

Student number - 2014184

Course - Creative Music technology

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I will be writing about 'the sonic environment', 'schizophonia' and themes discussed in 'the new soundscape' by R. Murray Schafer. What is music? 'music is sounds around us whether we're in or out of concert halls: cf. Thoreau'. The possible combination of sounds is limitless, but they can be split into 3 categories. natural sounds, human sounds and sounds of tools and technology. They are all present and interact in our environment and the music we listen to/create. The universal orchestra, anything that makes a sound is accessible and ready to turn into musical form through creative expression. Today natural sounds within the city are dying out and most sounds are causes of human invention. What effect does this have on the way we act, listen to and write music?

In the past, sound levels may have been low enough to not intrude the thought stream constantly and distract from calmness and contemplation, today it is the opposite and humans seek places to escape noise. digital music with human influence is the art of combining noises. Tones that are the by-product of technology, tools and machinery have similarities with certain tones in pop/other music, also natural and human sounds too, the same 3 sounds can be created in each category. Synth sounds (technology), bird sounds (natural) and vocal or movement (human) can create the same or very similar sound. Technology/machinery gave a new set of sounds, machines got louder and so did music. Does our interest/acceptance of loud music stem from the fact that our sonic environment is growing louder with each new invention. Due to our environment do we now have a thirst for noise? Electric guitar played through an amplifier can reach the audible pain threshold, whereas in the past soft or moderately loud sounds may have been favoured, like the piano. In this age bigger, louder and more powerful sounds are seen as impressive. For some people the level of noise in their environment may not be an issue. Sensitivity to sound is personal, but for any thinker noise can severely disrupt work.

Schizophonia - 'the split between an original sound and its electroacoustic reproduction.' (B Truax 1984) The Greek prefix 'schizo' means split or separated. Schizophonia can relate to a nervous soundscape caused by a barrage of sounds. Machines, cars, television, phones, music, media, construction sites added with human competition to communicate and work within the noise hits high decibel levels. Actions get twitchy and louder until non-human sounds disrupt and overpower the natural low ambient level, this can break thought, cause distress and result in health hazards.

The soundscape overrides the landscape. A quiet ghost town city has the opposite effect emotionally not just audibly to a busy loud chaotic one. Rural/natural calmness can be demolished by loud sounds and chaos. Sounds effect the inner psychic soundscape. with the advancement of technology, we can now create any portable sonic environment through headphones. Even though this is true in a quiet setting, many environments for example walking through a city or being on a train still get noise intrusions (unwanted sound signals)

from the original soundscape, in this case you are only masking sounds with other sounds not deleting them, this again can increase the ambient noise level. Masking unwanted sounds with headphones/speakers/natural environments can create some comfort and escape from the original environment providing the sounds heard override the uncomfortable ones without being too loud.

Floaty/ambient synth (technology) can replicate birds singing (natural). Is this the reason for ambient music played in a busy city having the same effect? Are we now personally replicating natural sounds to eliminate the chaos? Sound juxtapositions combined to create one piece can give the effect of schizophonia and tension in music. But within the harsh sounds there may be softer ones which can create harmony and balance within the piece, the new soundscape (busy/frantic) can be managed and navigated if balanced. Without noise intrusions we can concentrate, communicate, and exist in our environment without a high level of sonic aggravation. This needs to be taken into account with modern day societal changes happening rapidly such as technological/mechanical developments causing new sounds and noises on the threshold of pain that we are not accustomed to. With dense population this is the same case, humans are competing to communicate and live-in built-up areas. Whether its traffic jams, entertainment blaring out of speakers, construction sites, the technological hum... noises are becoming an infringement of personal space. The future soundscape should be designed and thought about now to limit the inevitable sonic distress as non-human sounds take over our environment. Sounds get louder as the population grows, more people on this planet means more vehicles, more voices, more jobs, more tech devices, more houses, more movement and less undisturbed natural land. Meaning there will come a point when natural soundscapes and low ambient levels become rare. 'The aim of technical development should be to serve man, to make his life more agreeable and enrich it. So logically, technical progress should lead to less noise, not more.' (Schafer 1969)

Schizophonia can be created through the mix of cultural sounds, past + present. Ancient fields and our own fields may have had a similarly low-level natural soundscape, but that soundscape has been invaded by the technological/mechanical sound category giving a new form and remixing a past soundscape. This can be achieved in music by the combination of past and present sounds. tribal instruments + digital sound effects + dark synth line + ethereal vocals + natural sound samples manipulated by technology give a dislocated sound. All individual sounds have a different context and meaning, like the new soundscape.

Creating music through the method of sampling is the art of combining noises. When sourcing samples it is noises, I am paying attention to, not the note, key, instrument, sound source or genre. Certain instruments, sounds and genres may be preferred to others when writing, this is because of the context and meaning of the possible sounds that instrument can produce. not all saxophone noises would be suitable for a relaxed sound, some are screechy and hectic. A soft female vocal with the manipulation of technology can create a harsh distorted sound. the feeling, context and effect of the sound is important when writing. schizophonia in music is achieved by taking samples from the 3 categories natural, human and technology/machine and creating a dislocated but cohesive piece (musical tones + noises). This is prominent in all music. Percussive sounds are not 'musical tones' but used creatively and combined with musical tones gives the listener 'music'. Taking sounds that aren't original from the source, manipulating them, then putting them into a new context/environment gives any sound new form. The source is never fully lost due the

relationship between the listener and detached sound, though the sound may have been manipulated and recontextualised the listener will still recognise the 'feel' of the sound providing the sound has not been heavily manipulated, giving them a link back to the original sound source and its meaning. Manipulating a sound will cause displacement by giving the listener more than one context, the soft female vocal still holds its original meaning, the listener knows, maybe subconsciously what effect the sound has on them. But when distorted the listener identifies again with another meaning. The soft vocal now has a harsh edge resulting in a juxtaposition. When balanced this effect can add texture, interest and tension to a piece.

It's not just musical tones that effect the listener. the crackle of a vinyl, before any music begins can also influence the listener in different ways. The link between the listener and this noise may be a 'nostalgic' one or that the sound quality of a record adds to the music. listening to vinyl, a constant crackle is playing, but it is not intrusive. It doesn't mask the music. like our sonic environment there is always something moving to make sound. Whether it's the hum of technology, the sound of waves, motors, birds, human. Silence isn't manageable. When noises aren't distracting or debilitating, we can focus, communicate and work within our soundscape. But with pop entertainment, tech devices and machines, sounds are becoming more intrusive. The management of sounds and making sure they sit cohesively without intrusive sounds impacting negatively on music or the environment is key.

Going forwards with my creative work I will continue to research and increase technical understanding, putting into practice the subjects surrounding 'the sonic environment' and our 'new soundscape'. Acoustic communications, soundscape studies and schizophonia will all be present and influence the art I create, the way I listen to the world and my opinions on society. When creating a piece of music, it is not just the song, but the soundscape and feeling created within the work itself that has new importance. Through my projects I will access the inner psychic soundscape, moulding it with the combination of musical tones + noises conjuring emotional response from the listener.

references

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