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Essay: Schizophonia, phobia and the radio.

Introduction

Schizophonia is a term coined by R. Murray Schafer, in his book *The Soundscape* he describes it as the following:

The Greek prefix schizo means split, separated, and phone is Greek for voice. Schizophonia refers to the split between an original sound and its electroacoustical transmission or reproduction. It is another twentieth-century development.

Looking at this quotation one could argue that schizophonia can be seen as a term used for a phenomenon that happens everyday in modern life, however there are moments when the schizophonic voice causes a form of disorder in the mind of the person hearing the electroacoustical sound. This disturbance can cause irritation, confusion or fear, yet we don't experience this disturbance every time we hear recorded material. In this essay I will look at what separates in perceiving an electroacoustical sound and one that causes a schizophonic disturbance. Is this disturbance inherent to the type of recording or transmission?

The Lo-fi problem

Schizophonia was never meant to be a term that simply states the separation of sound and origin, it was meant to provoke a sense of drama. Murray Schafer states the following:

I coined the term schizophonia in *The New Soundscape* intending it to be a nervous word. Related to schizophrenia, I wanted it to convey the same sense of aberration and drama. Indeed, the overkill of hi-fi gadgetry not only contributes generously to the lo-fi problem but it creates a synthetic soundscape in which natural sounds are becoming increasingly unnatural while machine-made substitutes are providing the operative signals directing modern life.

Murray Schafer intended the word schizophonic as an attempt to shed negative light on radio and its sound quality. By lo-fi he means, less quality than natural sounds, so any mechanically reproduced sound is lo-fi by his criteria.

Schizophonia and the radio from beyond the grave

Those who live, live off the dead. Our deepening collective **schizophonic** disorder is rooted in the electronic severance of the voice from the body, what the Tarahumaras of Mexico call the spittle of the grater, the smut of toothless coal. The circularity of cutting into/casting out radiobodies gives radio performance an inescapable post-mortem quality; man is sick because he is poorly made. Each radio transmission embraces the post-mortem recollection of beings that have been physically dispersed across multiple generations of media abstraction. We must decide to strip him bare in order to scratch out this animalcule that makes him itch to death. There is no reason to be squeamish about autopsies when the possibilities for stitching together new and highly charged radio-bodies are so enticing, their future so full of promise!

Questions:

What makes it that we experience a schizophrenic disturbance instead of just hearing a human voice via electrical means?

Possible causes of schizophrenic disturbance:

Fear of losing original sounds, fear of losing origins

mechanical reproduction of voice and the schizophrenic effect.

Is the lo-fi problem and the feeling of schizophrenic disorder related?

How does the schizophrenic affect and the Utopian desire that is radio relate?

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