MUSIQUE CONCRÈTE AND BEYOND

Musique Concrète

Music created from recordings of "**concrete sound material**[1]," i.e. sounds of the world around us.

Musical values are then **abstracted from the sounds**. "This is the opposite of classical music, which starts from an abstract conception and notation leading to a concrete performance[1]."

Objet Sonore (Sound Object)

"The smallest **self-contained** element of a soundscape," or electroacoustic composition, and is "analysable by the characteristics of its **spectrum**, loudness, and **envelope**.[2]"

Schaefer himself noted that there was confusion about what a Sound Object was, but just gives a list of things that it is not[3]. If you're having trouble grasping the concept just think of the **sound** *of a metal pan being struck, or a glass bottle breaking, or a cash register opening, or a door being slammed, etc.*

Collage

A collage is an artwork in which **fragments** of material are "cut and pasted" together. In Sonic Arts this would involve a fragment of one sound **followed** by a fragment of another sound **without any overlap**, e.g.:
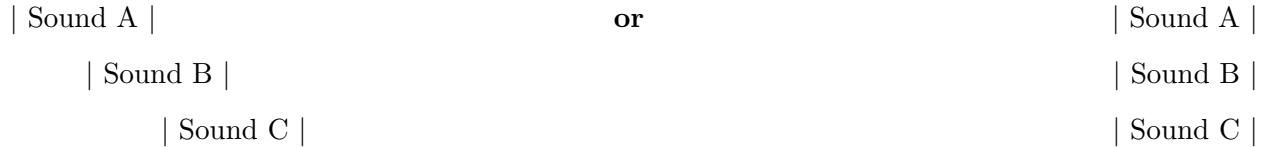
| Sound A || Sound B || Sound C |

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[1]
[2]
[3]

Mix

Mixing involves **blending** of 2 or more sounds together. This obviously does involve **overlapping**, e.g.:

Sound A	**or**	Sound A
Sound B		Sound B
Sound C		Sound C

In reality, most *Musique Concrète* pieces consist of a **combination** of both Collage and Mixing.

Soundscape

"An **environment of sound** (or sonic environment) with **emphasis** on the way it is **perceived and understood** by the individual, or by a society... The term may refer to actual environments, or to abstract constructions such as musical compositions and tape montages, particularly when considered as an artificial environment[4]."

Think of a landscape, but rather than the visual think of the sonic. This is the 'soundscape.' A Soundscape Composition then can be thought of as a landscape painting, but with sound. So, for example, dawn chorus on Nose Hill, or the sounds around you when you sit in a coffee shop.

Soundwalk

"A form of **active participation** in the soundscape. Though the variations are many, the essential purpose of the soundwalk is to encourage the participant to **listen discriminatively**, and moreover, to **make critical judgments** about the sounds heard and their contribution to the balance or imbalance of the sonic environment[5]."

So think of the soundscape in Nose Hill at dawn chorus. If you then participated in that soundscape (e.g. adding the sounds of twigs cracking under your feet as you walk) that would be a sound walk. Alternatively you start outside the coffee shop, walk inside, and then out the other door, that would be a soundwalk through the coffee shop.

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[4]http://www.sfu.ca/sonic-studio/handbook/Soundscape.html
[5]http://www.sfu.ca/sonic-studio/handbook/Soundwalk.html

Timeline and musical examples

1942 - **Pierre Schaeffer** starts working in Radiodiffusion Nationale/Radiodiffusion-Télévision Française (RTF) radio studio, experimenting with sound and sound equipment

1944 - Halim El-Dabh *Ta'abir Al-Zaar*

* 1948 - **Pierre Schaeffer** *Cinq études de bruits* (Five Studies of Noises)

1949 - Pierre Henry starts working at RTF with Schaeffer.

1950 - *Symphonie pour un homme seul* - **Pierre Henry** & **Pierre Schaeffer**. Composed on turntables[2, 75].

1951 - **Tape machines** introduced to musique concrète[2, 75].

1951 - "Groupe de Recherche de Musique Concrète" (GRMC) and first electroacoustic studio. Lots of composers come to work in studio and study musique concrète.

1951 - Pierre Boulez *Étude I* and *Étude II*

1952 - **Karlheinz Stockhausen** *Konkrete Etüde*

1953 - John Cage *William's Mix*

1954 - Edgar Varèse *Déserts* - combination of instrumental music and musique concrète.

* 1955 - **Hugh le Caine** *Dripsody* - single drop of water is the only sound source

1958 - GRMC breaks up, Schaeffer starts "Groupe de Recherches Musicales" (GRM).

1958 - Iannis Xenakis *Concret PH* - only sound source is burning charcole

* 1958 - Luciano Berio *Thema (Omaggio a Joyce)* [Vocal Transformations]

1963 - Terry Riley *Music for The Gift* - first use of **tape delay with feedback**[6]

1965 - Steve Reich *It's Gonna Rain*

* 1970 - Luc Ferrari *Presque rien no.1, le lever du jour au bord de la mer* - recording of full day at beach edited to only last 20 mins! [Soundscape]

1971[7] - R. Murray Schafer starts "World Soundscape Project" at Simon Fraser University[8]. [Soundscape]

1973 - *The Vancouver Soundscape 1973* [Soundscape]

1977 - Trevor Wishart *Red Bird* [Vocal Transformations]

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[6]http://www.loopers-delight.com/history/Loophist.html
[7]http://www.sfu.ca/sonic-studio/handbook/World_Soundscape_Project.html
[8]http://www.sfu.ca/~truax/wsp.html

1982 - Jonty Harrison *Klang*

1987 - Public Enemy *Bring the Noise*

* 1988 - John Oswald *Plunderphonics*

* 1989 - Hildegard Westerkamp *Kits Beach Soundwalk*[9] [Soundscape]

1990 - Javier Álvarez *Mambo a la Braque* [electroclip]

1996 - DJ Shadow *Endtroducing.....*

2001 - Matmos *Lipostudio... and so on* - samples of liposcution, bone saws etc.![10]

2003 - Robert Normandeau *Puzzles*

2015 - Soundhunters project

Other Resources:

Interview with Pierre Schaeffer

Pierre Henry Documentary

Barry Truax lecture on Composing Music with the Environment

References

[1] Michel Chion and Pierre Schaeffer. *Guide des objects sonores*. Buchet/Chastel, 1983.

[2] Simon Emmerson. *Living electronic music*. Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2013.

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[9]http://www.sfu.ca/~westerka/program_notes/kits.html
[10]http://www.discogs.com/Matmos-A-Chance-To-Cut-Is-A-Chance-To-Cure/release/56766