2004 - “Sound Art Now: An Online Symposium,” Artforum. Cox Christoph and Branden W. Joseph, Anthony Huberman, David Toop, Carl Michael vonHausswolff, Steve Roden, Marina Rosenfeld, and Stephen Vitiello. April 2004

In the April 2004 issue of *Artforum*, an "Online Symposium" titled "Sound Art Now" featured contributions from several figures including Christoph Cox, Branden W. Joseph, Anthony Huberman, David Toop, Carl Michael von Hausswolff, Steve Roden, Marina Rosenfeld, Stephen Vitiello, and Max Neuhaus.

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(113 messages)

Over the past several years, the art world has witnessed a tremendous explosion of interest in sound art. In 2000 alone, major group exhibitions of audio art were mounted at London's Hayward Gallery, New York's P.S. 1, Tokyo's NTT InterCommunication Center, and the California College of Arts and Crafts' Wattis Institute. The Whitney featured sound art in its 2001 exhibition "BitStreams" and its 2002 Biennial. And, since then, sound-art exhibitions have popped up in Paris, Frankfurt, Turin, Amsterdam, Göteborg, San Francisco, and elsewhere. More and more younger artists have begun to work with sound, while pioneers such as Max Neuhaus, Alvin Lucier, Christian Marclay, Maryanne Amacher, and Christina Kubisch have moved from the margins to the center of critical discourse and curatorial practice.

This spring and summer, New York City (and its environs) will pulse, hum, and chatter with sound-art installation, performance, and symposia as the "New Sound, New York" festival, organized by the Kitchen and the Irwin S. Chanin School of Architecture of the Cooper Union, gets under way. A celebration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of 1979's influential "New Music, New York" festival, "New Sound, New York" brings audio art's éminences grises into contact with its youngest innovators. It seems a good time to ask: Why sound now? What are the key antecedents to

current practices in audio art? Where is sound art heading? What are its most exciting manifestations? To consider these and other questions, *Artforum* has invited art historian **Branden W. Joseph**, composer and author **David Toop,** curator **Anthony Huberman**, and sound artists **Carl Michael von Hausswolff**, **Steve Roden**, **Marina Rosenfeld**, and **Stephen Vitiello** to participate in an online roundtable discussion moderated by philosopher and critic **Christoph Cox**.

Christoph Cox
04.23.04 10:21

Sound art is nearly a century old. To cite only a few moments of its history, it stretches back at least to the Futurists and Dadaists experiments with nonmusical sound and to Erik Satie and Arthur Honegger's performances of "furniture music." John Cage's compositions of the 1950s (for example, *Imaginary Landscape No. 4,* for twelve radios, and the infamous "silent piece" *4' 33*) abandoned traditional music in favor of "the entire field of sound." And "sound-art installation" as we know it today has been an established practice since the late 1960s, when Max Neuhaus coined the term and began producing site-specific audio art for city streets and interior spaces. Major museums such as the Whitney have included audio art for several decades. Yet only in the past five or ten years, it seems to me, have curators, critics, and the art-going public shown a genuine and widespread interest in sound art. What accounts for this turn to sound? Are we witnessing the emergence of an audio culture parallel to visual culture? And, if so, why now?

Anthony Huberman
04.23.04 11:57

Yes, sound is certainly gaining a lot of momentum! Like most of the twists and turns of curatorial and artistic practice, I wouldn't say that there are clear cause-and-effect reasons for it; but one of the currents that seems to be making its way into how we think about art has to do with the idea of the trajectory. I am thinking of Nicolas Bourriaud's comments about the artist as a "semionaut," or someone who "invents trajectories between signs." Implied here is an emphasis on the open fluidity between places, media, and disciplines. Of course, cross-disciplinarity is far from new; but sound is relevant here because, by its very nature, it "leaks" across spaces and materials, and it can play a role in the way

artists think about sculpture, installation, architecture, music, drawing, etc. If artists and curators are interested in things or places that overlap, sound emerges as a material that can encourage a "post-media" sensibility to art, which, I think, is something that many curators are interested in today. Rather than sound as a category in and of itself, sound can contribute in interesting ways to an understanding of art that is more about the trajectories between languages, media, places, and histories.

It's interesting to note, though, that the exhibitions Christoph mentions are often "sound art" shows—shows that emphasize medium-specificity and isolate "sound artists" from others. I wonder if this totally contradicts my thoughts on Christoph's "why now" question . . . or not?

Branden W. Joseph
04.23.04 12:40

It seems to me that there are already a number of interesting issues to discuss in what Christoph puts forward. I mean, to what extent is it really the case that Cage's and Satie's musical compositions—no matter how avant-garde—constitute a "sound art"? Certainly, they are part of the history of sound (or the acoustic) within modernity or the modern period. And Neuhaus, for one, does make the move into a recognizable type of sound installation, as Christoph points out. However, I would think of Luigi Russolo, Satie, and Cage as still within the realm of a particularly avant-garde thrust to extend into all fields—art, music, poetry, architecture, etc.—with similar strategies and ideas: for example, Russolo's attempts to create a Futurist music to go with Futurist writing, art, architecture, and cinema. This is not exactly the same thing as already being in a post-medium condition. Or, to look at it from the other side, as Tony Conrad has pointed out, many art practices of the early 1960s, especially those around Fluxus, put their works forward as a species of score. In other words, in the wake of Cage, they felt somehow situated within the realm of a larger field of composition, even though what they were doing might be largely visual. The relationship to a certain medium is, perhaps, flipped, but it doesn't necessarily disappear. I guess the question for me would be: What is the relationship between "sound art" or "audio art" and this larger "audio culture" that Christoph puts out for consideration? As Cage put it, "There is always something to see, something to hear"; but to have a century-old history, wouldn't we have to consider sound art in terms of a "medium"?

Christoph Cox
04.24.04 11:15

Anthony is interested in sound and "the between": sound as a fluid substance or medium that can conjoin various practices in the arts. Without trying to revive a modernist commitment to medium specificity, I confess an interest in what

Anthony calls "sound as a category in and of itself." Since the Renaissance, at least, hearing has been the second sense—second, of course, to vision and the visual. And, since its inception as a category (distinct, say, from craft), "art" has really always meant "visual art." Of course, there is a parallel history of music. But, even there, European art music is a highly visual and literate art, embodied in the score. The emergence of sound art is important, it seems to me, precisely because it promises to give sound and aurality their due. And it seems to me that the emergence of sound art is linked to the emergence of a broader "audio culture." Back in the '60s, Marshall McLuhan argued that electronic media were causing a shift in the sensorium, from the predominance of visuality to, if not the predominance, then at least the reemergence of aurality. I do think that something like that may be happening. Look, for example, at the abundance of recent books by anthropologists and historians that take sound as their primary material. In any case, while the use of sound in cross-media work can be wonderful and exciting, I don't want to give up the project of a sound art that centers on sound itself.

On this note, Branden implicitly raises the questions: What is "sound art"? What is its relationship to "music"? What is its relationship to avant-garde, multimedia practices? I think that Branden is right that Satie, Russolo, and Cage belong to the history of experimental music and that to call them "sound artists" is a bit of an anachronism. But I think that the work of these artists forms a kind of prehistory of sound art. Cage seems to me to be particularly important in this regard. He was certainly primarily a "composer" who worked primarily in the medium of music. Yet there is a sense in which Cage was not really interested in music but interested in sound as such: sound as a kind of impersonal, virtual, transcendental field that precedes and exceeds human beings, composers, and the domain of "music." That, I think, is what is so important about pieces such as *4' 33"* and *Imaginary Landscape No. 4.* Sound art is many things; and I wouldn't hesitate to include multi- or cross-media work within its scope. Yet, at its core, it seems to me, sound art has to be about the experience of sound as such; and I worry a bit about any definition that would take it to be a mere attendant to other media.

Carl Michael von Hausswolff
04.24.04 12:22

Cairo 17.55

At the moment I don't find it interesting to discuss the relation between music and sound art. It's very easy to notice that the development of musical ideas, experimentation, and final composition has placed itself within various categories depending on context and discipline.

I'd like to dwell on Christoph's question: Why is this happening now? Why the buzz? Well, the resistance had to break down sooner or later. For more than fifty

years, electroacoustic music, sound installation, free-form jazz, and progressive rock music have been neglected and put aside by the contemporary music establishment. Concert halls have kept on presenting classical music and music that feeds directly on the tradition of scores. The form of presenting music hasn't changed in a couple hundred years. Only places like Fylkingen in Stockholm and the Kitchen in NYC (and other places) have maintained the "other side" of serious sound works. The lack of development and expansion of the alternative places, probably because of financial considerations, has forced composers and sound artists to find new areas for showing their work. Since the visual-art world is much more open-minded and generous toward any kind of new tendency in the art world as a whole, this has become the playground for sound works. Curators like Hans-Ulrich Obrist, Minoru Hatanaka, and Catherine David have invited sound into rather important exhibitions in Europe and Japan; and that's where we are now. The term "sound artist" has been adopted by critics because of convenience. Most artists I know, including myself, do not answer to the "sound artist" label. Most of us do photography, writing, video, and any other kind of discipline . . .

. . . but, as I said, the bubble had to pop. The artists working with sound couldn't sit around for much longer and got a bit tired of doing bar gigs and cellar installations. The energy of Merzbow, Hafler Trio, PanSonic, the Mego gang, and the rest of the thousands of artists developing spoken word, frequency investigation, field recordings, and superleveled sonics just had to get out there; and it seems like there was a response to it. A positive one.

The concert halls can now be seen in the rearview mirror, and their directors are standing there with their pants down. There was a time when electronic-music composers actually wanted to perform their music in these places; but I think that time is gone. The acoustics are not good enough, and the spaces are not flexible enough. Sound installations and new electronic music fit better in the enviroment of the Kunsthalle with a curator who might not get the point but still is open to something new.

Steve Roden
04.24.04 12:48

I agree that artists tend not to be simply painters or video artists (or sound artists) anymore; but people who move across disciplines. Ten or fifteen years ago, it seemed as though every painter began including a video work along with objects in a show—simply because making a video had become a very real possibility for anyone who wanted to make one, due to technology and cost. You could always find someone to lend you a camera. Sound has simply become another tool that artists are interested in using—whether the interest has come from the historical trajectory Christoph is speaking of, or because artists are now able to work with a medium that seems fresh and new to someone growing up in a culture of electronic music and video games with a Macintosh as an extension of their

body. Unlike even ten years ago, an artist now has access to creating sound works in a way that is just about as easy as making a drawing. (With hundreds of free downloadable sound softwares available, I would say it is easier for most people to make a mediocre piece of sound work than a mediocre drawing :-).

The funny thing is that, at this moment, a lot of people are bent on calling this stuff "sound art" simply because it uses sound as a component of the work. I agree with Mr. von Hausswolff, that the term "sound artist" is not one that I would plant on my forehead. In fact, the folks who do tend to wave the "sound art" flag are somewhat conservative, exclusive, and protective of what they will and will not allow to be considered "Sound Art" . . . which I find somewhat problematic. When I showed an installation in Berlin a few years ago, a German newspaper writer came into the space and, after a few minutes of listening, cocked his head like the RCA Victor dog and said, "But it sounds like music!" . . . and he was kind of pissed off. It seemed that sound art was not allowed to "sound like music." So perhaps I really am a painter who also works with sound :-)

Marina Rosenfeld
04.24.04 03:16

First of all, I love Carl Michael von Hausswolff's vision of concert-hall directors receding into the distance with their pants down! (I'm visualizing Walter Benjamin's backward-flying angel unwittingly aiming straight for the facade of a cartoon Carnegie Hall!) In my experience there is definitely truth to the contention that this kind of (sound) production—whether predominantly musical, spatial/architectural, technological, performative, compositional, transmedial, etc.—has been gaining momentum (and, importantly, audience) for some time, and that the visual-art world has come around to noticing it more quickly (though not that quickly!) than the various musical establishments. The younger practitioners—artists and presenters in their twenties and thirties—who are really committed to an investigative, experimental, or hybrid visual/sonic kind of audio work do seem to be immune to some of the residual modernist prejudices that prevent older critics and institutions from seeing beyond the "medium"—ephemeral, unsalable, etc.

As for personal definitions, I think most artists would prefer not to take on any sub-label; but the world being what it is, I usually insist on "composer" as a complement to the "sound artist" tag, for reasons I've discussed elsewhere (see my recent conversation with Stephen Vitiello at NewMusicBox.com). Ditto for the relationship between music and sound art.

What's jumping out at me so far here is the possibility of talking about electronic music as a form of field recording, or sound installation as a kind of architecture-reverent music, or dub-plate production (that mechanical drawing of a single, spiraling line) as a kind of performance. These are just suggestions off the top of my head; but they mean to me that the art category "sound" as we're discussing

it lends itself quite magically to a conversation that slips and slides around static, solid media. I've always thought sound was the closest thing to a diagram of thought in the sense that, to actually hear and apprehend it, you have to simultaneously forget and remember, instant by instant.

4.24.04 03:21

Some quick thoughts, less articulated than all that has come so far, but things that came to mind as I read the various entries. As Steve was mentioning, the technology is more available than ever. Not only processing and editing technologies but also multichannel interfaces, consumer 5.1 systems, more complex systems such as Ambisonic. Charlie Morrow organized a workshop at the Kitchen this week on multichannel and spatialized sound. Alban Bassuet, an acoustic engineer, spoke of the military's investment in sound technologies (the use of binaural technologies in fighter planes and more).

Thinking more about the question of "why now," I would say that there is also the simple point that a few major institutions programmed important sound exhibitions four or five years ago: The Whitney with their "American Century" exhibition (1999–2000), the "Sonic Boom" show in London (2000), "Sound Art—Sound as Media" at the ICC in Tokyo (2000). Seeing that the public and press all responded so positively has inevitably created ripples into other institutions, who have either programmed sound into group shows of various media or have singled out sound shows that I think several of this group have already stated being wary of.

Christoph Cox
04.24.04 09:39

I'm interested in the wariness, expressed by Steve and others, about the "sound art" tag and about a conception of sound art that, focused on sound itself, is deliberately *not* multimedia. It seems to me that no one would worry about the fact that a drawing or a painting is solely visual. Why then worry about sound art that is focused on sound itself? On the other hand, it's worth noting that relatively few works of sound art have to do with sound alone. After all, it's a curious property of sound that it is powerfully shaped by the space it inhabits. Hence, sound has always been multi-media insofar as it is intimately bound up with architecture. Sound is also, of course, a temporal medium. So perhaps the turn to sound has something to do with some new relationship of ours to time and space?

In any event, Steve, Micki (von Hausswolff), Anthony, and Marina are right to point out that there is interesting and important work being done with sound in multimedia contexts and that it is perhaps silly to call such work "sound art" simply because it employs sound. The fact that sound has, relatively recently,

become just another artist's tool is interesting in itself and brings us (yet again) back to the question: Why now? Micki suggests that this has to do with institutional considerations (the conservatism of music establishments, the poverty of alternative venues, the open-mindedness of art venues and curators, etc.). Stephen notes the role of a number of important and well-received sound-art exhibitions. Steve and Stephen note the role of technology (cheap sound software, etc.). I'd like to dwell a bit on this last point. I don't think it is accidental that the recent upsurge in sound-art activity is fairly precisely coincident with the emergence of digital technology: the Internet, the laptop, cheap and easily available sound-processing software, etc. Is this perhaps the determining factor?

Even if the answer to that question is yes, it's also intriguing to note that the recent fascination with sound has led to a renewed interest in figures who were working with sound well before the digital revolution of the '90s: artists such as Alvin Lucier, Max Neuhaus, Christian Marclay, Christina Kubisch, and others. Which leads me to open up another set of questions: Which historical antecedents are (or should be) particularly important for sound artists today? What lessons can (or should) be learned from these artists and movements?

Anthony Huberman
04.25.04 01:03

Christoph, I totally agree. In no way did I intend to portray "sound as a category in and of itself" in a negative light or that it should rather be an "attendant" to other media. I am very happy that places like Diapason Gallery, for example, are doing what they are doing: focused on sound itself rather than how it might find its way into painting/drawing/sculpture etc. I was addressing the "why now" question, and I think that crossing (or challenging) disciplinary borders is something that the (visual) art world is very interested in; and so sound is emerging as a material that can play a newly energized role in articulating a broadened understanding of contemporary art at large. The art world today likes the "in between." But that certainly does not mean that the "only aural" is a fruitless thing to pursue. Quite the contrary. The work of all of the artists in this group testify to that.

I'd like to follow the historical thread Christoph raises. Again, what I think is fascinating is how experiments with sound fit into the history of Art. As several have suggested, the late 1960s and early 1970s, for artists of all media, are a crucial period to consider. In the visual arts, artists were drawn "outside the box" (of the white gallery cube). Robert Smithson, Dennis Oppenheim, Michael Heizer, Walter De Maria, Gordon Matta-Clark, Richard Long, etc., were working in fields, on piers, in the desert. Around the same time, we see Max Neuhaus moving "outside the box" (of the concert hall), stamping the word "listen!" on people's hands and leading them through the city, as his performance. He thought that Cage didn't go far enough, by having the idea behind *4′ 33″* remain *inside* the concert hall. Also, it's a time when art began to be not only outside but

about the white-cube space, about a self-awareness of site, and the beginnings of artists thinking about the site-specific. In art, we notice Barry Le Va, Robert Morris, Fred Sandback, Robert Barry. And at the same time, we see Lucier's *I Am Sitting In a Room,* or La Monte Young dragging furniture across the floor of a loft—sound that is not about a score or about composition through time but about space, about mapping "the box." One of my favorites: Bruce Nauman's *Get Out of My Mind, Get Out of This Room* (1968), an empty white gallery where one hears the artist aggressively whispering that title—a great early sound-art piece, one that moves beyond sound-through-time and explores an awareness of space and site, through sound (and language). Including people like Lucier and Young, or Nauman's sound work, into our study of the history of art of that period can encourage curators and art historians to notice the common conceptual pursuits that were shared by artists working with art or with sound—which implies that sound should certainly be more present in museums and galleries, or venues that represent the history (or the now) of art practices.

Steve Roden
04.25.04 02:30

Likewise I didn't mean to sound antagonistic about sound as a category in and of itself. There are some incredible artists, contemporary and historical, who use sound alone in a space and simply slay me. But I do have a problem with the camps that seem to develop through the idea that sound art *must* be a room with sound alone. I sat at a table with a group of card-carrying sound artists a few years ago where everyone was bitching about Documenta because there were works with sound but no "real" sound art. I don't think that having a visual element necessarily dilutes the audio (nor do I think that every sound work necessarily needs visuals). It depends upon the piece of course. I just meant that, for myself, I like the idea that it can be open—that a work can take left turns and be realized in a way that isn't dependent upon a kind of predetermined ideal of a medium. If broken plates can cover the surface of a painting and it is still a painting, why can't a work of sound art have other elements and still be primarily about sound or considered in relation to "sound art"?

In terms of my own work, I had a somewhat rigid approach to sound when I began to let it seep into my exhibition work. I felt that, if it was about sound and created of sound, there should only be sound in the space. Hence the first installations were simply speakers hidden, then speakers visible, and then slowly the visual aspect evolved to become a part of it. With the sound works the sound is still the thing of most importance; and I don't think the visuals get in the way or reduce the sound to a sound track or the work into sculpture with sound. But this is a fuzzy area, as I know there are folks out there who would disagree. Perhaps I'm simply not a purist at heart—and I like when seemingly disparate things collide.

In terms of historical figures or approaches related to visuals and sound, I think

Alvin Lucier's *Chambers* and Christina Kubisch's work are very important in this regard because the visuals are not there simply as visual elements, but there is an integral relationship between what you are seeing and what you are hearing—not in the sense that the seeing dresses up the sound, but in the sense that there is an integrity there between the objects and the sounds you are hearing; and in some sense the visual is a doorway through which to access/experience the audio. Ultimately, I respond to works that have visuals that eventually fall away so that the audio is the thing one actually experiences and has the most intimate relationship with—for me, it is reduced down to the idea that sound art or sound works are about the activity of listening—or better, listening as an activity.

In terms of the "why now?" I wonder about the ease of acquiring software and equipment to make this work, and if its influence on younger artists is simply through access to the medium itself. Could it also be through the fact that a lot of bands are visibly interested in *musique concrète*, Krautrock, Cage, avant-garde, etc.? I wonder if it isn't the cues taken from Sonic Youth, Stereolab, Spacemen 3, Merzbow, etc., that are sending younger artists toward the musical avant-garde through the back door (many of the grad students I work with have just recently discovered this stuff through Sonic Youth's *Goodbye 20th Century*). It does seem that along with a proliferation of sound in art, there is also a lot of visual art coming out of band and/or DJ culture or even bands participating in art culture with things like Black Dice, or visual artists working with music, like Stephen Prina or Rodney Graham. Could it be that sound art is finally OK with hipsters instead of just geeks :-) A scary thought! You can also see this in post-techno, laptop, microsound, or whatever you want to call computer-based electronic music of the last eight years or so.

I think Anthony has hit it on the head in terms of the possibility of common conceptual pursuits as opposed to simply being influenced by sound-art history—I think many of us have taken cues from the seminal works from the '60s and early '70s that Anthony mentioned—as well as a lot of the early works both Christoph and Branden mentioned. For me the list is a long one but would definitely also include William Anastasi's work, the early works of minimalism (Steve Reich's *Come Out* and *Pendulum Music*), Terry Fox's work, Tom Marioni's drum-brush drawings, Sol LeWitt's early cube pieces, Tinguely . . .

Stephen Vitiello
04.25.04 12:38

I'm often frustrated that there isn't one really good book on sound art (however we are each defining it); but maybe, considering this conversation, it is actually valuable that there hasn't been one overriding text. Perhaps the merging of all of these histories into various cultures is actually that much more possible because it is seeping in from so many directions.

Adding to the lists of histories, Vito Acconci comes to mind at the moment. He

has something like seventy audio pieces, some of which are meant to function purely as audio but many of which are specific to objects and buildings. His current show at Barbara Gladstone has an amazing five-channel sound work from 1971 or '72, and at least one more stereo piece.

Branden W. Joseph
04.25.04 04:15

I think Steve Roden is absolutely right to note that the contemporary interest in sound art derives as much from developments outside the art world as inside it and is not solely attributable to technology. As a technology, for instance, the turntable is not new, but it is a privileged material for artists like Christian Marclay, Philip Jeck, and Melbourne's Michael Graeve. I think the 1990s' massive hyping of grunge produced a sort of "anything but ‘indie' rock" attitude in many people that opened up a whole range of other areas, including not only Krautrock and the avant-garde but American roots music (the Harry Smith Anthology), free jazz, and so on. It's enough to note how much of the recovery of formerly neglected musical and artistic precedents has been done by independent record labels like Table of the Elements and Ampersand. I don't think that aspect of the current art scene can be underestimated.

When we look at historical precedents within art, however, I think it is important to keep in mind not just the diversity but the very different trajectories and goals that artists using sound pursued. Acconci, Fox, Baldessari, and others were coming out of Conceptual art, which subordinated the medium or material of the artwork to the idea or strategy being investigated. Sound was one way of pursuing what Lucy Lippard so famously called the "dematerialization of the art object." These types of Conceptual investigations obviously distinguish themselves quite clearly from any notion of modernist medium-specificity or the investigation of sound as such. It would be interesting, but probably ultimately insufficient, to try to separate, say, Acconci's sound production from his video and performance works. The connecting point would probably be something like Bruce Nauman's *Record,* which made sound into a form of sculpture—or, rather, recoded the record album as a multiple—but also intimately related to his film and video pieces using the violin (all of which was responding, in part, to the violin and viola of Conrad and Cale in the Theatre of Eternal Music). This Conceptual or post-Conceptual trajectory both relates to and differs from the equally Conceptual-related work of Mike Kelley and Tony Oursler's The Poetics, Art and Language and the Red Crayola's albums, and the "General Acognitive Culture" work of Henry Flynt, to name just a few.

If the one really good book on sound art that Stephen Vitiello envisions ever did appear, I would hope it would investigate these types of historical genealogies—not to isolate or regulate the mixing available to contemporary artists, but to begin pointing to the important critical and historical stakes that such practices have pursued and continue to pursue.

Stephen Vitiello
04.25.04 07:24

Just returning to the two things I brought up earlier. Regarding technology, one thing I have encountered, especially when visiting schools, is that a lot of students have turned to audio software after learning to use video software. The similarities in the interfaces, graphically, etc., have actually facilitated a comfortable switch into sound. It's an interesting switch—looking at the early history of video processing, where a lot of people came to video after using audio synthesizers.

Also, the issue of venues, museums, but also spaces such as Diapason (and Studio 5 Beekman before it) and Engine 27: An enormous amount of work has been created because of the opportunity of somewhere to present it. Similar to Charlotte Moorman's Annual Avant-Garde Festival, New Music America, the early days at the Kitchen: Having a place to present the work and a community to share it with has been a gigantic motivating factor. Similarly for CD-R pieces: I know that a great deal of music was made because Anomalous Records existed as a distribution possibility (while it lasted!).

I'd like to take up a thread that has run throughout this conversation: the role of (what should we call it?) experimental music today in bringing new audiences to sound art and new interest in the field. Micki cites PanSonic, Vienna's Mego label, and others; Steve notes the importance of Sonic Youth, Merzbow, Spacemen 3, DJ culture, etc.; Branden mentions the Table of the Elements label, which has released work by younger artists such as Jim O'Rourke and David Grubbs alongside classic work by Tony Conrad, Rhys Chatham, Arnold Dreyblatt, Pauline Oliveros, and others; Steve remarks on the role of music in the work of artists such as Stephen Prina, Mike Kelley, and Rodney Graham and alludes to the work of "art bands" such as Electrophilia, Workshop, and Van Oehlen. Then there are figures such as Carsten Nicolai, who straddles the worlds of post-Techno, neo-Minimalist visual art and sound-art installation.

All of these figures form part of a homegrown culture of musical experimentalism that has arisen in the past decade or so outside of both the world of rock/pop/dance music and the world of art music. And this experimental culture has actively traced a genealogy that includes Sonic Youth, Christian Marclay, Krautrock, Glenn Branca, free improvisation, punk rock, the Red Krayola, Minimalism, Cage, musique concrète, Futurism, etc. If you trace the various strands of this genealogy, you are pretty quickly led to classic sound art, Conceptual art, Fluxus, etc.

So there are clear affinities between this experimental musical culture and the (re)emergence of sound art. But are there relevant differences between music and sound art? Does the gallery or museum setting itself transform the one into the other? In *Grey Room* last spring, Mike Kelley criticized the Pompidou's "Sonic Process" show for its "embrace of popular musical forms such as DJ-based dance music." According to Kelley, the critical discourse around such musics falsely lays claim to avant-gardist strategies. While Kelley was *not* objecting to the identification of music with sound art (his own outfit, Destroy All Monsters, is arguably both), he *was* objecting to the admission into art institutions of "such popular forms of music, which are diluted forms of more complex and radical sources." Kelley's essay leads me to ask: Are there relevant and important lines to be drawn between music and sound art?

Stephen Vitiello
04.26.04 12:07

One other name to add to that list of pop musicians who brought an awareness to new generations of sound art/experimental music would be Björk—with her collaborations with Matmos, playing recordings by Chris Watson as part of her preshow, etc.

I always come back to this definition, which works for me: Music can be defined by sound in time, while sound art may be defined by sound in space. I realize that this doesn't work for everyone or all genres or subgenres; but personally, it has connected to my own definition of what I do and how I think about "sound art"—creating work that is open-ended, that may be experienced in a few minutes or hours, exploring sound as a physical medium rather than a temporal one.

There is also the issue of commodity that may be an influence for some about how certain works are categorized or catalogued and distributed. This too is something that we could address in this discussion, particularly given the nature of *Artforum*, which promotes and, many would say, advertises contemporary art. Here we are discussing a medium that has still to prove itself on the level of art-priced product.

Steve Roden
04.26.04 12:55

In terms of the needed sound art–history book Stephen mentioned as well as the inclusiveness of art-related band music that Branden mentioned—while it wasn't a history in the traditional sense—I was thinking that one thing that was a huge influence on me was the *Broken Music* catalogue (1989), which was an exhibition of LPs that connected the LP as an object to the art world through sound, music, cover art, artist bands, etc. I remember being obsessed with the Dubuffet liner

notes from his sound experiments, reprinted in that book, for years before I was ever able to even hear the recordings. I think at this stage, around 1990, the terms "sound art" and "experimental music" were much more interchangeable. The whole field seemed more open in terms of influences and possibilities.

I love Stephen's description of music as "sound in time" and sound art as "sound in space"—it really does get at something that speaks about the difference in the way the two things are experienced and intended, which I think is pretty huge.

I think Mike Kelley's rant is somewhat justified (although one could say the same of a lot of visual art at this point as well); but on the other hand it can be somewhat dangerous to dismiss things simply due to style. Conceptually, Carsten Nicolai's work and Panasonic (or PanSonic) is perhaps different than the dance music Kelley is speaking of. But their work would also fit nicely into what he calls "DJ-based dance culture" because it is beat-based, and basically you can still shake your booty to it.

Where are the lines drawn, and who gets to draw them? The interesting thing about David Toop's "Sonic Boom" show was that, along with someone I would consider a sound artist in the traditional sense, Christina Kubisch, it also included people like Scanner, Eno, and Lee Ranaldo, who approach sound from a very different place and have all made music that exists to some degree in popular culture. If you eliminate Kelley's conflict with style (because I am pretty sure he wouldn't have a problem with a sound-art show of Japanese noise music) and look more at Stephen's comment about sound art as "sound in space," you get to a deeper discussion, I think, about intention.

I agree with Kelley that simply placing music in a museum and presenting it as anything other than music can be problematic. But I think the real discussion becomes: Is it simply music being presented as sound art—and, again, how do we determine such things? It's fuzzy territory. I can't remember the name of the Rodney Graham piece from a few years ago where there's a film projection of him taking a hit of LSD and riding his bike backward through a park to a very Pink Floyd–sounding pop song; but it's not that far from a rock video. I loved that piece (and the funny thing is that I can still hum the tune even though I saw the piece two years ago :-)

Stephen Vitiello
04.26.04 04:06

If I didn't say it before, I believe that quote about "sound in space vs. sound in time" is borrowed from Max Neuhaus. (I've never been 100 percent sure where I came across it or whether I made it up to suit my needs. I think it's Neuhaus.)

Also, in addition to *Broken Music*, the other excellent book is *Sound by Artists*, from Art Metropole (1990). It did a good job of bringing together sound and

contemporary art histories up until that time.

Christoph Cox
04.26.04 09:56

In a short program note from 1974, Neuhaus writes: "Traditionally composers have located the elements of a composition in time. One idea which I am interested in is locating them, instead, in space, and letting the listener place them in his own time. I am not interested in making music exclusively for musicians or musically initiated audiences. I am interested in making music for people" (*Sound Works, Volume I: Inscription*). This may be the source that Stephen is recalling. Yet, here, I don't think that Neuhaus draws the space/time distinction as starkly as Stephen does.

In many respects, Stephen's distinction is helpful. Sound-art installation very often *is* about filling a space with sound, inhabiting that space and that sound, and perceiving the ways in which the particular container shapes its sonic material. But I don't fully endorse the distinction. I think that the discourse around sound art has focused too exclusively on space. Much sound-art installation (and Neuhaus is exemplary here) has concerned itself with site-specificity, with the acoustic imprints of architectural spaces, etc. Yet sound is irreducibly temporal. And I think that the music/sound, time/space parallelisms can work to occlude the profound temporal experience of sound installations such as Neuhaus's.

If we look back at Neuhaus's remark, I think that what we find is not only a distinction between time and space but a distinction between two kinds of time: (1) the time of musical composition, and (2) the listener's "own time"; (1) the time of "musicians or musically initiated audiences," and (2) the time of ordinary "people." I see this distinction, in Henri Bergson's terms, as a distinction between time (*le temps*: pulsed, counted time, spatialized time) and duration (*la durée*: nonpulsed time, time itself in its qualitative flow). It seems to me that sound-art installation can powerfully give us access to this latter kind of time.

I'm reminded of a set of remarks by Morton Feldman, who also wanted to free sound and time from musical composition and to allow both "to be themselves." Feldman wrote: "I am not a clockmaker. I am interested in getting to Time in its unstructured existence." "I feel that the idea is more to let Time be, than to treat it as a compositional element. No—even to construct with time won't do. Time simply must be left alone." "Not how to make an object, not how this object exists by way of Time, *in* Time or *about* Time, but how this object exists *as* Time. Time regained, as Proust referred to his work."

Steve Roden
04.26.04 10:35

I doubt I will articulate this very well, but while I agree with Christoph that the recent discourse around sound art has focused too much on space—I didn't take Stephen's comment (or Neuhaus's) to mean that there was necessarily always a connection of the sound to the space in terms of site-specificity or through conceptual thought—but for me it was much more about sound existing in a space to be visited, where the work loses the narrative structure of beginning and end that occurs in concert or even with a CD. With an installation, the viewer can enter and exit the work at will—it is almost "sound as space" as opposed to what Feldman says about music when he speaks of how an "object exists *as* time."

Anthony Huberman
04.27.04 01:53

There are a lot things to pick up on here: music in museums; the collector's relationship to sound art; bibliographies; time/space; etc.

Funnily enough, during some correspondence I had with Nicolas Collins a year or so ago, he used the exact same phrase to make a distinction between music and sound art as Stephen used here. So perhaps there is a source, somewhere, for it.

I agree with Christoph when he suggests that it is perhaps too neat of a definition and that "space" gets an almost all-pervasive attention in talking about sound art. While I agree that a space for sound where one can enter and exit without being tied to a beginning-and-end temporal time line is something that sound art often pursues, I wouldn't want to let the experience of sound-through-time somehow not "belong" to sound art, and only to music or composition. I think of Janet Cardiff's audio walks, for example. They are very much about space but are also about duration, about the process of occupying a fictional sound world for a particular amount of time, and about creating a "story," with a beginning and an ending, that people follow through a blurry aural juxtaposition of space and time. Future, past, and present are very present and important components to the work, as listeners are made aware of not being able to place themselves in time.

Also, several sound artists take the very concept of sound extending itself across time as their subject. I think of Jem Finer's *Longplayer*, a piece meant to last 999 years, or Leif Inge's *24 Hour Beethoven*. (Inge says, perhaps relevantly: "When I did this, I primarily wanted to make a piece where the duration is so long that the sensation of composition disappeared. It doesn't really have beginnings or ends you need to concern about. You can enjoy the time you actually spend to get at it wherever in the piece you are.") There is also something about the accumulation of sound (over time) that can inform the art of sound in interesting ways. Sound functioning like dust: adding itself on top of itself layer by layer, over time. Memory, I suppose, is what I'm getting at—something that is very linked to time and something that is very relevant to sound art.

In reference to the mentions some have made about visual artists working with music, this, I think, is the source of a lot of confusion in the art world, with mistaking work that makes use of musical iconography (vinyl records, notes, sheet music, images of musicians, instruments, etc.) for sound art. I have read too many articles with "art of sound" in the title that go on to talk about Janine Gordon's mosh-pit photos, Sue de Beer's youthful punk rockers, Mark Leckey's speakers, Pipilotti Rist's pop-song remakes, Dave Muller's music geneologies, or even Christian Marclay's cut-up vinyl-record assemblages. While all of those works are very strong, I am not sure how much they have to do with sound art (although Marclay, of course, has made many seminal sound art pieces). Should these works that address "music" be thematically paired with pieces by Max Neuhaus, for example, as works that deal with "sound"?

I'm not sure that sound art (sound-in-space, say) is in any way more closely linked to art that features the objects or the imagery of music cultures than it is to abstract sculptural installations (or even to abstract grid paintings!) that make no direct reference to music.

Hmm . . . it's late. I hope that this makes *some* sense, at least.

PS: I also loved Rodney Graham's *the phonokinetoscope* (2001), which Steve mentions. It's a great juxtaposition of music (the song that is played) and space (the record plays in one room, and the projection is in another, separating how one experiences the spaces where the music is (and where the image is) and time (once the record is stopped, the projection stops as well, making the beginning-and-end structure of the piece very open-ended).

Christoph Cox
04.27.04 09:48

Steve's description of installations in which sound exists in a nonnarrative form, in such a way that the viewer can enter and exit at will, is fairly close to what I (following Bergson and Deleuze) am calling "duration." After all, this is how we *live* sound and time. This is how sound and time flow for us. Musical composition constrains sound and time within metric and structural parameters. There's nothing wrong with this, of course. But I think it does mark a very different experience of time.

Bergson's idea is that duration describes our primordial relationship to time. Indeed, he says, it is what time essentially *is*. Clock time—time spatialized, cut into discrete bits—is derivative. I think the same could be said about the relationship between the "nonpulsed time" of sound art and the "pulsed time" of musical composition (to draw on Deleuze's extension of Bergson). One of the things I value about sound-art installation is that it foregrounds this experience of time and sound.

I take Feldman to be saying something akin to this. Feldman is, of course, a composer of music. Yet I think he's also an important figure in the prehistory of sound art, precisely because he sought (in his own way) to free sound from music, and duration from time. A propos Anthony's comments about long-form pieces, Feldman's final pieces are notoriously long: five and a half hours, in the case of *String Quartet II*. About these last pieces, Feldman famously wrote: "Up to one hour you think about form, but after an hour it's scale. Form is easy—just the division of things into parts. But scale is another matter. Before, my pieces were like objects; now, they're like evolving things." I think this quotation richly bears on a lot of what we've been discussing here.

Carl Michael von Hausswolff
04.27.04 06:15

Gulf of Akaba 00.16

I'd like to get back to some matters stated earlier here. But I also would like to discuss something that might be a bit boring to some: I'd like to circulate around the subject of form.

When I happened to get into a certain kind of music in the '70s, I remember that there were a couple of pieces that caught me: Stockhausen's orchestra piece *Trans*, the Peter Brötzmann Octet and their LP *Machine Gun*, and Fripp and Eno's *No Pussyfooting*. For a music consumer like me, this was stunning. The form of the music was not epic or ABA structured. It was shaped into a mass of sounds, an object. Not an object staying in one place but an object in motion. Readers of Deleuze/Guattari, etc., will, of course, recognize this rhizomatic flow; but from an exhibitional space–related (museum or living room) work it would be great to hear what you have to say about this. This is clearly what happened when I experienced Neuhaus's *Times Square* piece as well . . .

David Toop
04.28.04 11:10

My apologies for missing most of the roundtable. Interesting issues seem to be emerging, though I haven't had the time to read the contributions in detail yet. What strikes me is that our perception and definition of sound art depends on where we come from. By that, I mean geographically, culturally, and in terms of our own personal development. Maybe this seems obvious, but it has a profound bearing on the way sound art is discussed. For example, there is the divide between music and everything else. Understandably, a lot of sound artists don't consider their work part of the music world, let alone the entertainment business, but that doesn't mean that the complex, interwoven history of musical sources for sound art can be discounted, or filleted for "undesirable" elements such as disco

or free jazz.

My experience of many people in the visual-art world is that they have little interest in music, let alone knowledge of it, so judgments in relation to sound or musical significance can be pathetically out of shape. I think that Mike Kelley's idea of the dilution of art is ridiculous, but on the other hand, when certain art curators turn into born-again techno-bunnies, the consequences are embarrassing. At the same time, a lot of sound artists who began in music may have a limited view of visual arts. As an example of that, I'd suggest that a lot of contemporary sound work (think of Ryoji Ikeda, for example, or the near-silent school of improvisation) is closer to the "old-fashioned" work of visual artists such as Bridget Riley, Cy Twombly, Ad Reinhardt, Agnes Martin, and Robert Rauschenberg than it is to the post-'70s visual work that now dominates many contemporary art museums. This complete divergence of perspective ensures that there will never be the definitive book on sound art that Stephen is looking for. I know a few people working on such books right now, and I already feel annoyed, years before publication, about what I'm convinced they are going to produce, because I know how belligerently selective they are going to be.

In the end, I agree with Steve Roden: One of the great strengths of sound art is its hybrid nature, its elusive quality that constantly deflects snobbery, purism, and academic ring-fencing. I don't believe that space can be the defining characteristic of sound art, even though its importance is central. If you miss out soundscape recording or sound sculpture or conceptual works or any of the other strands of development within the field, then the picture is incomplete. I'm sorry that this is so thin . . . It's just one of those weeks.

Stephen Vitiello
04.28.04 11:22

Just a quick response: I definitely know that my connection to this definition of sound-in-space is simplistic; and by no means do I mean that it should apply for all artists and all directions. It has just been a useful reference for me personally. But when I think about soundscape and all that David is opening up, I still have space in mind, even if time is an undeniable factor as well. Ron Kuivila's new installation at Art in General—a time/space response to Cage's Ryoanji piece—is a very interesting piece that creates a space as well as a time-based network for each of the coexisting works. His use of time in the space is actually much more effective than the space itself.

Christoph Cox
04.28.04 08:45

In 2000, Max Neuhaus wrote a text that appeared as an introduction to P.S. 1's "Volume: Bed of Sound" show. I quote it at length here, not because I think it's

right (I don't), but because I think it's rich, provocative, and bears on quite a number of things we've discussed here (the definition of sound art, what sorts of practices fall within its domain, the relationship between sound art and music, the competence of visual-art curators in dealing with sound, etc.).

Neuhaus writes:

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.

This is cowardly.

When faced with musical conservatism at the beginning of the last century, the composer Edgard Varèse 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 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 do to 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.

Steve Roden
04.28.04 08:48

Thinking about when I first discovered that kind of time that Carl Michael von Hausswolff mentions, for me, was minimalist music. A friend of mine's father had tickets to see Philip Glass here sometime around 1980, and he couldn't make the concert, so he gave the tickets to us (we were in high school and deeply into the punk-rock scene here—where music = three minutes or less :-). I remember the concert starting and then I remember it ending and we had absolutely no concept of the fact that an hour and a half had happened in between—we literally felt like we were asleep the whole time and could remember very little about what we had just heard. It was a completely amazing experience in terms of time, because the repetitions induced this state where time completely disappeared. I suppose the space-related work that attempts to do this more than anything I've ever seen/heard is La Monte Young's "Dream House"—I never thought a small room in an apartment building with carpet and a few speakers could transport you so easily!

In regards to David Toop's posting regarding people in the art world's lack of interest in music—I am still surprised that although I would say most artists I know do have an interest in music, it's such an extremely conservative interest. Something seems wrong when I visit other painters in their studios and am hit with music my mom listens to—Anita Baker recently pumping out the stereo of an artist my age seems crazy.

The interesting thing in terms of recent sound work relating to "old-fashioned"

visual art is that a lot of these relationships are not accidental. It seems that a lot of sound artists/composers are attempting to link their works to visual artists they view as working similarly—Rothko, Bridget Riley, and Agnes Martin are mentioned as inspiration on many of the Internet sound lists as much as Cage, Feldman, and even Autechre. As much as I'm surprised by a young painter listening to Anita Baker, likewise it is really strange that someone who makes music on a laptop, reads Japanese manga, listens to Squarepusher, and has an Xbox has so little knowledge of (or real interest in) contemporary art.

A nice exception is the series of LPs that Robert Meijer has been producing in Germany under his Bottrop-Boy label as the En/Of series. He asks a contemporary visual artist to create a multiple and pairs it with an audio work by a sound artist/composer/musician. I think the majority of projects pair a sound and visual artist who did not know of each other's work before the project. The nice thing is that I would guess most people who buy these are coming from one interest or the other. But connecting the two cultures in a somewhat informed way seems quite rare to me.

Branden W. Joseph
04.29.04 05:40

I would like to go back to Christoph's invocation of Mike Kelley's article "An Academic Cut-Up . . ." Whether or not one agrees with Kelley's particular stance with regard to techno, the points he raises are important in considering the contemporary role of sound and/or music in the museum. Through a series of often unexpected connections (deriving from Kelley's earlier work), Kelley's article dialecticized the reception and meaning of a certain music—Kraftwerk versus contemporary electronica and techno—and a certain technology—turntables, magnetic tape, and digital recording and sound manipulation—as well as relevant historical and institutional aspects of contemporary sound, sound art, and their reception. Although Kelley was also reacting to what he saw as an uncritical importation of music as entertainment within the museum, his article also resonated with the Pompidou's mobilization of IRCAM and the legacy of electronic music to legitimize a national claim to techno as, essentially, a museum-worthy art. It's only one of the ways that the history constructed around sound art impacts its present understanding.

Perhaps more important, however, Kelley's position derived from and pointed to a critical post-Conceptualist legacy of allegorically dealing with art and music that runs through the work of himself, Dan Graham, and others. Graham's video *Rock My Religion* hasn't yet come up, but I think it has to be counted as one of the most significant touchstones for contemporary artistic practices that deal with music. Anthony has already mentioned this line of development, and Steve Roden has commented on it as well, but I think more stress could be put on the type of dialectical strategies that Graham and Robert Smithson pioneered in what Smithson characterized as the "site"/"non-site" relation.

On a panel I was on at the Whitney Museum a while ago, Graham stated in no uncertain terms that he thought rock music and rock bands should not be brought into the museum. This may seem paradoxical, given Graham's evident alliance with popular music; however, when Graham places a video of a Minor Threat concert in the museum it is precisely as a marker of a sort of absence: The museum is the non-site to the punk concert's site. Although Kelley's discussion of techno in the museum reflects his own particular taste (he says as much), it also reflects his commitment to such critical, dialectical practices. This is not something that needs to be in every form of legitimate or even critical sound art, but it is, I think, an important lineage of contemporary art practice.

It is not the same perspective that I would necessarily take to practices that deal with sound as an almost sculptural presence. Although these seem to have a more modernist lineage—and a relation between them and earlier painting has been brought up here and elsewhere (e.g., Bernhard Günther's "Monochrome White")—I think they ultimately derive from the Minimalist phenomenology instantiated in Young and Zazeela's "Dream House" installations mentioned by Steve Roden and in the Theatre of Eternal Music. We have not so far discussed what types of questions need to be brought forward to examine, evaluate, and understand these works within a contemporary social, cultural, and possibly political framework.

One area from which I might begin to approach them (and which goes back as far as the ambient investigations of Satie, Cage, and others who were brought up earlier by Christoph) is in the current environmental uses of sound. Although Cage was interested in ambient sound, he several times noted his dislike for Muzak. Muzak is, of course, only the most known of the many uses of sound as social pacification, the sculpting and shaping of an acoustical environment to effect a sort of control. Such a practice relates to space, time, and site: the three areas Christoph has mentioned as important to a thinking about sound art.

The other day, approaching a hotel to meet a relative, I was struck by anodyne pop music piped into the lawn by speakers concealed in trompe l'oeil rocks. Maya Lin, whose architecture so often refunctions and tames artistic strategies, is currently working on a project at UC Irvine that will include "whispering benches" broadcasting something called "audio art" but which seems to be anything from music to the reciting of folktales. This, obviously, does not question or disturb but rather collapses art and Muzak. It is thus not only in the realm of contemporary technology but also within these types of wider social and cultural contexts that current sound-art practices have evolved and should perhaps be examined. Whether or not artists are specifically thinking about them, these types of social uses of sound form one of many important backdrops. I guess my point is that defining sound art (whether or not the term has been "consumed," as Neuhaus put it) is not as interesting to me as examining the implications of the various ways that artists interact with specific sonic or acoustical strategies in

specific contexts, the museum being only one.

Marina Rosenfeld
04.29.04 05:57

Sorry to say, I am just back online after a three-day computer catastrophe, so what I'm adding below responds to entries that came in a few pages back.

To pick up on some of the discussion regarding durational time versus spatial time, or musical versus spatial sound: I think that it's an interesting idea to put Feldman's later work in a "sound art" historical trajectory, and fruitful for someone inventing or tracing a new history of sound art. Feldman's *String Quartet II*, for example, is so mysterious that it's tempting to look for more than simply a complex, inspired permutation of traditional musical material in it, something "nonmusical" or "beyond musical." But what exactly would this mean? That when it came to composing the actual notes, the composer was in some way naive in throwing certain instruments and pitches together? In organizing his sounds in time? When I actually listen to the music, I don't think his ideas can really be understood outside of the context of music; they constitute, if anything, an expansion of the musical language to embrace a next level of reality—sound, time, space, history, memory . . . I find both his writings and the music itself indicate a radically close, concrete embrace—not at all a rejection—of time and sound as the essential building components of music, no matter how that notion is expressed.

From Satie to Stockhausen to Maryanne Amacher, extreme duration as well as conscious consideration of space, rooms, architecture (in Amacher's case, arguably, the architecture of the body) have added up to expansions of the field of musical composition—and, I would argue, recuperations of ideas from the visual and other arts *into* the fold of musical composition. (Feldman was famously connected to and inspired by visual artists, like Philip Guston.) Even Feldman's remarks about scale and the "thing"-ness of his works confirm to me my feeling that the separation into camps of spatial and musical concerns is kind of a specious argument. I can't find this key distinction between time pulsed and time experienced as duration, at least as far as it applies to music or even any quasi-musical undertaking. Both concepts, if they can even be separated, are inherent to the way I believe we experience any music and are simultaneous aspects of that experience, even as we attempt to make one or the other explicitly manifest in a work.

So instead of the notion of Feldman's work contributing to a history of "freeing sound from music" that Christoph articulates, I experience the opposite: that in a great deal of groundbreaking twentieth-century music there was an attempt to radically reintegrate sound into music. And its maybe here that the tape experiments and electronic and instrumental inventions and plain old formal, compositional innovations that make the musical history of that century so

extraordinary all begin to be possible—in the liberation of music from the idealized and the abstract, from the written as opposed to the sonic. When you look at it this way, the loss of primacy of the score—and also the independent development of the score as a performance element—make sense as manifestations of the desire for sound to matter in music.

Perhaps sound art can be distinct from music only as long as the content of the sound is taken into account (not a very Cagean approach, I admit). Janet Cardiff's narrative works mentioned earlier, for instance, could easily be considered to be using musical criteria; but it would be silly to ignore the artist's obvious other interests. Part of the problem is that the history of music includes and involves so much . . . and the definition of sound art, as it stands for the moment, always seems to include something exclusionary.

To change topics slightly, I wanted to check something written in the *New York Times* over the weekend in a review of Morton Subotnik's concert of new and "historical" works at Merkin Hall on Thursday night. In "From a Sound Explorer, Serenades for Laptop" (4/24/04), Kelefah Sanneh notes, I think in the spirit of admiration, that the composer's "formerly alien sounds"—"flickering drones, pinging tonal clusters"—are now "everywhere," including on J-Kwon and the Trackboyz's new album *Hood Hop* on So So Def/Arista records. How great that the reviewer has heard both! I think acknowledging the spill of this (electronic, avant-garde) history into other domains is a good development—one maybe made possible, or more likely anyway, by the unusual energy and attention on experimental sound and contemporary music from the culture in general at this moment.

Sanneh also comments, on Subotnik's work *Until Spring* from the '70s, that what "Mr. Subotnik has called ‘regularly pulsed material' . . . listeners . . . may know [by] another term for this theoretical construct: a beat." Maybe, in this same spirit of diffusion and transformation, eventually we'll also have other words for "pinging tonal clusters" and "flickering drones"?

Christoph Cox
04.29.04 09:25

Over the course of our discussion, I've periodically made various claims about the nature and essence of sound art, focusing on the centrality of sound-itself, distinguishing sound from music, etc. A number of contributors have (rightly, I think) warned about making such firm distinctions and definitions and have insisted on the very mobile boundaries and definitions of the terms "music," "sound," "sound art," "time," etc.

As a committed Nietzschean (!), I generally try to stay away from Platonizing definitions (definitions in terms of essences and natures). But I think there's another way to take these sorts of claims. You can take them as heuristic

definitions that say something like "What if we take *x* to mean/be this or that?" Of course, such definitions are always going to fail, at some point; but they might open interesting perspectives.

For example, one can always expand "music" to cover "sound art" (as, I think, Neuhaus, and maybe even Marina, asks us to do). But might it not be fruitful or interesting to think of "sound art" as something else, as doing something else, as departing from the history of music in interesting and important ways?

"Sound art" itself is such a heuristic term. It's probably silly to look for some essence of sound art. And (*pace* Neuhaus, Kelley, and Graham), we could go the thoroughly antiessentialist route and say that "sound art" is just sound of any sort that shows up in contexts usually devoted to visual art.

For my part, it seems to me that some kind of middle ground is important. I think it's helpful and interesting to see some part of the history of twentieth-century music, for example, as part of a prehistory of sound art and to distinguish, for heuristic purposes, "music" from "sound," "time" from "duration," etc. Of course, the proof is in the pudding: in what such distinctions allow you to hear, see, think, and do.

I think that, without such heuristic distinctions and definitions, you'll be stuck with a slack, anything-goes attitude toward what you're trying to investigate, or with accepting someone else's choices about what music, sound, etc., are. I think it's better to offer up a set of distinctions/definitions and see where they take you.

So, for my part, I applaud Kelley's desire to challenge a curatorial practice that includes, within the domain of "sound art," something that he finds problematic. But, in the way that he wants to carve up the pie, I find a host of problematic motives and oppositions: America, critical, avant-garde, macho, punk rock, lo-fi, etc., versus European, commercial, functionalist, feminized, high-tech, etc.

Christoph Cox
04.30.04 09:52

We've been focusing on present and past sound-art practices and discourses. But what of the future of sound art? Where would you like to see sound-art practice, discourse, and curation go? What practices would you like to see supported and fostered? Are there practices and modes of discourse that are no longer interesting or viable? Should the term be sustained, or is it, as Neuhaus says, "consumed"? Is there a need for the kind of art-historical and -critical study of sound art that Stephen has called for and that David and others have worried about? In short, where is sound art going, and where should it go?

Carl Michael von Hausswolff

04.30.04 03:49

Stockholm 21.38

On quite a few occasions I have shaped various works according to what media they have faced. A sound installation outdoors in central Stockholm was, of course, formatted for this place; but the CD that was released some time after had a different shape. I think formatting will be an issue in the future. Artists know that any concept can be modulated for the occasion. The artist can be invited to a poetry festival, a biennial for visual arts, an electronic-music festival, etc., and the same concept can be used. The artist only needs to adopt the limitations of the specific discipline. This goes along with the general contemporary ideas of infiltration—the method used nowadays instead of the failure of direct confrontation.

I would also like to say that there is a vast quantity of yet-to-be-discovered "sound installations" in the world. Sound-art historians have a massive body of work in front of them. The history of sound is rewritten constantly. David, in your new book *Haunted Weather* there is sentence that says the sounds in the world are increasing. Maybe this is why there's a major focus on sound art now, or maybe this is wrong. Maybe we just have to look into the past. A couple of days ago I visited the mayor crypt in the Cheops pyramid in Giza. The operating sounds here were fantastic. A soft rumbling low frequency drone combined with higher-pitched combinations of between 500 and 1000 Hz tones were constantly sweeping the rather small room. I haven't heard anything so beautiful in a long time. Where did they come from? Probably from air that travels around inside the structure combined with vibrations due to the delicacy of the architecture. I highly recommend it. Maybe the past has a lot to tell us about the future—perhaps it has to be reinvented.

Steve Roden
05.01.04 11:34

Talk about a new thread: Carl Michael's description of this beautiful crypt drone is wonderful! I am always hopeful that sound installations will open people's ears to similarly wonderful listenings. (In my case, the city just tore up the street in front of our house, and the metal plates they've left to cover the holes temporarily sound like large gamelan gongs every time someone drives over them this morning with their car!)

I think the idea of shaping works is an interesting one—where a piece becomes specific to something other than site (the challenge is to keep the integrity intact).

As we all seem to be moving around so much, and our works are consequently having a temporary existence in different spaces and contexts, I suppose it is

inevitable that these things will continue to influence the future of both making and exhibiting. I've always thought about my installation works that can be formatted to work as CDs as sort of portable installations that can be set up in someone's private space and exist beyond exhibition dates and spaces.

As Christoph asks what is the future of this stuff, I think portability is definitely something that will continue to be explored. Sound art is one of the only art forms that can be presented over the radio or sent out into the world as cheap multiples in the same ways as books. Personally I'd like to see sound art integrated into things where it is simply viewed as artwork—where the novelty of the fact that it is audio wears thin in terms of that alone justifying its value. (Once the novelty wears off, perhaps the thing itself will not be defined any clearer; but curatorial decisions will be made from a different place, and I think some of the problems Mike Kelley was having will resolve themselves in a way that is in line with the rest of the art world's choices: some good, some sketchy, but a DJ in an art space might just be allowed to be a DJ again). In some respects it would be nice to see this discussion of "what sound art is" fall away from the thing just as the discussions of things like "Is painting dead?" seem finally to have vanished. I don't want to end up overprotective of a kind of sound-art territory. We've each followed a somewhat personal historical path in this discussion; and we all know it has a rich and cross-disciplined history that should allow the fact that the art is singing to be no big deal.

It would be nice to see things like Neuhaus's *Times Square* piece happening all over the world, where big steel objects in public spaces are replaced by things that people might not notice at first, but might be ripe for discovery in the way that someone can enter a crypt and think, "I haven't heard anything so beautiful in a long time."

Branden W. Joseph
05.02.04 11:10

As far as what the future holds, I think that Carl Michael von Hausswolff is right that there is a large body of historical work yet to be examined and that, as it becomes more known through reissues and archives like UbuWeb (www.ubu.com), it will start to have more of an impact on current sound-art practices. My feeling is that things will become even more varied and mixed in the manner that Steve Roden mentioned early on, and that a classic, "sound only" sound art of the type Christoph mentions will be one pole—perhaps a very important pole—against which continuing practices will be judged. It may become a touchstone for the larger field of sound art in somewhat the same manner as Minimalism has for contemporary art. Perhaps the early work of Terry Fox or Vito Acconci will undergo genealogical revision in the way that Robert Smithson does in the work of Renée Green or Sam Durant. It is certain to keep appearing on CDs.

Anthony Huberman
05.04.04 01:58

An interesting thread in what Michael and Steve and Marina have mentioned: this idea of the "objecthood" of sound. Going back to the technology-based discussion early on, it's interesting to note, I think, that the software used to make so many of these works has made sound so much more visible. It has a graphic interface, whether it be a sound wave that an artist zooms in on and manipulates or a set of MAX patch "objects" that an artist draws into a map. There is something more visual about approaching the task of working with sound than there was earlier on in its history. Something as invisible and ephemeral and porous as sound has become such an "object" that it can be looked at, turned around, and prodded from all sides.

Although sound art's links to (and overlaps with) music and music history are clear, I am coming from an art-world and curatorial perspective. So my leaning is to find ways for sound art to be in closer dialogue with visual art. I hope to see the immense dexterity of sound being explored to greater and greater extents in the coming years. By dexterity, I mean the many different forms it can take and contexts it can inhabit. I hope to see more places like Diapason gallery presenting sound-as-sound and how it shapes itself around space, across multiple speakers or sound sources. But, with no less urgency, I also hope to see sound works in exhibitions that are not about sound — shows about abstraction (Agnes Martin and Bernhard Günter?), about decay (Anya Gallaccio and William Basinski?), about language (Mel Bochner and Gregory Whitehead?), about the politics of borders (Emily Jacir and Minerva Cuevas pirate radio? or Ultra-red?), about generative structures (Sol LeWitt and Michael Schumacher?). What about a single-artist museum retrospective (with catalogue!) of the art-historically significant sound installations by, say, Christina Kubisch?

This plays into what Neuhaus writes about in his call to "dissolve" the term "sound art" as something that is somehow a category apart from "art." It also relates to what Steve says about an end to the "What is sound art?" question, just like the "Is painting dead?" question has fallen off. Sound can perhaps be less of a territory whose sanctity and separateness (or non-) from music we discuss in conferences and dinner conversations, and be thought of more generally as a language that articulates an aesthetic response to the world and shapes the history of art and ideas, alongside painting/sculpture.

David mentions that a good portion of the sound-art community has a limited knowledge of visual art (and certainly vice versa!). This can hopefully change in the future. Exhibitions about sound within the art context; exhibitions not about sound that include sound works; published projects like the En/Of series that Steve mentions; not only more sound-art books but better art-history books that incoporate sound works and point to common pursuits and conceptual starting points; radio stations run by art museums; inventive solutions to the question of

"collecting" sound works; etc., etc. . . . There are many ways forward, it seems.

PARTICIPANTS

Christoph Cox is associate professor of philosophy at Hampshire College. He is the author of *Nietzsche: Naturalism and Interpretation* (University of California Press, 1999) and coeditor of *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music,* forthcoming from Continuum. Editor at large at *Cabinet* magazine and cocurator of *Cabinet*'s CD series, Cox writes regularly on contemporary art, music, and sound art for *Artforum* and *The Wire,* among other publications. He is currently coediting a volume on sound art and writing a book on philosophy and electronic sound.

An artist and composer based in Stockholm, **Carl Michael von Hausswolff** has released CDs on the labels Touch, Sub Rosa, Firework, and RasterNoton. His work has been exhibited at Tokyo's NTT InterCommunication Center and Frankfurt's Portikus gallery and in biennials in Johannesburg, Venice, Istanbul, Pusan, and Alexandria, as well as Documenta 10. Von Hausswolff was the curator of the 2nd International Biennial for Contemporary Art in Göteborg, Sweden, and is currently a curator at the Fargfabriken Center for Contemporary Art and Architecture in Stockholm.

Anthony Huberman is program director at SculptureCenter. He curated the sound section of the exhibition "The Moderns," which was on view at Turin's Castello di Rivoli in 2003, and is currently organizing sound-based exhibitions for art spaces in New York and London. From 1999 to 2003, he curated exhibition-related music series at P.S. 1 and was actively involved in the development of WPS1, the museum's newly launched Internet art radio station. Huberman's articles on sound art have appeared in *Artforum* and *The Wire.*

Branden W. Joseph is assistant professor in the Department of Art History at UC Irvine. He is the author of *Random Order: Robert Rauschenberg and the Neo-Avant-Garde* (MIT Press, 2003), and his articles on John Cage, Andy Warhol, the Exploding Plastic Inevitable, and other topics within the postwar avant-garde have appeared in *October, Critical Inquiry, Artforum,* and *Art Journal.* Coeditor of the journal *Grey Room,* Joseph is currently completing a book on Tony Conrad.

Steve Roden is a Los Angeles–based artist who works in various media, including painting, drawing, sculpture, film and video, and sound installation. He has released numerous CDs under his own name and under the name in be tween noise. Roden's upcoming projects include exhibitions at e/Static Gallery, Turin, and Susanne Vielmetter Projects, Los Angeles, and a sound installation in collaboration with scientists from Cal Tech for the Williamson Gallery at Pasadena's Art Center College of Design.

New York–based artist and composer **Marina Rosenfeld** has created sound and performance works for the Whitney Museum of American Art, Creative Time, Ars

Electronica, and other venues and organizations. As a turntablist, she is a frequent performer in New York's downtown improvised-music scene. Recent projects include a commission for the Kitchen's House Blend ensemble in November 2003 and *The Emotional Orchestra,* a new composition/performance for twenty players, which made its New York premiere at Deitch Projects in December 2003.

Composer and author **David Toop** has published four books: *Rap Attack, Ocean Of Sound, Exotica* and *Haunted Weather* (all published by Serpent's Tail). In 2000, he curated "Sonic Boom: The Art of Sound" for London's Hayward Gallery. His first album was released on Brian Eno's Obscure label in 1975; since 1995 he has released seven solo CDs. He is currently a visiting research fellow at the London Institute.

Stephen Vitiello's sound installations have been presented internationally at venues including the Project in New York and Los Angeles, the Fondation Cartier pour l'Art Contemporain, and the 2002 Whitney Biennial. Also an electronic musician, he has released CDs on New Albion Records and other labels. He works as archivist at the Kitchen and has guest-curated sound programs and exhibitions at the Whitney Museum of American Art and the Musée d'Art Contemporain de Lyon.