

practices and concert venues. Most of the large classical music organisations with whom Beardslee worked are still going strong. The trajectories and recital programmes described by Beardslee, as she jets from Tanglewood to Ravinia, Carnegie Hall to university concert halls (in towns like Chicago, Los Angeles, Wellesley and Beloit), remains much the same as the current classical performing circuit.

For those interested in the inner machinations of the creative relationships and decision-making that catalysed some of the most important classical vocal music of the post-war period, Beardslee's memoir will make for a good resource. This book (and its index and appendices) give detailed accounts of her musical preparations, and often clues to where to look for further information. It gives deep insights into some of the pieces in her repertoire and the artists with whom she worked. The descriptions of learning methodologies and composer-performer negotiations could be useful to a variety of readers. *I Sang the Unsingable* is a book about music, but just as much about people, that tells us a lot about how far we've come and how far we have yet to travel.

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Beyond Unwanted Sound: Noise Affect and Aesthetic Moralism by Marie Thompson. Bloomsbury. £23.99

In *Beyond Unwanted Sound: Noise, Affect, and Aesthetic Moralism*, musicologist and media theorist Marie Thompson takes a critical and theoretical approach to deconstructing the notion that noise is always negative, and posits an 'ethico-affective' framework for understanding noise's inherent neutrality and necessity. Thompson asserts that, 'Noise is ubiquitous. It is present in every space, every milieu. It infests every medium, modifies every sound-signal, takes part in every musical event. It is an inescapable, unavoidable, inextinguishable component of material existence' (p. 175). The book opens with a discussion of 'what noise has been', detailing several socio-political and theoretical frameworks in which noise has been considered including subject-oriented and object-oriented perspectives, noise as unnatural, and noise as loudness. In the chapters that follow, Thompson 'perturbs' a series of dualisms – noise and signal, noise and silence, and noise and music – and proposes a relational approach to understanding noise.

In Part 2, 'The parasite and its milieu: Noise, materiality, affectivity', Thompson outlines an 'ethico-affective' approach to understanding noise, which draws from philosopher Baruch Spinoza's affect theory (as interpreted by Gilles Deleuze) and Michael Serres's figure of the parasite to position noise as a node network of relationships that affects and is affected by the other nodes in the network. She states, 'rather than characterizing noise as a type of sound or a value judgment that is made of sound, I recognize noise as a perturbing force-relation that, for better or for worse, induces a change' (p. 42). Thompson critiques Bell Telephone Laboratory engineer Claude Shannon's general model of communication; although Shannon depicts noise relationally, as an inherent part in any communication system, he nonetheless considers noise a 'necessary evil' that must exist in order for communication to take place. By reading Shannon through Spinoza, Thompson demonstrates that Shannon considered the relationship between noise and signal affective.

To further explore the affective nature of the system-signal-noise relationship, Thompson introduces Serres's parasite. Like noise, the parasite is a generative force that affects relationships; it also represents a network of relationships. As a 'third term' the parasite also points to the medium/milieu, or the thing that stands between the sender and receiver in all communication. Here Thompson focuses on the material medium in which all messages must pass through. She states, 'the medium is always noisy insofar as it acts upon the signal, transforming it in some way' (p. 61). Therefore, she maintains,

noise is something other – and something more – than an extraneous thing that needs to be subtracted from an intended signal-message. Rather than being a secondary and unnecessary nuisance ... the parasitic noise is an ineradicable and constitutive element in any communication process, and of relations more broadly. (p. 62)

To demonstrate the 'noisiness' of all media, Thompson considers works by Christian Marclay, Maria Chavez and Yasunao Tone because, 'rather than bringing noise into music, [these artists] amplify, extend and foreground the noise that is always already within the techno-musical system' (p. 6).

In this chapter, Thompson frames noise as a *function*. Like the parasite, noise is as noise does; it causes change. In doing so she conflates noise, sound and medium, often to productive – but occasionally to confusing – ends, leaving the reader wondering to what extent this ethico-affect framework applies to sound in

general. In spite of this, Thompson's recognition of the inherent noise present in any medium and that media are always affective is the major contribution of this book; she makes a strong case for an understanding of noise as an essential component in all sound transmission.

Part 3, 'Acoustic ecology, aesthetic moralism and the politics of silence', consists of a critique of R. Murray Shafer's platonic ideal of silence and 'nature' as good, pure and ancient, and noise as a negative, modern, pollutant. Thompson draws from her previous application of Spinoza to propose a non-hierarchical ethics of noise that 'treats noise's "badness" – as well as silence's "goodness" – as a contingent and relational effect rather than a constitutive feature' (121). In other words, noise is not innately good or bad; rather, judgment is applied after the fact based on how the noise affected the other nodes in its network of relationships. Additionally, Thompson suggests that since noise always brings about change through affect, noise can suggest new ways of relating.

In Part 4, 'Beyond failure: Noise music, exposure and the poetics of transgression', Thompson builds on the relational, materialist framework developed in the previous two chapters to demonstrate that noise is not music's other or opposite; rather it is an inseparable, constitutive element of music. She addresses an apparent dualism between noise and music, stating: 'the ontological relationship between noise and music is understood as dynamic, historically contingent, but nonetheless mutually exclusive' (128). In this duality noise is often framed as an 'aesthetic-discursive paradox' characterized by failure (of not being music).

This chapter contains a productive critique of the grandiose narratives of noise's transgressive potentials as reductive and limiting. Largely demonstrated through a discussion of the industrial noise band Throbbing Gristle, Thompson's argument is that the transgressive act relies on the taboo remaining in place. 'The transgressive act remains tied to the prohibition it seeks to break free from ... in other words, if noise music "succeeds" as noise, maintaining its taboo status, then it fails as music' (143). Moving forward, Thompson examines the work of Luigi Russolo, Henry Cowell and Jacques Attali, in addition to the parasitic notion of noise to frame noise as 'exposure' to the novel or previously unnoticed and (re)define music as 'organized and mediated sound' (161). Here Thompson draws from Cowell's essay 'The Joys of Noise' to maintain that all sounds heard are bound to physical media for transmission,

and the material medium/milieu always affects the sound signal. Thompson quotes Cowell to conclude: 'The only hopeful course is to consider that the "noise-germ", like the bacteria of cheese, is a "good" microbe, which may provide previously hidden delights to the listen, instead of producing musical oblivion' (151). Framing noise music as exposure foregrounds and celebrates this intrinsic aspect of sound. Thompson analyses works of Merzbow, Japanese *onkyō* (Nakamura Toshimaru and Sachiko M), Hype Williams, Diamanda Galas and Nick Collins as demonstrative examples of artists whose work reveals the 'hidden delights' of noise.

Thompson's readings of musical examples are one of the great strengths of this book. In particular the case studies of noise in 'everyday life' including the discussion of 'neighbor noise', 'noise as a weapon', the use of the 'mosquito' by the Israeli Defense Force demonstrate how noise operates in all sonic encounters. With the exception of the mosquito, her examples are taken primarily from the UK; it would be interesting to see how Thompson's ethico-affective framework applies in other cultural contexts. Thompson also offered insightful readings of musical works by Diamanda Galas, Hype Williams, Marclay, Chavez and Tone. Although a diverse group of makers is showcased, each employs practices centred around indeterminacy or, to borrow George Lewis' terminology, *eurollogical* approaches. As with Thompson's examples of noise in everyday life, considering the importance placed on context and milieu, it left the reader wondering how Thompson's framework might apply to musical practices based on improvisation, or on *afrological* or other non-Western approaches to sounding. Thompson in no way promises that this book will provide an all-encompassing framework for dealing with noise; however, an ethnographic or cross-cultural approach might offer a productive way to extend this work.

Although Thompson forwards foundational ideas about noise, materiality and sound, the centrality of a rather abstract philosophical framework and regular passages of dense academic language, make it ill-suited for a general audience. *Beyond Unwanted Sound* is best suited for scholars with an interest in critical theory, continental philosophy and media theory, who will likely find Thompson's employment of Spinoza, Serres' *parasite*, and the ethico-affective approach useful.

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