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Afterword

A World of Attunements

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Abstract. Sound contributes to the sacredness of a space and enables to make it a place of worship. But how is this really the case? How can one understand this close interweaving between a worship space and a sound space? To answer this question, it is necessary to approach sound in terms of ambiance and to recognize the atmospheric features of sound phenomena. Can the concept of attunement serve as a guide in this free exploration of *Worship Soundspaces*? At the crossroads of the sonorous, the atmospheric and the spiritual, the notion of attunement is particularly relevant in describing the sensory staging of religious experience.

Sound is closely connected to places of worship. For however diverse the cultural areas, religious beliefs or historical periods under consideration, sound is indeed part of the experience of such places. Far from being a mere epiphenomenon, sound can contribute to the sacredness of a space and help to make it a place of worship. But how is this really the case? How can one understand this close interweaving between a worship space and a sound space? To answer this question, it is necessary to approach sound in terms of ambiance and to recognize the atmospheric feature of sound phenomena. Can the concept of attunement serve as a guide in this free exploration of *Worship Soundspaces*? It can be interesting to draw on this notion of attunement, for two reasons. On the one hand, it enables us to connect the sacred and the spiritual domains to the sound world. We can explore how these fundamental dimensions of existence are concretely embodied and entangled with the world of the senses. Hence the purpose is not to develop a theological approach but rather to open up to phenomenology. On the other hand, paying attention to places of worship in terms of attunement leads us to question the sound world itself. Sound is then charged with its pathic and affective, rhythmic and corporeal, communal and impersonal features. In a way it is a matter of recognizing its atmospheric power and relating it as much to effects of presence as to a pure culture of signification (Gumbrecht, 2004).

Let's first focus on the atmospheric dimension of places of worship. In his seminal work on the question of the sacred, Rudolf Otto (1917) proposes the notion of the 'numinous' to designate a type of non-rational experience strongly marked by an affective dimension and clearly distinguished from ordinary experience. The aim is to highlight as much as possible what belongs to the sphere of religious experience. For Otto, the numinous refers to a feeling of absolute presence, the feeling of a divine force, a sense of 'something there' outside of the self. This ineffable feeling is imbued with reverence, awe, wonder, and admiration. We are here in the field of a *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*. What is of interest is that the numinous is precisely a specific quality of atmospheric nature, an 'atmospheric quality' (Nörenberg, 2017). Otto thus speaks of the numinous as something floating in the air, as of a diffuse quality imbued with a certain solemnity and authority that one encounters during the performance of rituals and near

religious areas. Even if he does not state it directly and explicitly, atmosphere is indeed constitutive of the numinous experience. Based on the work of Rudolf Otto, Hubertus Tellenbach (1983) says something very similar in his groundbreaking study of the oral sense: ‘We do not see any human region that is as atmospheric as that of religion. In all religions, whether primitive or tempered with spirituality, atmosphere appears as a medium transmitting to man an entirely original type of experience: the experience of the numinous’ (my translation, p. 61). As we are starting to understand, an atmospheric approach to places of worship can help us to highlight their experiential and sonorous dimensions.

If we are to advance in our exploration, we need to recognize the ‘authority of the atmospheres’ (Griffero, 2017), to emphasize their emotional power and their ability to grasp individuals by submitting them to impersonal forces. Like the numinous, atmospheres have the capacity to overwhelm and transform us by permeating the entire situation in which we find ourselves. They take possession of our bodies in the form of diffuse feelings and suggestions of movements. It is no coincidence that Rudolf Otto’s numinous approach and his reference to the power of the ancient Greek gods served as a model for Hermann Schmitz to develop his neo-phenomenology of atmospheres (Schmitz, 2018). Affective atmospheres are related to Greek gods in that they also exert local forces relating to vital experiences and corporeal resonances. Schmitz insists in particular on the idea of ‘vital force’, with its two dynamics of expansion and contraction. We will see later that this power of immersion and infusion corresponds precisely to the notion of attunement. Let us note for the moment that the numinous and the atmosphere come together as acting forces that operate on the level of situations and the lived body. But atmospheres also play a key role in the ‘staging of the numinous’ (Böhme, 2017). The numinous is not a purely abstract concept. It is based on embodied and situated experiences. Thus, for example, one thinks of the diaphanous haze and half-light of sacred spaces, their impressive silence and clouds of incense, the communal singing and the ringing of bells, and the significant reverberation of the interior spaces. These are all sensory phenomena that contribute to a singular atmospheric quality favoring the numinous experience. Places of worship seem to find their character and their consistency through a certain ambiance that is what needs to be created. Let’s not forget that the term *atmós* conveys from the beginning the idea of the spiritual and lends itself to many kinds of architectural variations that seek to embody and activate it (Pérez-Gómez, 2016).

If places of worship rely on the creation of particular ambiances, sound makes it possible to characterize how such places are charged with atmospheric forces and specific affective tones. In other words, resorting to the universe of sounds helps us to understand how a place is likely to become impregnated with spirituality. To support this argument and to highlight the concept of attunement, a brief incursion into translation issues is necessary. It should first be noted that, until the 18th century, music was the paradigm *par excellence* of attunement and *Stimmung* in European culture (Spitzer, 1963). Whether one takes the term *Stimmung* in German, or that of attunement (one of its possible translations into English), the connotation of sound is present in both languages. *Stimmung* carries with it the idea of a voice (*Stimme*), and attunement the idea of a tune. But again, for both German and English, this sound component is dynamically signified, involving something of the order of unfolding and development (see the ‘-ung’ of *Stimmung* or the ‘-ment’ of attunement). With attunement, we do not consider sound as a

static state, as a given acoustic environment, but rather as the expression of a process being carried out, such as the manifestation of tuning-in and harmonizing. Another evidence of the close interweaving between sound and attunement is to be found in the title of a fundamental work on the sonic environment. Murray R. Schafer, the famous Canadian musician, gave his cutting-edge book on soundscapes the title *The Tuning of the World* (1977). Obviously, sound operates as the primary model of the notion of attunement, whether in the context of a musical and ecological perspective like that of Murray Schafer, or in a philosophical perspective such as Martin Heidegger's existential analytic. Indeed, as Jennifer L. Heuson (2012) demonstrated, hearing played a crucial role in the Heideggerian conception of attunement.

Furthermore, like *Stimmung*, the concept of attunement is very directly related to the notions of ambiance and atmosphere (*Stimmung* is also sometimes translated into English as 'mood' and into French as 'ambiance'). In addition to a sonic connotation, these terms also contain an affective dimension irreducible to a purely individual and subjective state. In the English-speaking literature on this topic, the term 'affective atmosphere' (Anderson, 2009) has been used precisely to insist on this feature. Ambiance is also very often associated with 'affective tonality' or 'tuned space'. A long phenomenological tradition, from Martin Heidegger to Otto Friedrich Bollnow, from Hermann Schmitz to Gernot Böhme and Tonino Griffero, has emphasized the fundamental affectivity of being-in-the-world. For Heidegger, to have a world is to be invested in it, to care for it, and to develop various kinds of attachment. From this perspective, affectedness is a key condition of dwelling, and attunement refers to an affective and situated entanglement of world and body.

Finally, if attunement relates to sound and affect, it also lends itself to all sorts of uses and theories in the field of spirituality. It is a very meaningful term, open to the difficult question of the numinous, the magical, the religious, and the mystical. Attunement contains the idea of being or becoming in harmony with the world. As Mitchell Kossak remarks (2015): 'attunement is a model for being attuned to life. Attunement and connection overcomes the isolation and alienation of being disconnected. A large portion of people's emotional and spiritual conflicts has to do with their being out of attunement' (p. 149). There are various ways in which the notion of attunement is used to reflect on religious experience, be it in Judaism (Fishbane, 2008), animism (Novellino, 2009), Christianity (Hendley, 2017) or Zen (Nagatomo, 1992). If we take only one example, attunement fostered an original phenomenological approach stemming from Japanese philosophy and the practice of Zen. Shigenori Nagatomo developed a conception of bodily engagement in the world and of what he himself proposes to call 'being-in-an-ambiance'.

At the crossroads of the sonorous, the atmospheric and the spiritual, the notion of attunement is very helpful for describing and understanding the conditions for religious experience. It enables us to elucidate as much as possible how a situation is endowed with a specific diffuse quality, with a particular tone that sensitizes us, fostering a sense of participation in worship events. Of course, the worship soundspaces can be observed analytically, focusing for example on songs or musical instruments, on the acoustic qualities of places or on the unfolding sound of rituals. These studies are essential in highlighting and accurately describing the main components of such places. But worship

soundspaces can also be documented by sensitizing and attuning ourselves to variations in the sonic atmospheres. Let's not forget that attunement refers to a capacity to actively sense and attend to differences shaped by the atmosphere (Ash & Gallacher, 2015). With attunement, it is less a question of paying attention to particular elements of the situation – be they the physical components of the built space or the singular characteristics of a social ritual – than of experiencing an overall tonality that colors and modulates the entire ambient world. In line with Tellenbach's pioneering analyses, Friedlind Riedel (2019) emphasizes the 'mereological' character of the atmosphere, its ability to homogenize and unify into a coherent whole all the components of a situation: 'Atmospheres are thus modes in which the world shows up or coalesces an indivisible and intensive situation or in which a group of bodies comes to exist as a felt collective' (p. 85). Atmosphere gives rise to the global and immediate experience of a situation. It is felt as much as it is perceived, embodied as much as it is enacted.

In this respect, sound plays a very important role in the atmospherization of places of worship. It helps to set the tone for a situation. To fully understand this power of ambient sound, we must draw the consequences of its fundamentally pervasive and encompassing character. Sound consists in flow and movement, coming and going according to the currents of air and the material conditions, freeing itself from its source to drift away and spread around; it immerses us in a coherent whole while at the same time being colored by the place through which it is propagated. Think of the impact of church bells that can cover an entire territory with the same sonic envelope, of the importance of reverberation in worship services and communal vocal performances, or of the essential role of silence and calmness in such places. All these characteristics have the ability to give an entire sacred space its identity and to foster spiritual feelings. Sound has the ability to permeate and infuse each situation with an overall sonority, to mobilize a floating and defocused listening as much as a strictly focused perception. This is how bodies are really immersed in the same sound fluxes, how they are 'ensounded' (Ingold, 2011).

But if it is crucial to insist on the diffuse quality that unifies and specifies every situation, we must also emphasize the pathic and affective dimension of the sound world. The notion of attunement is there to remind us: 'attunement (i.e., the signatura of the resonating bodies) turns sounds into tones' (Böhme, 2017, p 129). In other words, with attunement it is the affective tones of situations which can be heard, whether it be the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* mentioned by Rudolf Otto, the contemplative attitude during religious services, the trance state during certain animist rituals or the meditative forms of Buddhist or Zen practices. The sonority of a situation is therefore in no way reducible to the sum of its acoustical signals. Rather, it calls on the ability of felt bodies to attune to their surroundings, and on the capacity of everyone to be affected. The emphasis on reverberation and resonance in studies dealing with places of worship is symptomatic in this respect. Indeed, these phenomena are not exclusively acoustic; they also involve the sensation of the amplitude of a space and the ability of a common body to vibrate with the sonic environment. Resonance is of particular importance for places of worship, giving access to a shared experience that goes beyond words (Wikan, 1992).

Three main considerations stem from this atmospheric approach to worship soundspaces.

First, sound has the ability to condition and to frame the experience. It has the power to install and delimit separate worlds. Thus, not only does sound show true immersive power, but it spatially and temporally delineates ambient units. Hence sound manages to open and close a situation by providing each time a specific and distinctive affective tone. In a way, we enter and leave a place of worship not only physically but also sonorously. We attune ourselves each time we enter a new situation. Our ways of being, moving, interacting, hearing and sounding are not exactly the same outside as they are inside a space of worship, before or during a religious service. Indeed, a space of worship ensounds the participants in a specific manner. By focusing on our ability to be affected, the notion of attunement helps us to understand this power of sound to install a world: 'What affects us - the feeling of a situation - is also a dwelling, a worlding born of an atmospheric attunement' (Steward, 2011, p. 449). In this respect, Peter Sloterdijk (2016) develops a rich and complex theory of spheres in which sound plays a very important role. The phonotope – a psychoacoustic envelop in which we are continually immersed and which infuses our daily ways of being together – is constitutive of any inhabited world. Each phonotope thus specifies a social form of life, a sphere of shared existence and a way of sounding in common. The question then is to know what characterizes the phonotope of a place of worship.

A second consideration consists in emphasizing the power of sound to embody various ways of being together, to engage diverse modes of communing. Based on the musical experience, Alfred Schütz (1951) highlighted the way sound enables us to develop a tuning relationship, a mutual tuning-in of relationships. The phenomenon of syntony that he detects and describes in detail reveals how sound contributes to creating a mutual vivid present, so we can share with others a common temporality and live in the same temporal and experiential flow. In other words, the social bond is inextricably embedded in sound. It is no coincidence that music plays such an important role in places of worship. It really contributes to an act of collective tuning-in based on various social phenomena such as synchronization, contagion and imitation. In such places attunement can be thought of as bringing about harmony and as a feeling of being at one with another being. The sound world does not only make interpersonal relationship through speech possible. It also helps to create a sense of contact and complicity that can in some cases go as far as a sense of communion. The hypothesis could be made that the phonotope of places of worship will tend to favor this experience of communion by ritualizing as much as possible the ways of hearing and being heard, by voice and singing, through performance and the playing of musical instruments. Worship soundspaces are then conducive to the creation of moments of a felt inner sense of deep shared connectivity. Everything is done to create consonance and ensure that all the factors contribute to the production of the same common sonic flow in which everyone participates.

Finally, a third consideration concerns the intensity of the experience itself. Places of worship are designed to produce a sphere separated from daily life and everyday routines. The ambiance and sensory conditioning, the design of the built space and material setting, and the ritualization of social practices constitute three of the main aspects of this heterotopic disposition. The special attention paid to the sonic environment and the staging of atmospheres is part of an 'attuning strategy' (Højlund, 2016), an active adaptive attunement which enables worshipers to optimize their resonance with the environment and with others. Everything is done to enter the domain of pure experience

(James, 1902), to promote peak experiences (Maslow, 1964) and to foster a genuine sense of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). With places of worship everything is designed to open up an optimal experience which dissolves the separation between body and mind, subject and world, inside and outside. Such situations aim at transforming those who experience them. The affective atmospheres of the place of worship – and first and foremost its sonic and musical features – set worshipers in motion and foster spiritual transformation. Hence the subject is not set once and for all but is always in the process of becoming. As Friedling Riedel (2015) notes, in a particularly enlightening article: ‘the affective corporeal involvement (by means of the felt body) in atmospheres is - in line with the postulated movement ontology - more appropriately termed becoming’ (p. 99). Attunement makes possible the experience of a common atmosphere in the making, in search of places, situations and sounds opening us up to the spiritual world.

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