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# Sound Art or *Klangkunst*? A reading of the German and English literature on sound art

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The article is a study on the literature of sound art from two language areas, German and English. The text reveals two different discourses. The German texts on *Klangkunst* (sound art in German) focus upon the sound material's relation to a spatial location where sound sculptures and installations are given central focus. These are genres that transcend the old divisions between spatial arts (*Raumkunst*) and the time-based arts (*Zeitkunst*). A strong emphasis on the dual aspect of seeing and hearing could be described as a central point of departure. *Klangkunst* concerns an investigation of both time and space, through ear and eye. In the English literature on sound art, there are often references to sound's inner aesthetical qualities. The perspectives on sound's relation to room is evident also here, but the perspectives are however broader, in the sense that the aspects of space and locality are diversified and pluralistic. One will find an even larger scope of literature and references if the area of sound art also includes cultural-studies perspectives on sound, sonic experiences and acoustic phenomena, the influx of new technologies on the everyday soundscape, and sound design. These are areas often referred to when speaking about the 'sonic turn'. The way the term sound art is handled in English texts is often very vague. The German study of *Klangkunst* developed within the academic field of musicology. There has been a fruitful collaboration between musicologists, publishing houses, music journals, galleries, academic institutions and higher art education, which together has helped to establish *Klangkunst* as an artistic expression and theoretical discourse. This strong intellectual infrastructure has been important in the 'construction' of the concept *Klangkunst*. The two separate theoretical discourses not only deal with the concept of sound art differently. Although many of the artists are dealt with in both the English and the German literature, there are very seldom references to the German literature in the English texts. This tendency is not reciprocal.

## I

The starting point for this article was a search in the musicological publication archive RILM in September 2006.<sup>1</sup> The search gave 238 hits for the phrase 'sound art'. Through a translation function, words synonymous with sound art were translated and included in the search, including terms such as the German

<sup>1</sup>This was undertaken as research for an article in the Swedish journal *Nutida Musik*, co-written by the authors of this text (Engström and Stjerna 2006/07).

*Klangkunst*, the French *arts sonore*, the Swedish *ljudkonst*. Two different languages seemed to dominate: German and English. What seemed to be of special interest was that the titles and abstracts indicated different academic discourses. The German abstracts leaned towards topics related to spatiality, while the English abstracts could be described as much more 'open' in the usage of the term sound art, and were more connected to the musical tradition. Both terms emphasise sound as the aesthetic material, but *Klangkunst* seemed to focus upon the sound material's relation to a spatial location as the *essential* component. The literature within the field confirms that the German texts on sound art differ in essence from the English.

This text does not focus on sound art itself as an artistic practice; rather, it is intended to be a reading of the literature and the academic discourses. By studying a body of literature within the field, one might attain an understanding for how cultural discourses are created and through this obtain perspectives on how artistic fields of activities are defined depending on academic traditions and spheres of written media.<sup>2</sup>

## II

In the German literature on *Klangkunst* the major work and reference is the anthology *Klangkunst – Tönende Objekte, Klingende Räume*, from 1999, edited by Helga de la Motte-Haber. This book is one volume of a total of thirteen in an edition on twentieth-century music. Although Motte-Haber considers *Klangkunst* as a general, multifaceted concept, the musicological identity is strong, although complemented with an art historical perspective.

The anthology takes as its starting point the relationship between the art forms and the development of the synaesthetical concept during the nineteenth century, and then clearly dissects the twentieth century's expanded concept of art and the so called 'dissolution of the art forms' (Motte-Haber 1999: 11–65).

<sup>2</sup>In this text the term sound art is used when referring generally to the subject. When referring specifically to the English and German discourses, sound art and *Klangkunst* are used respectively.

The genre *Klangkunst* should be seen in the light of the traditions of *Raumkunst* or spatial arts, and *Zeitkunst*, time-based art forms. These two terms can be traced back to the eighteenth century and the establishment of aesthetics as a philosophic and academic discipline. Sculpture and installation belong to the spatial arts, while music, with its performative act and narrative form belongs to the time-based art forms. With the development of technology in the twentieth century, these two art forms have changed, in ways that concern not only the technological aspect, but the very ontological level of these art forms as well. New aesthetical attitudes have generated new aesthetical expressions, which belong neither to the *Raumkunst* nor to the *Zeitkunst* – such as *Klangkunst*.

Sound sculpture and installations are given central focus, and their historical development is presented in two separate chapters.<sup>3</sup> Also ‘sound in public space’ is investigated in detail (Föllmer 1999). The points of departure are the spatially related aspects, such as the soundscape – but also here, the sound sculpture and the sound installation dominate. *Klangkunst* is not regarded in terms of being a performative art, and genres such as radio art and electroacoustic or acoustic music are not discussed within the volume.

Other articles and anthologies from around the same time use similar perspectives as in *Klangkunst*. In an introduction to an anthology, Sabine Sanio writes about the changed identity of the spatial and time-based art forms, and stresses that *Klangkunst* does not mainly involve performativity. ‘The increasing meaning of the spatial dimension corresponds to a relativisation of musical time, which in the concert music is the only real musical dimension. In *Klangkunst* this cannot be regarded as independent of other aspects, and especially not of the room.’ [*Dem Bedeutungszuwachs der räumlichen Dimension entspricht eine Relativierung der musikalischen Zeit, die in der Konzertmusik als eigentliche musikalische Dimension gilt. In der Klangkunst kann sie kaum unabhängig von den anderen Aspekten und insbesondere dem des Raums betrachtet werden.*] (Sanio 2000: 12). Space and site has through modern technology developed from being a container of music to something that might be articulated through sound. With the possibility of performing music everywhere, at any time and for as long as wanted, using sampling techniques and movable loudspeakers, sound art has been released from the traditional musical act of performing. The concept ‘space’ has changed, from being an architectonical construction that houses the music

to a possible concept and philosophical phenomenon to be investigated with sound.

Bernd Schulz claims that the development of sound art is to be seen in the light of the expanded concept of sculpture, and stresses the spatial aspects of an art form that is primarily not music. ‘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’ (Schulz 2002: 14).

The ‘expanding concept of sculpture’, one of the cornerstones in the German discourse, is emphasised by Helga de la Motte-Haber in the catalogue to the exhibition *Sonambiente 1996*. In the introduction, Motte-Haber states that *Klangkunst* does not include new performative aspects of music. Rather, by emphasising an art historical perspective, and by regarding the art form as the result of an evolutionary process, a new art form has emerged that involves two senses, hearing and seeing:

*Klangkunst* means in the first place not the many music performances, for which, with help from synthesisers and computers, artists develop new instruments that demand new performing techniques. Music performance might well have a place on the vague border with *Klangkunst*, and it has also become much broader, following action art. *Klangkunst* in the narrow sense is, however, mainly defined through new aesthetical implications, which have crystallised over the course of a long historical process. To this belongs an abandonment of the strong differentiation between spatial and time-based qualities, which had already been questioned by the musicalisation of painting and abolished with the onset of process art. Through this, every purist concept of the artistic material, which assumed a division between the eye and the ear, was dissolved. An art form emerged that wanted to be heard and seen at the same time.

[*Klangkunst* meint nicht in erster Linie die zahlreichen Musikperformances, für die, durch Synthesizer und Computer angeregt, Künstler neue Instrumente entwickelten, die individuelle Spielformen erfordern. Die Musikperformance kann wohl einen Platz an den unscharfen Rändern der *Klangkunst* haben, und sie hat in der Nachfolge der Aktionskunst auch eine starke Erweiterung erfahren. *Klangkunst* im engeren Sinne ist jedoch wesentlich durch neue ästhetische Implikationen definiert, die sich in einem langwierigen historischen Prozeß herauskristallisiert haben. Dazu gehört vor allem die Preisgabe eines strengen Unterschieds zwischen räumlichen und zeitlichen Qualitäten, der schon durch die Musikalisierung der Malerei fraglich geworden war und mit der Prozessualisierung der Kunst aufgehoben wurde. Damit aber löste sich auch jener puristische Begriff des künstlerischen Materials auf, der von einer sinnlichen Trennung von Auge und Ohr ausging. Es entstand Kunst, die gleichzeitig gehört und gesehen sein wollte.] (Motte-Haber 1996: 16)

In many German texts on *Klangkunst*, there is a strong emphasis on this dual aspect of *seeing* and

<sup>3</sup>Chapter 4 by Frank Gertich is called ‘Klangskulpturen’ (Sound Sculptures); Chapter 3 by Martin Supper is about technological aspects on installations, ‘Technische Systeme von Klanginstallationen’; and Chapter 6 is by Motte-Haber: ‘Zwischen Performance und Installation’ (Between Performance and Installation).

hearing. It thus can be linked both to *Raumkunst* and to *Zeitkunst*. It is illuminating that the festival Sonambiente in Berlin 1996 had as its subtitle ‘Festival für hören und sehen’ (festival for hearing and seeing). However, it should be pointed out that even though the borders are relatively clear in Motte-Haber’s quoted introduction, it would be a simplification to claim that the German discourse on *Klangkunst* wholly avoids the strictly sound-oriented or performative aspects. Reading through catalogues such as those to the exhibitions Sonambiente 1996 and 2006, the perspectives vary in their different contributions. In addition, German *Klangkunst* studies have from the beginning paid attention to the discourse on the soundscape. In the chapter on sound art in public spaces in *Klangkunst* (1999), Golo Föllmer elaborates on the performative and interactive perspectives of the city space, with its communicative events, as a foundation for artistic practices: ‘The city is a room of possibilities, a big chance generator of human encounters, and this side is also thematised in the arts.’ [*Die Stadt ist ein Möglichkeitsraum, ein großer Zufallsgenerator menschlicher Begegnungen, und auch diese Seite wird von der Kunst thematisiert.*] (Föllmer 1999: 194). Sabine Sanio, apart from pointing out that the time dimension in many installations is as important as the spatial aspect and that the sonic material often has a complexity on a par with traditional art music, also comments upon the importance of the conceptual aspects of sound art. ‘The history of a building or a room can be made into a theme as well as its original function can. Next to acoustic and visual elements, many sound artists also work with semantic and narrative associations.’ [*Die Geschichte eines Gebäudes oder eines Raums kann ebenso zum Thema werden wie seine ursprüngliche Funktion. Neben akustischen und visuellen Elementen arbeiten viele Klangkünstler auch mit semantischen und narrativen Assoziationen.*] (Sanio 2000: 14).

The integration of the aural and visual is, however, one of the main themes in the German texts. Motte-Haber claims in several texts that the core of the sound installation is the investigation of *both* time and space, through ear and eye, which in turn is the foundation of our perception of time and space; a perspective that also hints at the author’s background in perception psychology, which is one of the roots of the German synaesthetic approach to the genre.

Eye and ear are both more intensely involved in the construction of our views of space and time than the other sense organs are [...] In recent times, materials and the sense-specific stimulations they give rise to have become the means for the purpose of working with abstractions, namely of working directly with the perception of space and time. The intent is to achieve, through intensifications, disturbances, and blurred transitions, a new contextualization of what we take to be the reality of spaces and times. Sound installations, whose development took place

at the end of the 20th century [...] are one such intensification of the perception of time and space. (Motte-Haber 2002: 34)

Thus, when the sound art curator Christoph Metzger in the essay ‘Sounds Typically German – “Klangkunst”’ (apart from the title, which implies the particularity of the German art), straightforwardly describes sound art as ‘a category of installation art, [which] involves working with spaces both acoustically and sculpturally’ (Metzger 2006: 53), he is in a few words summarising the German academic discourse that developed in a particular historical and academic context. Sound installation is not a sound art genre among others – it *is* the sound art.

### III

To get an overview of the English literature on sound art is a much more complicated matter. The literature has a partly different point of departure, namely the sound itself. But above all, the usage of the term is often vague and one could easily agree with Alan Licht, who writes, ‘there has been a tendency to apply the term “sound art” to any experimental music of the second half of the twentieth century, particularly to John Cage and his descendants’ (Licht 2007: 12).<sup>4</sup>

In his history of sound art, *Background Noise: Perspectives on Sound Art*, Brandon LaBelle takes John Cage and *musique concrète* as points of origin: ‘Since the early 1950s, sound as an aesthetic category has continually gained prominence. Initially through the experimental music of John Cage and *musique concrète*, divisions between music and sound stimulated adventures in electronics, field recordings, the spatialization of sonic presentation, and the introduction of alternative procedures’ (LaBelle 2006: xii). The expression ‘sound as an aesthetic category’ is emblematic for the English literature on sound art, and so is also the tendency to speak about a division between music and sounds. The focus on sound can also be exemplified with what Christoph Cox sees as a neo-modernist trend in the arts, namely sound art’s focus on the ‘sound-in-itself’ (Cox 2003). Cox refers to several artists often considered sound artists – such as Ryoji Ikeda, Carsten Nicolai, Kim Cascone, Bernhard Günter and Francisco López – and mainly their pure sound works. These artists are generally not always associated with the art music or electroacoustic community, but rather with ‘alternative’ music. It is, however, emblematic that in an art journal such as *Artforum* these sound-oriented artists are used to exemplify tendencies in the *art world*, rather than music.

In the English literature, sound art is often connected to sound’s inner aesthetical qualities. Sometimes

<sup>4</sup>See also Lander (1990: 10).

it is regarded as the musical equivalent of the Duchampian ready-made or *objet trouvé*. Sound art is also connected to *musique concrète*, to Murray Schafer and the soundscape movement, and to field recordings. The origin of the term is often attributed to the Canadian composer and writer Dan Lander from the mid-80s. In the anthology *Sound by Artists* from 1990, Lander claims that artists using sound is not a well-defined movement, partly because of the many ways sound is used and functions in the different art works:

Although there has been an abundance of activity centred around explorations into sonic expression, there is no sound art movement, as such. In relation to artists' works, sound occupies a multitude of functions and its employment is often coupled with other media, both static and time-based. As a result, it is not possible to articulate a distinct grouping of sound artists in the way one is able to identify other art practices. (Lander 1990: 10)

Lander's anthology covers many sonic expressions, including sound-related video and performance art. This broad and diverse field of activities supports Douglas Kahn's thesis that already in the 1980s and 1970s, artists from different parts of the world were involved in different kinds of sound art, although using a variety of terms – such as radio art, audio art and sound art – which all have their own genesis (Kahn 2005). Kahn also claims that the general concept 'developed independently around the same time in Australia among individuals associated with the audio arts at the Australian Broadcasting Corporation and with students and staff at the University of Technology, Sydney' (Kahn 1999: 363–4). Thus, sound artists started their careers at different times and in different environments, long before 'certain metropolitan art centres – their markets, institutions and discourses, and only then a certain subset of those – "discovered" this thing called sound art' (Kahn 2005).

Douglas Kahn's highly influential book, *Noise Water Meat*, has the subtitle *A History of Sound in the Arts*. Kahn does not speak explicitly of a sound art. The book traces different aspects of sound and aurality in selected areas from the pre- and early modern arts through to the 1960s. Thus sound art, according to its general sense, lies ahead of the book's historical scope, but 'sound in the arts' is, according to the author, also a broader concept, 'especially when one keeps in mind the synthetic nature of the arts, i.e., the various intersecting social, cultural, and environmental realities wittingly and unwittingly embodied in any one of the innumerable factors that go into producing, experiencing, and understanding a particular work. *Sound art* is a smaller topic' (Kahn 2005).

Although sound art has not been the only phrase used to describe a certain artistic genre or tendency, it seems as if sound art *in the general sense* is the most commonly used term for describing a field within

contemporary art, music and media art where sound is one of several artistic parameters. This is supported by Kahn, who also claims that '[m]ost artists using sound use many other materials, phenomena, conceptual and sensory modes as well, even where there is only sound' (2005). The field could be further extended if one takes into account marketing strategies for record labels (using categories such as 'minimalist/sound art' or 'contemporary classical/sound art') or how the term sound art is used in popular media, where it is more or less synonymous with experimental music. Sound art as a general category is introduced relatively late, but this does not hide the fact that *in the general sense*, sound art is a very broad area.

In *Sound by Artists*, Dan Lander writes that 'phonography, as a form of cultural and social representation, exists in a vacuum, devoid of any substantial critical discourse' (Lander 1990: 12). This critique pre-echoes the activities of the publishing house Errant Bodies, which since the mid-1990s has published books and CDs 'on sound, auditory issues, spatial arts and design, and cultures of experimental performance and art ... [Errant Bodies] has been at the forefront of developing and supporting the diverse attitudes toward the emerging field of sound art, contemporary experimental music, and auditory culture' (Errant Bodies 2008). Errant Bodies often combines a focus on sound with an interest in the site-specific and the relation between the two, as well as with the individual in the social context. This is explicitly stated in the anthology *Site of Sound*, in which the editors '[draw] attention to areas of sound-art which aim to engage directly with the world and social reality. These works do not cut themselves off from location, INTERFERENCE, or unwanted noise, but rather embrace these elements as an important compositional source' (LaBelle and Roden 1999). In the anthology *Surface Tension*, the concept of site is further elaborated, as well as being in focus: 'While the terminology of site appears and disappears [...] 'site' continues to provide a location, both real and imaginary, actualised and theoretical, for considering the physical parameters of place and the phantasmic projections of what place may signal' (Ehrlich and LaBelle 2003: 11). By focusing on site's different formations, sound art is further conceptualised also through the performative, where 'the performing body' is highlighted in 'sound works' (Ehrlich and LaBelle 2003: 19) on an accompanying CD. Sound art according to Errant Bodies embraces a large area of auditory and sonic experiences that go beyond a more space-oriented German concept as well as any sound-in-itself-modernism.

One will find an even larger scope of literature and references if the area of sound art also includes cultural-studies perspectives on sound, sonic experiences and acoustic phenomena, the influx of new technologies on the everyday soundscape, and sound design.

These areas may be part of the ‘sonic turn’, ‘referring to the increasing significance of the acoustic as simultaneously a site for analysis, a medium for aesthetic engagement, and a model for theorisation’ (Drobnick 2004: 10),<sup>5</sup> where sound art is one of the key words.

To this field, one might add the books and publications by David Toop, whose contribution as a propagandist and populariser of experimental music, sound art and auditory cultures should not be underrated. In the text for the catalogue of the Sonic Boom exhibition in London in 2000, Toop states that sound art is ‘sound combined with visual art practices’. He gives a historical exposé of the development – the Futurist movements, Erik Satie’s *musique d’ameublement*, John Cage, soundscape – and also the technological development from automata and mechanical instruments to the impact of digital information technology on our sonic environment and listening habits: ‘[t]his absorption of music into the sonic environment (and the sonic environment into music)’ (Toop 2000: 107). Toop also considers electronic club music, noise, the sample and collage techniques of DJing (where ‘the authorship of individual tracks began to lose importance’), and laptop genres (where ‘the old divisions between so-called ‘high’ and ‘low’ arts have been blurred’ (2000: 120)). This emphasis on music’s intersections with a variety of fields (caused by the modern technological society), and how this becomes an integrated part of our daily life, stands in sharp contrast to Motte-Haber’s much more restricted perspective in the text for the Sonambiente festival in Berlin 1996.

#### IV

The study of *Klangkunst* in Germany developed within the academic field of musicology [*systematische Musikwissenschaft*]. Helga de la Motte-Haber – professor at Technische Universität, Berlin between 1972 and 2004 – has been a key figure. Apart from her own writings, she has educated several disciples who – as theorists, writers and curators – have in their turn contributed to the establishment of not only a German scene but also a theoretical discourse. The art form is supported through academic institutions and higher art education. For almost two decades there has been a fruitful collaboration between musicologists, publishing houses, music journals and galleries, which together has helped to establish *Klangkunst* as an important artistic expression.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup>This anthology is a good example of a type of academic cultural studies approach to sounds within diverse fields – performance studies, anthropology, philosophy, cultural studies, and artistic expressions with sound.

<sup>6</sup>See Metzger (2006). Among the publishing houses that have published extensively on sound art, most notably is Kehrer Verlag in Heidelberg, which has collaborated with several German musi-

Within this context, a history of *Klangkunst* has emerged with its key artists, landmark exhibitions and canonised literature. Für Augen und Ohren 1980, Vom Hang zum Gesamtkunstwerk 1983, Von Klang der Bilder 1985 and Sonambiente 1996 are the exhibitions most often referred to.<sup>7</sup> The exhibition catalogue of Sonambiente 1996 and the anthology *Klangkunst* from 1999 have helped to establish *Klangkunst* in the consciousness of a broader public. Some of the artists recurring in publications and articles are Bernhard Leitner, Rolf Julius, Christina Kubisch, Ulrich Eller, Robin Minard, Bill Fontana, Max Neuhaus, Hans-Peter Kuhn, Akio Suzuki and Andreas Oldörp. Far from all are Germans, but many have had Germany as a base or worked there with different projects, and they fit into the German concept of *Klangkunst*.

These artists are also frequently referred to in texts by non-Germans. For example, the American Christoph Cox focuses in his writing on the Sonambiente catalogue of 2006 (Cox 2006), as well as on Janet Cardiff, Neuhaus and Kubisch. However, there is a slight shift of perspective in Cox’s text that is striking. Cox takes a different look at time in music and sound art, and reads it through Nietzsche, Bergson and Deleuze. John Cage’s ‘Deconstruction der Musik’ from an ontological perspective is a deconstruction of ‘being’ [*Sein*] and instead this leads to a suggestion for becoming [*Werden*]. ‘He turned against the conception of music as *Being* and claimed subsequently, that it must become *Becoming* [...] the music should be brought in harmony with our post-theological world, a world that is fundamentally open, without origin, end or goal.’ [*Er wendet sich gegen die Auffassung von Musik als Sein und besteht darauf, sie sollte ein Werden werden [...] die Musik sollte mit unserer post-theologischen Welt in Einklang gebracht werden, einer Welt, die im Wesentlichen offen ist, ohne Ursprung, Ende oder Ziel.*] (Cox 2006: 218). Cox relates this new conception of time, being, to composers such as Feldman and Glass, free jazz, experimental music, improvisation and DJ music,

(*F’note continued*)

cologists, among them Motte-Haber, and also with Stadtgalerie Saarbrücken and its curator Bernd Schulz. The singuhr-hörgaleri in Berlin (established in 1996) is today one of very few galleries solely devoted to sound art. The main journals on contemporary music – *MusikTexte*, *Positionen* and *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* – publish regularly on *Klangkunst*, whereas German art magazines *Kunstforum* and *Texte zur Kunst* have been rather silent on the subject of sound art. Also note that Alan Licht (2007) identifies Germany as being central in this respect: ‘Germany, in particular, has become a world center of sound art activity’. This is written on the penultimate page (2007: 217). His book in general has a very strong North American focus, and he hardly pays attention to the German ‘world center’ elsewhere in the book.

<sup>7</sup>The historical connection between these exhibitions in the evolution of *Klangkunst* can be seen in the contribution from Nele Hertling in the catalogue to Sonambiente 2006, in which he makes connections between the festivals Für Augen und Ohren, Sonambiente 1996 and the festival in 2006. Hertling 2006: 388–91.

and a conception of sound as a continuous flow. Cox follows how music is becoming sound, and he concludes: 'I have tried to show that during the last fifty years – especially in the last decade – an important transition has taken place from the traditional conception of *music* to a conception of *sound as sound*.' [*Ich habe versucht zu zeigen, dass im Verlauf der letzten fünfzig Jahre – vor allem aber im letzten Jahrzehnt – ein wichtiger Übergang von der traditionellen Auffassung von Musik hin zu einer Konzeption von Klang als Klang stattgefunden hat.*] (2006: 221).

Cox claims that the discourse and praxis of sound art is mainly about room, place and architecture. It is therefore interesting how Cox is focusing on the deconstruction of time within the context of *music* – how music is entering a non-teleological process through *the sound* – and not on the area of time-space, as is so often emphasised in the German texts. Instead Cox is criticising the idea of talking about the dichotomy of music and sound art in terms of time and room (*Zeit* and *Raum*) (2006: 220). Although referring to sound art as concerning spatial aspects, the sound art anthologies he refers to are the above-mentioned Errant Bodies publications *Site of Sound* from 1999 (and not *Klangkunst* from the same year) and *Surface Tension* (Cox 2006: 219), which, as already mentioned, are not solely about sound art and its spatial aspects.

A parallel to Cox's phenomenological framework can be found in Brandon LaBelle's book *Background Noise*, which also deals with the expanded concept of room. His chronological investigation is not exclusively on the acoustical perspective of an architectural room-oriented sound art, but also on sound art's relational function: 'It has been my intention to historically follow the developments of sound as an artistic medium while teasing out sound's relational lessons. For it teaches us that space is more than its apparent materiality'. LaBelle continues to claim that 'sound's relational condition can be traced through modes of spatiality, for sound and space in particular have a dynamic relationship' (LaBelle 2006: ix). LaBelle's 'postmodern' approach – where sound art aesthetics, especially in the era of digital technology and networks, means 'a rethinking of sound's fixity, its location and its specificity, as well as what and whom actually produces it' (2006: 258) – does not stand in opposition to the perspectives in the German literature. LaBelle's perspective is, however, broader in the sense that the aspects of space and locality are diversified and pluralistic.

If LaBelle had shown a stronger awareness of the German discourse and taken into consideration the large body of literature within this field, his book could have been read as a critique of the 'German School'. The same could be said about Cox, although the size of his article does not allow for further discussions on academic discourses.

There are also different positions within German *Klangkunst* studies. In the proceedings from a conference held in connection with an exhibition in Neuen Museum Weserburg Bremen in 2005, sound art is read in the light of new media and the articles deal with sound poetry, radio art, text-sound compositions, sound design for film, and also intermedia. (Thurmann-Jajes, Breitsameter and Pauleit 2006).<sup>8</sup> According to one of the editors, sound art 'designates independent works arising from a great number of movements all concerned with new, unconventional ways of exploring sound and language as objects and – from the conceptual perspective – with the investigation of auditive material' (Thurmann-Jajes 2006: 29). In the art journal *Texte zur Kunst*'s 'Sound' issue (issue 60, December 2005), focus is mainly on sound, and with few exceptions they are not dealing with the room-oriented *Klangkunst* discourse and key words such as 'Hören und Sehen'.

But although *Klangkunst* today is accepted as a term and genre, to the point where these types of divergences from a relatively congruent German discourse are obvious, the concept has its evolution and also a point of origin. In her early text from 1986, Barbara Barthelmes discusses the works of Bill Fontana, Bernhard Leitner and Julius in terms of being *Klangskulpturen*, or sound sculptures (Barthelmes 1986). The word *Klangkunst* is not mentioned in the text. Not until a few years later does the concept of *Klangkunst* begin to appear in the German literature.<sup>9</sup>

Barbara Barthelmes, who in the late 1990s commented on the way *Klangkunst* was launched as a new art form (Barthelmes 1999: 117–36), claims in a more recent text that this defining and categorising had an important function in making the artistic expressions visible to the public and to the institutions. 'The formulation of this concept facilitated a wider base of reference to the phenomenon, with all conceivable contractions of content. This smoothed the way for its integration into the institutional context, helping the artists and composers and their genre-crossing works – sound sculptures, environments and performances – to come to the notice of the public and thus become exploitable, which often is the equivalent to survival' (Barthelmes 2006: 48).

Apart from paying attention to the relative youth of the word *Klangkunst*, Volker Straebel points out the political implications not only in acknowledging

<sup>8</sup>The publication is in both German and English. In the German version of Thurmann-Jajes' article 'Sound Art', the English phrase 'sound art' is also used.

<sup>9</sup>Note that the two publications by Motte-Haber from 1996 and 1999 are simply named *Klangkunst*, while the important forerunners – such as the exhibition catalogue to Für Augen und Ohren, 1980, *Musik und Bildende Kunst. Von der Tonmalerei zur Klangskulptur* (Motte-Haber 1990) – and the later *Vom Klang der Bilder* (Maur 1999) do not have the word *Klangkunst* in their titles.

*Klangkunst* as a movement but also in lending it the status of a genre (*Gattung*). This process began in the mid-1990s in connection with the festival Sonambiente 1996 and was further demonstrated with the publication of the anthology *Klangkunst* in 1999.

Helga de la Motte-Haber's project, in 1996, in connection to the festival Sonambiente, to establish *Klangkunst* as an independent genre, was most disputed at the time. Today, when the big festivals for new music usually also present sound installations, single institutions like galleries and competitions are founded and devoted solely to sound art, and when there even are courses for sound art, this thrust appears as consequent in the frame of the effort to establish theoretical and art political sound art.

[*Das Projekt Helga de la Motte-Habers, 1996 im Zusammenhang mit dem Festival Sonambiente die Klangkunst als eigenständige Gattung zu etablieren, war damals höchst umstritten. Heute, da die großen Festivals Neues Musik für gewöhnlich auch Klanginstallationen präsentieren, einzig der Klangkunst verpflichtete Institutionen wie Galerien und Wettbewerbe gegründet wurden und es sogar Studiengänge für Klangkunst gibt, erscheint dieser Vorstoß als konsequent im Rahmen des Versuchs, die Klangkunst kunsttheoretisch und kunstpolitisch zu begründen.*] (Straebel 2004)

Through the literature, there has been a process of 'constructing' *Klangkunst* and sound art. The construction of the German *Klangkunst* is, however, more obvious than the process of acknowledging sound art. We have already touched upon the explanations: the exceptionally strong intellectual infrastructure as is the case in Germany, which could be contrasted to the broad origin of the English term.

The importance attributed in Germany to the Sonambiente exhibition in 1996 has a parallel in the reception of the Sonic Boom exhibition at the Hayward Gallery in London in 2000. Sonic Boom even has a reputation as the exhibition that launched sound art to the world, a view criticised by, for example, Douglas Kahn.<sup>10</sup> However, it seems as if a generally broad concept of sound art, which also includes aspects of experimental or alternative music, has penetrated music journalism.<sup>11</sup> This broad perspective characterised Sonic Boom and also other large exhibitions at around the same time, such as Sonic Process in Barcelona and Paris 2002–03: an exhibition that, although presenting

installations, was about 'examin[ing] electronic music creation from the past ten years and its relationship to the visual arts' (van Assche 2002: 5).<sup>12</sup>

The different approaches to sound art presented in this text have their advantages and disadvantages as well as biases. Some of the German texts hang on to old-fashioned musicology, and in terms of references can be a bit outdated; even though they are about space, the site-specific and the public environment, they are not really up to date with contemporary discussions on site specificity. Several English texts, on the other hand, are more updated with contemporary art philosophical references, thereby being closer both to contemporary art studies and even to the 'new musicology'. The German discourse has used rather sharp tools in acknowledging and defining, and constructing, an important art movement. The way the term sound art is handled in English texts is, on the other hand, often very vague, to the point of being useless.

Art does not have any real language borders, but as a discourse it relies on institutions, which are shaped by their respective cultural and linguistic area. In the area of sound art, the artists that are being canonised are more or less the same regardless of language area. It is therefore very interesting to consider the point of references within the different intellectual traditions. Most major English texts, books, anthologies and articles have hardly any references to any German texts, or to texts in other languages for that matter. This tendency is not reciprocal. It seems to be a striking logic, and the few times German texts appear as references in English texts it is on those rare occasions when the text in question is translated into English. Obviously, there is some kind of language barrier, which of course looks different from one author to the other. And who is to blame: the Germans for writing in German and not translating their texts, or the English-speaking writers who do not read German texts, ignore them, or do not know about them?

Having English as a native language is always an advantage, and this is also the case in the academic world. Producing a text in English without the slightest process of translation is to be in command of the thought. English as lingua franca can of course not overcome the fact that there are 100,000,000 Europeans who have German as their native tongue, and, in this context, German will never be a subordinate language. But the stronger English gets, the more isolated German, as well as other languages in 'the rest of the world', becomes. The authors of this

<sup>10</sup>One New York sound artist said that sound art started around the year 2000, while in London, it is supposed to have jumped off with the Hayward Gallery exhibition Sonic Boom. Such representations seem odd to many artists from Continental Europe, the Nordic nations, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Mexico, and even to Americans outside the art market purview of a discrete commercial sector of New York City' (Kahn 2005).

<sup>11</sup>The monthly magazine *The Wire* has been crucial in this process. To this one could probably add the anthologies *Undercurrents* (Young 2002) and *Audioculture* (Cox and Warner 2004).

<sup>12</sup>Interestingly, in this text with its lack of perspective on the development of sound art as a space-oriented art form, 'sound-based expressions' which 'never found [their] place in a museum' are exemplified by musicians such as Tony Conrad, Terry Riley, La Monte Young, Patti Smith and Laurie Anderson (van Assche 2002: 5).

text do not have German or English as mother tongue. We are Swedes and consequently belong to 'the rest of the world'. With very few exceptions, in the area of sound art in Sweden, the references are English and the awareness of the German discourse is almost zero.<sup>13</sup> The anglicisation of the academic world is an undisputable fact. It helps to bring research areas closer to one another, but there is also an obvious counter-movement, which tends to separate discourses and thereby makes the world a little poorer.

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<sup>13</sup>Exception from this tendency is the Sound Art issue of the Swedish music journal *Nutida Musik* (Engström and Stjerna 2006/07), in which the German and English discourses are discussed, and a forthcoming anthology from Raster förlag, edited by Andreas Engström and Åsa Stjerna.