

The Sound of Music

Douglas Kahn

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Demarcated Sounds

- Drawing the line between sound (noise) and musical sound
- Major artistic revision was thwarted by authoritarian regimes, economic collapse, et al.
- Dominated by “vintage classes of instruments” and methodologies

Demarcation of Sound

- **Is contemporary music and sound dominated by vintage instruments?**
 - What about the synthesizer or drum box?
 - Are these instruments new spins on old tunes?

Demarcation of Sound

- **There is a caste/class of extra musicals**
 - Imitation is high in the caste
 - Contrapuntal sounds by non instrument objects were banished (e.g. circus, vaudeville, effects)
- **Unlike the relationship of visual art to photography, phonography did not relieve the music from aspiration of phonographic realism**
 - Yet the phonograph did promise an alternative to musical notation and archiving

Demarcation of Sound

- **Important Question**
Ask: “How could Western Art music be so successful in protecting its own domains when, at the very same time, so many other arts inverted their representational modes?” (pg 102)

Demarcation of Sound

- Perhaps western music has resisted fundamental change because:
 - The Conservatism of western art music – modest departure = transgressive
 - Institutional factors: need the bouguise for the “big factory”/musical caste
 - Designed to hamper and delay the force of deterritorialization
 - “Privileged position”: its abstracted character was thought to have already achieved what the other arts were attempting -. E.g. simultaneity

Demarcation of Sound

- Kahn and other speak of the big factory of music production – is this really the only mode of production for the time of which he speaks?
- **Does Kahn have an elitist stance?**
 - What about non-classical / non-high art works?
- **Are there contemporary analogies to be made to his historical references?**
 - Is Vaudeville not the dance club, is theater not equal to movies ?

Addressing the Dilemma

- Two artists provide perspective
 - Kandinsky
 - Mondrian

Kandinsky and The Dilemma

- two critiques of Wagner's **leitmotifs** in relationship to representation of music
 - First loved it– the hero sounds in his own way
 - Sought music which externally is completely emancipated from nature
- Sought communication among humans-**vibrationally**

Mondrian and the Dilemma

- Proposed new type of music with its own venue

“To achieve a more universal plastic, the new music must dare to create a new order of sounds and nonsounds (determined noise)”

“In the new type of hall for playing Neo-plastic music, people couple come and go freely without missing anything because the compositions would be repeated just like in movie theaters. Long intermissions would provide time to view projected images of neo-plastic paintings, the electrical playback equipment would be hidden, and the space would meet the new acoustical requirements of sound-noise”

Mondrian and the Dilemma

- “Man will prefer sounds and noises produced by inanimate nonanimalized materials . . . he will find the noise of a machine more sympathetic (in its timbre” the song of birds or men
- Does this sound true? Did this ever happen?

Drawing the Line in Theory

- Extramusical sounds posed a threat to music
 - Pierre Schaeffer – Musique Concrete (listen)
 - “closer to cubist poetry than to music
 - John Cage – In love with Sound (provided video)
 - Two types of sounds –
 - » that which tells you something (a door creak)
 - » instruments – which tell you la la la

Drawing the Line in Theory

- **Shaefer** returns from his journey defeated- no music was possible outside of conventional musical sounds
 - “its only things that change, the structures of humanity stay the same” (Strauss)
- Proposed - perhaps speech is the problem
 - man is poor at perceiving because of this?

Drawing the Line in Theory

- Consider what kind of stories can be told by means of noises only?
- Is the “rise of the foley artist” in support of this?
- What type of sound does a foley artist create – informational or “musical”

Drawing the Line in Theory

- **John Cage**
 - Williams Mix - erasing the associated properties of recorded sounds (listen)
- Poeme Electronique (1958)
 - reproduces the tradition of Europeans hearing non-European music

Synesthesia as Noise Abatement

- Explorations in synesthetic experience
 - From Fantasia to LSD– kinds of synesthetic experience
- Sounds act proposed as ciphers of the universe
- Old concept – Pythagorean, platonic, Newton, et al

Synesthesia as Noise Abatement

- Ask: Way types of synetesthetic experiences do we create today?

References

- [The Sound of Music](#)
- [New Art Theater](#)

Video provided through Youtube.com