

Spaces Speak, Are You Listening? Experiencing Aural Architecture

Barry Blesser & Linda-Ruth Salter
MIT press, 2006
ISBN-10 0-262-02605-8

In our present theoretical climate, plagued as it is by continuing, mordant Derrida-inspired debates as to the precise status of 'hauntology' in pop music and architecture, the publication of this book stands as welcome. In the first instance, a monumental and, frankly, intermittently somewhat leaden treatment of 'aural' architectural space, principally concerned with the various empirical vicissitudes of it. On the other hand, such an impressive synthesis is presented in this text, that at several key points a far richer and more interesting thematic bursts through its rather conventional surface. Specifically, this thematic is a philosophically charged one, strung between Plato and Schoenberg. In the third chapter, for instance, Blesser and Salter lend an almost luminous sonic spin to Plato's famous cave metaphor. Elsewhere, the dissonant politics of noise vis-a-vis various competing 'acoustic horizons' is given a simply outstanding analysis. At such giddy moments, it appears that Blesser and Salter are seriously threatening to overturn the millennia-old visual primacy of spectacular western culture, thence to liberate listening in the service of a truly militant sonic politics. And yet ultimately, suffice to say, this book does not manage to reach such a climax. The account it provides is really too broad and its critical grasp consequently too weak to seize it. Yet, in so extensively mapping the basic territory, this book nonetheless does serve to show that the eventual formulation of such a doctrine is perhaps not so far away.

DM