

Aneezah Tauseef

Corbin Alain, in the seventh chapter of his book 'Histories of Sound', talks about how the importance of bells in the French villages changed with time. He highlights the symbolic and practical importance of bells and forges their history starting from the Industrial Revolution to the nineteenth century. With time passing by, bells were replaced with clocks and machinery. Alain also mentions the arguments and conflicts of opinions that arose over bell timings related to holidays, feasts, call to prayers and announcements.

It was rather interesting to know that the sound of the bell defined the areas. The boundaries and walls we have created today were marked by the extent to which one could hear the bell. An aerial boundary seen yet unseen, for the sounds and eyes are interlinked even if the image is inside our head we visualize it. Although as Alain mentions, there were a lot of complaints regarding the fact that the bell ringing could not be heard over a distance. This was common in the plains as compared to valleys.

The bell tower used to be located in the middle of the town and no other sound could overpower that of the bell. It sounds rather magnificent to me how something that is almost forgotten now held so much importance back then. Such auditory power was held by the bell and the people believed that the sound would drive away all evil spirits that spread diseases. It was also said to drive away the clouds and clear the path for angels to come down.

R. Murray Schafer revolves his discussion around what we call 'soundscapes'. A soundscape is "a mélange of musical and sometimes nonmusical sounds". He asks a very interesting question "is the world an indeterminate composition over which we have no control, or are we its composers and performers, responsible for giving it form and beauty?". After reading his text, a question comes to your mind, what sounds do we want to hear? And why do we give them more importance? Appreciating the good in sounds will help us automatically eliminate what disruptive noise pollution that exists all around us.

According to myths, music is a subjective emotion. For some it is an internal emotion that comes

from within and breaks through your soul. For others it is more external, something that possesses power over them. It is also believed that the universe is an amalgamation of sounds held together by a precise design and mathematics. Schafer also mentions that before god was visualized, he existed in the form of sound or vibration. In Islam as the recitation of Quran and in Sufism the state of sama which is the whirling dance.

He talks about the Hi-fi sounds and how in a silent environment our ears are more sensitive to sounds and intercept them more easily. There is less to little background noise that makes the human ear very sharp, like that of an animal. All of this was disrupted by the industrial revolution which led to majority of the places producing lo-fi soundscapes that had so much auditory traffic that one could not focus on any of the sounds and it all became a chaotic mess.

Both of these texts highlight the importance of sounds and how it has changed and evolved throughout history. Sound is an integral part of our daily routine, but do we really sit and listen to the soundscapes around us and try to understand the universe through a new lens?

References:

- Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, s.v. “soundscape,” accessed January 2, 2021,
<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/soundscape>
- R. Murray Schafer, “Audio Culture”, accessed January 2, 2021