Abstract

For this project, I will analyze Max Neuhaus’s (1939-2009) and R. Murray Schafer’s (b. 1932) commentary on noise, its control, and its relationship with the environment from 1960 to the 1980s. The works selected reflect contemporaneous studies held in the USA and Canada investigating the psychological and physiological impact of noise on humans, animals, and their landscape. Just as these investigations grew into the 1970s, new attention was made towards acoustic ecology and public sound art, both fields dealing with the relationship between sounds, living beings, and the environment. Analyses of Neuhaus’s works include the Listen series (1966-76), his New York Times editorial titled “BANG, BOOoom, ThumP, EEEK, tinkle" (1974), Times Square piece (1977), and the Emergency Vehicle Siren Redesign project (1978-1989). The Neuhaus pieces provide an alternative to the movement towards acoustic ecology put forward by his contemporary, Schafer. Analyses of Schafer and the World Soundscape Project’s (WSP) publications include Ear Cleaning (1967), The Book of Noise (1970), and A Survey of Community Noise Bylaws in Canada (1972). These works help in considering how the public perceives sounds, addressing the larger eco-political presence of noise abatement. Primary sources from the Max Neuhaus Papers (Columbia University Rare Book and Manuscript Library) and the World Soundscape Project database will be featured in addition to interviews with artists/associates of Neuhaus’s Sirens project (Ray Gallon, Owen Greenspan, Herr Lugus, Julia Prospero, and Wolfgang Staehle), and interviews with Schafer's fellow WSP collaborators, Barry Truax and Hildegard Westerkamp.