# ON THE ONTOLOGY OF SOUND

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## Résumé

Cet article propose un examen approfondi des études sur le son, dans lequel l'auteur explore le lien entre le son et l'écoute en tant que points de jonction cruciaux entre les discours sémiotiques et phénoménologiques. En même temps, le son et l'écoute sont clarifiés en tant que lacunes perplexes dans le domaine philosophique du son. L'étude se concentre sur les études sonores en tant que sujet d'enquête afin d'examiner ses fondements ontologiques. En outre, l'article se penche sur l'énigme suivante : pourquoi les recherches sur les questions liées au son se sont-elles principalement déroulées dans les domaines de la science et de l'art, restant souvent confinées dans le domaine de la technologie ? En abordant ces questions, l'auteur cherche à élucider les limites du discours actuel sur le son. L'article explore les dimensions du son représentatif, du paysage sonore et de l'installation sonore, élargissant ainsi le champ d'investigation dans le domaine des études sonores.

**Mots clefs :** musique, philosophie du son, études sonores, paysage sonore, ontologie du son, cinématographie.

## Abstract

This article provides a compressed examination of sound studies, wherein the author explores the nexus of sound and listening as pivotal junctures intersecting semiotic and phenomenological discourses. At the same time, sound and listening are clarified as perplexing lacunas in the philosophical realm of sound. The study focuses on sound studies as a subject of inquiry to scrutinise its ontological underpinnings. Additionally, the article delves into the conundrum of why investigations into sound-related issues have predominantly occurred within the realms of science and art, often remaining confined within the purview of technology. In addressing these questions, the author seeks to elucidate the limitations of the current discourse on sound. The article explores the dimensions of representational sound, soundscape, and sound installation, thereby broadening the scope of inquiry within the field of sound studies.

**Keywords:** music, philosophy of sound, sound studies, soundscape, ontology of sound, cinematography.

## 1 Introduction

In discussing the metaphysics of sound, we must differentiate between music—structured, intentional auditory art—and sound—the broader category encompassing all auditory phenomena. This distinction is crucial for clarity in our exploration of how sound impacts human experience and understanding. Martin Heidegger's assertion in *Early Greek Thinking* that "We do not hear because we have ears. We have ears because we hear" [9: 65] highlights a fundamental, perhaps mysterious, need to hear that transcends mere biological function. This need is embedded in our desire for communication and understanding, resonating deeply within our encounters with the world. The metaphysics of sound represents an existential encounter between being and human consciousness, imbued with meaning. This encounter is often artistically rendered in imagery. Friedrich Schelling's *Philosophy of Art* posits that true art involves a holistic harmony of beauty, where no single sound or tone suffices, but rather a full-voiced harmony [26,13]. Here, Schelling speaks to the complexity of musical art, wherein individual sounds combine to create profound aesthetic experiences.

Sound, in its essence, is perceived through its associative and reflective qualities, shaping human interpretations and experiences. Alain Badiou describes music as "the most extreme concentration of sound," emphasising its unique potency and ability to convey deep affective and meaningful constructions [1: 62]. Music, with its primordial and evocative sounds, echoes the universal cry of the world, impacting the listener's body and soul [8: 135].

We often engage with sound through its reverberations rather than the sound itself. The intrigue lies in the melody, harmony, and structure rather than the individual notes, though each note is fundamental to these structures. Thus, every note must be considered meaningful, a communicative phoneme within the musical language. The Pythagoreans, by interpreting the laws of sound, sought to uncover a deeper "main message" inherent in these auditory phenomena.

Modern listeners and critics might project their emotions onto music, sometimes neglecting its inherent properties like expressiveness and beauty. Conversely, some might focus on the superficial brilliance of sound, missing its profound spiritual foundations. This dichotomy raises questions about the semantic and artistic value of musical sound, a topic of perennial interest among philosophers. Music as a communication method is inherently unreliable and complex. In marketing, for example, a melody might be simplified into an accessible message, but creating an advertisement solely from music without visuals or text is challenging. Music's ultimate purpose often lies beyond itself, in the creation of new sounds

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that express specific states and meanings. This indicates that sound, as a subject of scholarly research, remains exotic and underexplored, anticipating a significant scholarly breakthrough.

## 2 Method

### 2.1 The world is "made for listening"

In discussing contemporary Western man, it's crucial to address a common oversight: the frequent inclination to investigate sound by contrasting it with visual perception. Humans tend to neglect auditory sensations, favoring visual images instead. This prioritisation means that seeing is often perceived as an immediate comprehension of a constellation of data. Without this direct access to visual data, relying on memory becomes essential. This idea is captured in *Phenomenology of Perception*. Merleau-Ponty suggests that visual perception provides an immanent meaning that shapes our understanding of the world, making memory a fallback rather than a primary source of information [19: 181].

The author employs the term "meaning", but one could also speak of the potentiality of sense with which sound confronts us. It exists on the fringes of meanings, captivating us before we categorise perception into endless subgroups: appropriation, reminiscence, reflection. In everyday life, we do not realise all the potentialities of our hearing; they are continually displaced by visual events. As soon as the lights go out, our attitude toward the sounds around us changes completely; in fact, we hear better. The echolocation of dolphins and bats may seem almost fantastical. However, blind individuals, by tapping a cane on the floor, can discern the volume of a room, offering a unique experience of auditory relationships with space. Nevertheless, vision and hearing are fundamentally different consciousness resources.

The advent of sound films, replacing silent ones and incorporating noises and voiceovers in their context, significantly expanded the boundaries of the frame, allowing the audience to speculate about actions occurring beyond its limits. The use of noises and voiceovers has greatly expanded the limits of the frame, providing the viewer with the ability to infer actions occurring outside its borders. Moreover, the application of sounds as supplements or replacements for certain visual elements helps connect individual phenomena in space and understand the reasons behind a person's emotional reactions in the frame.

For example, in the film adaptation of Tennessee Williams' play *The Rose Tattoo*, the sounds of children's cries and a goat's bleating from the yard accompany a scene depicting characters inside the house, expanding the frame boundaries, and providing additional information: children in the yard are trying to catch a loose goat. The noise of a starting and departing truck allows the viewer to understand the emerging agitation and disappointment on the face of the main character, Serafina: her husband has left on a night trip without bidding her farewell.

Thus, sound is both fleeting and lasting – it's hard to stop or define. Even with technology, sound resists easy capture: an editor can extract a brief segment, but it remains a continuous moment. In contrast, a film frame, despite its limitations, can be seen as a frozen image of movement. Understanding sound phenomenologically is challenging because we only ever experience one phase of it. The listener must remember the sequence of tone changes and recall the sound as they hear it.

### 2.2 Sound and listening: points of intersection

In the 1960s-70s, Herbert Marshall McLuhan and Walter Ong emerged, demonstrating that the alphabet and printing changed the sensory organ hierarchy, giving humans an "eye instead of an ear". In contemporary times, many advocates advocate this position. However, within the realm of sound studies, the refrain resonates with the idea of the need to rehabilitate the "ear and hearing" which have been pushed to the background by the dominance of the "eye and vision".

Indeed, the verbal narrative in film is conveyed through two components: graphic/written (titles, inscriptions) and auditory/oral (actors' spoken dialogue, voiceover text, song). In contrast, a play's verbal narrative is primarily expressed graphically through lines and stage directions, which reflect the auditory elements of the text (excluding its oral reproduction in a theatrical performance, as the focus here is on the play's written text). Max Neuhaus coined the term "sound installation". He attempted to prove that, unlike music, several dozen radio transmitters on an ordinary road in Buffalo could capture and reproduce sounds in such a way that each formed its own composition, dependent on speed and direction of movement. Sound has a beginning, its vibration, and an end; when the force of the wave propagation is no longer strong enough, the sound stops. I suppose the author is referring to the perception of sound, which for hearing people only stops with their own death. Neuhaus emphasised that "sound works without a beginning or an end, where the sounds [are] placed in space rather than in time" [21: 42].

Bruce Smith addresses the issue of sounds before sound recording. Seeking to reflect on his experience as an "acoustic archaeologist" he writes: "Similar to a traditional archaeologist who first excavates objects and then studies and categorises them, an acoustic archaeologist must "extract from the un-air sounds that once dissolved in it, and catalogue them" [29, 22].

The perception of sound is subjective and culturally influenced. The phenomenological experience of sound varies based on the listener's culture, history, and personal traits. Sound objectivity, or noumenon, derived from spectral analysis, holds no absolute truth for the perceiver. Instead, it is shaped by individual and cultural contexts.

The scholar distinguishes two groups of authentic sources. The first includes antique musical instruments, church bells, and the acoustics of well-preserved structures, whose sounds can still be heard. The second consists of written sources such as memoirs, plays, and novels. Smith asserts that "graphic signs could also prompt readers on how to retrieve previously heard sounds from their memory" [29, 24].

Don Ihde focuses on the experience of listening to sound itself, rather than interpreting it as a sign of something else. While not a strict follower of Edmund Husserl, who sought pure knowledge by reducing psychology and cultural

interpretation, the work is a pioneering application of phenomenological tools to sound studies [13].

The philosopher posits that humans often neglect auditory sensations, favoring visual images and other mental representations such as feelings. He links this tradition to Descartes' visually dominant philosophy and suggests it's time to counterpose it with auditory thinking. Ihde explores sound spatial understanding by analysing localised and diffuse noises, discussing their centers and peripheries [13: 50].

Sound can highlight the relationship between nonsense and meaning. Ihde recounts hearing a recording of a humpback whale's cry, initially perceiving it as unique. Upon further analysis of its components, he recognised it as the cry of a living creature and "domesticated" the strange noise by relating it to a natural context [13: 186]. However, this associative approach, contrary to the philosopher's methodological principles, is not strictly phenomenological.

Technology allows us to "cheat" and make sound do and say what we want. A significant part of Ihde's work examines the impact of technology and the "electronic era" on listening. He discusses how technical devices have transformed the perception of familiar sounds, allowing listeners to manipulate their own perception. Ihde calls this capacity "variable focus" [13: 205], describing our ability to alter the auditory field and create an individual experience of encountering music.

## 2.3 Does quietness know how to "speak"?

Don Ihde pays special attention to the theme of silence, defining it as the horizon of hearing, as the necessary "environment" of sound that allows it to be heard. Simultaneously, he considers it a hidden, unattainable aspect of things, a step toward which any concentration, any listening, is. Similarly, it is not sound that is born of absence but sound that is born of silence, because silence is a concept that has no physical reality for the person who perceives it (see the experiments in acoustic chambers isolating the subject from all surrounding sounds...). Indeed, sound is born out of absence and corresponds to it. This semi-silence that emerges on the outskirts of meaning, presenting itself not as a sign of something sounding but as the pure phenomenon of itself, turns out to be a gap into the pre-subjective.

How, then, in silence or even in the presence of extraneous noise, can we mentally hear sounds? Jacques Derrida argues that it is impossible to conceive of the phoneme outside the representation of the grapheme, as it is present in our thought primarily in the form of a graphic symbol. However, the phoneme is not synonymous with sound as such. Should every sound be thought of in this way? Musical sound is represented in the form of a musical note grapheme. Is it necessary to necessarily imagine a "grapheme" for a non-tonal sound to think about it? Or do we need a mimetic "singing" to think about sound? Do we really think of the creak of a door or the hum of the wind as something resembling graphemes? Or do we reproduce them within ourselves, and sound does not necessarily require an image to be represented? In that case, is it time to admit Derrida"s mistake, designating the mention of the grapheme as a substitution for the enduring static, against which Bergson warned?

The crucial aspect of mimetic representation lies in the silence it maintains. As soon as one attempts to "shout out" the forest noise at the top of their lungs, the vivid memory threatens to turn into a horrifying parody. This is so far removed from the original that any verbal or even graphic description of the sound seems to be a much more reliable means of conveying it. So, where does the internal certainty come from that we can think about sound without hearing it? And how to define this process? We recognise it as a memory of a heard sound, as internal mimesis, an attempt to silently reproduce it for ourselves. This means that the sound must still be recorded in memory, and everything that has been said about sound recording remains true. If memory remembers, one wonders what silence has to do with it, unless it's what writers call the blank page, a psychological state that allows us to regain a relative innocence in order to reconstruct another story. We can think about sound without hearing it, not because we can imagine anything, but because there is something that allows sounds to represent themselves to us: silence, which gives birth to these noises and is louder than the sum of all the cries that have already sounded.

Engaging with the obscurity of sound points to the problem of disclosing the world as the horizon of what can sound. "In principle, we do not hear being" reflects Martin Heidegger [11: 535], but it is precisely silence that opens the world to which we already belong before we began to listen. French film director Robert Bresson believes, "Your film must resemble what you see when you close your eyes. You must be ready to momentarily see and hear it as a whole".

The raw power of sound as an artistic medium is often underestimated but can be just as impactful as words or gestures, sometimes even more so. In Henrik Malyan's film *Naapet* a disheveled figure wanders through a desolate landscape, his destination unknown. Suddenly, a haunting crane cry pierces the silence, stirring emotions. Though unaware of the crane's symbolic significance in Armenian culture, the cry resonates deeply, evoking feelings of exile and displacement. For someone who understands and feels, the crane's cry provides knowledge about the character that is so vividly and concisely expressed, impossible to convey in any other way, just as it was impossible to express in words what Charlie Chaplin's self-composed waltz conveyed in *City Lights*: the state of lovers' souls.

## 2.4 The ontological foundation of sound studies

While Pierre Schaeffer is often regarded as one of the founders of sound studies due to his pioneering work in musique concrète and the development of the concept of acousmatic listening, Michel Chion has made significant contributions to the field by synthesising and analysing sound in all its dimensions. Chion's seminal work, *Le son*, stands out for its integration of semiotic and phenomenological approaches. By classifying sounding phenomena and compiling an impressive registry, the composer compares the elusiveness of the sign to the fleeting landscape outside a train window, thus offering a comprehensive synthesis of previous sound studies

Chion thoroughly analyses sound objects not only from the conventional physical standpoint (frequency components, duration, intensity) but also operates with the concepts of sound "zones" and "calibres" using criteria like "graininess", "width" and "density" for distinguishing timbres. The author pays special attention to technology's role in altering sound perception. Contrary to Marshall McLuhan's popular view of the audio industry as a herald of the "oral era" the composer finds the Derridean concept of "hauntology" in my opinion more suitable for defining the essence of audio recording. In this coordinate system, the sound industry is more aptly described as a realm of ghosts. Decontextualising recorded sounds can be listened to dozens of times and thus radically change listeners" perceptions. Chion's scepticism towards the concept of timbre and his desire to expose its collective and metaphorical essence, categorising it into clear subtypes. The scholar draws an analogy to recognising a human face, which can be broken down into specific components like a characteristic jawline or eye colour. This example delineates the narrow boundaries of such an approach, prompting a recollection of Ludwig Wittgenstein's concept of "family resemblance": when recognising someone's face or the kinship between two faces, we fundamentally do not need to break them down into details. Moreover, if we start making such classifications and comparing features, eyes, gait, temperament will quickly be taken by pale photo-fit images (Wittgenstein, 1958: 32).

Sound recording practices must pay close attention to the elusive nature of timbre from scientific definitions. However, this catalogue of neologisms, where audio-visual is complemented not only by visual listening but also by concepts like audio-vasogenic and audio-division - brings a smile: perhaps the most consistent step here should be to abandon the use of the everyday, non-scientific, and extremely imprecise word "sound". Schaeffer's vague "sound landscape" seems more valuable than Shion's hierarchy of terms. Registries claiming a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon appear only as a catalogue of its features.

In a global sense, sound studies succeed only in the extensive "cataloguing" of sounds, based on various principles and methodologies – cultural, sociological, art-historical – but their foundation often relies on semiotic toolkit.

In Henri Corbin's book *Village Bells: Sound and Meaning in French Rural Areas in the 19th Century* the author revealed that the bell's sound contributed to "auditory unity" (local identity) among people. Hearing the bell ringing, peasants or townspeople felt their local identity. Corbin considers bell sounds a crucial means of shaping social space.

In recent years, works have emerged that place sound perception in a broad historical and cultural context. Nonetheless, it must be acknowledged that this issue is still on the distant scientific periphery. However, the initial steps in this direction were quite confident. Attempts to filter well-known facts through an auditory or multisensory lens deserve researchers' attention.

Emily Thompson, in her study called *The soundscape of modernity: architectural acoustics and the culture of listening in America, 1900-1933* transforms much of Schaeffer's analytical toolkit. Following Corbin, the author defines soundscape as an acoustic landscape that is both a physical environment and a way of sensing that environment. In her understanding, a soundscape is not only acoustic waves dissolving in the atmosphere but also material objects that either create or disrupt the sound. Therefore, it is necessary to study the aesthetic and scientific aspects of sounds, as well as the listener's relationship with the social environment, which dictates what exactly they hear.

The author believes that research into new sound technologies should contribute to a deeper understanding of society and culture. Thompson attempts to capture the sounds that people of different eras heard and find the reasons for changes in their listening methods; she considers the latest of these methods a product of modern technologies [30: 99].

## 2.5 Sound studies: pro et contra

Interestingly, discussions about sound as a sign avoid references to Peirce or Saussure. Charles Sanders Peirce's well-known triad - representative, object, interpretant - reveals impressive potential for analysing sound phenomena, from the rustling of an unfolding umbrella after thunder rumble to complex sound systems constructed by human memory. In everyday situations, there is a broad field for playing with various sense-making: the recognisable sound of a start-up Apple laptop simultaneously serves as effective advertising for the company, while, for instance, a discontented cough misinterpreted by a distracted interlocutor as a sign of a cold threatens to exacerbate the conflict. This presents an entire field for turning to semiotic conceptual apparatus. "We eagerly await the doctrine of sound challenging science, as the doctrine of colour challenged it", wrote Ernst Jünger a century ago [6: 164].

The assault on physics continues with the following arguments: since "sounds are open objects of auditory perception", there is no basis to assume that a vacuum is silent (O'Callaghan 2007: 2). Just as "the presence of light is necessary to distinguish colours, it does not mean that objects lose their colour in the dark" (2007: 50), there are grounds to consider that "sound is present in a vacuum but remains inaudible" as an event (2007: 51). What we call silence may well be the amplitudes of two sounds in antiphase (2007: 101).

Secondly, a separate chapter of the study is dedicated to sound spatiality. Despite noises interacting and conflicting with each other, sometimes blending in a way that makes it difficult to determine the moment of transition, one can speak about their localisation. And if sound is not a quality of an object it does not mean it lacks a source of sound. Recalling Bergson's well-known argument about the substitution of the durational by the instantaneous, it's worth noting that starting from the opposition between the audible and the visible, O'Callaghan moves on to spatial classifications of sound, largely using the same toolkit characterised at the beginning of the work as "predominantly visual" (2007: 3).

Salomé Voegelin addresses the problem of finding an innovative toolkit for discussing sound. In her work, the fundamental division revolves around the "phenomenological experience and its semiotic articulation" (2014: 150),

complicated by the fact that "deep listening is a process linked to constant doubt, the necessity to relisten, to understand whether everything was heard correctly" [32, 11]. For Voegelin, the challenge of hearing "sounds not conveying something but as conveying themselves" is particularly acute (2014: 85). Sound is not seen as a medium transmitting meaning but as a semiotic process – something that generates meaning. Unlike Schaeffer and O'Callaghan, many of Voegelin's theses can be called "phonocentric". For instance, she considers scores devoid of genuine musical life. Quietness "is not the absence of sound but the beginning of deep listening when there is nothing to hear, so much begins to sound" [32: 83].

Sound researchers rarely explore Henri Bergson. Still, the idea of merging the audible with the visible deserves attention. The root of the problem, named the tyranny of the visual, is formulated as follows: "We project time into space, and we base our reasoning […] on this geometrical figure, but this figure represents a thing and not progress" [2: 181]. In discussions about time, the presence of spatial elements manifests itself. He provides an example directly related to sound – the notation of durations with musical symbols:

As the effort by which your voice passes from one note to another is discontinuous, you picture to yourself these successive notes as points in space, to be reached by a series of sudden jumps, in each of which you cross an empty separating interval: this is why you establish intervals between the notes of the scale. Now, why is the line along which we dispose them vertical rather than horizontal, and why do we say that the sound ascends in some cases and descends in others? [2: 45].

In the realm of non-idiomatic free collective improvisation, sounds do not isolate themselves from space, embodying an inherent connection to their surroundings. This concept extends beyond auditory experiences, as visual elements can also persistently engage with space, with cinema serving as a prime example. However, an intriguing inconsistency arises in the opposition between the audible and the visible. When immersed in the spatial classification of noises, sound researchers find themselves relying on analytical tools they have already deemed "predominantly visual" [22, 3] such as focus and close-ups. This reliance necessitates a step back to justify that "a description that completely avoids spatial images will be very difficult, if possible at all" [13: 220]. This raises questions about the logical precision of even the so-called "soundscapes" by Schafer and whether the opposition between the visual and the auditory in sound discussions is truly fundamental.

The phenomenon of sound as an object of scientific understanding has captivated philosophers, aestheticians, and musicologists throughout history. Gilles Deleuze, in his characterisation of contemporary culture, posits that the "image of sound, musical, replaces the visual image and proclaims the emptiness and silence of non-being" [7: 278]. This statement signifies a pivotal shift in the dominant worldview of art. Classical concepts of mimesis are imbued with new meanings and are also surpassed by "anti-mimetic art." Consequently, art "exposes" reality, liberating artistic techniques from other functions except meaning-making, thereby shifting focus from the object to the process of creation. "What separates sounds from bodies makes sounds into elements of a language", writes Deleuze [7: 186].

Rephrasing Deleuze, we can assert that separating sounds from their source transforms them into elements of a musical language. Language becomes possible through the self-differentiation of its elements. This necessity for differentiation is intrinsic to the world of sound, which is reaching its final developmental stage, evolving into a musical language: "the expressed makes possible the expression" [7: 186]. This development confronts us with the ultimate task: to trace the history that liberates sounds and makes them independent of bodies, or how sounds free themselves from their source.

This notion encapsulates the relationship between reproducing a musical sound—the primal element of the composition detached from the energetic impulse—and creating a compositional whole imbued with expressiveness, which is what we refer to as "music." However, the phenomenological grasp of sound is hindered by our limited perception, capturing only one phase at a time. Melody, for instance, is constructed through the memory of previously heard notes, thereby incorporating its past into its present. This suggests that our discussion should focus on the constancy of becoming, rather than the present moment. The duration of a sound overlays the duration of consciousness, necessitating the remembrance of melody while listening and maintaining the sequence of tonal changes in our minds.

According to Salomé Voegelin, "the critical listener himself is full of doubt about the heard, and doubtful in his complicity he needs to hear and hear again, to know himself as an intersubjective being in a sonic life-world" [32, 11]. This reflection on the listener's experience highlights the complexity and depth of engaging with sound beyond mere auditory perception. It underscores the intrinsic connection between sound, space, and memory, emphasising that the understanding of sound extends beyond the auditory and into a multifaceted experiential realm.

Jean-Luc Nancy's research introduced a fundamentally different starting point: the opposition not between the visual and the auditory but between the philosophy of understanding and the philosophy of listening [30, 9]. The scholar contrasts the French verbs entendre (to hear, to pay attention, to understand) and écouter (to hear, to tune in): "Isn't a philosopher the one who always pays attention and hears everything but who is incapable of listening, or more precisely, who refuses to listen to begin philosophising?" [20, 13]. Instead of the obvious contrast between the visible and the audible, the problem arises of sound not endowed with meaning. This is perceived as something unclear yet extraordinarily close. Listening before understanding brings us back to the problem of intentionality as the fundamental structure of the subject.

"To listen is to approach meaning's possibility, whose instantaneous grasp is hindered" [30, 6]. In a sense, attentive listening is like a dream – an experience of losing the subject yet returning to it. Therefore, Nancy's discourse revolves not so much around a preference for listening over understanding but rather about pointing to what precedes this division. The starting point for these reflections is sound, or more precisely,

“quietness as the primary site of sound” [30, 21]. The nightly elusiveness of the subject closely converges with listening until understanding opens the world problem. Marcel Proust called this "sleep that fashioned sounds” – too clearly heard but never experienced [25: 438]. In his novels, various sounds are woven into a colossal associative series, connected by the tolling of bells, the ringing of the garden gate bell, the clinking of a spoon, the elevator’s thud, various creaks, the hiccupping sound of a water radiator, the crackling of flames in the fireplace, reminiscent of the overture to the opera *Tannhäuser.*

Listening is not like the familiar expansion of erudition. Prolonged listening can be defined not as the acquisition of knowledge but as an intentional horizon that grants access to auditory experience. It is evident that excluding space from the sound conversation would hardly be productive. However, Jonathan Sterne’s thesis “auditory is temporal, visual is spatial” fails criticism. We often hear noises from a specific area, especially sharp sounds. Hits or clicks usually originate from their own “corner” and dominate a certain territory. At the same time, enveloping sounds like wind gusts differ from the crunch of the branches it breaks. The wind itself is rarely easy to locate; it is scattered across the panorama, a broad sound. Michel Chion says we often forget that “sound often has not one but at least two, three, or even more sources; for example, when writing, the pen and paper become these two sources” [3, 28].

Sounds interact and conflict with each other. When listening to music, we are not required to imagine the musical instruments on which it is performed. Similar happens when falling asleep: sounds that seemed like disturbances just a few minutes ago freely enter the space of sleep and detach from familiar associations, becoming indistinguishable.

Here, the field is open to the study of sound's fundamental properties, and alongside terms like frequency, amplitude, and phase, others appear that might garner less trust from physicists: timbre, clarity, rhythm. Thus, the classifications of Alexei Losev are perhaps even more sophisticated than contemporary sound studies:

Sounding phenomena resist attempts to propose the only correct listening method. This is somewhat reminiscent of the example of a house on the banks of the Seine used by Maurice Merleau-Ponty in the context of perception problems. Although there is no way to see the house from all sides at once, the phenomenon of the house remains something greater than the sum of all views [19: 188].

If we imagine, if possible, turning into an insect and looking at the foundation from beneath the ground, the house will still elude us. The reasoning about the “summing up of views” itself is in the realm of calculation and, therefore, fundamentally unrelated to the problem of capture of the phenomenon. Here, the emphasis can be shifted: even “erroneous” perceptions can convey something not only about the listener but also about the phenomenon itself.

Phenomenological reduction reminds us that philosophy exists precisely to remove all the veils of practice, especially scientific practice [12]. This return to listening before knowledge, preferring description to explanation, allows moving from the question of symbolising phenomena to the problem of their genesis. Signals like the Morse code resist ambiguity: a factory whistle, a doorbell, a police whistle, a train warning whistle. Our reaction to them is almost reflexive – to the extent that one recalls Pavlov’s dogs. And, although in everyday life there are seemingly relatively few examples of this kind, virtually any of the sounds around us can play the role of such a signal.

This singularity can be contested: Schafer writes about the signal of a car horn, which can be interpreted differently depending on whether it belongs to an annoyed taxi driver or a driver in a wedding procession [26, 149]. But one can also provide a counterexample: at some point, phone manufacturers started discussing that humans' sonic culture should be enriched, and monotonous sounds should give way to polyphonic ones. The prerequisite we need to talk about involves an exercise in perception and deconditioning: learning to listen for oneself. This is akin to how one used to learn to think independently, a necessity now largely absent from educational priorities.

Erik Satie's *Musique d'ameublement* serve as examples. Musique d'ameublement, or “furniture music” was conceived by Satie as background music designed to blend into the environment. It is not meant to captivate listeners' attention but to function as part of the background, creating an ambiance without demanding active listening. However, when music started serving as phone ringtones, its role shifted drastically. Music, in this context, was reduced to an unambiguous signal, stripped of its compositional depth and reduced to a functional alert for an incoming call. This transformation highlights how the first and foremost meaning of the sound became its signal function, overshadowing any artistic or emotional content.

The phenomenon extends to background melodies in various public spaces, which are often perceived passively and not as works of art. These sounds, although part of complex sonic structures, are typically processed as signals tied to a specific, singular meaning. For instance, marches are generally perceived as music for soldiers' drills, despite their potential for broader musical appreciation.

This reduction of music to signal status demonstrates a broader trend in modern listening habits where complex sounds are often interpreted through a narrow lens, emphasising function over artistic intent. The challenge, then, is to cultivate the ability to listen actively and independently, appreciating the full spectrum of meanings and emotions that music can convey. At the same time, such unambiguity of sound can be existentially significant: the protagonist in André Gide’s novel *The Counterfeiters* hesitates to shoot himself because he realises that the last thing, he will hear is the sound of the shot, which completely disrupts his desire to immerse himself in death as in a dream and ultimate peace. For the same reason, in Boris Pasternak’s novel *Doctor Zhivago*, Lara decides to shoot Komarovsky: mentally hearing the shot before pressing the trigger.

As with words, when encountering sounds, we can sift through their meanings and choose the one that fits – even in a situation of blending multiple noises (a phenomenon defined as the cocktail party effect). An ornithologist can distinguish individual voices in bird cacophony, and a sound

designer can hear each tone composing the soundtrack. This ability to isolate a specific sound segment (the part of an instrument or even individual frequencies) during recording listening typically requires much more training than focusing one's gaze on one of the nearby objects.

In cinema, a common technique involves the exclusive sonic presence of an event, sometimes defining the drama of what is happening. In Bresson's film *A Man Escaped*, almost all the action takes place in the prison building, but occasionally, machine gun bursts are heard from outside, and solely by the sound of these volleys, the inmates understand that someone is being shot at that moment. However, this technique was also used in the theatrical arts: during the staging of Woyzeck by Georg Büchner, Bergman suggested that the actors perform the murder scene not on the main stage "but slightly to the side, in the shadows", so that people would only guess what was happening there by the noise [14 86].Thus, "the phenomenologist lives from the beginning in paradoxical circumstances, looking at the self-evident as if it were doubtful, as if it were mysterious", reflects Edmund Husserl [24].

## 3 Conclusion

Overall, in it important to note that the Greek philosophers and their descendants who have pondered the nature of sound, but also certain sages, shamans, and shepherds of the First Nations, those of deepest Africa, and even in the West, the Basque shepherds, who have and continue to hold a completely different vision of sound. They perceive it as belonging to the realm of "Liance" between humans, non-humans, and more-than-humans. Practically all sound studies face a puzzle: should sound be discussed not as a sign or quality, but as an essence?

It is remarkable that philosophers, for centuries, have only indirectly touched upon sound—through discussions about time, music, or technology—but almost never directly. We encounter a certain contradiction: on the one hand, declaring philosophy the sphere of soundless objects seems too hasty; on the other hand, it's nearly impossible not to notice this centuries-long gap. However, the absence of a rich tradition doesn't necessarily have to be perceived as a catastrophe or an impossibility to look beyond those boundaries. To establish a foundation, this claim to philosophers must be formulated in philosophical language. Sound should be explored as an essential phenomenon, integral to the "Liance" and interconnections among various beings, rather than merely a secondary quality or a signifier within philosophical discourse. This approach invites a reevaluation of traditional philosophical perspectives and encourages a more inclusive understanding of sound that encompasses diverse cultural and spiritual insights.

The ontological understanding of the sonic space of musical works is associated with the manifestation of the ability to "think in sounds", "eidetic images", "substantial ideas" [16, 108] as phenomena of being, perceived not auditorily but through "spiritual" hearing and sight – through the "high" sensations of the soul and heart.

We can hear sounds before they sound, and sometimes even those that haven't been heard at all. And this theme is still incomplete. We can imagine the sound of footsteps, then refine it: the click of heels on a stone floor, the crunch of gravel under boots, or the echo reverberating through the stairwell. This, in turn, allows delving into further nuances: mentally hearing that sound with different reverberations, envisioning the same footsteps with a shortened dynamic range, added high frequencies, or, conversely, an exaggerated low-frequency hum. Musicians easily sing orchestral parts to themselves, and the sounds in their heads can't be drowned out by street noise.

We can undoubtedly imagine a sound we've never encountered by envisioning it. Reminding ourselves that others recognise our voice in a recording faster than we do can again stumble upon this problem of separation between memory and imagination. Is the difference between a sound already heard, one not yet heard, and one that will never be perceived fundamental to thinking? Nothing prevents us from imagining the noise of a waterfall we've hardly seen, and this can hardly be deemed false compared to someone refreshing their distant stay on Niagara shores. Husserl would never agree to level this difference between memory and imagination, but the issue is not the absence of distinction between perception and recollection (otherwise, we wouldn't replay music). The point is that we are indeed capable of hearing sounds before they have sounded, and sometimes even those that haven't heard at all.

Concerning their belonging to the world, consciousness facts like memory and imagination are equivalent. In both cases, we can hear soundless sounds. "Memory and reality must exist in the same space. In turn, the image and reality also exist in the same space" – here, Wittgenstein can compete with phenomenologists [34: 38].

The unresolved question that virtually all researchers encounter is: what should sound be discussed, not as a sign or quality, but as an essence? It seems that persistent efforts to classify timbres divert attention from answering it.

In conclusion, it is essential to consider sound as an independent entity, distinct from music. While music is undoubtedly a component of sound, it does not encompass its entirety. Phenomenological philosophy should delegate the analysis of sound waves to physics, the study of auditory mechanisms to biology, and the examination of listener emotions to psychology. Intentionality and meaning exist in this auditory space in a unique manner. This approach allows the discussion about the audible to transcend traditional communicative codes. Heidegger described phenomenology as a method of "showing the determination of what is supposed to become the subject of ontology" [10: 72].

Statements by German philosophers like Johann Wilhelm Ritter, who said, "All music, like life itself – at least, an image of life," and Karl Krause, who stated, "Music is the sound of life," are pivotal in understanding music as a reflection of life. These perspectives underscore the notion that music, while a part of the broader spectrum of sound, mirrors the essence and dynamics of life itself.

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