and urgently, as part of a political agenda from which to build, define and reinterpret common places, transform everyday spaces, and weave relationships. A *poiesis* with which we can recycle our resonance with the world, update social dynamics and rework meanings in the continuous present.

Inhabit. Sound strategies and communities

Far from constituting a “machine” to suppress it, as Lévi-Strauss suggests in *The Raw and the Cooked* (1983), music allows us to recycle the experience of time. In the era of its digital “hyper-reproducibility”, the musical work can be part of any moment through access to reproduction systems and screens in which the hypermedia language of virtuality is displayed. In the hearing process, the perception of a sound event generates a kind of own time and, in turn, places us in the only dimension –the present– that gives us an appointment with the world, a moment in which, according to Koselleck (1990), coincides the spaces of experience and the horizon of expectations. According to him, the experience is defined as a *present past*, while the expectation supposes a *present future* that takes shape from what has been learned. Koselleck interprets modernity as a time in which experience and expectation have progressively moved away. That is to say, every time “we are more present”. Will this have something to do with speed and acceleration? Is the expectation set on something very different from the experience, that is, the future as something very different from the “recordable” past? In this sense, wouldn't recycling be a way of reconnecting the past-experience with a shared future-expectation? Recycling implies “taking charge” of what has been done and/or used with an expectation of improvement. And in principle, as effective action, it does not represent an individual practice, which is why it contributes to mitigating self-resonance in favor of building in common.

The increase in speed and acceleration in the experience of everyday life characterize the metropolitan lifestyle, majority in today's societies. The depersonalization of relationships with large urban centers increases the difficulty of living, understood as a particular way of connecting with the community and with the environment.

The city imposes a “way of life”, and, at the same time, represents a propitious environment for the incorporation of music that, together with other elements such as gastronomy, characterizes the cultural constellation of the city. In this context, musical cultures reveal their importance in the construction of identities, and encourage the configuration of a transnational network of relationships and meanings. In this way, the meaning associated with a musical work or an acoustic signal, is determined by its interpretation in a specific cultural framework, based on a communication situation and particular circumstances.

Since it attends the space in which one lives, it is possible to understand *inhabiting* as something far from music, more related to time. However, the city represents a propitious environment for the incorporation of music that, together with other characteristic elements of the cultural constellation of a metropolis, such as gastronomy, fosters the configuration of a transnational market network. What I propose is, precisely, that the change in the space or environment in which it unfolds, in turn, causes changes in the functions of music.

On the other hand, creativity around sound in relation to living and building communities gives rise to relevant proposals from a social and political point of view. The role of music in manifestations or, from a performative field, the interventions carried out by platforms such as the *Grupal Crew Collective* (“silent street discos”, pilgrimages with DJs in the middle of traffic, etc.), are examples in which sound is instrumented as a mechanism of occupation, protest, or resistance, to form sound discourses with which to intervene certain public spaces in order to promote some type of meaning and, with this, change. Consequently, we find sound expressions that communicate a collective will something to be transformed. The communication technology development and social networks have made it possible to increase the intensity and degree of synchronization of this type of action.

Brandon LaBelle (2010) has concretized the relationships between the spaces of everyday life and their respective sonorities in six suggestive “acoustic territories”. Each of these territories corresponds in turn to a sound figure: thus, the underground is articulated with the echo; the home (defined as the private space par excellence) with ways of creating silence; the sidewalks with the rhythm; the streets with vibration; shopping malls with the feedback effect; and the sky with the transmission and with a whole network of waves and frequencies.

The search for meaning through sonorities, the ways of inhabiting the city through collaborative proposals for sound intervention, or the mapping of cultures and societies through the ear, reveals the potential of sound and its necessary value regarding our time. If, as Augé suggests, we live in a world that we have not yet learned to look at and, therefore, we must learn to think about space again, the same can be said to learn to listen and think about time and current problems through sound.

CONCLUSIONS

Turning to music in search of meaning allows the individual to develop a strategy to overcome the sensation of fragmented reality, and manage acoustic saturation by changing the acoustic signals and (public) noises characteristic of the metropolis for the hyper-reproducibility of their playlist favorite (private). Overexposure to the musical phenomenon acts in this way as a catalyst for that daily need, and at the same time historical and metaphorical, to give meaning to our actions, experiences, and relationships. Music forms a non-place that acts as a common place, and influences decisively how we perceive time and community life. That is why, the reflection on the musical phenomenon and, in general, on the potentialities of sound, must serve us not only to delve into the connections between art and technology, but also in the re-construction and re-politicization of collective life, towards which we want to direct ourselves.

Noise pollution, acceleration, and alienation to which individuals are subjected in their daily trajectories, especially in cities, reveal an unsustainable community model, an issue that is perceived in a particularly alarming way in social indifference. In a time where diagnoses prevail over proposals, everyday life urges us to problematize the here-now in order to find possible solutions.

Related to inhabiting, virtuality has blurred the physical limits of space. The margins of the screens become the new horizon line. The world is in your pocket. The information-network has replaced reality. However, we cannot live without collective experiences and expectations. Faced with the paradoxical deterritorialization of presences as a consequence of the conquest of ubiquity, it is unavoidable to continue mapping and problematizing the sound in search of new strategies from which to weave community.

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