

Pure Geographer. Observations on J.G. Granö and Soundscape Studies

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Senses and aesthetics are fundamental elements in constructing the relationship to environment. The environment perceived as a work of art does not consist just of an aesthetic experience, but it could contribute to the critical evaluation of the environment (Niskanen 1996, 45; Karjalainen 2004, 55). These aesthetic and critical evaluations of the environment are both included in two groundbreaking books of different disciplines and eras, *Pure Geography* and *The Tuning of the World*.

Finnish geographer Johannes Gabriel Granö's *Pure Geography* was originally published in German (*Reine Geographie*, 1929), then in his native tongue Finnish (*Puhdas maantiede*, 1930), and finally in English nearly 70 years later (*Pure Geography*, 1997). Contrary to fellow scholars of his time, Granö aimed to utilize all senses in his geographical research and in order to do so, he needed to create a terminology for visual, auditory, olfactory and tactile phenomena sensed in the environment and to construct a cartographic representation of landscape (see also Wojciechowski 2008).

In the late 1960s Canadian composer and professor R. Murray Schafer and his colleagues set out to create a multi-disciplinary field of research in sound. Schafer presented his ideas in *The Tuning of the World* (1977) which has inspired academics, soundscape enthusiasts and environmentally conscious people with its multi-disciplinarity and wide-ranging topics, such as cultural history of sound, the qualitative research on sonic environment and basic concepts of soundscape studies.

In some respects Granö's thinking in the 1920s is parallel to Schafer's in the 1970s. This article seeks to shed light on the matter and contemplates on perceiving the auditory environment according to geography and soundscape research. The text includes explorations of terminology and basic concepts and takes a look at the ideological currents behind these two books.

Sensed environment

Granö's *Pure Geography* was principally influenced by the systematic research of landscape in German geographical thinking of the 19th century. This includes the visual Humboldtian approach, which utilized painting as a way of researching the environment. Granö did not conceive regions merely as measurable objects for geographical study but also as subjective landscapes to be included in a more holistic research approach. *Pure Geography* emphasizes the role of a perceiving human being. However, the research could not be accomplished without proper terminology and classification (Granö 1996 47–49; Raivo 1997, 195).

Granö's work differed from the studies of his contemporaries in the fact that not just measurable characters were taken into account while evaluating the environment but also the senses of the perceiver. Granö was also rather conscious of science politics: he reasoned that this new approach would help to establish geography as a science

in its own right, and to eliminate the notion common in his time, that it was a sum of numerous other sciences. It should be noted, though, that he did not consider artistic work as a proper tool for that. Although Granö is not belittling the role of art in geographical research he is somewhat skeptical of the notion that aesthetic issues should be included in scientific research (Granö 1930, 4; see also Karjalainen 2004).

As Granö was influenced by German geography, so soundscape research of the 1970s was influenced by German industrial design and musicology. 20th century classical music created new ways of listening, not only to music composed of tones but also of everyday sounds and noises. *The Tuning of the World* is introducing Luigi Russolo whose works challenged conventional ways of listening (and concert behaviour, for that matter). John Cage's work and Pierre Schaeffer's musique concrète are also discussed (1977, 110–11). Some of the terminology of soundscape studies, such as keynote sound, concentrated listening and the notion of balanced soundscapes, can be traced back to the ideals or concepts of Western classical music, not to mention Schafer's idea that the soundscape should be approached as a "huge musical composition" (see Schafer 1977, 205).

Schafer's multidisciplinary approach was inspired by the works and ideas of Bauhaus, which "brought aesthetics to machinery and mass production" (Schafer 1977, 4). The famous school for design and architecture was operating during the Weimar Republic (1919–1933), combining various scientific and artistic expertise, to create a new discipline of crafts and design. The school's Industrial Design (*Industrielle Gestaltung*) was to show the way to acoustic design: new methods from social sciences, musicology, psychology and architecture were to be brought together in the methodological tool box of soundscape studies. Also, the idea of environmental sounds as carriers of cultural meanings was introduced into the discussion.

Whereas Bauhaus introduced aesthetics into the industrial design process, acoustic design could contribute new methods towards improving sonic environments. Unlike Granö, Schafer aimed not just to research but also to improve the environment, make the world a sonically better place by advocating listening and including pedagogical aspect to his work (Granö 1930, 170; Schafer 1977). This is not to say that Granö was not also engaged in a multidisciplinary approach. He was willing to amalgamate sociologists into the study of geography and the new discipline of home area studies (*Heimatkunde*). He called this human ecology, which resembles strongly the concept of acoustic ecology – a term closely connected to soundscape studies (see also Schafer 1977, 271; Granö & Paasi 1997, xvi; Järviluoma 1998).

Granö suggested that "human-centered" geographers should be experienced scientists who had studied their books in methodology and terminology, not laymen or "casual bystanders" (Granö and Paasi 1997, xvii). Soundscape studies aimed higher since its peda-

gological goal was to awaken citizens aurally towards all aspects of the soundscape, not just to the noisiest ones. One could compare this approach to the difference between creating awareness of health issues versus treating illnesses. Problems of the soundscape can be avoided if knowledge is gained about the importance of sounds as a source of well-being for individual and community.

One of the main principles of soundscape research is the maxim of sounds reflecting society and especially its changes. Granö was perhaps not so straightforward in formulating his thoughts, but the idea is parallel to Schafer's. According to Granö "the threads of activity end in phenomena, and our task is to investigate where these threads come from." These phenomena manifest themselves as spatial or temporal properties (Granö 1930, 10–11; 24).

Perhaps one does not want to jump to conclusions by searching the causalities between single sound events and changes in society. However, the ideas of Granö and Schafer can be used as a relevant starting point of such research. Changes in the sonic environment are perhaps not straight indicators of social change but at least they are referring to the changes in society in micro and macro levels, such as economy and legislation. All this is closely connected to a dialogue between sound, power and cultural values that are affecting sound making and restrictions of it (see e.g. Westerkamp 1990).

Thinking in terms

Terminology is not only serving the practical purpose for which it is coined. Terms also have their political dimension: when researchers are conducting their analysis with the help of terms they have selected or created, they are representing their work and their relation to the environment within a certain terminological frame work.

Inspired by the Finnish ornithologist Mr. Jussi Seppäs book *Luonnon löytöjä. Lintunäkymiä ja -kuulumia (Findings in Nature: Ornithological Sights and Sounds, 1928)* Granö included sounds to the sensed environment. As a result he introduced the field of hearing (*kuuluma*) into his terminology (Granö 1997, 16). Granö drew a distinction between close and distant environments, which were called *proximity* and *landscape*, respectively. Proximity was to be perceived with all senses but physically remote landscape mainly with eyesight (Granö 1997, 19). This indicates, perhaps somewhat paradoxically, that according to his classification the distant sound events also were to be filed as proximities.

According to Granö auditory phenomena are considered to be "highly relevant factors in proximity". Because hearing provides more temporal information when compared to other senses, there is a good reason to call it the *sense of time*. To quote Granö (emphasis in original): "Things that occur are of greater significance in the auditory complex, the *field of hearing*, than things that exist, for everything that is heard is an occurrence: tones, sounds, noises, harmonies, and discords" (1997, 125–126).

According to Schafer the soundscape is any portion of a sonic environment regarded as a field of study. Just like Granö is stressing the relationship between a perceiver and the environment, the concept of soundscape is anthropocentric, since it underlines the ability of a person or a community to perceive and interpret the acoustic environment (1977, 274; Truax 2001, 50). If one wishes to make a Granö-like terminological distinction between the soundscape and the sonic environment one might think of a person or a community as being embedded in the sonic environment, since they are surrounded or encircled by the sounds (OED 2008). This environment can be transformed into a soundscape for further examination and to be scrutinized and analyzed in more detail. Thus the difference lies in a listener's and/or researcher's relationship to the sonic phenomena (Uimonen 2005, 34).

Granö tested his classification in practice, although auditory aspects were dealt with on a relatively small scale. In Schaferian

terms he was earwitnessing the sound events and acoustic rhythms mostly in a hi-fi environment (see Schafer 1977, 271–275). Granö classified and drew a visual representation of the quality and frequency of auditory phenomena in Valosaari, a small rural island in Eastern Finland. The time of year, the sounds of people, of domestic animals and birds and how often they were audible were registered. Transportation (boating route and ice road) was taken into consideration as well (1997, 126–127).

Like his fellow Finnish scientists of the early 20th century Granö was creating the terminology for academic purposes virtually from scratch. Because of the relatively short history of Finnish as a literary language, scientists considered it to be important to invent original terms instead of using words borrowed from Latin. This encouraged Granö to develop a terminology that is almost poetic in its eloquence. However, he is not systematic in defining all his neologisms. The terms of *Pure Geography* are derived from standard language as well as Finnish dialects. Single terms are part of the larger system and thus the meanings are constructed in relation to other concepts (Peltonen 1998, 4, 63; Uimonen 2005).

Self evidently one of the major differences between *Pure Geography* and *The Tuning of the World* is their relation to recorded sound. Soundscape studies was influenced by the environmental activism of the 1970s (see Truax 2001, 11) which might be the reason why some concepts were intentionally polemic and somewhat controversial. Despite or because of that they raised questions and perhaps some eyebrows and were thus suitable to promote the cause: they encouraged citizens to pay attention to the sonic environment also on a semantic level. The term *sound imperialism* was used to refer to a type of loud Western colonialism manifested particularly by aircraft noise. The widely known term *schizophonia* is used to describe an electro-acoustic sound and its inherent split from its original acoustic source (Schafer 1977, 77, 273). Especially the latter one, deliberately loaded with heavy connotations, can be interpreted as a reaction against the widely popular background music business of the 1970's. Indeed, the time was ripe to criticize piped music, since UNESCO had started its campaign against background music as early as 1969 (Lanza 1995, 156).

Granö divided auditory phenomena into natural and artificial proximities. The noise of traffic and industry were included in the latter and oddly enough, also the human voice (1997, 126). Without a doubt he would have included electro-acoustic sounds as well, had he continued his scientific work on the subject. It deserves to be noted here that one year before *Pure Geography* was published in Finland Granö's fellow countrymen bought over one million gramophone records and were also very eager to play them on their portable gramophone players.

Towards the history of science

The methods, ideas and terminology developed by Schafer in *The Tuning of the World* are somewhat parallel to Granö's introduced in the 1920s. The focus of both books was to research the perceived environment systematically. Unlike *Pure Geography*, *The Tuning of the World* does not try to propose a definitive classification of acoustic phenomena in the sonic environment (see also Truax 2001, xxv). More detailed methodological improvements and reflections were introduced in publications such as *The Vancouver Soundscape* and *Five Village Soundscapes* (1974, 1977). In addition different ways to categorize sounds and interpret the environment from a cultural perspective were presented. What is common to both of the writers is their ambition to research the environment holistically and in a multidisciplinary way.

It goes without saying that there are also lots of fundamental differences. As Granö paid attention to the whole sensed environment

and how it should be taken into consideration in research, sound-scene research concentrates on the aurally perceived environment. Granö was a “pure” geographer; Schafer had been doing not just research in acoustic communication but made a career as a composer, educator, and an environmental activist. A more profound clarification about the books and their writers is still unwritten. One of the tasks would be to connect the texts and the terminology to the *Zeitgeist* of the 1920’s and 1970’s, and evaluate how these pioneering books have affected the work of later scholars.

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Mexico WFAE Conference

Sound Megalopolis – 2009 will be held in Mexico City on March 23 – 27, 2009.

Researchers, teachers, sound producers, musicians, and acoustic ecologists will present papers, panel discussions, workshops, sound installations, and give sound art performances during the event.

The Conference planners have established a web site for the up-coming conference.

The site is currently in Spanish with an English version soon to be online.

Sponsors include: The National Council for the Culture Arts and The World Forum for Acoustic Ecology – Through The National Phonoteque of Mexico.

http://www.fonotecanacional.gob.mx/Web_FN_Test2/foromundial/foro_mundial.html