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How to build an interspecies acoustic community?

An ongoing project in collaboration with Neue Nachbarschaft Moabit e.V.

Documentation 2022-23



So far the project has been presented in two workshops, a lecture and an episode for a radio series. The two workshops were held in Strandbad Tegelsee as a part of a the two-year collaborative project called "Artistic Ecologies: New Compasses, Tools and Alliances" conceived in collaboration with WHW Zagreb, the Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten Amsterdam, and Neue Nachbarschaft/Moabit, Berlin. The lecture took place at the Akademie der Künste in Berlin in the context of the symposium "Time To Listen" and and finally the radio episode was produced using the material from the lecture for seeee radio and can be listened here (episode #7) or here. A transcript of the episode can be found here.

The first workshop, designed for children and young teenagers, took place the 24th of July 2022 with the title: "The Noise is Changing #1: A Creative Music Lab On Ecoacoustics". The goal was to try to explore in an interactive and playful way a number of issues not well known to many people but very important and fascinating concerning the sound organization of ecosystems and how this is threatened by climate change.

"Did you know that many species of animals, even fish, have to express themselves louder and in a simplified way to make themselves understood in an increasingly noisy environment? (It's called the Lombard effect).

And that plants can also hear sounds?

And that the most sought-after habitats are those in which each sound finds its own niche without one dominating the others? (This is called the acoustic niche hypothesis).

Do you want to hear how a German forest will sound if the global temperature rises more than 1.5 degrees?"

To talk about these issues, I organized a mix of

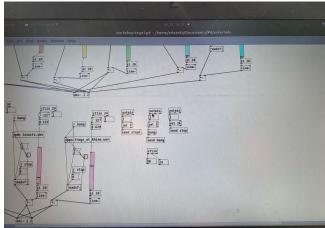
story telling, play activities and direct interaction with sounds through controllers connected to a laptop with Pure Data and 4 loudspeakers. For example, it was possible to listen to what a healthy forest sounds like or switch to the sound of a seemingly normal but actually dying forest due to climate change recorded in southern Germany. Or to perceive the difference in sound between birds recorded in spaces not populated by humans and in urban settings. Or to re-create the soundscape of an entire ecosystem by adding different sounds starting from geological background noises different types of trees moved by the wind (that is the sound signature of a landscape) than adding different animal species from insects to birds. I then staged an activity in which I asked participants to imagine that they were a group of crows and establish a set of sound



codes to communicate with each other, then scattered among the trees of the Strandbad, talk to their conspecific from a distance, communicate and most importantly listen to each other and listen to the sounds of the landscape.







The second workshop, for adults, took place on the 26th of August 2023, with the title: "The Noise Is Changing #2: How To Create An Acoustic Community".

It consisted of a listening session and a talk on the inhabitation of ecosystems by acoustic communities that are constantly listening to each other, the complexity of the resulting soundscape, decolonial ecologies and the climate crisis. Also on hybrid (human and non-human) communities and some ideas on how to listen to all this.

The listening session had started with a memory exercise trying to recall sounds heard in the landscape in the day, then focusing on certain particular sounds in the present moment, and finally an exercise of sound imagination, trying to populate the landscape with new imagined sounds. During the talk, I started from an important hypothesis in ecoacoustics, the acoustic niche hypothesis, to show how organically organized an ecosystem is sonically, providing examples (how do two birds date in the woods?) and comparisons with the human world. Then I illus-

trate how perceiving a landscape is a very complex and layered thing by talking about the odorscape and the vibroscape. I talk then about another important concept in landscape ecology namely the eco-field (whereby landscape cognition depends on how a species finds resources and meets its needs) and I linked it with Malcolm Ferdinand's decolonial ecology, because this makes it very clear about how and why there is a gap in understanding between the human and nonhuman worlds. This is caused at the end by the colonialist and descructive way of accessing resources. In the Western world, we are scientific observers, mostly "touristic" listeners or at all dominators and exploiters, but we fail to be in a space of shared dialogue with other species. In some rural European cultures, however, there has been different examples of familiarity and closeness to the nonhuman, and I have illustrated one such example. In certain valleys in northern Italy people could identify dialectal inflections and variations in chaffinch song even going so far as to recognize individual voices and the name that were given to each variation was very imaginative and onomatopoeic. This kind of practice requires care, closeness, patience and a more equitable and sustainable sharing of the same living space and resources. In the end, my proposal is to try to form aware communities that practice this kind of "creative listening".







The content of the talk was presented again in a lecture at the Akademie der Künste during the symposium "Time To Listen" on August 20, 2023 with the title "Sonic ecosystems and listening communities". Is it possible to watch the footage of the session on Youtube <u>here</u>.





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