

Hearing Holes

Socrates describes in the allegory of the cave, as is well known, how everything seen is reduced to seeing shadows, which forbids the true sight of things. However, the things carried by make noises or their carriers even speak to one another, and the sound is reflected from the wall on which the shadows are cast and therefore appears as if it were coming from the shadows.

So if the direction from which the sound comes is an illusion - the sound itself is not! We hear 'real' sounds together with unreal images. While the images are deception, the sound itself is not.

In the founding myth of occidental transcendental philosophy there is thus no complete prohibition against the 'thing in itself': the prohibition only affects the appearance of things, but not their sound. And from the outset, appearance was not just about the visual part of things, but also their naming: their representation in our language, in our heads. Language and vision follow the principle of deception. The sound of things is, on the other hand, largely freed from deception: only the direction from which it comes is an illusion. But the sound itself is what it is - as long as it is not corrupted by and in language.

As the allegory of the cave is usually read, it is a description of the difference between appearance (shadow) and truth. But if you look closely, the truth itself is a farce: behind a "low wall structure", "similar to jugglers' barriers", "statues" and other artifacts are carried past that evoke the familiar shadows, our image of reality. If we could turn around, we would see the artifacts that are supposed to deceive us. The illusion does not consist in the fact that the shadows originate from real, true things, from things 'in themselves', but much more dramatically, much more hopelessly: there are no 'true', 'real' things, there are only artifacts trying to make us believe that there could be something other than artifacts.

And the only thing that doesn't deceive, which is almost immediate (apart from the angle of incidence), is the sound of the deceivers, the sound of the jugglers behind their wall.

The realest reality accessible to us is the noise the jugglers make while they want to deceive us about reality, while they carry on with their circus parade to mislead us about the appearance of things in visual respect and verbal representation.

But if the actual appearance is not what differs from a higher reality, if the appearance itself is not the deception, if the deception is to want to distinguish between appearance and reality - after all we have seen that reality is only that of the jugglers who want to pretend a higher reality to us - which thus means in this light (in this darkness) the strange difference between the shadows on the wall and the reflection of the sounds through the wall.

The shadows are shadows of the appearance of a higher reality. The sounds are after all the echo of a reality of appearances: the reality of juggling. And the difference between appearance and echo should not be downplayed. Shadows and jugglers (pretended higher reality) differ so much that it was hardly possible to unmask the latter as such. On the other hand, there is in principle no difference between sound and echo: in principle, every sound can be subject to certain directional distractions without surrendering its identity and origin.

On this side of the allegory of the cave, the question remains whether the difference between visual/semantic and acoustic representation can also be used to establish a qualitative distinction, one that would mark one perception as 'more representative' or 'closer to reality' than the other. That may be difficult.

For now it should only be ascertainable that the millennia-old engagement with perception and its transcendentalty provides us with a fundamentally broader radius of differentiation, a clearly sharper awareness than for the processes in the acoustic area. At least in terms of language, this exercise, rehearsed for so long, has bestowed upon us, that in the concept of a thing we always also consider its mediality and contingency, and therefore convey a difference between concept and thing. In contrast, the acoustic experience seems to be much more 'naive'. It still wants to believe what it hears.

Perhaps my endeavors to distinguish hearing from 'hearing' might help here. Hearing is what wants to believe what it hears. 'Hearing', on the other hand, would then be something that does not entirely split what is believed from what is heard. To a certain extent, it keeps the linguistic (or other) representation away from itself - with the well-known drawback, as with a toothache, of being not at all, or hardly communicable, but at least being experienceable.