

Making Way to Sound Art

What resonates in
Di Scipio's audible
ecosystems?

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Making Way to Sound Art – What resonates in Di Scipio’s audible ecosystems?

Abstract

With the aid of Heidegger’s late lecture, ‘Der Weg zur Sprache’, a parallel way to sound art is sought that breaks with metaphysical ways of thinking on both conventionally conceived music and today’s sound art. The way is parallel ultimately because of the twofold way in which the world opens up for human being, namely, in understanding and attunement. Human beings can only engage in sound art through being attentively attuned to the quivering that grants and unleashes attunements. That is, it is the originary quivering that enables human beings’ openness to sound art *as* sound art. Thus human being is used by appropriation (Ereignis) to allow sound art itself to make way to sound art. As a foil to this post-metaphysical thinking on the way to music, some critical remarks are made on a recent philosophical article by Meric & Solomos (2009) discussing the nature of Agostino Di Scipio’s “audible ecosystems” as “emergent” sound art.

1. A parallel way¹

Together with you, I am seeking a parallel way to sound art. The way is to be parallel to Heidegger's way to language, thus in a certain way plagiarizing it with an eye turned toward *freedom*. It should first be recalled where the word 'parallel' comes from. It is Greek in origin, and comes from παρά ἀλλήλω, meaning "next to one another". Thus, the way to sound art is supposed to lie next to and to run alongside the way to language, in itself a mysterious circumstance calling for elucidation.

To seek a way to sound art is here supposed to first indicate that a type of thinking that is no longer metaphysical is attempting to make its way, to make headway, or simply, to make way (*Be-wägen*). In seeking to make its way, thinking is to travel on a path that runs alongside the way to language in order to experience something essential and intrinsic about sound art, in particular, its parallelism to language.

'The Way to Language' is the title of a late lecture that Heidegger held in January 1959. The lecture is the final text in a series of essays and lectures which Heidegger wrote in the 1950s and published under the title *On the Way to Language* (Heidegger 1959). As the chronologically last essay and the one which gives the volume its title, 'The Way to Language' could well be regarded as the final, mature fruit of a decade of intensive thinking and writing about language.

How are we to seek a way to sound art in parallel to a way to language? We can only do so by first looking over toward the way to language to see how that way makes headway. The formula announced at the beginning of 'The Way to Language' which is to serve as a thread for the way to language is: "Die Sprache als die Sprache zur Sprache bringen" (p. 242). The formula has to be rendered in English something like: "Put language as language into words." Heidegger points out that

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what seems at first to be a formula will be transformed while under way. In its final reformulation, the formula will become: “Making-way brings language (the essence of language) as language (saying) to language (to the spoken word)” (Die Be-wägung bringt die Sprache (das Sprachwesen) als die Sprache (die Sage) zur Sprache (zum verlautenden Wort). p. 261). Without having followed the path that leads to this ultimate reformulation of the apparent formula, this final rendering of Heidegger’s is initially incomprehensible.

Here, for the moment, I ask only: What does this formula imply for the parallel way to sound art? On this path I am trying to make way to sound art by way of thinking in language. The essential presencing of sound art, or sound art *as* sound art, will not be made to resound but, at best, it will be put into thoughtful words. The “as” in the preceding sentence is not innocent, but is the *hermeneutic As* that from the outset shapes and defines human being’s openness to the world. This shows that the way to sound art in thinking must be a way that runs alongside any way that leads to sound art as resounding, attuning sounds. Thinking can only seek a *parallel* way to sound art, and it can only make headway in words that show it the way. The parallel formula that can serve as a thread for an attempt to follow a path in thinking to sound art *as* sound art is the following: To put into words the making-way of sound art as sound art to sound art. Later on, this formula will be elaborated and transformed into the as yet incomprehensible formulation: “Making-way allows sound art (the essential presencing of sound art) as sound art (the quivering) to come to sound art (to resounding, attuning sounds)”.

2. Making way

To the present day, what is essential to music and, more recently, to sound art, has been regarded as inhering in tones or sounds brought into a form. Sound art is thought *aesthetically*, i.e. starting from aural sense perception. The chosen acoustic *material* is brought into a *form* through various techniques which today include also digital technologies through which the acoustic material is processed into the form of sound art that, in turn, is experienced *aesthetically*, i.e. as an aural sense perception, by

an aurally receptive audience. To recur to the formula of the preceding section, it can be asked: Does this conception of sound art appropriately describe the making-way of sound art as sound art to sound art? The traditional metaphysical way to music and sound art sets out in the direction of humankind, leading through music and sound art to something else, say, to the representation of human emotions in tonal signs, in a language of emotions. The essential presencing of sound art conceived of with regard to something else, however, does not already point toward or point out the essential presencing of sound art, the mode in which sound art holds sway and whiles *as* sound art, gathered into what allows sound art to come into its own *as* sound art.

If you and I carefully follow the track of sound art as sound art, then we have already renounced the procedures for regarding sound art that have hitherto prevailed. We can no longer treat sound art as the representation of human experiences, nor as a mirroring of physiological sense data in tonal consciousness, nor as a formal structure of harmonious sounds, no matter how conventionally or unconventionally 'harmony' is understood, nor merely as an aesthetic acoustic experience, nor as a representation of anything at all. Instead of explaining sound art as this or that, and thus fleeing from sound art, the way to sound art aims to go through an experience (*eine Er-fahrung*) of sound art *as* sound art. In defining the essential presencing of sound art as a representation or expression, or as a shaping, forming and structuring of the sensuous acoustic environment, sound art is indeed comprehended, but it is grasped by something other than itself. If, on the contrary, you and I pay attention to sound art as sound art, then it demands of us that everything that belongs to sound art as sound art be brought out into the open.

The way to sound art now attempts to follow more strictly the thread which the formula names: To put into words the making-way of sound art as sound art to sound art.

People making and listening to sound art (i.e. musicking in the broadest sense) belong to sound art as an instrumentally and technologically enabled activity, but not in the sense of cause and effect. Rather, those immersed in an acoustic ambience have their presence, and thus present themselves, in generating and taking in this acoustic

ambience. And where are they present? They are present with what they use for generating and taking in this acoustic ambience; they are present where they while with what already *affects* them in individual and multifarious ways. What affects them, each in its own way, are other people and things and everything that attunes these people and affects these things as a whole situationally.

In generating and taking in an acoustic ambience with and for each other, whether it be directly in bodily presence, i.e. live, or indirectly through the media, a whole range of moods is made to resound in one way or the other; it is modulated and perhaps developed, attuned in such a way that those generating and taking in an acoustic ambience attune each other and themselves. What is made to resound as sound art may disappear without leaving a trace or it may be preserved or linger on in some way or other. What is made to resonate in sound art of all kinds, including traditional music, may be an attunement long past, or it may have been long since allotted as an acoustic ambience destined to be brought to resonance.

What is made to resound as sound art in the broadest sense originates in manifold ways from what is silent, whether this be what has not yet been made to resound or what must be left in silence in the sense of what is withheld from sound art. Thus what is brought to resonance in an acoustic ambience in manifold ways has the appearance of being removed from those making sound art and does not belong to them, whereas in truth it holds up to those making sound art that toward which they already comport themselves, no matter how fittingly or awkwardly they resonate with what is brought to resound as an acoustic ambience from the silent origin.

2.1 The fugue

Let the sought-for unity of the essential presencing of sound art be called the *fugue*². This name calls on you and me to look more carefully at what properly characterizes the essential presencing of sound art. A fugue is a traditional musical composition in which several themes,

² Corresponding to “Auf-Riß” in Heidegger 1959 UzS:252.

which in their difference flee (*L. fugere*) from each other, are nonetheless held together by means of the laws of contrapuntal harmony. Here, by contrast, the fugue is taken to be the *entire structured manifold of originary moods of an open historical time-clearing* held together and adjoined in an articulated unity. The fugue thus resonates through and originally opens up the free dimension of attunement that comes to resonate in the manifold attunements of an age. The fugue is the originary, articulated, silent reverberation of the essential presencing of sound art in an historical time, the total structured quavering sheaf of attunements in which those making sound art and what is enabled as an acoustic ambience and its silent origin are joined and immersed in what has been allotted and conceded by the fugue of an age, including in particular, perhaps, the *moods of freedom granted, or unleashed, by the fugue*.

The fugue as the bundled, ongoing, essential presencing of sound art remains hidden and muffled even in its approximate reverberation as long as you and I do not take care to note in what sense already making music, sound art, acoustic environments and soundscapes has been spoken of. The broadening of music to admit also sounds and noise can be understood as its liberation from the strictures of Western arithmetical harmony pioneered especially, but not only, by John Cage (cf. Eldred 2000).

2.2 Making sound art

Making sound art is an aurally aesthetic making of sounds. It can also be conceived as a human activity. Both are correct conceptions of sound art as a making of sound art. Both are now put to one side, without our wanting to forget for how long the resounding of music and sound art has already been waiting for an appropriately attuned definition; for, the aesthetic, acoustico-physiological, emotionally expressive, harmonic and technologically defined explanations of sound-making do not experience their provenance in the *pealing of stillness*. Still less do they experience the attuned defining of sound-making which stems from and resonates with this origin.

In what way, however, have making music and sound art been thought in the preceding? They already show themselves to be phenomena through which and in which something makes way to sound art, i.e. comes to resonance, *insofar as sound art is made*.

But what does it mean to *make sound art*, which today is the technologically enabled extension of making music, i.e. of musicking? Sound art has left behind the laws of harmonic relations with their various arithmetic ratios and scales to admit all sorts of sounds and even noise, whether generated by someone playing an instrument or manipulating an electronic device or by capturing ambient sound or noise in some more or less sophisticated way. To experience what musicking means in the traditional sense we are bound to what language itself calls on us to think in this word. 'To music' is a nonce-verb to the noun 'music', from Greek μουσα, the mountain nymph who inspires the singer to sing. The singer can only sing when attuned to the musical source, and thus inspired through breathing in the spirit, his or her singing temporarily and temporally permeates and colours a situation as a whole with a particular mood or moods. Mood is the way the world is open to human being momentarily as a whole in any particular situation at any particular time. It is the way we find ourselves in any particular situation, whether downcast or uplifted or on even keel. Musicking, including now also making sound art, must therefore be understood as temporal opening of world in a particular *way* or *mode* in *bringing a mood to resonance*.

I am saying something self-evident and yet something that has scarcely been pondered in its significance and ramifications when I point out the following: To make sound art with each other means to bring each other to resonance, to reciprocally let ourselves go with the mood of a generated acoustic ambience in the time-clearing. To make sound art with each other means to make something resonate together, and thus to let a certain attunement quaver. What is unheard is not only that which lacks acoustic sound in not having been made audible, but also what has not yet gained resonance in an attunement. That which has to remain unheard is withheld in the peeling of stillness; it whiles as a hidden secret in muteness as that which cannot be made to resonate in an

attunement, perhaps even for an entire age of a given culture. What is granted to resonance resounds as an attunement in the sense of what has been allotted, whose resounding throughout a period or an age *does not even need any sound*.

2.3 Sound art as the quivering of an attunement

Sound art, now conceived as the resounding of an attunement, belongs to the fugue of the essential presencing of sound art which is permeated by the sheaf of resonant modes and melodies in which moods are announced, conceded and denied, come to resonance and amplitude in attunement or withdraw, ebb and fade. With regard to the rapport of attuned resounding, I call the entirety of the essential presencing of sound art the *quivering* and admit that, even now, what unifies this rapport of attuned resonance in the fugue of sound art has not yet come into sight.

The word 'quivering' is today usually employed in a pejorative sense. 'Quivering' is regarded as a description for that which is not firm, which shakes, quavers and trembles (perhaps with fear) and thus is not steadfast, robust and sturdy, perhaps wavering, ill-defined, ambiguous. The earth may shake and quiver in an earthquake that brings destruction. A person or an animal may quiver with fright or agitation, but perhaps also with sheer, overbrimming vitality. The quivering or rapid agitation of the prongs of a tuning fork allows a pure tone to resound. People quiver with emotions resonant with a situation. Quivering may possess the unreleased tension of a potential for movement. Every situation is resonant with the quivering of a mood which attunes those who are currently in that situation. Quivering is the hearth in whose radiance the attunement of moods can come to resonance. The quivering can be perceived from the attunements resonating with it.

The essential presencing of sound art is the quivering as the attuning of an epochal mood. A mood is the resonant mode of any given situation in a given ambience in a given historical time. Past historical times and periods can also be revived to resonate once again, while attunements arriving from a future age can be fore-cast reverberantly by sound artists with suitable sensitivity. We humans are the living beings open,

susceptible to this originary quivering as an opening of world in the time-clearing, and so we can resonate with it in a moodful attunement. Quivering's attuning is not based on any feelings or sensibilities, but rather, all feelings and sensibilities stem from the attuning quivering within whose resonance feelings as such can be felt.

With a view to the fugue-like character of the quivering, we must not ascribe attuning exclusively or primarily to human activity. Attunement as resonance characterizes the presencing and absencing, the resounding and fading of moods of all kinds and degree in an age and the periods of an age. Even when attunement is brought about by our musicking and making of sound art, this attuning as the striking of some kind of chord is preceded by a propensity and proclivity to resonate with a mood granted by the fugue.

Usually, making sound art and immersing oneself in it are counterposed to each other. Some make sound art and others listen. But listening accompanies and encloses the making of sound art not only in the sense that sound art requires listeners. Making sound art is in itself a listening, not a listening at the same time, but rather a listening *beforehand*. This hearkening to sound art precedes all other kinds of listening in the most imperceptible way. We do not just make sound art, but we make sound art out of sound art. We can only do this by virtue of having already listened to sound art. What do we hear? We hear the resonating of sound art.

But does sound art itself resound? How could sound art do this, since it does not have any musical instruments nor a voice with vocal cords, mouth, tongue, etc., nor any technological devices to generate sound. Nevertheless, *sound art* itself makes sound art. In the first place and properly speaking, sound art follows the essential presencing of sound art: the quivering of the fugue. Sound art makes sound art by quivering, i.e. by attuning a mood. Its quivering emanates from the once resounding and as yet unresounding quivering that reverberates throughout the epochal fugue of sound art. Sound art makes sound art as attunement by reaching into all ranges of attunement from which moods are brought to resonance or fade. Accordingly, we listen to sound art in the mode of allowing it to attune us with its quivering. Harkening

means *allowing oneself to resonate with the quivering*, thus enabling all apprehension of mood and feeling *as such*, which may then also be put into words and articulated in language. In making sound art as this fundamental — or rather, abyssal — hearkening to sound art, we are attuned to the quivering that we have already heard and make it resonate. We let sound art's silent voice come and we reach toward the sound that has been reserved for us and call for it. Thus do sound artists listen to the fugue of moods allotted to an age or a period within an age.

When sound artists, hearkening to sound art, let themselves be attuned by the quivering, this letting-be can only be granted insofar as our own presencing is exposed to and immersed in the quivering. We only hear it because we belong to it. The quivering only grants a hearkening to sound-art to those who belong to it. Such granting whiles in the quivering. It lets those susceptible attain the ability to make sound art. The essential presencing of sound art rests in the quivering that grants also the reach to make sound art. Insofar as the quivering liberates moods of freedom, it depends on sound artists' *open-minded courage* whether these moods come to resonance in works of sound art, for freedom goes hand in hand with courage, and open-mindedness means openness to the time-clearing as the sole site for all presencing and absencing.

3. The quivering of appropriation

And the quivering itself? Is it something completely separated from the making of sound art to which a bridge has to be built? Or is the quivering the stream of stillness which itself bridges its banks, of attunement and our making sound art, by forming them? Conventional ideas about music and sound art can scarcely reach this point. When you and I try to think the essential presencing of sound art starting from the quivering, do we not run the risk of inflating sound art into some fantastic, autonomous being that cannot be found anywhere as long as we think soberly and matter-of-factly about sound art? Sound art remains, after all, inextricably bound to the human making of sound art. To be sure. But what kind of bond is this? Whence and how does its

binding hold sway and bind? Sound art *needs* human making of sound art and is nevertheless not merely something made by our activity. Wherein lies the essential presencing of sound art? On what is it grounded? Perhaps it is asking in a direction that misses the essential presencing of sound art to ask for grounds.

Is the quivering itself the resting which grants rest to what belongs together in the fugue of the essential presencing of sound art?

The way to sound art from sound art as sound art has reached its destination. Thinking has arrived after travelling along the way to sound art. It seems to be so and it is so as long as the way to sound art is taken to be a path of thinking which thoughtfully follows the track that leads to sound art. In truth, however, thinking now sees that it has only just been brought to the *way to sound art* and has scarcely been put on the track. For, in the meantime, something has become apparent in the essential presencing of sound art which shows that in sound art as the quivering, something resembling a way holds sway.

What is a way? A way allows somewhere to be reached. It is the quivering which, insofar as we listen to it, allows us to reach the making of sound art.

The way to making sound art whiles in sound art itself. The way to sound art in the sense of making sound art is sound art as the quivering. What is characteristic and proper to sound art thus hides itself in the way in which the quivering lets those who listen attentively to it come to sound art. Sound artists can only be these listeners insofar as they belong to the quivering. The way that lets us, and sound artists in particular, reach sound art comes already from being enabled to belong to the quivering. This belonging shelters what is properly presencing in the way to sound art. But how does the quivering hold sway that it is able to enable and grant such belonging?

The quivering attunes. In everything which affects us, which touches us as a mood that has been brought to resonance, which attunes us, which waits for us as the unresounded, but also in making sound art which we ourselves generate, attuning holds sway, which lets moods reverberate and fade. The quivering is in no way a supplementary expression of mood; rather, all moods and their fading reside in and rest

on attuning quivering. The quivering composes the free fugue that permeates and resonates in the three-dimensional temporal clearing (cf. Eldred 2012) which all moods have to seek out and from which all spent moods fade, in which all resonance and fading away have to reverberate.

In having its eye on human being, it is *appropriation (Ereignis)* that appropriates humankind by giving it over to that which appeals to humankind in the quivering from everywhere, and so toward what is encrypted. The enpropriation of humankind as the ones who are attuned to the quivering is characterized by its releasing human being into its own, but only so that humans, as the ones who make sound art, respond to the quivering in their very own way. This is the making of sound art. The responding music of mortals is already an answer: a hearkening, attuned, accommodating making of sound art. The enpropriation of mortal human beings to the quivering releases human being into *usage* whence it is used to put the soundless quivering of the fugue into resounding sound art.

Through this enpropriating usage, appropriation lets the quivering reach resonance in sound art. The way to sound art belongs to the quivering that resonates out of appropriation as an accompaniment, parallel to the way to language that belongs to the saying that is defined and articulated out of appropriation. What is characteristic of sound art encrypts itself on this way which belongs to the essencing of sound art. The way is appropriating: appropriation appropriates human being for its usage through enpropriating it to the quivering. In appropriating attunement as its own property, appropriation enables the quivering to make way to sound art, just as, in parallel, in appropriating pointing (*die Zeige*, Heidegger 1959 p. 254) as its own property, appropriation enables the saying (*die Sage*, *ibid.*) to make way to language. The formula for the way to sound art thus becomes:

Making-way brings sound art (the fugue as the essential presencing of sound art) as sound art (the quivering) to sound art (the audibly resounding ambience of a temporal situation). In speaking of a way to sound art, it now no longer means merely and primarily the path of our thinking which thinks about sound art. The way to sound art has changed along the way. It has been displaced from our activity into the

propriating presencing of sound art itself. But the change in the way to sound art only seems to us, from our own standpoint, to be a displacement that only now takes place. In truth, the way to sound art has always had its sole locus and origin in the fugal essential presencing of sound art itself. This, however, does not mean that the way to sound art in the first sense becomes superfluous; on the contrary, it only becomes possible and necessary through the way proper, the making-way that appropriates and uses. For, because the essential presencing of sound art rests in appropriation as the attuning quivering, which hands us humans over to the serenity of free, attuned hearkening to the fugue of an age, it is only quivering's itself making way to sound art that opens up to us the paths on which you and I and sound artists can think about the proper way to sound art, insofar, of course, as those making sound art do not do without thinking.

4. “What emerges from listening?”

At the outset in their 2009 article, Renaud Meric and Makis Solomos pose the question cited in the subheading to this section. The authors follow up with a further question, “What phenomena does listening create?” (Meric & Solomos 2009 p. 57), and proceed to give a “simple and short answer”: “(musical) sound” which they conceive as “the birth of sound, its emergence as a structure”. They then ask, “What are the spatial and temporal limits of this emergence?” (ibid.). The key idea in the article seems to be the “emergence” (Varela 1989, 1996) of an audible sonic structure from an underlying chaotic complexity through active listening by the audience-subject. The sonic structure emerging from the interplay between the “musical material”, “the listener” and “the space in which they take place” is claimed to have “no independent existence” (Meric & Solomos 2009 p. 57) as a form, so that the conventional musicological analysis in terms of a form imposed on tonal material breaks down. Note that *time* is not mentioned as essential to this interplay.

Meric and Solomos aim to concretize these thoughts by focusing on Agostino Di Scipio's “audible ecosystems” consisting of a room,

performers, microphones, a digital sound processor (DSP), loudspeakers and listeners immersed in an ongoing process in which all the elements of the 'in-house com-position' or "ecosystem" (ὄικοσύστημα) are in a cybernetic interplay enabled by electronic and digital technologies (cf. Eldred 2009/2011). The authors see the difficulty in analysing Di Scipio's "audible ecosystems" to reside in the fact that "one must focus on the ephemeral moment where music emerges in the interaction between the listener and the product of the audio system, and inside a specific space." (Meric & Solomos 2009 *ibid.*) Does the music emerge through the subject-object interaction, or does it come to resonance from the quivering of the fugue? Later in their article, the authors specify further:

As the listener is a part of an ecosystemic work, he belongs to the same time, the same space as the work, as the sound. We have to set up the question in another way: what is moving inside what we are listening to? When we search for what is moving inside what we are listening to, we are not looking for a result, but for a structural process. The listener thus remains inside the ecosystem. The movements or the processes we are listening to are an ephemeral emergence of the entire ecosystem. What emerges can be considered as both objective and subjective: it is not an end of the circular interactions. (Meric & Solomos 2009 p. 66)

From this I infer that the "ecosystemic work" is an ongoing situation taking place in a room that has been set up technologically. Listeners are immersed in this situation in which ephemeral audible sonic structures emerge momentarily and fade. The authors emphasize that this is neither an objective nor a subjective processual movement, but an encompassing, immersive, situational whole. In particular, this implies that no subjective feelings are being expressed, nor are objective aural forms being imposed that could be analysed in their own right. Such ephemerally emergent structures are also not aesthetic in the sense of pure sense perception, but have to be perceived by the mind if they are to be perceived at all.

The mind, however, is not just intellect that comprehends, not just cognition that cognizes occurrents and occurrences such as sonic structures. Rather, the mind is the same as the reverberant open temporal clearing itself (Eldred 2012) which, through an audible ecosystem, *takes*

place (Eldred 2013) in an architecturally *spaced space* in which certain extended things, including microphones, wires, digital sound processor and loudspeakers take their places, shaping it acoustically in a reverberant way, thus setting up an audibly sonic ambience in which sound art can resound movingly. The movement here is neither merely objective nor merely subjective but is the temporal resonance of an attunement.

The objective description of a technologically enabled, cybernetically controlled movement of sensed sonic signals, including ambient noise, their processing by a DSP and their transmission to loudspeakers which in turn emit sound waves that bounce from the room's walls, says nothing whatsoever of an eventuation of sound art *as such*. Nor would a description of the inner emotional states of the listening subjects. And neither does a description of an ephemeral "emergent structure" in the active-listening situation itself, for it omits consideration of what human being is open to *as such* at all or, conversely, for what it is appropriated and used.

The movement taking place in the room is the *quivering of an attunement* that has made its way to resounding sound to which the listeners are open, for they are used by the situation to perceive its attuning mood. Sound art needs listeners open to situational attunements to *be* musical art. Conversely, this 'usefulness' of human being to musical art renders human being itself musical: human being resonates with music *as* music. Only by virtue of this openness to the quivering that resonates in an ongoing situation can a coherent audible structure be perceived attunedly.

Agostino Di Scipio deploys electronic and digital technologies to set up a cybernetically self-evolving sonic situation. The composer steps back, letting the cybernetic ecosystem move itself sonically, thus presencing for a time. What mood constellations, perhaps hitherto unresounded, make their way to resonance in these audibly sonic situations? Do *moods en-couraging to freedom set free by the fugue* come to resonance? Time will tell if we listen attentively.

5. Literature

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