

Sound and Meaning

Introduction

Sound is a constant; it is always present, we always hear something. But we don't always want it that way – when we want quiet all sound suddenly becomes noise, undesirable sound. And even if we should be so lucky as to make it almost totally silent around us, there is still sound – sound from inside of us, our blood circulating. So, sound is ever-present, and our ears are never turned off. We never escape sound, but become accustomed to it without reflection. Over the years we also lose some of our hearing ability. We lose some of the ability to hear what is happening, the ability to follow what's happening around us. This has consequences for us because hearing is our primary and best warning system. Hearing always tells us what is going on in our environment, and we become aware when it becomes suddenly quiet, or if sounds appear that don't belong to the setting or are completely foreign.

Sound says something about actions and contexts, and consequently about relationships between people, nature and culture. There hardly exists a society in the world where sound does not play a part in ceremonies or important rituals that are significant for the order of the society. There is also a lot of wonder connected to sound. In most cases it is easy to hear what causes a sound, but today technology makes it possible to separate the sound from the source. Therefore we have to learn what meaning is attached to the sounds we hear. For example, it can't be taken for granted that a certain whistling sound is supposed to tell us that it is time to cross the street or that the coffee is ready. And it certainly can't be taken for granted that signal systems will always attract our attention by playing a minor third. Sounds' meanings must be learned through participating in a culture, and as such sound also plays a part in shaping our social space – sound creates knowledge of the specific contexts in which we are situated, and influences how we relate to each other. The understanding and experience of sound is culturally conditioned.

Against this backdrop it is easy to understand the increasing attention placed on sound in society, an interest that takes many forms. There is research on sound within scientific, social scientific and humanistic approaches, in research on technological development, media production, music and art, and it is the focus of regulatory questions concerning environmental protection. This text is concerned with the artistic and especially in the relatively new concept of sound art. The term 'sound art' was not put to use until well past the 1970s, and was not commonly used in music and art circles until the last five to ten years. What kind of art form does the term actually describe? In this text I am going to examine some important approaches to the concept of sound art and present some examples. The aim is to contribute thought and reflection about the works in the exhibition, and relate these to a broader landscape of some key works in sound art's history. The articles by Bergman, Landy, Norman and Sekkingstad in this catalogue offer perspectives on important aspects of sound art in general, and Sekkingstad's article looks into a selection of important works and initiatives from the Norwegian sound art scene.

Early traces

Sound art has roots tracing back to the early 20th century, when industrialization's role in the development of society was relatively new and gradually growing, and sounds from everyday life to a greater degree consisted of mechanical sounds and industrial noise. The early world of sounds was, if not exactly silenced, to a large extent drowned out by the new mechanical

to ourselves and when we read out loud, even if the meaning of it is not created any other way than through the experience of its form.

Machine noise was also used as sound material, and in 1913 the painter Luigi Russolo published his famous Futuristic manifesto *L'arte de rumori* (The Art of Noise). He also later made noise instruments that were used in concerts with regular instruments. They looked like large boxes with a funnel mounted on them, and there were different types of friction in the boxes that made unpleasant sounds. However, when it comes to industrial sounds, Arseni Avraamov's piece *Symphony for Sirens* was conceived on a larger scale. The piece was written for an ensemble consisting of ships' whistles, factory sirens, machine guns, artillery and planes, among other material, and it was performed in the city of Baku in 1922.³ The ideas and ambitions were certainly in place.

The possibility of using noise sounds became radically greater with the invention of the tape recorder, which also offered the opportunity to cut and paste together different pieces of tape, copy them, shuffle them, and play them slowly and quickly. Work with this technology exploded right after World War II, spurring an intense development in the music world for both electronic music and *musique concrète*. To be sure, there were technical predecessors to the tape recorder, among them recorders that used steel wires, but the possibilities for editing were not the same. An important aspect of this development was not with the technology, however, it was the possibilities for abstraction that it offered. Sounds could be recorded, edited, arranged and put together in new ways, and removed from their origin to become 'pure' musical form. This was a particularly modernist claim that later met with critique, but at that time this viewpoint allowed for new artistic possibilities. The same technology was also the basis for the development of the genre electronic music, which in its more serialist form also depended on tape recording as a tool for developing sounds. Sound was perceived as severed from its origin – from time, place and source.

Space

Sound is vibrations in our audible range, sound is pressure waves, sound is the consequence of one or another action or event. Sound does not exist in a vacuum, for it is completely silent there. All sounds takes place in some kind of space, inner as well as outer, and in this section we therefore focus on the concept of space.

Defining the relationship between space and place is difficult as it is affected by the context it occurs in – a context that is both physical and social. We listen differently in a gallery than we do in a concert hall, and we listen in a concert hall in a different way than at a rock club. As mentioned above, listening is not something that only concerns hearing; listening is culturally determined, and it is situated. An analytical perspective on the relationship between sound and space therefore consists of asking whether the piece is dependent on a specific space, place or environment in order for it to offer meaning and be appreciated.

As early as the ancient Greeks, buildings were constructed to shape and elucidate sound for a specific purpose. Combinations of material, form and dimension turned outdoor amphitheatres of that time into suitable arenas for singing and speeches. Theatres were the mass media of the time, and housed society's public discussions. It was therefore important that the same message could reach many people at the same time. The knowledge of the

³ Avraamov, A. (1923) *The Symphony of Sirens*. In Douglas Kahn (Ed.), *Wireless Imagination*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992. pp. 245-252.

importance of space has not been lost; for hundreds of years composers have utilized the acoustics in churches and concert halls, and written music with tempos and melodic structures that depend on certain types of acoustics. Quick piano passages are lost in large cathedrals while melismatic choir works create harmony and flowing chords. Frequently used examples of this kind of composition are found in the works of Renaissance composer Gesualdo at the end of the 16th century in which he placed groups of singers in different locations in cathedrals where his madrigals were performed. He used the entire space to create the musical expression, and due to the long reverberation in the church space the development of the form of his works was slow, with many voices interwoven in contrapuntal, strictly constructed passages.

Many artists and composers in more modern times have explored acoustic effects and different constructions of space in their works. A frequently used example is *I am Sitting in a Room* from 1970 by Alvin Lucier. This work is more than 45 minutes long and it shows how the acoustics of a space during playback and recording alter the material over time. Katherine Norman's text she writes about this work in more detail in this catalogue, discussing the relationship between sound, listener and space. David Toop⁴ and Brandon La Belle⁵ stress that it is the investigation and activating of the relationship between sound and space that is sound art's most important characteristic, in terms of how sound appears, its audible qualities and its sensible surface. This is the surface that the listener must penetrate in order to encounter the underlying relationships explored by the artists.

One artist who clearly focuses the attention of the listener on something other than sound, yet works with what is considered sound art, is Felix Hess. For Hess, all changes in air pressure are points on a sensible continuum, and he focuses the listener's attention on this broad spectrum in his installations. One example is the work *Air* in which he transposes barometric changes, in other words movements between high and low pressure, up to an audible range. We hear both fair weather and wind, and we follow the development of these changes around the clock and track them in human activity. For example, changes in pressure can be heard when doors are shut with some force – there is little of this sound during night time, while there is more in the morning when people go to work. In this way, Hess makes us aware that we are part of larger contexts, and that these contexts are present whether we concentrate on them or not. One of Hess's other works, *It's in the Air* mounted a sea of small white paper flags in a gallery space in such a way that they moved at the slightest movement in the room, air currents as small as those created by a warm body in an otherwise cool room or set in motion by slow arm movements. Hess shows us that we are always present and that our actions mean something whether we are aware of them or if they make noise. Hess says that he does not investigate sound; he investigates sensitivity. However, sound is frequently his material.⁶

Place

Sound in a space also has explicit connotations, and artists intervene in order to make apparent surprising or new connections, either by emphasizing existing sounds or by adding sound – sonify – particular aspects of a place. Sonification means to use sound in the mediation of data, or more precisely, the information about them. The Geiger counter is a

⁴ Toop, D. (2004) *Environmental Music*. In Sadie & Tyrrell (Eds.) *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

⁵ Labelle, B. (2006) *Background Noise*. London: Continuum, p. ix.

⁶ Schulz, B. (2001) *Felix Hess - Light as Air*. Heidelberg: Kehrer.

frequently used example of sonification where the frequency of little clicks indicates the level of radioactivity. The focus on space as a general entity is therefore replaced by a focus on specific aspects of spaces and situations to create specific frameworks, both acoustically and for the production of meaning. The physical space is expanded to include social space as well, and the works connect to specific actions, situations, and spaces – the works would simply not be the same if we had met them in a different space. They become place-dependent.

Several examples illustrate this notion of the relation between sound and place. The first is an early work in sound art genre, *Times Square* (1977) by Max Neuhaus, which was installed below street level on a traffic island in Times Square on Manhattan. I coincidentally discovered this work in the early 80s, as I casually passed it by without knowing what it was, and returned later that day with a tape recorder to record this fascinating sound. Why was I so taken by it? The sound installation is invisible, heard only by crossing the street in a certain place where there is no crosswalk. The sound is like the roaring from several large transformers – they have tones and the tones do not change. Neuhaus has assembled such sounds in a way that collectively produces a harmonious spectrum that differs from what transformers normally produce. So, the sound that I heard appeared as something more – something shaped by aesthetics, with its own identity – something intentional. The fact that this work was invisible, that there was no 'label,' made the work seem like an organic part of the city. Neuhaus added to my feeling of Gotham City, a futuristic city with a soul of its own, an identity and life of its own – and its own social space where the role of the individual is as insignificant as a drop in the sea. This impression was amplified by the fact that traffic on both sides of the traffic island is the busiest in Manhattan, and that the sound of the installation was not particularly loud. If the work was moved to a small city like Oslo, for example, it would have been something else. And where would it have been placed?

The second example is from Norway, a large work that has to do with the social space of the individual in both urban and rural surroundings, and which explores 'place' in the sense of where we come from, where we belong, and our possibilities to express ourselves. In 2002, NRK and NOTAM jointly produced the installation *Norway Remixed* at Oslo Central Station.⁷ In one of the work's two parts, the passers-by (thousands during the exhibition period) could experience sounds being played in real time from different parts of the country, pre-selected locally because of their significance to that place, as representative of something that was important in that area. The work's guest book is full of accounts from visitors describing recalled and re-experienced events, even as they stood under a shower of sound in the busiest transit space in the country. The second part of the work enabled the audience to further develop their associations with the sound material through re-composing - combining and treating the sounds to create and play with their own interpretations⁸. The work was built according to a design and idea of Asbjørn Blokkum Flø, a composer and sound artist who has done extensive and advanced sound work in many installations over the last ten years⁹. Due to its immediate nature, the fact that it was so unexpectedly present in this public space, the sound material touched visitors directly and distanced them from the context of being 'in transit' back to experiences and remembrances. A similar project, Lane's and Perry's work *Voices from the Past*, is discussed by Norman in this catalogue.

⁷ Rudi, J. (2003) *Norge et lydrike* – Norway remixed: A sound installation. *Organised Sound*, 8 (2): pp. 151-155.

⁸ Bolter, Jay David and Grusin, Richard (2000) *Understanding the New Media*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

⁹ It is about large collaborative projects involving several artists. The works discussed here are *Spranget* and *Erotogod*. See Asbjørn Blokkum Flø's website (<http://www.notam02.no/~asbjornf/>) and Ståle Stenslie's (<http://www.stenslie.net/stahl>)

The last example that illustrates social space as place is a work by Christina Kubisch, a German sound artist with years of work in this field. Using special headphones that she designed herself, the artist makes electromagnetic fields audible. Through soundwalks and installations she draws attention to aspects of culture and modern life of which we are generally unaware. We hear electromagnetic fields, from cell phone transmission towers to shoplifting detectors and cable systems, and become aware of the staggering amount of these fields penetrating the city space. Kubisch chooses which sounds to use in showing us the electromagnetic fields. Although she could make the sound resemble a medieval choir, this is not her aim. Through her choice of sounds, Kubisch reveals her artistic intentions. In her electric soundwalks we get quite a different impression of the urban environment than we normally see and hear.

Nature as place also interests sound artists. Since the 70s, the sounds of nature and our relationship to them have been material for artists and composers in the soundscape tradition, and Norman describes several aspects of this in her text. Her examples provide insight into sound works composed using nature and culture recordings, and she discusses contextually oriented ways of listening, where sounds are allowed to ‘be themselves,’ experienced only as they are presented in a certain context, whether a concert with music by Cage or as strange elements in new connections, as in Bill Fontana’s installations. Usually great importance is attached to the fact that soundscape works are connected to a particular place or environment, but they can be performed anywhere. The works thus appear as conventional compositions.

From Norway we have a similar example in Kjell Samkopf’s *Mårådalen Walk* from 1994¹⁰, where we hear the composer’s steps in the mountains and we sense resistance and obstacles in the terrain from the way he is walking, his breathing sounds, and noise coming from the ground he is walking on. We get a feeling of what it is like to be there, to do what he is doing. Eventually the composer weaves in musical ‘foreign elements’ and carefully composes in the material – but no more than a gently ruffle. The composition is cautious and hushed and it focuses our listening on the fact that it is this care and attention to details and nuances that counts if one is to get some kind of impression of what is happening. A bit more of an insistent work is John Persen’s *The Birds Know* from the 90s. In this work, Persen alters the sound environment of birds using 48 birdhouses. He plays bird-like sounds out of the houses through holes that the birds otherwise would have flown into. After the houses were installed in trees for a week or two it was possible to hear how elements from the artificial bird sounds had become incorporated into the natural birdsong. Both works communicate directly with the listeners – using recognizable sounds – and in their respective ways challenge us to consider nature’s own sounds as aestheticized material.

Material from nature is also raw material for other types of compositions, where composers are not as concerned with the recognition of specific sounds. Composers and sound artists Natasha Barrett and Jana Winderen are similarly concerned with conveying aspects of an environment, but at the same time challenge our recognition of its sounds. Using a microphone like a magnifying glass, they pull out sounds and details that are either so tiny or hard to access that they are unknown to us. When a sound is unknown it provides space for reflecting on its abstract form and qualities. In Barrett’s series *Barely*¹¹, she accesses this contemplative space by composing with unfamiliar sound material. She gives individual sounds new meaning by putting them into a context – an aesthetic form, and we hear the sounds differently than if they were in their naturalistic form. Often it is sound’s emergent

¹⁰ Released by *Hemera* record company, HCD2907.

¹¹ <http://www.natashabarrett.org/barely.html>

qualities that support the development of form, as in much acousmatic music, and we are drawn into a world where we must connect the details with the context the composer creates for us. Winderen uses hydrophones to record sounds 25 meters below the sea or inside a melting lump of ice, putting hidden surroundings on display as objects for contemplation¹². The origins of sounds in their hidden reality is the basis of the works, and Winderen carefully edits in the material, concentrating and amplifying nature's own processes by finding the essence of aspects of the environments she investigates. Getting at the essence of sounds from natural environments through acts of recording was a theme in the *Sleppet* exhibition from 2007 where these works were presented. The exhibition is described in more detail in Sekkingstad's text in this catalogue.

The winning work in NOTAM's sound art competition, *Stone Piece* by Øystein Wyller Odden, is based on reflections of how an institution treats and relates to intrusions into its space, whether these intrusions are actions, works or the public. Wyller Odden has broken a window with a rock, and both of which are displayed with the shards of glass. The work presents the hardened remains of an artistic act, carefully preserved and painstakingly arranged, and with the sound of the breaking glass treated and stretched to the unrecognizable. The sound has been put through a 'sieve,' and the most important parts are reproduced in the form of a score for a string quartet. The piece will be performed at the opening of the exhibition, and will then live on as a studio recording of the music, played in a continuous loop through four loudspeakers during the remainder of the exhibition. The work depends on a formal museum or gallery context in order to retain its aspect of institutional critique. The irony in the work is reinforced by the sale of objects with a depiction of the hole in the broken window in the museum's gift shop. In a small, artist-run gallery, this critical aspect would be imperceptible, and the work would become something else. This is clearly the most place-dependent work in the exhibition.

Time, listening and meaning making

It is often claimed that the relationship to time is different in music and sound art. In music one focuses on how the narrative develops through sound and rhythm, and how time is apportioned so that its sequences become clear, making it possible to follow the development of the musical material. The trained listener remembers what happened earlier in the music and experiences that the musical events are linked together in ways that make sense. The experience is connected to this portioning of time. It exists in time.

This certainly applies to music, yet it is difficult to see how time could be less important when it comes to works of sound art, regardless of whether they are objects with sound on exhibit or pure sound loops. When the audience was exposed to John Cage's piece 4'33'' for the first time there were no existing interpretations. The audience sat quietly and watched a pianist who did not play, and during the course of the piece (which is exactly 4 minutes and 33 seconds) people eventually became aware that they still heard something, that it was not quiet around them, and that they were not particularly quiet themselves either. They became aware of their surroundings and at the same time sensed that they themselves were part of these same surroundings – breathing sounds, sniffing, shuffling of feet, ringing in the ears, or whatever. In addition, the premiere took place in a relatively rural setting where it was raining, with the windows open. Silence would have been impossible! This musical piece is

¹² An example of this is the work *Kangia*, where recordings are made inside a melting glacier. (Kangia is the Inuit name for *Isfjorden*, located outside Ilulissat, Greenland.) Several of her works will be released by Touch record company in 2008.

among the best examples of how both context and process are crucial in music, and that the experience of music is about listening and ways of listening over time.

The experience of room installations – not unlike the ones we have in the *Absorption and Resonance* exhibition – also takes place in time. That is, contemplation of the works increases when one takes time to sense the surface – sound – and not just confine oneself to look for references. An example of this from the exhibition is Bjørn Erik Haugen's work *Transfer*, where the movements involved in writing of a certain text were captured and recorded. The writing may be quick and spirited, slow and thorough or quite slow and ponderous. The relationship to what is written is illustrated through the way it is written. The mood and intention in the writing can only be heard during the course of time it takes to write it out, and the work cannot be understood unless one takes this time, even if you quickly grasp the idea. Sound art also unfolds in time, and the perceptible surface is hardly less important here than in music. We create the narrative when we listen and when we experience.

In attempts to put into words the experienced difference between music and sound art, references are often made to the concept of artistic practice. The argument is made that sound art is the bringing together of musical material and practice from the visual arts. Brian O'Doherty distinguishes between artistic practice for a composer from artistic practice for a visual artist in the following way.

The composer's surface is an illusion that is dressed up with something concrete – sound. The painter's surface is something real that can be used to create an illusion¹³.

In this statement, O'Doherty touches on the artist's or composer's intentions and which roles the material – sound or canvas – plays in the fulfilment of these intentions. It is claimed that when the composer begins he has an idea about a form, an abstraction, which will then be filled with sound or some other kind of note-based representation of a tonal palette. This gives the idea a concrete and sensible body that can then be performed for an audience. The artist works with concrete materials and groups them in such a way that they become greater and something other than what they were individually. This is no doubt the essence of O'Doherty's view, which works reliably well as long as we only relate to a description of a sensible surface. Yet art is always situated and experienced in a context. A knife at the butcher's does not surprise anyone in the same way as a knife under a pillow. Music teems with references outside of itself – historical, political, cultural, and of course musical. In Steve Reich's piece *Different Trains*, a voice calling out names of places has a different meaning after reading the title of the piece and understanding that these are names of well-known German concentration camps during World War II. A more subtle approach is seen in Judy Klein's *Rail Car*, which works with the same theme, although the composer's subtext for the work flashes only briefly. Therefore, the piece demands both concentration and references. A focus on the surface, in other words form, is insufficient as far as music is concerned.

In his quotation O'Doherty refers to the modernist notion that music should be free of references and thus function. Although the concept of pure form is impossible to defend without disregarding of all of processes involved with music, the idea was useful at a time when a new type of music was to emerge from the ashes of WWII. The question of form is generally framed through its opposition to context, but we can perhaps get more out of O'Doherty's quote by relating it to different types of music - those with a note-based

¹³ Feldman, M. *Between Categories*. In *Give my Regards to Broad Street: Collected Writings of Morton Feldman* Cambridge: Exact Change, 2000, p. 85.

representation and those which base themselves directly on concrete sound objects and electronic sound, not just the difference between sound and image.

In this catalogue Landy argues that what both sound art and music made directly with sound have in common is an assembling of known entities that create something new, because the references point beyond what the objects mean individually. His main point is that sound art can easily be classified as music even when made for other contexts and experiences than the concert hall. Another point made in this catalogue is by Bergman, in his text about the fact that today's types of works with sound do not allow themselves to be easily placed into existing categories. For Bergman, parts of music belong to Rosalind Krauss' expanded field, the same link between music and sound art that Landy makes. For both authors, the concept of organized sound is an important premise in this discussion.

Processes in both art and music deal with creating meaning, which is bound up with concepts, cultural references and previous knowledge – our situated sounding board. The sounding board has undergone significant changes in the course of only the past decade. Technology has become inexpensive, common, and easy to use, providing greater possibilities for more people to work with sound than ever before. Established arbiters of taste, such as record companies and large institutions, no longer define what constitutes interesting work with sound. These boundaries 'float' and the sound field is more open. This is clearly seen in electronica, where developments are so varied that they may not share any other common trait than the desire to distance themselves from 'traditional' electroacoustic music and its concert-like listening setting, similar to ensembles and orchestra music. Sound art's newfound popularity must be seen in light of these large changes. It is a child of music technology's intense dissemination and it reflects a desire to approach music from outside established conventions. This also means that the focus on craft in traditional electroacoustic music - the technical proficiency in getting at a sound's details in order to do the fine-grained work that electroacoustic music often entails - must tolerate noise. For many sound artists this kind of craft is not important, on the contrary, it may work against artistic intention where closeness and directness of expression is more important. From this perspective, a light touch of craftsmanship may be just the thing.

Absorption and resonance

In the exhibition *Absorption and Resonance*, sound is used to create narratives in an alternative manner than associative listening in traditional music. The exhibition does not define an obsolete listening situation where the mode of listening is framed beforehand - the works demand a different approach. For some works the sound quality is unimportant, for others the point lies in the surface's details. What they have in common is sound as a creator of associations, whether the work focuses on a small, intimate expression or a more broad reference to themes far beyond the museum space. It is not the sounds in themselves or their abstract progression that gives works their content - it is the works' references that are important. But the perceptible surface - sound - is the prerequisite for finding them.

Several of the works in the exhibition directly confront what sound in untreated form can tell us, each related to cultural environments. Siri Austeen presents complex and interwoven relations in Nordland County by recording sounds from everyday life and surroundings. In this way she challenges the more Romantic images of nature that are usually used to depict life in places like this. She gets close to everyday life in the county, and the project is also developed in collaboration with the local population to ensure genuineness. The work is in this way related to *Norway Remixed*, discussed above. The digital world is Christian

Bermudez's theme, and he questions our selections and focus in relation to digital reality. His choice of sounds is, as with Austeen, unmasked and direct, but where Austeen reproduces something genuine, Bermudez questions what is genuine in digital representation. In order to visualize the approach to the problem further, he turns to the bestiaries of medieval times and their pre-scientific summarization of knowledge, mythology, religion and morals.

Øystein Wyller Odden and Ewa Jacobsson critically reflect on process of creating art and the forming of its identity within the institutional art world and outside of it. Wyller Odden's work is most easily understood as a multi-faceted criticism of art institutions, elegant and paradoxical, because it depends on the very institution it critiques in order to function. He joins a fascinatingly resonant surface with critical reflection about how the institution creates and preserves meaning by transforming actions into the unrecognizable. Jacobsson explores the identity of art by pointing to the fine line between rubbish and lies. What has been thrown away once had a value, and is that value really gone? Perhaps the artist is only changing value by recycling it, the added value and meaning becoming fiction in relation to its origin – a lie? Jacobsson composes carefully for us, and the sounds speak directly without any particular studio-like paraphrasing.

The institution's treatment of art is also a problem addressed in Torvund's work, when he explores whether some of art's contents disappear when transplanting them into an institutional framework. There is no clear allegation here, as in Wyller Odden's work, since the question is presented in an open way to the audience by means of the link between video, sound and object presented by Torvund. Where Jacobsson discusses how the artist adds value and may be lying, Torvund shows us that value and thus truth is gone. Espen Sommer Eide, who installed the work *Carousel* outside the entrance of the museum, shares a focus on ritual aspects of music. He does not share Torvund's concern that ritual aspects of art are weakened through inclusion in the institution, but links history and play with tradition, and lets the body release the work's ritual conditions. His is the only interactive work in the exhibition and requires physical participation.

The shaping and composition of sound using electroacoustic techniques is characteristic for several works but is most apparent in the works by Bjørn Askefoss and Stian Skagen. During the opening of the exhibition, Stian Skagen will perform a combination of noise and noise rock, while his installation contains visualizations of the more rigidly composed spectra comprising this combination. Bjørn Askefoss uses an advanced technique for distributing sound between many speakers placed in a circle around the agora of the installation; the audience is also directed there. Both of these composers work with abstract sounds, Skagen with electronic sounding spectra, and Askefoss, with the smallest constituent parts of language – *phonemes* – which he distributes between speakers so that the audience can almost enter into the surface.

A focus on language and meaning is something that Askefoss shares with Emil Bernhardt, who approaches Ludwig Wittgenstein by assembling a montage of sounds connected with him, and reading aloud of parts of his writings translated from the German. The associations in the language combined with the sounding material create connections unachievable through reading alone - we get an impression of Wittgenstein's reasoning. A similar concern with text is found in Bjørn Haugen's work, which through a studio-like treatment of a harsh writing sound allows us to experience the movement involved in writing - its tempo, force and temper. Haugen presents written language in a form that cannot be read but must be listened

to. This approach reveals to us as much information about the intention of the text as the letters do.

One could say that the works in this exhibition *sonify* artistic ideas, and that sound is used as a material in the same way as pigments, stone, plastic, and metals. The characteristics of sound engender associations and aspects of problems not easily represented in other ways. The exhibition *Absorpsjon and Resonance* is based on this perspective, where sound and its references give surface to the artistic treatment of connections and artistic problems. The works in the exhibition encourage us to replace listening for abstract forms with listening for traces and connections, bringing to the fore sounds that would ordinarily be unidentifiable from noise. When we associate, objects are moved out of the noise to become thoughts and reflections. Sound art unveils elements and aspects of contemporary times in ways where other art forms can't reach.

Bibliographical reference:

Rudi, J. (2008) Sound and Meaning, in Rudi, J. (Ed.) *Absorption and Resonance - Sound and Meaning*, pp. 118-127. Oslo: NOTAM.