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NOISE DESIGN

Architectural Modelling and the Aesthetics of Urban Acoustic Space

By Björn Hellström

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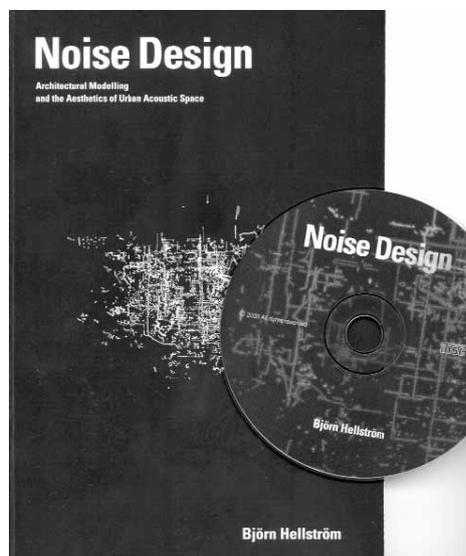
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In a climate of *sound-scapes* and *sound-design*, Björn Hellström has purposefully made a provocative choice for his book—*Noise Design*. His reason, as I understand it, is to move away from the common interpretation of noise as “unwanted sound”, towards a clearer understanding of noise as a “mediator of qualitative information”.

In the prologue the author presents a good overview of the current research field, setting out two camps; the WFAE and CRESSON institute. He then structures his main text into three essays—I. *On Sound Design*, II. *On Sound Effect*, and III. *On Sound Identity*—which are complimented by a CD-ROM. I. The first essay, *On Sound Design*, deals with sound from an aesthetical perspective of the sonic arts (electroacoustic music, musique concrète, neues Hörspiel etc.) and is divided into chapters on the *Sound-Object*, *Sound Landscape*, *Sound Perception* and *Sound Notation*. Here, Hellström introduces Pierre Schaeffer, Trevor Wishart, Iannis Xenakis and John Cage, amongst other key figures. Whilst, I imagine, some of this substance will be familiar to readers of this journal, the subsequent essays however are new to the English reader and absolutely essential. What Hellström importantly achieves in this essay is to “frame the knowledge field” of sound art in relation to that of sound design. Consequently he derives *six statements* that describe the close interface between the environmental and musical field. For example, “5. Listening perception is a basic qualitative tool for the sound designer when exploring the relation between sound and the user’s space, implying that sounds are not undesired, but possess certain qualities by bringing qualitative information in many aspects and situations.” CD-ROM. Also, interspersed throughout this first essay are fifteen *Studies*, which relate to audio and video on the accompanying CD-ROM. These aim to elucidate different concepts under discussion. For example *Study no. 1* invites us to listen or *attend* to a composition of electronic and environmental sounds first from an analytical level (i.e. acoustic qualities, social behaviour) and then on a creative level (i.e. its aesthetical, musical aspects). Of particular note on the CD-ROM is *Tiks* (Transparent Information of the Klara Systems) a sound and video installation by Hellström, which initiated his subsequent architectural and sonic explorations.



II. In the second essay, *On Sound Effect*, Hellström renders for the first time an English translation of *A l'Ecoute de l'environnement—répertoire des effets sonores* (Listening to the environment— repertoire of sound effects), edited by J-F Augoyard and H. Torgue. This comprehensive, qualitative tool was developed at CRESSON (Centre de Recherche sur l'Espace Sonore et l'Environnement Urbain) at the School of Architecture, Grenoble. CRESSON investigates the urban sonic environment using interdisciplinary and qualitative approaches with a view to producing sound design tools for architects, and it was here that Hellström studied from 1998-99 under the supervision of Jean-François Augoyard. Published in 1995, by Editions Parenthèses, Marseille, *A l'Ecoute de l'environnement—répertoire des effets sonores* is the only work where sound effects are thoroughly classified each according to

their acoustic, architectural, sociological, psychological, cultural, philosophical and musical contexts. In its original form 'effets sonores' consists of 16 major and 70 minor sound effects with which one might describe any unfolding sonic situation. Hellström goes on in the next chapter to translate one effect in its entirety—the *metabolic effect* (an appendix also translates the descriptions of a further sixty or so effects relevant to architecture and soundscape design). The author has done an excellent job opening this essential text up to other readers. I must admit however, that when I reached the more detailed schematics and various conceptual representations of *the metabolic effect*, I became swamped in the complexity of it all. I think I would have preferred to see/hear about more real-life examples.

III. In the third and final essay, *On Sound Identity*, Hellström presents us with a thorough presentation of Pascal Amphoux's *L'Identité sonore des villes européennes* (The Sonic Identity of European Cities), 1993. As with CRESSON's *effets sonores*, this is the first time that the text has been translated into English and Hellström has done all soundscape researchers and designers a great service here. Amphoux's work (including his earlier *Aux écoutes de la ville*—Listening to the City) also presented here by Hellström, should now be essential reading, especially by creators of any soundscape projects looking at applied methodologies. Hellström explains Amphoux's *CVS-model* (*Connu*-known, *Vécu*-lived, *Sensible*-lived) as well as the *EMP-model* (Environmental listening, Milieu listening, Landscape listening), which are used as tools to map and qualify different dimensions of sonic urban identity. These in turn refer to an extensive *Repertoire of Qualitative Criteria*, some of which Hellström translates in another appendix.

In the final chapters, the author presents his own explorative *Tiger* project using the *effets sonores* and *EMP-model*. Also presented on the CD-ROM, the *Tiger* (Tourist Information Guide to Environmental Resonance) represents nine short locations through surveys in Stockholm's Klara district, in which Hellström demonstrates how these tools can be employed both analytically and creatively. In summary, I must admit that I found this book a bit heavy going in places, albeit meticulously notated and referenced. In addition, the various layers of sub-chapters, headings, figures, tablatures, footnotes and CD-ROM studies were a little disorienting. Having said that, Hellström does well to contain this multiplicity with preambles and summaries to most chapters, keeping the reader on course within the larger trajectory of the thesis. Given the vast scope of Hellström's research and the sometimes deeply technical aspects of what he relates (and translates), he could not have done a better job. Hellström has provided the English speaking acoustic community with a detailed presentation of Pascal Amphoux's methodology and CRESSON's repertoire of sound effects. This has obviously been a huge undertaking and we should applaud Hellström for being able to act as a bridge to this essential work. This is not to undermine his own contribution either through the *Tiks* and *Tiger* projects, which I feel were unfortunately relegated and confined somewhat within the publication. Actually, I would have liked to have heard more of Hellström emerging in the mix. *Noise Design* is something to *shout!* about. It will be indispensable reading for any soundscape researcher, composer, architect, or urban acoustician.

Gregg Wagstaff is a freelance sound artist/designer and soundscape researcher living in Scotland. He is currently part of the UKISC management committee and its representative on the WFAE board. He recently co-edited *Soundscape Studies & Methods*, published by the Finnish Society of Ethnomusicology, 2002.