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Sound Arts, Sound Performance and Sonic Arts – Alternative Presence of Japanese Electroacoustic Music

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Abstract

The Japanese live electronic or Japanese style of algorithmic composition struggled for new forms of expression and presentation and created the alternative styles. The terms 'live electronic' and 'algorithmic composition' originated Euro-American electroacoustic music but the Japanese artists like Group Ongaku or Method Machine modified the concepts and created their unique styles.

Starting with the general definition of sound arts by Helga de la Motte-Haber, which would be applied to the survey of Japanese sound arts from Group Ongaku to Zombie Music, I will focus on two points: the terminology of 'live electronic' which was connected to the space concept in Group Ongaku, and 'media' as an aesthetic phase of music in the discipline of Method Machine.

Helga de la Motte-Haber admitted in 1999 that the piece like Steve Reich's *Pendulum Music* (1968) had exceeded the limitation of music as art genre and that the artists of fine arts invaded into music as sound creation. And *Klangkunst* was referred as 'toning objects' and 'sounding spaces' by him. Depending on the framework of de la Motte-Haber, I discuss the terminology of the genres and the media as method.

First, I discuss about the works as well as the aesthetic statements of Akiso Suzuki, Takehisa Kosugi, Yasunao Tone, Yukio Fujimoto who had started their artistic career in 1960's. As the direct roots of them, I discuss about Group Ongaku.

The second point concerns 'media' as transmitting system for the artists to have social communication. This framework suited to the key points of Method Machine manifesto, which was announced through Internet on the New Year's Day of 2000. The pieces by Masahiro Miwa are deduced from the algorithmic composition, which were very unique in the point that the algorithm simulates the algorithm itself.

Group Ongaku repeated improvisational performances in small rooms of Tokyo University of Arts or of Tokyo University before their first public concert in Sogetsu Kaikan (1961). Their improvisation has been succeeded to Taji Mahar Travelers, founded in 1968. According to Minao Shibata, the members played (or used) violin, harmonica, bass, vibraphone, santool and other ethnic instruments, Japanese traditional instruments and some gadgets. The interplay between the performers' narrative process and the spirit of the audience was occurring in a common 'space'.

The musicologist Koji Sano wrote in the article "Wave Music" in Transonic (n° 6, 1975), that the Japanese live-electronics in 1970's were composed and performed with electronics and

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their identity was in their spatial concept, which is not constructed on the time line. The concert held in Sogetsu Kaikan in Tokyo in 1961 by Group Ongaku with the title "Improvisation and *objets sonores*" will show their essence.

Masahiro Miwa, a founder of Method Machine and prizewinner of Golden Nica in Ars Electronica, made the audience do some physical training based on his minute indications. The purpose of physical training is to realize the virtual story with the real human body. This method had already been presented in *Ordering a Pizza de Brothers!* by Formant Brothers originated in 2003. Ordering a pizza as a fictional story evaluates the artificial voice created by their original formant synthesis. Even though the fictional purpose is not achieved, the performance is evaluated in the other dimension than the fictional goal. Zombie music by Taro Yasuno realizes a new type of communication through sound performance not with human body but with his automata and video.

1. Introduction

In the history of Japanese electroacoustic music we can find some musicians who seems to cross the border to the other genres and brought radicalism concerning the essence of music and musical presence. They struggled for new forms and ideas of musical expression and created the alternative styles, varied from live electronic performance to the algorithmic composition. They are unique enough to be called Japanese style and supposed to be based on Japanese cultural background.

There are several Japanese sound artists who have been using electronic tools and have been taken notice since 1960's. They have been separated from on-stage composers in the historical description. Or, even in the comprehensive books titled *Sengo-Ongaku-shi* (*History of Japanese Contemporary Music since WWII*), they have been given special description: 'Live electronic' performances of Group Ongaku of 1960's are under the sub-headings of 'counter-culture', and, the performances of 'algorithmic composition' by Masahiro Miwa and Ho-ho Machine (Method Machine) are under the sub-headings of 'across the border'.

Today I will talk about these two trends of sound performance, about their aesthetic concepts and the elements on which they focused. The 'live electronic' and 'algorithmic composition' originated Euro-American culture but the Japanese artists like Group Ongaku or Ho-ho Machine modified the concepts and created their unique styles. The discipline by Helga de la Motte-Haber could be applied to the survey of Japanese sound arts from Group Ongaku to Ho-ho Machine, that is, from 1960's to today.

And I will focus on two points: the 'space' concept which was indispensable to the 'live electronic' performance of Group Ongaku, and, the 'communication media' as an aesthetic phase in the discipline of Ho-ho Machine (Method Machine).

2. What is the outcome of the musical thinking of the sound performances?

The gigantesque handbook series of twentieth century music edited by Helga de la Motte-Haber[1] devoted one volume to Sound Art, *Klangkunst*, which was published in 1999. De la Motte-Haber admitted that the piece like Steve Reich's *Pendulum Music* (1968) had exceeded

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[1] Helga de la Motte-Haber (ed.), *Klangekunst: tönende Objekte und klingende Räume*, Laaber (Germany), Laaber-Verlag, 1999.

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the limitation of music as art genre and that the artists of fine arts invaded into music as sound creation. *Klangkunst* is oriented to the sense of hearing and seeing and it proposes the social situation of Media and the art expression often makes change and evolution of the function of the media. Here the term Media was used in a sense that artists could have social communication by way of some system of transmitting. *Klangkunst* was referred as 'toning objects' and 'sounding spaces' with audio-visual synesthetic. According to de la Motte-Haber's thought of *Klangkunst*, there are three forms of sound art: sound installation, sound sculpture and sound performance. Sound installation is mediated by space. Just as 'acousmonium' is a style of spatialization of music, sound installation is a space music, whose important element is how to design the space with sound. In the general thinking, sound sculpture may be defined as creation of object (sculpture) and sound performance can be described being deeply concerned with sound.

In order to think about the specifics to Japanese situation compared with the three forms de la Motte-Haber presented (installation, sculpture, performance), I take here Akio Suzuki's *Hinatabokko*, improvisations of Group Ongaku and *Ordering a Pizza* by Formant Brothers together with Zombie Music by Taro Yasuno. In their performances, sounds are not the starting point but the result of musical thinking or musical actions. In Suzuki's *Hinatabokko*, sounds come indeterminately in the indicated place. In the improvisations of Group Ongaku, the performers made unintended sounds. And 'space' is the key concept as they themselves said.

Zombie Ongaku can be both installation and performance. Yasuno's hand-made machine is a kind of sound objects, but neither performance nor the sound objects focus on space. His installation is not the machine presentation, while his performance has a slight difference from sound performance that is to be carefully listened to.

Is it on the edge where music immerses to the other genre? As the aesthetic statements of Akio Suzuki and Takehisa Kosugi showed, both of them worked at sound performance. But what is the outcome based on their musical thinking? Is it 'toning objects' that Yasuno focuses on in his performance with Zombie?

3. Suzuki's performance and 'live electronic' and 'space' in Group Ongaku (1961-) Let's return to Akio Suzuki

In 1960's, Akio Suzuki 鈴木昭男 started his performance with the concept of *Nagekake* 投げかけ (throwing) and *Tadori* 辿り (following), that means that discovering the questions by himself and searching through his own experience. *Nagekake* 投げかけ (throwing) and *Tadori* 辿り (following), that is, his self-imposed Q and A have been Suzuki's radical theme for long time, and the two corresponding concepts led his conceptual sound works.

Suzuki's first performance was held in Nagoya in 1963. That was on the steps of Nagoya Station. There he threw a bucket full of junk down a staircase. The idea came from the intention to listen to sound as it is. Suzuki had thought if one were to hurl an object down a well-balanced stairway, a pleasant rhythm might be the result and he executed the experiment. Thus throwing the question and pursuing the result. His soundless sound performance is also hearing experiment, and the main point is 'to listen to every sound in the space'.

Suzuki defined that his soundless sound performance like *Hinatabokko no Kukan* (*Space in the Sun*) is also his journey to the inner space of self. *Hinatabokko* recurs everyone's memory

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of his childhood when everyone is happy with his mother in beautiful sunshine in winter. These concepts of 'journey to the inner space' in Suzuki's term testifies that the sound materials and the silence in his works represent 'space' both as time and place, such as our personal 'memory'. We can find large places where nothing included. We encounter the time when nothing occurs. Thus we discover intermittence which lies under the surface of ordinary life. In Suzuki's sound works we find the secret intermittence as space.

Kosugi and Mizuno started their assertive performance in 1960's with the day-life goods and electronic gadgets. They joined visual artist Yasunao Tone 刀根康尚, Golden Nica Award winner of 2002, composer Mieko Shiomi 塩見允枝子, Japanese fluxus member, musicologists Mikio Tojima 戸島美喜夫, Syuko Mizuno 水野修孝, Gennichi Tsuge 柘植元, and Yoshio Tsukio月尾嘉男, architect and later, famous urban designer, and the team was named Group Ongaku by Yasunao Tone. Their principles were to activate the anti-establishment of music.

Space is also the main theme for Takehisa Kosugi 小杉武久 and Shuko Mizuno 水野修孝, the Japanese improvisation artists in 1960's. In their case 'space' implies place for psychological communication among the performers like that of American collective improvisation. How the members shared the space and time for improvisation? One of the methods was to organize the rules for improvisation and the other aimed at more philosophical way of reaching to the universe like Indian music. They repeated improvisations in Tokyo University of Arts and Tokyo University before their first public concert in Sogetsu Kaikan, "concert for improvisation and musical objects" (1961).

Concerning the Sogetsu concert, Kuniharu Akiyama 秋山邦晴, music critic, indicated that they presented actual problems only as such, which should be much more sophisticated and fixed on tape (*Ongakugeijyutsu*, 1961 Dec.). In effect, the private recording in 1960 by Shuko Mizuno was publicly released with the title *Automatism* and *This is Objects!*. The title *Automatism* can be connected with French *surréalisme* and *This is Objects!* is an anti-thesis to the *objet sonore* by Pierre Schaeffer. Both of them don't seek for completeness, but seek for experimental challenge.

Group Ongaku was soon dissolved. And that style of improvisation has been succeeded to Taji Mahar Travelers タージマハール旅行団, founded in 1968. The team leader was Kosugi.

Minao Shibata 柴田南雄 described about Kosugi and Taji Mahar Travelers タージマハール旅行団 in an article published in a magazine *Transonic*, of which the chief director was Yuji Takahashi 高橋悠治.

> It is a collection of non-periodical sound waves, which continue pretty slight changes. Surrounded by incessant diversified waves, both the audience and the performers wrapped by sounds. The source sounds are voices, instruments, electronic sounds and objects. All the sounds are amplified, modified, phased and diffused from several speakers. But the important point is that the equipment is not hi-fi but some handmade gadgets. If hi-fi sounds come from the speakers, that is the dying moment of this group.

They played （or used） violin, harmonica, base, vibraphone, santool and other ethnic instruments, Japanese traditional instruments and some **gadgets**. All of them were amplified through microphones and amplifier. Their collective improvisations were called 'live electronic' in their own meaning. The essence of their pieces is neither the sound material nor

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instruments itself. The important point is that their 'narrative process of sound making' is gradually **immersing** into the spirit of the audience. The interplay between the performers' narrative process and the spirit of the audience was occurring in a common 'space'.

With the phrase 'narrative process', I mean that people can recognize and feel in real time how each sound is produced with the materials and how is diffused into the space. Their live-electronics since 1970s were composed and performed with electronics and their identity was in their spatial concept, which is neither to be constructed nor developed on the time line, as the musicologist Koji Sano 佐野光司 indicated in the article "Wave Music" in *Transonic* (n° 6, 1975).

4. 'Communication Media' for music in Method Machine (2000-)

Now I move on to the Japanese artists of non-genre sound performance after 2000. Comparison with the space concept in Suzuki and Groupe Ongaku can show us another aesthetic paradigm concerning the sonic performance by Hoho-Machine (Method machine). Here I would like to call the paradigm 'communication media'. 'Communication media' is a social system which supports both public and private community. Let's listen to a part of Zombie musi*c* by Taro Yasuno, current leader of the group Hoho-Machine.

Zombi ongaku[2]

These cheap sounds are made by the robots invented and controlled with Max which was created by Yasuno. The piece is not a demonstration of the robot system but a strong appeal that the cheap machine and the creator Yasuno are making effort to make sounds. The key point is to show how t**he physical body is making sounds**. Yasuno and the members call the way of doing something, making sounds in this case, Method (Hoho). Their priority is **on the method**.

Here sound performance commits 'media' as conveying messages for the artists to have social communication. Today we have the ever changing communication system thanks to the technology of network like internet and SNS as well as with the hardware such as various type of sensing machines, smart phone, tablet and so on. 'Communication media' could be an art form as itself which is a framework of sending messages from the creator to the audience. This framework suited to the key points of the manifest of Method Machine. They don't use directly the social network media, hardware nor software.

Let's see the manifest, which was announced through Internet on the New Year's Day of 2000. The founders were Hideki Nakazawa, Shigeru Matsui and Masahiro Miwa (composer, studied in Berlin and Golden Nica winner of Ars Electronica 2007). At the time of the manifest, Miwa was known of his algorithmic composition which creates some instructions to the performers as deduction from the primitive rules. The method was very unique in the point that the algorithm simulates the algorithm itself.

Here is the Manifesto of Ho-ho Machine

Ho-ho machine (Method machine) is a system which can realize various types of arts understood as method arts and Methodism including method picture, method poem and method music with the help of physical training. Human beings have gotten their special body

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[2] See http://zombie.poino.net/index-eng.html (last accessed 11/14).

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as an art thanks to the trainings all through the history and the culture. And Ho-ho machine will, based on the idea of *Ho-ho* arts realize new representations of physical practices which have note been admitted as arts for now. Thus we will interpret all the paintings we draw as necessary for ourselves, all the poems we made as necessary for myself and all the music we composed as necessary for us, and we change them into physical trainings. Until now all the arts suppose the arts which is redefined in the history or in the culture. But Ho-ho machine dares to start from the zero level of cultural re-refinement and aims at the apparition of new Hoho-Geijyitsu.

Let's see the most representative piece of Ho-ho: *Ordering a Pizza de Brothers!* by Formant Brothers. This piece is a performance of the brothers who make sentences in front of the audience in a small live-house in order to communicate with the shop person of pizza delivery through telephone. The players don't speak by themselves, but the artificial voice speaks. That artificial voice is systematically produced by MAX/MSP in order to sound as Japanese consonants and vowels triggered by MIDI keyboard. The sampling and formant edited for Japanese consonants and vowels is so precise that the number of the imbedded consonants are pretty big. Depending on the context of the sentence, the players (Formant Brothers) must select the proper key control to make the right sentences. It means, special virtuosity is needed to control the right sound with the data of note number, attack, release, after touch and so on.

The first live performance was realized in November 2003 and the response of the shop person was so impressive. First he was apparently puzzled to hear the somehow strange voice say the telephone number (six, six, three, four) and he repeated stutteringly the number, but in the second turn for his response, his intonation was completely businesslike and he made an impression testifying he was a Japanese affable guy and he caught correctly the words of artificial voice. Finally the functional communication of ordering pizza was completed. The shop guy said 'thank you very much' and the telephone was cut off. This is the whole of the performance[3].

What does the audience experience during the performance?

At the moment the first word or the artificial voice, the audience grinned and followed each of the strange voice. The sentences and short answers made by the voice were predictable, because the conversation proceeded by stereotyped words. The audience rather watched and waited the voice could order the pizza without problem. So the players and the system applauded when the order was completed.

Here the usual communication is dissimilated, and the clear language as communication framework crumbles and is newly constructed. People find that the performance on the stage is not only the prescribed fictional action but also a real communication which should lead to a real result, which means ordering a pizza through telephone. In other words, the pseud communication on the stage should have a real function based on a real communication. The audience witnessed the fictional performance was reversed to be a non-fictional, real and socially functional action. They can evaluate the system because they know right or wrong about the social function in their ordinary life. They may rethink their usual communication by comparing with the impaired artificial one. This is a kind of 'reverse simulation' in Miwa's terms. 'Reverse simulation' is nonsense because 'simulation' means a fiction is made as non-fiction, that is, a real thing. In the *Pizza* performance, the real thing (actually ordering

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[3] See www.youtube.com/watch?v=FFvFlpVjEjM by Formant Brothers (last accessed 11/14).

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a pizza) was made artificially by a scenario, i.e. a fiction, which means the real thing imitates a fiction. The sound performance of *Pizza* worked excellently as nonsense of 'reverse simulation'. And the logical operation of reversing is one aesthetic algorithm for music or for sound performance.

5. Conclusion

In 1960's Group Ongaku thought the 'space' concept as their inspiration that ought to be shared among the members. In 21st century, Ho-ho Machine is searching for systems of meta-communication and creating new communication media.

This concept of Ho-ho machine is based on that music is still today should be communicative in the society. Experiencing the process of *Ordering a Pizza*, the audience witnesses the way we complete the social action, in other words, accomplish a communicative function.

Concerning the Japanese Sound Artists, here I mentioned, I propose three categories; Sound Arts, Sound Performance and Sonic Arts, rather than that of sound installation, sound sculpture and sound performance. The term 'sound arts' is for the generalization of the genre as a whole, and 'sound performance' is the most actual form now in Japan. And 'Sonic Art' more strongly concentrates on **sound making program**, as discussed in JSSA (Japanese Society of Sonic Arts).

In addition, I propose one linguistic point. The word 'communication' was translated as 'transmitting information' or 'association' in Japanese in 1960's. Today it is translated in Katakana 'コミュニケーション'. That may concern that the concept of communication in today's sense has been brought into the public consciousness during these forty years. Today the term communication has deep connection with computer processing.

That's why Ho-ho machine focuses on the process of communication.

And their method of new communication is in Japanese style of expression in a little bit comical way. I think that 'being comical' or 'the sense of laughing' is to be discussed concerning today's sound performance. To say nothing of performance, comical elements are to be the next topic about electroacoustic music.