

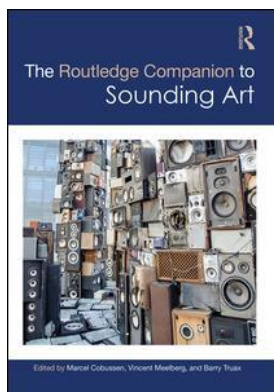
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But Is It (Also) Music?

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1

BUT IS IT (ALSO) MUSIC?

Leigh Landy

Preamble

Let's start off with a premise. The experience of organized sound becomes music in the ears of the beholder. Of course, the word *music* has different meanings in different cultures. It also has different meanings within single cultures. In fact, every individual has a view regarding what (s)he considers to belong within the delineation of music. The phrase, "that isn't music" is one often heard when a person listening finds a work too unusual, too loud, too dissonant or abstract, or sometimes even too banal. Therefore when discussing the listening experience of organized sounds—for the purposes of this discussion, the focus is on sounds that are normally *not* called musical notes in the sense of do-re-mi or quarter note, half note, etc.—it should be noted that there is a growing number of people who consider works containing such sonic materials as music. In sum, the attribution of the word music depends largely on the experience base and attitude of the person involved.

The placement of what many call *sonic art* (the plural is also used) is, after about sixty-five years of fruitful development, still up for grabs. There are departments in the UK, where I work, which are called Music and Sonic Arts. Anyone who has studied fundamental logic might conclude that sonic artworks are therefore not music, but most people studying in these departments, if not all of them, do regard this corpus as music.

Sounding art, as defined by this volume's three editors, covers both note-based and sound-based works. This new term is interesting as it reflects a more traditional French usage if *arts sonores* meaning music that existed alongside the *arts scéniques* (performing arts) and *arts plastiques* (fine art). In my view, sounding art is a synonym for music, but not everyone would agree.

In the world of works made from sound, terminology is used in inconsistent ways, perhaps more inconsistently than in general language usage. In this chapter, an investigation into terminology issues will be presented that will lead towards a general delineation of what I have called *sound-based music* (proposed in Landy 2007a, 2007b). However, to achieve this, a tension needs to be addressed between sound art with its roots in fine art (with its particular modes of critical discourse) and other forms of sonic creativity associated with music, such as electroacoustic music. This tension can be relevant to sonic arts makers, arts organizers and

the general audience. Does this relationship stand in the way of sound artworks *also* being experienced as music? I would suggest that such a separation is unnecessary.

How have scholars been investigating such works and their theoretical foundations? The section of this chapter following the terminology introduction focuses on issues related to the development of sounding art's scholarship and to how sounding art is presented in education. The fact that this field is an interdiscipline, to coin a term related to one of sound-based music's greatest pioneers, Pierre Schaeffer (Schaeffer 1966), is of great importance, for the multi-, inter- and transdisciplinary aspects of sounding art and its field of studies can easily lead towards the types of linguistic inconsistencies suggested above. They can also lead towards unique synergies that make sounding art such a special field and can influence how sounding art listeners receive sound-based works as music.

To complement the section on sounding art studies, a crucial focus is the socio-cultural dimension that concerns issues related to dissemination and cultural placement. Having already suggested that the appreciation of sounding artworks as music has to do with personal experience, the question arises: how does one, in today's society, gain an initial experience of works of organized sound when much of it is not that well known? The chapter then moves on from the general to the more specific: an example of sounding art is presented to illustrate points that have been raised. This case study leads to the chapter's brief conclusion.

In an era in which the art of sound organization is growing in terms of appreciation and widening its horizon, it is timely to investigate whether sound-based art consists of completely separable entities or, alternatively, represents a whole of intertwined parts. Having coined the term *the sound-based music paradigm*, alongside the long-existent note-based paradigm, in the 2007 publications, I have already voted for rhizome-like complexes allowing for all artistic articulations of organized sounds as defined above and of organized notes to be interrelated in terms of practice, reception and theory. At a higher level, I would suggest that sounding art might form such a paradigm as well.

Terminology

Music: Vocal or instrumental sounds (or both) combined in such a way as to produce beauty of form, harmony, and expression of emotion.

(Oxford Dictionaries Online)

Indeed there are better and more detailed definitions of music to be found, but this one has been chosen as it reflects what most people would consider music to be. Of course, beauty is as flexible a word, if not more so, than music especially when attached to words such as emotion. (There are, for example, many who thrive on the experience of perceived beauty in horror films whilst others abhor them; idem noise music.) What is more important here is that most sound-based music would not fit into this definition at all. An often-recounted anecdote, reflecting the notion of "in the ears of the beholder," concerns a white South African who was in the same train compartment as I in the 1980s who asked me what I thought of the "so-called music" made by black South Africans playing on drums. His view was that what these musicians played had no melody or harmony and hardly could be called music. As harmony was not present, it would not fulfill the definition either. Still, many would have no issue with calling African drumming music.

Anyone reading this book will have a more liberal attitude toward the question of what music is, one assumes. Our subject, sounding art, and particularly sound-based approaches,

includes various forms of art making that have evolved over the last century catalyzing an ongoing need for a broader definition of music. As a respectable portion of the art of sound organization has the word music as part of its genre or musical category, for example, electronic or electroacoustic music, and has chosen the concert hall and the recording (e.g., CD, online download) as its means of dissemination, the link with general music culture is evident. Nonetheless, a reasonable percentage of sounding art is created outside of music-related venues and dissemination channels. For example, many sound artworks have no clear beginning or end; therefore, a concert presentation or recording would only represent a version of the work. Many such works are made for particular spaces well beyond the concert hall. Prior to determining whether the differing backgrounds imply that these works do not relate to one another, let's spend some time with the main terms in use within the realm of *sound-based sounding art*. I have previously published on this subject, both in the above-mentioned books and on the ElectroAcoustic Resource Site (EARS: www.ears.dmu.ac.uk); this following short survey is taken from *Understanding the Art of Sound Organization* (9–17).

- Organized sound: A term coined by Edgard Varèse to describe his music. Not in general use, but instead a clear description of many of the following terms.
- Sonic art(s): The art form in which the sound is its basic unit. Sonic art should be an umbrella term covering the following entry, sound art, but is used primarily within music regardless of the fact that the word, music, does not appear in its name.
- Sound art: There is no single consistently used definition for sound art. Originating in the fine arts, the term is associated with sound installations, sound sculptures, public sonic artifacts and site-specific sonic art events and could be further subdivided into more specific categories. In many cases context is taken into account in sound art production. Radiophonic or radio art is sometimes related to sound art, perhaps due to the fact that these works are not created for concert performance. However, some radiophonic works are intended specifically as musical works and, more importantly, almost all have a fixed duration whereas many sound artworks do not possess a clear start or end point.
- Computer music: This term covers a broad range of music created through the use of one or more computers. This ranges from a computer composing instrumental music to digital sound generation and manipulation. It also has to do with computers being used for music-related research. Of all of the terms on this list, this one seems least useful regarding sounding art practice today due to its breadth.
- Electronic music: To many, electronic music is music in which sounds are generated through, for example, oscillators and noise generators—traditionally using analog equipment, today digitally. There are some, particularly in the United States, who define electronic music as a synonym for the following term, electroacoustic music.
- Electroacoustic music: Beyond its use in audio engineering that is not directly relevant to this chapter, this term refers to “[m]usic in which electronic technology, now primarily computer-based, is used to access, generate, explore and configure sound materials, and in which loudspeakers are the prime medium of transmission” (Emmerson and Smalley 2001). It is sometimes hyphenated electro-acoustic and the word electroacoustics is used for both musical production and its related field of studies primarily in Canada. Some restrict this term to so-called “fixed-medium,” i.e., pre-recorded works; however, the chosen definition is equally relevant to real-time sonic performance.

- **Electronica:** A term used for innovative popular music, often made in the studio and not intended for live performance. For our purposes, the term covers a subset of the last two terms, electronic and electroacoustic music, representing a reaction to what might be called academic or institutional practice. Here the focus is often on a lo-fi aesthetic.
- **Sound-based music:** A synonym for sonic art, but acknowledging a broadening of the notion of music. Sound-based music is the art form in which the sound, that is, not the musical note, is the basic unit. It differs from electroacoustic music in that the electroacoustic works may have a traditional musical note focus and sound-based acoustic works need not use electroacoustic means. Furthermore, this term accepts that the musical experience is not dependent on works starting and ending at a given point, nor is it dependent on music being ideally presented in a concert hall. It goes without saying that many works fall between note-based and sound-based only content. In sound-based music, the majority of the content is not based on the traditional note-based paradigm.
- **Sounding art:** This term was not included in the 2007 publication. I encountered it for the first time in Katharine Norman's book of the same title (2004). According to this volume's co-editor, Barry Truax, sounding art is "to include both music and sound art, as well as soundscape composition and other context-based work" (personal communication, 2013).

The term *sound-based music* was proposed to open up the boundaries of music to all forms of sound organization, helping listeners to behold all forms of sonic creativity as music. Sonic art theoretically does the same but, as said, it is mainly musicians who use the term. In fact, if it had included the word *music*, no new term would have been proposed. Sonic art remains neutral in terms of what one calls music, thus allowing for, for example, sound art, soundscape composition, noise music, and acousmatic electroacoustic music (music in which the source and cause of sounds cannot be seen) to fall under a single umbrella, as was already the case regarding sound-based music in the 2007 publication. In short, sonic art through its name is not directly concerned with the cultural expansion of the concept of music, whereas sound-based music does just that.

The ElectroAcoustic Resource Site (EARS) proposes a very broad range of genres and categories, related to sound-based music. The scope of this artistic world is vast. It also identifies that most terms relating to groupings of works are categories rather than genres. A genre holds together works with a common sound and musical approach. Terms ranging from sound installations to algorithmic sound-based music do not have a particular sound; instead they have a common medium, tool or method and are thus categories (and can also be note-based). A selection of further genres and categories beyond those already mentioned now follows to demonstrate the diversity of the area: sound-based computer games, glitch (a genre within electronica), granular composition, sound installations/sculptures (including acoustic ones), sound-based IDM (Intelligent Dance Music), sound-based Internet music, sound-based laptop performance, live electronics, lowercase sound (another electronica genre), musique concrète, text-sound composition, sound-based timbral music, sound-based turntablism and sound-based video art (including the sub-category, visual music).

A further dimension related to the classification of artworks made with sounds concerns the context of presentation. For example, where is a work presented/heard and is there a particular audience in mind? The answer to this can range between "I don't care, as long as

it gets performed” to “This piece is made in a particular location involving the sounds and other aspects of people living in a given place—it is about them and for them primarily” and very many other scenarios in between. Clearly the context of presentation of sound-based artworks can have as much to do with a work’s categorization as its relationship with other works. (Note: alongside context of presentation one can equally speak about context within the sonic content in any sound-based artwork; this ranges from contexts from the real world as a focus to more abstract worlds of sound.) The terminology related with this dimension of art making is currently under-developed.

The question is, therefore: to which form or forms of art does a given work belong? This knowledge is important as people do not just listen to music; they normally search for works that belong to one or more types of music in which they are already interested, that is, music that fits within their experience and taste. Some find, for example, site-specific sound art to be a manifestation of the fine arts. However, put to a blindfold test (that is, where listeners are not told to what a given recording belongs or whether it is an audio only or audio-visual work), many listeners will find it difficult to separate certain sound artworks from electro-acoustic music. With this in mind, why can’t a sound installation be both a work of fine art *and* music? Certainly operas are both music and theater, aren’t they?

Sounding Art’s Theory and How It Is Reflected in Education

With practice comes *theory*, or perhaps it is the other way around. In order to gain theory, *education* is involved.

Let’s start at the beginning and ask: in terms of education, what does one need to know about traditional music and/or fine art, not to mention a number of the other fields that will be introduced in this section, in order to study the art of sound organization? Starting from my own field of music, does one have to learn traditional counterpoint and harmony to master this new art form, or are notions such as horizontal and vertical approaches to sonic composition a bit more apropos? Are techniques related to video art and popular music recording production more or less relevant than knowledge of music from the Baroque period or of Indian raga traditions? This latter question may appear a bit absurd, but the potential number of fields relevant to the creation and study of sound-based art is quite high. As said, it is an interdisciplinary.

It is hard to imagine learning about sound-based art without learning about acoustics, psychoacoustics, perception, and perhaps cognition as well. For many, knowledge from computing science, audio engineering and areas within mathematics are not only highly valuable, but also, in fact, essential. Increasingly, people in the field are rather savvy concerning issues related to interactivity.

Many, although not all, will turn at one point towards other relevant fields, such as acoustic ecology, audio-visual theory, cultural and critical studies, media studies, philosophy (e.g., phenomenology) and semiotics. And, more recently, more specialist subjects have been evolving, such as sonification and virtual reality as well as broader subjects, such as sound studies. This rapidly evolving area of sound studies is extremely hybrid as part of it resides outside of artistic endeavor, investigating, for example, the presence and role of sound in specific areas or in an area’s history (see, for example, Sterne (2012), a companion volume to this Companion, and Pinch and Bijsterveld (2012)). The new online *Journal of Sonic Studies* (<http://www.sonicstudies.org>) exemplifies the important initiatives that are appearing to get this young field off the ground quickly.

This leads towards a potential richness of scholarly approaches, which is healthy, as any artistic medium deserves to have its supporting theories investigated from every conceivable angle. This is the good news; however, two forms of less good news accompany it. First of all, the amount of specific new theory that has been created for the benefit of sound-based art is relatively modest. Secondly, there appears to be too little investigation regarding sound-based artworks from a combination of approaches from both fine art and music regardless of which of the two a given work is normally associated with. There is an historical reason for this that will be discussed in a moment.

In *Understanding the Art of Sound Organization* the key contributions to sound-based music theory were presented as a survey. Some eight years later, that list of major contributions would hardly be extended. Spokespersons interested in sound typologies related to sonic morphology include Schaeffer (e.g., 1966; Chion 1983), Bayle (1989, 1993), the MIM group in Marseille (Frémot 2001) and Smalley (1986, 1997 and, concerning space, 2007); regarding sonic construction at micro-level (sounds that are too short to be perceived) include Roads (2001) and Truax (1988); regarding sonic construction at sound event level (Wishart 1985, 1994, 2012) and specific approaches from a host of other authors; regarding acoustic ecology which is related to soundscape composition (Schafer 1994; Truax 1984, 2002); and analytical tools, beyond those already mentioned (Bregman 1994; Emmerson 1986; Landy 1994; Roy 2003). Although this is a nice introductory list of specific theories, it seems a bit short given the sixty-five odd years since the first musique concrète piece was completed and about a century after the sound-based initiatives of the Futurists and Dadaists. Of course a significant number of authors have introduced theoretical knowledge ranging from listening strategies to discourse to classification to new means of composition and presentation to new forms of virtuosity, but these go beyond the scope of this chapter. A substantial bibliography can be found on the EARS site, accessible by search term and author. The journal *Organised Sound* is intended to represent a focus for developments within the musicological area of sound-based music studies including works evolving from fine art; of course a number of other journals also include submissions in this field.

Literature related to sound art is copious and will be discussed by other authors in this Companion volume. One of the finest overviews is edited by Helga de la Motte Haber (1999). What is special about this volume and others that followed is the presence of both authors from music and fine art within the same publication. In this particular case, it is also published in a contemporary music series. This is more rare than readers might assume which brings us to the above-mentioned tension, the highly disregarded invisible wall between fine art and music discourse. In fact a closer look at the 1999 “Klangkunst” volume demonstrates each author’s emphasis; most contributors were writing either from a musical or a fine art point of view. Why is this so?

Anyone who has worked in higher education in the arts will be aware of how differently art is taught in comparison with music. Naturally there are common points (e.g., approaches to history, shared philosophy and, where relevant, theory, schools of art that crossed media). However, the analysis of artworks, in our case, time-based artworks in fine art and music, are quite dissimilar. This has ramifications for artistic practice, as the making and understanding tools for those studying in one or the other are quite different as is reflected in artistic production in and discourse regarding, for example, sound art and electroacoustic music. It is suggested that this need not be the case.

Although a generalization, the main perceived gap between electroacoustic music and sound art, beyond their means of presentation, are the more sophisticated sonic composition

methods and techniques which are normally related to music and the more conceptual context-dependent aspects of sound art (soundscape composition, one exception, exemplifies the ability to combine both). Each has developed strengths that are not generally shared with the other, at least when it comes to education and scholarly discourse. Another author in this volume, Salomé Voegelin has articulated this in her talks and writings (see, for example, Voegelin 2016; Voegelin and Gardner 2015; and this volume). Also Brandon LaBelle's contribution in this volume, among other things, touches on this issue. The natural reaction to this is to share practice and its mirror in theory to advantage, yet this is too rarely done and is the main item standing in the way of a sounding art paradigm to function holistically. As stated we are dealing with an art form that is interdisciplinary. Sound-based works often represent a multiple art form. Why can't musicians learn from the communicative experience, the dramaturgically founded intention/reception loop, that is second nature to most sound artists, and why don't sound artists engage more with the tools of electroacoustic composition than they do?

Seth Kim-Cohen (2009, and this volume) reflects upon this tension in a different manner. Where most of this introductory chapter is discussing sound art from the point of view of reception (the eye, the ear, then the heart and the mind), Kim-Cohen is more concerned with the front end, the concept as articulated by the making of a work and consequently its reception as concept by an audience. He is, in a sense, an opponent to what is being put forward here, not solely due to his focus on the concept and all that is related to it, but also due to his search for "a sonic practice distinct from music" (Kim-Cohen 2009: xxiii). On the other hand, he is one of only a few examples of people attempting to merge musical and fine art discourse regardless of a work's genre or origin.

As the field of sound studies evolves, the field of sounding art (or in terms of the present discussion, sound-based music) studies deserves to take advantage of its synergetic potential of bringing together ideas and practices from its many artistic approaches and scholarly foundations. Theory could be developed that would cross more genre/category borders than is currently the case and, in consequence, appreciation and understanding would increase leading towards a much greater leakage amongst the varied communities of interest, in my opinion a desirable scenario. One need not be a specialist in every area relevant to sound-based art as, for example, formalization or sonification will only be of interest to certain artists, scholars and members of the public as will approaches closer to ecology or acousmatic thinking. What a more interdisciplinary approach would infer is that common foundations and specialist concepts could be shared and more generally available to anyone within this wide range of practices.

The Socio-cultural Dimension

How does one access and how accessible is contemporary innovative sounding art? Its socio-cultural aspects in terms of reception and social placement have hardly been investigated. The subject was not mentioned under the preceding section on theory. This is a shame.

The contemporary arts have had a varied history in terms of societal acceptance. The innovative fine arts have been far more fortunate in terms of reception and investment than has contemporary music. Analogously, a good deal of sound art related to fine art has reached a larger public than electroacoustic music has. Major modern museums have offered sound art exhibitions or large-scale installations visited by tens of thousands of visitors, a level of reception only few innovative musical works receive. Sound artists have won a number of national arts prizes, such as Britain's Turner Prize. Yet many nations do not offer a highly

prestigious prize in contemporary music and certainly not in electroacoustic music. Thus the art form's reputation has influenced the accessibility of its work. Both fine art and music are at times controversial and highly innovative, yet there is such a discrepancy in terms of audience with a few exceptions (e.g., composers of simpler, more "user-friendly" music including minimal music, who often do reach a larger audience than most others involved with musical experimentation). Clearly, artists and people involved in the cultural sector could work harder to alter this situation. More importantly, given the proposed view that sound-based and note-based artworks can all be linked together, those interested in sounding art in galleries, museums, and specific sites could very well find concert music of interest, and vice-versa, thus merging these different communities of interest.

Does this difference in reception simply have to do with the fact that fine art is extensively capitalized and thus issues related to the economy of culture are determining factors? Or, at work level, is a sound artwork's link with context or with particular sites of particular importance here, thus making the work more accessible due to experiential links? Might it have to do with the fact that you can walk in and out of sound artworks any time you choose whereas in sounding art presented as music, the norm is to stay for as long as a piece or concert lasts? In short, is the word "music" standing in the way of electroacoustic music's accessibility? (Probably not, as sonic art is not a household world generally.) If a given artist with particular techniques related to sound organization were to make one work for concert performance and another for a site-specific installation, does that mean one might be music and less popular and the other one is not music and more popular? This seems illogical. These are access questions worthy of much greater attention and will help us understand better how the field of sounding art/sound-based music fits together.

Case Study

The case study presented here was discovered during the writing of *La musique des sons/The Music of Sounds* and has been used in a number of presentations ever since. In this way, one can speak of fairly significant blindfold test results with audiences varying in experience and interest. Andreas Oldörp's *Trost für Anfänger* (Consolation for Beginners) is a sound installation that was presented in Saarbrücken in 2002 as part of an exhibition called *Resonanzen*. It was included in the exhibition's catalogue (Schulz 2002) and is described on the artist's website (Oldörp 2002). Here follows a description based on his notes:

At four locations at the space at St. Johann Market metal brackets are mounted on the wall with electrical outlets. They support heating elements that heat 4-liter flasks containing three outlets. The filaments bring the water to a boil, and the steam is passed through silicon hose lines to two organ pipes. The condensation that forms on the way flows back to the dispensing nozzle, that is, a water valve that regulates the flow of the steam and controls its dynamic. The installation takes about 3 litres of tap water per flask daily. . . . The specially made pipes create low-pressure fluctuations in the diverse sounds that are produced. The voicing of the organ pipes is intended to create a uniformly distributed choral sound in the space.

(Oldörp 2002, my translation)

What is clear from the description is that this work has neither a clear beginning nor an end. It is made for a large space. It offers a wink of the eye to musical traditions by way of

his remark regarding intonation and fluctuation, not to mention choral sound quality and it uses organ pipes as its means of sound production. Clearly every other aspect of the piece has to do with the flow of heat and water/steam based on the concept of an ongoing process. “Process” is an approach shared by fine art and music particularly from the 1960s onwards. (Think for example, of the phase process pieces by Steve Reich.)

When introduced to the catalogue’s recording without any information at all—often the case when people do not read program notes until after a performance or hear about a piece on the radio or the Internet until after listening to it—listeners are firstly drawn in by the highly peculiar sonic universe that Oldörp has created here. When asked whether this piece sounds less like music than examples taken from electronic music, acousmatic music using real-world sounds and soundscape composition that are included in the same talk, the vast majority says “no.” It is only then that the piece is described and images from the exhibition are projected. Thus, again, context is relevant to the artistic experience. However given these responses, is this installation both art and music? I believe so.

Conclusion

Does sounding art need a home and, if so, where? For this chapter, the key focus was on sound-based music. In *Understanding the Art of Sound Organization* it was suggested that much of this diverse corpus is not directly relevant to the popular/art music divide of note-based music. Instead its home could be found within what I called “the sound-based paradigm.” The addition that is equally important here is that much of this art of sound organization also crosses the divide between fine art/music. In some cases it crosses other divides as well. For example, soundscape composition has a relationship with music and acoustic communication. Sounding art is indeed an interdisciplinary. It should also have its own home and some of its works should have many homes.

And is sound-based art music? Certainly, in the ears of the beholder (and that includes this author), sometimes even supported by the eyes.

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