

MNE NOTE AURAL
2007

Over the past twenty years there have been a number of exhibitions at visual arts institutions that have focused on sound. In the last five years their number has increased to the point of almost an art fad. Often they include a subset (sometimes even all) of the following: music, kinetic sculpture, instruments activated by the wind or played by the public, conceptual art, sound effects, recorded readings of prose or poetry, visual artworks which also make sound, paintings of musical instruments, musical automatons, film, video, technological demonstrations, acoustic reenactments, interactive computer programs which produce sound, etc. In short, 'Sound Art' seems to be a category which can include anything which has or makes sound and even, in some cases, things which don't.

Sometimes these 'Sound Art' exhibitions do not make the mistake of including everything under the sun, but then most often what is selected is simply music or a diverse collection of musics with a new name. When faced with musical conservatism at the beginning of the last century, the composer Edgard Varese responded by proposing to broaden the definition of music to include all organized sound. John Cage went further and included silence. Now even in the aftermath of the timid 'forever Mozart decade' in music, our response surely cannot be to put our heads in the sand and call what is essentially new music something else - 'Sound Art'.

I think we need to question whether or not 'Sound Art' constitutes a new art form. The first question, perhaps, is why we think we need a new name for these things which we already have very good names for. Is it because their collection reveals a previously unremarked commonality?

Let's examine the term. It is made up of two words. The first is sound. If we look at the examples above, although most make or have sound of some sort, it is often not the most important part of what they are - almost every activity in the world has an aural component.

The second word is art. The implication here is that they are not arts in the sense of crafts, but fine art. Clearly regardless of the individual worth of these various things, a number of them simply have little to do with art.

It's as if perfectly capable curators in the visual arts suddenly lose their equilibrium at the mention of the word sound. These same people who would all ridicule a new art form called, say, 'Steel Art' which was composed of steel sculpture combined with steel guitar music along with anything else with steel in it, somehow have no trouble at all swallowing 'Sound Art'.

In art, however, the medium is rarely the message. If there is a valid reason for classifying and naming things in culture, certainly it is for the refinement of distinctions. Aesthetic experience

lies in the area of fine distinctions, not the destruction of distinctions for promotion of activities with their least common denominator, in this case sound. Much of what has been called 'Sound Art' has not much to do with either sound or art.

With our now unbounded means to shape sound, there are, of course, an infinite number of possibilities to cultivate the vast potential of this medium in ways which do go beyond the limits of music and, in fact, to develop new art forms. When this becomes a reality, though, we have to invent new words for them. 'Sound Art' has been consumed.

A. Sound is a dimension of our perception of space

Anechoic chamber experience

B. Aural and visual are fundamentally different systems of perception

Complimentary -

Eye/Ear Team

Spatial vs. temporal resolution

Ears see around corners

C. Sound less conscious than the visual

Hear meaning not sound

Common architectural correlations with music, No!

Perception of aural proportion has nothing to do with perception of proportions in space

II. The work

Traditionally plastic arts adjust space for eye

'I adjust it for the ear'

A. Lecture with no slides, no recordings

Work can not be reproduced

No photo - Invisible

No recordings - Sound not the work, but the means to make the work

Additional elements

Topography - sound configured in space

Context

Aural

Visual

Social

B. Sound as generator of Place

Examples from works

C. Aspects of communication with sound

1. Literal

The sound of things

Extended to description of sound by reference

It sounds like

2. Codified

Language

(Music)

3. Sound character

rich

warm

harsh

grating

a. Continuum between these points

Non-literal

Uncodified

b. Additional dimension to

Literal

Codified

c. I use as the activator

Instinctive

Pan cultural

D. My Method

Build sound by ear on site

Remote controlled sound synthesis by computer

Palette of sound color

Mix as paint

Virtual instruments

Build the physically impossible as model

Flexibility of computer modeling,

and also creates the reality !

Ability to compare instantly

E. Sound in everyday is always an event

I build entities with sound

Permanence of immaterial

F. Sound Art

Medium is NOT the message

Large small room

The actual space
is a small kitchen.

Inadvertent sounds
or talking in it,
generate sound
reflections which
duplicate those of
a much larger space.

When one is in the
room, these are
usually not noticed.

The ear's sense of
space automatically
adjusts to the eye's
reality and rescales
itself.

Upon leaving the
kitchen, however, one
enters a much larger
space with normal
sound reflections.

Here the ear, with
its new sense of

scale, reasserts
itself; insisting that
this larger space is
much smaller than it
seems.

Identical space works

Two passages,
bearing
in between
shadow
and daylight,

identical
in form,

diverging
in spirit

Sometimes also outside range of hearing

Subsonic -

MoMA -

The work had no sound of its own.

Instead, it was formed by a single tone,
tuned to a point below our sense of sound
but above our sense of vibration.

This unheard pitch generated a terrain
of regions where each audible sound
in the garden was slightly shifted -- a
transparent overlay on the garden's
sound landscape -- making fine shadings
of hue in the sounds of fountains,
conversation and street.

Ultrasonic -

PS1

Two
high
soft
tones,

Mixing
at the
upper
threshold
of hearing,

Shaping
a different
kind of air.

found Art ? on the phone)ding onn working with a public at large. Inserting works into their daily domain in such a way that people could find them in their own time and on their own terms. Disguising them within their environments in such a way that people discovered them for themselves and took possession of them, lead by their curiosity into lis (?)