

Introduction

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In the course of the past two decades, on the frontier between the visual arts and music, an art form has developed in which sound has become material within the context of an expanded concept of sculpture. The term which has come into use for the works thus emerging – for the most part works that are space-shaping and space-claiming in nature – is »Sound Art«. The German designation, »Klangkunst«, is no more than a rough translation, as the word »Klang« is usually associated with musical sound in the context of a certain traditional cultural form. »Sound«, on the other hand, can also refer to noise. And indeed, Sound Art owes much to the dissolution of the border between sound (in the sense of musical sound) and noise. In the context of music, sounds are regarded as messengers of subjective inner worlds; noises, on the other hand, are conceived of as symbols indicating trivial occurrences or objects of everyday life. Yet this distinction is arbitrary and a product of cultural learning. Physically speaking, they are one and the same thing, for every sound or noise can be comprehended as the sum or integral of its sinus tones. At most it can be said that the number of frequencies comprised by acoustic events regarded as »sound« is limited, whereas »noise« encompasses practically all frequencies within the human hearing range.

»To hear – we seem to know how to hear from birth. But in a certain sense, culture causes us to unlearn this natural hearing.«¹ The composer and conductor Hans Zender has often criticized the deformations of perception brought about by the traditional music production of Western culture. »Classical music, for example«, says Zender, »has used memory – to put it in very simple terms – in the sense that, through the frequent repetition of identical or similar forms, it has developed a kind of object-like presence in the process of form.«² He goes on to point out that it would be possible »to make use of the biologically given circumstances in a different way, e. g. by developing strategies whose objective is that no one figure establishes itself as something identical in the form process.«³ This is an unusual thought for our Western culture. For it would mean using the reverse side of memory – oblivion – for the act of formation, and moving the unique experience of »now«, i. e. of the present, with the significance it bears in the Buddhist tradition for example, into the limelight of perception. That is what John Cage did with his concepts of indeterminacy and the equation of sound and noise, leading to his being justifiably acknowledged as one

of the major stimulators of New Music and Sound Art along with Pierre Schaeffer and his *Musique concrète*.

The dominance of the sense of sight in our culture has repressed the experience of hearing. Whereas a picture or object requires us to gain distance in a clear spatial orientation based on left and right, bottom and top, the space of sound is characterized by simultaneity and transformation. The eye seems to be specialized in delivering material for structurally identifying thought, the ear information for dynamic, associative thought. The eye creates distance; the ear puts us at the centre of a dynamic and energy-filled realm. In our visual culture, space seems like an empty box. The work of Sound Artists – as Helga de la Motte-Haber points out in her contribution to this book – directs our awareness towards the fact that the sense of hearing is what gives visual space its actual plastic quality.

In terms of the psychology of perception, the installations of Sound Artists appeal to the phenomenal consciousness in that we perceive far more differences than we can identify and label according to certain categories. At 1,000 hertz, for example, differences of 0.3 percent, or 3 hertz, can be perceived.⁴ The normal listener is capable of recognizing some 1,400 differences along the audible tone scale.⁵ Through the development of new electronic methods of sound generation and analysis, it has become possible to respond to this power of differentiation with correspondingly complex sound figures of a kind which do not occur in everyday life and are hardly realizable in a typical concert hall. In his contribution to the book at hand, Robin Minard traces the beginnings of this development with Pierre Schaeffer's fundamental work in Paris.

For many of the states that occur within the context of our phenomenal experience, particularly in the area of acoustics, we lack terminology. Direct demonstration and experience are thus the only adequate means of communicating such states. The unnameable and indescribable in this experience of art does not have a metaphysical cause, but is to be ascribed instead to the objective circumstances of our perception. Yet since we can work from the fact that our perception is founded in certain anthropological constants (without which we could not be sure of any mutuality of experience), we can attempt to develop a precise language for the phenomena as a means of gaining access to a new form of art. The research and dissemination work with which Helga de la Motte-Haber has accompanied Sound Art since its beginnings can provide us with a solid foundation for this endeavor.

The inexpressibility and cognitive impenetrability of the phenomenal experience make it difficult to secure for Sound Art the place it deserves in the art world. Not only do many exhibition halls still shy away from the technical effort usually required to set up sound-spaces, but what is more, the music sphere is also quite slow to acknowledge hybrid forms between music and the visual arts. (The exceptions to this rule include the *Donauessinger Musiktage* and the Berlin New Music festival *Inventionen*, both of whose programs have encompassed Sound Art installations for many years.) Despite the long history of the

spatialization of sound in music, and despite the new attitude introduced by Cage with respect to the individual acoustic event, the traditional concept of musical form seems only to aggravate the acceptance of Sound Art, especially for the field of musicology. This concept is still associated a priori with the idea of fixed establishment in the form of composition. An art form in which music plays of its own accord, as is the case in the installations of Sound Art, – music which possesses no defined beginning or previously determined end, which enters into a new fusion with visual phenomena and wants nothing but to place realms of experience at the disposal of the recipient – an art form such as this still has no place in the framework of music criticism. And this despite the fact that the composer Helmut Lachenmann established new terminology for his new concepts of sound and the new manner of hearing which he called for, speaking of »fluctuation sound«, »texture sound« and »structure sound«. In other words, he developed terms with which many of the phenomena we are confronted with in present-day Sound Art can be described very aptly.⁶ In this context, form no longer defines in advance but emerges from artistic activity itself, the recipient taking on a new creative role in the process. (In his contribution, Robin Minard relates in detail how composition and production merged in the use of the new methods and how the work of the composer came to resemble that of the visual artist.)

For the history of art, the separation of the temporal from the spatial arts which took place in the eighteenth century still exerts a great influence. The history of the emancipation of sound and noise is generally regarded to have begun with the Futurists. Nevertheless, the listening space usually remains subordinate to the visual space of the fine arts. (Except for a few negligible examples, the last documenta exhibition in Kassel essentially ignored Sound Art altogether.) All the more highly is Michael Glasmeier's contribution to be assessed, in view of the fact that he assigns the responsibility for the history of sound and noise to the field of art scholarship and, taking Marcel Duchamp as his point of departure, describes a tradition that goes back to Fra Angelico.

Eleven approaches to Sound Art are presented in this book, having previously been made visually and audibly accessible to the public in a two-part exhibition project of the Stadtgalerie Saarbrücken. The exhibitions *Resonanzen I* and *II*, *Klangräume – Raumklänge* (resonances I and II, sound-spaces – space-sounds) brought pioneers of Sound Art, for example Bernhard Leitner and Rolf Julius, and international representatives of the middle and younger generations together under one roof. The term which served the two exhibitions as a title – *Resonanzen* – points to the fundamental equivocality of perception. The sound-space confronts us not only with the objective qualities of physical objects and spaces, but also with the resonance of our own bodies and the perception of our own selves.

Sound art has been a major focus of the primarily project- and intermedia-oriented program of the Stadtgalerie Saarbrücken since its foundation in 1985. In our exhibition concepts, we are constantly concerned with the »comprehension of esthetics as the exploration

of the esthetic conditions at the periphery of our system of perception.«⁷ This phenomenological-esthetic approach has been and is intended to counter the increasing fictionalization of our environment, in which direct physical experience is becoming more and more impossible. We may consider the ear to be closer to the world of the dream and the unconscious than the eye. Yet as the most sensitive organ for the exploration of reality, it connects our inner experience with the world around us. It is precisely this double perspective which is investigated to its very limits and with constantly new approaches in the Sound Artists' installations.

Because they form, in a sense, esthetically constructed framework conditions for perception, the experimentally oriented works of these artists are always instances of phenomenological research as well. This aspect is particularly evident in the work of Bernhard Leitner, who is given special emphasis with two installations and a look at his former sound research undertakings. Rolf Julius holds a similarly prominent position in the context of *Resonanzen*. Of all Sound Artists, he is the one who has the strongest affinity to the conception of sound in the cultures of the Far East – particularly with regard to his concept of silence. Installations by Christina Kubisch and Paul DeMarinis provide examples of how light and sound can find a new creative balance in our perception of them. Steve Rodden and Miki Yui stand for a minimalist manner of operating between concept and intuition, for the suspended weightlessness of a world under the dictum of poetry and music. The two youngest representatives of Sound Art to take part in *Resonanzen* are also – by virtue of their performances and CD publications – representatives of a new, growing network of artists who, working as composers and sound engineers with computers and samplers, unite technical and artistic competence in a single form of creative energy.

The shop-window-like space before the entrance to the Stadtgalerie was used by Ed Osborn in *Resonanzen I* for a daydreamy gaze at the everyday world, and by Erwin Stache in *Resonanzen II* for a further development of his musical instrumentarium and its interplay with bodily gestures. Andreas Oldörp introduced a new variation in his work with the generation of sound in permanence, inspired by the organ: an energy-filled, quite literally hot sound lab in which nature and technology unite in a wonderful way. In Oldörp's work it is particularly evident how visual and acoustic presence unite in form. Andres Bosshard airily festooned the inner courtyard of the Stadtgalerie with loudspeakers in a sweeping spatial gesture of the kind he is known for. He always seems to tell of great journeys. His sampler is like a large suitcase full of memories in which minimal sound occurrences merge with far remote spaces of other cultures or even the cosmos. The poetic text which Andres Bosshard contributed to this book shows what a great wealth of listening experience is offered by the world outside Western culture.

Two works, one by Paul DeMarinis and one by Martin Riches, are based on intensive investigation of human speech generation. These works stand not only for the inventive tal-

ent of the artists and the broad spectrum of Sound Art. They also make reference to a conception which seems to follow logically from research on evolution and cognition, according to which the sense of hearing developed to enable us to speak and communicate. Or to put it differently, they point to the emergence of music – and perhaps of art in general – from the spirit of speech.

1 Hans Zender, *Happy New Ears – Das Abenteuer, Musik zu hören*, Freiburg, Basel, Vienna 1991.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid., also see Hans Zender, *Wir steigen niemals in den gleichen Fluß – Wie Musikhören sich wandelt*, Freiburg, Basel, Vienna 1996.

The editor of this book owes essential experiences with the music of the twentieth century to the influence of Hans Zender as the chief conductor of the Symphony Orchestra of the Saarländischer Rundfunk (1972–1983).

4 Hans Peter Zenner, *Hören. Physiologie, Biochemie, Zell- und Neurobiologie*, Stuttgart 1992.

5 Diana Raffman, *Über die Beharrlichkeit der Phänomenologie*, in: Thomas Metzinger (ed.), *Bewußtsein. Beiträge aus der Gegenwartsphilosophie*, Paderborn, Munich, Vienna, Zurich 1995.

6 Helmut Lachenmann, *Klangtypen der Neuen Musik*, in: *Zeitschrift für Musiktheorie* 1970, no. 1.

7 Florian Rötzer, *Inszenierung des Unerhörten*, in: Ulrich Eller, exhibition catalog, Neuer Berliner Kunstverein, Stadtgalerie Saarbrücken (Lucie Schauer and Bernd Schulz, eds.), Saarbrücken, Berlin 1992.

The first synoptic exhibition on Sound Art took place in 1988 with works by Bernard and François Bascher, Gunter Demnig, Ulrich Eller, Stephan von Huene, Rolf Julius and Christina Kubisch (exhibition catalog, Stadtgalerie Saarbrücken 1988). This was followed by individual exhibitions (accompanied by catalogs) of the work of Ulrich Eller, Christina Kubisch, Rolf Julius, Akio Suzuki, Qin Yufen, Terry Fox, Robin Minard, Hans Peter Kuhn, Felix Hess and Alexander R. Titz. The first individual presentation of a Sound Artist took place in 1985 with a sound machine by Gunter Demnig within the framework of the annual assembly of the Internationales Künstlergremium (International Artists' Committee).

Ästhetische Wahrnehmung in neuen künstlerischen Kontexten

Aspekte – Thesen – unabgeschlossene Gedanken

HELGA DE LA MOTTE-HABER

Die folgenden Überlegungen gehen von Erfahrungen in neuartigen Kunstsituationen aus. Man steht mitten drin in einem rätselhaften künstlerischen Ambiente, wenn man einen dunklen Raum betritt, in dem, zu rechteckigen Feldern gruppiert, sich weiß pigmentierte Lautsprecher befinden. Über diese und durch den gesamten Raum wandern rein wirkende Töne – Töne, durch die sich die Felder zu weiten und zu verengen scheinen. Ein anderes Beispiel: ein Feld aus Eisenplatten, das sich unauffällig in die Umgebung einer Betonarchitektur eingliedert. Man hält inne, um auf leise, rostige, rötlich-kratzende Töne zu lauschen; an den Eisenplatten sind unterschiedlich farbige Spuren der Korrosion sichtbar. Manchmal sitzt man mitten in den Tönen, die einen umkreisen, als kullerten sie um eine Schüssel herum. Es ist auch möglich, eingeladen zu sein, in einer Lagerhalle an Gestellen entlangzulaufen, auf denen viele verschiedene kleine Lautsprecher liegen. Man wird versucht sein, die Töne zu erhaschen und sich gleichzeitig die Struktur des Raumes zu vergegenwärtigen. Und spannend ist es auch, über einen Gitterrost zu gehen, der irregulär angeordnete Leuchtstoffröhren schützt. Töne – woher? – erwecken den Eindruck, als würden sich die Lichtstäbe bewegen. Soweit einige Andeutungen über Arbeiten von Christina Kubisch, Rolf Julius, Robin Minard, Ulrich Eller und Hans Peter Kuhn.

Solch neuartige Kunstformen erfordern neuartige Kunstbetrachtungen. An solchen mangelt es in den letzten Jahren nicht. Verspätet gegenüber der Kunstentwicklung, wirken diese Publikationen jedoch meist unabgeschlossen und tastend. Merkwürdig genug, grenzen sie sich auch nicht von der traditionellen Ästhetik ab. Eine solche Abgrenzung will ich im Folgenden versuchen. Zuvor sei aber ein Gemeinsames der Neukonzeptionen der Ästhetik erwähnt. Der Begriff der Wahrnehmung hat Hochkonjunktur. Rückbezogen ist der Begriff dabei auf den griechischen Wortsinn, auf die Sinnesempfindung.

Zur Geschichte des Begriffs der ästhetischen Wahrnehmung

Der Begründer der philosophischen Disziplin »Ästhetik«, der seinerzeit in Frankfurt an der Oder lehrende Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten (1717–1762), hat den Begriff Ästhetik in