

Maksymilian Kapelański

Montreal Examples of Creative, Scholarly, Collective, and Psychological Varieties of Cultural Consciousness in the Perspective of Soundscape Studies

Special issue, *Muzyka* 1 (2014): 149-164.

Summary

Cultural varieties of consciousness in the sphere of soundscape exist on various social, professional, and individual levels. The author bears witness to such examples in connection to his place of residence: Montreal.

1. From the Grande noirceur to the Revolution tranquille in the Collective Consciousness of Quebec

The period of the nationalist provincial government of Maurice Duplessis that ended in 1959 is often, although somewhat controversially referred to as the Great Darkness and called upon the values of law and honour, anti-communist and anti-union sentiment, as well as the church administration of social services. The subsequent Quiet Revolution of the 1960s introduced public education, healthcare, social services, and grand projects in the city.

The sounds of the first period presently exist in a kind of closed 'time capsule' that is seldom remembered and listened to with certain unease. Among them, the sounds of religious holiday processions, monotonous collective prayers, strict education in Latin and human sounds of group hospital rooms, which are today relegated to the National Film Board, considered intellectual. There was a stronger preponderance of joul (French language sociolect) with a variety of religious profanities, which along with the 'funny' inflection of the hockey commentator created a bridge between the two periods.

2. The Consciousness of Two Authors: R. Murray Schafer's Wide Scope and Glenn Gould's Introspection

Changes in Quebec issue in part from transformations in America and the world. Quebec's impressive projects of the 1960s have a distant counterpart in the grand, quasi-religious anthropological structuralism and the wide scope of authors such as Marshall McLuhan and R. Murray Schafer. In turn, Glenn Gould stressed the introverted and quiet, but still religious qualities which characterized Toronto. The rivaling cities of Montreal (Catholic and exuberant) and Glenn Gould's Toronto (Protestant and reserved), differ sonically.

3. The Search for a Scholarly Consciousness in Soundscape and Sound Studies

R. Murray Schafer's soundscape studies and the recently developed sound studies constitute rich material in search of a collective scholarly consciousness. The main challenges stem from the musicologist's fear of identity (or 'scholarly ego') dissolution in

'nebulous' cultural studies, qualitative methods that dissolve the concrete, and an object of study dissolving into the soundscape. An example is the late acceptance of Russolo's experiments and Cage's 4'33", specially feared for its Buddhist post-humanism, as serious objects of analyses.

Montreal's Concordia University approach to the problem is a loosely structured study current relying on the expertise and communication of various faculty members, resulting in a contemporary, 'virtual' environment with proven results in research.

4. Toward a Psychoanalytic Interpretation of Soundscape Consciousness.

Extending currently existing psychoanalytic interpretations to soundscape experiences is desirable, at least on a metaphoric level. Schafer proposed the term 'schizophonia' for electroacoustic reproduction, but the fundamental split could actually be said to occur in the 'cultural consciousness', where problematic sounds are 'suppressed', to arise as symptoms of stress. The soundscape scholar as a 'cultural psychoanalyst' may introduce techniques for 'reality testing': a function normally aberrant in illness, but useful for purposes of integration.

The Listener's Voice. Early Radio and the American Public (2011), a book by Elena Razlogova, a Concordia University faculty member, is a type of cultural 'reality testing'. The author outlines radio's development from its rough, individualistic attempts to smooth, corporate control. The simple, sincere, often angry voice of the listener anchors us in real experience and is at odds with institutional silence.

Note on Methodology

The four sketches are intertwined in an evolutionary discourse that keeps returning to previous material while introducing new ideas. The organic associations are themselves reminiscent of a psychoanalytic session. Free association, dreaming, emotional testimony, and the personal voice promise new achievements in sound studies, with qualities reminiscent of sound itself.