AMBULANS LONDINENSIS

Disperse notes on preolympic London field recording.

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I reached London between the fourth and the fifth week of March of 2012 with the excuse of detailing a research project in mind. It wasn't my first visit to the city. In the past, however, I didn't had the time nor the need of submerging myself into the urban fabric with such a liberty of movement as I had this time. Despite I'm not a friend of touristic routes and guided visits I think that from time to time one has to give in before the lack of knowledge and let oneself go guided by authorized voices in order to optimize the time and to generate a certain image of visited spaces. Images, walks, visits, and so on that generally try to show a series of imprints and that rarely go further than the prefabricated, manufactured postcards for touristic and leisure use.

Neither would I have time enough in this occasion to deepen in the urban whole in general terms nor in sound terms given that, despite its loss of population (attending to official statistics), London's still one of the larger cities in Europe and in the known universe. The result of such a peculiar travel are these series of recordings that maybe is necessary to categorize under the genre of soundscape (perverse concept that I've never liked) or maybe under the field-recording one. Anyway, this recordings, as any other type of sound document (and I say sound document because it is the matter that mostly motivates these lines, but the reflections embedded in this text could be applied to any other audio visual materials)

cover little events in a wider urban derive, as I say, semistructured. Brief narrations of phenomena that occurred in the time gap between turning on and turning off the recording machine that, as samples of a larger series of phenomena, are not representative at all but they allude to a certain discovering, to a certain derive, and to certain situations.

Similarly to taking a sample from the fabric of a carpet, that not only contains carpet itself but also dust, food remains, bacteria, microorganisms and a lot of materials that can certainly be taken as part of the carpet, these recordings show evidences of the city's ecosystems, the city's sociophonic phenomenology. Through these a series of constants and variables associated to the diverse sound ambiances and dynamics -mostly sociophonic but also from other kinds; it's good to have in mind that cities are not exclusively inhabited by humans- that compose the aural global of the metropolis will be discovered.

Once this has been said nothing else remains but to recommend a headphone listening previous to the reading. The text is nothing but a descriptive and analytical exercise based upon the field notes and a posterior deep listening. It's perfectly possible to understand and construct these as documentary derivations of an initial phenomenon or as a work of art. That's the responsibility of the listener's will.
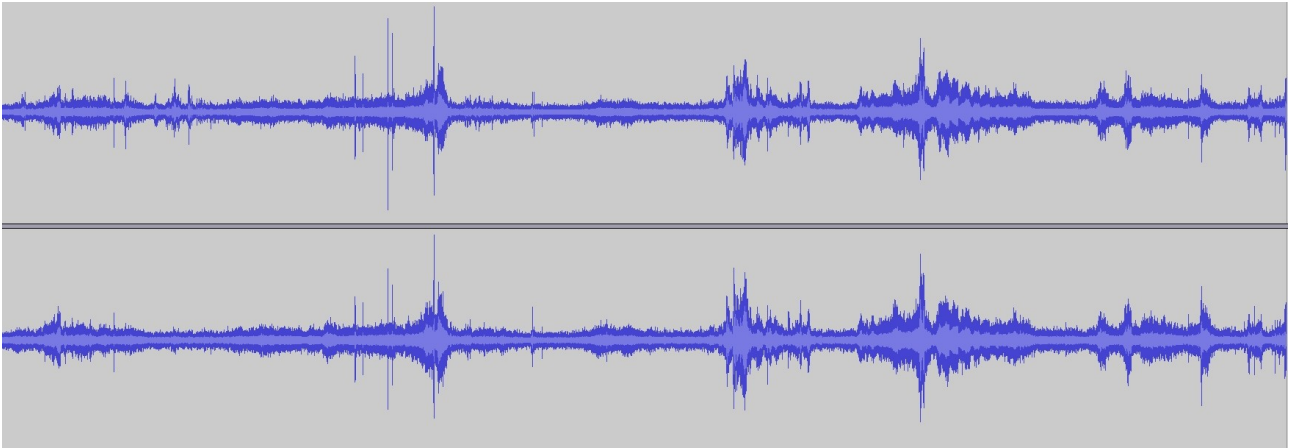
Carnoedo, February, 2013

1. Mile End

Figure 1: Graphical representation of the first track sound wave.

There are many the events that can be observed through the window of a building. While I double-check the final details of my first field expedition, once I am familiar with local dynamics, I stop and focus on listening this semi-periphery ambiance. It's problematic to talk about center and periphery in such a diffused city. the classic city, the model based on the center-periphery axis has little or nothing to do with this metropolis, where almost every district possesses its own centrifugal and centripetal dynamics regarding itself and the whole city. Even more when the settlement is immersed in a reorganization and readjusting process in relation to this year's Olympic games. Investments in infrastructures are considerable, as well as it's implementation phenomenological aggregate. Even the city's own logic is different from the Mediterranean model I am used to. Reconstruction, remodeling, or structure updating are a constant through a history marked by fires and bombings. International politics interference related to internal and external conflicts seems to have guided London's city planning and urban drift in a way that its growth does not exclusively respond to survivals regarding the use and social and architectural construction of the many and diverse spaces composing the city. Its logic is quite different to the one bequeathed by the colonial Rome and lies, as I say, in reconstruction.

The aural ambiance gathered in this recording is dominated by construction related phenomena. During the nearly 10 minutes of the recording the presence of sociophonic phenomena related to construction is constant. Sirens and alarms coming from construction vehicles such as cranes or trucks, events related to the handling of building materials, along with other phenomena that has to be associated with vehicle and people transit, acquire an important role in this typology of sound environment. Engines of diverse cylinder capacities, moving or in stand-by, different braking systems, gear and speed changes represent the day to day routines in a district riddled with extensions, upgrades, or improvements of existing infrastructures.

In addition, other type of phenomena are slightly audible, posses a discrete presence. Phenomena that could be associated to general urban life, such as motorcycle traffic, people transit (steps and voices), ubiquitous humming that suggest the presence of air traffic, police sirens, car horns, fences pulling down, and a whole myriad of details that indicate which activities are more common in the area during daytime.

It is also possible to discern other type of dynamics not related directly to human

activity such as the singing of certain types of birds (that can also be considered phonetic voices or praxis, in this case, of an ethological order). These are, in general, urban based birds such as sparrows, magpies or crows, which are said to have a large presence in a city whose imaginaries are rich in stories related to its activities and ecosystems.

If we look at the shape of the graphical representation of the recording (Figure 1) -the waveform- we may observe that a continuous humming background is present in all the recording sprinkled mainly with peaks and occasional off-peaks. The dynamics of this waveform gives us clues about what is common in a type of environment where low frequencies are predominant. Peaks have to be associated to the functioning of fossil combustion engines.

Continuous listening and experience of this type of environments leads me to think over my previous experience of private vs. public spaces. Thinking in how this is a purely symbolic difference that after all is constantly transgressed by lack of awareness or by disdain. By lack of awareness or ignorance because the main part of construction workers don't have the slightest intention (I want to think) of breaking into anyone's house. By disdain or snub, because the instances governing the decision of where and when construction works should be done and the use of more invasive or discrete methodologies seem to take little account of the impact of their activities. Thus, due to an interesting phenomenological abstraction process, workers work regardless of their environment in a kind of permanent eidetic reduction, knowing only by contextual clues, circumstantial evidences or experiential information that they are working in a residential, industrial or leisure district. This fact doesn't seem to suppose a moral trouble to workers or managers. Such an abstraction process regarding the closest environment seems to be produced due to the concentration in construction related activities -what could be perfectly applied to other activities of similar environmental impact such as catering or urban cleaning. The general ambiance is abstracted from the worker's perception apart from his nearest context in relation to communicative practices in order to be aware of other workers activities or of any unexpected event that may threaten his integrity.

This seems to be an ecological constant in contemporary interaction of humans with our environments. We seem to be dominated by a discrimination through which we prioritize that which is immediate and related to the self in a way that we ignore or discard other processes that do not lead to that. But in many occasions we're not even aware of self-related events. The worker who is, for instance, striking the wall of a house with a hammer doesn't worry about what's on the other side or the discomforts or impact of his activity. The military logic behind the phrase "just following orders" extends to such a degree that we are not responsible of the possible consequences of what we are doing. It is likely that in the eyes and hears of any other living being we may appear as eminently noisy beings in the popular sense of the term "noise": that we generate constant interruptions in external processes. This sort of detachment regarding our environments puts us in an extremely aggressive position. If we compare these dynamics with the ones described by Bioacoustics we may find that there's no human comparison to the notion of *bioacoustic consistency*. This notion alludes to a presumed harmony (who knows if constructed through a systematic sight) regarding the biophonic dynamics of environments where human species is not present or where his presence is marginal.

This disruptive constant seems to be rooted in our ways of doing. "Noise" is, more than an isolated element, more than a variable in the social equation of our species, a constant that has been repeating through the synchronous and diachronic geography of our activities. We sound for ourselves, we care little what may be around us.
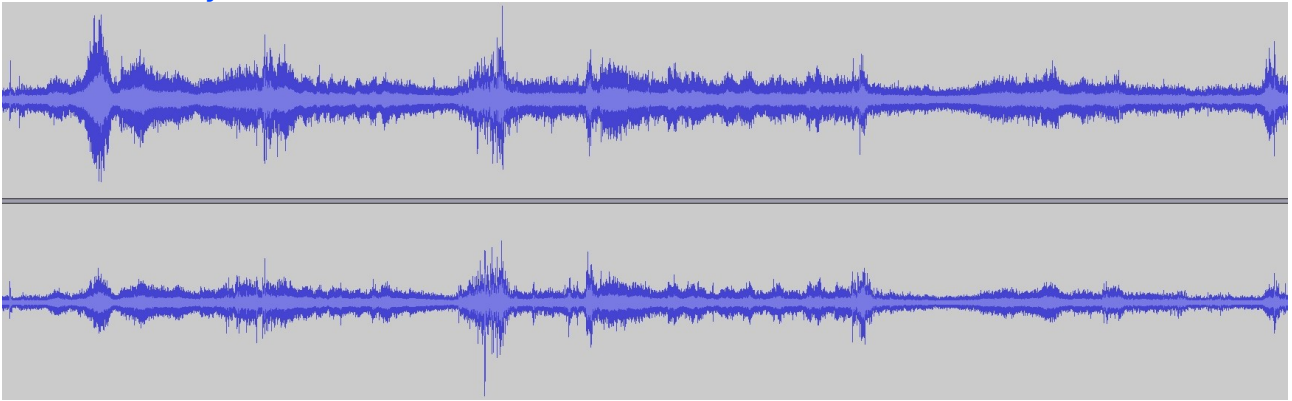
2. Saint Mary-Le-Bow

Figure 2: Graphical representation of the second track sound wave.

It's always a good exercise, if one has the time and will, taking a walk through what tourist guides and city maps describe as "historic center". Concrete-based life, as well as to the carbon-based one, also seems to be subjected to the inclemency of time. In this way it's peculiar and distinctive of the kind of space one's stepping to carry out a contrast between these "historic" areas[1] and the rest of the city. It is particular as the relationships that urban dynamics draw between these "historic centers" and the rest of the city are somehow one of the narrative lines that describes the life and functioning of the city itself. Anyway, and beyond the ethnourbanistic reflection, the "historic center" would come to be what someone sometime called "the mother of the city"[2]: the space that attended to the genesis of the city, to the placement of the first stone that would later shape the idea of the city. There seems to exist a myth, an urban legend that this primary set of spaces irradiates its people so that they become more similar to the original, to that perverse notion that is "authenticity" which turns us critical even with our own personal histories.

Thereby, we can realize in the cases of southern Europe Mediterranean cities how this narrative is presented in terms of conservation, ostentation, exposition, and capitalization of a past. But not any past. A past also based in concrete, perhaps in granite, limestone, or other materials historically used to build. A past also built or constructed not only in terms of edification but as written by a series of hegemonic social classes. The case of cities like Barcelona, Madrid, Valencia and many others from the Spanish, Italian, and French littoral of the Mediterranean Sea. The case we're dealing with is diametrically opposed, or rather all the opposite that a phenomenon common to the human species can be.

London is a city that emerges from two centers: what we currently know as the "city center" and Westminster. It is the dialogue between both what forces a transformation to contemporary urban space and what historically orchestrates the appearance of these narrativities mentioned before, these general discourses regarding action and interaction in the city. Geopolitical inclemencies force the reinvention of the city. Events such as 1966's great fire or the bombings that took the lives of nearly

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1 A term that may sound quite obvious. Or maybe there is anything that transcends history. Anything that, mirroring the notion of non-place, can be designated as non-historic place or space -always having in mind an institutional point of view, far beyond popular significations and imaginaries.
2 Not in vain one of the figures by which a Spanish city stands one of its citizens is the title of "favorite son", meaning "honorary citizen".

30,000 Londoners, generated architectural and urban tissue recovery policies. Policies that, given the impact of the destruction processes, seem to incrust into popular imaginaries and representations in such a way that are eventually extended over time and are assumed by these urban dynamics, by the city's own narratives. As in a movie or a series of movies, London's main story line is reconstruction.

This narrativity takes shape into one of my favourite topics, the one that motivates these lines and the origin of this project: urban sociophonic phenomenology. Sound in human species seems to work, among many other ways, in a similar way to the mortar of buildings: it binds situations, giving continuity to what happen in space, and providing an useful guide to know where we are. It's easy to put this hypothesis into test regarding "historic centers". The rule may appear to be simple but it hides a greater complexity as one submerges into the many and very diverse layers that suppose sound in the city.

If urban ambiances coming from any city are contrasted we'll find that is possible to classify them, for instance, regarding sound sources (that is to say, in relation to events previous to the sound process itself such as activities, events, incidents, etc. that originate sound waves that later we'll be able to hear) or regarding the sound effects hosted by the city[3]. However, there's a category that is even more suggestive and entertaining that connects the two above mentioned with any we might imagine. It is the sociophonic dynamics. It's not an easy concept, as it relates the sources that generate acoustic energy with spaces where those spread, and with the time variations that, throughout the day, week, month, station, year, etc., possesses and practices urban life. In this sense sound ambiances coming from "historic centers" usually have an special relevance in relation to the rest of ambiances that form the whole sound environment of the city. It may happen that the ambiances of the "historic centers" to be convergent or divergent regarding their analogues in the rest of the urban fabric, if there's any analogous space[4].

The case of London's "historic center" is highly peculiar. Its sound ambiances[5] are -generally and excluding the occasional corner either arranged for tourist consumption, either known just by urban drifts gourmets- what any contemporary urbanite would call actually urban.

Let's pay attention to the presented recording. It was done during march, 2012, approximately at 11 hours in the morning at Saint Mary-Le-Bow square, just in front of the bell tower with the same name and that, by the way, seems to be one of the most emblematic sounds from the city. Several layers might be observed. In a more distant one the discrete and distant murmur of traffic can be heard (discreet as continuous,

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3   For a definition on the notion of "sound effect" see Augoyard and Torgue, 2005.

4   In many cities there's no possible comparison between the "historic center" and other districts. These are unique in both its disposition and its composition, both urbanistic and socio-spatial.

5   It is really difficult to make a rigorous inventory of absolutely all the sound ambiances that form the general sound environment of a portion of the urban tissue such as a "historic center" or any other urban district. Not just because the need for the human factor in order to totally complete these, but also because the mutability, unpredictability, and permeability of both sounds and spaces can reach surprising degrees. On the basis of observation we're almost certain about that there's no phenomenon that urban space cannot absorb, integrate, appropriate turning the exotic into endotic. This statement (hypothetical until further notice) turns even clearer if we refer to public space in sound terms.

monotonous, that ends up undergoing through an erasure effect), just splashed by nearer vehicles passing by such as big motorcycles or old two-floor buses. In a second layer, closer to the environmental listener, micro-social dynamics appear: the ones of the life of the space where we are: steps, conversations, terrace cutlery, the bustle of loading and unloading, a cough drop, women heels or the combustion and expectorations of some long-term smoker. Nothing that cannot happen in other type of space. Nothing to add to the cacophony of capitalist post-industrial city.

There exists, however, a discordant element: the bells. Who can imagine or place the sound of bells in such an anonymizing space? The sound of the bells does not seem to be out of tune or place to the point of generating surprise because, as has been said before, the extension of post-industrial urban dynamics forces an extreme permeability into the sound ambiances of cities living under its patronage. It is the sound of the past that resists. It is a resistant dynamic facing a myriad of emerging dynamics. Clearly everything depends on the reach of our senses, of our perspective. If we listen from immediacy it won't be possible for us to establish this kind of discrimination. It is the conscious, critical, and aware listening surrounding the ambiance, of that para-environmental in its sense of genesis, what provides us the keys to a symbolic interpretation.
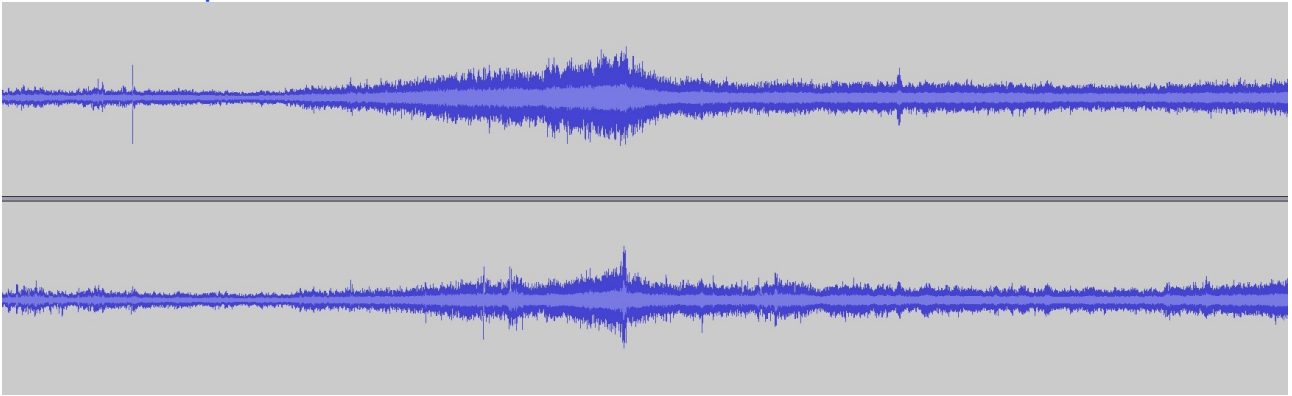
3. Whitechapel Station

Figure 3: Graphical representation of the third track sound wave.

Human concentration phenomenology possesses its own dynamics. Dynamics that are external to what our own species construct as "natural" and "artificial". There exists a common misunderstanding between what is "natural" and what is "habitual", between what happens on the margins of human action and interaction and what derives from those. Nature also possesses habits in the sense of Bourdieu, so that the Cartesian opposition between culture and nature loses its sense as we separate from the common imaginaries and representations of our species and societies.

Disciplines like Bioacoustics that deal with aural phenomena in natural ambiances or environments often depart from these representations. Hypothesis are often related to anthropocentric reasoning without realizing how narrow we have turned the notion of "cultural transmission". It seems that culture is the field of pointless and dead end research, made just for the mere pleasure of researching or for personal enrichment, either monetary or related to knowledge.

In a similar way as the opposition rural/urban is not valid anymore -as human beings are immersed by a series of ideological flows (imaginaries, representations...) that determine our options, our complicities and preferences which are spread by means not related to space anymore-, differences between what's human and what's not beyond pragmatic issues should not exist. Scientific research should transcend this moral distinction even being conscious of its existence.

This reflection is even more clear from the aural paradigm. From this point of view an ambiance like the one documented in the recording we're commenting should be analogous in a structural sense to any other produced or that relates other animal species. Contents, readings and/or interpretation will clearly change, but this should not affect to methodologies applied to its characterization and analysis. Perhaps a greater development of a species should lead to more detail (contextual variables), but the basis should be essentially the same.

From this point of view that seeks a disciplinary holism unifying all kinds of knowledges, ethology and ethnography would share something more than a common methodology. Maybe objects of study and units of analysis should be also shared. If we carefully listen to the track that motivates this reflection we may observe a general dynamic tinged by slight brush-strokes that have a phenomenological relevance. The process that serves as story line -as the orientation of the registered interaction- is

transportation. The waiting for a conveyance: an underground station previous to the arrival of a train.

This is by definition a moving space. Movement is already an structural element of sound processes, since sound travels after birth, it occurs and disappears generating a series of streams or suggestions in the orientation of behaviour. Suggestions that reverberate within the physical limits of space and thereby generate differential discourses. A cloistered sound is not the same as an outdoor one, seems obvious. The physical space affect sound behaviour but also its social construction. A discrete *hyperdecibelic* practice[6] in an enclosed crowded space may provide grounds for a contagion. Thus, and as the recording shows, the arrival and stay for a certain time of a group of school age children -probably in a school organized activity- may generate what may be called a "sociophonic disturbance" affecting either the general dynamics of space, either a punctual event related with the most played activity of that space, with the general social signification of that place.

Without the wish of forcing any sensitivity, but with one foot in intersubjectivity and comparison among animal species, we may assure that infancy (early stages of learning in each and every animal species) implies learning by the trial-error method in a very similar way to the role played by anthropologists and ethnographers in the early stages of fieldwork in unknown environments. The anthropologist takes the role of the "village idiot", the one who doesn't understand and notice anything, who is constantly making mistakes, transgressing norms, subverting the established order to know how far (spatial) social order can be stretched. In this sense, infancy, as anthropological practice, may be denominated as "polluting industries". Anyone who has lived near a primary school will know exactly the meaning of this.

However, these considerations are only tangential to what we try to describe here, which is related to the dynamics of a particular space sociophonic phenomenology. The train station, the bus station, of any means of transportation may be understood as a non-place in terms of Augé. Nevertheless, day to day experience, the *habitus* of the passenger may construct it in different ways. If we understand that the recognition and the symbolic appropriation of spaces are directly linked to the predictability of sound ambiances (as Barthes suggests), we may also understand that once the general dynamics of that space are assumed it passes to the sphere of familiarity. A known field that is not necessarily controllable but that is positively related to different degrees of permeability, porosity, and estimation. When one has experimented a space a number of times, one won't be surprised of what that sound space can provide.

In this way, and if we have traveled often enough by train or subway, we won't be surprised by the sound of the brakes of a train approaching a station. We may anticipate the possible need to temporary cover our ears facing the metal grinding that is coming. We will know the discourse and the narrative of the train activity in sound terms.

It's not the same when we're unfamiliar with the space. That's why is positive for description and analysis to combine both perspectives: between absolute knowledge and absolute ignorance, between the ability to be surprised by everything and a broad control of what's happening. Habitual, daily practice may lead to an erasure effect[7]

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6   A shout or an event whose intensity exceeds the limits set by sociophonic practice of space.
7   Like the one that happens in the residential neighborhood close to any bell tower. When a new

However, for this effect to be produced the dynamics under which the event in question operates must be clear: its predictability. On the contrary, it doesn't happen in a similar way with one of the elements of the recording, as it's necessary to zoom in in order to understand its predictability. We're referring to the siren that appears seconds after the beginning.

Sirens or "daily commotion sonotopies", as also been called (García, 2005) are part of the most common phenomena to the urban environment. These are indicative of the type of district or sector from where we're listening, even at a symbolic level (NOTA: In order to emphasize the marginality or level of conflicts in a space numerous fictional audiovisual documents use sirens and/or alarms as these express the aural alteration in the "proper" functioning of urban order.). It's a good exercise to count the quantity of sirens that wander near one's place of residence in order to know with more or less certainty the place where our sector is in regard to the symbolic weave of the city. There are different sensitivities that characterize these phenomena differently. When facing the experience of a police convoy through a well-known via a friend commented that this city has an easy trigger at the time of switching on the alarms, that for any slight reason several police cars would congregate and provide a rumble more typical of other latitudes. This fact does not invalidates, however, the recently deployed hypothesis. It implies a geopolitical variant regarding the management of commotion and the visibility of emergency in aural terms.

To finish our reflection we may wonder about the inherited permissiveness in terms of visibility and interference that these sonotopies of commotion related to emergency suppose. From a public and politic point of view, commotion is justifiable as it is a lesser evil regarding a common, public good: the siren breaks -it's a disruption- but it does it for one reason, maybe to save a life, sure for solving a problem. But, in an increasingly privatized world, as health management goes into private hands, the fact that these dynamics still putting into practice strategies of a public service may verge on the tolerable. A private ambulance should be subjected to other type of regulations, the ones that regulate private sound/"noise" activities in public spaces as its objective is not public health care but the increase of the benefits of private interests and, as such, it can't and must not participate of the same legal regime as those all citizens agree that are justifiable.

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occupant moves to a district that hosts an emblematic element such as the sound of bells, the initial perceptions may be overwhelming. This is a process that can extend for months, until the cognitive system proceeds to the preventative erase of certain signals that only provide reiterative information so that the system doesn't consider relevant to remember it continuously. After some time the signal in question seems to melt away so that the subject is no longer aware of its presence until it disappears.
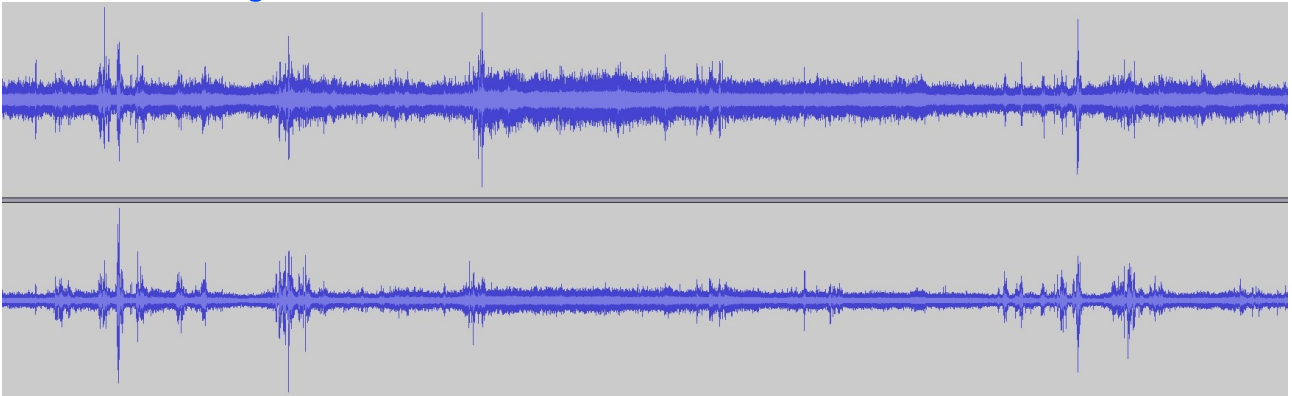
4. London Bridge

Figure 4: Graphical representation of the fourth track sound wave.

Transit is, since antiquity, one of the most recurring elements of sound ambiances generated by human action. Movement is a consubstantial part of carbon-based life. With the passing of time, with the diverse revolutions that ended up modifying severely the ways in which humans are and do, sound and sociophonic dynamics associated to both the activity and social interaction of human species with ourselves and with others have changed.

The industrial revolution bursts into human sound environments with new presences. Forms that, once the paradigm is internalized, are characterized as cacophony. The whole urban sound is frequently characterized as cacophonous. Nevertheless, and in the light of the meaning of the term as well as its etymology[8], it is a slight characterization with a clear component of moral judgment and poorly contrasted. The literal translation of the original Greek term may lead us to its initial application to the phonetic use and meaning. As it is described by the Cambridge dictionary, the term refer to "an unpleasant mixture of loud sounds". The DRAE[9] states that it is "a dissonance resulting from inharmonious combination of acoustical elements of the word". Beyond the reservations with which we may or may not accept this definition, its application to urban sound ambiances is something common in our days. It's somehow frequent to see references to typical urban sounds as cacophonous due to the fact of its repetitiveness, the lack of relevant information regarding what's happening in the city[10]. Once we've heard the rumour of urban traffic it seems little what it could offer to the thoughtful listener.

However, it is relevant to ask if repetitive sound is bad, morally reprehensible, harmful in sanitary terms, sensorially irrelevant. Can we accurately assure that what is repetitive inexorably leads to a shift away from the positive? There are many examples that falsify this excessively general and widespread hypothesis. There are many evidences that, for example from musical practice, reject this affirmation. If we move our ears close to any traditional and popular music practice we may be aware of that fact. From any of the shamanic practices that we can find today in many parts of South America, Africa or Asia, or from a diachronic axis, among the dwellers previous to the colonization of North America or Micronesia, rhythmic repetition is a constant in all

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8   "Kakós" from ancient Greek meaning "bad" or "wrong" and "phone", also from ancient Greek meaning "sound" or "voice". The terms has its opposite in "euphonic", where "eu" means "well" or "good".
9   The "Diccionario de la Real Academia Española", used for the original Spanish edition of this paper.
10 An interesting question here may be why the apparition of an erasure effect that affects globally to these dynamics is not common.

known human societies[11]. While this is a musicalized reiteration, there's not much distance between that and the one of post-industrial societies beyond its negative evaluation. Perhaps the underlying issue refers precisely to the difference between musical sound and non-musical sound[12]. Besides this distinction, if we carry out a general analysis we may find that there's little or no difference between the narrative structures of "cacophonies" similar to the ones in the track with others, more characteristic of social scenes around musical practices such as drone, noise or serialism.

While both phenomena are similar structurally, is its interpretation that makes them different. Both are analogous phenomena that show different valuations and therefore very different social treatments. Despite the similarities it won't be the same the percussion of a jackhammer on an urban road, for instance, at a frequency of 80 BPM than a rhythm box modulated at the same speed. Analogously, it won't be the same the on-site listening of any sound ambiance than its representation, that is to say, its digital or analog recording and later relocation and exhibition, as well as would happen with the sound ambiance of a river port (as the one of the track previous to this text) and the recording of such ambiance as inserted in a musical context. Cacophonous sounds are not necessarily, therefore, lacking in information by itself but, more precisely, regarding the listening context.

In this way the events that occupy the approximately eight minutes of the described track acquire a new dimension. To the background drones and buzzings coming from diverse mechanical engines as they navigate the Thames -being ship, plane or crane motors and other devices related to transportation and goods or people management- the ones of vehicular traffic have to be added, as these are also present and take the shape of mechanical polyphonies.

In a second structural layer, grouped in relation to sound sources, we find human interaction related phenomena with the human body as interface. These are the different phonetic variations that happen close to our recording point, basically English and French, but also diverse step, whistling, whisperings or coughs tempos and modes. Phenomena that could be located in many other spaces of the urban fabric but that, thanks to its contrast with port activity, acquire a new significance. The large majority of these phenomena refer, as indicated at the beginning, to motion, to transit, both the ones described in relation to the river as the ones related to human activity on the riverside.

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11 Perhaps, like Barthes affirms, it is the constant: "Long before that the written word was invented [...] something that perhaps is what fundamentally distinguishes humans from animals happened: the intentional reproduction of a rhythm. [...] it's logical to imagine [...] that rhythming (incisions or knocks) and building houses are contemporary activities: the operative feature of humankind is precisely the rhythmic percussion repeated for a long time. [...] Also thanks to the rhythm listening is no longer pure vigilance and it becomes creation. Without rhythm there's no possible language: the sign is based on a swing, that of the marked and the unmarked that we call paradigm. [...] then what we listen to is no what is "possible" (the prey, the threat or the object of desire that passes without warning), but what is "secret": what, submerged into reality, cannot come to human consciousness but through a code that is both ciphering and deciphering of that reality. [...] Since that moment listening is subjected [...] to a hermeneutic: to listen is to get ready to decipher what is obscure, confuse or mute in order to unveil to consciousness the "backhand" of sense" (Barthes, 2002:246-247).

12 Although if Small's proposal is accepted (1997) perhaps the opposition might be musicked sound vs. non-musicked sound.

The track was recorder in a small garden near to London Bridge. A riverside promenade through which, as will be seen in the next two tracks, provides an unique perspective regarding the ways how activities are organized in front of that big communication channel that is the Thames. A space where the city's port and leisure activities converge, including urban structural attention (street cleansing, aerial, fluvial and terrestrial traffic).
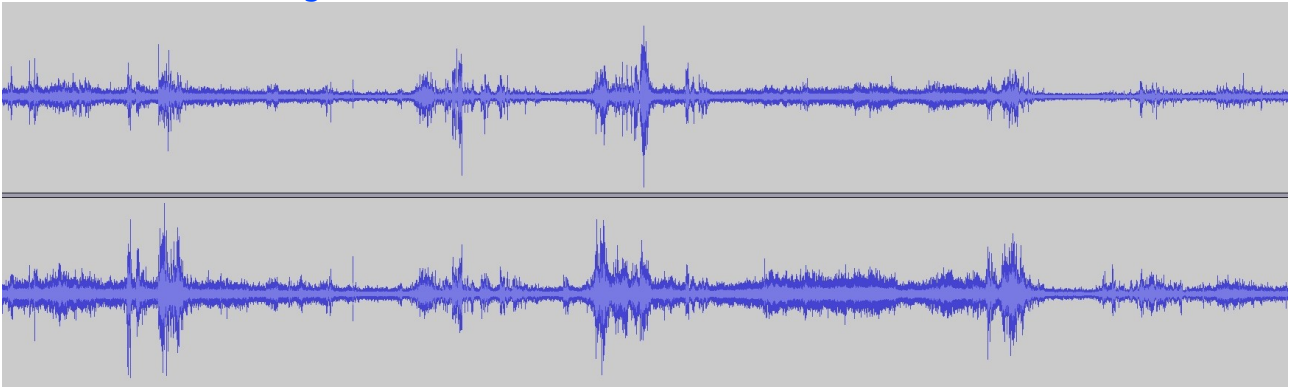
5. Southwark Bridge

Figure 5: Graphical representation of the fifth track sound wave.

On the same side of the river, few yards further, we can hear a very similar ambiance to the one on the previous recording. Although the presence of ground traffic is higher here because of the acoustics, it's still possible to sense the presence of the river, particularly of its flow hitting the walls of its border. The rumor of agitated waters is complemented by some sort of radio communication. It's easily distinguishable as it lacks the low frequencies that characterize direct communication and as it's full of glitches and brief lapses of interference.

The quality of the recording is somehow irregular, as can be seen by the distortions caused by slight wind that harasses the microphones. The acoustic particularities of the space -a slightly roofed corner- facilitates the clear perception of the phonetics -slavonic perhaps- passing by and give us an idea of the quality of the place. Also, the reverberation of the steps of passers -with different tempos and drag nuances- give us an indication about the type of space: a casual use and practice, an "accidental stroll" that draws the contour of an iconic space not at all emblematic but that contains some of the most statistically common elements of the city. It is also possible to distinguish traces of railway traffic -particularly the sound of the brakes of some nearby train or subway- and air traffic -the hum of some airplane, hardly locatable.

All these elements brings us back to the reflections of the previous track, that must be extended to this one. It is, therefore, an ambiance that we could identify with the quotidian passage of urban life. An infraordinary ambiance -as Perec would say- that isn't characteristic for unusual events. It's curious to realize how this type of ambiances -as well as other sensitive aspects of them- does not usually appear in tourist guides nor remain in the memory of their users. What is highlighted from the city is what is arranged as attractive, rarely the quotidian, both at an aural-sociophonic level as at others. In this sense, what we may find familiar, aural ambiances and environments that are known, practiced, and produced in a nearly automatic way, are the ones considered "trivial", "banal", "mundane", lacking any information as redundant. In line with this thoughts, the words of Barthes seem to change a little. As he said:

"There's no sense that humans do not have in common with animals. However, it's quite evident that phylogenetic development -and within human history technical development- have modified (and will continue to modify) the hierarchy of the five senses. [...] Audition, for its part, seems essentially related

to the evaluation of space-time situation (to which humans add the sense of sight and animals smell). Listening -constituted from audition- is for the anthropologist the sense of space and time as it captures the degrees of distancing and the regular return of sound stimulation. For mammals their territory is marked with noises and odors; for humans -a phenomenon often uncounted- the appropriation is also sonorous: domestic space, the one of the home, the one of the floor -an approximate equivalent to animal territory- is the one of familiar sounds, 'recognizable' ones, and its whole is part of a sort of 'domestic symphony'". (Barthes, 1982:244)

It is important to differentiate between what Barthes calls "sonorous appropriation of space" and what Blesser and Salter describe as "auditory cultures". Both notions may be included within a larger group regarding acoustemologic practices but the first one refers to sociophonic production and the second to interpretative practices. Therefore, the "symphony" (domestic or public in the present case) referred by Barthes is related both with a physical reality where the social practice of spaces means acoustic energy production, and with the psycho-social reality that necessarily implies an interpretation of everything that comes to our ears in contrast with the activity we're doing and the space where we are doing it.

All this leads us to wonder about the nature of our object of study, that is to say: What is a sound? What processes or dynamics have to do with things defined as sonorous? The following extract of Aristotle's "De Anima" may be clarifying in this sense:

"Let's begin doing now some distinctions around sound and audition. Sound can be understood in two ways, in act and potential. [...] Sound in act is always produced by something, against something, and on something. The agent is of course a hit and thus it is impossible to produce a sound if there is only one thing, as the body that hits and the one that receives the hit must be different: then what sounds does it against something and on something. Also the hit does not happen unless there is movement. [...] Regarding the differences between sounds, these are revealed on the sound in act: in the same way that colours cannot be seen if there is no light, high and low pitches cannot be perceived if there is no sound."

In absolute terms, and referring to the classical communication model (emisor, medium, receiver, etc.), we could almost ensure that a sound phenomenon has three distinct phases. In the first one happens what Aristotle described as the "hit": a physical phenomenon that initiates a flow of acoustic or sonorous energy, beyond the intentions related to its origin. Energy that necessarily happens in a particular location, in a medium, in a street, in a plaza, in a park: in a space. The second phase refers to a space that becomes part of the signal as it contributes with nuances derived from its own acoustic properties, which are determined or conditioned by a particular architectural and urban order. Once the space contributions are added to the signal we'll enter into the third phase, that is related to the perception and cognition of the signal. Firstly a particular physiological structure is necessary, as well as an auditory system able to capture the vibrations of a signal and a system of values able to interpret and categorize what is heard.

In summary, a sound is a process that includes physical, environmental,

urbanistic, architectural, physiological, psychological, and socio-cultural variables where the only constant is structural, and where the connecting thread is the signal. Sound does not exist beyond planetary atmospheres as the signal is not submerged in an adequate medium for its transmission. A medium through which any signal may move and spread. In a similar way, without any of the above mentioned variables the equation would be incomplete. It is commonly obviated that if the socio-cultural variable is eliminated the process will not work alike.

Perhaps this is the explanation why urban sound management systems operate under minimal conditions. On one hand these respond to a similar criterion to waste management: the starting point is not sound management *per se* but annoying sound management (noise). On the other hand it also focuses on a negative logic scheme based in presumably objective values product of the mathematization of reality, of the reduction of sound to quantitative values that obviate psycho-social and cultural variables. And these are not only obviated but systematically excluded, repeatedly set aside any discussion. Maybe that's because of the prestige that this technical-sanitary paradigm seems to have among the social classes that historically have been taking charge of urban management (although its effectiveness is undeniable, we must not forget that always within very specific contexts). Or perhaps because psycho-social and cultural variables in this regard are subjected to stigmatization (as the paper of qualitative social research is very poor in relation to international academic dynamics) even if those could be a key issue in relation to improving the quality of life in human settlements, whether urban or not.
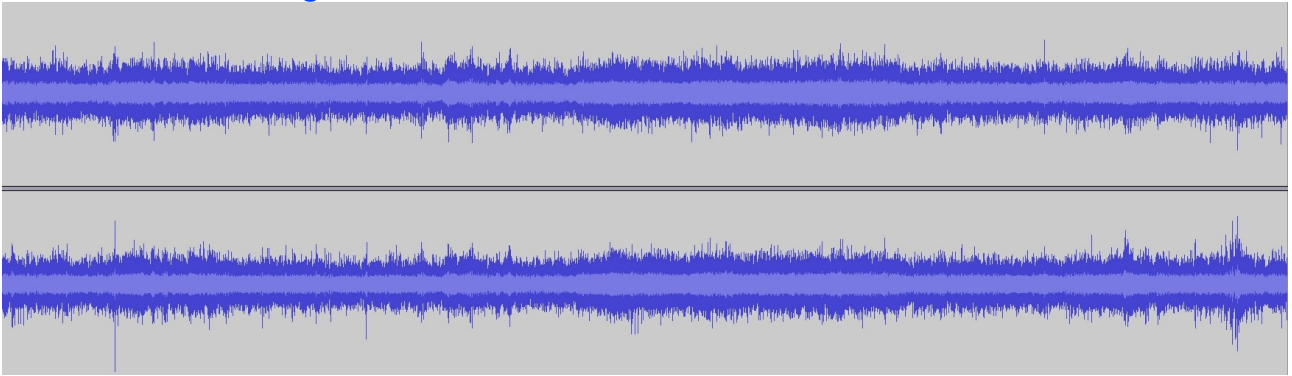
6. Blackfriars Bridge

Figure 6: Graphical representation of the sixth track sound wave.

Even within the banks of the river we now move to the other side to attend to a major change in the sociophonic composition. Despite the nearby construction works we are moving from an hybrid environment where industrial activities coexist with touristic ones to another where the latter prevails. As if these were two layers competing for centrality, capriciously overlapping, both environmental typologies intertwine in order to show us which side and where in the Thames course we are.

The ambiance reproduced in the recording belongs to the second group. Sociophonies derived from ludic and commercial interaction are more evident in this track. Laughters, declamations, happiness explosions, phonetic diversity with a high anglophone degree are all phenomena that point out that we are in a space of recreation and amusement. The slight cutlery and cash hustle, liquids that change its container, terraces achieve what many years of evolution and drift didn't: to separate the space of consumption from the space of work in hostelry establishments.

However, the presence of the river and the post-industrial city spectrum are still with us. A helicopter across the sky remind us that we may feel safe: the guarded city. The cyclical water percussion on the banks of the river connects this track with the previous, as the background murmur coming from industrial activities does. If we pay attention to the waveform we may realize that it's a regular scheme, not many peaks and non-peaks. This shows some information about the stability or instability of this particular sociophonic dynamic -which is applicable for the length of the recording but not so for the global ambiance routines. A nearby sign (Figure 7) warns us of the possibility of loud noises, probably due to the Blackfriars Bridge restoration works.

Sociophonies associated to social interaction may, in this particular case, be listened and understood as a background drone or hum. In this sense, is illuminating to see how practically any ambiance sound may be understood as such, always depending on the listener's situational or global relation with the space where those are perceived. It won't be the same to listen to a jackhammer, a saw on marble, or any other phenomenon derived from construction works if the listener is meditating than if the listener is working in construction. The activities performed always interfere in our reading of the phenomenon. Activities that, in case of not being subjected to a particular space or in case of being mobile, will tend to increase the disruptive potential of its socioacoustic spectrum.

This is a consideration that, despite being hypothetical, should be taken into

consideration when anticipating the repercussions of different options regarding the urban whole management. Noise complaints in relation to the activities of public services such as ambulances, police, firemen or street cleansing are many. But another reflection must be done, this one of a symbolic character and political significance. There is an unwritten norm -usually fulfilled in almost all cases- that seems to confront the subject with the group in a way that public (sound) production leaking into private space is bearable and private (sound) production leaking into public or private space is sanctionable. When this happens -the public leaking into the private- sanctions are not quite clear, morally or administratively. This logic seems to have been passed on to situations where the private subject's (sound) production leaks into the public in the same environment. That is the case of construction works. If acoustic conditions where a (public or private) construction work is held amplify its own sociophonic phenomenology there's no necessarily a sanction, unless the social environment sends complaints.

Figure 7: Poster found nearby Blackfriars Bridge.

It is a perverse logic and a common one at the same time. Not because alleged collective interests are prioritized against the private ones, but because these are deployed regardless any sensitivity, typology, and domestic spatial fragmentations. Even the commons sense states it: Have anyone ever heard of any construction work that informed the neighborhood about its schedule and estimated duration? Palliative measures are useless if preventive ones are not taken. There is no point in "fighting against noise" if we don't review the pacts that bind us.
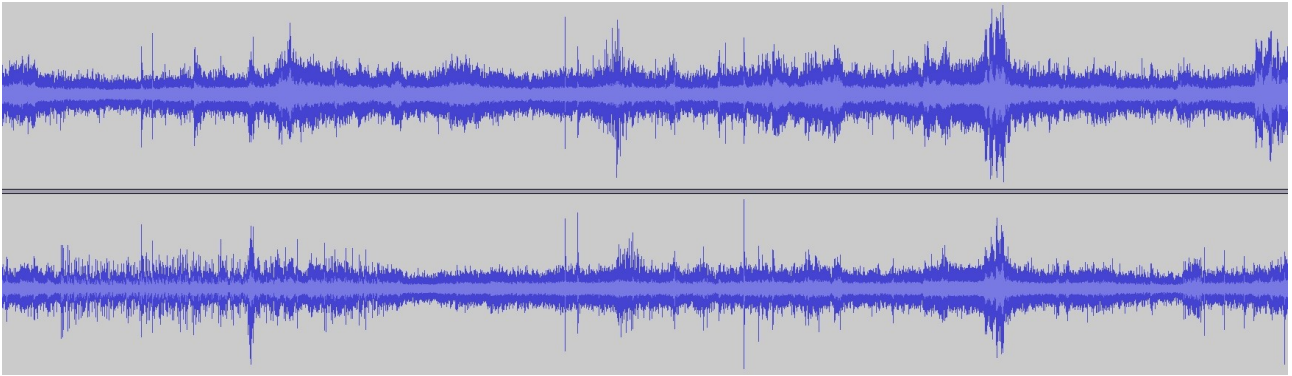
7. Station Road Market

Figure 8: Graphical representation of the seventh track sound wave.

With this last recording we pass to something completely different than the last three. Typically urban sound layers (traffic, transit, sociophonic derivatives from industrial activities and cleaning services) pass from the front to the background and cede prominence to social interaction dynamics. There are still constants related to the general urban environment as traffic rumor or footsteps, but it's the balance among these and the textures generated in the interstices the one that informs us about the space we're practicing.

The most abundant in this recording is the murmur of social activity. We are in a street market. A market where people from the surroundings show their products for direct sale. The bustle of walkers, potential customers, and users is important, with its aggregate phenomenology. Terraces extend all along the market's frontiers. Music floods its interior. Sociability impregnates sound space and forces an important relaxation in relation to the rest of the nearby urban fabric.

This track was recorded while sited in a terrace, tasting some tea with biscuits. An elderly man sits by my side with a mint tea and a sandwich. It does not take long until we start talking. Similar situations emerge constantly around.

Anglophone phonetics abound in its most diverse variations. The one that prevails is Jafaican, a phonetic pattern originated in neighborhoods that have a high transnational components, as this one. Almost unaware of the traffic rumor, tourists and natives share a space whose leitmotiv is exchange. Plastic bags, cash money hitting bars and stands, that goes in and out from diverse materials wallets, running footsteps, sleeping footsteps, kids shouting, coffee machines that warn, sirens that alert... A myriad of phenomena that refer to activities unconnected with the Calvinist spasms of other areas. This is not an area characterized by its human density, nor it's on the contrary. It's not a space lacking activities.

In some place between post-industrial frenzy and rural relax lies this market. As if it was an island at the foot of the railway, numerous traditions mix in order to generate another multitude of potential interpretations. Perhaps a soundmark is missing, some bell chiming or another emblematic element related to community space. To this respect is interesting to remind the work of Kisser and Lubman that, starting from the study of London's East End, argue that the traditional Cockney nomenclature has been historically assigned to those people born inside the area where the Bow Bells -Saint Mary-Le-Bow's bells, as seen in the second track- can be listened. Over the years and

the arrival of the successive transnational migration waves, the degree of the Cockney community's cohesion would have decreased in a way that "cultural diversity and immigration of new ethnic groups may have weaken such a community" (2005:2). These claims are not unfounded, but have a counterpart on which is appropriate to reflect.

Seems evident that the formal and representational inputs generates the progressive arrival and inclusion of groups and individuals that practice other traditions will result in a formal weakening of modes and representations previous to this arrival. Something similar happens when a city grows and absorbs the nearby settlements: the settlement yields identitarian space in order to incorporate other traditions and to generate a new phenomenon resulting from the hybridization of the previous. However, and despite the facts that corroborate the hypothesis of the authors, the result is a different thing. The initial community ceases to exist in the same terms as to generate another social group that participates of both traditions, in a more or less equilibrate way depending on the quantity of individuals integrated in the collectives previous to the resulting one. In the case of the interpretative practices regarding sociophonic construction, is interesting to attend to the following extract:

> "The ringing of bells from the XIXth century, that for us has become a sound from other times, was listened and evaluated according to an affective system that today is unfamiliar for us. These show a different relation with the world and with the sacred in a similar way that account for a different form of understanding and experimenting time and space. The reading of the audible environment would constitute one of the processes related to the construction of identities, both regarding the individual and the community. The bell ringing established a language and founded a communication system that has been gradually breaking apart. It gave rhythm to forgotten forms of relationship between individuals as well as between the living and the dead. It made possible forms of expression -now lost- of joy and cordiality."
> (Corbin, quoted by Kisser and Lubman, 2005:11)

It's also evident that the incorporation of new traditions to existing paradigms "breaks apart" the traditional forms. New forms imply new environmental readings and practices. However, in a similar way to when we decide to rent a room of our home, the new incorporation implies a time of adaptation between the previous and the new paradigm. The same seems to happen to a macro level. Affirming that diversity weakens the community is, in absolute terms, biased and demagogic. It may weaken the values and practices previous to the contact, but a community needs contacts and integration in order to survive and perpetuate. It is, by the way, an unbalanced contact that possesses similarities to colonial processes.

Conclussions

The reflections made until this point respond more to the pleasure of writing and synthesizing than to any academic or formal rigour, and are intended to deal with the description, abstraction, and analysis of the role of sound regarding relational patterns. Reflections that don't have a simple assemblage, an easy disciplinary articulation as these feed from social analysis traditions (Sociology, Anthropology, Law, Ethnography, etc.), and from technical-biased ones (Architecture, Acoustics, Musicology), but also from others related to aesthetics and composition (music, Sound Art, Ambientalism). These are, therefore, hybrid and transdisciplinary reflections where the resulting knowledge tends to what can be called Social Acoustics or Socioacoustics. The general idea is to approach sound phenomena from a holistic perspective while paying attention to its relational aspects. Speaking about the relational or social aspect of sound is to a certain extent falling into a tautology or a reiteration as these social aspects are embedded in the same sources that originate sound processes. If, as Aristotle affirmed, sound in act is always produced "by something, into something, and against something", then for a sound to happen an interaction must happen as well and, therefore, sound is always a metaphor of (social) interaction.

From the field recordings taken in London we have done a brief and not so deep review to the sociophonic dynamics common to urban settlements. These phenomena are typical both to human urban settlements in general and to this particular one. The history of the settlement is always key at the time of interpreting its current phenomenology. Because, at the end that's what all is about: applying a generalist hermeneutic pattern in order to understand the relationship between the two fundamental basis of any Socioacoustic analysis or diagnosis that deserves certain credibility, that are sociophonic phenomenology and acoustemologic patterns. The first one would suppose an inter-subjective element on which to base the reflections. It might be argued if this or that phenomenon have this or that interpretation. However, the existence of the phenomenon cannot be denied. Bells can be interpreted in many ways but the presence of a sound phenomenon that happens when bells are played is indubitable. The second one would be related precisely to social and cultural hermeneutics around sound and sociophonic phenomena.

Central to these seven reflections that define the excuse for the present writing are two issues that are also central to general and particular reflections regarding Social Sciences. On the one hand the big Cartesian nonsense that contraposes culture to nature, as if human beings were the peak of creation and a there would be a wall between us and what's not human. It's necessary to get over not only the ethnocentrism of human groups but also an anthropocentrism that situates us at a clear disadvantage by dyeing our analysis with an unforgivable bias. On the other hand there is the issue of the scale of the analysis: of how a macro characterization and analysis of sociophonic (and social in general) phenomena show different results than a micro one. As Éluard said "there are other worlds, but they are in this one", what may remind us that there always are behavioural dynamics but that these can change considerably, as well as its interpretations. With respect to human production of sociophonic phenomenology a logic sequence seems to be given where the macro-sociophonic processes -these macro-dynamics- have to be deafening in order to have an identity, to be perceptible. By the other hand, the micro-sociophonic dynamics are incredibly more abundant and require an attentive listening. A music of the spheres positively exist (according to

NASA's recent findings) to which we are exposed since we're born and that supposes our starting point. In a similar exercise to the one made by John Cage in order to corroborate the existence of silence and where the results showed that our bodies turn to listen themselves if they don't perceive any outside sound -that is to say that silence has no existence beyond a metaphorical world-, if the scale is broadened to the universe we might find something similar. Each planet has a particular "silence", determined by its mass and orbit speed (among other variables, presumably). This "silence" of its own, this starting index would necessarily affect to the way in which we perceive and interpret sound phenomena. The frequency emitted by Earth is undoubtedly our *tabula rasa*. The question now is to find points of comparison in order to isolate our particularities and to know more about how aurality works and how it affects to terrestrial sociability.

Acknowledgements

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