Sound Art and Music

Sound Art and Music:

Philosophy, Composition, Performance

Edited by

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FOREWORD

This book is not an attempt to define terms, parameters, or disciplinary borders. Instead it seeks to celebrate the many and varied interests that make the fields of Sound Art and Music such intriguing ones. It is increasingly difficult, and perhaps even of questionable value, to differentiate between these two subject areas. Many Sound Artists celebrate their origins in Fine Art practices and assert their right to work with sound as a material without the weight of music history bearing down on them. On the other hand, composers have demonstrated beyond any doubt that they know how to choose, organise and transform sound as material for their works. That such knowledge can be applied to sounds that are not traditionally associated with music speaks volumes to the scope and breadth of the fields under discussion. The truth is, of course, that Sound Art and Music have much in common. They encompass sound forms stemming from artistic practices to new ways of thinking about the qualitative nature of sound within musical objects and contexts, developing extended modes of devising compositions and showcasing experimental approaches to performance.

The contributors to this volume are composers, performers, artists and writers who have, through differing means, become especially intrigued by particular aspects of our engagement with the sonic, or as John Cage has put, the 'activity' of sound itself. The chapters have their origins in the Music and Sonic Art Conferences held in 2014 and 2015 at the Institut für Musikinformatik und Musikwissenschaft in Karlsruhe, Germany. Each of the twelve chapters reflect the broad range of approaches adopted by practitioners and researchers. Indeed, it is a recurring theme of this book that theory and practice (like Sound Art and Music) are frequently indistinguishable.

The authors therefore consider the body, as a transitional, multisensory space (Lamounier), explored through the analysis of interactivity and gesture, embodiment and auto-choreography in relation to the solo instrument (Ho). The voices of objects (Hochherz), through practices and codes of behaviour in sound receiving spaces, leads to the musical instrument as a tool for thinking (Schmidt), collapsing the distinctions between theory and practice, and investigating the unique qualities of digital musical instruments and new timbres achieved. Collaboration is seen as a means of

moving away from and questioning established compositional principles. What may be gained by such an approach (Williams), is then highlighted in the role of prior research within a live, site-specific performance model (Spinks). In terms of means and methods, (Stanovic) questions the validity of compositional rhetoric within acousmatic music. When considering the constitution of the sounds themselves, however, Warde investigates the field of spectromorphology, devised by Denis Smalley, to reveal new ways of listening, detecting and dissecting sounds. Referencing the phenomenon of ASMR, or the audio tactile, Spencer reflects on materialities, agencies and 'intra-action', (as opposed to inter-action) whilst Sergeant, influenced by Barad, opens up possibilities of the non-passive object in relation to the instrument. The very spaces of performance itself is investigated by Rodrigues in keyboard recitals and through the sounds of Western-art jazz piano (Benetti).

Taken as a whole, the authors address the many ways in which composed or devised Sound Art and Music can be experienced: from concept, to the form taken, the means of conveyance and, ultimately, to its affect and significance. Far from offering any kind of finite statement on these practices, this book offers a timely snapshot of the bewildering and diverse fields that constitute Sound Art and Music, demonstrating the seemingly infinite ways in which they are pursued by practitioners and theorists alike.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCING A COMPOSITIONAL MODEL FOR LIVE, SITE-SPECIFIC, SOUND ART PERFORMANCE

TANSY SPINKS

"Take a space, make a sound in it…"
—Cornelius Cardew[1]

In this chapter I shall introduce a new way of approaching site specific sound art practices, by offering practitioners a strategic model to approach and expand the parameters of the compositional process. In introducing this concept, I will allude to a number of my own sound works, undertaken over the six-year period 2008 to 2014, that have been informed by my accumulated experiences as a practitioner of site-specific, sound-making in live performance.

The practitioner, in the sense of this essay, is taken to be a multi-disciplinary artist, a sound artist, a composer, an improvising musician or simply someone who experiments with the possibilities of live, performed sound in an art context. The site, can be considered as a place, a building, a social space perhaps, in which to encounter sounds heard, almost in passing: an abandoned or derelict space, an outdoors space, a liminal (un-prescribed), or 'guerrilla' space, (used without permission), an unorthodox place, in other words, to find art or performance.

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[1] A quotation from Cornelius Cardew's *Improvisation Rites* from *Nature Study Notes* of 1969, written whilst working with the Scratch Orchestra at Morley College. (The author interpreted a small selection of these rites for *The Engine Room* festival, Morley College, December 9th 2011, mapping the space of the working canteen by pacing out the dimensions whilst using an electric violin and (school) hoops for bows. http://www.tansyspinks.com/sound-performance/ or https://vimeo.com/45501052)

The site itself might be ‘found’, presented or offered; as an inspiration, by invitation or by commission for an event. It may be deliberately selected by the practitioner, as a site to explore, to respond to and in which to provide sounds to be experienced by others. However, it is not a ‘white cube’ gallery space, a ‘black box’ rehearsal space or a ‘shoe box’ concert hall, with all the expectations that each venue might engender. This chosen site is another place altogether, encompassing aspects of social use, histories and narratives whose connotations are intangible and ephemeral.

How can this challenge be usefully approached? What are the essential elements to consider and how can a methodology of interrogation be best established to develop and steer the sound-making practices?

Arrived at through my own experiences, I now introduce a new tripartite model, to be employed as an aid or driver of this compositional process. This model identifies and clarifies the site-specific elements and opportunities within the given space, to enable a means of distinguishing between the distinct sonic and potential sonic properties of any site, and to establish the active role of the performer(s).

The model identifies three specific terms of engagement (referred to in this document as the three ‘*A*’s), and asks what we should work at in identifying the *actual*, the *activated* and the *associative* sounds of the site. I will expand on this in due course.

In addressing the proposed project, the practitioner will arrange an initial site visit, where possible. This not only gives a physical impression in identifying a certain spirit of place, but provides an opportunity to listen, make sound recordings, test the acoustic properties, walk around, photograph, sketch, list the sounds heard and talk to any of those people involved with the place; as custodians, workers or temporary occupants. It gives an opportunity to consider what happens in the space now and what has occurred in the past. The building or host site then becomes the locus and the source of the enquiry. By taking stock of the sonic properties and the materiality of these surroundings, possibilities for devising a performance begin to be formulated.

Time will be spent walking around the place and its environs. Aspects of the emerging discoveries may now require, beyond the inevitable google search, a visit to a local museum or a specific library. Materials forming the fabric of the site or objects from the site, may be identified as sound producers or as having sonic potential. Speculative emails will be sent out - following a hunch - wanting to know more from a conservation group perhaps, or a local historian, an amateur enthusiast or an expert in the field. Conversations may evolve – taking trains of thought into hitherto unexpected regions: with a librarian, sociologist, historian, geographer and

perhaps with the work of other artists or composers. Contextual references are raided. Have any other artist-musicians produced something like this before? If so, how, and can this be built on?

There are several notable precedents to be cited in relation to sounds in space. For pioneering American artist-musician, Max Neuhaus[2], sounds should emanate, and the affect, for the audience-listener, is contingent on being in the space itself to experience both the unseen addition and, in some cases, the mysterious removal, of his recorded sounds – made from material gained and recorded at source. His site-specific installations, such as *Time Square*, 1977, helped define our sense of place, through sound.

Installation artist Maryanne Amacher[3] plays with our experiences of sounds in similar but differing spaces, by manipulating our expectations of their acoustics and challenging our psychological responses. Janet Cardiff, working with G. Bures Miller[4], takes a more sociological approach by inviting us to engage with closely recorded binaural recordings that have an often uneasy, implied and manipulative narrative. John Cage of course drew our attention to the very notion of 'silence' in his piece 4'33" of 1952/3, during which our expectant role as an audience member is undermined and extended, into the spaces beyond the concert venue.

In the late 1960s, Meredith Monk[5] used staged versions of site-specific works to inhabit atmospheric, liminal locations in New York, whilst Susan Phillipsz's Artangel commission of 2010[6] explored locations in the City of London in order to play out a lone voice or instrument – used to evoke the ghosts of presences past. David Byrne's[7] 2009 work devised for the Roundhouse in London, is of particular significance as an example of building-as-instrument, for which he encouraged the audience to individually 'play' the building by attaching motors to the fabric of the building itself, linked to an organ keyboard.

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[2] https://www.diaart.org/program/exhibitions-projects/max-neuhaus-collection-display (accessed 20.09.18)

[3] As referenced in Stefani & Lauke (2010)

[4] Cardiff, Janet and Miller, G. Bures, http://www.cardiffmiller.com, (accessed 20.09.18)

[5] Monk, Meredith, http://www.meredithmonk.org, (accessed 20.09.18)

[6] Phillipsz, Susan, *Surround Me*, a song cycle for the City of London, (sound work) an Artangel commission, https://www.artangel.org.uk/project/surround-me/ (accessed 20.09.18)

[7] Byrne, David: https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/music/rockandpopfeatures/6004403/David-Byrne-on-playing-the-building-at-the-Roundhouse.html, (accessed 20.09.18)

On considering the site for which to devise the possible sound work, the practitioner may identify a number of inherent sounds. For example – the ongoing sound of traffic, the whine of an internal light-fitting or fan, the wind through the crack of a window, distant birdsong, the acoustic property of the space, distinct voices, running water, distant traffic. Sociological implications then become apparent as the human presence surfaces, (perhaps virtually or metaphorically) and as possible collaborators come to mind. Contexts expand and narratives begin to develop as ideas coalesce.

Dates and times of performances approach, timings and durations are considered. Initial impressions have become lines of inquiry with firmer intentions. Technical and physical means of sound making become more tangible as specific technical requirements, requiring testing. Extra performers are brought in as required. A plan has now been formulated, if a little circuitously and discursively.

To expand on the model offered, I suggest that:
the *actual*, sounds of the site, are those one could describe as inherent to the place. The *actual*, is perhaps self-evident as being those sounds particular to the site, which can be defined differently of course according to how and when one listens, (according to time of day, in a market, for example). Can we distinguish between foreground and background sounds? These *actual* sounds heard, and their sources, can then be further identified as having specific characteristics in the way of mechanical, natural, human, or animal elements with rhythmic qualities which are continuous, have a pattern or are intermittent. Can the volume, pitch, grain and timbre be described? Identifying *actual* sounds, could in some way be considered analogous to how we approach what composer and writer, Michel Chion calls the *reduced* form of listening (Chion 1994).

The *activated* element, which introduces a less passive role than that of listener, asks the performer(s) to intervene in some way, in order to engage with the physicality of the space. This second 'A', deals more specifically with allowing the objects of the site to have a sonic voice through manual activation by the performer(s). Where this differs from Chion's second listening stage, of the *reduced*, is in the agency of the performer: no longer a passive listener but now an active participant within the space. It is in the physical, gestural actions, or oral 'soundings,' made *as* activations, that the sounds occur. Again – a rhythmic pattern may be established or a drone-like sound built up which can be explored further with the use of contact microphones in direct contact with physical objects, (hit percussively), materials or the fabric of the building. Aleatory methods and improvisation,

a key element in its own right – (but not within the scope of this essay) - are important components. In noticing, identifying and experimenting with these, the activator becomes a composer of sorts, able to 'play' the site, or an aspect of the site, to others.

The third so-called 'A' element, the *associative,* offers a more expansive and particularly leading strategy by informing the content of the sounds to be heard. The term I use here, the *associative,* reflects in part Michel Chion's notion of *semantic* listening, or listening *for* meaning. However, more proactively, it defines and describes how research into the site, undertaken previously in the run up to the event, as a kind of sonic 'mining', can now convey to the listeners, something historical, sociological and even musical about the site, through the act of compositional transcription in the context of a live performance. The *associative* allows for a truly site-responsive approach.

The *associative* is the most extensive and open-ended term of the three, encompassing sounds that have come about through research into the site itself. These might engage metaphorical, or indeed remembered triggers as references. Even sounds that could well have occurred on the site in the past, may be imagined and evoked. Chion's *semantic* listening is perhaps recalled, in this context, as a kind of Peircian *interpretant,* but here my development takes the *associative* into a more expanded form. This category can be sub divided again into the following:

associative-historical
associative-sociological

associative-musical
associative-mimetic

associative-metaphorical
associative-remembered
associative-imagined

The terms have been developed through the experience of devising sound works for what might be deemed 'alternative' sites. I have considered many different given spaces and how the materiality of each might be activated whilst also reflecting on what could be brought to the site additionally, through this *associative* term which can be expanded further to describe what I have come to call the unique, physical and conceptual *material of the site,* to be explored later with reference to specific works.

Michel Chion continues to be influential to this way of thinking. Inspired by the earlier theories of Pierre Schaeffer, in his *Traite des objets musicaux*, (Schaeffer 1966) Chion's own definitions, of the *causal*, *reduced* and *semantic* modes of listening are perhaps not dissimilar to Peirce's[8] concept of the semiotic triad in terms of meaning. In the *causal*, Chion introduces the notion of what it is that is making the sound and reassures us that this may not always be specifically definable or located. By encouraging a *reduced* form of listening, he then suggests that the listener should put aside consideration of the sound source and attend rather to objective definitions of the nature and the state of the sounds heard in and of themselves, whether natural, man-made or machine made. When dwelling on the *semantic* however, the listener is encouraged to think beyond the accumulation of information provided by these causal and reduced forms of listening and to consider the connotations of the sounds heard. This may of course, include language, but could also invoke personal, sonic material, triggered through the evocation of memories.

It may be useful here, to consider advice given to the art student on how to 'read' an art object, in terms of ways of looking and thinking. This is an encouragement to think *from, around* and *into* the object, or art work. In other words, to notice what the object initially suggests or conveys, (as in my *actual)*; to notice what you, the viewer and listener, (but also in this context, the performer), actively and consciously bring to it, (as in my *activated)*, and to consider the meaning of other contextual material surrounding it, (as in my *associative)*. The notion of 'site' could be substituted here as a form of 'art object,' of course.

To summarise: in this exercise there are three stages of awareness and action, involving for the creator, crucial elements of preparation, involvement and reflection, including the use of documentation, regarding the sound-as-art-event, in performance:

'from'- 'causal' –	identifying the *actual* within the site
'around' – 'reduced' –	identifying the *activated, or activate-able,* as performer
'into' – 'semantic' -	identifying the *associative* as the contextual *material of the site.*

[8] Peirce's semiotic triad defines a relationship between signs, signification and meaning, summarised as: the sign, the object and the interpretant: https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/peirce-semiotics/ (accessed 05.02.18)

The first in my series of twenty sound works cited, was performed on a gantry above Deptford Creek, South London. *Henry's Ballad at Harold's Wharf*, (2008)[9], alluded to the use of a building, previously standing on the site, as a slaughterhouse. The imagined sounds of distressed, braying animals were conjured mimetically on the instrument, (a violin) and combined with the fragment of a rediscovered melody, *Pastime in Good Companye*, written in the early sixteenth century by Henry VIII, whose palace had dominated the waterside at Deptford. In this work, the *associative-imagined* is tackled through *associative-mimesis* which then evokes an *associative-historical* reference combined with an *associative-musical* one. The sounds, played out on a violin through an amplifier and a looping device, mingled with the layers of *actual* sounds at the site, provided by passing docklands trains, water sounds from boats on the creek and a hubbub of voices on site. The *activated* element in this work deals, not so much with the fabric of the site itself, but in how the played sounds mingled with voices and the site's unique outdoor acoustic properties of complex brick walls, concrete pillars and water surfaces.

As an aside, I wonder; can the *associative-imagined* approach be feasible? Can one 'mimic' something imagined? If 'to mimic' suggests an attempt at mirroring, how can this be regarded as possible if the 'original' is only projected or envisaged? Research, but also experience and memory come into play here in our ability to build and retain a bank of images (as described poetically by artist John Baldessari in relation to his own work) but equally, a kind of 'audiobank' of sounds. The mimetic can be considered in the wider sense as an act of simulation in the form of sonic evocation.

A distant memory of an aural event has triggered two of the later works in the series. *Leeds, Leeds, Leeds,* 2013[10] and *Echo Lake*, 2013[11]. Both recall the sounds and physical sites of events and incidents in my own aural history. The sound of thousands of voices in a football crowd, impinging on a small domestic space in a back-to-back house in Leeds in the early 1980s, prompted the making of a contemporary sound work in which a lone, singing female voice is heard recreating and layering forty football chants. *Echo Lake* revisited a childhood game exploring the phenomenon of a haunting echo of a returning 'shout', experienced across

[9] *Henry's Ballad at Harold's Wharf*, 2008. Author's work can be seen/heard at: https://vimeo.com/17884431

[10] *Leeds!, Leeds!, Leed!s,* 2013. See article in Nparadoxa Vo37, Jan 2016, http://www.ktpress.co.uk/article-abstract.asp. Author's work can be seen/heard at: https://vimeo.com/98810940

[11] *Echo Lake*, 2013. (Author's work).

an expanse of water beneath a mountain, in Snowdonia, North Wales. In both works, the female voice travels across space and time to re-imagine and represent past sonic memories of place.

"A sound imagined but not actually heard" is the description of the term phonomnesis, described by Augoyard, in *The Sonic Experience, a Guide to Everyday Sounds,* as a mental activity recalling sounds from memory, not through stimulation of the memory to prompt a past sonic event, but as a means of conjuring up internally heard sounds stimulated by the imagination. The device of evocation forms an important part of my *associative-imagined* approach to a sound work that delves into the personally interpreted realms of the *associative-historical*. Janet Cardiff and G. Bures Miller's work is often notable in employing this method.

The parallel concept to the common notion of envisaging, is the notion of 'audiation', which is dependent on experience and memory of sounds. Defined by music educationalist, Edwin Gordon in 1975, as both a term and a process, the concept is similar to composer and educationalist Kodaly's description of 'inner hearing,' suggestive of a means of envisaging sounds internally.

Imagination was employed in the sound work *Seaforts* (2010)[12] (see: Figure 1-1 and Figure 2-2). A live performance was enacted eight nautical miles off the North Kent Coast, on one of the historic structure's gun platforms; the sonic characteristics of surfaces and objects offering rewarding sonic material. By using contact microphones applied directly to the Seafort's iron structure, a metal ordnance container betrayed its rusty iron properties, a pile of seagull bones was manipulated to make a dusty rattle whilst a steel pylon was tapped to give a taut metallic ring. Looped, the circling rhythms began to suggest distant guns. In this work, the instrument (violin) was added, to bring in another, mimetic sound layer to the proceedings. By introducing a rhythmic 'scurrying' sound as a jumble of fast, sotto-voce notes, a suggestion of past human presences on the gun platform was conjured.

Here, the method acknowledges the *actual* and the *activated* in combination with the *associative-historical,* the *associative-imagined* and the *associative-mimetic*, simultaneously attempting to form three layers of the real (or actual, as the sounds of wind, waves and gulls), the evoked (or activated, by the two performers), and the imagined (rapid action gunfire). The hazardous nature of the site and rapidly encroaching tides, introduced a certain urgency to the setting up of equipment and the segue into

[12] *Seaforts* (2010)*,* devised for the Whitstable Biennale Fringe, performed with Antoine Bertin. Author's work at https://vimeo.com/17884661

performance. The piece was devoid of an audience, aside from two participants, a fisherman and numerous seagulls and was consequently only ever experienced through documentation.

Brixton Market (2010)[13], performed live within the arcades of a large, multi-cultural South London market, set out to suggest once more, the bustling element of a site as an actual, not imagined one. As a form of 'affrettando' perhaps, in combination with mimetically referenced sounds, the banter and cries of the street traders, the inflections of voices, the squeak of the trolleys, the chopping of meat and fish, distant beat-boxes, the drone of a forklift truck – all coalesced into one received soundscape. The emphasis here tended to feature more prominently what I have called *associative-sociological* mimesis, by which I mean a direct listening and evocation made in situ on the instrument (looped violin), of the many different human voices and presences in the daily situation of the market. As Walter Benjamin noted:

> "These arcades… are glass-roofed, marble-panelled corridors extending through whole blocks of buildings, whose owners have joined together for such enterprises. Lining both sides of the corridors, which get their light from above, are the most elegant shops, so that the arcade is a city, a world in miniature, in which customers will find everything they need." (Benjamin 2002)

The Laboratory of Sonic Possibility, 2014[14], undertaken as part of *Acts ReActs*, took place in a large performance space at Wimbledon College of Art and brought the environment into the space by referring to a local figure of historic significance, Joseph Toynbee, an English otologist and philanthropist, who specialised in diseases of the ear. The final work invited the participatory audience to get involved in their own sound making and sound questioning activities by amplifying objects that would normally be considered to have no intrinsic sound. Large cardboard 'ear trumpet' cones were provided, to enhance the act of listening.

Other sites explored in the author's practice have included such extremes as a goods lift, an art school library, a canteen, the top of a windmill, a

[13] *Brixton Market*, 2010. (Author's work)

[14] *The Laboratory of Sonic Possibility*, 2014, a collaboration with Iris Garrelfs. The residency took place at Wimbledon College of Art, UAL as part of *ActsReacts 1, Performance Lab*. Author's work can be seen/heard at: https://vimeo.com/91650127.

beach and a Masonic chamber. Sound making devices have included objects and surfaces 'played' using contact microphones or vocal microphones, an electric violin, amplified pens and wires, and a multi-layered voice. Later works include *Sonic Activations of The Rake*, 2014 [15]- a version of Hogarth's Rake's Progress told through objects and contact microphones, performed at Pitzhanger Manor in Ealing, the house of the collector of the works, John Soane. The work embraced liveness, in performance, as a form of embodied activation whilst the activation of 'stand in' objects themselves, (metal chains, crumpled paper, a dice in a cup, a wine bottle and glass, a dance master's small pochette violin, a metal bucket), gave a visual focus to the significance and potential sound of the objects seen in the paintings. The audience stood around and within the performer's space, who then 'activated' the objects before them.

What defines this process of composition? Within all the sound works in the series, the act of transcription is key: the act of turning one thing into another, with information becoming sound, in a new act of 'setting down'. In all the sound works, the 'existing motifs' here could be regarded as the physicality and the historiography of a site, whilst the 'arrangements,' to borrow the musical sense of a transcription, or the devised sounds heard, lead to a different or new understanding of place, through a heightened awareness of experiential listening.

To reiterate, sounds can be devised and performed in numerous ways, including the use of conventionally notated musical composition, but in this context, overwhelmingly prompted by the site itself: location is key as instigator and host.

Where does this strategic *AAA* model fit, for practitioners? Why should anyone use it? Can it be treated as a set of guidelines or even as some kind of loose, instructional score perhaps? Does this new tripartite model offer an inter-disciplinary or trans-disciplinary practice, free from the constraints of established disciplines, or does it suggest perhaps a wholly new mode of practice? I suggest that this unique fusion, borrowing from and building on the many affordances of art, site-specificity, site-responsiveness, music, composition, improvisation, sound art, acoustics, architecture, studio and performance practices, allows for a new and vital mode of experiencing performed sounds; as both material and compositional events, in alternative, egalitarian spaces.

[15] *Sonic Activations of The Rake*, 2014, at Pitzhanger Manor. Author's work can be seen/heard at: https://vimeo.com/121158054

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CHAPTER TWO

THE METHODOLOGY MYTHOLOGY: RECONSIDERING COMPOSITIONAL PRACTICE IN ACOUSMATIC MUSIC

ADAM STANOVIĆ

Experimentation, *serendipity*, *intuition*, and *emergence* were the four most common terms in my recent literature review on the topic of compositional methods in acousmatic music. Admittedly, my review was brief. After all, very little has been written about methods in the acousmatic field and, aside from a few dedicated monographs[1], most of what I discovered was found in either transcribed interviews with practitioners or taken from the programme notes accompanying their works. Despite this relatively limited set of sources, I observed an overall tone, and use of terminology, so suspiciously uniform that I initially suspected a degree of collusion. Upon further inspection, however, it became clear that these similarities have more to do with the fact that this monolithic field has a single point of origin; the development of *musique concrète* by Pierre Schaeffer around the middle of the twentieth century. Employing electronic technologies of the age, Schaeffer developed a bespoke method for the creation of music, through which the transformation or manipulation of recorded sound encouraged musical form to emerge through acts of discovery, rather than predetermination[2]. This approach was evidenced through Schaeffer's various

[1] Curtis Roads' *Composing Electronic Music* (2015), Trevor Wishart's *Sound Composition* (2012), and Adrian Moore's *Sonic Art: an Introduction to Electroacoustic Music* (2015) are the only major texts that deal with specific methods. Despite offering extremely valuable and meaningful insights into the working practices of these three very different composers, these texts rarely present their composition in the form of a method.

[2] More specifically, Schaeffer was responding to the serialised instrumental music of the same era, believing that the adherence to tone rows and the subsequent

studies in, and works of, musique concrète, along with a wealth of written texts, including a diary charting his search for a concrete music (Schaeffer 1952, trans. North and Dack 2012) and a lengthy philosophical treatise on this new art (Schaeffer 1966, trans. North and Dack 2017). Within the pages of those texts, we find the very first sense of how *experimentation*, *serendipity*, *intuition*, and *emergence* are located at the heart of this method.

The term *musique concrète* was ultimately abandoned, and we are now accustomed to referring to this kind of music as *acousmatic*[3]. Despite the passage of almost seventy years, however, the method of producing this kind of music continues to be described using exactly the same terms and ideas. For example, in an interview about his music, Denis Smalley provided the following answer to a question about his method of composition, providing a direct and unambiguous reference to Schaeffer's approach:

> When I started out I followed the basic French, musique concrète method, as taught at the GRM[4], and in principle this has stayed with me. First discover and then record your source sounds; sort and catalogue them using pertinent criteria (I keep card indexes), which may be spectromorphological[5] or refer to source bonded[6] qualities; experiment with transformations to create families; along the way try out combinations and sequences through mixing, to see if relationships are going to work; constantly assess whether there is sufficient variety and contrast in the nature of the sounds and in the ways they are developing. Then gradually the piece emerges: form grows out of materials. (Smalley, quoted in Gayou 2010: 15).

Smalley is not alone in his references to Schaefferian ideas, but others express similar ideas without such a direct reference. For example, in a

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manipulation of such rows moved music away from the concrete nature of sound towards an ever abstract system of communication (Dack 2002).

[3] In recent years, the term acousmatic has been used to describe a listening situation in which the source or cause of a sound is not presented (visually) to a listener. When used in this context, the term acousmatic suggests an aesthetic stance in which an acousmatic listening situation is essential to both the presentation and the reception of music (Harrison, 1999: 1).

[4] The Groupe de Recherches Musicales (GRM) is a research group established by Pierre Schaeffer in 1958.

[5] The term *spectromorphology* was invented by Denis Smalley in order to describe the way in which sound spectra changes over time (Smalley 1997).

[6] *Source bonding* is another term invented by Smalley. It refers to our innate tendency to search for, or assume, a real-world origin for what we hear; we intuitively bond the content of our listening, Smalley argues, to ostensible sources (Smalley 1997).

special edition of the *Journal of Music, Technology and Education* dedicated to compositional methods in acousmatic music, Jonty Harrison set out *The Harrison Method* which, despite using his own name, exhibits clear similarities with the Schaefferian method described above:

> I am aware that I may be guilty of being a bit coy about my own composition, so I think the time has come to reveal in all its complexity my method of composing with 'sounds related only one to another' – and here it is: 1. Record some interesting sounds (usually real, but could be synthetic); 2. Process and develop them in the studio; 3. Put them together with some others, adjusting as required. (Harrison 2013: 318).

Harrison goes on to use exactly same terms listed above, telling the reader that "I encourage exploration, experimentation and critical assessment" (Harrison 2013: 318), that "serendipity certainly plays a part in my method" (Harrison, 2013: 320), and that: "I have no notion of the overall temporal structure of the finished work. That emerges progressively" (Harrison 2013: 319).

In other cases, we find similar ideas without any use of either the specific terms listed above or references to the Schaefferian approach. For example, composer Andrew Lewis provides a highly personal account of his practice using quite different terms:

> I try not to be too intentional too soon. In choosing and recording sounds, and in transforming them, I aim to have a completely open mind, and just go with the flow. I see what I can find, almost by accident, without worrying too much what I am going to do with it. I stumble across things, and allow myself to be surprised by unexpected revelations. This is 'finding'. […] Then comes 'seeking': this means I start actively looking for specific things, trying to realise certain kinds of ideas, exploring and developing the latent possibilities of the stuff that I have 'found'. (Lewis, in Moore 2015: 222).

In many respects, it is easy to understand how and why acousmatic compositional practice is described in this way; most acousmatic composers *are* following the Schaefferian method in-so-far as they record sounds, develop them in a studio, and allow form to emerge gradually. This is most certainly the case for Smalley, Harrison and Lewis and, in this sense, direct or indirect references to Schaeffer seem entirely justifiable[7]. There are other

[7] This chapter does not intend to criticise those composers quoted above; Smalley, Harrison and Lewis are all known to, and highly respected by, the author of this chapter and references to their writings were chosen on the assumption (or perhaps

good reasons to retain this overall sense of what the practice involves; since Schaeffer's work is extremely well-known, for example, a simple reference or statement is often sufficient to communicate compositional methods to others without lengthy explanation.

Despite these positives, there are also issues with the evocation of Schaefferian methods. Firstly, Schaeffer's terms and ideas were both extraordinarily detailed and numerous, and a brief mention does little to communicate what, exactly, is being referenced; although there is no space within this short chapter to provide a detailed summary of Schaeffer's writings, readers might be able to assume their overall complexity upon hearing that Michel Chion's *condensed* summary of Schaefferian writings comes to some 210 pages of A4, with an alphabet table of some 136 key terms (Chion, 1983, trans. North and Dack 2009). Secondly, it is often the details of *how* Schaeffer's method is adapted that are of interest, and such details are often overlooked. Take, for example, Smalley's statement above; although we must not forget that this was said in the context of a spoken interview, the acousmatic community would greatly benefit from additional clarifications: What, for example, does 'discover' mean to Smalley? How does he know or decide when a discovery is worthwhile keeping? How does he approach recording in this context? How does he decide upon what to record? What does the process of sorting and cataloguing entail? Is there some overarching agenda or strategy in which certain materials are prioritised and others rejected? Does the mere fact of sorting determine the ultimate form or the piece? If not, at what level is sorting meaningful in the compositional process? How does Smalley begin to find appropriate terms in order to start the process of sorting sound materials? What does experimentation actually entail? and so on.

It might be possible to counter both of the above points by suggesting that Schaeffer has already done the hard work in producing these various terms and ideas, and this allows contemporary practitioners to use them without producing their own. Here, however, we get to a third reason why a reliance on these terms is problematic (and, in fact, we arrive at the crux of the matter in hand); although references to Schaeffer's method may well retain their overall relevance to the field, we should not forget the fact that his terms and ideas were developed in quite a different era, and there are certain key differences between compositional practice in Schaeffer's day

hope) that they would agree with the central aim of this chapter: to highlight the many changes that have occurred in the field, and call for clarification over the various ways in which contemporary practitioners now work. Others references might very well have been selected, since just about every mention of a method discovered during the writing of this chapter revealed the same terms and ideas.

and his contemporary acousmatic counterparts. At the time, the above terms and ideas were unquestionably justifiable; his search for a concrete music clearly involved the painstaking development of a new method that lacked precedents, systems, models, and established technologies. Understandably, therefore, Schaeffer's work required a high degree of experimentation and serendipity, in which he was needed to follow his intuition from start to finish; Schaeffer's diary testifies to the fact that his musical outcomes could not be determined in advance, and his personal sense of failure (which he describes on an almost daily basis from the outset of his diary) was regularly accompanied by a clear sense of personal guilt if he were ever found to be wasting the time and money of his small research team. Thankfully, his research bore fruit, and among Schaeffer's numerous achievements was the elaboration of a method of composition quite unlike anything previously seen in the Western classical tradition. Today, by contrast, we have reached a point in which the acousmatic field has spread around the globe and is known in a wide range of both musical and academic contexts. This, as we shall discover below, makes it far more likely for contemporary compositional methods to involve precisely the kind of planning or predetermination that Schaeffer once sought to reject.

Given what is said above, the purpose of this chapter is to present and explain the following point: continued use of the terms such as *experimentation*, *serendipity*, *intuition*, and *emergence* will ultimately perpetuate a *mythological*, as opposed to *methodological*, account of the compositional process. To demonstrate this point, the remainder of this chapter presents a list of reasons why these terms are no longer fit-for-purpose. The list is certainly not exhaustive, and much of what is written relies upon anecdote, debate and conjecture. It is hoped, however, that the reader might forgive such things, since the ultimate aim of this chapter is to inspire much-needed debate within the acousmatic community about the *actual* methods that composers now employ. Failure to do so risks misunderstanding and marginalisation of a field that has long since coveted, but often failed to achieve, both audience and academic attention. Now is the time to rethink compositional methods in acousmatic music.

The Choice of Sound Materials

Adrian Moore's *Sonic Art: an introduction to electroacoustic music composition* is pitched as a text book for undergraduate students learning electroacoustic music. It is largely instructional, providing a wide range of insightful and valuable suggestions of how to approach the creation of a work from start to finish. The opening chapter, for example, is dedicated to

sound, and provides many different ways in which one might select, approach, record, and respond to a wide range of different sounds. By following one or more of the many suggestions listed in this chapter, Moore hopes that the reader will be able to make an informed decision about what they want to capture and why, and begin the act of composition. It is notable that Moore emphasises the importance of this stage, since he is effectively calling for his readers to: 1) preselect materials *prior* to recording, 2) consider what exactly those materials might suggest or imply, and 3) formulate a plan about how such sounds might ultimately be used in composition. In a sense, then, Moore advocates a strategy of pre-selection, in the knowledge that a thoughtful decision undertaken at the outset will have considerable bearing on the compositional process from then on.

One might suggest that Moore's personal approach bears little resemblance to the field of practice at large. This does not seem to be the case, however, as even the quotations from Smalley, Harrison and Lewis (listed above) imply a degree of pre-selection. For example, Smalley's tells us that one should "First discover and *then* record your source sounds" (Smalley, quoted in Gayou 2010: 15). Harrison's idea of "recording some *interesting* sounds" (Harrison 2013: 318) implies pre-selection of the "interesting", and Lewis tells the reader that he starts by "choosing and recording sounds" (Lewis, in Moore 2015: 222), giving the impression that he makes a decision about what to capture, before capturing. It seems, therefore, that common practice does not involve some kind of chance happening while recording. Instead, composers are making decisions, in advance, about what might be interesting or suitable for a particular piece. In this sense, we immediately start to erode the idea of experimentation and serendipity; a key aspect of the compositional approach is pre-determined.

It is not simply the written text that communicates pre-selection; many pieces in the acousmatic field have a central theme, or topic, around which sound materials have clearly been chosen. Smalley's *Wind Chimes* (1987), Harrison's *Internal Combustion* (2005-2006), and Lewis' *Lexicon* (2012) are wonderful examples of pieces for which materials were selected in relation to a specific theme or topic. Indeed, this is a very common approach in acousmatic music which, as Curtis Roads points out, frequently relies upon an evocation of context:

> Today, the term "acousmatic" refers to compositions in which external reference – or the hiding of it – is central to the meaning of the work. […] Acousmatic works tell stories. The sound of a door opening or closing, for example, might signal a new musical scene about to unfold. People whisper, storms gather, a train passes by. The meaning is sometimes veiled by various strategies such as familiar sounds place in unusual contexts. Acousmatic

> works play with recognisability, mimesis, reference, meaning and semantic allusion. (Roads 2015: 85)

Returning to Moore's text book, we find something very pertinent to this topic; the notion of *originality* (Moore 2015: 102-104). Moore suggests that the prevalence of water sounds, in the field of acousmatic music is not a reason to avoid their use, but that one must remain *original;* overuse leads to cliché.

Leaving aside the somewhat thorny issue of what originality means in this context, we may take something useful from Moore's observation; the choice of what to record is not simply a matter of selecting from all of the available sounds around us. Rather, it is conditioned (at least, to some extent) by the existence of other pieces of acousmatic music. This should come as little surprise, for creative practice does not exist in a vacuum, and knowledge of the various different sounds that have been used in the past necessarily helps to inform decisions about what to use in the present and future. The choice of sound materials is, therefore, less serendipitous and experimental than first thought.

Listening

The most common piece of advice given to students of acousmatic composition is to *listen* as much as possible to existing works. The fact that there is so much acousmatic music to listen *to*, however, demonstrates just how much the field has evolved and developed; in 1948, when Schaeffer first started composing concrete music, there were no works that he could listen to, and therefore no way in which Schaeffer's approach to composition could have been informed by the work of peers. This is not to suggest that the thriving contemporary music scene of Paris and elsewhere was without influence, nor that Schaeffer was without artistic influence more generally. Rather, it is to note that that there were no compositional precedents in the field of musique concrète, and therefore no possibility of direct influence from others in the field.

In one sense, we might dismiss this clear contrast (between now and then) as an irrelevance; aside from pieces including an homage, pastiche or reference to other composers, most ostensibly strive for a degree of originality. Whether they achieve this or not, it seems reasonable to suggest that it is only by listening to existing works that one can develop a concept of originality; how else would one know what is, or is not, original? In another sense, the fact that there is so much existing music is of critical importance to the field today; we have already seen how listening informs