

Fake Music Re-Anticipations

The FCC – The National Radio Quiet Zone

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In 1958 the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) established the National Radio Quiet Zone (NRQZ), an approximate rectangle of land in which radio transmissions would be restricted and closely monitored in order to protect sites of scientific research and military intelligence work. The 13,000-square-mile zone extends from just outside Clarksburg, WV to below North Garden, VA, south of Charlottesville, and it protects the National Radio Astronomy Observatory and the now defunct Sugar Grove Station, the latter of which was run by Navy Information Operations Command. Within this region, anyone who establishes a fixed – that is, licensed – antenna must work with officials to ensure that “silence” of the quiet zone remains unperturbed. Such antennae must operate at reduced power, say, or be specially made to radiate in directions that do not interfere with the areas surrounding these research sites.

In the case of the National Radio Astronomy Observatory, the regulation of the NRQZ allows astronomers to observe frequencies in outer space whose detection from Earth would usually be made impossible due to radio towers, cell phones, WIFI, etc. With instruments like the Green Bank Telescope, the world’s largest fully steerable radio telescope, these transmissions can be used to discover hitherto unknown constituents of our universe such as the Orion molecular cloud, which is 23,000 light years away.

Sugar Grove Station was part of the ECHELON surveillance program, and had in the past used the silence afforded by the NRQZ to gather intelligence on Soviet radar and radio frequencies during the Cold War. The program was operated by the National Security Agency, who in 2015 declared that advances in surveillance technology had rendered the base obsolete, effecting its disestablishment in September of that year.

In these fields, silence is information or the potential for it; the noise of communications services like radio and Internet (whose contents, certainly, include music) disturbs and distracts from the signal. These slivers of interference-free air are instances of atmospheric censorship, restricted areas which we tolerate for their use in the two poles of scientific investigation – “pure” discovery and military advancement.

We at Fake Music acknowledge our debt to this zone (for we do know exactly how much we owe it), though we regard it with suspicion. It is not our purview to privilege this limitation of frequencies over other exchanges that might otherwise take place in the skies over the NRQZ. We hope that information, or the potential for it, need not continue to eclipse culture.

We appreciate your support.

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