
Ephémérité, fragilité, émotions, pouvoir. La mise en scène du corps politique dans l’histoire de la minute de silence

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Résumé

While historians have studied silence in fields as diverse as religion, politics, music, theatre, communication, or science and technology, it has – astonishingly – been widely neglected within the recently flourishing *sound history*. And yet, a sound history of silence, conceiving of silence not as a negative, abstract phenomenon, but as a full-fledged sound object or acoustical practice, would not only fill a lacuna, but provide a highly fruitful challenge to some cherished soundhistorical assumptions.

So, while *soundscape studies* tend to neglect the culturally and historically changing perception of sounds, their critics often reduce sound history to a cultural history of listening. To overcome this lopsidedness, Daniel Morat has recently proposed the term ‘Klanghandeln’, aimed at ‘methodically enlarging sound history and opening it for questions of historical performativity’ (Morat, 2014). In order to further elaborate on this concept, I propose that sound historians turn to the historical and cultural agency inherent to both the perception *and* the production of *silence* – this unique sound that we cannot listen to without at the same time also producing it.

Drawing upon case studies from the history of the minute’s silence, my contribution centers two aspects of *silent Klanghandeln*, namely the peculiar constellation of fragility and power in political silences, and the complex set of practices involved in the performance of silence.

The minute’s silence can be understood as an acoustical staging of an ‘imagined community’ (Anderson) – or a ‘sounded community’. While any political staging is susceptible to interference or even failure, this fragility is accentuated with acoustical stagings – and even more so, with silent ones. And yet, does the fragility of *faire silence* not also account for its possibly powerful political effects?

Still, the fascination with and the power of silence must not be taken for granted, but rather depend on the participants’ bodily engagement with a highly complex set of manifold practices: These encompass sound practices providing for the acoustical framework (comprised of instrumental pieces, vocal songs, chorals, or hymns, and acoustical signals from buglers, maroons, or church bells), as well as the moment of silence itself, which consists of sounds ranging from breathing, feet shuffling or children’s crying to the constant humming noise of the city. But the fabric of silence is also made of other practices: bodily movements

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