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MUS302 WEEK 3

SOUND, SOUNDSCAPE, TIMBRE AND MUSIC (SOUND-STRUCTURE IN MUSIC)

WHY CREATE WITH SOUND? (ENVIRONMENT AND EXPRESSION)

- ▶ R. Murray Schafer, a pioneer of 'soundscape composition': 'Two postwar developments, both related to technology, propelled [...] sound research. On the one hand, the world was becoming more urban and more noisy [...] On the other hand [...] new and more accessible technologies of recording and sound analysis made it easier to "freeze: sound, to listen to it repeatedly and analyze its components the way photography and the microscope had sharpened the observation of visual phenomena.'
- ▶ 'In the 1960s many of us felt that the whole sensorium of the Western was in upheaval. By 1970, having joined the communication department at Simon Fraser University, I had announced the World Soundscape Project [...] our purpose was to study the effects of the changing soundscape on human behaviour and with this information begin to develop the new discipline of soundscape design.'

(both quotes from Schafer's foreword to *Sonic Experience*, ed. Augoyard and Torgue, 1995, translated edition, 2005)

LISTENING: SOUND-STRUCTURE IN MUSIC

- ▶ Examples:
- ▶ *Spectral Canon for Conlon Nancarrow* (James Tenney)
- ▶ *It's Gonna Rain and Come Out* (Steve Reich)
- ▶ *Bucephalus Bouncing Ball* (Aphex Twin)
- ▶ *A Third Trombone* (Phil Niblock)
- ▶ All of these are pieces of music whose structure is more based on textural concerns

ENVIRONMENT AND MUSICAL EXPERIENCE

- ▶ Are musical cues derived from environmental audio cues? Have these cues changed in recent years? And if so, have the rules of music changed? (Think back to the Futurists and Luigi Russolo's manifesto.)
- ▶ If so, the processes of recording, manipulation and playback will allow us to respond to this challenge posed by the novelty of our contemporary soundworld. It will also allow us to respond to the challenge posed by the availability of musical materials from a range of different cultures (both contemporary and 'historical')
- ▶ Does the combination of these two factors give us a greater insight into musical possibility? How?

BEYOND 'TRADITIONAL' MUSICAL STRUCTURES: SONIC ART/SOUND ART

Trevor Wishart (1985/1991) notes that :'**Sound-art can no longer be confined to the organisation of notes'** (which is the primary 'traditional' definition of music.)'

He continues...'Even this original conception [of music] had already been broadened to include at least three areas:

(1) the instrumental approach where pitched sound-objects of short duration and fixed timbre were organised into larger structures through the medium of conventional notation

(2) *musique concrète*, using instead a vocabulary of sound-objects of various types categorised according to a phenomenological description of their properties and organised using studio techniques without (necessarily) any reference to the notated score

(3) [...]synthesis techniques, giving us the possibility of sustained yet transforming streams of sound [...]'

SONIC ART (IN ITS VARIATIONS AND MUTATIONS)

- ▶ 'Traditional' instrumental composition or composition which retains its assumptions
- ▶ *Musique concrète/electroacoustic music/acousmatic music/soundscape music (also, industrial music)* - play with sense of sound source, in some cases plays with cultural associations, though sometimes attempts to overcome both of these 'extra-sonic' associations
- ▶ **Sound poetry/text-sound art** - focus on the dramatic, emotive content of sounds, impressions (expressions?) of proto-linguistic structures?
- ▶ **Elektronische Musik/computer music** - concern for timbre, but strong focus can remain on pitch structures and pitched materials
- ▶ **Spatial composition/sound installation/composed sound environment** (often used in all of the above, but may be foregrounded more)
- ▶ **Plunderphonics** - appropriation and re-contextualisation of more 'traditional' musical materials in compositional structures which owe more to concepts of timbre and cultural associations

SOUND STRUCTURES IN MUSIC

- ▶ If we're designing sounds or composing with new sounds, **we need to understand how we organise our perception of sound**
- ▶ In doing so, we need to engage with the concept of **timbre**, which is a term which is variously used in the contexts of '**sound texture**' and '**sonic signature**'
- ▶ **Timbre** is the key issue in this class: if we're composing with sound or designing sound, what is it that we're actually shaping/ changing? If we're gathering sounds from the wider world of sound materials around us, how can we describe them (apart from their sources)?

INTERLUDE: ASSIGNMENT 1 PROJECT WITH PROF. LEIGH LANDY

- ▶ Intro to Leigh Landy's academic work:
 - ▶ **Sound-based music**, 'that is, music in which **sounds, not notes, form the basic unit**. The separation of art music and popular music is clearly becoming less relevant as the distinction becomes less audible in a great number of sound-based works and the means of production converge, opening up this type of music to a much larger community than the one it has known in the past.' Landy, L. 2010, in Dean, R. ed. *Oxford Handbook of Computer Music*.
 - ▶ See also Landy, L. 2007. *Understanding the Art of Sound Organisation*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT.
 - ▶ Landy (2007) is somewhat critical of other, pre-existing terms for this type of music (computer music, electroacoustic music, etc.); why do you think this may be?
- ▶ Discussion of this project and radio-based sampled materials
- ▶ Example of previous radio-based work by Landy
- ▶ Discussion of approach to local/regional/national radio materials (with soundbite samples) ...what is significant about our local 'mediascape'? (i.e. why would a leading figure in sonic arts want to make a piece here?)