
SOUND STUDIES
AND SONIC ARTS
READER II
Sound in Artistic Research
edited by
Sabine Sanio, Elen Flügge
and Julia H. Schröder
wolke

Sound in Artistic Research

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Sound Studies and Sonic Arts Reader 2

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In memory of Peter Ablinger (1959–2025)

Introduction

Sabine Sanio, Elen Flügge and Julia H. Schröder

This volume gathers most of the contributors to *Artistic Research in Sound,* originally two streamed public lecture series held during the academic terms 2021/22 and 2023/24. The lectures were hosted by the master's program Sound Studies and Sonic Arts (SoundS) at the Berlin University of the Arts. For invitations, we had a faculty meeting where everybody suggested speakers to invite, resulting in a stimulating mix of artists and academics who could discuss their own artistic research in sound or bring theoretical perspectives to the topic. A few speakers could not share their talks (our field is a precarious one) while other authors stepped in and kindly let us publish papers on the subject originating elsewhere. Mostly, the authors were part of the series, and their contributions are shaped by the dialogue with students, colleagues and wider audience that followed their presentations.

As a current topic, the Berlin senate decided to offer grants in artistic research around that time, art universities in European countries had started doctoral programs in artistic research and the discussion was wonderfully rich in many lecture series and publications which were introducing new methods and questioning the rigidity of the field. You will find this collection open and circumventing definitions beyond its individual contributions. This reflects our interest in sharing arguments and allowing for emergence: the emergence of meaning, of knowledge, of questions, of something new.

Artistic Research is a topic that has been an inherent focus of the Sound Studies and Sonic Arts program. Since its inception in the early 2000s, under various similar titles and different directors, the program always brought sound art together with theoretical approaches. For two decades it has been an innovative hub of sonic practices, drawing international students and guest lecturers who bring diverse artistic and scholarly backgrounds to studying, teaching and experimenting with sound. As such, the interweaving of research and artwork, as well as interdisciplinarity, has been a core aspect.

In that sense SoundS is – or was – unique. The decision to discontinue the master's program was made in 2026. Thus, the current students will be the last cohort. They were able to study with many of our contributors. We hope this volume keeps alive some of the discussions and content making them accessible to a wider public. It might even inspire a potential future program: There are efforts from all sides to continue the SoundS program in a renewed form and find a sustainable place for it within the Berlin University of the Arts.

The book's title "Sound in Artistic Research" broadly outlines its subject matter. However, it is by no means limited to questions of artistic research in sonic arts, music, soundwalks, and soundscapes, or to the role of sound in the visual arts. Even the act of listening – perhaps the other central theme of this volume alongside sound – brings further themes into play, from the aesthetics and history of audio media to philosophical and anthropological questions. The book is organised in chapters that emerged from the contributions. Thus, they loosely form units of topics and fields. The chapter titles bring forth new questions and there are numerous themes the reader will find recurring and resonating in and across multiple contributions. One of these is the debate about what 'research', compared to 'art' entails; as well as what is researchable – or perhaps remains un-researchable (Klein, Ablinger). Another theme is the quest for, and formulation of, appropriate methodologies in artistic research, alongside an epistemological position that might operate within both artistic and scientific practice (Aubry, Arteaga, Flügge). While some texts express skepticism about the term 'artistic research' itself (Mersch), others defend artistic practice while bringing a decolonial counter-canon to bear in critiquing wider sound studies and musicological discourse (Chattopadhyay). There are conditions such as the Covid pandemic and lockdown, as well as ongoing ecological crises, which form a background in multiple texts (such as Bulut, Voegelin). And, often in connection to such conditions, authors raise questions regarding empathy, care (as in careful and care-full listening) and ways of listening-with and listening-together (Losleben and Buyken). Many authors offer insightful accounts of their own artistic practice (among others Auinger, Stjerna, Oliveira, and Guffond), while academics reflect critically on artworks by others (Khazam, Bulut, and Sanio). Some of these contributions dwell on the intimacy of the personal body and voice as generative sites for knowledge (Popova, Voegelin); others elaborate the role of media and technologies in the relationship of science and artistic creativity (Schlüter, Stjerna). These are just a few of interwoven themes the reader may discover in exploring these pages.

For this richness, we are grateful to the authors, as well as for their patience and dedication in engaging in the process of editing and peer reviewing. The texts (with three exceptions) were peer-reviewed in a single-blind peer review with three reviews for every contribution. For their insightful and constructive criticism, we are grateful to Gilles Aubry, Sam Auinger, Christa Brüstle, Zeynep Bulut, Evelyn Buyken and Katrin Losleben, Alejandra Cárdenas Pacheco, Fabian Czolbe, Nico Daleman, Jasmine Guffond, Michael Harenberg, Marius Hofbauer, Rahma Khazam, Lucas Kühne, Eric Maltz, Pedro Oliveira, Samuel Perea Díaz, Stephanie Schroedter, Francisco Taborda, Salomé Voegelin, Kim Wichera. The editing team Elen Flügge, Sabine Sanio and Julia H. Schröder also contributed openly to the peer review.

We acknowledge our colleagues who helped to organise and shape the lecture series as well as contributing to it, namely, Jacob Eriksen, Daisuke Ishida and

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The Sonic and the Scientific

THE UNKNOWN OF EVERYDAY LIFE
How sonic arts encourage us to question as we listen

Sabine Sanio

Over the more than fifteen years that the debate on artistic research has been waging, a broad spectrum of different concepts and positions have been explored. Since key aspects of this debate are discussed in detail in several contributions to this volume – including the texts by Rahma Khazam, Dieter Mersch, and Alex Arteaga – I will not present my own account of this topic here. Instead, I will discuss some positions and developments within the arts that may be of interest to questions of artistic research.

Overall, this study is divided into three parts. In the first section, I look at the history of the arts to illustrate how, following Alexander Baumgarten's founding of aesthetics, Hegel's definition of the arts as a form of cognition brought about a lasting revaluation of the arts, thereby leading to changes in the arts' self-understanding as well as to reflections that anticipate current ideas of artistic research. In the second part, I will use three artistic concepts and strategies to demonstrate how questions of reflection and research, of exploration and experimentation, are becoming increasingly significant in the arts. In the third part, I will present three compositions that require a mode of reception characterized by attentive listening as well as an ability to recognize the concepts underlying a given composition. This text is therefore less about research that could be situated close to the sciences, and more about raising awareness of the themes, strategies, and materials with which the arts engage, and which, especially when considering their use of media, can always provide us with insights into social, historical, and political conditions.

I. Prerequisites

With the societal establishment of aesthetic autonomy at the end of the eighteenth century and the founding of aesthetics as a philosophical discipline through Alexander Baumgarten, philosophy turned to an intensive consideration of the arts. Positions discussed at that time – such as Kant's theory of aesthetic judgment as resulting from a pleasurable exercise of the faculties of reason, or Hegel's thesis that arts are a fundamental form of recognition alongside religion and philosophy – implied a lasting reappraisal of the arts (Hegel 1985, I, 21f.). Unlike in antiquity, when, for example, the arts were characterized primarily by their capacity for

illusion and imitation of reality, they were now seen as a form of cognition, which also raised the question of the truth of art (Plato 2012, 424a–425a). Adorno's assumption, for instance, that musical recognition manifests itself in the historical state of the material – which thereby also provides decisive clues to upcoming musical developments – is entirely in line with this stance (Adorno 2006, 31–34).[1] While this reappraisal has often been criticized since then as an overloading of and excessive demands on the arts, the hierarchy established by Hegel was quite ambivalent: for him, the form of recognition developed through art belonged to the past; by contrast, he considered only philosophical and scientific recognition to be forward-looking and appropriate to the Age of Enlightenment (Hegel 1985, I, 14; cf. Bubner 1989, 9–51). In nineteenth-century historicism, these relationships were gradually solidified as the humanities (which were at that time emerging as disciplines) declared the arts as their academic subject matter. Scholars investigated the great art of the past, thereby placing the artistic genius at the center of their inquiry, yet without attributing to them an equivalent scholarly status. Within scholarly institutions, artists were not considered capable of participating in discourse.

However, the history of academia in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries also shows that the histories of the arts and the sciences did not develop along such clearly separate paths as one might have expected in light of Hegel's distinction between the two. Thus, during that phase of academic differentiation, artistic positions and movements were often precursors to new areas of scientific research. This applies, for example, to the nineteenth century psychological novel, which – despite all differences in methodology and forms of representation – in a sense preceded psychology as a scientific discipline in the twentieth century and heralded its emergence. This can be similarly said for certain ideas and trends within the avant-garde movements of the early twentieth century. With their call to abandon established art institutions such as museums and concert halls in order to participate in everyday life, they anticipated the early turn in cultural studies toward everyday culture as a new area of research. And long before the emergence of media studies, avant-garde artists devoted themselves to the exploration of mod-

1 The differentiation of dissonance, leading all the way to the dissolution of tonal music through atonality, twelve-tone music, and even serial, microtonal, and spectral music, marks the culmination of this development. In the twentieth century, the focus shifted toward an exploration of sound sources and methods of sound generation, space as a central element of the performance situation, and the new role of the listener, who interacts with the sound event by listening, seeing, and moving through the space (Rolf Großmann 2006). In this sense, the history of painting – from icon painting through the discovery of perspective and spatial representation to abstract painting – can also be read as a history of the exploration of painting's aesthetic material.

ern media and technologies (Großmann 2006).[2] More recently, a comparable trend can be observed with regard to ecological research on non-human life as well as in urban planning: New artistic movements such as soundwalks and soundscapes have long been broadening perspectives, a shift now reflected in attitudes toward the Anthropocene and in an urban planning seeking to reduce the focus on architectural structures in favor of incorporating experiences of inhabitants.[3]

Overall, any discussion of further developments in the twentieth century must also consider the effects of certain fundamental social developments on how the arts understand themselves. While the institution of art as an autonomous sphere of social validity remained largely unchanged, society as a whole underwent an 'aestheticization', which was most recently described by Andreas Reckwitz as a success story of creativity. As a result, however, the social conditions for the arts have fundamentally changed (Reckwitz 2017). As early as the 1980s, Odo Marquard observed that one effect of this 'success story of creativity' was an increasing transformation of reality into a realm of the fictional (Marquard 1989a). In a situation where the production of fictional scenarios characterizes everyday social life, the arts – for which the fictional and the illusory once constituted, to some degree, their unique selling point – find themselves stripped of their social role. The consequence is a radical reorientation: instead of producing fictions, the arts now devote themselves to exploring reality (cf. Marquard 1989a). Among the earliest evidence of this reorientation are the aforementioned calls by the historical avant-garde movements at the beginning of the twentieth century to abandon art institutions such as museums, opera houses, and concert halls. In the 1960s and 1970s, these calls for participation in everyday life were taken up again and further developed by neo-avant-garde movements.[4]

As for the arts' self-conception, the turn of the twentieth century saw a gradual shift away from an ideal of artistic productivity modeled on artisanal production. This was a reaction to profound social changes. First, there was the fundamental experience of the destructiveness unleashed in bourgeois society during World War I, which prompted the Dadaists to distance themselves from bourgeois society and its conception of art (Bürger 1974). Two further developments came into play. First was the discovery of photography, which was soon followed by

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2 Dieter Daniels pointed out that many artists were involved in the discovery of new media, Daniels 2002.

3 Among the first artists to consistently leave the concert hall to work with sound in outdoor spaces, public spaces, or nature were Max Neuhaus, Maryanne Amacher, and Bill Fontana.

4 Cage played a major role in passing on avant-garde ideas in the 1950s and 1960s. During this period, many young artists – including Yoko Ono, George Maciunas, Nam June Paik, Maryanne Amacher, George Brecht, and Max Neuhaus – gathered in New York; they paid little attention to the distinction between painting and music and instead sought direct contact with the audience in their performances, Kellein 2007.