
What silence keeps : a political listening of silence in sound practice

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Résumé

With this communication we want to examine how some sound practices approach silence from the political commitment. Therefore, we want to question how a political listening of silence would be. To this end, we will analyse a composer and a group of sound artists whose artistic practices are defined as political and who place silence at the centre of their work: Luigi Nono (in his last period) and Ultra-red.

Nono and Ultra-red understand listening to silence as a political practice by itself because it implies both the inter-subjectivity and the abandonment of certainties. Listening always means listening to others, that is, putting those who listen in the risk of being affected and questioning the preconceived ideas. This may allow opening other possibilities. It is not just about disrupting perception, but also about transforming the world in which we live.

Silence becomes a focus of Nono's work since the late 1970s. After a deep crisis, the composer abandons certainties and immerses himself in a process of unlearning and listening. In his latest works, Nono places performers and listeners within the tense line that borders the inaudible to discover us unheard possibilities which remain silenced by ideologies, knowledge or beliefs. Likewise, for Nono, silence as a musical pause would condense a non-linear, uncertain, fragmentary and heterogeneous temporality which allows exploring other possibilities. He does not abandon hope for the transformation of the world (as his critics say), only the certainty of how this change should or will be.

Silence is one of the main focuses in the career of Ultra-red. For instance, it is the subject of their *10 Preliminary Theses on Militant Sound Investigation*, and also of *SILENT — LISTEN*, which explored the affective panorama of the AIDS crisis from the sound. For Ultra-red, silence is a requirement and an objective, against the activism which understands silence as a failure. The "Militant Sound Investigation" advocated by Ultra-red is conducted by "technicians of silence" who know that the microphone is not a neutral and objective instrument (the role of the microphone with regard to silence is also very important in Nono). Their objective is to practice a collective listening attentive to what is silenced, looking for contradictions and putting preconceived ideas in crisis. "Organising the silence" refuses to be a speaker of the already-known slogans. This makes the artistic practice of Ultra-red a highly critical proposal within their own areas of action: groups in struggle.

Therefore, the political *listenings* of silence proposed by Nono and Ultra-red look for paying

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