

The Bloomsbury Handbook Of Sound Art

Sanne Krogh Groth & Holger Schulze

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Sound art, sonic arts, auditory culture, sound studies, sonic sensibilities: the phrases used to describe sound works proliferate. At one end of things, they abut experimental music and musicology; at another end, live art.

The Bloomsbury Handbook Of Sound Art, edited by Sanne Krogh Groth and

Holger Schulze, thus enters a noisy sonic field, a multidisciplinary space in which multiplicities and complexities of artists, theorists, musicians, philosophers (this list of categories is expandable) are already operating. Because of the lack of firm boundaries that delineate sound (a huge advantage to those working and writing about the medium) it means that, inevitably, this *Handbook* will have porous borders. It might be read in tandem with its main competitors – in the main, *The Auditory Culture Reader*, *The Sound Studies Reader* and *Sound Objects* (edited respectively by Michael Bull and Les Back, and Jonathan Sterne and James Steintrager and Rey Chow) – which is no bad thing. All the many collected writers in these edited volumes are, to a greater extent than not, writing complementarily, in ways that reflect the multiplicities of writing about sound.

Daniel Fischlin

So what do Groth and Schulze, both academic musicologists working in Sweden and Denmark respectively, bring to the table that these earlier books – not for reason of omission, but scope – do not? The answer lies in the breadth of this book's perspective, and, most importantly, an understanding that sound art – whatever it is, whatever it isn't – does not take place exclusively in a first world perspective. Both editors acknowledge this in an opening chapter that tackles the difficulties of definitions and intellectual alignments. Indeed, they suggest, maybe the form should not embrace one, a position that allows more names than those of the usual suspects to be discussed. Thus, exhilaratingly, Pussy Riot, Goodiepal and live artist Julie Tolentino inhabit these pages quite easily.

But sound art also takes place in a world where ecological apocalypse, political turbulence, race, social politics and body-blurring technologies exist, and all these topics are addressed with an admirable forthrightness. One of the book's five sections offers essays on Indonesian sound art, Cairo, and the global south. This is not simply a superficial postcolonialist stance but a strategy: by seeding new names and practices into contemporary discussions of sound art, the way is opened up for new routes to be imagined and brought into being. One of the most

perspicacious essays in this section is Juliana Hodkinson's conversation with Elke Moltrecht, formerly the head of the music section at the Berlin based DAAD artists in residence programme, and curator/musicologist Julia Gerlach. The speakers are clear that institutional power matters and, therefore, a just and humane curatorial programme needs not to replicate itself in terms of the artists it promotes, but to move outwards towards new communities.

Institutional power comes up many times: it is there in Laura Zattra's revealing of the sites of Italian experimental music: not simply in the new music centres of RAI in Milan and others in Florence, Turin and Padova, but in the informal second-generation studios built up in private homes and therefore outside the tier of elite, state-funded studios. Zattra does not mention, in late 1960s Paris, Éliane Radigue installed tape machines at her flat so that she might combine work and childcare, but the point is the same: elites, left to themselves, recycle themselves.

Networks, too, have this potential for reinforcing their own positions, which is why hacked networks – ones that allow academics, artists and those without institutional affiliation to interact – are so important. Elen Flügge nimbly identifies the ways that these networks might work, referencing how the use of situational

space outside the gallery or concert hall can help sound art practices resonate with wider audiences.

The other clear strength is an emphasis on listening – in particular, how the body takes in sound (listens) and emits it (speaking). Writing on sonic intimacy, Cathy Lane marshals an impressive array of artists to situate her research, among them, Indian artist Yashas Shetty, whose *The Nine Billion Names Of God* is a program that pulls out the word God! from downloaded porn files. Inspired by an Arthur C Clarke story in which the world ends once the names of God have been collected, this is a story of collection, of curation, of the strange vocabularies of desire and of apocalypse. By spinning sound into the technological world, the way Shetty and Lane remind us of the ethical dimension should ring loudly around all sound studies.

At a recommended price of £134, a huge amount typical of academic publishing (the ebook's about half as much), its market will be, inevitably, institutional libraries. It deserves a wide and engaged readership, for this is an important collection of curated essays that drives the debates around sound art into new territories. Its focus on sound as an operative force that might hold power to account makes it that rare thing, a most timely textbook.

Louise Gray