

WFAE 2011 PAPER SESSION (1):

'Values and Ethics in Acoustic Ecology'

Monday, 3/10/2011-- 12:15- 13:00-- Ionian Academy, Corfu

*Session Chair: Eric Leonardson*¹*

Title of Presentation: *Listening and Value Systems: Towards an Axiology of Soundscape Documentation.*

Abstract:

For over 40 years the World Soundscape Project (WSP) has been collecting sound recordings and other documentary materials about acoustic environments. A recent digitization initiative has created an opportunity to examine the decision-making processes surrounding the creation, annotation, and maintenance of this unique collection. The history and current activities of the WSP provide insights for our study of the axiology, or study of values (aesthetic, social, ethical and political) associated with diverse approaches to listening and understanding acoustic environments through sound collection and preservation. Our research analyzes documentation in the collection of audio recordings, visual images and texts as well as fieldwork and interviews with sound recordists and researchers involved with the project from its origins (in the early 1970's) through the present.

One goal of our study is to seek insights into how value judgments inform changing notions of listening, and inspire practices of sound recording and collecting. Over the years debates have emerged among WSP researchers regarding the relationship between the sound collector and the sonic environment. Questions have arisen about the social and ecological missions associated with documenting sonic environments and how to study them in the context of transformations in listening practices. Even if there is agreement that technology is not environmentally or socially neutral, when can recording technology be considered an affordance for listening? Should we use recording technology in studying acoustic ecology at all? How can we document listening in sonic environments without technology?

Although there are diverse opinions about the mission and constraints of various approaches to soundscape documentation, our research suggests that evolving notions about the nature and uses of sound collection and preservation have inspired methodological strategies based on shared understandings of when and how to mobilize different value systems and research strategies. This paper will present findings from our study of systems of values-- or the axiology-- of soundscape heritage preservation. We hope to provide insights into how practitioners of soundscape studies who hold a

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range of philosophical perspectives are still able to share understandings that allow them to work together as a community of experts actively engaged with research on acoustic ecology.

AUTHORS

- Murphy, David, Senior Lecturer, School of Communication, Simon Fraser University.
- Marontate, Jan, Associate Professor, School of Communication, Simon Fraser University.
- Truax, Barry, Professor, School of Communication, Simon Fraser University

David Murphy is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Communication at Simon Fraser University. He has been a teacher and researcher at SFU for the past 15 years in the area of Media Analysis and Production, specializing in Sound Design and Audio Media Analysis. David is the president of Vancouver New Music and is committed to the development and presentation of original and innovative sonic events.

Jan Marontate moved to Simon Fraser University from Acadia University where she held a Canada Research Chair in Technology and Culture. Her current research focuses on transdisciplinary networks and cultural innovation, with particular interest in communications among artists, scientists, conservators and curators about new strategies for the preservation of time-based media (such as audio-visual recordings and works made using obsolescent technologies) as cultural heritage.

Barry Truax is a Professor in the School of Communication at Simon Fraser University where he teaches courses in acoustic communication, specializing in soundscape composition. As a composer, Truax is best known for his work with the PODX computer music system and the development of Granular Synthesis. In 1991 his work, Riverrun, was awarded the Magisterium at the International Competition of Electroacoustic Music in Bourges, France, a category open only to electroacoustic composers of 20 or more years experience. He is also the recipient of one of the 1999 Awards for Teaching Excellence at Simon Fraser University. Barry Truax is an Associate Composer of the Canadian Music Centre and a founding member of the Canadian Electroacoustic Community and the World Forum for Acoustic Ecology.

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Title of Presentation: *The Philippine Suburban Village Soundscape: Challenging Filipino Social Values. (will not attend)*

Abstract:

This paper describes the existing soundscape of a Philippine suburban village located on the outskirts of Manila, the Philippines' capital. It assesses the relationship between natural sounds, man-made sounds, and mechanical/technological sounds. It also presents how a society's social values system influences community behavior towards the sounds that exist and are continuously being created in the soundscape.

A descriptive-qualitative study was utilized to gather data. It involved fielding a survey questionnaire and conducting 10-minute audio recordings at 12 strategic locations at 2-hour intervals around the village over a 24-hour period.

Since social values are deeply embedded in the society, the paper proposes that, to practically address issues regarding noise pollution,

government and non-government units as well as private sectors must be one in: 1) creating innovative provisions that would help control sound but at the same time would take into consideration the existing social values system and culture of that society, 2) educating society to reevaluate their own values system in relation to their conception of noise and, 3) encouraging the positive utilization of social values so as to achieve a sustainable, peaceful and quiet environment for all.

AUTHOR

Joaquin, Jethro, Theatre Sound Designer/Educator, University of the Philippines, Diliman.

Jethro Joaquin (pronounced as *Wah-keen*) is theatre sound designer and educator based in Manila, Philippines. He has collaborated with cultural and national institutions around the country on productions ranging from theatre, dance and film. His theatre sound works have been presented and recognized in international music and theatre events such as the Prague Quadrennial in Czech Republic, the World Stage Design held in Canada and South Korea respectively, the Impulse Clandestino Dub Music Festival in Gotenburg, Sweden and the Technical Theatre Exchange Project in Fukuoka, Japan. He teaches sound design and theatre courses at the University of the Philippines Diliman.

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Title of Presentation: *The Ethics of Listening.*

Abstract

In *The Other Side of Language* (1990) Italian philosopher Gemma Corradi Fiumara understands contemporary Western culture primarily as a culture in which speech (logocentrism) is superior to silence and listening. Fiumara's alternative hinges on the possibility of freeing our thinking from this logocentrism by giving back to Western thought the other half of language, namely, the rich openness of listening. Listening can be an important support to the effort of seeking to establish a relationship between our world and a different, polyphonic world where different voices, with various resonances and intonations, can resound and reverberate.

Although Fiumara hardly addresses music in her book, it is my opinion that music, sound art, and acoustic design can contribute a great deal to the modern human capacity to listen, to listen to the voices and sounds that are silenced through our logocentric discourses, to listen to the unheard within those discourses. Sonic arts can teach us to listen attentively, cautiously, and respectfully. This might even be one of the biggest contributions the sonic arts are able to make to our contemporary culture. (With this 'attentive listening' I am not primarily arguing in favor of Theodor Adorno's ideas on 'structural listening' although his thoughts certainly deserve careful reflections.)

Starting from these observations, this paper will focus on the ethical aspects of listening and the important roles music, sound art, and acoustic design play in this, not so much by telling us precisely to what one should listen as to call us to listen. However, this 'attentive listening' should not only be understood in a more or less passive way – with dilated ears while being completely silent and fastened to a chair, as during a concert of classical music. To listen carefully might even not (only) take place through the ears. Sometimes other parts of the body seem better equipped to register certain sonic events: the brain when dealing with ultrasounds, the stomach and guts when dealing with heavy bass sounds, and even the skin when dealing with high frequency crackling sounds. (See also Steve Goodman and Kodwo Eshun.) In other words, the ethics of listening should also include reflections on the influence of sounds on the body and the mind.

AUTHOR

Cobussen, Marcel, Dr., (PhD) at Leiden University (NL)

Marcel Cobussen studied jazz piano at the Conservatory of Rotterdam and Art and Cultural Studies at Erasmus University, Rotterdam (the Netherlands). He currently teaches Music Philosophy and Auditory Culture at Leiden University (the Netherlands) and the Orpheus Institute in Ghent (Belgium). Cobussen is author of the book *Thresholds. Rethinking Spirituality Through Music* (Ashgate, 2008), co-author of *Dionysos danst weer. Essays over hedendaagse muziekbeleving* (Kok Agora, 1996), and editor-in-chief of the online *Journal of Sonic Studies* (www.sonicstudies.org). He edited a special issue of *New Sound* on improvisation (Belgrade, 2009) and is contributing editor of two special issues of the *Dutch Journal of Music Theory*, one on music and ethics (AUP, 2002) and one on artistic research (AUP, 2007). His Ph.D. dissertation *Deconstruction in Music* (2002) was presented as an online website located at www.cobussen.com.

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Title of Presentation: *“(Why) should we learn to listen? The Ethical Basis of Finnish Listening Education.”*

In 1972, the advisory instructions of the very first Finnish curriculum of comprehensive school mentioned that “the starting point of music education in comprehensive school is the analysis

of Finnish society and the musical environment of the youth.” However, music education in Finland, both on the practical level and in the theoretical accounts, is generally seen apart from other sonic environments. Further, listening is seen instrumentally as a listening skill to listen to music in musicing practice. Thus, in music education, it still remains a challenge to ask: why it is important to bring attentive listening, analysis of daily sonic environment and its critical interpretation to Finnish basic education?

Many instrumental reasons of listening, as a useful tool for some ends or purposes, are found. For example listening can be seen as an important skill for a member of networking information society. However, when we speak about skills, a question of ethically good practice will immediately arise. Ethics of listening education concern to the ethical use of the skill of acoustic competence and ethics of educating people in listening skills.

Theoretically, ethical obligations of listening can be divided into positive and negative obligations towards oneself, other people as well as towards current and future environment. Ethical care can be divided into two criterion sections, ethical significance and ethical consideration. In education, ethical basis of education – including listening education – is regulated by law. In Finland, according to Basic Education Act 628/1998, in addition to the knowledge and skills, the main goal of education is to cultivate people as moral subjects.

In environmental education, cultivating of a learner as moral subject is possible through three simultaneous learning processes. Listening education can be defined as: 1) listening education about the acoustic environment, 2) listening education in (or from) the acoustic environment and 3) listening education for the acoustic environment. In addition to listening to environment in acoustic communication, ethical listening can be connected more directly to face to face communication. Thus, ethically emphasized Soundscape competence is the key of listening education.

AUTHOR

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Olli-Taavetti Kankkunen Master of Music Olli-Taavetti Kankkunen is a music teacher and choir conductor at Tampere Teacher Training School, University of Tampere, Finland. He is making his doctoral studies at the Department of Music Education, Sibelius Academy, Helsinki. The title of the dissertation will be “Sonic Environment Education in Finnish Basic Education”

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