

CHAPTER SEVEN

“All Sounds Are Created Equal”: Mediating Democracy in Acousmatic Education

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Acousmatic music is a genre of experimental studio-based composition founded in the 1970s by disciples of French composer and radio engineer Pierre Schaeffer.¹ Although it is sometimes defined in contrast with other electroacoustic genres as a music made primarily from samples of “natural” or “everyday” sound, strict acousmatic practice is articulated not in terms of sound material but in terms of listening style. Although the aesthetics and cultural politics of acousmatic music frequently involve questions of mediation, the ideal is not to achieve a more perfect reproduction of sounds in nature, but rather to discover the organic musical structures afforded by the nature of inner sonic experience.

Schaeffer held a deep conviction that knowledge about music should be based not upon formal and pedagogical rules inherited from tradition, but rather upon the universal “structures of perception” underlying music’s articulation in particular cultures, periods, or places (Schaeffer 1966). What he imagined was not a new genre per se, but an experimental, interdisciplinary research into the ways that modern recording and broadcast technologies could be used to directly manipulate the relations between sound and experience at an immediate level preceding the concepts, affections and motivations normally associated with systems of musical convention (Palombini 1993). The few compositions Schaeffer produced were mostly formalist “studies,” concerned

with manipulating the structure and sequence of a set of “sound objects” so as to frustrate or erase any reference to their instrumental, technological or natural sources. He adopted the term “acousmatic” to describe this “veiling” of the merely “acoustic” facts of sound production and transmission, focusing compositional and analytical attention on the perceptual experience of the individual listener (Kane 2014). In principle acousmatic theories were not to be deduced from rules or instrumental affordances, but induced from the basic features of auditory experience itself.

For Schaeffer, this meant that the acousmatic approach could be applied to the production of any music at all. The implication was that acousmatic listening afforded better support for musical diversity than existing systems based on melody, harmony and rhythm. Like his structuralist contemporary Claude Lévi-Strauss, Schaeffer saw cultural diversity as threatened by the advance of Western imperialism (Johnson 2013). He noticed that comparing musics in terms of their adherence to Western formal standards made it seem as if some were more correct, even more modern, than others. By focusing on sound and listening, he thought, musicologists could develop a synchronic perspective in which all musical expression might be treated as equally correct and equally modern (Schaeffer 1966: 603–05).

Following Schaeffer’s retirement from the French public service in 1976, control of his legacy shifted to ambitious disciples like François Bayle and Michel Chion, and acousmatic research began to diverge from Schaeffer’s pluralist politics. An acousmatic concert practice coalesced around the use of elaborate, spatialized arrays of loudspeakers modelled on Bayle’s *acousmonium*, and a performance technique known as “diffusion,” in which composers routed their recorded compositions live to the array from a multi-channel mixing desk (Emmerson 2007: 96). Refashioning the acousmatic style as a “cinema for the ears” (Dhomont 1996: 24), second-generation theorists placed a strong emphasis on the dramatic possibilities afforded by juxtaposing familiar and unfamiliar sonic textures. Distinguished from forms of electronic music privileging technical or formal registers of invention, acousmatic music was thus reimagined as an art extending the perceptual field with new “auditory and mental” images (Bayle 1993: 54). The ideal of transparent, unmediated listening remained, however, and by extension the genre retained some aspects of Schaeffer’s founding pluralism. In Britain, for example, much acousmatic research in universities still focuses on highlighting the music’s perceptual immediacy, either by training composers to better anticipate listeners’ expectations (Weale 2006) or by designing production tools that highlight the accessibility of acousmatic techniques (Landy 2012). Acousmatic aesthetics have been unfairly marginalized, these studies argue: if educators and the media simply offered the genre more exposure, it would naturally manifest a wider appeal (Weale 2006: 190).

It is therefore important to distinguish acousmatic pluralism from both the “relational” pluralism currently ascendant in music studies (Born 2010) and the kinds of “multi-dimensional” pluralism now being applied in

epistemology and political ontology (Connolly 2005). All musics are equal for the acousmatic listener not because their differences are all valid on their own terms, but because their differences are secondary to human perceptual structures, which according to acousmatic theory must all be the same. This understanding was shaped both by a conjunction of post-socialist political and scientific ideals in postwar France (Drott 2009) and by specific public investments in the instruments market and in concert life (Veitl 1997). When it took root elsewhere, such as in Quebec or the UK, it retained these strong ties to the construction of cultural modernity. Notwithstanding later reinterpretations such as those of Denis Smalley (1996), acousmatic listening was not originally intended to be one “mode” of listening among many. For its inventors, it was the only form of auditory discipline that would allow all musics to manifest their true diversity.

The tension inherent in this ideology—the emphasis on universality almost in spite of diversity—has made acousmatic music a fertile ground for contestation, especially in the form of calls for aesthetic democratization over the past few decades (Ostertag 1996; Waters 2000; Emerson 2001; Haworth 2016). The vast majority of acousmatic production takes place in higher education, where its associations with experimentation, technological innovation and interdisciplinarity have given it an important role to play in postmodern and neoliberal manifestations of these debates. These new modes of democracy seek to make acousmatic production more accessible to novice musicians. They also put pressure upon acousmatic educators to tolerate a more and more diverse range of musics. But does the friction persist between this tolerance and the acousmatician’s critical stance on the universality of perceptual structure? This chapter looks at how the politics of listening are mediated in the context of formal academic production training. Its focus is the prominent acousmatic scene in the Canadian province of Quebec, which has been singled out for its “eclectic” sound (Dhomont 1996). I am interested in how acousmatic composers learn, in phenomenological terms, to “bracket” their particular technological and cultural conditions, and thereby to understand the acousmatic aesthetic as a natural consequence of their individual perceptual propensities (Kane 2014: 23–30, Schaeffer 1966: 270–72). I am also interested in whether this bracketing endows acousmatic composers with a sense of personal agency in the shaping of their political identities.

Acousmatic Training and the Transformation of Cultural Citizenship in Quebec

The arrival of acousmatic education in Quebec coincided with a highly mythologized transition in the history of Quebecois cultural politics. Until the 1960s, the primary and secondary education system had been dominated

by strict Catholic clerical authorities, and the professions by an anglophone business elite based in the province's cosmopolitan centre, Montreal. The francophone population was predominantly rural and working class. Women received a lower level of education than men, were largely restricted to care and service professions if they worked outside of the home at all, and until 1964 were even denied the legal right to hold property (Dumont et al. 1983: 76; Lefebvre 1991: 76; Dickinson and Young 2008: 334). The period, usually associated with the rule of conservative nationalist premier Maurice Duplessis between 1936 and 1959, is often referred to in local accounts as the *Grande Noirceur* or Great Darkness.

The death of Duplessis in 1959 helped loosen restrictions on labour organization and ushered in a period of rapid urbanization and liberalization. Through a combination of major industrial projects and Keynesian economic policies, Quebec's politicians placed power back in the hands of the francophone majority, and thus helped give rise to a more progressive left-wing nationalist movement committed to raising the status of Quebecois language and culture (Létourneau 2006: 75–93). Inspired by contact with liberation movements in francophone Africa, Southeast Asia and Central America, young leftists reimagined the Quebecois resurgence as an anti-colonial struggle against anglophone oppression (Mills 2010). Only as an independent nation, they speculated, could Quebec truly realize its aspirations to modernity and democracy. To counteract this rise of separatist sentiment, the Canadian federal government launched a series of policy and funding initiatives meant to effect greater integration of the Quebecois in a transformed “postnational” confederation (Létourneau 2006: 89). By the end of this period, the provincial government had enacted sweeping educational and social reforms, secularizing all levels of instruction, guaranteeing equality of access and drawing students from all over the province to larger institutions in the urban centres. The federal government, meanwhile, enshrined an unprecedented level of accommodation for francophones at the national level in a series of legal and constitutional reforms. This period, from the death of Duplessis to the first Quebec sovereignty referendum of 1980, is referred to as the *Révolution Tranquille*, or Quiet Revolution.

Before secularization, francophone student composers lucky enough to attend the province's universities were largely taught in a conservative neoclassical style favoured by local composers who had studied abroad with prominent French teachers like Nadia Boulanger and Darius Milhaud, and were graded with a system of examinations modelled on the Prix de Rome. Among the first Quebecois composers to take a serious interest in Pierre Schaeffer's research was Pierre Mercure, who in 1957 gave up on the neoclassical orthodoxy and produced a series of tape compositions using recorded material prepared during his second study visit to Paris (Richer 1992). Mercure became one of Quebec's busiest supporters of the avant-garde, his activities peaking in 1961 when he organized a major festival of new music that hosted the first concert of Schaeffer's work in Canada

(Beaucage 2008; Stévançe 2012: 159). Although he later died prematurely as a result of a 1966 traffic accident, Mercure's work also contributed to the formation of the province's first new music concert society, the Société de Musique Contemporaine du Québec (SMCQ) (Beaucage 2011). By 1967, the post-serialist composer and SMCQ artistic director Serge Garant had taken up a post teaching composition at Université de Montréal, bringing the ideas of the province's avant-garde into higher education for the first time (Boivin 1996). A popular avant-garde exploded as well, generating a genre known after Mercure's 1961 festival as *musique actuelle* (“current music”) that mixed free improvisation, psychedelic rock, traditional folklore and satirical performance art skewering the religious and economic elites. This strongly Quebecois-identified aesthetics of new music gave young composers a means of deconstructing previously denigrated local traditions and exploring new forms of improvisation, stylistic hybridity and dialogism (Stévançe 2012: 51).

Schaeffer's ideas about listening mapped easily onto Quiet Revolution principles of authenticity, democracy and globally oriented modernity. Collage-based tape musics had already seen increasing use in the accompaniment of Quebecois film and dance, and by the end of the 1960s Schaeffer's particular approach began to attract a new wave of student composers to Paris (Beaucage 2008). In October 1969, students Ginette Bellavance-Sauvé and Hélène Prévost proposed a course at Université de Montréal modelled on Schaeffer's *solfège* to run in parallel with existing training in composition and acoustics (Bellavance-Sauvé and Prévost 1969). Schaeffer himself visited the university in November for a week-long engagement arranged by SMCQ co-founder Maryvonne Kendergi (Beaucage 2008). His system seemed to fill a gap in the understanding of the auditory “aptitudes” necessary for the successful musical maturation of Quebecois society (Hirbour-Coron 1971: 42). It took particularly strong root in connection with early childhood education, a domain with close metaphorical associations to the nationalist project of separation.

The first full university course in acousmatic listening was initiated in 1973 at Université Laval in Quebec City by Marcelle Deschênes, who had just returned from almost three years studying with Schaeffer in Paris (Lefebvre 2009). Policy makers were keenly aware of the behavioural and cultural benefits that could be derived from inductive theories of aesthetic perception, and thus workshops for children played a key role in Deschênes's project (Direction générale de l'enseignement élémentaire et secondaire 1973). She and her undergraduate students designed experimental games and dramatic scenarios that imparted a holistic, multimodal framework for developing children's sonic awareness, at the same time introducing them to a wide variety of audio media and musical traditions. In 1980 this framework became the basis of the first official electroacoustic composition curriculum at Université de Montréal, where Deschênes remained until 1997 as the programme's principal architect and advocate.

Her course designs mediated between acousmatic theory and government efforts to promote an open, secular alternative to traditional schooling. The policy climate of the time amplified the pluralism at the heart of her teacher's work. The commission placed in charge of devising Quebec's educational reforms in the mid-1960s frequently struck a note of unity in plurality informed by the same conservative humanisms that had inspired Schaeffer in France. "To achieve a modern humanism," its authors asserted, "[the educator] needs, without neglecting to tap into tradition, to find in the growing diversity of knowledge a new unity of culture" (Corbo 2002: 66). A sub-report on music education circulated to schools and universities in 1968 characterized this growing diversity as a "crisis of language," identifying popular culture and media literacy as key fronts in the battle to renew the legitimacy of the province's musical expression (Deslauriers 1968). Joined with a body of musical research increasingly informed by structuralist ideas about the formation of sociocultural subjectivity (Donin 2010), these policy initiatives encouraged educators to take an increasingly experimental approach in the classroom. In a document setting out new guidelines for primary music education in 1973, the same year Deschênes began her work with children at Université Laval, policymakers explicitly link this approach to the correct inculcation of the province's musicians as democratic citizens. "Arts education is an essential foundation of the formation of the child, provided that it is done in the spirit of active pedagogy, and consequently that the focus is placed on practical experience through free expression. The child actively participates in sensory externalization, and his learning comes from the fact that he experiments with musical facts as they are presented to him" (Direction générale de l'enseignement élémentaire et secondaire 1973: 1).

As reforms crystallized over the ensuing decade, the Quebec government began to consider the consequences of its egalitarian policy measures. The most famous of the assessments it commissioned is Jean-François Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition* (1984), first published as a report for the provincial council of universities in 1980. The gap left by the evacuation of religious authority was being widened by increased access to higher education, on the one hand, and advances in information media, on the other. Where earlier policy makers had sought a solution to the crisis of epistemological legitimacy in a renewal of shared unities, however, Lyotard proposed an emphasis on pragmatic, local social bonds. Thus, the ideal of knowledge as a progressive force of self-reproduction in the sense of German *Bildung* should, for Lyotard, be replaced with an understanding of knowledge as a special type of "language game," a procedure adapted to a particular purpose through the performative utterances of the individuals involved in its immediate construction. The technologically mediated breakdown of disciplines should not be held back, he argued, but rather encouraged. Progress would then be achieved not through increasing authority over language games but through "paralogy," a kind of knowledge

moving against the existing logic of affairs, the importance of which may not be recognized until later (Lyotard 1984: 61).

Acousmatic music rose rapidly to prominence under this new, “postmodern” regime, with its flattened, relational understanding of knowledge and heavy investment in widening access through new media technologies. Instead of following Lyotard on the course of paralogy, however, acousmatic composers and educators remained closely committed to the humanist “grand narratives” that inspired both the initial reforms of the Quiet Revolution and the theoretical challenges of Schaeffer. From this older perspective, cultural diversity still had a unified generative basis in human perceptual experience. There might be a plurality of sounds, but there could be only one way to listen.

Acousmatic Pluralism in the Classroom

In the studio and the classroom, acousmatic pluralism has coalesced into a robust repertoire of material and interpersonal conventions. To illustrate this I draw upon material gathered from interviews, oral histories and archival sources in Montreal between 2011 and 2015. This research mapped social and technological differences between the universities, where academic electroacoustic genres dominate, and the city’s vibrant underground experimental music scenes, where generic hybrids and more conceptual approaches tend to flourish. Having defined the Montreal sound of the 1980s and 1990s, acousmatic thinking was still a powerful point of reference for both academic and freelance musicians when I did fieldwork there in the early 2010s, if only in the sense that it provided a foil for emerging practices they saw as more complex and idiosyncratic (e.g. Adkins et al. 2016). The acousmatic bracketing of culture and convention persisted in both the felt quality and the prescriptive structure of the undergraduate lessons and evaluations I observed.

The emphasis in acousmatic theory on sound as experienced was originally shaped by an eclectic mix of influences from phenomenology, spiritualism, and structuralist anthropology (Kaltenecker and Le Bail 2012). At its core is a system of four “listening functions”—*écouter* (indexical listening), *ouïr* (passive reception), *entendre* (qualitative hearing), and *comprendre* (symbolic understanding)—which Schaeffer conceived to account for the way meaningful acoustic experiences could be afforded by the basic processes of auditory attention (Schaeffer 1966: 116). He understood these functions not as distinct intentional attitudes, but as interrelated nodes in a deep cognitive structure that synthesized the dialectical oppositions between internal auditory intentions and external sonic phenomena into elementary musical intuitions. The private experience of music was thus more primary than both the materiality of musical instruments or sounds (which Schaeffer

collected under the category of the “concrete”) and the cultural conventions defining systems of musical qualities or references (which for Schaeffer constituted the “abstract”). Differences in style or skill could thus be seen as relative and external factors in musical perception. What was essential for Schaeffer was the individual experience that afforded such differences. Instead of explaining the value of particular musical works, his system focused on fostering awareness of the organizing capacity of human perception and cognition, which he understood as the “common trunk” of all musics (Schaeffer 1966: 627–29).

Classroom strategies aimed at fostering this focus on sensibility date back to the earliest academic electroacoustic studios in Quebec. Many of the academics I interviewed highlighted the importance of the curriculum established by Marcelle Deschênes at Université de Montréal. These early courses were among the first efforts to derive formal educational strategies from acousmatic theory. They coincide roughly with the establishment of similar programmes at the Universities of Birmingham and East Anglia in the UK. At the same time, however, they are profoundly personal, coloured especially by Deschênes’s ongoing interests in visual media and drama and, as I have already mentioned, intimately connected to the policy climate of the Quiet Revolution.

The course Deschênes taught at Université Laval between 1973 and 1977 took the name *morpho-typology* after the taxonomical approach to sound analysis described in Book V of Schaeffer’s 1966 treatise. In her syllabus Deschênes identified a need to move from finding sources of legitimacy in conventional musical authority structures (*systèmes musicaux*) to individual engagements with concrete “musical facts” (*faits musicaux*) in their cultural and material diversity. “Sonic morphology-typology favours the personal constitution of a new vocabulary,” she explained, “furnishing a solid basis for improvisation, composition, and the comprehension of musical facts which no longer correspond to the reference system of Western classical music” (Deschênes 1977). The notion of the “musical fact” appears around the same time in the work of French ethnomusicologist Jean Molino, who argued for replacing normative theories of music with an empirical study of the ways in which music is constituted in human social life (Molino 1990: 115). Deschênes stayed true to Schaeffer, however, in focusing her attention not on the sociological factors that make musics so diverse, but on the “universal data of listening and gesture, which precede all cultural diversification.” To listen morpho-typologically was to participate in “the search for a common denominator in all the particular uses of the totality of possible sound sources” (Deschênes 1977).

Deschênes’s approach to technical skills shifted somewhat between her early teaching at Université Laval and her later work at Université de Montréal. In the first courses, strictly centred on the system of morpho-typology, Deschênes develops an inductive approach. The idea was to discover new technical and notational skills appropriate to the sonic

phenomena in question. Students were guided through three stages of experimentation using only the studio's microphones, tape decks and record library for sound manipulation. The first stage consisted of collective improvisations inspired by existing avant-garde compositions or ethnographic recordings. In the second stage students collected fragments of sound from their recorded improvisations or from compositions on record, and then classified them according to Schaeffer's perceptual categories. In the third and final stage they produced graphic listening scores to illustrate the relationships between the perceptual "objects" they had identified in the recorded stream of acoustic material. Between 1974 and 1977 Deschênes expanded the course to encompass a series of listening games for elementary school children. Students from the morpho-typology course would essentially conduct the same sequence of inductive experiments with the children, and then take the children's work as an object for further analysis. By the time Deschênes had left Laval in 1977, she had assembled a database of thousands of sound examples for further research, each accompanied by an index card correlating it with a set of musical examples, and with one or more improvisatory games that would dramatize its structure in multimodal form.

In 1980 this collection became the basis for a course in "auditory perception" for students in the new electroacoustic degree programme at Université de Montréal. Here, however, with a newly equipped studio at her disposal, and a mandate to focus on training students in composition, Deschênes began to treat studio technique as a separate topic from listening. She called the course *techniques d'écriture*, or "writing techniques," suggesting that studio production had an inscriptional rather than a directly creative role (Deschênes 1980). From an acousmatic perspective, of course, studio equipment and instruments are not the source of the music, but rather a means of registering the composer's listening to share with others. Again Deschênes took a taxonomical approach, dividing the apparatus into "sources," "transformers," and "formers" based on its function in the compositional process. Techniques were presented first as auditory effects and then illustrated with examples from the growing electroacoustic repertoire. The lesson on the use of microphones, for example, focused not on the acoustic characteristics of specific microphone types, but on the placement of the microphone in space in relation to the sound source, and the possible mechanical preparations the recordist can make to alter the sound captured during the recording process. The illustration given was from Robert Ashley's 1964 piece *The Wolfman*, in which a performer shapes feedback by changing the shape of his or her mouth in close proximity to a microphone that is linked to a speaker system playing back a tape collage. The focus of Deschênes's microphone technique was thus not reproduction so much as variation. The point is not to use the microphone to transfer a given set of predetermined units like notes or words onto tape, but to discover the particular ways that the microphone transforms the audible as such.

Acousmatic concepts could thus be detached from culturally and historically specific aesthetic decisions. I encountered this implication repeatedly in my classroom observations. “I keep telling the class,” one instructor at Concordia University (which had recently named a studio and an undergraduate scholarship in honour of Deschênes) told me, “music is not an object. Music is about relationships. You understand a relationship and you can transport it to any part of the spectrum, anything.” Instead of being taught as the conventions of a particular genre, acousmatic principles were being taught as the scientific fact behind all musical experience. Staff readily admitted to me, however, that few of their students would go on to identify with the acousmatic aesthetic. Since acousmatic production is generally restricted to universities, doing so would almost certainly require them to commit to the unforgiving pursuit of an academic career. Instead students were encouraged to discover their aesthetic allegiances outside the classroom. With acousmatically attuned ears, their instructors insisted, they would be better at everything from noise to hip-hop to folk. Another instructor explained:

It requires the sort of perceptual skill of knowing what’s going to work for listeners . . . and just to be the cut above seems to be the goal that most of these students have. So when presented with the acousmatic aesthetic that tends to be the kind of core that the department has always been about, well I mean, I think students are very practical in seeing what their goal is, in being this cut above everybody else in terms of understanding of sound, and they go for it because . . . anybody who can produce that quality, and that type of balance, and that type of richness of spectral invention, and all the rest of it, that’s got to be good, and that’s got to be useful in some manner to them.

Instructors brought a similar attitude to the teaching of technical skills. “What’s going to come out someone’s laptop is going to depend on what’s in there, and also if they’ve got outboard gear at home, and if they are really coming from a much more traditional studio perspective or a virtual studio perspective,” I was told. “All of these things have influence on the work, but in principle certainly my understanding is that creative work is creative work. Compositional work is about the process.” So for the instructors I spoke with, gear was interchangeable insofar as it could be understood to operate transparently. Technical procedures were imparted as transformations of auditory experience rather than as instructions for operating specific machines. And indeed, for all of its association with images of technological innovation in university marketing, acousmatic production has evolved relatively few of its own tools or techniques. Once students had a functioning Digital Audio Workstation software and a set of reasonably priced monitor speakers, the rest was up to them. Left without

guidance, they turned to online sources to find tips about what equipment to buy.

Since acousmatic theory taught them only that they should discern what equipment was best with their ears, students learned to trust peer recommendations most of all. Usually this corresponded with either "industry standards" or whatever instruments would be most emblematic of the genre they hoped to emulate in their extracurricular practice—a modular synthesizer for drone, a hardware sampler for hip-hop, etc. In the classroom, however, they still had no choice but to "transcend the technology." The productive possibilities of different technologies were eliminated in advance by the notion that they were all fundamentally equal. Thus, students generally separated the pleasurable, embodied side of their practice, in which they identified intimately with pieces of equipment as commodities, from the rational, detached nature of their studies, which they saw as revolving around learning to listen well. Under these conditions, acousmatic music as such took on the function of a kind of laboratory tool. An acousmatic composition could be an exercise for demonstrating the different auditory transformations possible with a given sound fragment, but it would rarely be considered valuable as music. As a consequence, students often struggled to reconcile their training in the genre with their own practices. As one put it, "Somehow it feels like, in order to justify its own existence, the institution needs to create its own separate forms. It feels like it would be more relevant, at least to me, to sort of set that aside and just study what's out there."

Conclusions

Later commentators have frequently remarked that Quebec's acousmatic style is uncharacteristically diverse for a genre so steeped in dogma. In a widely cited 1996 article, for example, Deschênes's colleague Francis Dhomont speculates that Quebec's composers must be essentially North American in outlook. They are therefore more focused on the "here and now," and inclusive of sounds from a wider variety of genres and media than their European forebears (Dhomont 1996: 27). He also goes on to identify the "Quebec sound" as a specifically urban construction, linking it to Montreal's vibrant multiculturalism. The acousmatic composer in Montreal, claims Dhomont, grows up with an innate conviction that "all sounds are created equal" (*ibid.*: 25).

Dhomont's account is ripe for critique. Claims to emancipation in acousmatic production have failed to account for the reasons why, for one thing, the privilege of "equality" is so rarely afforded to sounds made by women. This is ironic on a number of levels, not least because acousmatic music is so often set up as the "feminine" alternative to more scientifically minded forms of electronic music production, such as those informed

by serialism. Andra McCartney (2006), for example, has suggested that acousmatic practice provides a fertile environment for the development of “soft” or “empathetic” epistemologies, which make it more amenable to participation by women. Discourses associating the acousmatic with equality and democracy seem to corroborate such a conclusion, but the association of figures like Marcelle Deschênes with teaching rather than composing or engineering reveals a clear division of labour behind such assumptions. The tools of electronic music production, many of them originally conceived for military research, are still heavily coded as masculine (Meintjes 2003: 104; Rodgers 2010: 6–7; Born and Devine 2015), while responsibility for childhood development and the fostering of sensibility is widely regarded as essentially feminine (Harrington Meyer 2000; Zimmerman et al. 2006). While it is important to celebrate the participation of women in organizing electroacoustic training in Quebec, then, it is crucial to recognize that this specialization has also contributed to their being pushed out of the histories of more stereotypically masculine, and consequently more highly valued roles. Deschênes, who is little known in spite of her pioneering work, is herself an obvious victim of this kind of exclusion.

There is clearly a difference between all *sounds* being created equal and all *sound makers* being created equal. Embracing a plurality of sounds, as Schaeffer himself sought to do, does not necessarily entail a questioning of the social hierarchies that determine who is allowed to produce them. In fact, by shifting authority from historically sedimented convention to immediate individual perception, acousmatic theory may actually exacerbate such inequalities. It hails the composer as a maverick, transforming the private experience of resistance to institutionalized aesthetic norms into a shared “structure of feeling” that works against the recognition of wider social inequalities (Williams 1977: 132).

Efforts to further democratize acousmatic production thus face an important ideological challenge. As long as acousmatic composers claim a critical position based on theoretical assertions about universal structures of audition, they complicate their own efforts to tolerate other musics. In Jacques Rancière’s formulation, democracy is not a kind of unification through collective intelligence; it is a form of dissensus, ensuring constant opposition to absolute power (Rancière 2006: 96). Hannah Arendt (1968) comes to a similar conclusion, arguing that politics must have an external relationship with truth as it is conceived in science and philosophy. From this point of view, the democratization of acousmatic music eventually forces a choice between theoretical universality and musical plurality. And in this sense the democracy acousmatic theorists and composers aspire to mirrors the Quebecois cultural transformation from clerical orthodoxy to modern secularism. Their challenge going forward is to decouple the grand narrative of unmediated subjective agency from the valorization of new auditory knowledges.

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Notes

- 1 Although it shares several features with the older genre of *musique concrète* (concrete music), the two are historically distinct. Schaeffer's major theoretical work the *Traité des objets musicaux* (Treatise on Musical Objects) (1966) presents *musique concrète* as mired in theoretical contradictions and in need of correction. His student François Bayle (1993) introduced the new term *musique acousmatique* (acousmatic music) as a means of consolidating the gains he saw in Schaeffer's mature thinking. It did not become commonplace until the 1980s.

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