

WFAE 2011 PAPER SESSION (5, 6) 'Soundscape: Theory and Research.'

Tuesday, 3/10/2011-- 15-15:40 and 15:45-16:45 -- Ionian Academy, Corfu

*Session Chair: David Murphy*¹*

Title of Presentation: *“Murray Schafer’s term “Soundscape” and its interdependencies with the media theoretical paradigms of H. Marshall McLuhan.”*

Abstract

This paper seeks to map the diverse auditory crossroads and similar listening paths of Schafer and McLuhan. Who guided whom? Who influenced whom? As a matter of fact, R. Murray Schafer and H. Marshall McLuhan were contemporaries, one generation apart, and lively aware of each other. The latter became certainly much more popular and even “hip” in the world of mediamakers and scholars. But, was it really McLuhan, who coined the milieu for Schafer developing his paradigms of “Soundscape” and “Acoustic Ecology”? Or was it Schafer’s theory, which devised with a huge consistency and persistency an approach to culture and media being based predominantly on listening and the auditory, which allowed McLuhan’s paradigms to issue into, to cross and share the listening paths of his younger compatriot?

Even if a clarification to the initial question might be possible only as an approximation, this lecture explores the influences, parallels envelopes and shifts between both Canadian thinkers who assigned to the auditory sense an outstanding importance and even a key meaning for the individual in a future society. The lecture will elaborate in detail on both’s notions of the dominance of the visual, of the concept of an acoustic space, their similar figures of thought and thinking strategies, and their overall, deeply holistic approach, considering the order of the senses and of consciousness as a reflection of the order of environmental perception.

While Schafer and McLuhan share a considerable common ground, their differences and the conclusions they draw from their individual findings are obvious. The paper will investigate to which extent the gaps between both are based on their potentially contrasting a prioris, as well as their opposing visions of the social values and consequences of their theories. To read and understand Schafer through McLuhan (and vice versa) will add to a deeper understanding of Schafer’s approach and elaborations, positioning them within an intellectual climate, a philosophical field, and a specific contemporary artistic mindset.

AUTHOR

Breitsameter, Sabine, Professor for Sound and Mediaculture, Hochschule Darmstadt, Faculty of Media, Germany.

Sabine Breitsameter: Radio artist and dramaturgue since the mid 1980s, specializing on experimental radio, radio art and cultural programming; invited composer to Simon Fraser-University/Burnaby in 1996; head of numerous international festivals on soundscape, listening and contemporary art and theory (e.g. Documenta/Kassel, ZKM/Karlsruhe, Academy of Arts/Berlin, Ars Electronica/Linz); artistic director of the German-Polish art radio station “Radio_Copernicus” 2004-2006). In 2003 she cofounded the Master program “Soundstudies” at University of the Arts/Berlin (guestprofessor for “Experimental Audiomediamedia” 2004-2008), since 2006 appointed professor at Hochschule Darmstadt, teaching and researching sound, mediaculture, and sounddesign. Member of numerous juries; compositional workshops in Europe and Latin America; latest publication: a re-edition and new translation of M. Schafer’s central work “The Tuning of the World” for Schott

<p>1 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.</p>

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Title of Presentation: *“Vancouver Soundscape Project 2010: motives, intentions, and practice.”*

Abstract:

The Vancouver Soundscape Project (VSP) is the most comprehensive sonic analysis of an urban environment anywhere in the world. Originating in the 1970’s through the work of the World Soundscape Project at Simon Fraser University, the VSP sought to document, analyze, and question the increasing noise levels of Vancouver’s rapidly changing soundscape. A collection of sound recordings was captured, consisting of typical sound signals, soundmarks, and ambient soundscapes that were definitive of local culture. Many of these very same sites were then revisited in the mid-1990’s, twenty years following the original documentation. Robert MacNevin, the recordist for the project, followed the lead of the original group, and his recordings culminated in the release of the double CD “The Vancouver Soundscape” (1973, 1996). This project demonstrates an obvious longitudinal dimension, illustrating the soundscape’s similarities, differences, presences and absences between the two eras.

We are now approaching forty years since the original recordings were made, and during the summer of 2010, the project was revisited for a third time. This collection of recordings represents merely the first stage of this iteration, and at the forefront of the approach is once again the question of how sound might articulate the prevailing values, beliefs, and attitudes concerning local culture. However this time, the festival, or the event, has emerged as a site in which to survey more explicitly local customs and traditions. By addressing the sonic qualities of social relationships within such an environment – that is, the manner in which the voice, music making, and general social activity are employed as a communicative form – we are offered a unique vantage point from which to explore the socio-cultural milieu that is definitive of Vancouver.

The archive from the summer of 2010 contains recordings that range from various street festivals to the Celebration of Lights fireworks presentation. In much the same way that field recording of any sort is laden with choices and decision-making for the recordist, the process of documenting such time-sensitive events adds a layer of intrigue. From what spatial position is a particular occasion best documented? At what moment? And how might the recordist deal with the inevitable presence of electroacoustic sound? The answers to these questions inform what we might call a “recording aesthetic”; that is, the manner in which the recordist attempts to acoustically frame the subject of documentation. This paper addresses the decision making process throughout the documentation of Vancouver’s festivals during the summer of 2010.

AUTHOR

Andrisani, Vincent, PhD Student, School of Communication, Simon Fraser University

Vincent Andrisani is a PhD student in the School of Communication at Simon Fraser University, and is the current recordist for the Vancouver Soundscape Project. His work emphasizes the local character of the practices of soundmaking and listening, and employs them as a site of social and cultural exploration. By addressing the nature of contemporary digital technologies in this localized setting, Vincent aims to investigate the relationship between listening habits and social organization, and the manner in which they have been renegotiated by the dynamics of the modern soundscape.

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Title of Presentation: *“Hybrid Soundings: The Social Spaces of Documentary.”*

Abstract:

The opening of music to sounds from the real world has resulted in introducing to composition concepts and practices related to the domain of documentary. In this sense the role of the composer has intermingled with that of the documentarian, specializing in the processes of recording, presenting and disseminating aural assemblages of spatial multiplicities. The ideas of presence and telepresence will guide me through an examination of that role and an analysis of two distinct approaches to the creative use of real-world sounds.

The first approach, manifested through an aesthetics of transparency, strives to recreate the aural experience of place through the use of immersive sound technologies. The increasing level of refinement from the phonograph to contemporary immersive surround sound environments could be seen as a process of naturalization of the medium, rendering the technology behind sound recording and reproduction gradually concealed. Through this process of internalizing technology and eliminating differences between the real and the virtual is shaped a mode of perception of reality that is mediated by an aesthetics of transparency. The latter shares an affinity to current developments in virtual reality environments and the condition of telepresence.

The second approach to the creative use of real-world sounds is manifested through an aesthetics of presence and evinces the appeal for an active engagement with the auditory. That is a creative task which recognizes itself as part of the social, political and sentimental lives of both maker and listener and attests to their presence. Thus, instead of attempting to present place through an unmediated, detached contemplation, the aesthetics of presence suggests an ontological view of the listening subject, embracing subjective sensibilities and personal accounts of the spatial multiplicities around us.

Concluding, I will argue that this second approach to real-world sounds finds expression in documentary, as a creative domain which can integrate multiple aesthetic sensibilities into hybrid forms and emergent unities, reflecting a social outlook on our diverse spaces and sonic environments.

AUTHOR

Yiannis Christofides, MA by Research Student at the Music, Technology and Innovation Research Centre, De Montfort University (UK).

Yiannis Christophides: Born in Nicosia, Cyprus in 1985. I am a composer, sound artist and researcher. Currently a postgraduate research student at the Music, Technology and Innovation Research Centre at De Montfort University, Leicester, I hold a Bachelor degree in Media, Communication and Culture from Panteion University, Greece and a BMus (Hons) in Music from City University London. Interested in situations of spatiotemporal displacement, distraction and daydream, hybrid forms and the combination of different media and creative practices, I have been researching subjective interpretations and personal accounts of urban spaces. My recent work incorporates documentary and docu-fictional practices and may take the form of audio, installation pieces and multimedia works.

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Title of Presentation: *“The Everyday Listening Project.”*

Abstract

The increasing cultural importance of media and interactive technology brings with it a renewed interest in the perceptual, cognitive, ontological and epistemological affordances of our different senses. The “dominance of the visual” has started to give way to the multiplicity of sensory spaces that in turn, it may be argued, help [re]-legitimize different ways of knowing. Digital (and portable) technologies in particular, exist within a paradigm of a mediated aurality not only literally - because of the proliferation of multi-sensory interfaces for interaction; but also because of the changes in the way knowledge produced and implicit through these devices is conceived of, transferred and legitimized.

My doctoral work focuses on exploring the epistemological dimensions of (mediated) aurality by creating a framework to map out contemporary soundscapes by way of an “auditory inventory” or “aural postcards,” specifically focused on everyday listening, mediated through portable digital devices. My fieldwork involves an ethnographic exploration of ways of listening to contemporary (urban) soundscapes, with the help of a small group of dedicated listeners who take on sound journaling about their everyday listening experiences for two weeks. Ultimately, I intend to distill relevant patterns from this ethnographic study and situate it within larger discourses around listening, voice and the role of sound in contemporary society. What I hope to present at WFAE’2011 is my preliminary findings from the ethnographic study done with two groups of 4 listeners, and be able to talk about a framework for understanding mediated aurality.

AUTHOR

Droumeva, Milena, PhD Candidate, Faculty of Education, Simon Fraser University.

Milena Droumeva is a doctoral candidate in the Faculty of Education at SFU. With a background in media studies and communication as well as interaction design and auditory display design, her current interest brings together traditions of acoustic ecology and design methods by exploring the mediated aurality of the contemporary urban soundscape. In the past, Milena has also been involved in the sonic arts with a number of her own electroacoustic compositions, including an artist-in-residence with Deep Wireless (2005); and participation in several public installation projects - one river (running) - 2008 and Talking Poles - 2010, in conjunction the Surrey Art Gallery; an augmented reality project with the Museum of Natural History in Ottawa, 2004; and an installation at the 2011 PuSH festival Vancouver.

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Title of Presentation: *“Just eavesdropping? – How and why study private acoustic space.”*

Abstract:

When talking about acoustic environments the focus often turns to “our soundscape”, that is more generally speaking the shared public, common and the outdoors. If considering the spaces in which everyday life is spent we realize that expectations, cultural codes, agency and preferences concerning the soundscape change significantly when it comes to acoustic privacy and private space. In this paper I will discuss this point of departure: the sonic cultures of private sound space. The historical concept of privacy can be heard in counterpoint with the concept of public space which in turn is entangled with the ideas of bourgeois family life, urbanity, democracy and individuality. These notions construct modes of sound practices that vary from one sonic culture to another but at the same time pose challenges to ethnographic soundscape field work. How can one approach such a topic with the methods of cultural research when the concept itself might prevent talking of it not

to mention participatory recording or observing? Or is it possible for the researcher (ethically and technically considering) only to access some of the overlapping layers of space, sound and time? I will also argue for the importance of private soundscapes as important discursive texts to be acknowledged when talking about the acoustic environment.

This paper is part of the research project “Soundscapes and Cultural Sustainability – Strategies for Local Action”.

AUTHOR

Meri Kytö, Junior researcher, University of Eastern Finland

Meri Kytö is an ethnomusicologist and a cultural researcher writing her PhD on articulations of private and public acoustic spaces in urban environments. She has written about apartment building acoustemology in Finland and Turkey and acoustic communities of football fans. She has been active in the Finnish Society for Acoustic Ecology and it's various soundscape projects from 1999. <http://uef.academia.edu/MeriKyto>.

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