TOWARDS A REWILDING OF THE EAR

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INTRODUCTION

If music grounded in tone is a means of sending messages to the world, then music grounded in noise is a means of receiving messages from the world. Noise takes us out of ourselves. It invites communion, leading us to embrace the patterns that connect us to everything around us. As we listen carefully to noise, the whole world becomes music. Rather than a vehicle of self-expression, music becomes a mode of awareness. (Adams, 2009, p. 4)

To produce sound is the means we have to connect communally as a species, but have we not become too self-centred as a species, too autistic to our surroundings? I feel that in present times, more than ever, we are lacking our own conscious silencing to listen to the planet we inhabit. How can listening change our relationship to the environment and reconnect us with it at a deeper level?

In this paper I am attempting to stress the idea of an empirical/experiential reconnection to the natural non-human world through the practice of deep listening. I believe that the aesthetic experience is central to a more ecological positioning of the human being on earth and that aesthetic experience should involve a 'rewilding of the ear'.

To discuss this concept, I build an argument from Edgard Varèse's music as “organized sound” and approach it from a perceptive point of view. This leads to the discussion of other concepts like David Dunn's "grief of incommunicability" and Jean-François Augoyard and Henry Torgue's "sharawadgi effect" and, in continuity to it, I discuss a parallel between Truax's continuum (Speech—Music—Soundscape) and Peirce's semiotic system – all of which I believe are important to an aesthetic understanding of the listening experience. Finally, we can discuss the possibility of the re-tuning our ears to the wider sound palette of the world, and consider George Monbiot's concepts of "rewilding" and "rewilding of the human life", in order to create a parallel to our relationship with the soundscape.

I believe that this rewilding of the ear lies firstly in our aesthetic experience. Our ears are atrophying for all we hear is symbols, we listen for meanings that might come shaped in sound, ignoring sound itself. We do not let our bodies resonate to sound if
all we look for in sound is significance about something else. We need to first listen, let ourselves be affected by the matter of sound. Meaning comes later. Music is an extension of our learning to listen. This paper also suggests that music should reflect and develop forms of listening to the natural world through the practice of ecoacoustics.

We need to rethink what it means to listen…

1. TO ORGANIZE SOUND

In the 20th century, Edgard Varèse defined music as "organized sound" (1966, p. 18). Personally, for a long time I have not been as fond of this definition as the one used by John Cage, borrowed from Henry David Thoreau: "music is sounds all around us" (Schafer, 1969, p. 1), until recently. In my understanding both definitions are consistent with my own conception of what music might be, which is almost a disposable concept, for I am not interested in actively distinguishing human from non-human aesthetic stimuli (Pinto, 2012). It becomes very difficult to establish boundaries when you take aesthetics as being first perceptive and not expressive. By this I mean that, it is we humans who discern whether we find something aesthetically interesting, pleasant, etc. and give it a critical value, an appreciative value, an importance, and from there on we can think about the boundaries of art, music or any other aesthetic stimuli. This seems to be a very basic premise, but is something I find very important to take into account when it comes to the thinking of big western concepts and their cultural meanings and values like 'art' and 'music' (the ones I am interested in for this paper).

Unlike Varèse's statement, I believe Cage's has an intentional polemic point to it, which has to do with all the circumstances of music and his theory at the time. It is/was a bold statement, inevitably destined to generate some controversy within the different existing conceptions of music. On the other hand, thinking about Varèse's definition, I find it very elegant, for, if you think about it, it can hardly be disputed as a definition: it translates what music is essentially, universally and, on top of and more than that, it accurately describes the semiotic process of active listening! What I find fascinating about this definition is related exactly to that basic first premise about aesthetic sensing. It is common to interpret Varèse's citation taking the composer's perspective: 'Composer organizes sounds in order to make music, therefore music is
the result of that, ergo, what is not organized by the composer is not music.' However, taking into account my first point that aesthetics are firstly perceptive rather than expressive, the comprehension of that definition takes a twist where the understanding of 'organization' is nowhere but in the perceptible appreciation of the listener. Organized sounds are only organized by those who can hear organization in them. Organization is a perceptive quality rather than an expressive one.

It is our own sensible analysis that critically organizes the sounds we hear, thus it is only our subjective semiotic process that decides whether what we hear is a form of organization or not. Is not stochastics a form of organization? Organization is a subjective concept of perception, thus if music is "organized sound" then music has the potential to be anything audible to anyone. If this is so, do we really need to concern ourselves so much about its boundaries?

If we understand music as organized sound, and agree that this organization and aesthetics are perceptive rather than expressive, then we may also agree that inflexible conceptions of music and art are not really defensible, for music becomes as subjective as the very nature of the listening activity.

From the understanding of music as the result of the aesthetic process of active listening, how we organize sound, we can deduce something that may be obvious, nonetheless important: listening is a feature that might be culturally and contextually (thus individually) learned and developed:

Everybody inhabits a distinctly individual soundscape, dynamically responding to our surroundings and to others that inhabit it with us. Personalities notwithstanding, our individual sense of sound perception is also influenced by social, cultural and even economic meta-factors that establish the backdrop of our auditory sense of who and where we are. (Stocker, 2013, p. 5)

This means that we have the ability to tune our own ears intentionally by actively listening and sounding, so we empirically can 'learn to listen'. We can engage with the sonic environment in the same fashion as we might do with music in Varèsian terms: 'organizing' its sound.
Pauline Oliveros (2012) divides what I consider to be 'active listening', 'deep listening' or, shall we say, 'musical listening', into two modes of focus that according to her, when balanced, may bring about homeostasis:

"listening can be focused, linear and exclusive and listening can be open, global and inclusive. Focal listening is concentrated moment-to-moment attention to details, such as a phrase or phrases of music. Inclusive listening is receptive to all that can be heard in an ever expanding field of continuous simultaneous events perceived as a whole." (Oliveros, Foreword, 2012, p. iii)

Listening is the first and most important step in 'making sense' of our sonic environment and by training our ears to deeply listen to the environment we are actively involving ourselves with it, engaging with it, creating meaning, thus connecting to it in a deeper way. To listen strengthens our relationship to the environment, develops awareness of our place in it and seduces our curiosity to understand it ever more deeply.

2. Sharawadgi out of the Grief

Sound itself is emotionless. It is only from a person's point of view that music acquires its emotions. If one listens to music from nature's point of view, music is free of emotion. Therefore, emotion is a synthetic and not a natural distinction. (Chung, 2001, p. 72)

As it often is the case with other field-recording practitioners, the moment I actually spent time to listen carefully and attentively to a natural soundscape through a pair of microphones and a headset, I was changed by it. I found myself in a meditative state for hours, static, listening to the most organic piece of music subtly changing through the end of a summer afternoon in the woods by the ocean.

This type of aural aesthetic experience that one might understand as a 'sublime moment', is named by Jean-François Augoyard and Henry Torgue (Bick, 2008) the sharawadgi effect. It is defined as the blurring of the edges of aesthetics, the 'determinatorialization' of the senses and monumentalization of sensation:

"Unbridled and unintentional structures disrupt the nature-culture binary and reveal new forms of life beyond their disorder (...) The sharawadgi affirms itself in contrast with the very banality it is based on." (Bick, 2008)
Claude Schryer describes the *sharawadgi* effect as being essentially a "state of awareness, in which one tends to open the ear in the hopes of experiencing the sublime beauty of a given sound in an unexpected context" (2001, p. 125). I believe that this aesthetic experience of aural 'sublime' or *sharawadgi*, is closely related and, in fact, an outcome of what James Agee defines as the "grief of incommunicability" (Dunn, 1997). This 'grief' arises from a sensation of otherness that is simultaneously a sensation of belonging to the world/environment/cosmos, when listening to it 'speaking to itself'. This phenomenon is related to the aural experience of the world, the life we share with the whole terrestrial biome. It consists of our empathetic, although alien relation with what transcends our being, the natural world that envelops and contains us. In my interpretation of it, the grief is what exceeds the 'struggle' to construct meaning within music or the natural environment.

We hear in the world talking to itself a sense of otherness that simultaneously mirrors our deepest sense of belonging (...) Somehow we have always intuited that music is part of our reflection to and from the non-human world. (Dunn, 1997, p. 1)

I interpret the grief as being the content of the aural aesthetic experience.

The grief is autonomized sensation leading to the aesthetic experience, the ‘letting go to glance chaos’¹ in a process of sensorial deterritorialization. Its incommunicability or untranslatable quality can be explained through Adorno's aporia of aesthetics:

[The aesthetic] object is determined negatively, as indeterminable. It is for this reason that art requires philosophy, which interprets it in order to say what it is unable to say, whereas art is only able to say it by not saying it (Adorno, 1970, p. 72)

If we understand that 'art' happens first perceptively as we have discussed before, then we can understand this statement as valid to any aesthetic experience. Being so, we can relate it to the grief of incommunicability. To paraphrase Adorno's citation into a sound oriented discourse: The grief of incommunicability is determined

¹ This concept of 'chaos', borrowed from Elizabeth Grosz, may be understood as ‘the beginning’, nature, cosmos, the vibration of the universe. It is what is there that is, and transcends, our human nature. See *Chaos, Territory, Art* (Grosz, 2008).
negatively, as indeterminable. It is for this reason that soundscapes require sound studies, which interpret it in order to say what it is unable to say, whereas soundscapes are only able to say it by not saying it—but sounding it.

It is out of this grief that one might eventually experience the *sharawadgi*—the monumentalization of the aural sensation by 'resonance' with the bodies that experience it. "[Sounds] only become Sharawadji by decontextualization, by a rupture of the sense." (Schryer, 2001, p. 125) I consider this decontextualization to be open to comprehension, for I understand that the decontextualization might often be within our perception and not an exterior factor. I consider it to be a framing of that 'rupture of the sense', i.e. monumentalization of sensation. The 'grief' is the decontextualization of our sensation towards the natural world, rendering the sense of belonging and otherness with it, which might evoke the *sharawadgi*.

3. **Sound and Signification**

3.1. **Musical Values and Systems**

Pierre Schaeffer states, "musical value is inseparable from the idea of system" (Hodgkinson, 2001, p. 38). I find these two concepts ('musical value' and 'system') key to a comprehension of a transition from the listening to 'our music' to a 'music of the environment' back to an 'environmental music'. Schaeffer is strongly critical of western music’s internal structure. He argues that it functions similarly to language: There are 'musical values', just as there are phonemes in language, which are attributed a meaning by the relations they create within their pre-established system or syntax. It is this system that renders them meaningful, and, according to Schaeffer, sound itself is neglected in favour of its musical value.

To understand how we attribute meaning to sounds, and how we differentiate them in different systems, I shall resort to the semiotics of sound as argued by Barry Truax and Charles Peirce's theory of semiotics. I shall attempt to relate these two theories in order to understand better the act of listening and our aesthetic experience of sound—the grief of incommunicability.

3.2. "Speech—Music—Soundscape" (Truax's Continuum)

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2 The experienced sound, sound in the perceiver's perspective, containing 'the grief', that may or not be rendered music/organized sound.
Musical instruments refine the sounds of nature into a powerful form of human expression. But music communicates on the basis of its organization of sound, which is the product of human thought processes. (Truax, 2001, pp. 50-51)

Truax (2001) divides the semiotics of 'acoustic communication' into a continuum of three fundamental systems. They are: speech, music and soundscape. Analysing the systems in this disposition, we can identify that, from left to right, there is a corresponding increase in the range of the acoustic repertoire: from the relatively small number of phonetic units existent in speech, through the wider variety of musical sounds (that has increased even more since the 20th century), to the virtually infinite universe of possible sounds of the acoustic environment, which can even integrate the sounds from the previous systems.

It is also suggested that, from a very general perspective, there is a reduction of the strictness of the syntactic structure, while moving from left to right. This, taking into account that, for the transmission of meaning in a language, there are quite stringent rules regarding the organization of phonemes in order to shape words, to be then organized in the form of speech. Regarding music, the syntactic rules that determine a 'musical language' may not be as clear or well understood as in spoken language. However, a listener who is familiar with the genre of a certain music piece will be able to recognize the occurrence of a mistake or variation. This is certainly less clear in more recent music genres that are structurally freer and exploratory. We can then infer that these will be placed more at the right of the continuum, closer to the soundscape where, to our understanding, there is virtually no syntactic structure for it is very open-ended, above human scale.

Finally, Truax suggests that, along the continuum (from left to right) there is a decrease of the density of information in time. In language, the information is very condensed and structurally optimized in order to be conveyed in a clear and objective manner, "compare what can be understood or inferred from two seconds of speech, compared with that of music" (Truax, 2001, p. 52). In music, meaning is developed over longer periods of time, therefore articulated in other ways and out of other syntactic structures. Regarding the soundscape, we always have the most extreme examples. Given that it is the totality of a perceived sound environment, it will potentially contain within it all the other acoustic communication systems, only from
a macroscopic, or rather 'macrophonic' perspective. Nevertheless, I reckon that the soundscape is also the one that potentially contains the highest density of information, if we interpret it as a "macrocosmic composition" (Schafer, 1977, p. 5), resorting to some imagination to consider the entire sound universe taking place in time. This is, of course, an abstraction and, on a human scale of perception the soundscape is the one that contains the lowest density of information, i.e. it has a longer temporal development for an attainment of meaning by the human listener.

In short, according Truax, moving through the continuum from left to right, the acoustic meaning we can attain or, the acoustic communication, will be determined by the effects of the increasing sound repertoire, the decreasing constriction of the syntactic structure and the temporal density of information.

![Figure 1 (Turino, 1999, p. 226)](image_url)

Peirce developed his semiotic theory, based on three main trichotomies, to analyze the different aspects of a sign and the different types of relationship between the three basic components of semiosis: sign-object-interpretant. These trichotomies are, in a
way, an escalation of the complexity or of the levels of mediation in the relations between the components of the sign.

According to Peirce, a sign is "something that stands for something else for someone in some way" (Turino, 1999, p. 222). The components of the sign define it and its reference or, its relation with the object and the interpretant. Therefore the object is the 'something else', the entity signified by the sign, and the interpretant the effect generated by the sign and object in the perceiver.

According to Peirce, semiosis is a chain reaction process that consists of an unfolding of signs into new signs in the mind, *ad infinitum*. This chain reaction takes place in time and can be divided in stages of semiosis. In each stage the interpretant (the effect of the sign in the observer, whether feeling and sensation, physical reaction as well as ideas articulated and processed in language) becomes the object of a new stage of semiosis, creating a new interpretant, and so on until it is interrupted by another process.

On the sign itself, the trichotomy is divided in *qualisign, sinsign and legisign*. *Qualisign* refers to a pure quality of something concrete (e.g. the mass\(^3\) of the sound of a particular recording); *sinsign* to that something concrete, specifically (i.e. that particular recording); and *legisign* refers to a generalization produced by identifying specific cases, a class (i.e. recorded sound).

On the sign's relation to the object: *Icon, index and symbol*. *Icon* refers to a relation of the sign with the object through some kind of resemblance of morphology (e.g. the creaking of a door resemble the yelping of a dog); *index* to a relationship by co-occurrence (e.g. the creaking as an indicator that the door is not oiled); *symbol* to a linguistic or conventional relationship (e.g. 'door').

On how the sign is interpreted as representing its object: *Rheme, dicent, argument*. *Rheme* refers to the interpretation of a sign representing its object as a qualitative possibility ("a sign that is not judged as true or false but as something that is simply possible [...] [i.e.] a painting of an unknown or imaginary person or scene may be interpreted as a rheme." (Turino, 1999, p. 229)); *dicent* is refers to its object in respect

\(^3\) In Schaefferian terms, 'mass' is the harmonic contexture of a sound. (Schaeffer, 1996)
to actual existence (i.e. a recording is dient of the acoustical event that it registered, the direct effect); argument represents its object through symbolic propositions like language, mathematics, music notation, etc.

The interpreter itself (the effect) of a sign is a dynamic component divided into three classes: emotional (emotional interpretant) — a direct unreflected-upon feeling caused by a sign; energetic (energetic interpretant) — a physical reaction activated by a sign, e.g. tapping your foot to the music rhythm; and signic (sign interpretant) — that is already a linguistic conceptualization.

Signs are constituted by combinations of these components, which can be categorized by type: "Peirce's three most basic categories for all phenomena" (Turino, 1999): "Firstness [qualisign, icon, rheme], something in and of itself without relation to any second entity; Secondness [sinsign, index, dient], relations between two entities without the mediation of a third; and Thirdness [legisign, symbol, argument], involving the mediational capabilities of a person to bring a first and a second entity into synthetic or general relationships with each other." (Turino, 1999, p. 231)

These categories are not inert. As in Truax's continuum, there is dynamism in signification that, even categorized, can approach a neighbour category. In other words, a sign may have components belonging to different categories at once, however in the end it will be generalized in a dominant category, according to the mediation it reflects. There is a basic principle in these significant cadences, that is characterized like this: Thirds include Seconds and Firsts, Seconds include Firsts and Firsts can only determine Firsts ("whatever is a Third determines a Third, or degenerately a Second or a First, etc." (Turino, 1999, p. 223)).

According to Turino, musical signification operates mainly in the first two categories (Firstness and Secondness). Thirdness is reserved for semiosis of symbolic complexity of abstraction (symbol: the component that is related to your subject by signification conventions), belonging to the domain of logical thinking and its mediators and coding systems. However, western music has developed quite well a whole signification system based on the Thirdness, where its notation is contained. I agree that it might not be common for anyone to listen to music in a Third level of mediation, as if reading a score. However I believe that the conventions that are perpetuated in western music theory and notation also perpetuate legisigns (which are
Thirdness components), i.e. a glissando from low to high frequencies standing for the abstract concept of 'ascension'.

3.4. Trichotomy and Continuum

The power of music to create emotional responses and to realize personal and social identities is based in the fact that musical signs are typically of the direct, less-mediated type. Music involves signs of feeling and experience rather than the types of mediational signs that are about something else." (Turino, 1999, p. 224)

Based on Peirce's semiotic system, Turino argues that musical signification is usually more direct and less mentally mediated, semiotically acting in a more sensitive and emotional fashion than a logical and rational one. This will be the later semiotic stage, if the 'experiencer' decides to express the experienced object discursively. This remits us back to Adorno's aporia of aesthetics.

We can infer from Peirce's semiotic system that there is meaning in a particular object from the moment it causes an effect (be it an emotion, physical reaction or a linguistic concept) in its perceiver. Also, we can logically deduce that, accordingly to the system's cadence, there is an emotional interpretant in every semiotic chain. Regarding that every semiotic structure can be deconstructed down to the First category and Firstness is the less mediated category/stage of semiosis, I conclude that it is in Firstness that the aesthetic experience is contained. The aesthetic experience is the emotional interpretant of a semiosis. It is 'the grief of incommunicability', in the sense that it does not determine anything but itself, and to verbalize it would be to sublimate from its level of simplicity, from its Firstness to a Thirdness.

Adorno illustrates with his 'aporia of aesthetics', how significant structures of First and Second categories (which therefore cannot determine Thirds), require symbolic argumentative systems (hence Thirds) to its logical rationalization and communication. However, the aporia lies here: while Thirds can be deconstructed in Seconds and Firsts, Firsts and Seconds do not determine Thirds, therefore, resorting to Thirds to 'translate' or try to say Firsts will operate in a purely 'symbolic' process of classification, distanced of experience by great mediation.

If we analyse Truax's (Acoustic Communication, 2001) continuum again, we discover that, with a similar gradation from left to right, we can recognize in it a Peircian decrescendo:
We can then understand that, what happens in the movement from left to right is a decrescendo of the mediation within the semiotic processes. In other words, speech, which produces meaning by the articulation of symbols, clearly belongs to the Third Peircian category; on the other hand music may contain Thirds (symbolic notation and structural conventions that can be understood as legisigns), Seconds (indexes that can refer the listener to experienced or imagined situations, such as a flute may evoke a pastoral ambience) and Firsts (using icons in producing sounds that resemble others, such as the imitation of a bird song for flute). Turino claims that "the vast majority of musical signs are of three compromise types: rhematic-iconic-legisigns; rhematic-indexical-legisigns; dicent-indexical-legisigns. The aspect of generality provided by the legisign for each is, in fact, the cultural component, and a major defining facet of culture universally" (Turino, 1999, p. 232). These significant composites concede music’s place in Firstness and Secondness according to Peirce's hierarchy.

From this relation between Truax's continuum and Peirce's trichotomy, we can infer that from left to right, there is not necessarily a reduction in the amount of information but rather a reduction in the mediation of the semiotic process. The semiosis gradually moves towards more energetic and emotional rather than 'signic' interpretants as it advances to the right. Therefore, there is a reduction of the symbolic information (Thirdness), however there is an increase in the acoustic repertoire. In other words, there are more possible causes for consequential effects (interpretants) thus, conversely, more semiotic potential. In this way it influences a perception of structure, system or syntax, since those are more rigid and required for a Thirdness, as is speech for functioning in an argumentative way for interpretation.

However, there is a peculiarity in Truax's continuum. Of the three systems presented, we can notice that the soundscape is the only one that might abstractly exceed the 'human scale'. In abstraction its dimension is fractal, reaching from micro to macro. It is like a sonic noumenon, theoretically infinite, except its experience is always angled, contextualized and subjective. In fact, a perceived soundscape is an anthro-scopic perspective of its sounds in context and might therefore be fractioned
into music, speech and remaining acoustic information that there might be, depending on our perceptual focus, like other sonified symbolic systems.

The perceptive rendering of the soundscape as music is the product of the human process that allows us to freely associate all stimuli to signs, subjecting them to a semiotic process.

The soundscape is the original 'chaos', the signic compound that acts only in First and Second categories, although it might contain all the Thirdness systems too. It is, in a sense, the audible cosmos ready to be organized in complex semiotic processes, such as music and speech. It is how we listen that renders these systems.

We hear the alien quality of the non-human in our music and the humanity of music in nature. (Dunn, 1997, p. 1)

3.5. To Organize the Soundscape

John Cage states, "I love sounds just as they are, and I have no need for them to be anything more than what they are" (jdavidm, 2007). Similarly to Schaeffer's criticism of western music previously discussed, Cage exercised listening in a way that opposed conventionalized listening required in earlier western music. This listening is, in a sense, a democratization of the sounds by destroying their conventional system and therefore effacing their original 'musical value'. Cage's music reflects his listening, approaching a soundscape-listening mode (most famously in his 4'33'' piece). By attempting to hypothetically emulate a possible stochastic behaviour of the soundscape with his chance based works, Cage intends meaning to be within the sound itself, or even better, to be the sound itself rather than a musical set, letting the aesthetic experience be free. Cage wants to strip his music from acquired 'musical values', wants to clear the sounds from culturally seized connotations of 'symbolic' meaning: legisigns.

In this century, contemporary music has moved toward the environment with its use of an increased repertoire of sounds. (Truax, Acoustic Communication, 2001, p. 53)

The interpretative transition of the soundscape into music depends only on the change in focus of perception through a deep listening practice, allowing the listener to release self, escaping from pre-established conventional modes of musical listening
and understanding, giving more space to a 'grief of incommunicability'. We can only listen to the soundscape as music if we re-'organize' our musical listening towards it. By doing that we focus on a more empirical and sensorial form of 'letting in', a sonic meditation, an openness to 'the grief', an openness to the sharawadgi. I believe this to be a possible direction towards a 'rewilding of the ear':

1. Can you find the quiet place in your mind where there are no thoughts, no words and no images?

2. Can you remain in this quiet mindplace by listening to all the sounds you can possibly hear, including the most distant sounds beyond the space you now occupy?

(Oliveros, Sonic Images, 2001, p. 131)

**4. LISTENING ANEW: REWILDING THE EAR**

**4.1. Rewilding**

Reductionism in scientific thought has also led us to regard ourselves as apart from the world, rather than a part of the world. This fallacy has led us to dominate life on earth to the extent that our own survival is now threatened.

(Adams, 2009, p. 9)

We are going through an ecological crisis in every sense, not just in the macrocosmic scale of our planet, but including our own relationship to the environment we live in. Understanding that there is an organic connection and integral relationship with the environment and, before the ecological crisis we are going through, I believe an epistemological change in the relationship of human beings with their physical environment is essential.

In his book, *Feral: Rewilding the Land, Sea and Human Life* (2014), George Monbiot develops a proposal to rethink how we relate to the extinguishing natural non-human world on our planet in order to, not only preserve what is disappearing, but to let it flourish in its own wilderness, together with a re-connection of our own experience to it.

Monbiot's argument spawns from a very real emotion of experience in the wilderness. He describes it as an ecological boredom. This ecological boredom is a very contemporary feeling, I would say, for it is the result of our virtually total
domination of the environment we inhabit in. It is the dullness of the contemporary sterilized urban human life and the craving for a richer, rawer life closer to the excitement of the 'wilderness'. It is the feeling of disconnection provoked by a lack of direct interaction with the nature outside our own artifice.

In response, he proposes a 'rewilding of human life'. This ecological notion is drawn from the larger concept of 'rewilding' which "is about resisting the urge to control nature and allowing it to find its own way" (Monbiot, 2014, p. 9), and applied to human life at the experiential level: "rewilding is not about abandoning civilization but about enhancing it. It is to 'love not man the less, but Nature more'" (Monbiot, 2014, p. 10). Rewilding does not mean a human retreat from nature, but a reinvolvimento with it. It is a concept that is resultant from a presence, an experience of the natural environment. I also understand 'rewilding of the human life' as a search for awareness within the environment and nature. It is the extension of us outwards towards the ecology, to the nature that's beyond our civilization. The effort is to re-engage with nature and discover a new way of living, to bring wonder back into our lives by exercising a positive environmentalism.

I believe that the ideas previously discussed in this essay can relate strongly to this concept in the aural domain. How can we advance toward a rewilding of the ear through listening and sounding?

4.2. Impression

As I have discussed before, hearing is a very malleable sense. There are different ways to hear and listen and different semiosis processes that might emerge from the acoustic stimuli. My attention has been focused on the practice of an active, deep listening. Deep listening is a practice that we can learn to develop and the more we learn, the more we find there is to learn, the more we experience, the more we stress 'the grief' and the more we connect with our inner and outer worlds through a Firstness of sensing. Not that there are not other levels of semiosis are involved, they are probably unavoidable. However, I understand that this Firstness, the 'emotional interpretant' is the level (which exists in the bottom of every semiotic chain, regardless of its complexity) that is closer to a 'direct' connection to the world in the experiential level as opposed to a rational one. It is the aesthetic experience in every
semiosis. Surely, when we listen to the sound of an environment, we usually listen in
the three Peircian levels of semiosis: Firstly the sensory/qualitative effect, Secondly
the contextual/dicent information about source and place, and Thirdly our own
symbolic/argumentative articulation of what we are listening. This would be a normal
analytical way of listening. However, running the risk of sounding vague or esoteric, I
believe that a state of deep listening is reached by focusing on the Firstness levels that
derive from those semiotic chains, in the attempt of reducing the semiosis to a whole
Firstness. It is meditation through sound.

I believe that the refinement of listening to the world, and especially the non-
human nature, is the refinement of a sense of belonging, a strengthening of our bond
to the earth, therefore this might light an awareness of our responsibility towards the
ecological issues we are witnessing, of which our species is the one to blame.

The science of ecology is a study of patterns. Ecology examines the intricate
patterns that connect organisms and the environments in which they live. Beyond
the particular patterns themselves, ecology considers the totality of patterns and
the larger systems they create.

An ecosystem is a network of patterns, a complex multiplicity of elements that
function together as a whole.

(Adams, 2009, p. xvii)

Deep listening is not a science; it is not an analysis of the morphology or structure
inherent to the sound we hear. That would be the function of sound studies or acoustic
ecology: to analytically study the sonic ecology of the environment, grounded on
listening. But deep listening is essentially ecological, except it functions in the realm
of experience, in that it consists of a holistic experience of sonic 'ecosystems'. By
sonic ecosystems I mean the whole sound matter of a perceived soundscape, its
"complex multiplicity of elements that function together as a whole". I understand
that deep listening is a direct engagement to the endless 'network of patterns' that
forms the soundscape. To listen deeply is to bodily experience sound as matter, a
perceptual 'wholeness'. It is to let oneself be immersed in it, to get lost, to meditate, to
let sound sink in our Firstness, to open up to 'the grief of incommunicability' in search
for the sharawadgi.
In turn, acoustic ecology functions like the Adornian aporia, distanced from the experience of actual sensing by rationalization and analytical study, in order to unveil another world of information contained in the communicating network of sound. This is the information we use to make logical sense of what composes and shapes the ecology of the sonic realm. Sound studies inform this deep listening towards a rewilding of the ear by analysing patterns from a mediated perspective. As an example, I take Bernie Krause's Harvard University lecture (Harvard University, 2012), where he shows the recording of a Central African Ba'aka pigmy playing a flute to the rhythm of a choir of frogs among the big enveloping sound of the rainforest. Our untrained western ears cannot distinguish the sound of the frogs from the rest of the environment sounds, we cannot hear the rhythm of the croaking frogs. We can only know it by the reading of the spectrogram of the recording shown by Krause. To me, this was mind-blowing. Listening becomes a super-power of inclusion and wonder in the environment.

Deep coupled with Listening or Deep Listening for me is learning to expand the perception of sounds to include the whole space/time continuum of sound—encountering the vastness and complexities as much as possible.

Such expansion means that one is connected to the whole of the environment and beyond. (Oliveros, 2005, p. xxiii)

Listening is a constant learning and unravelling of new realities out of our known ones. The more we learn, the more we discover, the more we have to learn. Sound is bottomless, inexhaustible, hyper-dimensional... Listening is not, but we can strive to reach out there. It is contextualized, inevitably more or less focused, 'presential'. The wonder of deep listening or, of the attempt of rewilding the ear is also the search for the sharawadgi effect, the aesthetic sublime. It is the effort to overcome the grief of incommunicability by diving into the fractal unravelling dimensions of the soundscape. The sharawadgi might arise from that experience of newness, the decontextualization, the disembodying of the senses. Deep listening "strips bodies of their inertia, of the materiality of their presence: it disembodies bodies…" (Deleuze, 2003, p. 21)

It is only by proximity (direct experience, real engagement) that one can connect to and belong in the environment, and if our concerns are environmental towards a
rewilding of the planet, then we should also learn from those who preserve a strong connection with the wilderness. I believe sound is one very important part of that proximity for the enhancement of that connection. Ecological thought and action can hardly exist without an empathetic, maybe spiritual relationship to the environment, and sound has always embodied 'spirit' across the ages and transversely to many different cultures.

4.3. Expression

In Papua New Guinea, when a Kaluli songmaker searches for a new song, he may camp by a waterfall or a running stream. (...) The songmaker listens carefully, sometimes for days, until he hears the voice of his new song. (Adams, 2009, p. 4)

In the western world, art has become self-referential, redundant. According to Boris Groys (Art Power, 2008) the paradigm of modern art, which grew since the 'classical modernity' period (thus embodying the vanguards since the beginning of the 20th century) lies in the artists’ creation of ‘paradox-objects’. These paradox-objects are the result of an art that is neither religious nor political propaganda. They’re the expression of modern art, a product of an enlightened atheism and humanism.

The paradox-object appears when the art world begins to function redundantly in its space/environment/influential area. Art starts to serve its own purpose, that is, to theorize its own nature into a pleonasm, which begins to alienate itself from life. An art market system is formed and art begins to be sterilized and stratified in an independent ‘cosmos’ or, we may call it by analogy—‘umwelt’.4

Music is not an exception of this. If we refer back to Schaeffer's criticism of western tradition music, we can understand that listening became focused on the development a vocabulary, a system that has moved toward a defined syntax that approaches the operation of language. Musical values have been refined and the

4 Meaning ‘environment’ or ‘surrounding world’ in German, Umwelt is the term used by the Estonian biosemiotician Jakob von Uexküll (1957) to define the human and animal’s world of perceptions by their biological functions, i.e., the way different species experience their lifeworlds through the understanding of their milieu and the milieu’ interaction with their sensing-bodies; “It is literally a form by which nature can be understood as dynamic, collective, lived rather than just fixed, categorized, or represented.” (Grosz, 2008).
system has been polished. Music has been evolving redundantly by focusing on itself and building on itself as a paradox-object.

Assuming that “the sounds of the wild (...) determined the first music our ancestors made” (Hendy, 2013, p. 23), it seems that presently we empirically understand very little and relate less and less to them for we have been progressively losing that connection. Our fairly recently industrialized and strongly urbanized society has changed our environment, our habitat. Music reflects the status quo, yet its 'language', its system of meanings within it, have been highly developed throughout history both by musicians and listeners. To a point where music starts to be based on itself; it refers back to it and builds upon it. It becomes familiar to the ear because it expresses within a particular system specific musical values that one can come to relate to and more accurately and easily draw a meaning from it. It presents itself as something separate, distinct and independent from the rest of the universe of sounds, and throughout history hardly relating to them, because its 'message' is precise in what it is supposed to deliver. Music becomes a reflection upon music and evolves along that line. Its environment, context and status quo influence its display and direction, however they are not central to its pre-established syntax. The system is already a 'language', thus it has become independent of it. It is an acquired cultural model.

I believe art is a child of its time. Being so, it reflects a world it envisions.

In an ecologically threatened existence we need to be silent and listen to learn. We need to reinvolve ourselves within what we have been distanced from. We need to rethink our relationship with our planet and that has to be reflected not only in our system of musical values, but in our system of living values. We need to rethink our life on this earth, therefore we ought to be exploratory and experimental in this sense, in order to learn.

One of the lessons of ecology is that when we see ourselves as "different" from nature and not as an integral part of it, we are more likely to violate its balance, ultimately at our own peril. (Truax, Acoustic Communication, 2001, p. 55)

Referring back to Truax's continuum, western music has shown a tendency to develop towards the side of speech. This is natural because the development of a semantic system takes repetition in order to establish new meanings. A rewilding
attitude would be the attempt of breaking that self-referential circle of music, the paradox-object, and refer back to the natural world; learning from the Ba'aka flutist, the Kaluli songwriter, the rainforest cacophony or the deep ocean quietness... we need to experience and explore the voice of the wilderness so we can sing along with it in our own fashion. This is an ethical, political attitude, focusing on what we need to save because we need to feel we are part of it again. Rewilding the ear is a re-directing of our aural attention into the natural non-human world we threaten, a rewilding of our engagement with what we have been distancing ourselves from. The way we listen to our own sound, the sound we make, the way we relate to the sonic environment by sounding also determines and develops the way we listen, and listening has a big role on the ways we experience the world, therefore, how we live in it.

A way of hearing the world comes from interacting with it, but it also has to do with appreciating it, imagining it as one's very own. (Feld, 1994, p. 5)

In our search for wonder we silence, we listen. We learn to 'organize sound'. We hear music in nature. We can glimpse its beauty, it is infinite, boundless. We experience the grief of incommunicability when we open up to this experience. Maybe the sharawadgi. When we distance, we try to make sense of it. So we distance a bit more, and we circle around it. We learn some more. We need to re-engage with it. So we listen again. We feel immersed. But we want to be involved. We want to belong. We want to further the exploration, further the learning, shorten the distance. So then we sound... and nature re-organizes itself... and we re-organize listening... and we learn some more... and listen deeper, again. And "by deepening our awareness of our connections to the earth, music can contribute to the awakening of our ecological understanding." (Adams, 2009, p. xvii) Music is crucial for a rewilding of the ear.

4.4. Praxis

'Rewilding of the ear' is primarily an attitude towards the soundscape that is rendered aesthetic, rather than being an aesthetic style in itself. Given the fact that the natural soundscape is a vast open-ended infinite that is high above the human scale, it seems to me that to recreate from it is a way to make sense of it, to frame it into human proportions in a way that we might experience the sharawadgi. Being so, there is a range of creative practices that extends from soundwalking to intermedia works
which I believe are important contributions to this notion of 'rewilding the ear', not to mention the obvious academic areas related to soundscape studies, acoustic ecology and, more recently, ecomusicology, which are crucial to it. I shall highlight a few practices and works I consider to be important to a development of this idea:

It is only fair to begin with the practice of soundwalking, which might be the most fundamental one to a development of our listening in the environment. Hildegard Westerkamp states "soundwalking is a practice that wants to bring our existing position-inside-the-soundscape to full consciousness" (Westerkamp, 2006). It is a way to heighten our senses and develop our ways of listening.

As a practice, it might have different approaches and it will always be essentially different as an experience, regarding that it is completely dependent on the chosen place, path and time, which are conditioned by all the other predictable and unpredictable variables: If it is a group soundwalk or an individual one, if it is guided or not, weather conditions, traffic, fauna, etc. All this make each soundwalk a unique event of perception and absorption, mediated only by our ears and listening, which is already creative in itself, thus there are no two equal experiences. Soundwalking is a form of organizing sound, organizing listening, and it is compositional in the sense that it is based on choices of listening, of paths to take, of places to remain in... hence, it is a personal framing of the soundscape. Soundwalking enables the framing of a deep listening stance within the environment. Westerkamp describes it very elegantly in this excerpt:

Initially a soundwalk is an opportunity to let the world in without any compulsion to respond or—to put it differently—to be open without a need to define, intellectualise, categorise, or interpret, to listen without expectations, assumptions or judgement, to listen without the compulsion to change things or to act immediately. Such a soundwalk simply allows participants to hear the environment for what it is and to become aware of their own relationship to the soundscape. In this sense a soundwalk can be similar to a meditation: the world happens, the sounds occur and they pass. (Westerkamp, 2006)

Phonography takes another step in the compositional domain, and widens the creative possibilities of composition by being a fixed medium, subject to the sonic mediation and transformation through the use of microphones, editing and processing
techniques. Phonography frames and renders the soundscape as another soundscape that is electroacoustic. (Drever, 2013)

I find the work of artists like Francisco López and Jez Riley French important as aesthetic explorations of a 'rewilding of the ear'. Francisco López's approach to nature sound environments is, in his words "devoid of such [bioacoustic-like] analytical or explanatory goals, trying to forcefully move away from a rationalization and categorization of these aural entities (...) because it promotes a perceptual shifting from recognition and differentiation of sound sources to the appreciation of the resulting sound matter" (López, 1998). This approach can be experienced in his piece *La Selva*, which is an over one-hour piece of a sound mass of Amazon rainforest.

French's work interestingly often explores the properties of non-conventional microphones, like contact-microphones, geophones or hydrophones. I am particularly fond of his record *...Audible Silence*, which is composed out of untreated sounds of the Tate Modern building in London directly recorded with special microphones. This kind of phonography unveils a new sonic universe to our ears that we can only experience through the mediation of technology. It reveals a kind of sonic hyper-reality, exploring different perspectives of listening from what we are accustomed to. Apart from the beauty of his work, I appreciate French's holistic understanding of nature that transpires in his work, which does not exclude the human being from it (unlike the Oxford English Dictionary which defines the nature of the phenomena of the physical world collectively, including plants, animals, the landscape, and other features and products of the earth, as opposed to humans or human creations), and so approaching sound and specially urban and industrial anthroponies in what I would call a very organic aesthetics.

Any idea of 'reality' is filtered through so many layers that it has become almost impossible for us to approach a connection to nature that is not already based on an evolved removal of our species. (French, 2015)

*Soundscape composition* is also a very important practice that greatly contributes to the notion of 'rewilding the ear'. It is so because, having its genesis in the 1970's in World Soundscape Project (Vancouver, Canada) where soundscape ecology studies were pioneered, it finely substantiates the previously discussed idea of our natural necessity to make sense of the environment through creative means. Soundscape
composition was the first inherently ecological practice regarding the creative use of sound. It was born out of the scientific/analytical and pedagogical uses of listening/soundwalking and phonography to become a different form of exploration that is rendered primarily aesthetic, with its relationship to the environment. It is a form of composition informed by the experience within the environment rather than from preconceived 'musical values'.

Soundscape composition is a varied genre given that it is defined by the exploration of 'sense of place' through aural means, which becomes endless when one admits the possibility of imaginary places, imaginary soundscapes. Yet, assuming there is no "such a thing as an 'objective' apprehension of the sonic reality" (López, 1998) since even our perception and conception of the experienced world is subjective and partly our own creation, are not all soundscapes imaginary to some extent? However, we can admit that the increased possibility of manipulation and composition techniques takes soundscape composition off from the 'phonographic' towards the 'abstracted' aesthetics: "The progression from phonographic documentation to a more abstracted approach to ultimately a virtual synthetic soundscape is one that takes the listener from surface level of an environment, recognizing its sound sources and ambiences, to the mental world of psychological and cultural associations, memories and symbolism provoked by those sounds, and then to the unbounded world of the imagination." (Truax, 2012)

Soundscape composition can be comprehended as a context-based type of composition, where the knowledge of specific contexts is the basis of the composer's work. What comes at play, according to Truax, is "the perception of inner acoustic structure and its interpretation through our knowledge of the world. Perhaps the most creative aspect involved is how the two may become related." (Truax, 2013)

The soundscape work of composers like Barry Truax and Hildegard Westerkamp, among others, has been extremely important for a defining of this genre and attitude towards environmental sound, and also as a instigator of new forms of thought and practice within the realm of soundscape ecology.

As listeners, and composers, we may return to real life disturbed, excited and challenged on a spiritual and social plane by a music with hands-on relevance to both our inner and outer lives. (Westerkamp, 2002)
Ecoacoustics is a more recent concept that envelops a larger range of practices. It has grown from the acoustic ecology tradition initiated by the WSP to embrace musical practices that relate to an ecological awareness, thus it makes use of techniques borrowed from soundscape composition, sonification and direct engagement with nature. Jonathan Gilmurray describes it as "an area of music and sound art which focuses on human engagement with an ecosystem through sound, functioning as a creative response to contemporary environmental issues." (Gilmurray) Ecoacoustics is a very wide 'genre' for it is an ideologically defined concept, rather than a more technically or aesthetically defined one: "Its key characteristics include revealing and emphasising the musical characteristics of natural environmental sound, and the employment of musical metaphors for the rediscovery of humankind's harmonious functioning within the earth's ecosystems." (Gilmurray) Matthew Burtner is one of the first applying this term to his sonic practice. He understands ecoacoustics as an attempt of creating a symbiosis between music and environment, by analysing it and processing it in ways for it to be rendered sound: "Through complex feature extraction, an ecosystem can be rebuilt with its own defined logic. Such a system allows the composer to interact with the environment through many systems of change, not only through audio features. I describe this approach as ecoacoustics. (...) It is a way of hearing the world as music." (2011, p. 237)

Within ecoacoustics we can find quite a diverse variety of works, like David Monacchi's ambisonic multimedia compositions/concerts (e.g. Fragments of Extinction), Matthew Burtner's sonification compositions (e.g. Song for Low Tree), John Luther Adams' scoring of environmental features or phenomena (e.g. In the White Silence) or David Dunn's performative interactions with the environment (e.g. Mimus Polyglottos). Ecoacoustics is a very important contribution to the 'rewilding of the ear' in its experimental approach to an exploration of modes of listening to the environment and relating to the ecology, awareness and activist concern for the ecological crisis of today. Ecoacoustics seems to sum up most of the practices I consider are working towards this notion of 'rewilding of the ear'. However, I believe there are still some practices which I also consider important to take into account, that do not seem to fit within the scope of ecoacoustics for their main concerns might not
be directly related to an ecological action, yet contribute to a development of deep listening within the environment.

Within the worlds of contemporary music and sound art there are a few historical examples that cannot be overlooked, either for the advancement of sound and musical thought, or for the ecological attitude towards sound and a 'rewilding of the ear'. I am referring to the works of John Cage and Alvin Lucier, which I consider to be the best examples that witness the shift from a 'music-based music/listening' to an 'environment-based music/listening'. The works to highlight are obviously Cage's 4'33'' work and Alvin Lucier's I am sitting in a room sound installation, which are two great examples of a 'framing' of the sonic environment, drawing one's attention to the detail of one's aural perspective and surrounding environment. Both Cage and Lucier's oeuvre have stressed the exploration of modes of listening within the environment and been inspired by it, whether within urban or 'natural' environments. Other more recent works that I find to be good examples of a sound art approach to a 'rewilding of the ear' are Jem Finer's Score for a hole in the ground and Christina Kubisch's Electrical Walks, which both explore hidden acoustic features of an environment: a forest in Finer's piece and a city in Kubisch's.

Finally, I have to mention free improvisation. Free improvised music is a spontaneous sonic engagement with and within a specific environment. It is the framing and the exploration of real time and real world sonic relationships. Free improvised music is often social, considering the traditional setting of a concert where there is an audience and possibly more than one musician. In this kind of practice what is developed is a sensitivity to act sonically in a social environment, thus ‘the player becomes the music’ — ‘you are what you play’. Then, the social experience becomes a kind of ‘virtuosity’. Eddie Prévost was one of the pioneers of this musical philosophy back in the 1960's and co-founder of the legendary band, AMM. In a (recorded) conversation I had with him, he argued that free improvisation is a way of contributing to our culture in a way that what we create and see in a free improvisation environment are people’s priorities for the creation of a better environment, that is:

What it is we want best out of this world and how we want to contribute to what our culture is. (…) We are actually engaged in organizing a different view of the
world, or a view of the world which is more responsive or reactive to the needs of our time. It is an analog of how we treat the world, how we see the world. This is all a development of those kinds of skills which are the kind of skills for a more positive kind of environment — we enjoy problem solving. Developing that sensitivity to the materials [instruments], thinking about what we are doing with it… I know it sounds a long way from what people understand as music, but it seems to me to be precisely what music should be about, rather than being some abstract notion of putting together sounds in patterns that are pleasing. It has got to be more than that, otherwise not worth doing it. (Pinto, 2011)

Prévost does not understand this kind of activity as an emulation of ‘how life should be’, but rather as a refinement of living skills, inside the cultural sphere that we operate in. In a free improvised environment your first instrument is your ear, so that you can engage and 'react'. Derek Bailey states, "historically, it pre-dates any other music—mankind’s first musical performances couldn’t have been anything other than free improvisation.” (Bailey, 1993, p. 83) Considering this, we can understand the experimental level of such a practice, be it in an individual-alone-in-nature set-up or a group concert. Interacting is a form of listening and a form of belonging, therefore I consider free improvisation to be a very important practice for a 'rewilding of the ear'.

If there is one blanket statement that can be said about sound and how we are affected by it, it is that sound is a perception of inclusion. By gauging the size of our body through the sensations of the sounds we feel—both internally and externally, we establish our relationship to our surroundings; we connect to our environment. How we mediate this connection, consciously and unconsciously, deeply influences our sense of being—of who and where we are. (Stocker, 2013, p. 9)

Curiously, “deep listening” is a term employed by Pauline Oliveros (2012) firstly to name a recording of an improvised performance by her, Stuart Dempster and Panaiotis inside a big cistern. Other than the fact that the cistern was deep, the term 'deep listening' was used because the 45-second reverberation time of the place would compel you to listen deeply in order to play in that environment. Free improvisation is all about this relationship within an environment, about the framing of sound and the exploration of a place, interplay with the soundscape.
Receptivity takes relaxation and openness. These opposites make us whole.
(Oliveros, 2012, p. iii)

5. Final Considerations

Throughout this paper I have argued about the aesthetic subjectivity of listening and how malleable and biased it may be. Departing from Varèse's definition of music as organized sound, I argued how organization is a perceptive factor, therefore music is a subjective matter, subject to values obtained from the practices of listening. From there, I argued about the importance of an attempt towards a 'pure' listening, deep listening as a constant learning process of embracing and immersion within a sound environment. This process of listening may evoke a sense of belonging together with a sense of otherness, 'the grief of incommunicability', which for David Dunn is the invisible lasting connection we sense there is between music and nature and their relationship. This 'grief' is, in my understanding, the basis of the 'sublime' aesthetic experience, the *sharawadgi*, which involves the decontextualization or deterritorialization of sensation through the aural experience.

Thus listening-learning involves a questioning of how we might understand music and how music might influence our listening. Music has the tendency to narrow itself towards a more speech-like syntax, while natural sound remains an open-ended field that exceeds the human-scale and is more open to experience. Deep listening involves the attempt of reducing the semiotic experience to the level of *Firstness*, what renders the aesthetic and what renders the sense of belonging, direct experience.

Rewilding of the ear is the adventurous attitude of diving into the sonic whole, the soundscape, to explore it and our self within it. It is the reengaging with the environment through listening, the immersion in the environment towards an ecology, towards an equilibrium of the human in nature. Rewilding of the ear is a political stance, an ecological attitude rendered aesthetic, expressed through sound and experienced in sound: a rewilding of our listening experience stimulating and stimulated by a positive environmentalist attitude.

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