

Manual for the construction of a sound as a device to elaborate social connection

Where is that sound coming from?

I don't know...

Read before opening

The Manual project explores sound and auditory experience as platforms for social meeting and environmental investigation. Bringing together a working group of artists, the project functions as a site-specific field study of Oslo, involving locational research, artistic presentation, performative actions and public discussion. Such an approach aims not to uncover statistical information, or overarching viewpoint on city life. Rather the works involved supplement such objective perspectives with face-to-face interaction, fictions, secret messages, and live sensing so as to capture the everyday. Including the Swedish collaborative duo Kristina Lindström and Åsa Ståhl (aka å+k), whose projects are based on forms of story-telling and sharing, the American artist Brandon LaBelle, working with urban networks and distributed sonic narratives, Tao G. Vrhovec Sambolec from Holland/Slovenia, investigating questions of architectural space and forms of transmission, and Norwegian artists Jana Winderen, uncovering hidden sources of sound through blind field recording, and Siri Austeen, exploring concrete sounds and the act of listening.

The Manual project acts as a working space for exploring sound and listening as important locational and social material. How do the sounds of everyday life generate forms of commonality, and how might the dynamics of listening impart other types of artistic intervention? Exploring such themes, the Manual project is based on process-oriented actions and events, aiming for an exposed mode of production. To be situated in public space as a laboratory, the artists will bring forward amplifications of city life, giving expression to sound and listening as social energy.

Step 1: Sound as productive transgression

Where is that sound coming from?

I don't know... it must be the neighbors again.

Sound unfolds as a dynamic relation between an inside and an outside – it forces the two together. This physical movement immediately occurs at the level of the ear – without closure, the ear radically permits the intrusion of the exterior onto the interior of the body. As a spatial transgression, this mingling between inside and outside creates a sense of immediacy – sound comes from somewhere, it originates from a source and travels *toward* a listener: it is immediately close. Resulting from material frictions and vibrations from a given object or body, sound propagates to leave behind the original object or body. It immediately crosses a number of borders, of the object or body, of given spatial separations between rooms or related divisions, and of the separation between object (source) and subject (ear). Sound comes directly into the listener. This no doubt forms the basis for the dynamic force of sound to intrude and influence a given environment. Such

understanding repositions a visual perspective of space, creating instead an “acoustic horizon” that delineates the distance between a listener and source of sound, while charging this with energy. The hearing of a sound forms an acoustical space inserted within the material constructions of architecture: sitting inside I hear all the sounds from outside, which generates a temporal addition to a particular space, as a second living architecture.

Step 2: Sound as signifier

What did he say?

I don't know... I think it was something about the time of departure.

Sound also carries messages. It functions as a communicational medium. As a physical and spatial movement, sound carries information related to the conditions of the original object or body, and the related environment. It creates what Barry Truax refers to as a “feedback” of acoustic information, which “is necessary for orientation, and in the most general sense, the awareness of self in relation to others.” Importantly, this information also grants animation to things: by coming from an object or body, sound signals that movement is occurring, and more so, that life is happening. Many esoteric traditions understand sound as the voice of objects, of nature, of animals, and the world as an audible chorus whose multiple voices are continually speaking. Sound comes to radically suggest or announce *presence* (even as recorded material). This may form a primary and elemental aspect for acoustical understanding that also elaborates the spatiality of aural experience. The crossing of inside and outside provides a key communicational platform in forming bonds with the environment and others. Sound may allow the fundamental articulation: I am here.

Step 3: Sound as community

I really like this song.

Yeah, it rocks.

Sound is also a significant social and cultural material. It is marked, coded, a mobile and itinerant matter circulating through different contexts. By continually moving in and among bodies, it imparts a sense for sharing. It gives emotional and psychological charge to environments, bringing so much presence from here to there. Sound immediately enlivens the environment with relations that easily move from a one-to-one contact and toward community orientation – sound is never completely private. The feedbacking of sound and place carries within the dynamics of not only conversation, but also interference: noise not only as an unwanted sound or a break in the transfer of messages, but importantly as social material – *to interrupt* is the beginning of participation. This social understanding to sound underscores the crossing of boundaries, of the inside-outside link as an acoustical forum through which relations flex, gain elasticity, or break. As Barry Blesser writes, “Spatially distributed sound, or lack thereof, conveys the difference between here and there.” It is important to stress, that such conveyance of

difference is also the foundation for the emergence of community: from here to there is the making of a public.

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