
STUDIES

Article received on November 25th 2022

Article accepted on December 13th 2022

Original scientific paper

UDC 78.01

DOI 10.5937/newso2260011C

Marcel Cobussen*

Leiden University

Faculty of Humanities

Academy of Creative and Performing Arts

THE SONIC TURN: TOWARD A SOUNDING SONIC MATERIALISM

Abstract: Since the turn of the millennium, philosophy has been enriched with a new “-ism”: New Materialism. However, as usual in most philosophical movements, this New Materialism is grounded in a visual paradigm and the existence of (static) objects. In order to further develop the ideas that contribute to a Sonic Materialism such as the ones conceptualized by – among others – Christoph Cox and Salomé Voegelin, I will present an *Auditory Ontoepistemology* as an alternative way to encounter the world.

Keywords: Sonic Materialism, Sound Studies, listening, auditory ontoepistemology, New Materialism, relationalism, human and nonhuman agents

1. Context – Personal Note

More than 20 years have gone by since I first met Professor Veselinović-Hofman at a conference in Ljubljana. We did our presentations on the same subject: music and deconstruction. Later she became a prominent member of

* The author's contact details: MA.Cobussen@kunsten.leidenuniv.nl

my PhD committee, and we both published on the potential connections between music and ethics. In more general terms, I think that our common interest was, and still is, the role that music – in the broadest sense of the word – can or should play in our contemporary society and how music studies – in all its different forms – can investigate that role and actively contribute to it.

Since my daughters told me that my preferred music sounds most of all like a broken fridge, I decided to pay more attention to the sounds of broken fridges and all the other sounds that are surrounding us on a daily basis.¹ My experience in listening to many different experimental music styles definitely helped me in not immediately rejecting most sounds as simply noise, unwanted and disruptive.

However, listening to everyday sounds also started to inform my more theoretical interest, bringing my attention to the way we (don't) shape our sonic environment. I could reflect on these sounds through musical concepts such as harmony, melody, and rhythm, but I also learned from, for example, Edgard Varèse, to think about (musical) sounds in terms of timbre, density, frequency, vibration, and resonance. And especially the latter two lead me to think of sounds, music, and our sonic environment as a complex system in which many sounding as well as non-sounding *actants* are interacting with one another.²

It is with this train of thought that this essay begins, an essay that is partly based on my latest (e-)book *Engaging with Everyday Sounds*, which could never have come into existence without a prior long journey through music, philosophy, writing, and listening, a journey upon which Professor Veselinović-Hofman has accompanied me for so many years already. Therefore, it is to her that I dedicate this text.

2. New Materialism

Around the turn of the millennium, a few new interdisciplinary, theoretical and politically committed fields of inquiry emerged, which I will subsume here under the heading “New Materialism”. Granted, this may be too short-

¹ See also my inaugural lecture from 2016, when I was appointed Full Professor of Auditory Culture at Leiden University, the Netherlands. <https://cobussenma.files.wordpress.com/2011/10/cobussen-inaugural-text.pdf>

² Echoing Bruno Latour, I prefer the word “actant” over “agent,” as it makes clearer that also nonhuman entities have agency, that is, the capacity to act and being acted upon.

sighted, as this New Materialism ranges from, for example, Levi Bryant's object oriented ontology to Karen Barad's agential realism, from Donna Haraway's situated knowledge to Graham Harman's immaterialism, and from Quentin Meillassoux's speculative realism to Rosi Braidotti's feminist philosophy.

However, what perhaps connects all these scholars is that they attempt to, first, analyze how dualisms – such as nature versus culture, matter versus mind, or human versus nonhuman – have been produced in the predominant discourses and concrete actions of modernistic philosophies and, second, to radically rethink those oppositions.³ One keyword to overcome such a dualism, mainly developed by Barad, is *entanglement*, here understood as placing humans into varying degrees of interconnection with nonhuman beings and materials. Entanglement thus comes with an ethical responsibility (or response-ability) that resides in one's response to the human-nonhuman assemblages in which one finds oneself participating.

Unpacking the term New Materialism a bit more, one could say that “materialism” can pertain to corporeality or embodiment (including embodied, practical, or tacit knowledge), to inorganic objects, as well as to technologies and nonhuman organisms, processes, and infrastructures. However, it is important – to avoid holding on to a thinking in dualisms – not to regard materialism in opposition to (transcendental) thought. Instead, emphasis should be on the active role of matter in the actualization, the taking shape or achieving form, of (philosophical) thinking. Barad calls this the material-discursive character of *all* events.

Hence, what is “new” in New Materialism is that matter is considered an active force. Matter is not only determined by but also co-productive in establishing societies, human life, discourses, and experiences. Matter, nonhuman beings, or things also have *agency*; they don't need to communicate in a human language for them to exhibit vital capacities and affects. When glaciers thaw, they speak to us: the preserved remains of skin, pollen, and clothing give testimony to events and times from elsewhere, processes and practices that would remain otherwise unknown.⁴ In short, New Materialism

³ New Materialism constitutes a philosophy of difference or immanence which “leaves behind all prioritizations (implicitly) involved in modern dualist thinking, since a difference structured by affirmation does not work with predetermined relations nor does it involve a counter-hierarchy between terms” (Rick Dolphijn, Iris van der Tuin, *New Materialism: Interviews & Cartographies*, Ann Arbor, Open Humanities Press, 2012, 86).

⁴ Mark Peter Wright, *Listening After Nature. Field Recording, Ecology, Critical Practice*, New York, Bloomsbury Academic, 2022, 111.

postulates constant interactions between matter and meaning.⁵ The material dimension creates and gives form to the discursive, and vice versa; New Materialism accounts for the material reality of our everyday existence without losing sight of the discursive dimension of that reality (as, for example, emphasized by Michel Foucault).

3. Sonic Materialism – Christoph Cox

As in most philosophical movements, New Materialism too seems primarily grounded in the visual paradigm and the existence of (static) objects. One had to wait until the second decade of the twenty-first century to discover the first traces of New Materialism emerging within discourses on music, sound, and sound art. In 2011, the American philosopher Christoph Cox published “Beyond Representation and Signification: Toward a Sonic Materialism,” and the opening paragraph of this essay immediately lays out Cox’s objectives and what he considers the main material-discursive actants standing in the way:

Why does sound art remain so profoundly undertheorized, and why has it failed to generate a rich and compelling critical literature? It is because the prevailing theoretical models are inadequate to it. Developed to account for the textual and the visual, they fail to capture the nature of the sonic.⁶

In order to make ideas on representation and signification, ideas grounded in the dominance of the visual, less prominent, Cox developed the initial contours of an alternative theoretical framework. To start with the visual: its dominance is articulated in, for example, speech (think of words like enlightenment, perspective, vision, observation, visionary, point of view, imagination, or reflection). Moreover, written texts and images need to be observed from a certain distance, thereby creating a separation between subject and object. And finally, in and through the paradigm of the visual we experience a spatial juxtaposition of actants, of human and nonhuman beings.⁷

⁵ Regarding artworks, new materialist thinkers closely connected to the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari express an interest in finding out how form of content (the material condition of an artwork) and form of expression (the sensations as they develop) are being produced in one another (Rick Dolphijn, Iris van der Tuin, op. cit., 91).

⁶ Christoph Cox, “Beyond Representation and Signification: Toward a Sonic Materialism”, *Journal of Visual Culture*, 10/2, 2011, 145. It is quite remarkable that Cox’s text was published in the *Journal of Visual Culture*; perhaps the rather provocative content of the essay was indeed better placed in a journal usually dealing with the visual than in platforms created for the sonic.

⁷ Ibid., 148.

If our interacting with the world would be grounded more in the sonic, Cox suggests, the chasm between subject and object could be rethought and re-experienced, as sound is immersive, both surrounding and passing through the body.⁸ Besides, by thinking with, in, and through the sonic, the emphasis on a spatial parallel existence of actants could be replaced by an emphasis on temporality and dynamics. Sounds are not bound to their sources as properties but may change almost continually when traveling through time and space. So, instead of founding his proposition on a world conceptualized in terms of stability and stasis, Cox proposes a sonic materialism that puts emphasis on events instead of objects, flux instead of immobility, becomings instead of beings. He replaces an ontology of objects and beings with a new sonic ontology of change and becoming.⁹

Cox's rejection of the concept of representation emanates from his reservations against the extant discourse which deals with the complex relationship between music and representation or symbolization. Through a short explanation of Kant and Schopenhauer's philosophies, both of which are grounded in an old paradigm of music as representing something extra-musical, he arrives at Nietzsche's ideas on the Dionysian and, finally, at the thoughts of Edgard Varèse for whom music should (primarily) be regarded as a play of sonic forces, intensities, densities, and vibrations, a play determined by relations of attraction and repulsion.¹⁰ Cox thereby replaces the question of what music means or represents with what it does and how it operates.¹¹

Regarding music's signification and the emphasis on its meaning, meaningfulness or recognizability, Cox mainly argues against the mediation function of discourses and interpretations. Moving beyond language, discourse, and meaning, one could pay more attention to the materiality or the nature of sound. He gives the examples of the phonograph, which simply registers acoustic events, instead of the score, which has traditionally been the focus of attention; of sound poetry, which is more about the features of the linguis-

⁸ For Cox, this body is still, almost exclusively, a human body. Later in this text I will make clear that Cox's idea can and should be expanded to nonhuman bodies as well.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 157.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 153.

¹¹ Although I fully agree with Cox's reluctance regarding, for instance, program music, I am also a bit hesitant to adopt only a modern type of formalism as an alternative. Music, for me, definitely presents (rather than re-represents perhaps) "extra-musical ideas", be they political, social, ethical, or ethical.

tic signs themselves than about what they signify or represent; and of an increasing attention to noise, which disrupts or subverts meaning and the possibility to unproblematically denote.¹²

In short, Cox's Sonic Materialism proposes a true paradigm shift in how Western philosophy and thinking in general should consider the world: not as stable, filled with independently perceivable objects, separated from the perceiving subject, but as a world in flux, an eternal becoming in which subjects (also eternally becoming) are immersed.

4. Sonic Materialism – Salomé Voegelin

In her reflections on Western culture and theories, Swiss-British sound artist and writer Salomé Voegelin demonstrates her alignment with Cox's analyses. First, Voegelin, too, argues against a visual dominance, which she connects to concepts like presence, reality, objectivity, and stability. It is not that she wants to completely do away with these concepts and the practices in which they occur. Rather, instead of holding on to the habitual reality of things – so often set within the boundaries and certainties of a language rooted in the visual, and anchored in the visual witnessing of the object itself – Voegelin would like to challenge the world's actuality and articulate a substitute of how things *could be*, presenting alternative possibilities below reality's visible surface;¹³ this is what she calls "sonic possible worlds". Second, similar to how Cox orients the sonic in a world of becoming and flux, she considers sound as a contingent materiality that cannot be captured by a noun but should be considered a verb.¹⁴ And third, echoing Cox's reservations regarding the dominance of discourses, language, and signification, she attempts to avoid starting "from a certain context and a priori knowledge about the work or the world, but suspend as much as possible ideas of genre, context, theory, and purpose".¹⁵

What Voegelin proposes as an alternative to the visual, the static, and all sorts of classification systems we employ to gain control over the world we live in, can actually be captured in one word: listening. Listening, for Voegelin, presents an alternative for almost everything she opposes: through listen-

¹² Ibid., 154–5.

¹³ Salomé Voegelin, "Sonic Materialism. Hearing the Arche-Sonic", in: Mark Grimshaw-Aagaard, Mads Walther-Hansen and Martin Knakkegaard (Eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Sound and Imagination*, Volume 2, New York, Oxford University Press, 2019, 559–577.

¹⁴ Salomé Voegelin, *Sonic Possible Worlds. Hearing the Continuum of Sound*, New York, Bloomsbury Academic, 2014.

¹⁵ Ibid., 3.

ing we are able to encounter an ephemeral materiality and an invisible, unstable, and formless sonic world. Instead of mastering and measuring the world, listening invites and encourages inhabiting, participating, and engaging with it. The listening practice that Voegelin explores and advocates does not aim to know what something really is, nor does it have a huge interest in detecting the source of the sound; instead, its main objective is to engage in the possibilities of the sonic material itself.¹⁶

Voegelin calls this openness to really engage with sounds, developing a *sonic sensibility*. This sensibility should encounter the material world, not to achieve an uncritical understanding of its processes nor to prove the superiority of sound as a material-discursive actant, but to augment and multiply the ways we can experience our being in and with this world. Instead of focusing on solid structures and being able to recognize what can be heard, the emphasis should be on a “being-with”: a being-with sounds, a being-with the world, a being-with (sound) artworks. Voegelin’s Sonic Materialism thus foregrounds a personal responsibility and participation; it foregrounds a critical and creative re-imagination of material relations and processes, thereby simultaneously offering alternatives of how things might be and how they might relate.¹⁷

Stressing notions of listening, sonic sensibility, participation, responsibility, and, particularly, being-with does have ramifications for the position of the human subject. Listening considered as engaging in the possibilities of the sonic material does not, of course, herald the absence or end of the human but does call for a more humble position. Instead of regarding themselves as masters of the world, humans should accept that they are but one sort amidst others, existing in an unstable, fluid reality of existence. Sonic Materialism announces a world inhabited by human subjects who are not at the center of that world; it is a relationalism, not of actants separate from each other, but of actants connected to each other. Sonic Materialism for Voegelin could be thought of as a vibrational texture that actants create simultaneously in their encounter with each other.¹⁸

¹⁶ Ibid., 2. The listening practice as advocated here by Voegelin is firmly rooted in experiencing sound art and experimental music and is, thus, quite specific. Besides, it is a listening confined to the human ear. Further on in this essay, I will try to present a more extensive idea of listening, an idea which is, nonetheless, deeply influenced by Voegelin’s writings.

¹⁷ Salomé Voegelin, “Sonic Materialism. Hearing the Arche-Sonic”, op. cit., 561.

¹⁸ Ibid, 565.

5. Sonic Materialism – Marcel Cobussen

Inevitably, my own thoughts on Sonic Materialism are closely related to and heavily influenced by the ideas presented by Cox and Voegelin. Therefore, in addition to a first attempt to extend the scope of Sonic Materialism, my rather modest contribution to this discourse will basically consist of a slightly different emphasis on certain aspects of their thinking. What interests me in the philosophies above – subsumed under the denominator New Materialism – is how they might contribute toward understanding the aesthetic, political, social, and ethical demands of sounds, of sonic worlds, of the role of sound in human existence, an interest in what sound *does* or *can do* instead of what it *is*, simultaneously with and apart from human actants.

5.1 Sounds do not preexist

I invite you – now and here, that is, before you continue reading and wherever you are at the moment – to listen to your environment for a moment. What do you hear? Perhaps your first impulse is to try to detect and name the sounds' sources. However, both Sonic Materialism as I understand it and listening itself go much further: our ears are capable of detecting so much more than just the origin of a sound.

Suppose you hear a car. Or, to be more precise, suppose you hear the *sound of* a car. What do you actually hear? You hear whether the car is passing by or standing still; you hear whether it passes by quickly or slowly; you hear whether it is being driven forward or backwards; you might be able to detect whether it is a small or a large car and even, if you are an expert, which brand it is or what type of engine it has.

Is that all? No! From the sonic reflections you can also deduce whether the car is being driven through a narrow or a wide street, through a green environment or between high buildings, and even whether these buildings are constructed predominantly of concrete, glass, or bricks; it is also pretty easy to hear whether the car is traversing a dry or a wet street surface, whether the surface is made from asphalt, bricks, or semi-paving, and if there is just one car or many more. In other words, when a sound moves from its source to the listener, our ears also register information about surfaces, bodies, and other sounds it intersects.

Is that all? No! There is more. The listener hears the car from a particular position: they are either outside or inside and, if inside, with windows closed or open; they listen in a familiar or an unfamiliar environment; they hear whether the sound belongs to that environment or is quite alien to it; they

listen attentively or distractedly; they hear whether or not other sounds are partly masking the car sound; etc.

And there is still more to hear. The number of cars, their brands, the street surface, and the overall environment also give a rather clear indication of the social, economic, and cultural context of the sounds. That is, through sounds and through listening to those sounds, we get access to such a context. So, once more, we always hear more than “just” sounds!

In light of the above, I question the idea of *preexisting* sounds, of sounds out of context. Sounds are co-constituted in and through their interactions with other, material-discursive actants, audible or not. Whereas the visual is tied to a metaphysics of separated objects,¹⁹ through the sonic the interrelationships of actants materialize and become perceptible. Research in and through sound is particularly suited to investigate interrelationships and entanglements, precisely because sound is attached less to its source as to the networks it lets vibrate, whether these networks are themselves audible or not. And it is exactly here that a direct link with New Materialism can be made. Besides the fact that addressing the specific listener’s position connects to Haraway’s thoughts on situated knowledge, and besides the fact that Barad and Bruno Latour have deepened the idea of a complex network of actants all acting upon one another, sound somehow *furnishes proof* that matter doesn’t refer to a fixed property of independently existing objects; instead, it refers to interactions in their ongoing materialization.

5.2 Sound produces a more extensive or inclusive idea of knowledge

As is already described by Voegelin, knowledge production in and through sound implies moving through, participating in, and interacting with an environment that is dynamic and incessantly in flux. The sonic environment is not an inactive entity, simply waiting to be investigated; it is not just raw material for human interests. Gaining knowledge in and through sound should be understood as an emergent and contingent process, unfolding through an ongoing interplay between humans but also between humans and nonhuman forms of life, elements, materialities, technologies, and sites.

In this interplay sound has double position. On the one hand, it is an actant whose potentialities only become audible while interacting with other actants: sounds vary according to their transmission, whether water, solids, or air, and whether they are reflected by glass or wood. On the other hand,

¹⁹ Don Ihde, *Listening and Voice: Phenomenologies of Sound*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 2007, 7.

sound is the medium through which actants are able to interact with one another. The resulting sonic knowledge is not (only) an acquisition of meaning but, and perhaps first of all, a continuing cumulative and interactive process of participation and reflection through experiencing spaces, places, and their human and nonhuman actants.

Some artist-researchers call this process sonic documentation or sonic journalism: in and through sound they reveal and accommodate the multiple truths and agencies that construct a site.²⁰ It is another type of participatory observation where informational knowledge is necessary yet also understood as partial and contingent.

5.3 Sonic Materialism can also be called a relational materialism

The sonic environment doesn't precede the bodily systems and/or material devices with which it is perceived. And, conversely, human and nonhuman actants partly constitute and are partly constituted by this environment. Taking these two observations together, we have what Karen Barad calls *agential realism*. In short, the medium – our ears, the microphones or loudspeakers that we use and whether sounds are propagated through air, solids, or water – through which humans perceive their sonic milieu determines what they can hear; our sonic environment is created by the technologies with which we encounter it. And, simultaneously, we co-constitute our aural surroundings as we actively participate in them, by talking, walking, or even by sitting still on a bench, breathing and reading a book.

Why can this connection between the sonic and agential realism be called a *relational materialism*?²¹ Or perhaps it is better to rephrase the question: What makes it possible to overcome the (visual) separation between subject and object, subject and subject, object and object? What overcomes this separation is the shared ability to (sympathetically) resonate, by movements of extension and penetration, by vibrating. Vibrations connect every separate entity. A relational materialism refers to that invisible field of connections within which the human body oscillates as one entity amidst other entities; all entities are potential media that can feel or whose vibrations can be felt by others. Hence, it is not New Materialism that is now resounding in sound studies. On the contrary, sound as vibration, sound as flux is in fact the harbinger of New Materialism.

²⁰ I am referring here in particular to a lecture by sound artist Peter Cusack titled "Field Recording as Sonic Journalism." <https://ualresearchonline.arts.ac.uk/id/eprint/9451/1/Cusack%2C%20Sonic%20Journalism.pdf>

²¹ According to Barad, phenomena reveal themselves *from* their relations.

5.4 Rethinking listening through Sonic Materialism

Thinking further along the lines of the ability of every entity to resonate, to affect and be affected by and through sounds, I would like to posit a resemblance between resonance and listening.²² Or, to reformulate this as a kind of provocative statement: not only living beings are capable of listening! Of course this statement only makes sense when we move beyond a more conventional biocentrism and rethink listening as the general responsiveness of human as well as nonhuman actants toward sounds. Places, bodies, objects, materials, and surfaces all have acoustic properties; besides being affected by sounds themselves, they are also able to affect other entities. They resonate, amplify, or transmit vibrations; they produce and react to vibrations, some of which we refer to as sounds. Hence, stretching current definitions of listening means that it could encompass “normal” human listening as well as physical vibrations in materials, kinetic oscillations, etc. Human listening – that is, listening with the ears and auditory centers of the brain – is only one particular materialization in a broader ontological field of vibrations that can be perceived by various bodies or various parts of the human body.

Moreover, the whole concept of listening can be expanded in another direction when taking into account that resonating with, for example, everyday sounding objects or events also means that sounds will evoke experiences and sensations connected to memories, psycho-acoustic or semantic meaning as well as geographical, biological, or sociocultural contexts.²³ This expanded notion of listening then opens up to a more generic act of engaging sonically with an environment.

In listening, the real and the imagined are combined, a process sometimes achieved with the help of technology.²⁴ Geophones, hydrophones, or EMF recorders accommodate alternative forms of hearing. We can listen to the clicks of a bat, the pulse of a distant star, or the signals of submarine life. Through these technological devices, the acoustic worlds of humans and nonhumans

²² Sound and vibration are intimately linked: at atomic level, all matter sounds all the time *because* it vibrates. In one of his speculative interviews, John Cage stated that proper receiving sets could make audible what a book, a table, or a wall sound like, not by tapping or striking them, but because it would reveal their “inner life”. Here, Cage understands things as being in constant motion, which could be interpreted as a shift from object to process.

²³ This also makes immediately clear that listening – differing across species, actants, locations, and disciplines – disrupts any universal truth claims about reality.

²⁴ Technological devices are never neutral; although they certainly extend our hearing abilities, they concurrently determine what we hear and how we hear it.

come into proximate relation, if only fleetingly. Often, the sound sources are hard to trace, giving free rein to one's imagination and sensory fictions.

5.5 Sonic Materialism is an auditory ontoepistemology

Sonic Materialism investigates, stimulates, and advocates alternative ways of encountering and knowing the world. Its focus is on a knowing in and through sound; on a sensual and bodily experience of sound, thereby pointing out the singular circumstances of each situation and each actant; on a performative understanding of the world, an understanding from within, as part of this world instead of as outside observer, reflecting from a distance; on acknowledging that our sonic environment is always also shaped by cultural, historical, social, technological, and political factors.

In my (e-)book *Engaging with Everyday Sounds*²⁵ I call this an *auditory ontoepistemology*: sounds, sounding entities, and an embodied experience of sound, sonic presence, and sonic awareness are connected to each other. It builds on a sensibility that forms the basis of an experiential truth that is not objective nor completely relative but always “partial, split, heterogeneous, incomplete, complex”.²⁶

However, as Mark Peter Wright makes very clear in his book *Listening After Nature*, both Sonic Materialism and our modes of listening should always remain critical practices as well. That is, they should always be formed and informed by the question: what am I *not* hearing? What escapes from my listening? What is withheld from my ears? Who is heard? Who is recognized? Who decides what I hear? Who excludes, and who or what is excluded? Who controls what I can listen to? Who decides how our environment sounds? Who assesses what we can hear on a daily basis?

6. Towards a Sounding Sonic Materialism

In both Cox's and Voegelin's ideation on Sonic Materialism, attention for music and sound art seems essential when accessing the sonic dimension. I completely agree with them. Performing musicians, composers, sound artists, and artist-researchers have an important role to play in the evolution and further development of Sonic Materialism. It is, among others, in and through challenging performances, in and through sonic experimentation, in and through improvisation, in and through new compositions (for example using new technologies or composing with field recordings or combining

²⁵ Marcel Cobussen, (e-)book *Engaging with Everyday Sounds*, Open Book Publisher, 2022, 35. <https://www.openbookpublishers.com/books/10.11647/obp.0288>

²⁶ Donna Haraway, “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism as a Site of Discourse on the Privilege of Partial Perspective”, *Feminist Studies*, 14/3, 1998, 589.

more conventional musical sounds with everyday sounds), in and through artistic research projects that they create new sensory fictions, new sonic worlds, new ways of engaging with sounds that lead to new interpretations, new ideas, new thoughts, new art. They are able to trigger our auditory imagination, to confront us with alternative possibilities of what could be, to make us listen patiently and quietly, and to invite us to inhabit and engage with our sonic worlds through attention and curiosity. In their practices, the material, the social, the discursive, the artistic, and the technical connect; in and through sounding art new modes of engagement can be presented and can relationality be demonstrated.

Sound art and music making are modes of thinking, modes of thinking-doing; they are affective and transformative practices, that is, not searching for what something is but what it can become, searching for not-yet-actualized forms of expression. Both explore heterogeneous, sounding and non-sounding actants and their complex relations as well as modifying those relations, establishing new experiences and alternative modes of perception through strategies of deterritorialization. In so doing, sound art and music not only affect (and are affected by) the concrete sonic environment; their products and processes also influence social, political, or institutional contexts as well as discursive, philosophical, or theoretical domains by exposing and activating the potential, the ignored, or suppressed forces of these contexts and domains.²⁷ Sound art and music always already traverse the material, the social, and the discursive; Sonic Materialism materializes in those art works, and thereby becomes a *sounding Sonic Materialism* which does the work of compensating for the silent, silencing, and silenced visual and discursive forces.

Works Cited

- Barad, Karen: *Meeting the Universe Halfway. Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2007.
- Cobussen, Marcel: (e-)book *Engaging with Everyday Sounds*. Open Book Publisher, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0288>
- Cox, Christoph: "Beyond Representation and Signification: Toward a Sonic Materialism", *Journal of Visual Culture*, 10/2, 2011, 145–161.
- Cusack, Peter: "Field Recording as Sonic Journalism", Lecture at the *Hearing Landscape Critically* meeting at the University of Oxford, 22 April 2016.
- Dolphijn, Rick; Iris van der Tuin: *New Materialism: Interviews & Cartographies*. Ann Arbor: Open Humanities Press, 2012.
- Haraway, Donna: "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism as a Site of Discourse on the Privilege of Partial Perspective", *Feminist Studies* 14/3, 1988, 575–599.

²⁷ This resonates with what Deleuze has described as "the virtual".

- Ihde, Don: *Listening and Voice: Phenomenologies of Sound*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007.
- Voegelin, Salomé: "Sonic Materialism. Hearing the Arche-Sonic", in: Mark Grimshaw-Aagaard, Mads Walther-Hansen and Martin Knakkegaard (Eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Sound and Imagination*, Volume 2. New York: Oxford University Press, 2019, 559–577.
- Voegelin, Salomé: *Sonic Possible Worlds. Hearing the Continuum of Sound*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014.
- Wright, Mark Peter: *Listening After Nature. Field Recording, Ecology, Critical Practice*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022.

Summary

This essay, "The Sonic Turn: Toward a Sounding Sonic Materialism" finds its origin in the question what certain ideas – rooted and developed in the works of philosophers who rethink issues around matter, materialism, and the relation between those two and metaphysics – can contribute to the discourses on sound studies. The essay first gives a brief introduction to some basic concepts prevailing in New Materialism, before it addresses the ideas of two sound scholars – Christoph Cox and Salomé Voegelin respectively – who have introduced the sonic counterpart of this New Materialism, Sonic Materialism. Both argue against New Materialism's strong reliance on visual culture, on visual concepts and metaphors, on a (meta)physics which is rooted in the visual; Cox and Voegelin propose alternative approaches in which sound prevails, which has ontological as well as epistemological consequences.

Taking Cox and Voegelin's reflections as point of departure, I try to further develop the concept of Sonic Materialism. In order to do so, I focus on five particular points: first, I argue that a sound does not exist in itself but only in relation to many other, sounding as well as non-sounding *agents*; two, Sonic Materialism might lead to new or other forms of knowledge, not so much aiming for the acquisition of meaning but stemming from interactive processes of participation and experiencing; three, Sonic Materialism starts from the premise that everything vibrates and that those vibrations can be felt by other entities. As such, all those entities are by definition interconnected. Hence, Sonic Materialism is a *relational* materialism; four, I claim that, if everything affects and is affected by everything else, the concept of listening should be rethought and expanded beyond living beings: listening can be considered in a more general sense as the ability to perceive vibrations; and five, Sonic Materialism's focus on an expanded idea of knowing, of knowing in and through sound, may lead to a new *auditory ontoepistemology*. This auditory ontoepistemology builds on a sensibility that forms the basis of an experiential truth that is not objective nor completely relative but always "partial, split, heterogeneous, incomplete, complex" (Haraway 1988: 589).

Most of all, Sonic Materialism materializes in art works; it thereby becomes a *sounding Sonic Materialism* and as such compensates for silent, silencing, and silenced visual and discursive forces.