Aestheticization of Everyday Sound

The development of sound art is closely associated with a “musicalization” [1] of everyday sound in the 20th century. This process is also at work in the installation 24/7, which merely replays the sounds of the environment. The installation provides the listener with not so much a pre-defined musical form as an instrument to perform on. Once listeners overcome any expectation of instant gratification by music they might have come to associate with headphone listening, the absence of any pre-produced sounds challenges them to simultaneously adopt a perceiving and a performing attitude.

Everyday Rhythm

The sound artist arguably functions as a “rhythmanalist” in Henri Lefebvre’s sense, equipped with an “attentive ear” and “capable of listening to a tea house, a street, a town as one listens to a symphony, an opera” [2]. Like many other works of sound art, 24/7 echoes the polyrhythms of everyday life as they manifest themselves in the sound environment.

The layout of 24/7 invites visitors to first pick up the pair of headphones featuring the shortest delay of 2 seconds. At this time scale, any audible action on behalf of the visitor is experienced as an immediate echo. Visitors frequently try to challenge each other’s perceptions by performing sounds in the immediate proximity of the microphones while one person wears the headphones.

Delays of a few minutes yield a different reaction. Listeners who have already spent some time in the gallery will be confronted with an acoustic mirror, but this time one that cannot immediately be addressed through performative action.

At delay times of several hours, the experience shifts from soundmaking toward listening. Visitors listen to sound from a point in time that probably occurred before their visit to the gallery, which even might have been closed at the time. Sounds from the street outside have greater significance, and any voices heard are likely those of strangers. Listeners now start to engage with the installation on a different level. One listener in Belfast recited some poetry to the dummy head for future audiences to enjoy.

Sound material resulting from a week earlier, although temporally more distant, would probably be more familiar to the listener, because the existent time of day would match that of the recording. Some visitors from the Belfast opening night returned to the gallery a week later to revisit their experience.

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References


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