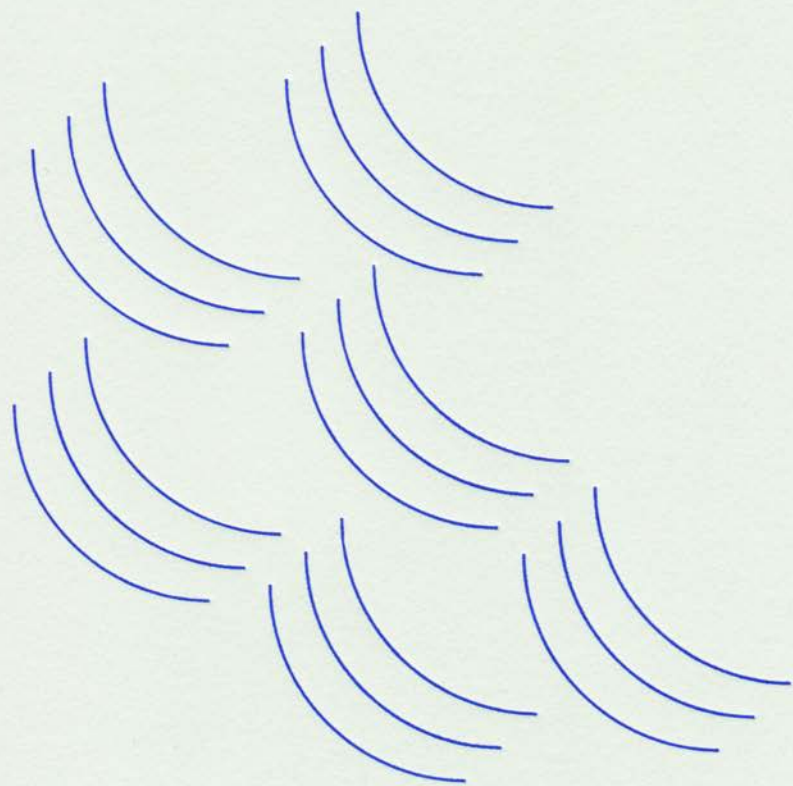


Around

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## Erasing the visible — Jaffa Lam's *Sound Tree*

Dr Cédric Maridet

Jaffa Lam's *Sound Tree* is made from an eight meter-long bronze pipe planted in the middle of the interior courtyard of the Hong Kong Architecture Centre. Both branches stemming from the trunk of the sculpture disappear into the first and second floors of the buildings forming a narrow courtyard. The splayed shape at the end of both branches of the tree is used to collect the sounds from the direct surroundings as they circulate inside the pipes. Visitors are invited to place their ears at the point of the opening set approximately one meter and fifty centimetres above the ground on the hollow trunk of the tree.

This tree is not acoustic like a musical instrument; it cannot be played. However, it is a medium between the resonant surroundings and the visitor who becomes a listener. The sound is filtered and altered by the material and its structure. When considering the sculpture as a whole, it somehow reminds me of the hybrid shape of the first ear-cornets. Thus, Lam's project takes roots in well-known traditional hearing or auscultation devices that accentuate a specific attention to sound and advocates a listening-in from an expert's point of view. I am specifically referring to the telegraph, or the stethoscope in the medical field, which before the invention of modern screening devices, played a significant role in the understanding and knowledge of the human body, as stated by Tom Rice<sup>1</sup>. The only body present here is a resonant body forged by the main air column that dubs the sounds arising from the upper floors of the buildings and transforms them through the sculpture's hollow tube-shaped form.

This art piece is very unique in the development of Lam's art because it clearly stands apart from her former works. I am referring to *motion* (1999), *murmur* (2000) or even *discrepant motions* (2001), which represent a series of objects whose exploration is both tactile and acoustic. This piece is also very different from the sculptural form that can be found in some of her former works, such as the series of sculptures *To someone wants to hide*, *To someone wants to fly*, *To*

*someone wants to cry*, *To someone wants to run* (2003). In these sculptures, the work of the matter inhabits the space and can be grasped by the eye alone. Here, Lam uses a classical material, bronze, commonly used in sculpture, which often, through a specific rhetorical connection, designates the sculpture itself (one may mention a bronze by such or such artist). However, it seems to me that Lam offers less a sculpture than a distinctive physical and relational stance towards the surroundings.

Where normally the viewer keeps his distance in order to gain a point of view for assessing and grasping the formal and spatial relationship determined by the sculpture offered to the eye (his attitude comes closer to the concept of "engaging" with the world developed by Merleau-Ponty<sup>2</sup>, here, the visual work steps aside and gives way to the audible. Here lies the paradox of *Sound Tree*: as a sculpture, it can be seen as an extension of the buildings as it is incorporated in the disarray of the external pipe work; however, it can no longer be experienced by the eye when the ear is placed against it. Consequently, the suggested position of the ear does not permit the simultaneous vision of the sculpture and grasp of the sound. The acousmatic situation, that is, the detachment between the sound and its source, is established because it is impossible to see the cause of the sounds stemming from the floors of the buildings and surroundings and reinforced by the device displayed in this work.

This acousmatic situation sets in place the same implications defined in the writings by Chion and Schaeffer: sounds perceived without the relaying of other perceptual senses, such as eyesight, allow for decontextualisation as they are dissociated from the source. Consequently the dissociation between sound and source allows one to (re)discover the sounds for themselves, thus extending towards the perception of Pierre Schaeffer's acoustic object through the practice of *écoute réduite*<sup>3</sup>, or reduced listening. Similarly, the situation set up by the *Sound Tree* emphasizes

a specific listening stance and invites the visitors to prick up their ears.

This expression indicates a particular attention given to sound, and notably, a specific position of the ear's auricle: the ear stands upright and scans the acoustic space in order to better comprehend its content. "This is an intensification and a concern, a curiosity or a worry," wrote Jean Luc Nancy<sup>4</sup>. Thus, this work provides me with an attentive and intense listening attitude, a suspension, where the hearing transcends the other senses. Here lies the whole paradox of Lam's work: the focus on the hearing through a visual device. Then one may wonder what sounds the *Sound Tree* provides to the ears?

Lam clearly emphasizes the issue of the origin of sounds through the significance of the site for the device she created—purposefully, a cluster of old buildings on borrowed times waiting for a major urban redevelopment operation. Lam underlines the acquaintance of the area, as a well-known but taken-for-granted neighbourhood with its acoustic environment, which rarely draws any specific attention. The sculpture's structure illustrates this relationship between the visitor and the surrounding and its inhabitants. I feel that the work goes beyond the frame determined by the acoustic ecology developed by Schafer<sup>5</sup> and focuses on the connections between the sounds and their real or imaginary causes. It does emphasize a specific sensitivity of the listener towards the acoustic environment. However, the sounds are mixed up, filtered and even altered, due to the shape of the sculpture. Besides, because of the acousmatic listening situation, multiple listening purposes are permitted.

Heterogeneous listening purposes are at the centre of a theoretical context of *acoulogie*, determined as the field of study of the acoustic experience. Through a reflexive attitude about my listening activity, as articulated in phenomenology, I am able to identify the diverse types of my experiments and analyse the various listening



intents that connect a listening consciousness with acoustic objects. Schaeffer emphasizes the tautology in the French expression "intention d'entendre" (or hearing intention): based on its etymology ("intendere"), the French word "entendre" conveys the same notion of "drawing attention towards", as in the definition of intention. He adds that the juxtaposition of both synonyms shows the automation of the listening phenomenon<sup>6</sup>. Each object I listen to is targeted and discovered on the basis of various purposes that may vary depending on my practice, my skills and my attention. The object is determined by my own perceptive experience of sound, as a result of an interaction between a physical event and my purpose. Thus, several possibilities arise: I am listening to causes, references, clues in the context of a cultural and natural common listening exercise. As opposed to an ordinary listening exercise, the Schaeffer approach performs a movement towards abstraction, setting aside the causal relationship and the context in order to focus on the sound itself. The stop-action on the sound carried out by Lam's sculpture allows such decontextualization of the sound. In my multiple intents, my listening fluctuates between the recognition or non-recognition of the source, the relationship with a specific context or a decontextualized perception. My listening may also be defined through the level of fiction that may be committed in these sounds. It is the possibility of exploring these multiple listening intentions that is at stake, I think, in Lam's *Sound Tree*.

translated by Celine Cruickshanks

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- 1 Rice, Tom. "Stethoscopes : Auscultation and the Sound of the Self" in Carlyle, Angus (ed) *Sound and Environment in Artistic Practices*, Double Entendre, Crisap, 2007
  - 2 Merleau-Ponty M. *Phénoménologie de la Perception*. Gallimard, 1945. Also a notion referred as "maximal grip" in many Hubert Dreyfus' writings.
  - 3 Chion, M. (2006). *Le Son*. Paris, Armand Colin.  
Schaeffer, P. (1966). *Traité des objets musicaux : essai interdisciplines*. Paris, Édition du Seuil.
  - 4 Nancy, J.L. *A l'écoute*. Galilée, 2002, p.18
  - 5 Schafer, M., R. (1977). *The soundscape : our sonic environment and the tuning of the world*. Rochester, Vt., Destiny Books.
  - 6 Schaeffer, *ibid.* p.140



林嵐的《聲音之樹》(Sound Tree)由一支八米長的銅管所構成，「植根」於香港建築中心內的狹窄中庭裡。從雕塑主幹延伸出來的兩條支幹分別伸進了一樓與二樓裡面。支幹末端呈張開的形狀，用來收集它周圍的聲音再送到銅管內傳遞。而主幹則是中空的，在離地面約一米半高之處有一開口讓參觀者貼近耳朵聆聽。

這棵樹不是樂器，它沒有可供演奏的聲學設計。不過，它是環境的共鳴聲與作為聽眾的參觀者之間的一個媒介，聲音透過它的結構和物料而被過濾和轉化。整件雕塑看起來令我聯想起早期助聽筒的混合外形。因此，林嵐這件作品可追源自眾所周知的傳統聽診設備：突顯對聲音的關切和強調專家們的聆聽工作。這兒我尤其是指電報和診療用的聽診器，正如 Tom Rice<sup>1</sup> 指出，在現代的診斷設備出現之前，它們對了解和認識人體結構方面曾擔當著重要的角色。而在此，唯一被呈現出來的則是一具回蕩著聲音的軀體，由一個把樓上傳來的聲音收集、混合在一起的中央氣槽打造而成，利用它中空的管狀結構把聲音轉化。

這件作品與她過去的創作有著明顯的區別，因而使它在林嵐的藝術進程中顯得尤其獨特。例如與《輓》Motion (1999)、《喃喃》Murmur (2000)，以至是 *discrepant motions* (2001) 相比的話，它們都是透過一系列的物件而進行觸覺上和聲學上的探索。此外，在雕塑形式上《聲音之樹》也和她之前部份的作品有很大分別，例如她的雕塑系列：《給想藏的人》、《給想飛的人》、《給想哭的人》、《給想逃的人》*To someone wants to hide, To someone wants to fly, To someone wants to cry, To someone wants to run* (2003)，以上眾雕塑以空間的形式呈現作品主題，可以純粹透過視覺而認識它們。在《聲音之樹》，林嵐選用了雕塑的傳統材料：銅，來製作。「銅」這辭彙透過其特定的修辭關係而往往直接指向雕塑本身（在歐洲文字的語境之中，有時會以某藝術家的「銅」(bronze) 來指他的雕塑作品)。不過於我看來，林嵐所創造的是一個指向周圍環境的獨特物理和關係性位置，而不只是一般雕塑的情況。



在雜誌《新華月報》(New Moon)《第二卷》(Volume 2)第1期(1925年1月)中，胡適之先生曾發表〈論中國文學史之編纂〉一文，其中論及中國文學史之編纂，其目的在於「整理國故」，並主張「整理國故」之標準，應以「科學的標準」為準。胡先生認為，中國文學史之編纂，應以「科學的標準」為準，而非以「傳統的標準」為準。胡先生認為，中國文學史之編纂，應以「科學的標準」為準，而非以「傳統的標準」為準。



胡適之先生(1891-1962)在《論中國文學史之編纂》一文中，曾論及中國文學史之編纂，其目的在於「整理國故」，並主張「整理國故」之標準，應以「科學的標準」為準。胡先生認為，中國文學史之編纂，應以「科學的標準」為準，而非以「傳統的標準」為準。胡先生認為，中國文學史之編纂，應以「科學的標準」為準，而非以「傳統的標準」為準。

一般來說，觀眾會選擇和雕塑保持一定的距離，以達至一個視點去鑑賞和了解我們和雕塑之間在形式和空間上的關係，而這關係是由雕塑賦予給我們的眼睛去看的（這態度近似於梅洛龐蒂<sup>2</sup> (Merleau-Ponty) 在他的世界觀中的「參與」(engaging) 概念)。但在此，視覺的原素被擱在一邊而讓位給予聆聽。這正是《聲音之樹》弔詭之處：作為一件雕塑，它可以被視為建築物的延伸，因為它與建築物外牆混亂的喉管已經混為一體；可是，當我們把耳朵貼著它時，卻無法再用視覺去體驗它。故此，它誘使我們去聆聽的位置，也就是不容許我們同時看到雕塑和聽到聲音的位置。故此，盲聽 (acousmatic) 的狀況便形成了：聲音與它的源頭分離。這作品的裝置，令我們不可能見到來自各樓層與及周圍環境中使到聲音出現的原因。

這盲聽的狀況實現了與西昂 (Chion) 和薛華 (Schaeffer) 的文章中相同的含意：當聲音在沒有依賴其他知覺（如視覺）的情況下被感知，會因為它與源頭割裂而容許去脈絡化 (decontextualisation) 的出現。故此，聲音與源頭的割裂容許人們去自行（重新）發現聲音，並透過「還原聆聽」(écoute réduite<sup>3</sup>) 的方法去延伸至感知得到皮耶·薛華所說的聲音物件 (sound object)。同樣地，由《聲音之樹》所產生的情況強調一個獨特的聆聽位置，邀請參觀者豎起耳朵細聽。

「豎起耳朵」代表了對聲音的特別注意，並尤其表示了我們耳廓的一個特定位置：耳朵直豎，偵察四周的聲音以了解它的內容。有如讓·呂克·南希 (Jean Luc Nancy<sup>4</sup>) 所書「這是一種增強與一種關注，一種好奇或是一種擔心」。因此，這作品給予我一種專注和熱切的聆聽態度，在一刻間的延留中，聆聽超越了其他感官。於此我們陷入了林嵐這作品的詭局中：透過一件視覺裝置去專注於聆聽。這令到人們疑惑到《聲音之樹》究竟提供了什麼聲音給我們去聽？

林嵐有意地利用作品場地的象徵意味去強調聲音源頭的重要性：一組正處身於借來的時間的舊建築物，它們等待著市區重建的來臨。林嵐突顯這地區的熟悉之處，

一組大家很是了解但又同時令人習以為常的社區，它的聲音環境很少得到他人的注意。雕塑的結構描繪出參觀者與周圍環境及其住客之間的關係。我覺得這件作品已經超越了由薛華 (Schafer)<sup>5</sup> 所發展出的聲音生態學理論框架，而更著重於聲音與它們真正或所想像的起因之間的關係。它雖然強調聽者對聲音環境的一種獨特的敏銳感，但由於雕塑的結構，這些聲音都被混合了、過濾過而甚至被改變了。此外，由於它盲聽的狀況而容許人們因為多種不同的動機而聆聽。

相異的 (Heterogeneous) 聆聽動機是純聲學 (*acoulogie*) 理論脈絡的中心思想，它是聲學經驗的其中一個研究範圍。通過以反照的態度對待我自己的聆聽活動，並與現象學構連 (*articulate*)，我能夠分辨出我的實驗中存在的不同類型，並分析我多種的聆聽意圖，它們連繫著對眾聲音物件的一種聆聽意識。薛華在他的詞句 “*intention d'entendre*” (聆聽意圖) 中強調它的同義反覆：基於 “*intendere*” 的詞源，在法文 “*entendre*” (聆聽) 一詞中已表達了和 “*intendere*” (意圖) 相同的「引起關注到」的意思。他補充道，這兩個同義詞的並列顯示了聆聽的自動化現象<sup>6</sup>。每一個我去聆聽的物件都是基於多樣的動機而被我選取和發現，這些不同的動機則關乎我的習慣、技巧和我想關注什麼。這物件由我自己對聲音的知覺經驗所決定，是實際發生的事情與我的動機相互動的結果。因此，這裡可以出現幾種可能：在一次文化上與自然的慣常聆聽練習的脈絡中，我正在聆聽著內裡的眾原因、參考和線索。與一次普通的聆聽練習相反，薛華的方式傾向於抽象，捨棄了因果關係與其脈絡，並以此而集中於聲音本身。林嵐的雕塑為聲音帶來一「停頓」的行動，因而容許了聲音的去脈絡化。基於我的多重意圖，我的聆聽徘徊在認得出和認不出音源之間；在某脈絡裡的相互關係又或者是去脈絡化的知覺。我對這些聲音的定義也可以基於它們可以包含多少程度的想像。《聲音之樹》提供了探索這些多重聆聽意圖的可能，我認為這正是此作品最重要的部份。




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1 Rice, Tom. "Stethoscopes : Auscultation and the Sound of the Self" in Carlyle, Angus (ed) *Sound and Environment in Artistic Practices*, Double Entendre, Crisap, 2007

2 Merleau-Ponty M. *Phénoménologie de la Perception*. Gallimard, 1945. Also a notion referred as "maximal grip" in many Hubert Dreyfus' writings.

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5 Schafer, M., R. (1977). *The soundscape : our sonic environment and the tuning of the world*. Rochester, Vt., Destiny Books.

6 Schaeffer, *ibid*, p.140

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致力在香港推廣聲音藝術，其教育及研究工作。

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