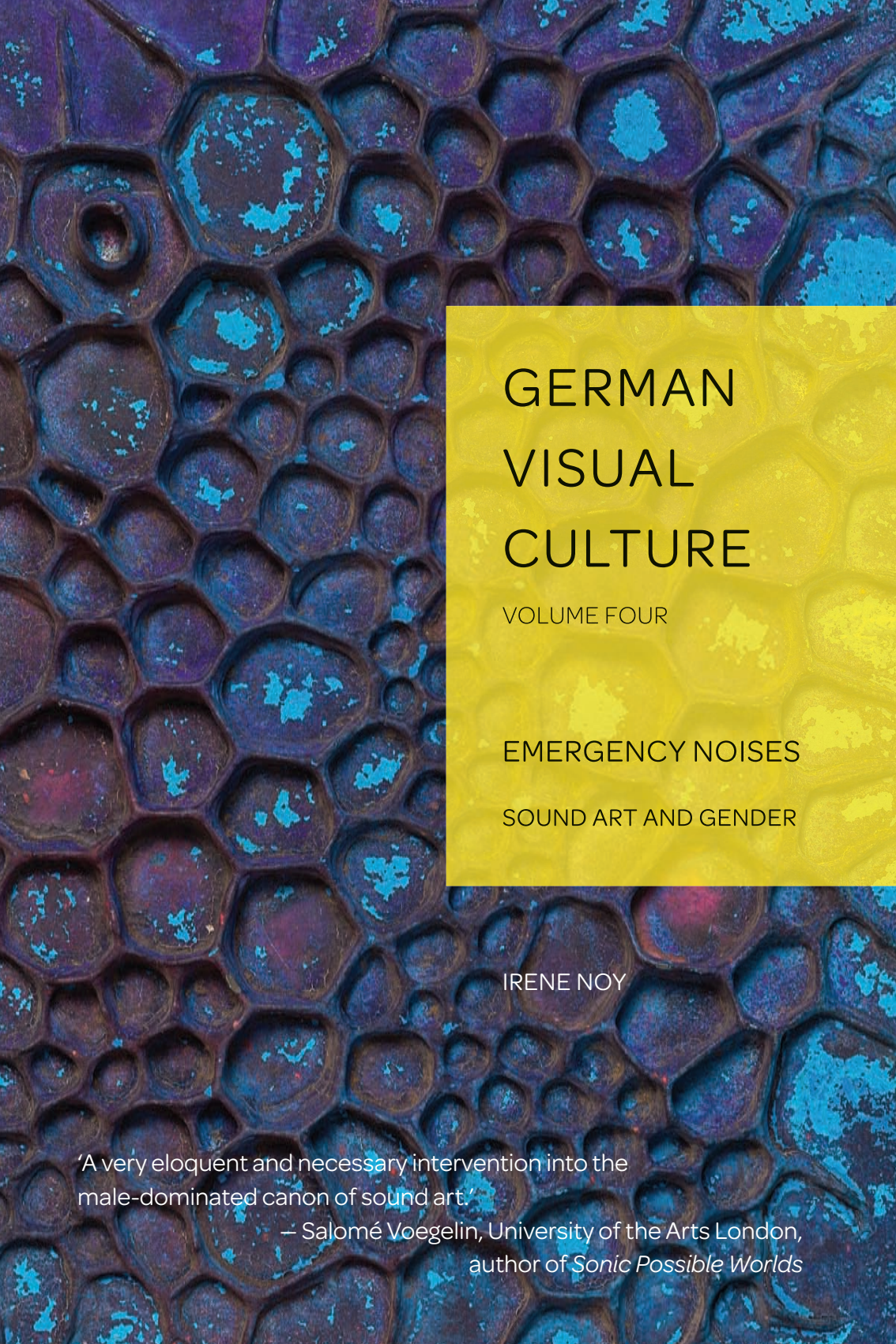

GERMAN VISUAL CULTURE

VOLUME FOUR

EMERGENCY NOISES

SOUND ART AND GENDER

IRENE NOY

'A very eloquent and necessary intervention into the male-dominated canon of sound art.'

— Salomé Voegelin, University of the Arts London, author of *Sonic Possible Worlds*

‘Gerda Nettesheim’s stainless steel kitchen sink with piano pedals, transformed in to a sound box … ! Noy’s feminist reading of German-based women sound artists is an interdisciplinary wake-up call and superbly well written: a visually and aurally powerful book.’

— Sarah Wilson, Courtauld Institute of Art

‘Noy successfully uncovers an untested area in research that traverses art history, music, German history and feminist theory. This publication effectively situates sound and listening at the core of twentieth-century “visual culture”.’

— Professor Wulf Herzogenrath, Director of Visual Arts at the Akademie der Künste, Berlin

‘A highly original, informative and enlightening study.’

— Rolf Gehlhaar, Professor Emeritus, Coventry University

Art history traditionally concentrates on the visual. Sound has either been ignored or has been appreciated in a highly selective manner within a different discipline: music. This book is about recent attempts by artists trained in (West) Germany to provoke listening experiences to awaken the senses. Their work is revolutionary in artistic terms and in what it reveals about human relations, especially concerning issues of gender.

The main focus of the book is to explore a gendered reading of the unity between the visual and the aural, a strand most prominently expressed within sound art in the period from the beginning of the 1960s to the 1980s. The book juxtaposes sources that have not been considered in conjunction with each other before and questions sound art’s premise: is it a separate field or a novel way of understanding art? The study also opens up sound art to gender considerations, asking if the genre possesses the capacity to disrupt conventional, gendered role models and facilitate alternative possibilities of self-definition and agency across genders. *Emergency Noises* brings to light the work of underrepresented female artists and explores new intersections of sound, art and gender.

Irene Noy is an art historian and a curator exploring twentieth-century aural and visual culture in Germany and Britain, particularly in relation to gender and the senses. She holds a PhD from The Courtauld Institute of Art, London, where she also completed a postdoctoral fellowship. Previously, she received her education from the University of Edinburgh, University of Bonn and University of British Columbia.

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Emergency Noises

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VOLUME FOUR

PETER LANG
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Bibliographic information published by Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek.
Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data is available on the Internet at http://dnb.d-nb.de.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Noy, Irene, 1983-
Title: Emergency noises : sound art and gender / Irene Noy.
Description: New York : Peter Lang, 2017. | Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2016044368 | ISBN 9783034319874 (alk. paper)
Subjects: LCSH: Sound in art. | Arts, German--Germany (West)--20th century. | Arts and society--Germany (West)--History--20th century. | Women artists--Germany.
Classification: LCC NX650.S68 N69 2016 | DDC 709.43/0904--dc23 LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2016044368

To listen to *His Master's Voice* by Hildegard Westerkamp (as discussed in Chapter 7), please go to our website:

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Cover image: Mary Bauermeister, *Untitled (Blue Honeycomb)*, 1958, layered paste on wood, 18 x 24 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

Series cover design by Brent Meyers. Cover design by Peter Lang Ltd.

ISSN 2296-0805
ISBN 978-3-0343-1987-4 (print) • ISBN 978-1-78707-854-3 (ePDF)
ISBN 978-1-78707-855-0 (ePub) • ISBN 978-1-78707-856-7 (mobi)

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This publication has been peer reviewed.

Printed in Germany

With love and gratitude to Anna Krakovich and Martin Neary

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Preface

Traditionally, art history has concentrated on the visual, while sound – which is perceived in a different way – has either had a highly selective appreciation in a different discipline, music, or been ignored altogether. This book is about recent attempts by artists trained in (West) Germany to provoke listening experiences – to awaken the ear. Their work is revolutionary, in artistic terms and in what it reveals about human relations, especially those where there are issues of gender.[1]

My own enchantment with senses other than sight has been a constant companion in my journey as an art historian. For me, the parameters of art history expanded from it being a purely visual discipline to one that was aural and, later, fully sensorial, during a time when I lived in Canada. There, I came across the World Soundscape Project in Vancouver, which had been making an impact since at least the 1970s. Its work made me realise that I could greatly benefit from opening my ears as well as my eyes. On returning to Bonn, in Germany, I researched art perception in art museums and chose Tate Modern – and specifically the grand space of the Turbine Hall – as one of my main case studies. A fascination with art practices and institutions consciously experimenting with sensorial perception was also fuelled by the professional involvement I had with institutions outside academia. As I worked, among others, at the Bonn Museum of Modern

1 The feminist battle of the second half of the twentieth century witnessed a forceful reinterpretation and redefinition of terms such as 'sex' and 'gender'. I discuss these terms in more details in various chapters throughout this book. One particularly helpful definition was proposed by Monique Wittig (who influenced later thinkers such as Judith Butler): 'Gender is the linguistic index of the political opposition between the sexes. Gender is used here in the singular because indeed there are not two genders. There is only one: the feminine, the "masculine" not being a gender. For the masculine is not the masculine, but the general'. See Monique Wittig, 'The Point of View: Universal or Particular?', *Feminist Issues* 3/2 (1983), 64.

Art, the *Kölnischer Kunstverein* and the Berlin Biennale, it became clear that the increasing use of technology by art galleries and artists to mediate sensorial perception meant that I would have to adapt my own way of examining artworks as an art historian.

I had to adapt many times. Whilst moving between various countries across the globe in order to study and work, I became particularly alert to the diverse links between sounds and their meanings (while employing the four very different languages I had by now acquired); and this permeated my research, and ultimately my writing. My nomadic existence also meant that I often had only audio contact for keeping in touch with my family and friends. Initially, I *heard* them more often than I saw them and voice became a simulacrum for human contact – mediated by technology, of course. Over the past decade, technology has advanced rapidly and simultaneous hearing and seeing is now something we take for granted, making human sensory contact even more essential.

Living in different countries also meant that I frequently had to question or redefine my identity – not necessarily willingly. My gender identity preceded every national, social or religious aspect of identity and it became evident that, no matter what country I was in, there were still things to be improved on in terms of gender equality, albeit to varying degrees. So, much like Virginia Woolf, famously writing back in the 1930s, I could still feel that, 'As a woman, my country is the whole world'.[2] Over the years, I have lived in Germany and researched the art world in Britain. Now, living mostly in the UK, I have written this book dedicated to artists who originated in Germany but who also travelled and explored beyond it. This outside/inside positioning, this seemingly unstable stance, is pivotal to my perspective.

The artists I am surveying have, in one way or another, tried to embrace the emotive power of sound. Since the 1980s, the term Sound Art, or *Klangkunst*, has been used to describe an emerging field which proposes new reference points between music and the visual arts. Its formation was driven mostly by developments such as reproduction sound technology,

2 Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas* (1938). Details of published works cited can be found in the Bibliography.

experimental compositional techniques, interdisciplinary practices and exhibitions; and this happened in the period of reconstruction following World War II. In West Germany, building on a rich (if disrupted) legacy, these developments were influential in both the alternative art institutions emerging across the country and the major exhibitors. On the one hand, Sound Art proposed an alternative to the concept of absolute music, whilst, on the other, its development moved in parallel to a 'dematerialisation' evident in the visual arts. Emphasis on the 'material' of sound as a source of experience outside the system of representation chimes with the historiography of the senses and feminist accounts of 'matter', such as those of Judith Butler.

Accordingly, this book juxtaposes sources from the fields of art, music, exhibition history and feminism that have not been considered in conjunction with each other before. It opens up Sound Art to gender considerations and questions its premise – is it a separate field or a novel way of understanding art? And the main thrust is to explore a gendered reading of the unity between the visual and the aural, a strand most prominently expressed within Sound Art in the period from roughly the beginning of the 1960s to the 1980s. During this time, a number of distinctive female practitioners, such as Mary Bauermeister, Christina Kubisch, Gerda Nettesheim, Monika von Wedel and Hildegard Westerkamp 'came of age' in the art world. These five individuals are the subjects of the case studies that form the core of this book. They have seldom been compared with each other and have never before been assembled in a study together. Their individual works – encompassing the media of painting, performance, sound objects and sound montages – are examined in relation to contemporary discourses and practices pertaining to Sound Art as well as to the redefinition of gender. Analysis of the dominant scholarship on the relatively new field of Sound Art, in which female practitioners were initially under-represented and underrated, is linked to a critical mobilisation of feminist theory to make the case for a gendered reading of the field. The study comes to focus on how female practitioners disrupted official gendered role models and opened up alternative possibilities of self-definition and agency for women, in the broadest sense of the term.

Acknowledgements

I am indebted to the many wonderful people who have helped this book come out, not least to Peter Lang's commissioning editor, Dr Laurel Plapp, who encouraged me to publish it, and Jon Ashby for copy-editing.

For the research and publication, I received generous funding from the Sackler Trust and the Marie Louise von Motesiczky Charitable Trust, for which I am extremely grateful. Both grants were made during my time at the Courtauld Institute of Art, which has been a welcoming habitat for me since autumn 2011. There I have met a considerable number of scholars to whom I would like to express my appreciation. I owe deep gratitude to Dr Shulamith Behr for her time and trenchant advice. I am obliged to Dr Alixe Bovey for enabling me to be part of the vibrant team at the Sackler Research Forum. Collegial support, which I have also deeply appreciated, was provided by Professors Mignon Nixon, Sarah Wilson, Dr Katie Scott and Dr Ayla Lepine. Stirring conversations with Dr Michaela Zöschg led to a series of collaborations entitled *Art History and Sound: The Listening Art Historian*, which shaped the early stages of this project.

Scholars and artists in other institutions have also offered helpful guidance, and I would like to thank Professor Simon Shaw-Miller, Dr Astrid Schmetterling, Dr Salomé Voegelin, Dr Johanna Hällsten, Dr Martin Parker, Dr Tamara Trodd, Dr Caroline Yi, Frances Carey, and Professors Cathy Lane, John Harvey, Iain Boyd Whyte and Richard Williams.

My field research in Germany was met with great interest and my appreciation goes to the artists Mary Bauermeister, Christina Kubisch, Peter Nettesheim and Monika von Wedel for kindly allowing access to their archives, without which this project could not have been realised. Contacting all the way from Canada, Hildegard Westerkamp was also very helpful and generous. Many thanks for invaluable suggestions go to Marianne Pitzen and Horst Pitzen at the Frauenmuseum in Bonn. Professors Helga de la Motte-Haber, Anne-Marie Bonnet and Dr Claudia Tittel provided equally useful advice. Complementary material was supplied by Dr

Ralf Hänsel, Hauke Ohls, Johann Camut, Carsten Seiffarth, Jutta Ravenna and Rolf Langebartels. I am truly thankful to all of them.

The time, effort and challenging remarks offered by my proof-readers Martin Neary and Brian Brooks deserve special appreciation. I am also appreciative of Dr Tami Gadir, with whom I had the pleasure to collaborate in performance and publishing, for generously commenting on various chapters.

Many thanks are due to the staff at the following institutions: the Bauhaus Archive (Berlin), the Archiv der Akademie der Künste (Berlin), the Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie (Karlsruhe), the Bonner Kunstverein, the Courtauld Institute Library, and the British Library.

Finally, I am obliged to all my friends and colleagues for the seemingly mundane everyday experiences which all fed in one way or another into what this book came to be.

CHAPTER 1

Sound Art or Sound in Art: What Matters?

Post-war decades: If you look at art, open your ears

'Sound saturates the arts of this century', states the art historian Douglas Kahn, referring to the twentieth century in one of the most influential publications yet issued on the topic of sound in the arts.[1] Though advances were already afoot at the end of the nineteenth century, they became especially evident in the decades following World War II. New trends, found, for example, in Fluxus, performance art and multimedia installations called into question the silence and fixity of visual art. Artists such as Robert Morris, Yoko Ono, Charlotte Moorman, Michael Asher and Bruce Nauman started incorporating live and recorded sound into their works from the 1960s on. Though a great amount of scholarly art-historical attention has since been devoted to their visual practices, their other sensory outputs have passed almost entirely unnoticed. Practices concerned with sonic, olfactory and tactile elements in art, have only recently been investigated as challenges to the ocularcentrism of twentieth-century art-historical criticism.[2]

The aural sense, in particular, continuously supplies context and content to the visual arts. However, both the Renaissance notion of the unity of the arts and the substitution of a modern splitting of temporal and spatial art forms crumbled during the Enlightenment, causing art historical interpretations to concentrate almost entirely on the visual aspects of

1 Douglas Kahn, *Noise, Water, Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts*, 2. Details of published works cited can be found in the Bibliography.

2 See, for example: Francesca Bacci and David Melcher, eds, *Art and the Senses*; Caroline A. Jones, *Sensorium: Embodied Experience, Technology, and Contemporary Art*; and Laura U. Marks, *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media*.

art. These interpretations have disregarded the existence and significance of aural representation, its connection to visual representation and visual aspects of the aural. In the second half of the twentieth century, there were signs of this imbalance being reassessed. From this time, the parameters of what is considered to be 'visual culture' have been expanded by interdisciplinary collaborations, the increasing dissemination and pervasiveness of technologies mediating the sense of hearing, and experimental compositional techniques that have destabilised the concepts that have dominated Western music since the beginning of the nineteenth century. These developments have also made the connections between aural and visual cultures of particular relevance to art historical enquiry. Nevertheless, despite the recent broadening of art history's disciplinary boundaries to include 'non-traditional' media as well as related fields, art historians are still primarily trained to analyse and explain the non-ephemeral or fixed dimensions of art. When visual culture approaches the transient qualities of the aural, problems of methodology and terminology arise.

As an artistic practice and scholarly discipline that highlights the crossovers between the aural and the visual, Sound Art has become one of the most prominent manifestations of a new kind of intertwining of the senses of sight and hearing.[3] Today, Sound Art can no longer be regarded as a peripheral phenomenon.[4] This is indicated by the prevalence of recent exhibitions – for example: *Sonic Boom – The Art of Sound* at the Hayward

3 When the art historian Simon Shaw-Miller wrote a review of relatively recent publications by Peter Vergo, Charlotte de Mille and Peter Dayan (all three from 2011), he categorised these as belonging to the spheres of visual culture and music, and considered them to be addressing specifically music and art. According to Shaw-Miller, this group stands in opposition to 'audio-visual studies, which tend to focus on sound and art, or sound-art'. Simon Shaw-Miller, 'State of Play: Visual Culture and Music', *Art History* (February 2013), 200–17 at 216. Although there are various interconnections between these two classifications this book focuses on the latter category.

4 Other terms such as Audio Arts or Sonic Arts have also been used, albeit with slight variations in meaning and connotation. In this book I will be using the term 'Sound Art' as a translation of *Klangkunst* throughout. I briefly outline the differences between the term in English and German in the following chapter.

Gallery in 2000; Bruce Nauman's show at the Tate Modern's Turbine Hall in 2005; *Soundworks* at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, 2012; and *Sounds: A Contemporary Score* in MoMA, 2013. On the European continent, specifically in Germany, similar exhibitions have included: *Frequenzen [Hz]: Audiovisuelle Räume* in Frankfurt, 2002; *Sonambiente* in Berlin, 2006; and *Sound Art: Klang als Medium der Kunst* in Karlsruhe, 2012/2013.[5] All of these demonstrate an increasing recognition of Sound Art. Other events at the beginning of the twenty-first century show that Sound Art has established itself securely as an independent arena of artistic expression outside, or between, the traditional disciplines of music and the visual arts. Examples include the allocation of the UK Turner Prize in 2010 to sound artist Susan Philipsz and the founding of an annual *Deutscher Klangkunst-Preis* (German Sound Art Award) in Marl in 2003.[6] A seemingly new arrival, Sound Art should not be perceived as a competitor to music or the visual arts, but rather as a force that nourishes both, and as a reaction against the stereotypical narrative that depicts the modern age as almost exclusively visual.

Technological advances, which are able to mediate the senses of sight and hearing – thereby increasingly effecting shifts in aural and visual perception – are of specific relevance to a field such as Sound Art. Nora M. Alter and Lutz Koepnick have endeavoured to find out why sound has received significant attention throughout the twentieth century. In their publication *Sound Matters: Essays on the Acoustics of Modern German Culture*, they argue that sound has become more easily produced, distilled, manipulated and controlled than ever before, and that this unprecedented proliferation of sound production technologies has led to a growing fascination with

5 English translations: 'Frequencies [Hz]: Audio-Visual Spaces'; 'Sound Ambience'; and 'Sound Art: Sound as an Artistic Medium'.

6 The *Deutscher Klangkunst-Preis* is a collaboration between Westdeutscher Rundfunk (WDR, West German Radio Broadcasting) and Skulpturenmuseum Glaskasten (Sculpture Museum Showcase) in Marl. The first prize was given to the musicologist and researcher Helga de la Motte-Haber.

the acoustic.[7] Early technical devices for recording provided opportunities for experimentation, but these were limited. It was not until the end of the 1950s that Sound Art received a new impetus, when the tape recorder entered mass production. Further popularising examples included the commercial release of Moog synthesisers in the 1960s, and distribution of the Sony Walkman in Europe and the USA at the beginning of the 1980s. These technological innovations facilitated quicker production and dissemination of acoustic artworks. They also enabled an easier bonding of aural and visual elements in works such as installations and sculptures. Likewise, the gramophone record itself became one of the most fundamental materials.[8] It was cherished both for its function as a sound carrier and for its presence and effectiveness as an art object.

The employment of these technological innovations in the post-war period led to innovative developments in composition and artistic production. In the decades following the 1960s, most Western influences have stemmed from the USA, where major institutions had already been hosting influential exhibitions, such as *Art by Telephone* (Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, 1969). The 1960s was also the decade when other relevant influences emerged, such as minimalist music, which used electronic musical instruments in the works of La Monte Young, Terry Riley and others. In later decades, Joe Jones became famous for building music machines while Andy Warhol and Raymond Pettibon drew attention to the significance of the artistic design of record covers.[9] Experimenting with new technologies, Max Neuhaus, Pauline Oliveros, Maryanne Amacher and Annea Lockwood developed 'deep listening', performed outside concert halls and (quite literally) burned pianos. Other American artists and composers such as Alvin Lucier contributed to subcategories such as sound installations. On the other side of the Atlantic Ocean, in France, Iannis Xenakis enhanced the development of electro-acoustic music. He had been doing this as early as

7 Nora Alter and Lutz Koepnick, 'Introduction' to *Sound Matters: Essays on the Acoustics of Modern German Culture*, 3.

8 Anne Thurmann-Jajes et al., *Sound Art. Zwischen Avantgarde und Popkultur*, 33.

9 Although some of the practitioners I will refer to were trained both in music and the visual arts, I employ the terms 'artists' and 'practitioners' throughout.

the 1950s and had in turn been predated by Pierre Schaeffer who, at the end of the 1940s, had been experimenting with sound-recording technology to develop what became known as *musique concrète*. Different approaches to sound and the experience of it were offered several decades later by the Austrian architect Bernhard Leitner, who also lived and worked for an extensive period in Germany. Leitner became particularly famous for his explorations of the correlation between movement in space and movement in sound.

The development of Sound Art in West Germany presents an interesting case in its own right. It has been based in alternative scenes and settings, reacting against, yet inspired by, the German legacy of the nineteenth century. Two prominent examples of these legacies are the Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk* and the innovative twelve-tone compositional method of Arnold Schoenberg. From the early 1950s onwards an expansion of listening habits took place. Compositions by prominent figures such as Herbert Eimert and Karlheinz Stockhausen, among others, contributed to this, via their use of unorthodox instruments, some of which were operated by computers. Their efforts became recognised chiefly through their work at the *Westdeutscher Rundfunk* radio station (WDR), when the Studio for Electronic Music in Cologne was founded.[10] Due to the experimental frameworks they propagated, several other cities across West Germany became internationally renowned in musical and artistic circles. For example, Darmstadt became a hub for the popular International Summer Courses for New Music. By the 1960s, radio was widely available across Europe, and radio broadcasts were both related to, and a strong influence on, Sound Art. For example, the Austrian author, artist and composer Gerhard Rühm created poems as a means of disassociating himself from 'post-fascist' ideas. Rühm's influence grew in West Germany when he moved there at the beginning of the 1960s and started developing the *Neues Hörspiel*, or New Radio Play, in collaboration with figures such as Franz Mon. Their efforts were recognised when they received support from the WDR *HörSpielStudio*

10 Radio had its time of flourishing even earlier, of course. Prominent examples include Walter Ruttmann's *Weekend* in the 1930s, which I discuss in various other sections of this book.

founded by Klaus Schöning in 1968.[11] Other prominent artists who worked there included George Brecht, John Cage, Ernst Jandl and Mauricio Kagel. On Radio Bremen there was an influential programme, *Pro Musica Nova*, initiated by the German composer Hans Otte at the outset of the 1960s. This, too, gave an airing to experimental composers. The 1960s was also the decade when numerous events and exhibitions took place, arguably related to the development of Sound Art. Examples are the *Fluxus Festival* (Wiesbaden, 1962) and events in relatively small galleries, such as the Galerie Parnass in Wuppertal.[12] Further events occurred in private studios in cities such as Düsseldorf, Cologne and Berlin.[13]

By the 1970s major art institutions had picked up on that trend and were accommodating group exhibitions where artists such as Rolf Julius, Christina Kubisch, Hans Peter Kuhn and Ulrich Eller were discovered. These figures were among several practitioners who did not consider themselves sound artists at that time but who are now recognised as the driving force of what later became known as Sound Art. Crucially, none of these artists was strongly associated with any particular discipline then prevalent, although some became linked with Fluxus. For example, happenings and artistic actions by Joseph Beuys and Wolf Vostell, who used found objects and constructed social sculptures, facilitated the emergence of some of the later sound works. This was also the case with Ben Vautier, George Brecht, Emmett Williams and Nam June Paik, who created concert scores, sound artworks and sound objects for their concerts and happenings. Mauricio Kagel was one of the pioneers in the development of experimental music and sound theatre, and these initiatives also influenced several visual artists who were active in various cities across West Germany simultaneously working with music, theatre, painting, literature and installations. By the 1980s their sound interventions, sound installations and sound objects had acquired a reputation such that they became part of the Sound Art canon.

11 This was renamed as *Studio Akustische Kunst* ('Studio for Acoustic Art') in 1991.

12 For example, in 1963 the gallery in Wuppertal presented the works of Nam June Paik in an exhibition entitled *Exposition of Music – Electronic Television*.

13 I will elaborate on related events in these cities in Chapter 3.

Despite these vital contributions to the intersections between the aural and the visual, Sound Art in Germany was often perceived as artistically distinct from what was occurring in other influential countries in the West.[14] This meant that Germany's role was insufficiently represented in the exhibitions and research that came to constitute Sound Art's canon. In their comparison between the English term Sound Art and the German term *Klangkunst*, Andreas Engström and Åsa Stjerna attribute this situation to several factors, but especially to the domination of the English language over German in research.[15] Moreover, Germany's unfavourable status after World War II meant that, even amongst Germans, there was a turning away from their national culture in favour of influences from abroad. Yet, it is difficult to set clear geographical and temporal boundaries between the artistic activities outlined above. Artists travelled and migrated abroad and influential events took place simultaneously in various locations. For example, in West Germany, figures such as the gallerist René Block, who was employed by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), invited numerous American Fluxus artists to the country in the 1960s. In turn, many artists and experimental composers from West Germany, such as Karlheinz Stockhausen and Mauricio Kagel, travelled widely, exhibited and repeatedly gave concerts abroad.

Despite political disgrace and the complexities of the post-war era, works created in West Germany continued to receive exposure. Male visual artists such as Gerhard Richter, Georg Baselitz, A. R. Penck, Markus Lüpertz, Sigmar Polke, Jörg Immendorff, Anselm Kiefer and Hans Haacke, to name but a few, were making headlines with the startling stances they took, confronting their country's Nazi past and challenging the pervasiveness of American abstract expressionism. What is particularly relevant in this context is the fact that in the post-war period, male domination proved to be cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary. An uprising against

14 It is worth noting that this publication focuses on Western understandings of Sound Art, in particular as they came to be expressed in West Germany, as opposed to tendencies which developed simultaneously in places such as Japan, Taiwan and China.

15 Engström and Stjerna, 'Sound Art or *Klangkunst*? A Reading of the German and English Literature on Sound Art', 17–18.

male primacy over the arts ran in parallel with the enormous upsurge of the women's liberation movement. This led to the recognition of several female artists in West Germany in the 1970s and 1980s. Active mainly within the medium of performance, these included figures such as Rosemarie Trockel, Ulrike Rosenbach, Rebecca Horn, Friederike Pezold, Katharina Sieverding, and Isolde Wawrin.[16] With their distinct artistic language, most of these practitioners confronted women's under-representation in the arts and the misrepresentation of the female body. Yet in art history – a discipline that thrives upon the sense of sight – these feminist artistic propositions, and especially their musings on the body, were analysed chiefly from a visual perspective.[17]

Materiality: A core theme

The controversial representation of the female body, and the symbolic system on which it was based, played a crucial role in the second feminist wave. To a great extent, the debate focused on Western notions of agency – that is to say, subjectivity – which have been preoccupied with thinking about the body as the locus and symbol of sexual difference.[18] Yet it was precisely this self-consciousness and agency that were denied to women by Lacanian theory in the symbolic realm. Seeking to formulate the difference between himself and the objects of his discourse, Jacques Lacan famously stated that '[...] they [women] don't know what they are saying,

16 It is also worth mentioning the prominent contribution of women writers such as Ingeborg Bachmann and Elfriede Jelinek.

17 There are numerous publications dealing with gender theories and visual representation, particularly of the female body, such as: Susan Rubin Suleiman, ed., *The Female Body in Western Culture: Contemporary Perspectives* (1986); Amelia Jones, ed., *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader* (2003); and Fiona Carson and Claire Pajaczkowska, eds, *Feminist Visual Culture* (2000).

18 Suleiman, *Subversive Intent: Gender, Politics and the Avant-Garde*, 141.