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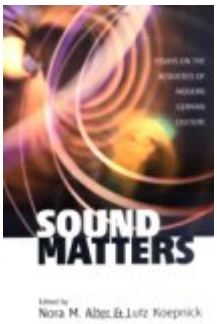

Nora M. Alter, Lutz Koepnick, eds.. *Sound Matters: Essays on the Acoustics of Modern German Culture.* New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2004. vii + 257 pp. $80.00, paper, ISBN 978-1-57181-437-1.

Reviewed by David Tompkins

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This collection of fifteen articles is an engaging, largely successful attempt to place the aural on equal footing with the visual in cultural and media studies. As a less-researched area of study, sound lacks much of the critical vocabulary that has developed in these fields, and many of the articles strive to alleviate this gap. Most argue that sound was and is essential to the formation of meanings and identities in modern Germany. Many of the artists discussed in this volume attempted to use sound to heal social ills and create community; some authors examine the role of sound in imposing and maintaining authoritarian rule, while others foreground other uses and political implications. The articles look at sound in both "high" and popular culture, and see the aural everywhere as a site where identity is constituted. They also demonstrate how sound has become increasingly important and prominent to both scholars and the general public due to its increased proliferation and portability thanks to the gramophone, radio, walkman and more recently, iPod.

Editors Nora Alter and Lutz Koepnick provide a sophisticated theoretical structure for the volume in their introduction. They detail the arrival of modern sound and describe how the industrial revolution produced aural effects on an unprecedented scale, even as technological advances increasingly disconnected sound from the visual as well as from a fixed place, thus disrupting humanity's perception of the aural and offering the possibility of reconstituting multiple identities separate from a sound's conventional space. This "sonic modernism ... the unfixing of sound and image from tradition" underpins the articles in this volume (p. 8). At the same time, modernity tries to link sound back to place in various ways, as with nationalism. The editors further claim that sound is an essential part of a modernity that ruptures traditions in favor of the new, and see modern sound as "a transitory space of articulation and negotiation" (p. 15). Another recurring motif is the juxtaposition of Richard Wagner with Bertolt Brecht: Wagnerian modernism seeks to restore perceptual synthesis, while Brechtian modernism

explores fragmentation to draw attention to the ways we perceive the world.

The first of five thematic sections examines the relationship between sound and national identity in Germany. Three articles look at how sound and music aided in the nationalist project, even as conceptions of national identity shaped sound itself. All three essays modify commonly held views and add to our knowledge of the intersection between music and nationalism. Nicholas Vazsonyi persuasively argues that the emerging relationship between music and German nationalism began already in the late eighteenth century, rather than the early nineteenth as is commonly assumed. Following Adorno and Horkheimer, he thus links German nationalism more closely to a totalizing Enlightenment project that, in trying to achieve universal harmony, excludes those who do not subscribe to its ideals and thus evinces a totalitarian undercurrent. Through the examples of ***The Magic Flute*** and Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, Vazsonyi shows how differences are effaced and hegemony is established. In his article, Carl Niekerk argues for a reconsideration of Gustav Mahler as an important representative of German culture through his focus on the fragmentary and ironic, in opposition to the Wagnerian agendas that have received so much more attention from scholars. In a fascinating essay on music during the Third Reich, Frank Trommler claims that the acoustic occupied a much more important role than the visual for the Nazis. He notes such obvious manifestations as the radio and amplification at rallies, and also stresses the acoustic elements of the war, as in the use of fanfares and *Wunschkonzerte*.

The articles in the second section deal with film, and each foregrounds sound in German film studies, which, as the editors maintain, until recently have focused largely on the silent films of the 1920s and the (visually) expressionist films of the 1970s. In her detailed consideration of sound in ***Kuhle Wampe***, Nora Alter examines how the music also helps viewers to identify with the narrative and its message, in contrast to the usual emphasis on a Brechtian alienation effect. Given that she challenges those scholars who see Brecht's theory of film as an extension of his ideas on theater, some reference to other films would have strengthened her insightful claims. Hester Baer looks at ***The Girl Rosemarie***, a hit film in 1958, and the ways in which it incorporated popular music as a means to question the political consensus of the Federal Republic. Through its use of popular and cabaret-style music as well as electronic distortions of expected sounds, Baer demonstrates how the film criticized unsavory aspects of the late 1950s. This section closes with Brigitte Peuker's sophisticated theoretical examination of Rainer Werner Fassbinder's ***In a Year of Thirteen Moons*** (1978). Conceptualizing sound broadly, she argues that the film breaks down key binary oppositions and emphasizes mutuality through the use of many voices and soundtracks, thus decoupling itself from fascist aesthetics.

The concept of silence is the focus for the articles in the third section. Lutz Koepnick engages with Walter Benjamin's classic 1936 essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" and examines why Benjamin treats film as a silent medium despite the introduction of sound in the late 1920s. After tracing Benjamin's ambivalence regarding the aural and his privileging of the visual, Koepnick argues that ignoring sound allowed Benjamin to maintain that film was both fine art and politically progressive, rather than a medium filled with music and dialogue that lent itself to promoting a depoliticized mass culture as well as to use as propaganda. Koepnick convincingly shows that Benjamin's failure to engage with sound limits the use of his theories in understanding the fascist use of film. Elizabeth Hamilton's article neatly picks up on the use (and absence) of sound in film through an examination of Volker Schlöndorff's ***The Tin Drum*** (1979). She argues that the director uses silence as a critical means of resistance and healing in opposition to the loud

noises representative of Nazism. Further, she describes his use of techniques similar to those in silent films in order to confront West German cultural silence about the past. Though somewhat out of place in this section on silence, Christopher Jones's article turns to the use of sound in literature in his article on the crime fiction of contemporary writer Pieke Biermann. Though lacking a clear argument, Jones describes Biermann's use of the ideas of composer John Cage on employing noise as a building block to create a larger composition. In her fiction, she creates a sound profile of urban Berlin, including both noises that evoke life there more generally as well as those that stress and assault.

The next section looks at sound in a transnational context, and four articles examine sound crossing borders and operating in cultural milieus different from where it was produced. Thomas F. Cohen examines the interaction between Wagner's music and the American movie and radio industry in the late 1930s. Focusing on a scene of a Wagner aria sung in the Hollywood production ***The Big Broadcast***, Cohen looks at why the resulting effects were considerably different from what the composer might have intended, and asserts that differing modes of transmission are the reason. Wagner wanted strict control over performances and sought to train and influence the interpreters of his music; such an approach contrasted starkly with Hollywood's aim of reaching a mass audience through all forms of media. Russell Berman then looks at African-American performer Nina Simone's renditions of songs by Brecht and Kurt Weill, and focuses on the transformation of meaning from a Weimar German (con)text to the culture of American protest music during the civil rights movement. Berman closely reads Simone's reworkings of "Pirate Jenny" (1928) and "Moon of Alabama" (1930) as evocative of the politicized American South, thereby suggesting differing meanings from the original context. More generally in the essay, he points to the lack of studies of African-American responses to German culture, which is embedded in a larger critique of American German studies as having an overly narrow view of American identity that interacts with an overly uniform Germany. In his essay on the postwar decades, Richard Langston argues that rock music enabled youths of the 1950s and 1960s to exorcise or escape (both Nazi- and dominant West-) German identity and cultivate an "antinationalism" by identifying with a cultural form outside of the mainstream, represented in this essay by traditional pop, or ***Schlagermusik***. Through the example of writer Rolf Dieter Brinkmann, Langston shows how young West Germans used rock music to challenge and then renegotiate their inherited national identity. Although some became disenchanted with rock's excesses and commercialism in the 1970s, Langston argues that rock continued to be an important means of critiquing the dominant culture. Caryl Flinn's somewhat disjointed essay on the international hit film ***Run, Lola, Run*** (1998) and its techno-driven soundtrack rounds out this section. Her essay plays on the seeming contradictions inherent in the film and accompanying music such as the acceptance and rejection of Germanness, and the themes of freedom and containment, and calculation and spontaneity. Flinn includes a brief overview of techno music and its relationship to the transformative and transgressive rave scene; while she ascribes its popularity to democratic and emancipatory qualities, she fails to acknowledge the powerful role of the DJ who controls the space. She also offers an impressive close reading of the rhythmic collaboration between the techno music and the film's images. Flinn believes that techno is a perfect choice for the movie, but arrives at the perhaps surprising conclusion that techno in the film serves as a conservative universal language that reinforces traditional values relating to what she describes as "contracts." She concludes that this emphasis on such traditional conceits led to box-office success both domestically and internationally for its director Tom Tykwer.

The book's two final essays come to grips with postmodernism in German music. David Barnett considers how composer Heiner Goebbels has worked with the texts of Heiner Müller. Barnett argues that Goebbels encourages the listener to interact with the texts in the creation of meaning through his complementary use of found voices and traces of music. This sound accompanies the text so as to offer the possibility for a number of responses; audiences actively contemplate an aural and textual landscape of history and memory and must themselves negotiate this space in their own particular way. Like Goebbels, Karlheinz Stockhausen experiments with diverse musical traditions; in the final essay, Larson Powell looks at the work *Hymnen* (1966-67), which deals with themes of nationalism and memory. In addition to surveying the composer's career and influences, Powell examines Stockhausen's transformations of forty different national anthems grouped into four thematic sections through serialist technique in a recounting of the apocalypse and survival of humanity. This dense, musicological study of *Hymnen* notes that Stockhausen, while quite influential in the 1950s and 60s, has had few successors due to his work's fragility as well as, Powell argues, lack of funding.

This ambitious volume clearly fulfills its goal of emphasizing and analyzing the role of sound in modern German culture. Its one significant omission, in an article collection that aims to cover the conventional periods of modern German history, is the absence of East Germany. A great deal of exciting and innovative research has been emerging in this area since German unification, yet the GDR is scarcely mentioned in the volume.[1] Nonetheless, ***Sound Matters*** comprises a number of important and fresh contributions to a small but growing literature on music and sound in modern Germany. With its focus on the aural, especially through sound's intersection with space, this volume is an essential and timely contribution to the current transnational discourses within modern German studies.

Note

[1] To scratch just the surface: Joy Haslam Calico, "'Für eine neue deutsche Nationaloper': Opera in the Discourses of Unification and Legitimation in the German Democratic Republic," in ***Music and German National Identity***, ed. Celia Applegate and Pamela Potter (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Maren Köster, ***Musik-Zeit-Geschehen. Zu den Musikverhältnissen in der SBZ/DDR, 1945 bis 1952*** (Saarbrücken: Pfau, 2002); Elizabeth Janik, "'The Golden Hunger Years': Music and Superpower Rivalry in Occupied Berlin," ***German History*** 22 (2004), pp. 76-100; Daniel zur Weihen, ***Komponieren in der DDR. Institutionen, Organisationen und die erste Komponistengeneration bis 1961: Analysen*** (Cologne and Weimar: Stiftung Mitteldeutscher Kulturrat, 1999).

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