

# Print Run

New music books: devoured and dissected



Steve Goodman aka Kode9

## ***Sonic Warfare: Sound, Affect And The Ecology Of Fear***

Steve Goodman

MIT Press Hbk 270pp

What is compelling about *Sonic Warfare* is the way it rethinks the distinction between what it calls the politics of noise – the art of noises in the art of war waged by Marinetti and Russolo and continued by Industrial and Death Metal today – and the politics of silence, the tendency initiated by Cageian listening which extends through the defence of the soundscape initiated by R Murray Schafer and codified by the acoustic ecology movement. These positions still organise much of what we are accustomed to think of as radical aesthetics in sonic and musical thinking. Steve Goodman argues that these oppositional tendencies are

nonetheless linked by their restriction of sound to the question of volume and the impact of speed.

*Sonic Warfare's* achievement is to reorganise this habitual opposition between loudness and quietness by opening up the much wider dimension of force that it calls the 'unsound'. The unsound is the range of frequencies that extends across, beneath and beyond the audible. Because it cannot be heard, it is experienced as a field of vibration that can be focused and diffused, endured and enjoyed, as dread and as fear. The British, American and Israeli military have consistently researched and deployed high-frequency, infrasonic and ultrasonic weaponry against civilians and on the battlefield. *Sonic Warfare* is, in part, an inventory of this real and fictional history:

from the Squawk Box, an ultrasound device used to control crowds in Northern Ireland in 1973, to the astonishing account of the phantom army created by Division 17 of the US Army during World War Two, to the Mosquito Anti Social Device that emits a frequency of 16 to 20 kilohertz supposedly detectable only by teenagers and made to dispel unwanted gatherings outside shops and in malls.

Goodman extends his investigation of sonic control into the under-analysed terrain of corporate capitalism. He analyses the ways in which the "audio virology" of contemporary entertainment hooks consumers through tactics such as "stuck tune syndrome" in which certain types of music act as a "mental mosquito bite" that imply "brand memory implantation" for "products that may not yet exist". These tactics of sonic control are complicated by a third strand that focuses on what *Sonic Warfare* calls the "bass materialism" of sound system cultures operated by selectors and deejays in the urban densities of Kingston, the pirate radio ecologies of London, the favelas of São Paulo and beyond. For Goodman, these inventions constitute an affective collectivity that educates itself in the ways of enjoying dread and thereby modulating the ecology of fear. The global ghetotech of dancehall, baile funk, kwaito, crunk, reggaeton and cumbia can be understood, in their distinct ways, in terms of a 'subpolitics' of frequency whose implications in turn exist within the context of the ongoing "war in the age of pirate replication".

It is here that Goodman, aka producer and Hyperdub label boss Kode9, draws upon his years spent DJing at Rinse FM and his

antipathy towards theories of resistance popular with subcultural studies. From this perspective, Goodman's label emerges as a laboratory, or better still, a sonic war machine that is not illustrative but inventive in ways that are consistent and yet surprising. *Sonic Warfare* is not music journalism, per se; rather it draws upon and argues with the writings of *The Wire* contributors such as Simon Reynolds, Mark Fisher and – full disclaimer – myself, in order to construct a series of passionately argued philosophical positions that assemble concepts from the machinic thinking of Deleuze and Guattari, the political writings of Brian Massumi, the affective ethics of Spinoza, the rhythmic vorticism of Michel Serres, the ontology of war as expressed by Friedrich Kittler, the strategy of deception formulated by Sun Tzu, the audio futurology of Jacques Attali, the apocalyptic 'dromology' of Paul Virilio, the urban dystopia mapped by Mike Davis, the rhythm analysis of Henri Lefebvre and Gaston Bachelard, the memetics of Richard Dawkins and the aesthetic ontology of Alfred North Whitehead, in order to emphasise how control operates through the force of frequency as it connects to the politics of futurity.

For Goodman, the unsound is the name for the "not yet audible"; it is the "nexus of imperceptible vibration" which the military-entertainment complex attempts to colonise, and whose potential is constantly deployed by the inventive tactics of sonic collectives. *Sonic Warfare* is fully embedded within this forever war of nerves and membranes; it is an intervention that is precise, painstaking, enthralling and captivating.

Kodwo Eshun

## ***Notations 21***

Theresa Sauer

Mark Batty Publisher Hbk 318pp

The art of musical notation has existed for centuries: the earliest recognised fragments of scores date back to 1250 BCE. More recently, this ability to represent aurally perceived music through a series of graphic symbols has developed significantly, until the accepted Western tradition of writing music down on a sheet of manuscript paper has now taken on a more visual aspect that includes drawing, painting, collage, photography, sculpture and even architecture. While the scores themselves are primarily designed to instruct musicians as to how to play the composition, they are also artistic objects that work equally well on the wall of a gallery or in the pages of a sturdy coffee table book such as the present volume.

Taking John Cage and Alison Knowles's pioneering 1969 book *Notations* as her principal influence, Theresa Sauer's equally ambitious compendium picks up where they left off to show just how visually diverse and exciting graphic musical notation has become during the past 40 years. The emergence of the internet has allowed Sauer to expand upon Cage's original vision, with works by various composers from over 40 different countries making contributions to the project. Together with such familiar names as Karlheinz Stockhausen, Earle Brown, Philip Corner, James Tenney, Pauline Oliveros, Joan La Barbara and, of course, Cage himself, are featured works by contemporary composers like Makoto Nomura, Will Redman and Gaël Navard, whose *Hexagonie* is set out like a geometrical board game where the players

(or pawns) move and interact with a series of constantly changing musical situations.

Unlike the traditional clef and staff format, graphic musical notation encourages an improvisational approach to be incorporated into the composition, without straying from the composer's original creative, philosophical or political intention. The clue to how to approach *Chaos*, Henrik Colding-Jørgensen's 1982 composition for instrumental ensemble – with its angular pattern of staves violently exploding out of the page – is almost self-explanatory, while his earlier *Museik No 9* from 1979 (its three elegantly arranged, red paper cut-out shapes are reminiscent of a work by Matisse or German-French surrealist Jean Arp) is less clearly defined and more relaxed in its attitude as to how "any instrument" should perform it.

Elsewhere, Cathy Berberian's *Stripsody* (1966) and Sven Hermann's *Tha-choom!* (1998) trace and splice images of Superman into their scores – with Hermann enclosing instrumental instructions inside speech bubbles – to create an aural form of Pop Art.

There are some unfortunate, glaring omissions. Anthony Braxton and Cornelius Cardew are mysteriously absent, as are La Monte Young and Frank Zappa, who are only mentioned in some of the accompanying texts. But Sauer admits that her book is not comprehensive and, hopefully, a future *Notations 21* collection will include those composers who missed her deadline. What is sorely needed next time, however, is an accompanying CD, so that a selection of these beautifully illuminated and constructed compositions can be heard as well as seen.

Edwin Pouncey

Jake Walters (Goodman)