

Book Review

Sanne Krogh Groth and Holger Schulze (eds.), *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Sound Art*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2020. ISBN: 978-1-5013-3879-3.

Alan Licht, *Sound Art Revisited*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2019. ISBN: 978-1-5013-3377-4.

Peter Weibel (ed.) (2019) *Sound Art – Sound as a Medium of Art*. Karlsruhe/London: ZKM/MIT Press. ISBN: 978-0-262-02966-7.

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It is a bit like fish in an aquarium: It is unaware that it is swimming in water, because water is its natural environment; for the fish, it is invisible. Only when the fish is removed from the aquarium through human intervention and brought into contact with air does it suddenly realize that it is in a new medium. We humans live in an aquarium of sound waves. That is one important message of sound art.

This quote from Peter Weibel (p. 144) is developed from a point in Marshall McLuhan's *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (1964) and expresses the focus on sound as medium that Weibel has built his book around. Sound art has been grasping for theory since its inception, and it has been slippery – having absorbed new artistic practices and avoided clear definitions so effectively that it has been in danger of collapsing as a meaningful category. I voiced this concern in issue 14.1 of this journal in 2009 and am glad to report that the understanding and discourse of sound art has advanced significantly since that time.

In comparison with scholarship on music and the visual arts, the theory of sound art is a relatively young genre, and the volume and scope of these three books can easily be said to represent a state of the art of how sound art is understood and understands itself. Alan Licht published his first overview of sound art in 2007 as an extended catalogue for an exhibition, and later wrote a much downloaded and read article in *Organised Sound* (14.1); Peter Weibel has a lifetime of international practice as artist, scholar and organiser of the Ars Electronica Festival (1986–95) and as director of Zentrum für Kunst und Medien (ZKM) in Karlsruhe from 1999 onwards. Their books present thorough overviews of the historical development of the genre, and where Weibel's book is a massive extended and beautifully illustrated documentation of the 2012–13 ZKM exhibition by the same name, Licht's book is a thoroughly revised version of his 2007 publication, this time with new insights

and understandings, and in condensed shape with much less visual material.

The three books discussed in this review all have the ambition to explain different strands of sound art and to describe the historical and contemporary developments by way of closer examination of a number of artworks. Weibel and Licht share a historical perspective, while Groth and Schulze's book is organised around six theoretical perspectives that bring different aspects of sound art into focus. Groth and Schulze look at the genre from more specific art theoretical perspectives, while Weibel and Licht are departing more from open readings and 'emergent qualities', to borrow a term from Pierre Schaeffer. Triangulating is a well-tried method for mapping terrain, and the three books successfully approach sound art along several vectors. As Weibel's book, Groth and Schulze's book is an edited volume, with contributions from many authors, allowing different voices to enter into the discussion. This is very valuable for sustaining theory-building, and since the book is structured around specific readings of artistic intentions and types of content, it makes for interesting discussions not often seen in sound art literature. The book also has a better than excellent literature list, more extensive than anything I have seen in any sound art publication to date.

The three books describe the problems of understanding an art form that leaves the established contexts, and have approximately identical goals. Groth and Schulze has felt drawn towards outliers in art aesthetics, and have wanted to change such imbalance in appreciation, while Weibel has wanted to increase attention to the genre and sound as a medium (p. 8). Licht's purpose has also been to give 'sound art a meaningful context beyond its reputation as a vague and often misinterpreted catchphrase' (p. xi). The three books discuss criteria for appreciation as well as emergence of new formal conventions, underpinned by suggested interpretations and readings of concrete works.

1. THE BLOOMSBURY HANDBOOK OF SOUND ART

A quote from John Kannenberg (2018) can be seen as a point of departure for Groth and Schulze's book: 'Sound art is art of any form that critically explores the cultural, political, scientific, and/or conceptual situations surrounding the act of listening' (p. 15). The chapters are structured under six headings: 1) After the Apocalypse. The Desert of the Real as Sound

Art, 2) Journeys across the Grid. Postcolonial Transformations as Sound Art, 3) Come Closer... Intimate Encounters as Sound Art, 4) De-institutionalize! Institutional Critique as Sound Art, 5) The Sonic Imagination. Sonic Thinking as Sound Art, and 6) Making Sound. Building Media Instruments as Sound Art. This structure brings more conventional art historical discourse to bear while including and bringing focus onto marginal figures and theories of sound art, allowing broad theorisation. The handbook includes contributions from thirty-seven artists and academics, and this makes a detailed discussion of each text impossible for keeping this review within a productive scope, so each section will be summarised with the overall perspectives fielded.

Part I, 'After the Apocalypse', concerns soundscapes as they appear in light of our anthropocene period, where humans totally dominate the fate of all life on the planet. In some ways this expands our notion of ecology (as in protecting the environment) to the increasingly used understanding of dark ecology, where a more holistic view places people *in* the environment rather than outside it. Soundscape art in this genre transforms material from being a mere matter of fact into being a matter of concern, moving the sounds beyond mere 'objecthood' when focusing on their connections and correlations in social context. This concentration on what sound *does*, rather than what it *is*, joins the discourses on sound art and participatory practices. There is also a political discussion in this section, on how soundscape works can critically present alternative and imagined spaces.

Part II, 'Journeys across the Grid, Postcolonial Transformations as Sound Art', maintains a postcolonial focus on sound art from the second and third world. Sanne Krogh Groth makes a strong case for why a situated understanding of sound art, and increased awareness of post-colonial and colonisation issues, are necessary for understanding and appreciating the transformational potential of sound art. A key point in this entire section is that a situated understanding often renders pre-existing categories of sound art and music irrelevant, due to their focus on aesthetics rather than on contextual framing and processes. When interviewed by Juliana Hodkinson, previous DAAD executive Julia Gerlach states, 'we have to ask what this artist is relating to, what this practice is building on, and what questions and issues are behind it' (p. 137). Four reports on artistic processes have also found their way into this section, making it largely a descriptive account of recent events in emerging scenes, social engagement, participatory art and intermedial expression – all understood as practices that emerge in the ubiquitous paradigm.

Part III, 'Come Closer... Intimate Encounters as Sound Art', features four texts on how sound art

can both facilitate and engage a sense of intimacy, and serves as a reminder on how the intimate sphere is always active in production and reception of art. This is explored through texts on voice and vocal sounds as well as descriptions of projects where sound is used to probe and intrude into our private sphere. Activist intentions are also discussed, in particular in Cathy Lane's text on the use of women's voices. The section serves as a reminder of how the intimate sphere is always active in the production and reception of art, and points to a broader physicality, much like what was popular in musicology a few years back, when the 'Cartesian split' was much discussed. This focus on the senses being crucial for our 'knowing and being in the world' (a quote taken from social anthropologist Steven Feld, 2015) is elaborated in texts on listening in virtual reality and on resounding recorded speech and sound in settings that we normally consider personal. This would have been more interesting if discussed from also a psychoacoustic perspective.

Part IV, 'De-Institutionalize! Institutional Critique as Sound Art' discusses aspects of institutionalisation and critique in four chapters. Sharon Stewart argues that sound can be effective in art-based activism, and uses dissimilar examples such as Pauline Oliveros and Pussy Riot to point out that 'pressing societal issues... are not just to be pointed out, discussed or politicized, but they can also be engaged with' (p. 257). Two artist's statements further augment the activist perspective in installation work and sonification methods. In her chapter, Laura Zattra discusses how strong activity in experimental music led to the establishing of several studios in Italy during the 1960s and 1970s, and carefully lays out a historical gallery of personas that gave these studios their local flavour. The final chapter in the section traces 'contemporary sound art and... listening as a means of interrogating institutions' (p. 295) suggesting that these experiences contribute to changing the attitudes to modern cityscapes.

In Part V, 'The Sonic Imagination, Sonic Thinking in Sound Art', the opening text by Macon Holt discusses sound art as sonic fiction, as a way of describing possible worlds. He argues that music pulls sonic experience towards abstraction and signification, while sound art pulls towards 'deterritorialism' and more open perception. The next chapter, by Sandra Kazlauskaitė, is a welcome reminder of the significant and inventive work of a number of female pioneers in experimental sonic arts. It must, however, be said that this text would have been stronger had the author attempted to explain how listening 'through and with sound' allows the 'mother tongue' to have a specific significance. Alastair Cameron and Eleni Ikoniadou elaborate on how sound allows insights into political and social rift lines, and how media

sound significantly colours how we perceive the events they portray, also how sound can create ‘alternative lenses’ (p. 363). This vector extends also into Tobias Ewé’s text on how mechanical sound can free conceptualisation of sonic events from ‘narratives focusing exclusively on human creativity, technical schemas, or pure representation’ (p. 397).

Part VI, ‘Making Sound. Building Media Instruments as Sound Art’, brings several interesting ideas to the fore. Sanne Krogh Groth and Ulrik Schmidt discuss how building and modifying instruments can be seen as a type of critique of traditional music and performance, and read this tendency as a development of sound art *singularities* as opposed to the standardisation and reproducibility that has characterised musical development over the centuries. In their chapter, Chris Salter and Alexandre Saunier examine the reinvention of the instrument from an almost opposite perspective – in light of the technoscientific development of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, rather than as a continuation of the classical instrument making. They see new technological instruments as reconfiguring the ‘mesh of technological-individual-social relations’, leading to the development of new aesthetics and artistic practices (p. 420), and explore this complexity under the headings ‘Appropriation’, ‘Instruments and Processes’, ‘Bending and Tinkering’ and ‘Learning’. Rolf Großmann’s chapter, ‘The Instrument as Medium’, concentrates on how the new media from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries also embed and expand performance practices with sound beyond the strict definitions of tone and pitch in most Western art music. The remaining texts in this section explore the new skillset of sound artists; engineering, composition and performance.

Sanne Krogh Groth and Holger Schulze have edited a volume of almost 600 pages that consists of very interesting texts that explain how social perspectives and art historical theory can fruitfully be applied to sound art and yield insights not easily developed through the traditional focus on sound and space. The book makes a very good case for why it is necessary to expand the reading and understanding of sound art’s many sub-genres in order to grasp the contemporary developments, in particular socially engaged works with political intentionality.

2. SOUND ART, SOUND AS A MEDIUM OF ART

In Weibel’s book, twenty-five chapters are grouped under four headings – ‘Sound as a Medium of Art’, ‘Media Technology in Theory and Practice’, ‘Sound Art in Context’ and ‘Historical Cartography of Sound Art’. An explicit goal of the book is: ‘to move beyond the established disciplinary divides to open our

eyes and ears to the full potential of sound as a medium of art in the twentieth and twenty-first century’. This broader ambition for media art fits well with the profile of the ZKM that Weibel directs, and the idea for the book was also born during a large exhibition that the institution hosted in 2012. More than half the book is filled with pictures of works presented in the exhibition. As with Groth and Schulze’s book, a detailed review of each text will lead to an impossibly long review, so each of the four sections will be summarised.

My impression is that Weibel situates sound art as an extension of music, but with an expression that belongs to the arts. His opening text ‘Sound as Medium of Art’ is a tour de force description of the development of sound art, from the noise of Futurism and organised sound, via strands that focus more on visual objects, to pure sound experiments in the expanding field of experimental music. This broad overview captures long lines of development, and presents a compelling lens where many different offshoots come into view as building blocks for one another. Richly illustrated with artist sketches and photos, this programmatic chapter provides a comprehensive introduction and description of the development and diversity of sound art. Weibel does not overlook the politics that can be read into the arts, and aided by Jacques Attali (*Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, 1977), he reads sound art into the larger development of society, and states that we are now confronted by a new universe of sound, where by digital means any object can control any sound and any space can emit sound. Digital technology has made sound art a universal medium (p. 147). The historical perspective is maintained also in Lázló Moholy-Nagy’s and Germano Celant’s texts on phonographs and records, where they drill deeper into the recording as *medium* rather than *content*, and Achille Bonito’s text on ‘Forte Piano: The Shapes of Sound’, an exhibition that he curated in 2012.

Perspectives on ‘Media Technology in Theory and Practice’ are elaborated in three texts. Siegfried Zielinsky looks selectively at music technology archaeology, starting with 6,000-year-old Chinese bone flutes as musical instruments, and continues with mechanical instruments and automata from the 1100s to 1200s and onwards. Seth Cluett describes the loudspeaker as both artefact and artistic topic, and points out how the loudspeaker has extended the audible reach of artistic potential over the last fifty years. Importantly, this reach has had social consequences for the availability and content of art, thus the speaker is not only a mere mediator of recorded data. Alexandra Supper discusses sonification as a step towards materialist and objective expressions, rather than the individual subjectivity that has ruled the

stages of the past. She describes examples on exchange between science and art, where both knowledge domains benefit and enrich one another.

The section 'Sound Art in Context' starts with a chapter by Linnea Semmerling where she endeavours to hunt down the soundtrack of the white cube by dissecting works that introduce different noises into these ritualised spaces. She argues that the 'sound of silence' is augmented by sound works, and that listeners might 'never be able to hear the white cube's silence again' (p. 506) once it has been turned into a space for listening, and mechanical and visitor sounds would be difficult to ignore. Irene Noy discusses the inclusion of multimodal experiences in curatorial practices in Germany, and Brandon Labelle approaches the topic of sonic site specificity, arguing that sound art points towards 'a desire to discover new openings for collectivity, sharing and togetherness', nurturing 'imaginative solidarities' (p. 527). Tony Myatt's text on sound pavilions traces the development of these 'sound houses', as Francis Bacon probably would have called them, and their potential to unify architectural, sonic and visual experiences. Starting with Le Corbusier's Phillips Pavilion and Xenakis's polytopes, Myatt leads up to discussions of contemporary structures and how 'they remain valuable sites of experimentation and innovation' (p. 547). Morten Søndergaard writes about his curation of the unheard avant-garde in Sweden, Denmark and Finland for the ZKM exhibition, and leaves us with interesting descriptions of little-known personae and works, reaching back to the 1960s and bringing the narrative up to the current situation.

The next section of the book holds a 'Historical Cartography of Sound Art', with articles on the UK, Germany, Poland, Russia, Turkey, China, Japan, Australia, US, Canada and Brazil. Although the list of countries could have been longer, this section provides an fascinating insight into how this art genre has migrated and found local adaptations. David Toop has been interviewed about the British scene, and produced a personal account of his experiences, anecdotal and full of examples of noteworthy works. The German tradition is presented in the form of an interview with Bernd Schulz and Carsten Seiffarth, both seminal figures in Germany: Schulz as the founder of Stadtgalerie Saarbrücken (1985) and Seiffarth as the founder of Singuhr, Berlin's foremost sound art organisation since 1996. They explain the typical German Klangkunst as more object-oriented and less performative than the more Anglo-Saxon sound art with links to (electroacoustic and) experimental music. The next chapter revolves around Polish Studio Eksperymentalne (PRES), and Daniel Muzyczuk describes the development of the studio and important works from its catalogue. The studio served as a basis of musical critique in Poland.

Dmitry Bulatov delivers a hugely interesting account of the developments in the Soviet Union. Russia has an amazing history of musical and technical innovation, but since these are little known in the West, Bulatov's chapter a very welcome read indeed. The chapter includes an excellent, however, brief overview of the history from the early electrical instruments up until the current computational tools. Basak Senova describes the emerging sound art scene in Turkey, and how it has moved from stage to exhibition space over the last fifteen years.

In China, knowledge about sound, acoustics and tuning systems date back thousands of years, and Dajun Yao's chapter provides an interesting account on acoustic phenomena from ancient times that we can still experience today. Examples are taken from The Temple of Heaven (1420) and the particular tuning of the 2,500-year old tuned temple bells of Marquis Yi of Zeng. He goes on to describe a number of contemporary works, and how this heritage can still be traced in some of them. Towards the end of his chapter, he describes how social media in general, and in particular the app *PaPa*, empowers users to be creative by recording, processing and sharing their recordings, and how this increases their sensitivity to their sonic environment. With a user base of tens of millions, the magnitude of this activity transcends the artist-oriented concept of sound art, and argues that it is likely to have social significance over time.

The description of sound art in Japan by Ryo Ikeshiro and Ataru Tanaka also takes a look at early cultural history, and points out that noise in Japan was not considered the 'other' to silence – rather a complementary view into the same thing. The non-harmonic spectra of Japanese instruments that typically balance order and chaos serves as an example. Historical development from the 1950s is described in more detail, explaining how international influences by John Cage and others fertilised the growing interest. Caleb Kelly has written a short introduction to sound art in Australia, which has unfolded for decades supported by important milestone exhibitions and institutional initiatives.

In his introduction to sound art in the US, Christopher Cox describes sound art as different from other manifestations of acoustic manipulation such as music, film and video. Cox's chapter provides an encompassing overview of the origins and different iterations of sound art in the US, and he emphasises in particular John Cage's 'ontological and epistemological inquiries', and argues that 'American sound art has and continues to be a series of footnotes to Cage, its progenitor and the source of its problems and prospects' (p. 687). Artist Christof Migone's text on the Canadian scene opens with a recognition of 'listening as a pedagogical imperative with a

socio-political agenda' (p. 689), highlighting an approach to sound art where sound plays an important role in the organisation of everyday life. Migone continues his text with a thorough review of the diversity and maturity of sound art in Canada, with more of a focus on younger artists than on the canon.

The two last chapters in the book are dedicated to the Brazilian scene. Giuliano Obici presents Brazilian sound art from the perspective of *gambiarra*, which is a type of informal improvisation without appropriate resources. This is in essence a DIY-perspective, and playing with and subverting the rules is essential in Brazilian art, exemplified by the several works that Obici discusses. The last chapter in the book is dedicated to a seminar figure in Brazilian experimental work with sound. Walter Smetak (1913–84) pioneered physical sound sculptures and instruments, and left behind a legacy that can still be traced in the Brazilian sound art scene.

The history of sound art that has been laid out by Peter Weibel in this edited book is comprehensive, and presents the long lines and development strands in a manner that makes the complexity easy to follow, comprehend and appreciate. The book is more than 700 pages long and beautifully illustrated. The chapters by many authors underpin the focus on sound as a medium; how sound has been used as material. The regional variation in sound art has been explored in several texts, bringing less-known works and development trends into view in this international discourse. The book features a comprehensive literature list, as well as a well-built index.

3. SOUND ART REVISITED

Sound Art Revisited is a revised version of Alan Licht's groundbreaking book on Rizzoli from 2007. In the revised version he has abandoned the initial intention of 'differentiating sound art from music and sound artists from musicians', and he has 'looked at sound art from a variety of angles in hopes of giving it a meaningful context beyond its reputation as a vague and often misinterpreted catchphrase' (p. xi). *Sound Art Revisited* is organised in four sections: 1) Introduction, 2) Prehistories and Early Manifestations, 3) Sound and the Art World, and 4) Recent Sound Art.

In the introduction, Licht dives into definitions, and describes the exchanges about sound art's genealogies from either experimental music or from the visual arts. In his view, the term 'sound art' has value 'mainly . . . in crediting site- or object-specific works that are not intended as music per se but is often catchall for any kind of piece, be it music or an artwork, that experiments with sound'. He also launches a two-part definition of sound art himself as 'An installed sound environment that is defined by the physical and/or

acoustic space it occupies rather than time and can be exhibited as a visual artwork would be', and 'A visual artwork that also has a sound-producing function, such as a sound sculpture.' He continues: 'Sound art tends to heighten a listener's sense of place, even if it's filling it, whereas music aims to transcend its setting' (p. 6) and fills the remainder of this section with examples and further discussions on sound art's defining characteristics. This is probably the best overview of the discussion about what sound art is and how it can best be categorised that I have read. Furthermore, he proposes, 'sound art grew from the separation of sound from its source via the technological agents of microphones, transmission and recording' (p. 22). This rings true immediately, and points back to Murray Schafer's description of schizophony, but this time with a positive twist. More importantly, it also points back to musique concrète, and to Pierre Schaeffer's ideas of both abstraction and listening, something that Licht explicitly points out (p. 27). Sound art has strong roots in both audio technology and experimental music.

The second section, 'Prehistories and Early Manifestations', opens with a discussion of the separation of sound from its source by way of technology, and how this has made sound into an object that can be treated separately; sound can take on a life of its own. By this objectification, it has become easier to develop listening strategies for taking advantage of these new affordances, and this is Licht's argument for why sound art stems from musique concrète. He goes on to describe how the deliberate use of space has a history also in music, at first with placement of instrument groups in churches, and after the invention of electric audio technology, as electroacoustically constructed and augmented spatialisation. This leads logically into a discussion of sound installations and pavilions, extending into gallery exhibitions. Licht illustrates his points by examples, and his narrative is easy to follow. He continues to describe how sound art expressions also include what we can call ecological listening to the totality of soundscapes indoors and outdoors, and interestingly he posits that 'It is these [outdoor] soundscapes, and the highly concentrated listening within them, that became the model for indoor sound installation, rather than the normal infusion of music into an auditorium.' Detailed descriptions of a number of outdoor projects follow, of such different character as Rolf Julius's acoustic 'land art' and Bruce Odland and Sam Auinger's custom-built acoustic manipulation of traffic sounds, previously discussed in *Organised Sound* (10.2). In the following, the kinship between sound art and land art is further explored, and both Hilda Westerkamp's sound walks and Andrea Lockwood's installations are discussed, among other works. A part of this section is dedicated to sound sculpture, where Licht describes a

large number of examples, beginning with pioneering works from Cage and moving forward into more recent works; for example, Camille Norment's *Dead Room* (p. 77), where she visualises the physicality of sound by feeding subsonic frequencies into large exposed subwoofers.

In the third section, Licht is looking at the developments that can be traced from the visual arts, in particular kinetic art and land art. As in the previous sections, he starts the section with a historic overview of how attention to sound can be found in works of several artists normally active in painting and sculpture, and expands his description towards the more contemporary situation. Sound poetry and performance art get a thorough treatment, and Licht expands on the importance of Rauschenberg, Cage and the Fluxus movement, especially in the US art scene. He describes how conceptual art and performance art have left their impact also in sound works, and how early audio exhibitions are interested in tracing the development up until the early 1980s. Brief mentions are also made of a few European exhibition spaces, such as Stadtgalerie Saarbrücken, and Galerie Gianozzo and Singuhr in Berlin. This section continues with a large listing of festivals and galleries, all in the Western world.

Following these mainly historically organised sections, the fourth part concerns recent sound art. Licht has looked at sound art from the last two decades, and has found that there are actually only a few works that 'advances' the traditional sound art, and he speculates that this re-circulation of ideas could perhaps be attributed to a general lack of knowledge about sound art. He finds that the main trend is towards pluralism, where the focus is not so much on 'the keen awareness of both listening and the site itself' as earlier (p. 123). As in previous sections, Licht discusses a large number of examples to underpin his point of deliberate transgressions of the border between music and visual art, resulting in changes in the nomenclature, where the term 'sonic art' is now used for bringing all types of technology-based expressions with sound in under the same umbrella. This might be an effective way of addressing sound art's paradoxical nature as a subgenre of both music and visual art.

In the conclusion of his book, Licht suggests that sound art has changed character from being listener-to-listener to person-to-person, and that this is a more social framing. Elaborating on this point, he quotes Brandon LaBelle: 'Sound is produced and inflected not only by the materiality of space but also in the presence of others . . . Thus the acoustical event is also a social one' (p. 152). Within this focus on paying attention, this new development 'raises consciousness about sound as much as any sound art of previous eras that relied on hearing' (p. 156).

Alan Licht's historical approach successfully unpacks the development of sound art and explains its development through a multitude of examples. He has in particular described the definitions and genealogy of sound art from music and the visual arts, and has brought neighbouring fields such as sound studies into his framing of different development trends and strands. This framing brings new clarity into the discussion of sound art and its variations, remembering its roots and perhaps more importantly bringing social perspectives to bear in the narrative for scrutinising conceptual, instrumental and performative aspects of this many-faceted art form.

4. SUMMARY

The three books are quite different, although they share many characteristics. They are all well-argued narratives on sound art, with a wealth of work descriptions that exemplify the points in the presentations. Weibel's book is an expanded exhibition catalogue, extremely well illustrated with photos from the exhibition at ZKM. It is a beautiful book where the images let the reader study the works better than what a mere text can allow. Weibel explains historical trends and offshoots, and the book can be described as a well-developed and hugely illustrated narrative that explores exactly what it set out to do – sound as a medium of art.

Licht's book discusses the origins of sound art from the perspectives of experimental music and the visual arts, and presents convincing arguments for why its genealogy and character stems from both. His overview is discursive more than descriptive, and his concluding section sheds light on recent developments, which in sound art as in other arts are towards the social, moving from the modernist focus on material to a postmodern interest in how art connects and works in broad contexts. Licht has chosen to not include the illustrations from his first book, and the clear focus on the reflective text strengthens his discussion and keeps the reader on track.

In likeness with Licht, Groth and Schulze's book has a discursive ambition, clearly rooted in the conception of sound art as a type of socially connected expression. This underlying premise runs through most of the book's six sections, which represent a generally updated art historical perspective rather than a close look on the materiality of sound, acoustics and origins. In this perspective, it differs from both Licht and Weibel, given their more historical approach. In Groth and Schulze, the historical perspective is covered in just eighteen pages.

These three views into sound art are all interesting – one can hardly fully appreciate a genre without seeing and hearing what it is, or without reflecting on the

thought and ideas that has gone, and goes into it. In addition, many of the same works and artists figure in all three books, supporting an already burgeoning canon, and the question emerges: What is the nature of sound art? Are we closer to an authoritative unpacking of the term? I think so.

The original description of sound art is bound to the material – sound – in both Klangkunst and experimental music, in sound as physics, acoustics and performance. This has kinship to modernism in visual art and music both. The more recent descriptions of sound art have moved the attention towards function – still requiring intent listening – but with a clear connection to significance in social context, perhaps also ecological in a sense of the word. Much sound art still represents a move from the general to the singular, in particular in instrument building and installation, but the idea of iconic sounds has yielded the stage for more performative strategies.

Particularly in Licht, the point is made that sound art stems from the separation of sound from its source, turning sound into an object that could be considered separately, and this understanding is found also in Weibel and Groth and Schulze. This separation dates back to the invention of mechanical and electrical audio technology, which can be productively combined with John Kannenberg's definition that is quoted in Groth and Schulze: 'Sound art is art of any form that critically explores the cultural, political, scientific, and/or conceptual situations surrounding

the act of listening' (p. 15). Clearly, not all sound art works depend on technology, but the underlying premise of separation is the same. To broaden the perspective to become inclusive without losing its defining potential, it is tempting towards the end of this review to again point to Rolf Großmann: 'sound art, with all its conquests of the twentieth century, thus becomes the mainstream concept of a changed cultural practice of shaping and listening' (Groth and Schulze 445). And this brings us to back to musique concrète, and how deeply technical affordances affect us.

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