The Concept of Soundscape and Music Education in Japan

Re-examining the Imposition of European Musical Epistemology

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[Ed Note: In Japan a large variety of soundscape activities have been developed within many fields such as environmental education, social education, and so on, which most recently also includes music education. The following article focuses mostly on the latter, music education.]

Michel Foucault (1966) says, "if we study thought as an archaeologist studies buried cities, we can see that Man was born yesterday, and that he soon may die," (Reader, 1987: p. 7). Foucault clarifies that the Western people in the twentieth century are still "the prisoner of a determined system" (Ardagh, 1980: p. 538) of the nineteenth century, bourgeois-humanist. Postmodernism in art was begun as an antithesis to a preconceived idea of Western art including its aesthetics in the twentieth century. This movement proposes several goals, as follows: a) anti-human-centrism, b) anti-Euro-centrism, b) anti-ethno-centrism, and anti-logo-centrism, to develop a new definition of art. Traditional Western music education based on Platonic ethos and Aristotelian mimesis has also exerted great influence on Japanese music education. Today there is an urgent need to bring contemporary discourses to the clinic of Japanese music education.

In this article, I describe new types of music education in Japan to contribute to that discourse. The initial idea was carried out during a workshop in the "Exploratorium Exhibition," at the Science and Technology Hall in Tokyo, sponsored by Science and Technology Hall, Sony Education Encouragement Foundation and Asahi Newspaper Publishing Co. It was held in August and September 1989. The workshop was based on the concept of *soundscape* as evolved by the Canadian composer R. Murray Schafer in the early seventies at Simon Fraser University in Burnaby, Canada.

I. The Workshop "Sound Orientation"

The original "Exploratorium" is a science museum in San Francisco that offers visitors "participatory style". That is to say, all visitors are allowed to interact with the exhibits. (This was the model utilized in the Tokyo Technology Hall.)

The purpose of one workshop, "Sound Orientation", in which I worked as an instructor, was to study "sound" from a variety of aspects. One such way was to examine the kinds of sounds existing around participants and how they are interrelated. It was a comparison of just how "music" and "noise" differ from one another, or to become aware of how similar they can be. The workshop was also designed to encourage participants to examine traditional *Japanese* aural sensibilities through the activities of re-discovering daily sounds that are heard in city spaces. The outline of the workshop, "Sound Orientation" is as follows:

1) The participants listened to a recording of *Fantasie for Horns,* composed by the Canadian composer Hildegard Westerkamp. *Fantasie for Horns* is constructed from a variety of foghorns found in Vancouver. I wanted the participants to understand music composed without using any conventional *musical* instrumentation.

2) The participants listened to all the sounds in the room for one minute, and then answered questions about the kinds of sounds they heard.

3) Participants were divided into a couple of groups, each with an adult guide. They then left the workshop and searched the entire Exploratorium for the most interesting sound, for them individually, and then they recorded that sound on tape, to be compared later with what others had heard.

4) The participants also listened to a live performance of the voice of soprano Kano Shibata, essentially in the context of Western music, with my accompaniment from a synthesizer, of a small, improvisatory-like piece that I had composed for the workshop, utilizing a twelve note scale. Then, they listened to my own tape music work: *Spirit Sings.* It is a work in which environmental sounds and a soprano were collaged. I wanted the participants to experience a work in which there was a mixture of music and environmental sound (noise).

5) I composed some works using a soprano, synthesizer and sounds, that were previously taped by the participants. That is to say, I collaged audio sources in order to teach the participants how they could easily compose by themselves.

I believe that we cannot perform any music without first paying attention and carefully listening to the various sounds. For a long time, music education has emphasized *playing* musical instruments and *singing* songs. However, it is my view that we should pay more attention to *listening* activities rather than performing activities. A receptiveness to music as sound should become a principle aspect of music education. Such a workshop could lead to more detailed plans and further an educational movement based on the concepts of *soundscape.*

II. The Tokyo Soundscape Project

We listen in different ways to different things. This is a very important aspect for the concept of *soundscape*. Soundscape is an idea of perceiving various sounds—from the sounds of nature on Earth to the artificial sounds found in cities, or "music"—as total "scenery." Soundscape is a method of research that not only conceives of sounds as physical vibration, but is concerned with the defined quality of sounds people are hearing, and what their intrinsic *values* are in relation to such particular qualities.

With a Toyota Foundation Research Grant, I did co-operative research of the Tokyo soundscape from 1986 to 1988. Specifically, we attempted to decode the Tokyo soundscape using an "Interview Survey" (interviewing people in the surveying areas about their values).

One example are the values concerning the sound of the bells at Nicoli Temple, a Russian Orthodox Church Temple, from people in the town of Kanda, in Tokyo. This is a daily sound that people hear in Kanda. We collected a variety of expressed values concerning Nicoli Temple from informants. This is an example of one such listening activity.

Question:
"Explain in words your impressions of the sound of the bells."

Answers:
"I wish you every happiness."
"It was a signal of evening in my childhood."
"I don't like it, because it reminds me of when I was poor."
"I wish to marry as soon as possible."
"It is not noisy. I have very fond memories of it."
(Imada, 1991: pp. 214-215)

This survey represents a basic stage in soundscape research and it is presumably hard to understand the relationship between this interview and art. However, performing art in the twentieth century should allow for discovering other means of evaluating the *art experience* in everyday life. One way might be to make it possible to understand such an *interview* as art.

Currently, the sound of bells at Nicoli Temple cannot be heard every morning and evening because of several exterior (*political*) reasons (e.g., sound pollution). People can listen to them once a week for a Sunday service only. However, when we did our interview, several local senior citizens said, "I am experiencing listening to the bells every morning and evening." Afterwards we let them know about the current situation, and then they said, "Oh my goodness, I didn't remember that. I really believed I was still hearing them twice per day." This experience is a kind of "communal auditory hallucination." I believe that the Japanese people still listen to environmental sounds as a *total* soundscape rather than as each single sound. Moreover, this project is closely related to my concepts of music education, as I outlined above from the workshops at the Exploratorium.

Murray Schafer and I published a book titled *A Little Sound Education* (Tokyo: Shunjusha, 1996). We believe that the concept of soundscape has a possibility of being a natural cultural exchange not only between the East and West. We tried to release music from the Western modern thought patterns such as *logo-centrism*, *metaphysics* and *rationalism* to those of a chaotic physical acoustic space. Such an exchange of verbal or aural messages is an important aspect in the concept of soundscape.

There are a multitude of sounds in nature. Humans often use sound to give someone a message. Since the history of the human race began, we have partially used sounds like animals. Animals cry to tell their companions of danger. Sound evolved as a means of human communication. We can often guess meanings through vocal sounds. When we say "you," we can express many messages, (e.g., love or anger) through intonation and rhythm. In fact, voice sounds can potentially convey more information than the written word. We can sense the state of human minds and feelings by intonations and rhythms. As applies to a single word, we need to understand grammar to enable us to properly use it. That is to say, the grammar is applied to phrases and sentences rather than single words to form meaning. However, we can use vocal sounds without understanding the grammar. A baby can express many feelings using only voice sound, its intonation, intensity and rhythm. "The cry of the baby is an unmistakable acoustical signal to the mother about its current needs; the loudness and high frequency characteristics of the cry ensure that the message gets through. Abnormalities in the *cry* have been shown to reveal internal problems that may not have been diagnosed by other means (Oswald & Peltzman, 1974)," (Truax, 1984, p. 30). These elements (intonation, intensity and rhythm of sound) are a baby's first signals.

Such ingredients have developed as essential components of music. We use instruments as tools to make sounds. The origin of "trombone" is the Greek trombos which means a conch shell. The origins of the oboe and clarinet are in the reed pipe. In the case of the horn, it means just the horn of an animal. The origin of the violin is a bow. That is to say, modern musical instruments originate from our earthly materials.

We say, utau for "sing" in Japanese. The origin of this word is uttaeru or uchiau. Uttaeru is equivalent to the English "complain" or "explain," and uchiau is "interaction." In other words, uttaeru means performers, and uchiau means close to the audience. People sang to explain or to *communicate* with a god in ancient Japan.

I've learned that musicology, as a particular *Western* academic field, has advanced music as a fine art (i.e. classical music), and musicologists discriminated against certain musical forms that were more based upon mundane, daily life activities (e.g., folk music). Musicological distinction is not always clear. For example, the minuet originated as a functional musical form to accompany a particular dance ritual, but later changed to a more sophisticated musical *style*. As fine art, it became known as the "Minuet," part of the classical symphony. These two kinds of music, folk music and classical music, interacted with each other; as a result, a variety of musical cultures were created in each era.

Daily life is filled with many sounds, but people are often unaware of the existence of sound when it is so deeply integrated into that life. If you are in a soundproof chamber where you can hear nothing, you will be attacked by an inexplicable disquiet. You hear sounds from inside your body, (e.g., heart beating, stomach sounds, swallowing, cracking of bones and ringing in the ears) whereas you are usually unaware of the existence of these sounds. Thereafter, you will probably want to go where such sounds are balanced more within typical daily settings. Normally, whenever you hear your heart beating strongly, your health condition is probably not so good. That is to say, sounds play an important part in our lives like a kind of radar.

There are no answers that music teachers can give academic marks for to the questions raised in *A Little Sound Education*. The American composer John Cage (1972) suggested a similar comment as Schafer's concept: "What interests me far more than anything that happens is the fact of how it would be if nothing were happening. Now I want the things that happen to not erase the spirit that is already there without anything happening. Now this thing that I mean when I say not anything is happening is what I call silence, that is to say a state of affairs free of intention, because we always have sounds, for instance." With regard to Schafer's concept of soundscape , I believe that "silence" is also the most important word.

Final Thought

European music is autonomous, based on metaphysics from the nineteenth century that has been believed and taken for granted for at least a century (Said, 1991, xvi). Many music teachers in Japan have focused on interpreting such musical value of what some call the "aesthetic experience" and have complete blind faith in the "power and glory" of Western music.

Osamu Nishida (2001, p. 90) on this subject writes:

> In the 1980s, *environmental sounds* had already been used for music classrooms in Japan. Yoshio Hoshino (1993) was one of the most important figures in terms of creative music education in Japan. However, many music teachers misunderstood what Hoshino really intended to do. "Creative" music education has not yet been assimilated into Japanese music education. The principle thought of Japanese music education is still deeply involved with superficial Western music practices, and research for a re-examination of the historical influence from the West upon Japanese music education has just recently started.

My attention is more focused on philosophical changes rather than on aural consciousness. We Japanese music teachers need an exteriority, something not reliant upon European logo-centrism. The concept of soundscape is definitely playing an important role in this regard.

The concept of metaphysics, however, has been de-constructed by structuralist and post-structuralist theories proposed by such thinkers as J. Derrida, M. Foucault, J. Baudrillard and R. Barthes in the twentieth century. Parallels can be observed between modern language theory and some twentieth century musical practices. Western classical music simultaneously entered a period where familiar sonic practices like melody and harmony have been abandoned. In the twentieth century, one can find similar post-structuralist views on music and music education. The concept of soundscape is certainly one example.

Semiotics by Barthes extends Saussurian linguistic theory to analyze socio-cultural phenomena as the structure of meaning. Semiotics assumes that language is not merely a tool for communication but also for creating any other communicative apparatus including music, advertising, foods, material objects, clothes and so on.

What I believe is important for today's music education is to discover how one can reach the stage in which *critical listening* can be taught. A philosophical intensity in the concept of soundscape is required to make it useful as an exterior tool for the analysis of what is actually happening in a contemporary social context. It is my opinion that the concept of soundscape should be more deeply involved in both structuralism and post-structuralism, which take into consideration a) cultural studies, b) post-colonial studies, and c) gender studies for music education. Otherwise I think that the concept of soundscape will become absorbed by the established educational system as a *safe* and a *manageable* tool in the long run. In order to clarify the issues outlined here, a critical analysis of the concept of soundscape , with reference to structuralism and post-structuralism is urgently needed to make a space in music education that incorporates the notion of sound as a cultural phenomenon.

Regarding acoustic ecology: as Schafer says, the home territory of soundscape studies will be the middle ground between science, society and the arts. From that I am simply taking "soundscape" as my working concept. How can we possibly differentiate method and practice clearly, (acoustic ecology and soundscape)? Therefore, I presume parallels can be observed between "structuralist/poststructuralist" theories and the concept of soundscape.

In the 1980s, when the concept of soundscape was first introduced in Japanese classrooms, it probably made an impact on music teachers as an external perspective, particularly those who had problems relating to literacy and technique. Teachers were surely sceptical of their achievements with one or two hours of work a week. However, if they were to maintain the practice of soundscape as a substitution for the teaching of European harmony and solfege, sooner or later a severe problem would make itself apparent: namely, a kind of nostalgic and ecological precept derived from European and North American perspectives. I think that any external perspective is neither universal nor neutral but very much cultural, historical and contextual.

The imposition of European musical epistemology on Japan has continued for over one hundred years. *Soundscape* is useful as a concept in Japanese music education, in that it can show us how to simply listen to sounds critically and socio-culturally. Simultaneously, this concept should also be re-examined by post-colonial theory, based on post-structuralism, to avoid being utilized by any invisible political power.

Upon the integration, in Japanese music education, of this "sound revealing process" through the concepts of soundscape and post-structuralism, Japanese music teachers should probably start creating their own methodology (rather than acoustic ecology) as another exteriority. That would go beyond only a simple adaptation of Derrida's or Schafer's concepts, as the West views sounds and cultures. This is my point, and it is one which has never been made in Japanese music education.

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