

The invisible sample, or rather, “the audible sample”

Trying to translate, with this pun, the original title of exhibition into same terms more related to the hearing; with the listening. Because “showing” refers to something presented to be seen, and “invisible” is something that cannot be seen. This collision of antonyms represents, to my understanding, a clear and implicit declaration of intent. It is a subtle “political action” of the curator Delfim Sardo who points out the promotion and diffusion of the sound phenomenon and its integration in the usual circles of artistic expression. But I insist that I should translate the title of the exhibition as a Muestra Audible, closer to the immaterial essence itself of its contents and, above all, further from an old and historic fight of the sound against the visual which is not too interesting nowadays.

Let's have a vertiginous historical walk through the human evolution in order to catch a glimpse of the hegemony of the visual over the rest of the human senses. The sight was used by the first inhabitants of the planet to survive (hunting called for seeing the catch), and as Delfim Sardo says: “The hearing is bound to the sight almost so inseparably as the palate to the smell”, It is true, but in these first moments of human existence there was still, let's call it a technology, which allowed the reproduction of the image: our reflection in the water. However there was no technology to reproduce the sound: human voice is listened in real time by the ears of the person who is speaking, but it is a coloured listening, it does not match with what the others listen to; the nostrils and other acoustic elements do not allow us to know/listen to the real tone of our own voice. Even the echo, as an acoustic phenomenon that allows a self-reproduction of the sound, is fragmented, incomplete and scarcely literal. Here we have the origin of the problem. Much later, when the engraving and the paper were invented, there was a technology that allowed the preservation and reproduction of the image (and also the copy). This technology, improved with the invention of the press in the 12th century, acted as an element for the visual diffusion being at the same time a transformer of oral worlds in visual worlds; promoted a sense of private identity. And when does a technology which allows to reproduce the audible literally appear in history? Well, at the end of the 19th century (Edison's gramophone), that is, almost eight centuries after the invention of the press. “We live in a universe full of images”, says the curator, we are also surrounded by sound, but we don't perceive it the same, it does not contain the same density of information, we have not been educated to code it: “first of all the introduction of the sound is the latest landmark of the exit of the visual field of visualization to other field, a wider field and at the same time without aesthetic rules to be judged”, Sardo insists. Let's go on with this comparisons between hearing and sight, let's be demagogic.

The ear has no eyelids, as Pascual Quignard said, there isn't a physiological element that allows to “switch off” the sense of hearing, as well as the sight. When we don't like an image we just have to turn away from it or to close the eyelids; however, when we don't like a sound we have to escape from it, we cannot avoid it, “it takes up the space filling it until the spectator becomes aware that his/her body is being moulded in sound, both physically and emotionally far away”, says the curator. When we are sleeping sight is switched off. The hearing remains switched on, active, paying attention to the dangers risking our life, it becomes the sense of survival par excellence. Then, the sound has a certain component of subversive and uncontrollable, some elements that have separated it from the exhibition rooms historically, and in view of its immaterial condition, inevitably associated to the concept of time (in the case of recordings, to a residue of time), the art market has had serious problems to give it shape and incorporate it to the immateriality of the artistic work.

Nowadays art is separating from the artistic object and is approaching social practices, it is dematerialized and the artist acts as a cultural manager, organizing social events. The field of art is abandoned and the artist's ideology prevails; the citizens' issues become art issues. The sound has now an excellent opportunity because of its ephemeral essence, associated to real time, to reality; it is an event itself, this is its condition.

Some touches on the exhibition

“Historical” would be the adjective which best approximates to the approach of this exhibition. A vertiginous itinerary which trave/s from the futurism of the beginning of the 20th century, with Luigi Russolo, to the young humour of Martin Creed or the sound experiments by Stephen Vitiello, two contemporary artists who take on creative attitudes typical of this period. Roy Ascott said some years ago that what distinguishes or divides a generation called antique from other considered as modern, is that the antique one represents while the modern constructs, from the figurative plane to the pattern, from the perspective to the immersion, from the object to the process, from the content to the context, from the reception to the negotiation, from iconicity to bionicity, from nature to artificial life, from the observation to the action, and from the brain automatism to the distributed mind. In the exhibition the generational leap can be noticed, this different way of adopting artistic discourses, this historicist component, and for that reason the curator acts as a historian, from a cinematographic or narrative point of view, typical of a generation inheriting the discoveries of the artists such as Pierre Henry, Pierre Schaeffer or the closest to these discourses Michel Chion in Radio France; some artists who have adopted a discourse typical of the narration with images rather than the narration with sounds.

It is clear that each techno-cultural period contains the previous ones within it. The previous cultural ways tend to go on seeping into the present ones. It is very easy to think that each new technology is a radical cut with the previous ones (I say a new technology because the field of Sound Art has allowed to mutate paradigms), but there are always adherences, yet more pronounced at the beginning of each evolution. It will be necessary, as McLuhan said, to see the present through a driving mirror, to move forward reversing towards future and not to lose any connection with the past. This exhibition is far from being a multimedia show of this time, but it is able to create other realities that make conscious some unconscious aspects of reality, and the most important thing is what is seen through this driving mirror which we look at from the present. Congratulations for the MARCO team.

Present artist presents in the exhibition: Vito Acconci, Joseph Beuys, Louise Bourgeois, James Lee Byars, John Cage, Janet Cardiff, Martin Creed, Luisa Cunha, Ceal Floyer, Rodney Graham, Raoul Hausmann, Juan Hidalgo, José Iglesias, Joan Joñas, On Kawara, Douglas Khan, Christophe Kihm, Antoni Muntadas, Bruce Nauman, Julio Sarmiento, Kurt Schwitters, Michael Snow, Luigi Russolo, Stephen Vitiello, Olivier Razaç y Guy Rosolato.

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