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## Report and Resolution of the Soundscape Research Study Group

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# Report and resolution of the Soundscape Research Study Group

## I. Introduction

Why this report?

Since up to three decades exists a strong demand for qualitative approaches in the field which is approximatively denoted by the terms "soundscape studies" or "acoustic ecology". This has become especially visible at the Banff 1993 conference and the increased interdisciplinary and international exchange that followed it.

This report aims at formulating an outlook concerning the *scientific* segment of the soundscape research field and its relation to the *artistic* and the *educational* segments.

How has the field of soundscape studies developed?

A field which today would be called "soundscape studies"— respectively "recherche sur l'espace sonore" or "Klanglandschaftsforschung"— is in existence only since the mid-sixties. Some single "precursors" in the 19th century, but especially Willy Hellpach in Germany and Johann Gabriel Granö in Finland up to the 1930s have tried to consider the sonic environment within the larger scope of a scientific environmental interest. Their work has partly been remembered in the second half of the century.

The so far the most focused activities that lead to systematic scientific approaches go back to the 1960s and 70s. When teaching at the 1965 newly founded Simon Fraser University in British Columbia composer and musicologist R. Murray Schafer started the *World Soundscape Project* WSP (1970-1975). In 1979 was created the *Centre de recherche sur l'espace sonore* CRESSON in Grenoble by philosopher and urbanist Jean-François Augoyard.

Activities with less institutional continuity are recorded in 1968-69 in the planning and architecture department at the *Massachusetts Institute for Technology* MIT (Michael

Southworth), 1984 in *Espaces Nouveaux* (Louis Dandrel), since 1987 at the *Laboratoire d'acoustique et musique urbaines* LAMU (Pierre Mariétan) in Paris, and since 1990 at the planning department of the Universität/Gesamthochschule Kassel (Detlev Ipsen). In the 1990s research is done at Department of Folk Tradition at the University of Tampere (Helmi Järviluoma), Geography Department of University of Basel (Justin Winkler), and in the interdisciplinary research programme *Mensch-Umwelt-Beziehungen* of University of Oldenburg (August. Schick, W. Nitsch et al.).

Parallel with these attempts to create systematic approaches a number of punctual work in the zone between science, arts and broadcast can be tracked. Despite efforts to create "sonological" curricula, musicological and musical institutions are practically absent. A great number of graduate, master's and doctoral theses have been written in various disciplines which did not find their way out to the public sphere.

Some individual initiatives work on the merging of artistic and scientific approaches. We point to Albert Mayr's *Times and tides*, to Dawn and Lou Mallozzi's *Chicago Soundscape Project* or to Karl Karst's *Schule des Hörens*. There are so many more that it is impossible to not do some people injustice by not making the list comprehensive.

### What can be said about terminology and contents of soundscape studies?

Our remarks about the transgression of the division lines between not only *scientific* disciplines but also towards *artistic* or *educational* work outline the complexity of the definition task which has to be executed. This report is about the science segment only. A theory about the relation between the three domains—science, arts, education—is lacking. The soundscape research study group invites artists and educators to formulate a similar theory-oriented programme.

A terminological review of the connotations and ontological implications of the term and notion "soundscape" in all major scientifically relevant languages has still to be done. For practical reasons we do not enter into a terminology discussion and follow the English "soundscape" label. Soundscape shall be defined tentatively as the totality of sound phenomena that lead to a perceptual, esthetic and representational comprehension of the sonic world.

Since it would be too difficult to describe the disciplinary *topics* of the multifaceted research field of "soundscape" or "acoustic ecology" we prefer to formulate a *catalogue of questions*. This is a form sufficiently structured and yet sufficiently open for any further discussion.

## **II. Research fields**

### **1. Acoustics adapted to the questions of everyday life**

How can we get instruments that are adapted to the problems of everyday life?

Today a host of instruments and technical procedures of very high standards are available but tend either obscure the underlying questions by the sheer weight of their application or do not meet the expressions of everyday life on a humanistic level. Acoustics and acousticians do not have to be demonised from a humanistic point of view but integrated into exemplary interdisciplinary communication and work.

### **2. The sonic lifeworld and everyday sonic culture**

How can the sonic relations between indoor/outdoor and private/public spaces be described?

The division operated by the terms of indoor/outdoor and private/public, which form the basis of law, planning and construction, is derived from their visual evidence. The phenomenology of the sonic spaces reveals a logic that contradicts visual categories to an extent as to lead to potential conflict with common environmental and urban planning practice. For instance sonic trespassing or injury have a very peculiar spatio-temporal structure. Research has to contribute more insight in the character and extent of single lifeworlds.

What can we learn from an effort to redefine our notions of boundaries and territories when considering their acoustic appearance?

As a whole, sonic space has to be conceived as something which is constantly produced, which is by its nature highly dynamical. This offers an opportunity to introduce notions of movement and communication into existing approaches and practices of environmental management and planning.

### **3. Sonic comfort in ordinary living spaces**

What is sonic comfort?

Sonic comfort is a salient feature of the sonic lifeworld and has to be taken into consideration on all levels, from sheer subsistence to abundance. The notion of sonic comfort has to reach beyond the common "non-noise" representation.

How are people suffering from sound and production of sound on the individual and group levels?

Common noise abatement aims at enhancing living comfort, without asking for its qualitative content. Implicitly, comfort is still too much taken as an effect perceived by an artificially isolated individual which is, in psychology, blown up by statistics to a virtual social compound. The notion of sonic comfort has to be evaluated by a methodological shift from common "in vitro"-research to vigorous "in situ"- studies.

The social production of sound and the individual suffering from sound are intricately linked. This link has still to be described more thoroughly. Thereby it is important to include the possibility given to people to influence actively their sonic surrounding. The possibility to participate in the production of sonic spaces and to induce modifications of its components is a cultural fact that is often underestimated by research centering too much on a passively suffering singled-out subject.

#### 4. Esthetic values

Which cultural filters shape the perception of sonic situations?

The cultural shaping of sonic environmental perception is a large and rich qualitative research field which has so far only punctually been investigated. Well structured interdisciplinarity could contribute a big deal to a general concept of cultural esthetics of the sonic (and generally sensuous) space.

What are the ideological and economic values of sonic ambiances?

All research concerning values should contribute to a "disideologization" of the noise-vs-silence problem and to overcome the representation of sonic environments in terms of good or bad. This is especially true for the "silence mood".

Is the priority of the language intelligibility criterium biased, which is at the base of the hi-fi/lo-fi-environment concept?

There are some doubts as to a general validity of a linguistic balance model in sound scape research. From a cultural point of view noisy spaces can offer niches of privacy because they prevent that "the walls are listening". The idea of lofi-environments as the qualitatively best is a puristic expert's view which silences the alternative and everyday perspectives and exhibits a strong ideological basis.

## 5. Comparative inventory

Is the original World Soundscape Project's aim of comparative regional sound-scape research still an option?

It is—if all "naïve" documentation is complemented with crossing methods and coordinated documentation standards. Then it can become a valid scientific activity. To achieve this, we are in need of a strong concept of interdisciplinarity and involvement in a "political" programme which activates those regions of the world that have so far only been known through sonic colonialism.

## 6. Application and action

How can a sustainable presence with the communities and other agencies of the society be established?

With respect to a lasting effect of its work the scientific community has to accompany technical executive bodies, territorial organizations, educational institutions and artistic activities.

What can be the contribution to a general pedagogy of the sonorous?

One of the most immediate applications of scientific soundscape studies is the *education* sector. In turn education can offer a rewarding field for investigations. Since education is considered as a main segment within the WFAE there could be an important connective function of the latter.

## III. Conclusions—Resolution

In conclusion the authors of the soundscape research study group propose:

The establishment of a permanent scientific soundscape research group is highly desirable.

This group is self-constituting and acts as a co-ordinating agency and centre of expertise which supports research projects and programmes at an international level.

The soundscape research group evaluates project proposals and accompanies their execution.

This will be done by bringing together people on an interdisciplinary and international basis, linking their methodological and technical knowledge, and giving directions for fundraising. The group communicates and co-operates with eventually existing study groups for education and for the arts.

The soundscape research group creates an interdisciplinary centre for advanced studies in sound and soundscape research.

This centre is not necessarily permanent and bound to a single place or institution, but can emerge in a calendrical rhythm in different regions.

The soundscape research group provides a scheme for scientific communication that takes into account the problem of language and different scientific cultures.

By doing this the group will contribute pragmatically to the cohesion of a future scientific body. It respects different cultures: even if English continues to act as *lingua franca* it cannot penetrate in the capillaries of the social realities of research.