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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(physiological, kinesthetic, emotional, cognitive), discursive contexts and interpretations, logistics, or media processes.

I argue that the successful or failed performance of silence heavily depends on the interplay of these practices, and I will make this evident by presenting some of my case studies from the early history of the minute's silence in Britain and France, centering the interaction between acoustical and emotional practices, and the 'coping strategies' of silence: emotional practices overcoming acoustical disturbances, or acoustical practices silencing the lack of emotional coherence.

Reference

Morat, Daniel. 2014. "Der Sound der Heimatfront: Klanghandeln im Berlin des Ersten Weltkriegs", *Historische Anthropologie*, vol. 22 no 3, p. 351–352.

Biographical note

Karsten Lichau studied Education Sciences in Berlin and Paris. He mainly works on cultural history, historical anthropology, and the history of science, with primary research interests in the body and the senses within historical-anthropological and cultural contexts, and on the role of sound, emotion and religion in staging politics.

His dissertation, entitled *Menschengesichte. Max Picards literarische Physiognomik* (Akademie / De Gruyter 2014), was written within the framework of the DFG-funded graduate seminar "Body Performances" at the Free University Berlin. He has later been research scientist at the Centre Marc Bloch, Berlin, and Fellow at the Max-Planck Institute for the History of Science, and is currently working on a research project about "The acoustics of the political body" at the Max-Planck Institute for Human Development in Berlin, focusing the political and cultural history of the Minute's Silence in Great Britain, France, and Germany.