
Book reviews

Martha Brech, *Analyse elektroakustischer Musik mit Hilfe von Sonogrammen*. Peter Lang, Frankfurt, 1994. 211 pp. ISBN 3-631-47427-X

When presented with titles, even abstracts of doctoral dissertations, it is often difficult to choose what to acquire for one's research given the variable quality and, in some countries, depth of these publications. Publishers or distributors who take on dissertations are involved with financial risk and price these accordingly, making those decisions even more difficult.

Peter Lang has a huge catalogue of European dissertations. Of the 438 entries under music on the publisher's website at the time of writing this review, about eight seem to fall directly within the field that *Organised Sound* represents, an alarmingly low percentage.¹ (There were more entries dealing with the combination of popular music and religion, much to my surprise.) Dissertation publishers tend to keep titles 'alive' longer than other commercial organisations, which is commendable. So, exceptionally, the book briefly discussed here is about a decade old, discovered only recently by chance in a library collection.

Despite the qualification concerning depth above, one advantage of dissertations is that they tend to concentrate on a focused subject in some detail, perhaps more than in other academic publications. Dissertation topics tend to be well contextualised and documented; that is, a dissertation normally provides a wealth of information to the reader that has been scrutinised by supervisors and examiners alike.

Brech's approach to analysis is a product of her time, favouring the argument of the primacy of the ear, that is, dealing with perception-based – aka esthetic, see Nattiez² – analysis employing a tool to support the analyses, the sonogram, at what Nattiez calls the 'neutral level'. The common poietic approach to analysis – from the point of view of the construction of the piece on the basis of a score in an appropriate form, be it a five-lined staff or computer print-out – is ignored to a large extent here, although dramatic or intention information is shared by the author. The publication includes an excellent bibliography.

¹Of these, I would most highly recommend Flo Menezes, *Luciano Berio et la Phonologie: Une approche jakobsonienne de son œuvre*, Peter Lang, Frankfurt, 1993, 278 pp. ISBN 3-631-45351-5. This book fully introduces phonology and semiotics concepts, primarily derived from Jakobson and Saussure, and applies them analytically to several of Berio's compositions (although most compositions treated, after an introduction concerning electroacoustic music, are his vocal and instrumental works). Many readers will remember that the first electronic studio in Milan was called the Studio di Fonologia Musicale.

²See J.-J. Nattiez (1990), *Music and Discourse: Toward a Semiology of Music*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Brech's research contains the best defence for the use of sonograms in electroacoustic music I've encountered thus far. Unlike examples in recent literature, as well as the early publications of Robert Cogan, where analysis seems to be based on the computer-generated image, Brech seems to suggest that the sonogram provides a useful means of confirming evidence gained through listening. What she does not emphasise is the fact that (i) sonograms demonstrate some acoustic information that the ear does not (easily) discern, and (ii) there are details that listeners can perceive that are not evident on sonograms. This is a shame as it is here where its use can be formally identified. This mild criticism aside, Brech's approach to this publication is as straightforward and logical as can be.

The book is split up into to separate sections, the first contextual, the second dealing with case studies. Each part is also divided into three chapters. Part 1 commences with a partly historical, partly contextual study of notation types relevant to electroacoustic music, ranging from production to realisation scores, spectromorphological symbols, and everything in between. After introducing the pros and cons of a variety of notation approaches, the second half summarises Cogan's foundational work concerning the sonogram and its relevance for analysis of this corpus of music. (Cogan was of course interested in a much wider variety of repertoires.) Chapter two takes a jump into the realms of reception and perception. This chapter, again rather contextual, presents a survey of knowledge from relevant disciplines contributing to reception. Readers who have studied electroacoustic music will most likely not learn terribly much here, but it is useful to students being introduced to this corpus. Chapter three brings the key concepts of the first two chapters together introducing the reception-based methodology for her analyses. Basically, this approach has three interrelated aspects: (i) a general analytical overview consisting of the following headers: time spans, layers of sound, structural segmentation, dynamics, space and tension; (ii) spectrograms; and (iii) a descriptive element which takes both elements from (i) and (ii) as well as dramatic information from the composers into account. This approach is then applied in the second part by investigating three works: *Vox 5* by Trevor Wishart, *Repulse* by Åke Parmerud, and *Ritual Melodies* by Jonathan Harvey.³ The three analyses are followed by a brief conclusion, essentially

³It is suggested that the author had analysed several other works as part of this dissertation and also possessed more images relevant to the three studies. She mentions in particular that it was a shame not to include Bernard Parmegiani's *De Natura Sonorum*, a work analysed by several others as part of a conference in music analysis in 1991.

remarks supporting her analytical approach and particular use of sonograms.

There is little use in discussing these analyses in detail. What I found to be a bit strange was the amount of descriptive detail that was needed to cover information that neither the spectrogram nor the survey information was able to cover. Furthermore, the author could not use the same overview elements in her discussion of the Parmerud piece as she did in her introduction, Wishart and Harvey analyses. She claims that this is due to the more complex treatment of sonic material; instead, she concentrated on impulse levels and general sound development. This lack of consistency seemed to demonstrate that nothing is terribly universal in electroacoustic analysis as the repertoire is so hugely diverse. A final oddity was that, for whatever reason, only a selection of sonograms was included with each analysis. Given the depth of the investigation, it would seem logical to have included a complete series of images.

These criticisms aside, the volume is one of too few studies in which an approach to electroacoustic music analysis is treated in depth with comparative case studies. My view concerning the usefulness of the spectrogram remains slightly more modest than other colleagues in the field, but this study does demonstrate how these images can be put to good use within a clearly defined methodology.

Leigh Landy

Imke Misch and Christoph von Blumröder (eds.), *François Bayle – L'image de son/Klangbilder: Technique de mon écoute/Technik meines Hörens. Series – Signale aus Köln/Musik der Zeit*, LIT Verlag, Münster, 2003. xi + 234 pp. With CD. ISBN 3-8258-7106-1

In 2000, 2001 and 2003, François Bayle paid three visits to the University of Cologne where he presented three talks combined with concerts, events that were co-funded by the Institut Français de Cologne. The talks and following discussions were transcribed and published along with the concert programmes, relevant illustrations, a significant chunk of Bayle's 1993 book, *Musique acousmatique: propositions positions*,⁴ a glossary and a full list of his works. As the reader will have discovered from the title, this bilingual volume includes a complete translation from the original French into German.

There will be some readers who, like this reviewer, have struggled to come to grips with Bayle's philosophy. He has been known to state that his theory is like poetry, which in my view means that it is open to interpretation, difficult to pin down. As someone who once acquired a science degree, the notion of a theory being open to interpretation seems oxymoronic. However, I was tipped off that if one wanted to understand Bayle's thoughts, this would be an ideal publication. I was told that through the book his ideas would be found to be accessible and interesting even if there is always an element of mystery that remains.

To be honest, the theorists at the Groupe de Recherches Musicales (GRM) in Paris, in particular its first two directors, Pierre Schaeffer and François Bayle, have never

gone out of their way to provide readers at an entry level with much clarity in their writing. This is a shame given the fact that many of their ideas are still fundamental to electroacoustic music-making today.

Bayle's biggest claims to fame in terms of terminology are his passionate plea for the use of the term 'acousmatic music' to represent works recorded on a fixed medium, including those made at the GRM, and his own term, *i-son* or *image-de-son* (sonic image). Readers with French or German are provided with extensive introductions to these terms. Acousmatic is treated historically as well as in terms of its application within the electroacoustic music field. Demonstrating the cross-disciplinary importance of the acousmatic notion, on p. 16 Bayle suggests that the first technology for semiotics was the curtain (i.e. that of Pythagoras). More importantly, as the *i-son* is of his own conception, this term and the extensive terminology that is related to it seem to have been introduced with greater clarity than I had previously seen. The concepts of Bayle are clearly rooted in the theories of Pierre Schaeffer, his predecessor at the GRM. He is not interested in perceiving cause within organised sound, but instead is interested in *l'art des son projetés*, the art of diffused or projected sound, clearly influenced by Schaeffer's notion of reduced listening. It comes as no surprise then that Bayle speaks of his *i-son* as doubly disjointed, both physically and psychologically. Bayle also investigates listening strategies, another interest of Schaeffer, by comparing extensively the *trois* or *quatre écoutes* of Barthes, Peirce (with whom Bayle agrees) and Husserl (Schaeffer's inspiration). It seems a shame that Denis Smalley's contribution to this subject is ignored here. He also introduces new terminology pairs, again as did Schaeffer in his writings, one of which I found to be of particular interest: *cohérence/écoutabilité* (coherence/appreciability). In a sense, this once cryptic theorist is demonstrating a sensitivity to access. He even describes how acousmatic composition works best when works draw strongly on what he describes as musical archetypes, a very interesting notion that might have been worked out in greater detail.

Perhaps the clarity in the volume was due to the circumstances of giving these talks to a primarily foreign public, one that may have included non-specialists, or to the fact that Bayle is currently better able to articulate his thoughts developed over the decades; what is important here is that my friend provided me with a very useful tip. Whatever the reason, it is a welcome addition to his writings. He comes across as more interested in being understood and equally willing to illustrate concepts with sound examples, some of which are provided to the reader on the enclosed audio CD.

Leigh Landy

Simon Emmerson (ed.), *Music, Electronic Media and Culture*. Ashgate, Aldershot, 2000. ISBN 0-7546-0109-9 (hardback)

In the restored New Synagogue in Oranienburger Strasse in Berlin, there is at this moment an exhibition, *Pioneers in Celluloid: Jews in the early world of the cinema*, which chronicles the beginnings of the film industry in Europe. This is a stunning exhibition, in both design and content,

⁴INA-GRM/Buchet/Chastel, Paris.

combining documents, photos and film clips from a huge array of archives. It deals with all aspects of the medium, from cameras and lighting to music, scenery and screen-plays, and is a fitting counterpart to the huge Berlin Film Festival currently underway. Yet amid all this detailed documentation, the most striking and enduring impression remains the sheer *look* of the people captured in the many film clips. In these silent images we see scenes of expressionist drama, scenes of everyday life captured as documentary moments, dramatic reconstructions of historical events, spectacular fantasies, and in all of them the *aspect* of the actors; their eyes, body language, gestures and facial expressions, their whole demeanour bespeaks the often unrecognisable strangeness of a world radically different to our own. It is a world whose wholly naïve approach to this mirror of *technology* is evident in every pore. These are people just discovering the nature of the entrapment of their world on film, and often their fascinated, gawping astonishment is all too evident. The artifice of their acting is clearly not the artifice of the seasoned film actor. Above all, this lack of experience is characterised by *excess* and *energy*; by a multiplicity of signification which swamps the medium, packing the frames and rendering them quite exhausting to view.

This is of course a fascinating comparison with the film imagery of our own time, on show just up the street, and it forces on us a consideration of the nature of technology and its effect on its users, and on the cultures they construct. Of course, the technologies capable of recording and transmitting sound are roughly contemporaneous with those for recording moving images, and they share some technical innovators (Thomas Edison, of course) as well as some conceptual apparatus. Thus considerations of the film and the filmic have occupied many commentators on recorded sound, just as sound and its structures have fascinated many film-makers (Sergei Eisenstein being only the most obvious example). The cultural impact of the sound recorder has been no less profound than that of the film camera, and these twin impacts have now been superseded by their merging in the digital domain of the information age. The cultural ramifications of this permeate all our lives, and it is this situation which Simon Emmerson and his collaborators attempt to address in *Music, Electronic Media and Culture*.

Though the book turns out to be rather less engaging than the exhibition, it nevertheless turns to the task with nine varied chapters which grapple with most of the crucial themes: the nature and context of electronic sound recording and reproduction, the effect of this technology on its users and on their cultural and imaginative worlds including the realms of *music*, the possible extensions and developments of the technology, and of course, in this *postmodern* era, the nature of the discourses and language games which surround and enshrine the technology and its artefacts.

There is no doubt that this is a particular moment in the history of *music*, where the electronic media and their cultural effects are making a huge impact. We are already past the stage of our cinematic forebears in our understanding of the new media, yet there is still a heady mix of prefigured skill and naïve wonderment in the air, coupled with a huge sense of puzzlement at the ways in which things are changing. The sheer speed with which quite fundamental aspects of our cultural landscape are being challenged

by new practices and discourses is both exhilarating and confusing. Of course, discussion and theorising both have a crucial role to play in these developments, and so books like this one are to be welcomed. But the discourse is a problematic one, in a number of ways. The old distinctions between genres of thought and practice are disintegrating, and with them their constituencies of expert practitioners and enthusiasts. Simultaneously the number of people actually concerned by these ideas has increased dramatically as boundaries between the expert and the everyday have broken down. This situation makes it hard for an author to know what is the target audience; whom to address? Thus one of the problems of this book, on top of the obvious limitations of some of the writing, is its extremely heterogeneous tone, often at once too simplistic and too specific quite to fit an obvious social target: composers? musicologists? cultural theorists? digital artists? undergraduate students? bedtime readers?

Yet curiously the book is at its best when considering precisely this issue itself. Thus Simon Waters' gripping and lucid discussion of the current cultural contexts of music ('Beyond the acousmatic: hybrid tendencies in electroacoustic music') has much to offer everyone, quite beyond the explicit references of the title. His account of the *postmodern* cultural shifts, the loss of faith in *grand narratives* and the primacy of *data* in all its representations, does not just rehearse Lyotard, Attali and the rest, but introduces, along with some other original and useful concepts and metaphors, the sobering and usually avoided dimension of economics. Money, of course, is a powerful force in culture, as Virginia Nicholson's recent book, *Among the Bohemians: Experiments in Living 1900–1939* (Penguin Books, 2003) documents with devastating clarity. The fact that it is so often omitted in discussions of *new media* (unless as an incitement to the exploration of the lo-tech alternative) is evidence only of a blindness which frequently threatens the whole intellectual and technical enterprise, and renders many serious issues (like the change in attitude to the *creator*) unapproachable. Similarly, the representation of the history of music as a stopped-up bath serves to recuperate notions of inefficiency and forgetting which, Waters argues, are crucial but systematically neglected elements in the ecology of the new world of *data*, *information* and *sampling*. Ecology is a good metaphor for the interdependence of the concepts, practices, power relationships, materials and discourses of legitimation that surface in and around *sonic art*, and Waters takes care with the detail and integrity of his discussion. Like all good discussions, this one is both illuminating and emboldening.

Ecology is also the principal focus for Luke Windsor ('Through and around the acousmatic: the interpretation of electroacoustic sounds'), in his attempt to explore the *acousmatic* theories of Pierre Schaeffer: those psychological, acoustical and phenomenological issues surrounding the way we perceive sounds that come out of loudspeakers. This is clearly a crucial topic in any discussion of electroacoustic music, or indeed of sound and new technologies, and Emmerson rightly emphasises it by placing the chapter right at the start of the book. Windsor's initial insight, that ecological notions of *environment* and *affordance* provide a useful way into a discussion of electroacoustic music, and sound in general, is a good one. His account of these ideas

is clear and well referenced, and the prospect for their contributing something exciting and useful to the notion of the *acousmatic* seems good. However, Windsor's discussion is hampered throughout by its assumption that the reader is already familiar with the writings of Pierre Schaeffer. This is a pity, as the lack of substantive reference to Schaeffer's work often makes it hard to sort out just what Windsor is getting at, and the concentration of the discussion on positivist, materialist theories of perception begins to have some unfortunate consequences. Thus Gaver's assertions that

Most musical sounds are harmonic; most everyday sounds inharmonic or noisy . . . Musical sounds seem to reveal little about their sources; while everyday sounds often provide a great deal of information about theirs. (Gaver, W. 1993. What in the world do we hear? An ecological approach to auditory event perception. In *Ecological Psychology* 5(1), quoted p. 9)

not only pass without comment, but actually form the starting point for a discussion of the perception of electroacoustic music which bypasses basic psychological issues like *attention* and *context*, as well as, more crucially, notions of metaphor and imagination. This rather appears to avoid engaging with some of the central issues in Schaeffer's thinking, as well as failing to capitalise on the real insights of Windsor's own line of argument. It also makes Windsor's final remarks about aesthetics rather pallid, since the concentration on the denotative aspects of sound at the expense of their metaphorical powers effectively removes them from the crucial play of signification which renders them true 'language particles' (cf. Lyotard, J-F. *The Postmodern Condition*. Manchester University Press, 1986, p. xxiv). In the absence of Schaeffer's own thoughts within the text, even the rhetorical force of Windsor's argument, if indeed there is one, is hardly apparent.

More clearly rhetorical is Simon Emmerson's contribution, one of two in this volume, on the *acousmatic* notion of *indicative fields* ("Losing touch?": the human performer and electronics'). This follows Windsor, to some extent, in attempting to give a theoretical account of the ways in which we decode the meanings of sound, taking Denis Smalley's idea of *indicative fields* as a starting point. Here the approach is more musicological than scientific, though it follows a scientific paradigm in setting up categories and oppositions of descriptors (or *fields*) for our experience of sound. Emmerson's account of Smalley's theory is clear and well documented, and though it is not immediately apparent that such an anecdotal effort of categorisation has much new to offer, it is clearly in the Schaefferian mould, eschewing any attempts at verification by reference to psychological or physiological information. It seems odd that what is really an account of the play of metaphor should get itself dressed up in such positivist colours, and that it should ignore all the attempts of Derrida, Lyotard and others to address anew the issues of signification. But Emmerson makes his own attempt to legitimate Smalley's theory with reference to the work of Braithwaite and his account of the perceptual learning process as the result of 'regular concomitances' in phenomena. This is quite a powerful idea, and it allows Emmerson to generally champion the cause, while extending the theory to include *ideas* and *technology* itself as possible indicative fields. But there is a slightly paranoid sense

of protesting too much here, as there often is in discussions of electroacoustic music. It surfaces most clearly in Emmerson's final section, where he protests that the human is not (or *should not be*) entirely absent from the machinic emanations of the new media, as if electroacoustic music and other sound arts already stood so charged. As Alexei Monroe puts it, in a recent article, and rather differently:

Aesthetic warmth is infinitely saleable and therefore corporate: available to form part of the superficially non-threatening and seductive soundtrack of what an American agit-rap group termed 'friendly fascism' (Consolidated: Network Records NET-033. 1991). It is in this light that we should judge demands for machine music to be more funky, warm or accessible . . .' (Monroe, A. Ice on the Circuits/Coldness as Crisis. In *Contemporary Music Review* 22(4). Routledge, 2003)

Continuing the theme of the human and the machinic, Kersten Glandien's chapter on the radio ('Art on air: a profile of new radio art'), provides a fascinating, historical account of the changing attitudes and hybrid approaches engendered by this medium of mass-communication. There is a real feeling here of the energy and excess of imagination that seems to characterise the start of a new technology, so evident in the early films. In the process of discussing these attempts to grapple with the formation of a radio praxis, Glandien also uncovers much about the *acousmatic*; as the way in which technologies of recording and broadcasting isolate sound from one set of contexts and radically recontextualise it as the output of the radio set. In fact, although much of this book is concerned in one way or another with discussion of Schaeffer's *acousmatic* and its ramifications, it is Glandien who comes closest to providing some sensible and coherent thoughts on the matter. Of course the coiner of the term and its first theorist, Pierre Schaeffer, worked in radio, and in this context the sometimes arcane and improbable notions which arise in discussions of his work get grounded in more sophisticated, real-world necessities. As Glandien points out, radio art is by nature hybrid and democratised, and consequently free from the sorts of vested interests which hobble discussions of *music* per se. At the same time, the power of the *acousmatic* metaphor to tell us important things about our current culture and its modes of mediation, seems to point ever more clearly to the need for some proper dissemination of Schaeffer's original, ground-breaking work; particularly an English-language edition of the *Traité des objets musicaux*. This, one feels, would at least open up many of the discussions around sound-art to a more informed and critical scrutiny.

Still, for Glandien, radio seems to be a technology whose effect is largely social and gravitational, pulling around itself a disparate array of sound events, shaped largely by the still evolving nature of the technology itself; once analogue, now digital. In an era where, despite the seeming hegemony of the Internet, it is localised, community-based radio networks which are challenging the media empires of Berlusconi and Murdoch, and where both in the UK and Germany the boundaries of the medium are being pushed to include local network access to the Worldwide Web (cf. www.c-base.org); the technical and conceptual powers of radio have never seemed more appealing.

The other chapters of this volume, though rather uneven in content and quality, do cover an impressive array of related topics, from the copyright issues of the information

age, as brought to a head by John Oswald's notorious CD *Plunderphonic* (Chris Cutler, 'Plunderphonics'), to an account of the noise aesthetic of Punk (Robert Worby, 'Cacophony') and the effect of the new media on the old boundaries between cultures (Simon Emmerson, 'Crossing cultural boundaries through technology?'). Ambrose Field ('Simulation and reality: the new sonic objects') and Katherine Norman ('Stepping outside for a moment: narrative space in two works for sound alone') contribute chapters more centrally concerned with electroacoustic music, and the whole, neatly edited into three main sections comprising three chapters each, has a compendious feel to it. The notes and references throughout are exemplary, and there are some other real gems: Chris Cutler's account of the organisation and technology behind a rap recording session being the most illuminating. Ashgate, as always, have produced a high quality book, but somehow the feeling of

excitement is muted, and this is not really attributable to postmodern *ennui*.

There is no questioning the importance of the issues tackled here. The loudspeaker, which Emerson in his introduction places at the heart of the contemporary experience of music, is already repositioning itself as the earpiece of the iPod, the output of the laptop and the video game, or the Dolby surround-sound of cable, satellite and DVD home cinema systems. The capacity of technological developments to outstrip our ability to theorise or contextualise them is already enshrined in cliché. And as Deleuze, Lyotard and others have pointed out, we require a new *type* of theorising to deal with this situation; the prevailing language games have also changed.

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