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Ecologic consciousness and the crisis of modernity:

sonic environments

between ethic imperatives and aesthetic autonomy

TWO INTERMINGLED EVOLUTIONS :

- the emergence of an ecologic sensibility
- the emergence of a postmodern sensibility

ONE CONTEXT:

- the crisis of Descartes' modernity
according to which
man is the « master of nature »

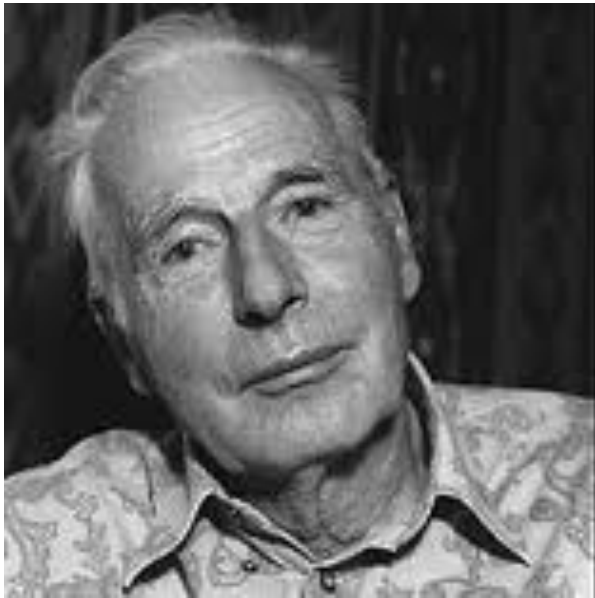
CONSEQUENCES ENTAILED BY THE RISE OF AN ECOLOGIC CONSCIOUSNESS

- new non anthropocentric ethic: Hans Jonas, Michel Serres, Edgar Morin, Elizabeth de Fontenay...
- new economic models in contradiction with the idea of an unlimited growth
- new forms of art: land art, field recording, phonography, soundscape, sonic design, **sonic environments**

TWO DIFFERENT ECOSOPHIES

Arne Naess (1912-2009)

Ecology, community and lifestyle



Félix Guattari (1930-1992)

Les Trois Écologies



ONE CRUCIAL POINT OF DIVERGENCY BETWEEN NAESS AND GUATTARI

The meaning of the notions of
subject and *subjectivity* seen in the context of
the relation between man and environment

TWO PHILOSOPHICAL AND MUSICAL STANDPOINTS

ARNE NAESS -JOHN CAGE

- Deep integration (inclusion) of the human subject in his environment
- Weak subjectivity

GUATTARI-XENAKIS/STOCKHAUSEN

- Autonomous human subject considering himself as exterior (other) to his environment
- Strong subjectivity

THE RELATION MAN-NATURE ACCORDING TO ARNE NAESS

AXIOM : Nature has an intrinsic value

MAIN CONCEPTS :

- **Self-realisation** (of the human individual)
- **Identification** (of the human individual in connection with a « larger Self » meaning Nature)
- **Gestalt** : Nature seen as a supreme Gestalt incorporating all the individual « small » Gestalts

JOHN CAGE'S VISIONARY IDEAS

BLURING THE BOUNDARIES

- between sound and silence, noise and musical sound
- between art and life
- between the human subject and his environment

ABSENCE OF SUBJECTIVITY

- no intentionality, no interventionism
- silence

SOUND ECOLOGY

EXPLICIT ETHIC CONCERN

- Preserving the sonic environment

TANGIBLE GOALS

- Eliminating sonic pollution
- Recycling, saving energy

MUSICAL IMPLICATIONS

- Music tends to integrate the soundscape
- Music tends to transform itself into a musical therapy applying to the planet
- Music tends to be close to silence

GUATTARI'S ECOSOPHY OF « RE-SINGULARISATION »

- The man (human individual): an autonomous and active subject
- The environment: something to be constantly reinvented
- A relation of outwardness and otherness between man and his environment

PROPOSALS

- Strengthening subjectivity
- Creating « intrusive singularities »
- Favoring « asperity » and dissension

AESTHETIC IMPLICATIONS

- Ecosophy should take art as a model
- The work of art is an « intrusive singularity »,
a fragment separated from the world, a catalyzer

THE FRAGMENT AND THE WHOLE

Guattari (quoting Schlegel)

- “Similar to a little work of art, a fragment must be totally detached from the world surrounding it, and self-contained like a hedgehog”

Arne Naess

- “Fragments cannot be separated from the whole ... [They are] part of a greater Gestalt”

XENAKIS AND STOCKHAUSEN IN THE LATE 1960' and 1970'

CONTEXT: Transition between the late modern and the postmodern period

SOME WORKS: *Polytopes, Sternklang, Musik für ein Haus, Alphabet für Liège*

LATE MODERN ASPECTS

- « Intrusive » subjective attitude
- Rivality between man and nature (demiurgy)
- No particular concern about preserving the environment

LATE MODERN AND POSTMODERN ASPECTS

- Opening towards environment

Aesthetic aspects :

- spatialisation on a large scale, mobility of the auditors
- interactivity, prolonged immersion, poly-sensorial experiences

ETHIC AND AESTHETIC CONCERNS

- On the one way, ethic concerns tend to impose themselves to art
- On the other way, art tends to preserve its aesthetic autonomy

The late modern environmental approach

- Aesthetic concerns
tend to prevail

The postmodern environmental approach

- Ethic concerns
tend to prevail

AESTHETIC MUTATIONS ENTAILED BY THE RISE OF AN ECOLOGIC CONSCIOUSNESS

A BREACH IN THE “AESTHETIC REGIME” OF ART (Jacques Rancière):
art could integrate some aspects of the ancient “ethic regime”

THE EMERGENCE OF A NEW “INTERMEDIARY DOMAIN *between music in the traditional sense of the word and sonic ecology*” (Makis Solomos),
or of a new “*sonic art*” distinct to music (Bastien Gallet)

THE “DISQUALIFICATION OF THE WORK OF ART” (J. Clavel & L. Fel)

- the new ecologic constraints affect the production and the diffusion of the work of art
- the artist becomes a kind of mediator between his auditors and the environment ; he is not the creator of an original work anymore

AN UTOPIAN PERSPECTIVE ?

- The “aesthetic regime” as described by Rancière, implying an autonomous individual endowed with subjectivity, could (should) last in spite of the new ethic (ecologic) constraints.
- Ethic (ecologic or other) and aesthetics should not be contradictory: they rather should support each other (Guattari).
- Music means “sound art” but also “harmony”, in the broadest sense of the word.
- Music could then inspire the paradigm of a harmonious relation between man and environment.
- The ecologic ideal could become the new utopy

“To treat the sound domain requires being a musician [...]

I see nowadays many actions
defining themselves as sound art.

What does sound art mean ?

As a musician, I can say that sound art is called music”.

Pierre Mariétan