A vision of Sound art, architecture and sound practices in the field of Sonic Urbanism

Julien Ottavi – October 2020.

I have been independently organising the curatorial and research project of APO33, which I founded in 1997, in Nantes. The Association defends the sound arts and experimental intermedia practices by providing space for research, pedagogy and public presentation of these practices.

Since the end of the 90's I have been involved in many projects, exhibitions, performances and publication around the subject of sound, architecture, urbanism, sound art and urban soundscapes. To explain my ongoing research as an artist, academic and as part of a different group of independent researchers I will draw a detailed timeline with a selection of works, exhibition and publication related to what I think to be a significant research output.

I started my research in 1996 when I was hosting a radio show, for a local radio station where I started to experiment with sound from radio broadcasts, city soundscapes, voices and other sounds from the transmission arts. At that time I also started to experiment with sound poetry and voice with site-specific acoustics such as everyday living spaces, abandoned buildings or resonant architectures.

In 1999, Jaap Blonk invited me to propose a work for **voice and architecture** published in Leonardo Music Journal - Volume 15 - December 2005 – p.83-84, where I drew a relation between listening, sound poetry and acoustic space.

- https://www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/abs/10.1162/lmj.2005.15.1.83a#authorsTabList

In the meantime I moved away from the radio studios towards urban spaces, creating performances with radio transmitters and receivers (micro pirate radios) using the soundscapes of the surrounding environment to produce real time sound transformations and to send these back through radio into the acoustic space of the city.

From 2000 – 2006, I worked with other artists from the Apo33 group on a specific research project called : Mobile radiophonic device. The aim was to create multiple aural architectures using city soundscapes and live urban radio transmissions. We created a regular mobile laboratory at the Villette center in Paris, across different neighborhoods in Nantes to the streets of Brooklyn in New York City with the support of free103point9 and Sound Drop (Nuit Blanche Paris and Mu Collective) in order to organise what I called a transmutation of city soundscapes between different city.

- https://www.sound-drop.org/IMG/pdf/Sound_Drop_2005_-_Dossier_de_presse.pdf

Over 2 years (2004 - 2006) – I established a research project called Poulpe (Grant Research Dicream-CNC - 2004), with Apo33: an ongoing experiment to create a new form of art using the sound of architecture, public spaces and mutation of soundscapes in real time. Le poulpe (the octopus) is an analogical and digital organism living in a network. Each branch constitutes a sonic installation which, out of a specific location, collects its own locally generated sound effects, transforms them via a digital automaton into a new arrangement of sounds. The outcome is then broadcast locally, through loudspeakers, and across the Net, through streaming. Le Poulpe belongs in the city, where people live and make noise. It gives a virtual body to this city, expressing through sounds its invisible movements and its continuous flows. Over the Net, its tentacles collect and connect continuous sonic fluxes from ever changing contexts, to infiltrate and modify another environment. We realised a serie of installation / exhibition in different types of space (Library, Public spaces, building, school...etc) for different cities all connected together with real time audio streaming.

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XsZLFjFdhI8 / http://poulpe.apo33.org Apo33 published a art book that traces the research with an audio CD -Poulpe – 2006 – Edition Parenthèses / Metamkine, Nantes.

- http://apo33.org/poulpe/lib/exe/fetch.php?media=2cor_maquette_poulpe.pdf Brandon Labelle uses the Poulpe project in his book background noise as part of one of his chapter : Live Streams: Apo33 and Multiplying Place – Brandon Labelle Bloomsbury Academic (London, United Kingdom).

Radio Transarchitecture – is a concept that involves cross transformation and architecture. It forms the bases of a project I started working on in **2007,** through which I continue my research to transform urban architecture and spaces with radio transmission and sound from the environment. In 2008 I participated in 2 major exhibitions for this project, the first one in London at **Tenderpixel gallery**, the principle was to transform the street of the gallery into a radio transmission spiral.

Every shop and every part of this ancient gallery & bookshop street mutated into radio waves generators, the people passing through became interference to finally change the resonant property of the transmissions and of the space.

Performance in the streets of London; I invited the public to perform by walking and calling a phone number which was transferred through a radio transmitter. While the performers narrated their surroundings, a program transformed and mixed their voices with sound from the city to be sent back to the street through radio broadcasts and radio receivers. The same year I participated to architectones, a festival and a seminar on sound and architectures practices at **Arc & Senan/FR – 2008** - Behind the scene, radio transmitters and receivers are playing together in a radio feedback system modulated by the hyper surveillance architecture (typical architecture of Arc & Senan). The main principle of this installation was to reverse the panopticon situation (half circle centered surveillance) through airwaves and feedback changing the perspective of the viewer / listener moving around and escaping the surveillance, the frequencies generated are impossible to control in this sense.

- https://www.frac-franche-comte.fr/fr/architectones-1

In 2008 I was also working at Area 10 Medialab in London, a space I co-founded with Jenny Pickett, as an extension of Area10 Project Space, Peckhams' activities. I began working on a project called BOT in Nantes and in London. The BOT: a Continuous online lab uses artificial Intelligence with city soundscapes and audio streaming to mutate space - BOT/BioBOTs make up a virtual community with a view to assemble a collection of entities in one location in order to diffuse their production to many more places. They were part of a new to digital phenomena : networks, multi motionless geo-location, interconnection of on-line produced or processed cityscapes, automation in the treatment of reality and, especially in the case of BOTs, sites for experiments, always accessible, and from anywhere with listening devices (spatialisation, sculptural and online streaming). In **2013**, I published an article on the BOT research under the title: Sound Scope and Sensory Ubiquity - The networked field of listening and audio experimentation – Experimental Music Review, Editions Météo / Les Presses du Réel, Paris 2013

- https://www.lespressesdureel.com/EN/ouvrage.php?id=2636&menu=3 (Peer reviewed)

I presented this work in different galleries and festival in collaboration with different artists: Jenny Pickett (Sollefteå, Nantes, Paris, London), I worked also a version that will include the architecture as resonant space for BOTs and cityscapes: Halbot – vibrating the architecture space within the wall

themselves. Installation with Philippe Roux for Sound Delta festival along the Danube during the **summer 2008**

- https://www.sound-delta.eu/-Networked-sound-installation- We installed microphones in the close surrounding of the exhibition space that was sent to a machine to filter frequencies in order to make the space vibrate using bass pump and transducer.

In **2009**, Apo33 received grant (Dicream-CNC) to research new artistic method (through gaming) to work with sound, urbanism and public spaces, we proposed the 5th dimension – audio mapping of urban soundscapes – collective research on how urban sound could build new artistic project and a better understanding on how sound is being listen in our cities.

- https://issuu.com/apo33/docs/5_dimensions_10_juin/11

From 2009 to 2011, my art and research concentrated on the crossing of urban soundscapes, narration of listening experiences with urban communities and sound art installation.

Dream Sweepers is a sound installation work, using speech (narration) and sound related to concepts of memory and experience of the city. The audio souvenirs, perceived ambiances and the received sonic life of the city delivers its unconscious impressions / expressions and simultaneously transmits those via remote telephonic narratives and resounding cut ups echoing across different cityscapes (London, Marseille, Nantes, Amiens...etc). In-situ installations were exhibited at Morley Gallery, Amiens Art School, and at Apo33's Sound art gallery in Nantes, Riam Festival in Marseille...etc). Dream Sweepers takes the form of Graphical Score – structured and unstructured elements refer to the possibility of alternative audio compositions of the inter-city soundscapes and aural architecture or sound narration. This research was published in Brandon Labelle and Claudia Marthinho's second edition of *Site of Sound*. - Dreams Sweepers & the murmur of Imaginary architectures, Jenny Pickett, Julien Ottavi – Errant Bodies Press, NYC - Site of sound #2 : of architecture and the ear - edited by Brandon LaBelle & Cláudia Martinho. (Peer reviewed)

- https://www.lespressesdureel.com/EN/ouvrage.php?id=2153

The same year PAJ published a catalog of artists on Transmission arts, Artists and airwaves – in relation to transmission arts and sound of the cities (Public works, interactive and networks)

- https://wavefarm.org/ta/archive/works/ah1hz2

During **2011 and 2013**, I continued my research in Field recording, Streaming and sound mapping - and I actively participated at Locus Sonus research on international sound mapping with live microphones; and a final seminar at the Architecture of Nantes on Sound, Architecture, ambiance and live audio mapping of the world sound.

- https://www.locusonus.org/site/streams/map.php
- https://locusonus.org/w/?page=Symposium+internet+auditoriums.en

As well as co-authoring and coordinating 'Opensound' a pan European Project on sound arts, for which Apo33 received a two years European grant (Grundtvig 2013) - mapping sonic experience and experimentation in Europe involving seven sound-based organisations. The project focused upon non-formal adult learning, contemporary European sound practices (with a particular emphasis upon open-source technologies, attitudes and politics) and sustained knowledge transfer between organisations and individuals. Casting contemporary European practice in close relation to transcultural exchange provided the opportunity to reflect upon habitual contexts of auditory practice and facilitated a questioning of previous methodologies of sonic documentation. The result was published in the journal of Sonic Studies:

- OA#1. Listening and Mapping the Sonic. Plurality and Wayfaring: Writing the OpenSound Project - J. Milo Taylor, Carlos Alves, Xabier Erkizia, Julien Ottavi, Wajid Yaseen (Peer review) and on a CD (Fibrr/Metamkine)
- https://www.discogs.com/Opensound-Opensound/release/8120683

In addition APO33 received a cross disciplinary research grant from the European Cultural Foundation for the project We Have A Situation! (*an ongoing series of live, trans-border, online-offline participatory performances addressing current cross-cultural issues)*. This took place in a virtual theatre for sound art and cyberformance discussing political issues local to the European countries involved. During the course of this project my research with APO33 centered around sound pollution (the sound of planes over the city and the resistance against the implementation of a new airport for Nantes, which saw weekly protests and gained international attention). Edition WHAS 2013

- https://wehaveasituation.net - The following "situations" have been created:

In 2014 and 2015, I raised a grant for 2 years research with Subtecture – a framework for research on sound (using sub frequencies) and architecture to produce critical response and installations in

different contexts. Subtecture is an ensemble of varying configuration, using a combination of low sound frequencies and sub-bass as a temporal architectural structuring of space, audio-visual scores and musical tools to transform sound material and space perception. Subtecture attempts a fresh approach to acoustic configurations of places in unusual locations. A sound hypothesis, using acoustic and light which takes the form of an installation-concert without beginning or end, whose sole purpose is to uncover and return the sonic spatiality of a place. An article independently by Apo33 and Avatar (Metamkine), Quebec-Nantes 2015. This article is part of my Thesis.

My research on noise music extends over many years with a particular interest in its relation to urban noise. I have worked extensively towards recording sound using noise generators for performance, based on noise from electricity generators as a way to listen to our urban surroundings in a different way. In **2015**, an article I wrote in 2010: **The City Of Noise** - Noise : from the everyday practice of listening and composing, beyond any musical genre or aesthetics, creates an experience of the self in the world. - was published by Radical Matters 2015,

- https://www.yumpu.com/fr/document/view/50858316/julien-ottavi-the-city-of-noise-radical-matters (peer review) and I also published a double audio CD – Electromagnetic Collective - Sound of Electricity – Mapping the city and participatory performance with Electromagnetic Antenna – (Fibrr Records/Metamkine)
- https://www.discogs.com/Julien-Ottavi-Jenny-Pickett-Electromagnetic-Collective/release/12917602

Electromagnetic Antenna and participatory workshop-performance have become a very important part of my art and research practice on inaudible urban soundscapes, performances, derives and sound based listening experience.

In 2016, I formalised this research in an article 'Considerations on audio-geographical dérives or how to listen to the electromagnetic spectrum - Urban Dérive and electromagnetic spectrum'**.** Starting from one position and walking across the city; meeting somebody by chance; getting lost; observing what is beyond the real; finding yourself once more at the point you started from.

The Dérive - an approach to urban walking that has been widely developed by the Situationist movement, especially after Guy Debord's «Report on the construction of situations» in which he proposed that we «change the world» by outstripping all the artistic forms through the unitary use of all the the available contrivances that will revolutionize everyday life.

The article is published L'art Des villes, Presses Universitaire de Pau

- https://recherche.univ-pau.fr/fr/productions-scientifiques/puppa/catalogue/fa/figures-de-l-art-31-l-art-des-villes.html (Pau University Pau, Peer Review)

The project was also published and presented at **ISEA 2016** in Honk Kong

- http://www.isea-archives.org/docs/2016/catalogue/ISEA2016_catalogue.pdf (Peer review)

In 2017 and 2018, I spent a significant amount of time finalising my thesis on "New forms of networked sound practices: collaborative practice, shared creation, the Internet as a non-space,extended listening and permanent installations."

- http://docnum.univ-lorraine.fr/public/DDOC_T_2018_0266_OTTAVI.pdf

This thesis addresses these creative projects, practices and expertise and articulates a theoretical methodology which draws together current forms of artistic language relating to cutting edge music and poetry and networked practices.

For the last 2 years I have been developing the project called Archisonic (sonic architecture) to work on sound and architecture – the transformation of acoustic spaces using resonant frequencies of buildings and city soundscape mapping with multiple pirate radio transmission. (Exhibition at Plateforme Intermedia, Nantes, Shoe Factory social Club, Norwich, Piksel Festival, Bergen). Sound and architecture have an ambiguous interaction in their relationship to one another. Sound used to be one of the main criteria for constructions of buildings such as churches and cathedrals. Complex construction where sound was a key element in the consideration of the structural design and indeed the sonic organization of a space would inspire the composition of that space. Today sound is the poor sibling of architecture dominated by the visually based dictate of contemporary construction. As an added extra sound is often overlooked and thus a virtually non-existent feature of modern architecture.

In **2019**, I directed a new version of Electropixel international – a festival across Europe on Sound art, urban soundscapes and its relation to resonant architecture. During this tour over Europe (London, Norwich, Brussels, Berlin, Paris, Nantes) I proposed different projects related to Sound, architecture, urban soundscapes and community based radio transmission performances.

20Khz Orchestra at Turbine Hall in the Tate modern – performance with ultrasonic sound and transformation of the acoustic spaces, moving sound and silent interaction with the audience. (12/07/2019) and at the Cathedral of Nantes (31/08/2019). **Radio Transarchitecture**, public spaces and the architecture of Georges Pompidou art center (22/09/2019). I also organised a **Seminar** at Goldsmiths University - conferences on Electronic bodies and the abstract morphology of the real - https://www.gold.ac.uk/calendar/?id=12695 (11/07/2019)

Publication in Process on the subject with an article co-written with Jenny Pickett - Haunting memories : Radio statics, spectre research and Body Antenna