

---

# EDITORIAL

---

This issue of *Organised Sound* is dedicated to public art, a field that is changing rapidly as electronic tools and media are becoming more common among artists, and more accepted among those responsible for commissioning art. The articles in this issue are written by composers, artists, curators and academics, and range from historical overviews and curatorial perspectives to detailed descriptions of how installations have been formed to fit specific sites.

When public space becomes an arena for art, art serves purposes outside itself – it develops social spaces and signifies that our societies value things that cannot easily be assigned value. Art helps to develop perspectives on nature, architecture and human activities, and fills public space with opportunities for reflection, not with stimuli for consumption. The main interest in this issue is on art in which sound plays a fundamental role, presented in contexts where the public can come into contact with it without actively seeking it out, as in concerts, play or exhibitions.

Public space as an arena for art is not an unproblematic one, although it most often affords a much larger audience for art than dedicated spaces. The works are often placed in contexts that have been constructed for other purposes – they disturb, and are being disturbed by, other activities. The public's concentration on the works may be impaired by the fact that they are busy doing 'something else'. People might also be provoked by the art and feel more compelled to sabotage it in a setting that is outside established art contexts. There are other practical considerations to take into account as well – construction, durability and security. Some critical attitudes can be brushed off as examples of uncultured intolerance, but artists do well by considering that individuals have the right to refuse unsolicited experiences as visual and acoustic pollution. And we can turn our heads, but cannot close our ears. Furthermore, public art demands the question: Where does art belong in life as it is placed in a quotidian space as opposed to a specialist arts space?

Some of the concerns above can be disheartening for many artists, but when the art works, the rewards are great. Art breaks through and affects people completely unprimed for the experience!

One of the main characteristics of electronic art is that it is always changing. In her article in NOTAM's

publication, *Electronic Art in Public Space*<sup>1</sup> from 2004, theoretician and blogger Jill Walker proposes the following taxonomy of electronic art based on type of change:

- cyclic repetition of predefined patterns,
- generative change, developing over time in (constrained) unpredictable patterns,
- continual change, by piping in and listening to external influences, and
- interactive change, requiring conscious user input for realisation.

Sound art in public space is based on a number of approaches and content – from ecologically concerned transmissions of data from natural systems, to more chaotic issues of user interaction through use of new media – works that would not be realised without the public taking interest in them. Henrik Frisk and Miya Yoshida's article describes a work that makes use of mobile cellphone technology to investigate the notion of participation in the age of Internet and mobility. SMS messages were processed as parameters for sound generation through Max/MSP and Csound, and each new message changed the sound noticeably.

Transmitting sound that belongs in one place into another environment represents another approach that provides considerable room for artistic intent and exploration of attitudes and imagination. In his works, Bill Fontana changes urban settings through overlays of sound, and thus conjures mental images of other possible realities. In his interview here, he also explains his thoughts on music as a state of consciousness – where the listener discerns and correlates musical patterns around her, as acts of interpreting the world.

Sound installations are also used as tools for interactive – or non-interactive – explorations of principles found in nature, such as Peter Bosch and Simone Simons' multiple combinations of chaos and resonance. In their article, they describe many of their successful installations from the last fifteen years, and discuss the limitations public space imposes for appreciation of the subtleties in contemporary music.

Natural processes are also a theme in Natasha Barrett's modelling of the human immune system in

<sup>1</sup>[http://www.notam02.no/eart\\_in\\_public\\_space/](http://www.notam02.no/eart_in_public_space/)

*Adsonore*, where user interaction is processed similarly to the human body's processing of infections. The concept for this work fits its context, which is a new university building for basic biological research in Bergen, Norway. Barrett discusses the principles and technology in her work in great detail, and also shares her experiences from the more practical aspects of the process – the commissioning, building and operating phases.

Listening to people and letting their voices contribute to, and in part constitute, the artwork, is part of the idea in Cathy Lane and Nye Parry's installation *The Memory Machine*, which they describe in their article. The work was installed in the British Museum during its 250-year anniversary, and consists of recordings made of the visitors' impressions and thoughts on objects in the exhibition. The *Memory Machine* was heard at the exhibition's entrance and exit.

Laura Heon, curator at Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (MASS MoCA), provides a historical and ideological perspective on the emergence of sound art, starting off with the Futurists. MASS MoCA's exhibition *Earmarks* from 1998 is placed into this tradition, and four works from the collection are discussed in detail. The article is rich on references to other sound installations, bridging the gap to the more traditional sculptural forms by, for example, Richard Serra, realised without the use of electronics.

Overview and history is also provided by Ros Bandt in her thorough and richly illustrated comparative study of sound art in Australia. Her article draws on details from the online gallery and database of the Australian Sound Design Project, which is a unique collection of detailed data from the perspectives of the creator, the design criteria, the electroacoustic tools and methodologies, the audible sound result, and the site context.

Garth Paine discusses *Endangered Sounds*, a project that explores patented sound – 'sound marks' – and the legitimacy of privatising and protecting sounds that are released in public space. Paine's insightful critique of this oversight and possible neglect of public rights was executed as part of the installation by the playing of sound marks in a vacuum, where no sound can be heard. *Endangered Sounds* is an ongoing project, and participation is invited.

The sound installations described in this issue are all in constant change – some because user interaction has been given strong influence, others because they are making use of complex systems, constructed or in nature. Most of them focus on experience of process, rather than appreciation of a fully predefined work, and this focus on process is a challenge for the composer, who has to yield control over the sonic detail and timeline in her works. By limiting her or his role to crafting the framework for experience, rather than the precise detail, (s)he crafts processes that develop the awareness and listening skills in the audience, qualities that are needed for participation in, and appreciation of, the works. Compared to traditional composition and improvisation, this is a new position for the composer, who takes on a new and considerably larger audience by moving these processes into the public space.

The new type of space, the need to overcome limitations in the installation site, and the new type of composition, all represent challenges for the composers, and in this issue we show a few examples of how these challenges have been met. The issue is concluded with a survey article by Bob Gluck concerning the history of electroacoustic music in Israel.

Jøran Rudi  
Norwegian Network for Technology, Acoustics  
and Music  
E-mail: joranru@notam02.no