Research > ON LISTENING #1. Thinking (through) the ear

Over the last two decades, listening has gained a lot of attention both in the field of philosophy and in the human sciences. At the same time, sound has increased its presence in museums and galleries, challenging the visual narratives and spatial codification of these institutionalized spaces and demanding new aesthetic discourses able to cope with artistic practices that critically deal with and explore listening. A vast amount of books and academic journals devoted to almost every aspect of listening and to sonic phenomena of all kinds (mostly written by young theorists from different fields) attest to what Jim Drobnick has called a ‘sonic turn’ or as Veit Ermler termed it, ‘the resurgence of the ear’.

Against the backdrop of the fertile space for reflection and critical thinking around sound and listening, Radio Web MACBA presents the series ON LISTENING. Divided into three parts, each focused on a different topic, field or practice, we engage with leading experts to provide an account of what listening means and implies in different areas of contemporary society and culture, from philosophy to art and from anthropology to technology studies and media theory.

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ON LISTENING #1
Thinking (through) the ear

In the first installment of this series, we discuss some issues related to the philosophy of listening with Seth-Kim Cohen, Christoph Cox, Julian Henriques, Casey O’Callaghan, Peter Szendy and Salomé Voegelin.

01. Summary
To what extent is listening ‘thinkable’? Philosophical inquiry, deeply rooted in the visual regime, seems to struggle when it comes to theoretically coming to grips with listening and sonic phenomena. It is, after all, no coincidence that the Greek term ‘theoria’ (θεωρία) means ‘looking at, viewing, beholding’. This programme explores philosophy’s seeming difficulty in grappling with listening and its counterpart – sound – as a powerful deconstructive means to cut through some of the philosophical certainties that underpin classical and modern Western thought.

Can we conceive sounds as objects, or it would be more appropriate to consider them events? How far can the phenomenological approach to sound take us, and how much can we rely on it? And what about new materialisms? Are they more useful, in hermeneutic terms, when dealing with sound and listening? These are some of the issues addressed in part one of the ON LISTENING series.

02. Interviewees (in order of appearance)

Salomé Voegelin, artist and writer
Peter Szendy, philosopher and musicologist
Christoph Cox, philosopher, writer, and curator
Salomé Voegelin, artist and writer
Casey O’Callaghan, philosopher and writer
Seth Kim-Cohen artist and writer
Julian Henriques, philosopher and writer

03. Related links

Christoph Cox, Sonic Philosophy
artpulsemagazine.com/sonic-philosophy

Martyn Hudson, What, am I hearing light? Listening through Jean-Luc Nancy
www.hz-journal.org/n19/hudson.html

Julian Henriques, Sonic Bodies: Reggae Sound Systems, Performance Techniques & Ways of Knowing
research.gold.ac.uk/4257/1/HenriquesSonicBodiesIntro.pdf

Seth Kim-Cohen
earroom.wordpress.com/2013/12/04/seth-kim-cohen/

Casey O’Callaghan
www.youtube.com/watch?v=SEPWB3-8h04

Salomé Voegelin
earroom.wordpress.com/2012/07/01/salome-voegelin/

04. Bibliography

Christoph Cox, Jenny Jaskey, Suhail Malik (eds.), Realism Materialism Art. Sternberg Press. 2015.

Curated by Arnau Horta. Music by Annie Goh

Arnau Horta is a freelance curator specialising in contemporary sound art. In his curatorial projects and his work as researcher and communicator he analyses the phenomenological and political aspects of sound, with a particular focus on the relationship between sound and space and between the act of listening and the act of dwelling. At present he is a doctoral candidate in philosophy, writing his dissertation on composer and sound artist Alvin Lucier’s seminal work ‘I am sitting in a room’.

Annie Goh is an artist and researcher working primarily with sound, space, electronic media and generative processes within their social and cultural contexts. She has co-curated the discourse program of CTM Festival Berlin since 2013 and is currently undertaking a PhD on echo and archaeoacoustics at Goldsmiths University of London.


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**05. Credits**


**06. Acknowledgements**

Many thanks to all the interviewees, Matías Rossi, Sònia López, Annie Goh.

**07. Copyright note**

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