IMAGINARY FOLKLORE
IN SOUTHEASTERN MORAVIA

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Every music system is predicated upon a series of concepts which integrate music into the activities of society and define it as a phenomenon of life. This research preludes a discovery of a material access to sound that goes beyond the concept of representation. Folklore is ancient wisdom of rural communities, and sound is a non figurative element participating in everybody's lives, so that all sounds can be understood as music and therefore become an active symbol[1].

My interests here are not directed toward the distinctions people may make between a major and minor thirds, for example, but rather toward what the nature of music is, how it fits into society as a part of the existing phenomena of life, and how it is arranged conceptually by the people who use and organize it. Ethnomusicology involves more than the structural analysis of music sound, music is a human phenomenon produced by people for the people and existing and functioning in a social situation. We shall be searching not only for the motivations which lie behind music behaviour as such, but also for the means of expanding knowledge of other and wider human behavioural processes. What do we learn from music? Music is just one further aspect of human behaviour taking its place beside man's other multiple activities.

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1. A symbol involves, first, the abstraction level of the thing or behaviour which we wish to define as a symbol. There is no question that music is symbolic, but the difficulty lies in the precise nature of what is meant by symbolism. We enter here upon a troublesome area, for symbolism can be defined in a number of ways, and the distinction between signs on the one hand and symbols on the other is not always clear. Our reference here is that a sign is something used by human beings and is therefore inevitably associated with behaviour. Wether we treat signs separated by symbols or as a continuum, music does seems to function as a symbolic part of life, at least in the sense that it does represent other things.

The objective of my research is the articulation of an "imaginary folklore" of southeastern Moravia. Imaginary folklore reworks inherited symbols re-birthing them into a contemporary environment. This approach creates a uniquely ecological relationship between musician, his environment and cultural traditions, thereby enriching the creative process.

The outcome of the research has taken the form of an original repertoire, recorded in a CD entitled *Sámo*.

If we can understand our contemporary world as fragmented into several "geographies", then we can imagine that from within each geography we have access to different strata from which we can derive meaning. Explorations through sound open up new possibilities of thinking about processes which these landscapes are exposed to and the transformation of meaning that come about from the contact with different processes.

The revolution of the modern world paradigm, what Martin Heidegger refers to as *world as a painting,* is a metaphor of an hermeneutic transformation, which reveals new perspectives of the world understood through art. This overcomes the typical abstract and universal point of enquiry. If folklore is a living organism, how to frame a post-digital reality of Moravia today?

Ecology got more consideration in my music analysis. Acoustic ecology refers to the system of relationships between organisms and their sonic environments, how information flows between listeners and their environments, and how sound creates relationships, both personal and social.

I find useful to ground an approach to the issues of this research within three interrelated concepts: soundscape, acoustic communication, and acoustic ecology. The soundscape concept refers to an environment of sound with an emphasis on how it is perceived by listeners. This study embraces aspects of speech, music and environmental sound as elements in a communicational system.

Rather than considering perception to be a constructive process, in which the perceiver builds structure into an internal model of

the world, the ecological approach emphasizes the structure of the environment itself and regards perception as the pick-up of that already structured perceptual information. The world is a highly structured environment subject to both the forces of nature and the profound impact of human beings and their cultures; and that in a reciprocal fashion perceivers are highly structured organisms that are adapted to the environment. In this perspective sound becomes a vehicle, that helps revealing what is ephemeral and hidden in the same world, opening different spaces, different visions, different approaches to our experience of it. The sound completes the abstract and instantaneous idea that we have about a place, it forces us to re-examine the world as a painting through the discovery of unexpected spaces and geographies that are hidden to the modern mapping systems.

Field recording offered the possibility of revealing other spaces in Moravia, where the differences between documentary and imagination, prose and poetry, art and anthropology, in daily life are fluid.

The fieldwork in southeastern Moravia happened in December 2015. My sonic exploration doesn't begin from music as a set of cultural objects but from the deeper experience of sound as flux, event and effect. My goal was to meet singers involved in folk music nowadays and collect oral histories, songs, and field recordings so as to define the basis of further work of imaginary folklore. Kyjov, that has long served as a primary Moravian centre of folk music and dances, has been the destination of my field research, the place where representatives of two subregions of Slovácko met: both from Dolňácko and Horňácko.

With the collaboration of 15 people, plus additional violin players and others in the Kyjov community interested in folk music, we carried out ethnographic research within the context of an intensive workshop. The workshop has to be meant as a frame for learning, where we were moderating the discussions and recording the music. We worked primarily with the representatives of four ensembles considered by themselves and

other to be active in the folklore movement. The groups were from Velká nad Veličkou, Hrubá Vrbka, Strážnice, Svatobořice-Mistřín, Ratíškovice and Kyjov. Each of these groups participated in class presentations (we call it a class even though we were in a wine cellar) and interviews, a process which was followed up by more focused ethnographic inquiry. Each group carried out further individual and group interviews, attended performances and gathered additional materials ranging from old programmes to published recordings.

We also had a more concentrated and dedicated focus to Václav Horák, with whom we carried a long one to one interview-discussion with a number of other individuals active in the folk music environment, including instrument makers and a number of musical professionals and amateurs.

The research was aiming to a wide and complex group of topics that are focusing on community, belonging or border, highlighting a plural reality, that is not possible to reduce in one direction. To

Singer Marcela Miller from Svatobořice-Mistřín. Photo by Elia Moretti 2015

listen to a place means to unveil many elements from its stories, that are defining its conditions. It means to recover the sense of the moving levels that characterize the ecologies.

Getting to know a territory through listening implies a deep immersion into situations, events, stories, elements that tell about it. It is a process that recalls ways of listening that expand the perception of sounds to include the whole space/time continuum of sound—encountering the vastness and complexities as much as possible.

Field recordings are facilitating opportunities of augmented listening, through which imagination, sensorial immersion, critical reconfiguration and affective relationship are overlapping.

The acoustic spaces investigated represent the place of a soundscape. In the process when disintegration and reconfiguration of space maps comes to be a political process. In the soundscape we assume sonic process that has to be participative, through multiple properties of sound: fluxes, vibrations, echoes, and so on. The soundscape is a shared property, that pushes to a relational and associative understanding. When the narration of a landscape through its memory comes to be conjugated to an acoustic level, an entire community could be involved in this process, activating a sound approach to the same landscape and generating the opportunity to relate to history though different perspectives, that allows to read its hidden layers. The hearing space is the space of critical thinking, it is an imaginative and creative praxis that produces action like an aesthetic momentum, ready to be reflected in the discussion.

Sound, as a powerful methodological tool, allows to travel in the complex soundscapes and to reconfigure a critical cartography, that is questioning history, politics and dominant culture.

All these aesthetic actions are framing an iconographic exploration that opens up a path, that will bring to create a critical and theoretical structure, through which is possible to oppose to dominant ideologies. A perspective where sound art goes to marginalized and peripheral territories, rediscovering

stories, activating multiple critical devices and questioning the position of dominant power. Imaginary folklore is another critical space to overcome the objectivity of aesthetic models of our times, by stating a post-colonial or de-colonial approach that is decentralizing the thinking from those places where the same art is performing.

Imaginary folklore gives the sound the possibility to incarnate an empiric device. From the intersections between sound, space and place comes an acoustic knowledge, that articulates on listening processes as actions of knowing, and that is directly connected to material and relational fluxes of the sound per se, without any perception reference.

In what I call imaginary folklore, music is essentially as symbolic of other things and processes. It seeks to understand music not simply as a constellation of sounds, but rather as a human behaviour.

In this research it has been of particular interest whether music in connection with the literature of the songs is an emotion producer. Reference is not made to the function of music as such, but rather to what extent music producers conceive the song's lyrics and music as something which can arouse emotion either in the producer or the listener.

In imaginary folklore the elements of a cognitive approach to music perception[2] are on the same level, they have the same priorities. The work that has been done after the field work has been on a philological base, but essentially with poetic criteria. New music has been composed. This idea of imaginary folklore leads to the core of the research. What is the musical meaning of the folklore music nowadays, what are the values. In analysing the consequences of change in the relationship with the environment caused by the globalization processes, under the pressure of new communication technologies, is the musical meaning collapsing?

2. Aesthetic, reference, meaning, form, tonality, scale system, melodic organization, meter, pitch, timbre, rhythm, etc.

We identify those songs that we considered having a self-conscience, the ones who had a force of reality that was exploding into fantasy and imagination. Why should folklore be deprived of freedom? Should people just repeat well-known motives, without a real creation? Imaginary folklore is a way to express what is peculiarly pertinent nowadays.

Composition seems clearly to be the product of the individual or a group of individuals. All composition is conscious, composers may be casuals, but compositions have to be accepted by a society at large. The techniques involved in the process of imaginary folklore include at least the following: the re-working of old material, the incorporation of borrowed or old material, improvisation, communal re-creation, creation arising out of particularly intense emotional experience, transposition, and composition from individual idiosyncrasies.

A myriad of other understandings about the soundscape—place—music relationship should be investigated. Musical

Musicians from the Horňácko region: Jakub Šácha – violin, Josef Slovák – viola, Vlastimil Škopík – singer and from Ratíškovice: Petr Kostiha – violin on the left, Marie Ostřížková – violin on the right. Photo by Elia Moretti 2015

Jan Pavel Nedvěd – piano, Václav Horák – singer from Kyjov. Photo by Elia Moretti 2015

anthropology has been the way to explore musical performances, culture and social life. Imaginary folklore has led us, further, into speculations about language, and particularly about the concepts of the aesthetic and the interrelationships among the plurality of arts. Cross-cultural perspective, such an integral part of ethnomusicology, is needed here, as is the ethnomusicological approach which stresses not only the sound of music but the concepts out of which that music arises.

Music is made meaningful by its connection to place and social environment. We always have the need of a meaning, because the human being always need a perceptible experience. The primary focus of the imaginary folklore process involved in this research is an ecological contemporary listening, and those listening attitudes and practices have their own history and have come about by means of a historical process that continues to exert its influence. Understanding the perception of musical meaning therefore involves a historical dimension that surfaces in different ways, and to different extent.

The result of this research has lead to the production of a group of new compositions. A new music program was born on the conceptual ground described in this text.

The advantages of this approach as far as music is concerned are that it places the emphasis on an investigation of the invariants that specify all of the phenomena that music is able to afford in relation to the diversity of perceptual capacities of different listeners; and that it offers a framework within which musical attributes that have previously been regarded as diverging poles can be understood together, from physical sources and musical structures to cultural meaning and critical content.

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Summary

The subject of this research is folk music in southeastern Moravia. The tools of the research are following a track given by Ernesto De Martino, but with a peculiar perspective of an ecological perception of music. The current globalization processes, under the pressure of new communication technologies, are changing the meaning of music. How can folklore be sustainable and independent from nationalism and identity issues? From the intersections between sound, space and place comes an acoustic knowledge, that articulates on listening processes as actions of knowing. Imaginary folklore gives the sound the possibility to incarnate an empiric device. This essay proposes an experiment of imaginary folklore.

Key words: Imaginary folklore; ecology; acoustic perception; soundscape; field recordings; the Slovácko region; post-digital reality.