

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Indeed, in 1989, Dan Lander, the Canadian artist credited with inventing the term sound art, lamented that, in comparison with the visual arts, sound art lacks “any substantial critical discourse.” Nearly two decades later, Landers assessment remains on the mark.

[Cox 2007: p.127]

In this research paper I agree with Lander and have taken the view that a lack of critical discourse is true of sound art in Johannesburg too. Therefore, this study is an attempt at a critical review, of sound art in Johannesburg, between 2005 and 2009.

I begin by unpacking its history, examining LaBelle’s proclamation that the history of sound art runs parallel to site-specific art beginning in the 1960s. I look at Belinda Blignaut’s *Poster* (1995), proposed by James Webb as South Africa’s first sound artwork to enter the gallery space [Webb 2006: <http://www.onair.co.za/mn/isea_newsletter.htm> accessed 04/08/09] in comparison to the use of the term “sound art” by Lander in 1989. Thereafter, I propose a number of reasons for the recent popularity of sound art in Johannesburg namely: sound as a universal medium, the relative inexpensiveness and immediacy of the medium and the rise in popularity of the home computer in the 1990’s.

Following from this discussion, I consider audio culture as a whole and locate sound art within a range of sonic practices. I then explicate the structure of the sonic event in relation to the sonic landscape, sonic matter, recording, playback and transmission after which I lead into a comparison of sound, silence, noise and music as likely partners. I have defined sound art as a distinctive discipline in Johannesburg and discuss sound projections, the spatial politics of

Johannesburg with reference to the underground, the surface and the edge. I then conclude the first chapter by proposing a model for the analysis of a sound artwork.

1. A BRIEF HISTORY OF SOUND ART

Over the past half century, a new audio culture has emerged, a culture of musicians, composers, sound artists, scholars, and listeners attentive to sonic substance, the act of listening, and the creative possibilities of sound recording, playback and transmission. This culture of the ear has become particularly prominent in the past decade, as evidenced by a constellation of events.

[Cox 2006: p.XIII]

Sound art as a specific genre and mode of production in Johannesburg is to a large degree still in its infancy. The poverty of the literature that deals specifically with sound art, attests to this. However, the tables are beginning to turn. In Johannesburg the last five years has seen a popularization of sonic practice entering the domain of the visual, as this research will show. The “events,” responsible for the recent popularization of sound art are many. Three pivotal factors that I propose include firstly the “shift in the sensorium,” [Ong 1991: p.47-60] secondly the popularity of the home computer and thirdly, the relative inexpensiveness and immediacy of sound as a medium.

Sound art in Europe and North America developed alongside site-specific practices “that questioned the system through which it would pass.” [Reiss 1999: p.70]

The artistic developments of the 1960’s introduce a question of phenomenology and presence alongside social and political concerns, demanding that art become indistinguishable from life and that objects take on relational dialogue with people.

[LaBelle 2006: p.XII-XIII]

From this assertion, Brandon LaBelle (1969-) then begins to link the history of sound art with site-specific practices such as land art, installation art and performance art. [LaBelle 2006: p.XI] With reference to Ong, the recent popularity of the acoustic is described by Cristoph Cox (1965-) and Daniel Warner (1955-) as a “shift in the sensorium disposing the visual from its millennia-old hegemony and giving way to an immersive experience exemplified by the auditory.” [Cox 2006: p.XIII]

Cox describes this as “the culture of the ear” [Cox 2006: p.XIII] and LaBelle calls it an “enlarged acoustical mirror.” [LaBelle 2006: p.XVI] Both theorists, albeit at times indirectly, attribute this shift from the visual to the aural to electronic innovations in digital media. [LaBelle 2007: p.280] There are a number of reasons for this. The tape recorder allowed musicians and artists alike to work “concretely” with sound as opposed to using notes and scores. [Cox 2006: p.XIII] The Magnetophone was the first recording and playback device that was developed by the German cartel AEG/Telefunken in 1933, thereafter, tape recording took off. [Carnes 2007: p.60]

Sound became conspicuously the medium and acousmatic listening, a concept formulated by Pierre Schaefer (1910-1995) “viewed” sound as separated from its original visual or auditory context and in my perspective, the idea of “sound-as-such,” [Cox 2006: p.XIV] would not have gained as much popularity without the invention of the tape recorder. Sound in this sense is raw material.

Digital culture in terms of sound reaffirmed the effects of electronic technologies of the past such as sound recording and audio tracking. Today’s home studio gives its user the ability to record, observe in fine detail, edit and distribute widely to an online community and conversely access a vast archive of recordings. [Cox 2006: p.XIV] The history of the home computer and the Internet are influential factors in this respect, but are beyond the scope of this study.

More significant is the exponential growth of personal computer users and consequently the ability to work with sound.

In 2006, James Webb (1975-) credited Belinda Blignaut's *Poster* (1995) with being the first sound artwork in Johannesburg to enter the gallery. [Webb 2006: <http://www.onair.co.za/mn/isea_newsletter.htm> accessed 04/08/09] If we consider the artistic developments of the 60's and 70's, the tape recorder of the 80's and 90's, the popularity of the personal computer and relative inexpensiveness of the medium in the 90's until today, we can trace a lineage for sound art in Johannesburg back much further. Even though following Webb, it might not have entered the gallery until 1995.

We know that there was a pronounced literary development, in the form of artist's books in South Africa that David Paton (1960-) traces back to the mid 60's. [Paton 2000: p.37] If we take Leonardo da Vinci's (1452-1519) view that poetry is "a kind of 'blind painting'" [Mitchell 1986: p.116] and the propensity for artists books during the 1960's to be "self consciously unconventional in spirit" [Paton 2000: p.37] then perhaps this is the beginning of sound art in Johannesburg through orality and poetic defiance.

Sound art takes many forms: sound installation, performances, recordings, whether for direct public consumption, or as purchasable object to listen to domestically, interactive pieces, pieces designed for headphone use, transmission of sound (often from other locations). Each of these have many variants. The sound source could be the most important factor, or the process of listening it establishes. Sound art is not just sound working as art.

[Hegarty 2007: p.169]

Sound can be an accompaniment of a visual experience. Video and animation art, installation art, performance art, and sound sculpture, to name but a few, all make use of sound in relation to visual components. This is important for two reasons. Firstly, this means that the history of sound in the visual arts, predates

Poster (1995), William Kentridge's (1955-) animation for projection, *Felix in Exile* (1989), being an obvious example. Secondly, the notion of sound art being self-referential becomes less suitable when discussing the use of sound as a medium in art. The multiple lines of sound's transmission that I refer to later, relates to Hegarty's proposition that "sound art takes many forms" [Hegarty 2007: p.169] and therefore, many of the works I discuss are not exclusively sonic.

The importance of the experience is central to the understanding of any sound artwork, in that sound is spatial and temporal. However, there is no ideal experience as Hegarty suggests. [Hegarty 2007: p.169] Sound art can take many forms of distribution or lines of transmission. Therefore, production and reproduction are closely linked and documentation is vital for the survival of a sound artwork and can often be an end in itself. Paul Crowther asserts:

Walter Benjamin famously claimed that the mechanical reproduction of images [and sound] destroyed the "aura" of original works by making them available in times and places other than that defined by their immediate physical presence. This theory is demonstrably false. Indeed the exact opposite is true. Far from negating the aesthetic impact of the original work, mechanical reproduction has amplified it to the highest degree.

[Crowther 2008: p.169]

Photography, video documentation, recording and re-recording are in this sense, forms of "reproduction rather than documentation." [Reiss 1999: p.XVI]

2. AUDIO CULTURE

Audio culture or "the culture of the ear" includes a diverse range of practices such as music, sound engineering and sound art to name but a few. All depend on the ear and therefore I will look at the mechanics of hearing and thereafter unpack various modes of listening with the aim of locating sound art within a range of auditory practices.

Hearing ▶ The multiple lines of transmission through which sound art can be broadcast, point us to reception and central to the reception of sound art, is the ear. The body, through the ear, is the means by which we hear sound. Hearing is a physiological condition. [LaBelle 2006: p.158]. The body can position itself through sound by echolocation or radar and through hearing; the body can determine the position of the source of sonic events. There are four known methods that our ears use to do this, apart from using visual cues. [see Truxal 1991: p.195-198]

- Firstly sound reaches one ear before the other. If it reached the left ear before the right, then the source of the sonic event is from the left and vice versa.
- Secondly, in a similar fashion as mentioned above, there is a phase delay between the left ear and the right ear. If the sound waves entering the right ear are slightly delayed, then the source of the sonic event is from the left.
- Thirdly, the head creates “sound shadows.” A sonic event from the left leaves the right-hand-side of the head in a sound shadow. Ears are sensitive to this and the side that is in shadow opposes the direction of the sound source.
- Lastly, the path that the sound takes to reach the eardrum, within the ear canal also determines the direction of the sounds source. “There are actually many different paths, since the sound does not bend around obstructions. The signal at the eardrum is a combination of all of these different signals.” [Truxal 1991: p.198]

Listening ▶ Sound artists often have a very different way of listening than musicians, sound engineers or other sonic practitioners for that matter. However, modes of listening for sound artists are not fixed and there are a number of modes, which the sound artist draws from. These multiple modes of listening cannot all be covered in this study and therefore I have described the

three primary modes, most relevant to the subjects that I am dealing with. These include firstly spatial listening, secondly pure listening and thirdly hands-on-listening.



1. A two-horn location system at Bolling Field, U.S.A. (1921)

- Spatial Listening. For this mode of listening, sounds are spatial. Sound artworks activate space in particular and considered ways. Firstly, the sound could be designed for a stationary listener, as is the case with *Musique Concrète*, “creating a ‘virtual’ acoustic space.” [LaBelle 2006: p.73] Secondly, the sound could be designed for a moving body in order to “generate spatiality,” as is the case with La Monte Young’s (1935-) work. [LaBelle 2006: p.73]. In the first case, sounds pan from left to right, fade in and out, echo and reverberate to create the illusion of spatiality. In the second case, the sounds change as the body moves through actual space and each listener experiences the sound according to the path they follow. Both modes of spatial listening are forms of deep listening where sound is “an environmental condition.” [LaBelle 2006: p.158]

Deep listening then develops into inclusive listening where “many places at once are treated as one rather than many” [Oliveros 2001: p.158]



2. Berhard Leitner. *Sound Space Sculpture*. (1968-1973)

- Pure Listening. This is also known as listening without seeing or “blind listening.” [López 2001: p.82] In this mode of listening, the sonic event is separated from that which makes it. The ear is separated from the eye. Pierre Schaefer calls it acousmatic listening, a concept derived from Pythagoras (570-480BC):

The disciples of Pythagoras who, for five years, listened to his teachings while he was hidden behind a curtain, without seeing him,

while observing a strict silence. Hidden from their eyes, only the voice of their master reached the disciples.

[Schaefer 1966: p.76-77]

This mode of listening seeks the “inner-worlds of sounds.” [López 2001: p.85]
The sonic event is non-representational, a sound for its own sake. Michael Chion calls this reduced listening or “listening for the purpose of focusing on the qualities of the sound itself.” [Chion 1994: p.223]

Live completely alone for four days
Without food
In complete silence, without much movement.
Sleep as little as necessary,
Think as little as possible.

After four days, late at night,
Without conversation beforehand
Play single sounds.

WITHOUT THINKING what you are playing
Close your eyes, just listen.

[Stockhausen 1968 p.64]



3. Rolf Julius. *Music for the Eyes*. (2003)

- Hands-on Listening. In this mode of listening, “the distinction between sound producers and sound reproducers is easily blurred.” [Oswald 1987: p.134] A range of electronic manipulation of recordings allows for an “interpretive” mode of listening, the listener is not passive but by manipulating electronic equipment, becomes a “participant listener.” [Gould 1984: p.122] Interpretive listening is a somewhat diluted understanding of hands-on listening. In its most concentrated form, it is called “active listening” or what Roland Barthes (1915-1980) calls “Listening that speaks.” [LaBelle 2007: p.16-17] The listener and the sounds he/she make unintentionally are the sound artwork. One is made explicitly aware of this when listening to *John Cage meets Sun Ra* (1987), as one of many examples. There are breaks in the music, at first one asks, “What happened to the music?” You check whether or not the song is still playing and find that it is. You wait. One minute passes and still nothing. Perhaps you pour yourself a glass of water and upon closing the tap, the music begins again. You realize that, for that brief period, you were the music.
- Adequate Modes of Listening. The sound artist’s mode of listening is ideological, in that it develops in congruence to the “set of opinions belonging to a social group,” [Stockfelt 1997: p.92] which is in our case the art community of Johannesburg, its sonic practitioners and critics. The discourse of sound art has a bearing on the mode of listening. Listening is framed by critics, consumers and a community of sound artists alike, which positions and to a certain degree determines, how to listen and what to listen for.

Ola Stockfelt (1953-) calls this an “adequate mode of listening.” [Stockfelt 1997: p.91] A sound artist’s ear has in this case developed to what is relative to sound art as a “genre.” Sound artists are attentive to different sets of concerns, but are not entirely dissimilar to other audio practitioners. In this sense, many of these modes have been appropriated or borrowed from musicians, sound engineers, composers and a multitude of acoustic practices and incorporated into the sound artist’s vocabulary. By way of example, a sound artist can work with

music but is largely interested in how it moves through space and its materiality as opposed to its melodies or harmonies.

Technically speaking musicians, composers, sound artists are all audio practitioners. However, the nature of the practice and medium is fluid and unfixed. Through appropriation, cross-referencing and cross pollination, generally, sound artists are often less concerned with a pure utilization of the medium as they are with its ability to easily be attached to, or intertwined with, other practices such as installation art, sculpture, performance or site-specific work. Therefore, modes of listening for sound artists tend towards sociality and hybridity. There is not a singular mode but rather, when listening to a sound artwork, spatial, pure and hands-on-listening are equally important considerations. Furthermore, sound art lends itself well to collaboration, assimilation, and interdisciplinary practice. By implication, critical discourse and breadth of audience is as diverse and varied.

Stockfelt does however not attempt to define the elements that compose sound art as a “genre.” I would therefore like to unpack some of the primary components of sound art as a “genre” by way of a comparative analysis, drawing from a number of texts that allude to sonic elements. There are three fundamental concepts: The first is the sonic event, second is the sonic landscape and third is sonic matter. These are primarily related to the materiality of sound. While unpacking the idea of sound as material, I will also refer to technological implications such recording and playback.

3. THE SONIC ELEMENTS

The Sonic Event ▶ “Sonic” is sound, be it musical, noisy or so-called silent. “Event” implicates and locates the particular sound within a temporal and spatial context. The temporality I refer to is the historical context that, in the case of this study, is predominantly within the past five years, but also refers to the duration

or length of a specific sonic event. The broad spatial context refers to Johannesburg and then, more specifically, the exact location of particular sound artworks within the city. Sound artworks are sonic events but sonic events are not necessarily sound artworks. The sonic event is any sound made by anything. The aim of this study is to focus in on the specific sonic events made by the sound artist, called sound artworks – small aural explosions in the urban soundscape of Johannesburg.

An exercise I took part in during the 24-Hour Workshop (2005), hosted by South African Artist Christian Nerf (1970-) is a rather apt example when comparing the sonic events within the sonic landscape. In the exercise, a painting was placed on the wall and artists were invited to add layers of paint to the pre-existing painting. My layer was a response to the pre-existing layer and the next artists layer was a response to mine. The sonic landscape of Johannesburg (discussed below) is spatially something like this canvas, unsilenced but constantly and inconsistently morphing. Sound artists create sonic events that are layered on top of the sonic landscape however, unlike the marks on the canvas, the sounds are ephemeral (unless recorded), opaque and in motion. The sounds bounce off transforming arrangements and radiate from various positions – surround sound.

The sonic event, for a sound artist, is in some ways comparable to making a mark on a canvas, although the canvas in this case is by no means completely white. Here, I would like to refer to an exercise I took part in during the *24-hour Workshop* (2005), hosted by South African artist Christian Nerf (1970-). An abstract painting was placed on the wall and participants were invited to add layer upon layer to this painting. My layer was in response to the pre-existing layer and the next artist's layer a response to mine. Johannesburg is spatially something like this canvas, and has a given sonic landscape at any moment, unsilenced but constantly and inconsistently morphing. Sound artists create sonic events that are layered on top of the sonic landscape however, unlike the marks on the canvas, the sounds are ephemeral (unless recorded), opaque and in motion.

I provide a specific analysis for the analysis of a sound artwork later on in this chapter under “analysing a sound artwork,” what is however more important to understand at this point is the idea of sonic events made by sound artists are responses to the pre-existing layer of sound in the city namely the sonic landscape.



4. La Monte Young, *The Well-Tuned Piano*. (1964)

The sonic event can also have a physiological affect on the listener. In *The Well-Tuned Piano* (1964) by La Monte Young, the artist: “...make[s] a catalogue of intervals and the feelings they produce, so as to be able to calculate a measurable effect that could be made on the listener.” [Mertens 1983: p.310]

Lastly, The meaning is embedded in the process of sound making itself. For the sound artist, sound is distinctly and decisively the medium. The mechanisms of sound making operate on intentional acts like: button pressing, subtle tweakages, line drawing and sound cuttings. Simultaneously it can, and usually does, utilize and encourage the element of chance. From sound searches and unlikely discoveries, recorded mishaps and the happy mistake, to needle dropping, instrument burning, random selections and arbitrary movements; all sources of sound. The relationship between contingency and intentionality in terms of sound is a complex one, but mutually beneficial nevertheless.



5. Guy Tillim. *View of Hillbrow looking north from the roof of the Mariston Hotel.* (2005)

Sonic Landscape ▶ The sonic landscape or “soundscape” [Schafer 1973: p.29] is the given range of sounds emitted continuously within, in this case, Johannesburg. The residents of Johannesburg all contribute to this haphazard composition of amalgamated sonic events within their city. This could be intentional communications or unintentional results of everyday actions. It is specific to Johannesburg in that it is shaped and moulded by its various forms:

architecture and objects such as people, vehicles etc. within multi-dimensional spaces. The sonic landscape and the sonic event can be likened to the way that a still life, for example, drawn by a group of students, changes according to different points of view depending on where they place their easels. Sound artists listen, draw inspiration from what they hear and send out responses. The artist's response to the sonic landscape and events within the landscape is what I refer to as a sound artwork.

Furthermore, there is a distinction to be made between the Hi-Fi and the Lo-Fi sonic landscape. "The Hi-Fi system is one in which discrete sounds can be heard clearly because of the low ambient noise level." [Schafer 1973: p.32] The sonic landscape of the city and its mechanical noises disrupt and dilute the subtle and minute sonic events and therefore, the sonic landscape of Johannesburg is a Lo-Fi system where "individual acoustic signals are obscured in an over-dense population of sound." [Schafer 1973: p.32]

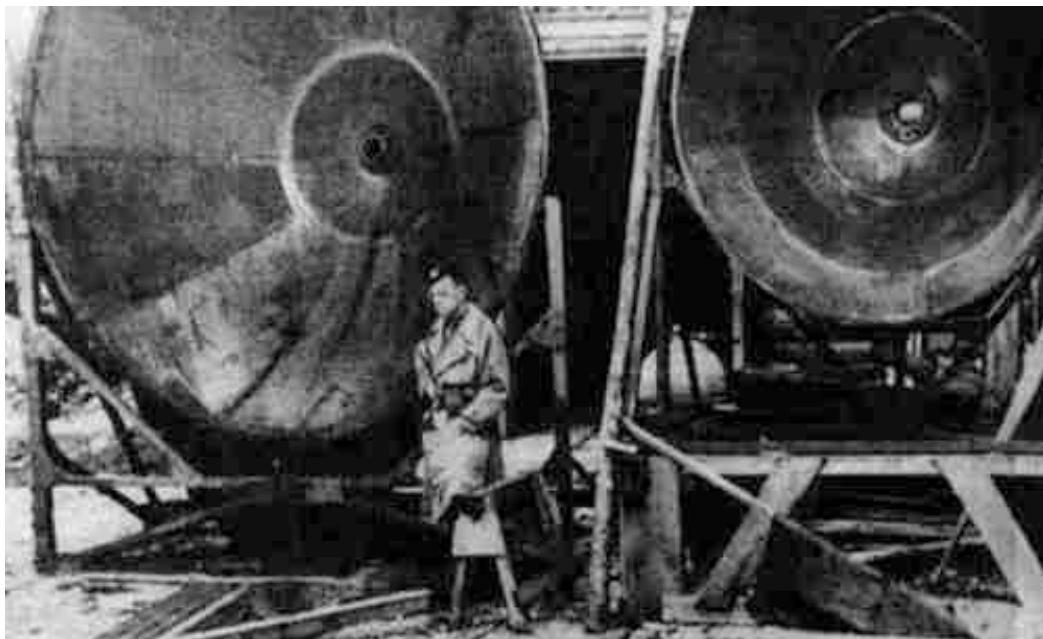
Sonic Matter ▶ Sound and space have a complementary relationship. As we will see in the analysis of a sound artwork, both sound and space are the medium. Having discussed the sonic landscape of Johannesburg, here I would like to look at the materiality of sound demonstrated through recording and playback.

- Recording. "The effect of recording is that it takes music out of the time dimension and puts it in the space dimension," [Eno 1983: p.127] and also captures the serial flow of time. The sonic event is projected into space by the transmission device and hereby, recording presupposes playback and transmission that are both manifest through time.

Furthermore, recording captures sonic events within the sonic landscape and "breaks the contextual link" [LaBelle 2007: p.30] between the sound and that which makes it and between the sound and its impermanence. This recorded sample is called sonic matter or sound material – anything that can be squeezed

though a microphone input and saved, is sonic matter. Recorded sound is raw material. In this regard, artists might want to record a specific sound and even make it themselves or simply record sounds at random. Sonic matter is malleable and can be shaped or sculpted, cut and pasted together, inverted or reversed, composed and arranged using a multitude of tools at the sound artist's disposal.

- Sound artworks are sonic events are often manifested through playback. By pressing play, the sound artists I discuss, engage in a kind of site-specific auditory dialogue with the sonic landscape of Johannesburg. A speaker is a sound transmission device and is the mechanism through which recorded sound is played and propelled or projected into space. It can take a private form through headphones or a public form through loudspeakers. The speaker is motionless without being literally connected to a playback device. This device plays recorded sound in various formats and sends signals to the speaker that recreates the sound through its vibrations. [Hood 1999: p.305 also see Watkinson 1998: p.159]

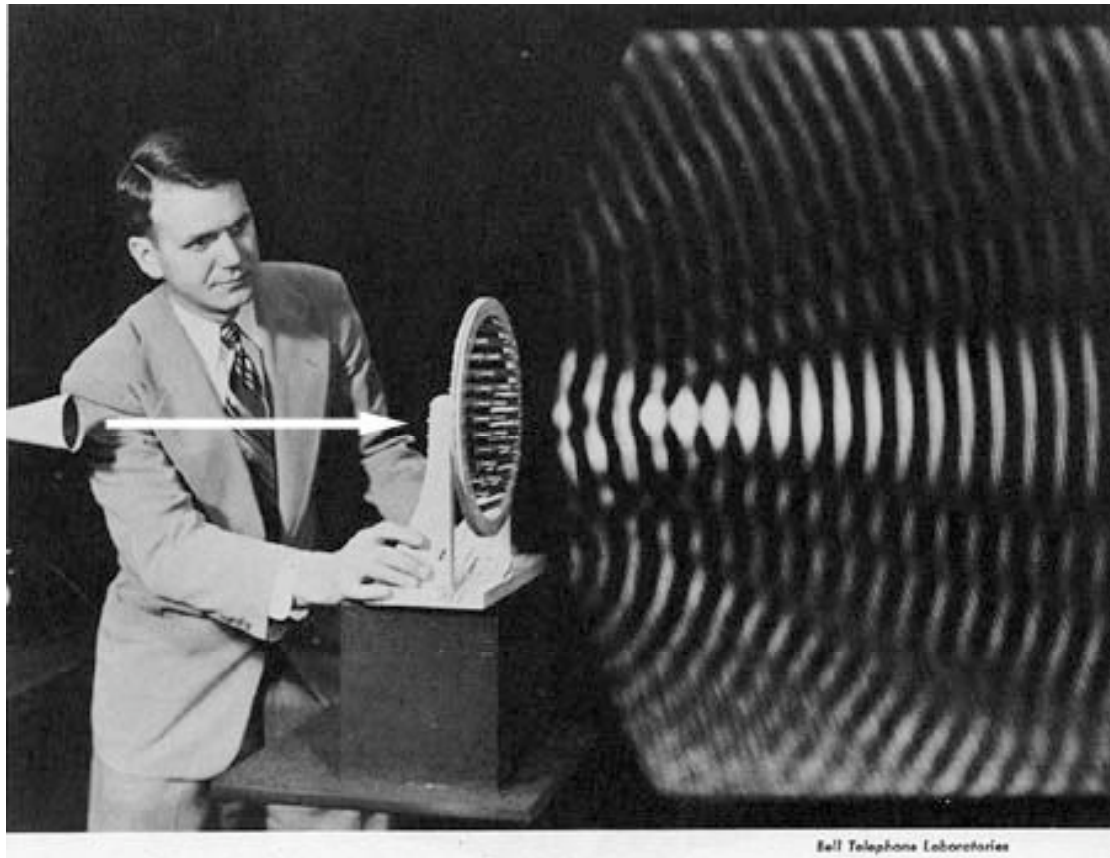


6. *German Schallkanone*. (1944/5)

4. SOUND, MUSIC, NOISE AND SILENCE: A LIKELY COMPARISON

In many ways, this study was initiated by questions that I was asking myself in my earlier years of study in relation to sound art. I needed clarity. Furthermore, I assumed that if I was asking myself these questions, then it could only follow that the majority of individuals interested in this medium would be asking themselves the same. The first of these questions revolve around finding a working definition for sound, music, noise and silence. I have provided some provisional definitions but they are not at all fixed or final in any way and should rather act as a starting point. Furthermore, the definitions overlap, interrelate and even contradict each other. Nevertheless this preliminary engagement aims to summarize each subject in order to give a clearer sense of what I wish to address.

Sound ► There are two ideas about what sound is. Firstly, a vibrating body “such as a tuning fork or string” [Cogan 1976: p.435] produces sound waves. The sonic landscape of Johannesburg is an amalgamation of vibrating bodies that are sound producing. Music, noise and silence all consist of sound as “any type of pressure wave.” [Deeson 2007: p.430] Secondly, sound itself is all that can be heard [Cowell 2002: p.23] and *also* a simple sensation in the brain or “a sensation produced when hearing waves of sound.” [Deeson 2007: p.430]



7. A Visible Pattern of Sound Waves. (1960)

It is not a negative or positive quality but rather forms the plane on which sound and “silence” interrelate and intersect, giving space for form and formlessness to coexist. It is similar to light and darkness where the atmosphere is the plane on which these two properties jubilantly generate an image that the eye, or in our case the ear, then absorbs and interprets. [See Hegarty 2007: p.167]

There are two units of measurement primary to the understanding of sound. First is the decibel, written: dB. The decibel is related to the measure of sound level or magnitude. It is related to loudness in that 0dB is usually set to the threshold of human hearing: 5dB are barely audible and 140dB are very loud and even painful – such as a jet engine. [Talbot-Smith 1995: p.20] Secondly the frequency of a sound wave is the measurable quantity of pitch and is measured in Hertz, written Hz. The frequency range of human hearing is approximately 20-20,000Hz; lower frequencies have a lower pitch and higher frequencies have a higher pitch. [Talbot-Smith 1995: p.24]

Sound waves are further divided into two categories: periodic and aperiodic. Whereas periodic vibrations are constant and are usually related to tone, harmony and consonance, aperiodic are irregular waveforms and related to noise, and dissonance. [Watkinson 1998: p.21]

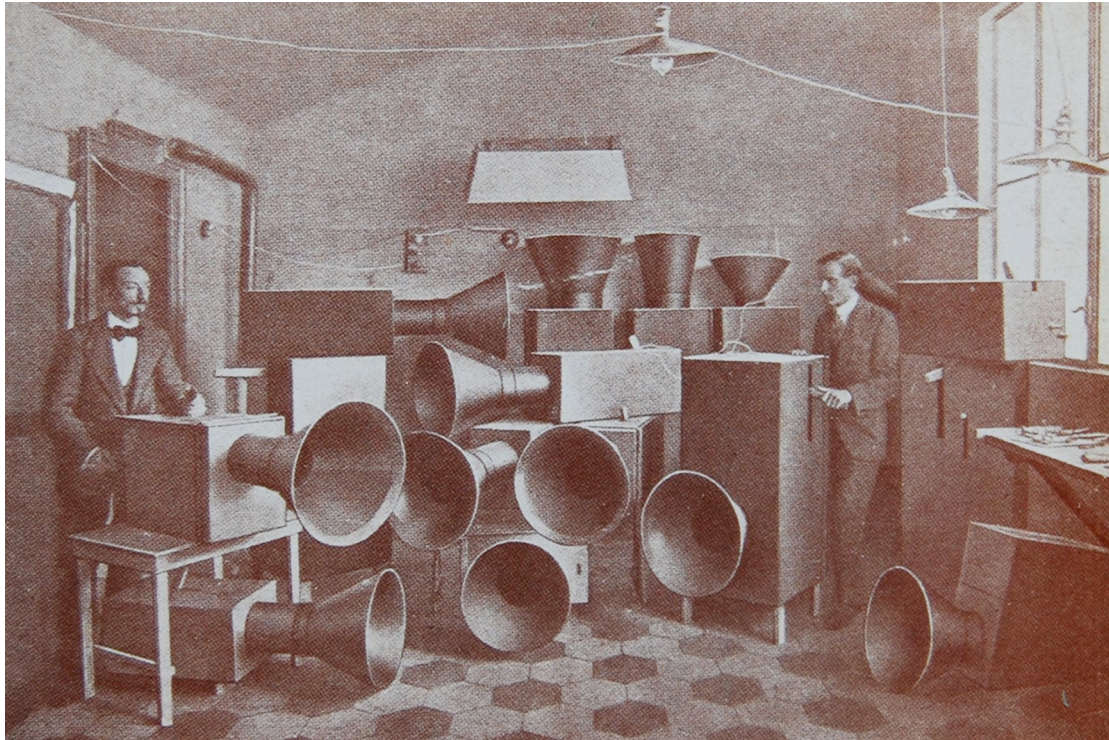
Music ▶ Music, “according to Jacque Atalli (1943-), is the constant effort to codify and stratify noise and silence.” [Cox 2006: p.6] John Cage calls it “organized sound.” [Cage 1961: p.26] The Greek Pythagorean scale established the mathematical ratios that delineate the intervals of music [King 2006: p.15] and therefore the Western conception of harmony and tone defined “music” in opposition to “noise.” Christopher Small (1927-) asserts that Post Renaissance music loved noise. [Small 1996: p.20-21] In the 20th century it became more difficult to distinguish music from noise as a consequence of the industrial revolution and “the invention of the machine.” [Russolo 1913: p.10] Music and noise formed a partnership when composers began making “machine-music” out of “muscle sounds.” [Schafer 1973: p.34] The development of noise music was an important factor in shaping the understanding of music. Another is recorded sound and its reproducibility.



8. Elgar Recording. (1914)

Thomas Edison (1847-1931) recorded the first sound and was able to reproduce it with the phonograph in 1877. [Welch 1994: p.6] Be it the concert hall or ancient ritual, before the phonograph, music was performed. The phonograph was able to, for the first time, capture the serial flow of time. "Music no longer required a live performer" [Peters 1999: p.161] and with the invention of the phonograph, music became portable and could be relived in its recorded form. [Chanan 1995: p.3] The phonograph: "is the first means of musical presentation that can be possessed as a thing." [Adorno 1990: p.58] Finally, the tape recorder made it "possible to insert any sound from the environment into a composition." [Schafer 1973: p.34] Any sound, be it noise, music or "silence," when recorded was transformed into sonic matter.

The distinction between sound, silence, noise and music begin to blur with the invention of sound recording and reproduction technologies. [Cox 2006: p.5] Music can be noise or silence and visa versa. [Cox 2006: p.6] There are minimalist musicians such as Steve Reich (1936-), noise musicians such as Masami Akita (1956-) and musicians that deal exclusively with environmental and ambient sounds such as Francisco López (1964-) and Brian Eno (1948-). There are artists that sing and manipulate the voice, re-examining vocalisation and aurality in both musical and poetic ways such as Merideth Monk (1942-) and Laurie Anderson (1947-). There are artists that make music unrestrictedly and uninhibitedly improvising, such as Jean Dubuffet (1901-1985) without having any prior musical training *per se*.



9. Luigi Russolo and his assistant Ugo Piatti with their Intonarumori. (1913)

Figure 9 shows the Futurist Luigi Russolo (1885-1947) who embraced noise in his emblematic essay *The Art of Noises* (1913) whereby he formulated amongst other things the concept of “intonarumori” or noise instruments and established six categories of noises with a futuristic music in mind. [Russolo 1913: p.10]

Noise ▶ “In the 19th century, with the invention of machines, noise was born.” [Russolo 1913: p.10] The muscle sounds of which R. Murray Schafer speaks were first heard, on a noticeable level, during the industrial revolution. [Schafer 1973: p.33] Henry Cowell (1897-1965), places tone in opposition to noise. Tone being sound produced by periodic vibrations and noise being sound produced by non-periodic vibrations. [Cowell 2002: p.22]. Russolo compartmentalized the noises of his time into six different categories, which I will refer to later. His noise instruments demonstrate noise ability to be musical. John Cage (1912-1992) believed that:

Wherever we are, what we hear is mostly noise. When we ignore it, it disturbs us. When we listen to it, we find it fascinating. The sound of a truck at fifty miles per hour. Static between two stations. Rain. We want

to capture and control these sounds, to use them not as sound effects but as musical instruments.

[Cage 1961: p.25-26]

It is useful to understand noise as a verb rather than a noun in this context. People are seen to make noise when they blare, blast, clatter or clamour and rather than seeing these things as negative by describing them as disturbances, which is entirely subjective. Noises can be purposeful and political markers of presence and signals that arouse the reality of human vivacity. As I write this, a man mows his lawn, another hammers a palisade fence, the gate rattles open and closed, a motor vehicle rushes its driver home and at a distance a woman voices her disapproval of something unknown to me as and then an airplane flying overhead drowns everything out for a few seconds.

Silence ► Silence is nonexistent, “a conceptual ideal,” as John Cage so ingeniously pointed out in his composition *4'33* (1957), it is something we constantly aim to achieve when looking at it through acoustic ecology’s perspective. [Schafer 1973: p.29] In Figure 10 we see what is said to be a completely silent room or anechoic chamber used for testing various specialised sound equipment. When in the room, it is possible still to hear the softest sounds, like blood of pumping through your veins. It is still not completely silent.



10. Prof. Mendel Kleiner listening to the hemispherical loudspeaker array used for auralization in the anechoic chamber. (1974)

Silence is comparable to empty space, which we all know is hardly empty however, it helps to imagine that it is there giving shape to that which is visibly striking to the eye. Therefore, in visual terms, silence might be the equivalent of negative space. It does not mean that there is nothing there, but that what is there is relatively passive, still, potential energy or to borrow a term from sport terminology, it is a dead ball situation. The game has not stopped at all, although the ball *is* out of play.

Whereas Cage is “reminding the audience that music is made of sound,” [LaBelle 2006: p.3] Schafer is in pursuit of a the silent environment exemplified by the Hi-Fi soundscape “in which discrete sounds can be heard clearly because of the low ambient noise levels.” [Schafer 1973: p.32]

I believe that Schafer’s view suggests that the urban situation is one of being drowned in noise is contradictory. [Schafer 1973: p.29-39] On the one hand acoustic ecologists long for a pre-industrial, silent past in which hearing was a

sense that remained unchallenged. With the rapid industrialization at the turn of the 20th century, the ear was made acutely aware of the extent of its sensitivity. [Schafer 1973: p.32] This would be felt to a greater degree within the urban context than the rural, where machines and mechanical instruments created a constant drone that works towards deafening the planet. It is here that the paradox of acoustic ecology is most obvious. The silence that Schafer so nostalgically strives for will be ultimately gained though a hearing-impaired globe. [Schafer 1973: p.29-39]

5. WHY JOHANNESBURG? WHY NOW?

In our view, this dialectic between the underground, the surface and the edge is, more than any other feature, the main characteristic of the Africa modern of which Johannesburg is the epitome, and perhaps the late modern metropolis itself.

[Mbembe 2008: p.17]

The underground that Mbembe speaks of is not only made up of “various subterranean spaces” but also “lower classes, the trash heap of the world above, and subterranean utopias.” [Mbembe 2008: p.22] The underground is that which is not visible to the eye. The surface is visibly compartmentalized on a horizontal plane in terms of its industrial, economic, residential and recreational zones but more significantly on a vertical level that generally signifies power relations. Except in the case of satellite-cities, the edge is less significant in terms of its verticality. It is predominantly residential with commercial outcrops and pockets of recreational zones. The surface and the edge overlap by virtue of their connectedness to the street.

The spatial nature of sound implicates sound artworks within this metropolitan dialectic. In this section, I would like firstly to discuss spatial politics and how sound can be used to permeate these spaces and secondly unpack temporal

and technological factors in which sound artworks between 2005 and 2009 are inevitably located.

Spatiality ▶ There are two primary and interrelated factors that contribute to the spatial inheritance of Johannesburg today, namely mining and the body politic. I will briefly discuss these factors and thereafter compare ways in which sound artists can engage with the spatial politics of the city in ways that work *with* space in the case of *Poème électronique* (1958) and *against* space in the case of Group Ongaku's work.

- Mining. Initially the spatial formation of Johannesburg had much to do with its underlying geology. [Beavon 2004: p.4] This was roughly along a north-east to south-west axis with a northerly apex that forms a triangle. [Beavon 2004: p.285] The formation of an urbanized Johannesburg however has more to do with the laying out of mining stands by the Randjeslaagte Syndicate on 5 October 1886 dividing the triangle along a east-west axis with Braamfontein to the north and Doornfontein to the south. [Beavon 2004: p.23] Therefore it can be safely assumed that the form that the Johannesburg CBD of today takes is primarily motivated by monetary gain, a template for building in which “the sole reason for its creation was the pursuit of material wealth.” [Mbembe 2008: p.18]
- The Body Politic. The rapid growth of Johannesburg based on the potential for economic gain resulted in an exponential growth of its population hence “Johannesburg emerged as an instant city of strangers, foreigners and aliens (uitlanders).” [Mbembe 2008: p.17] Furthermore, the need for cheap labour on the mines was served largely by indigenous African people and later Chinese labourers. [van Onselen 1982: p.27-29] This amalgamation of people had a definite impact on the spatial formation of Johannesburg: “As such, race directly gave rise to the space Johannesburg would become, its peculiarities, contours and form.” [Mbembe 2008: p.42]

The evidence of the “spatial framing” [Mbembe 2008: p.20] throughout its history largely based on race and class is evident on two levels in the Johannesburg of today, namely the vertical and the horizontal. Skyscrapers, in part, signify a vertical domination and conquering of the gravitational limitation. Towering and projecting skyward they appear to signify architecture’s command over this limitation and are related to the “exuberance of spirit and power.” [Ruskin 1904: p.37 also see Conway 1977] Johannesburg is also significant in terms of the horizontal plane. It is on this plane that the overt segregation based on class, race, political and religious beliefs was most evident [Beavon 2005: p.98]. The legislative history related to territorial demarcation can be traced back to The Land Act (No. 27 of 1913) The Urban Areas Act (No 21. of 1923) and The Group Areas Act (No. 41 of 1950). However, sound projects in all directions and its reach is virtually limitless. The sounds of the city overlap, are woven into each other and single sounds become diluted in the sonic landscape, therefore omni directional sonic events challenge the vertical and horizontal spatial politics of Johannesburg.

- Engaging spatial politics. Today, the legacy of “spatial framing” [Mbembe 2008: p.20] of Johannesburg, once enforced by law, can still make itself evident. In the architectural sense and specific to most metropolitan areas, “One is traumatized by the spatial.” [LaBelle 2006: p.39] Almost endlessly flowing palisade fences, two, three and four meter high walls and boom gates followed by more boom gates.

However, such trauma sets in motion a conversation, however unstable or quiet, through which one is conscious of both architectural power and the power of one’s own body: one recognizes the larger architectural order to which one is both held and made responsible.

[LaBelle 2006: p.39]



11. Le Corbusier, Iannis Xenakis, Edgard Varèse. *Poème électronique*. Philips Pavilion. (1958)

One is not only traumatized by the spatial but also enabled. *Poème électronique* (1958) is a collaborative project by Iannis Xenakis (1922-2001), Le Corbusier (1887-1965) and Edgard Varèse (1883-1965). Under the supervision of Le Corbusier, Xenakis designed an architectural environment where sound and light are fabricated into the actual structure and design of the Philips Pavilion. Varèse's composition for tape made use of some 425 speakers. The sounds would journey through the space and envelop the listener in a "total" experience of sound and light as mobilized by the inner space of the pavilion. [Föllmer 2004: <http://www.mediaartnet.org/works/poeme-electronique/> accessed 04/08/09]

In Johannesburg, public and private space is highly contested and in this respect, sound is powerful, especially as a medium of artistic expression because it "offers potential escape routes, where use becomes resistance." [LaBelle 2006: p.36] Therefore, the flow of sound can be an expression of liberation and emancipation from spatial conditions. Its ability to trespass, intrude and encroach into, between and over enclosed spaces has to date not

been fully harnessed and its potential remains, to a degree, unrealized by artists in the city. It has the ability to draw crowds, catch the attention of a passer-by while simultaneously dispersing, disbanding and yet again separating groups of people. It follows that if the lines that separate one space from another are to be crossed using sound, then the horizontal and vertical plane must be carefully considered for it is on these two levels of interaction between people that the reinforcement of difference is most intensely felt.

Sound artworks might not only challenge the spatial disposition determined by architecture and town planning, but can also confronts the body in that space. The Japanese art collective Group Ongaku dealt quite specifically with the body as a form of resistance to space, the spatial constraints and limitations of architecture through an “expanded aurality.” [LaBelle 2006: p.36] Their performances dealt directly with the “intersection” of the body with architecture moving through urban space as the body remodels, disrupts, and resists the built environment. [LaBelle 2006: p.39]

Sound artists are agents of resistance through their use of public space. Sound radiates in all directions and is not limited to the spatial politics of horizontality and verticality. Sound as a medium can call into question the limitations of the body by having the ability to cross the threshold between public and private space. It is weightless and moves in all directions and therefore is not bound to, but still associated to the “body politic.”

Temporality and Technology ▶ In conjunction with the spatial framework of Johannesburg, it is also important to consider the temporal implications and the effects these have on specific sound artworks. Here, a distinction needs to be made. In general, sound art employs the use of some or other form of electronic technology. The technological narrative persists and it becomes impossible not to consider the history of broadcast media or radio in Johannesburg and the history of recorded sound, which I will discuss in some detail later, that are all dependent on electronic technology. There are a number

of influential and interweaving factors that are pertinent to understanding the recent popularity of sound art in Johannesburg between 2005 and 2009.

First, is the shift from the visual to the aural and the influence that digital technologies related to sound has on this shift. Originally a mining town, Johannesburg has come a long way and can currently be said to be in a state of rapid transformation and is redefining itself as a city whose economy is founded on its technological *savoir-faire*, rather than on its mineral resources, mining contributing a mere two percent towards Johannesburg's economy. [Beavon 2005: p.270]

From its roots deep in its many gold mines, to a manufacturing powerhouse and the financial capital of sub-Saharan Africa, Johannesburg has a new target in its sights: to turn itself into a world leader in information and communications technology (ICT) and other new technologies

[See The Official Website Of The City Of Johannesburg: 2009
<http://www.joburg.org.za/content/view/415/58/> accessed 14/12/09]

Advances in technology and redefinition of the very identity of Johannesburg, begins to suggest that technologically based art practices should flourish. [Cox 2006: p.XIII]

From personal experience, I witnessed a growth in personal computers in the early nineties and consequently the availability of sound production. The first edition of Sonic Foundry's Acid¹, a sound-editing and sequencing program, ran on Windows 3.0 (1990) and was readily available to many due to its small size, inexpensiveness and propensity to be shared in bootlegged form. [Stallings 2009: p.81]

Sound art reinforces this move away from the disciplinary strictures of cultural production towards multi-disciplinary, all-encompassing modes of production or

¹ Acid is a Windows-based, multi-track audio sequencing program, which allows its users to import sounds, and readily edit, record and sequence sound. [See Menasché 2002: p.44]

“total art”. [LaBelle 2007: p.57] It is my view that the rapid development of digital technology, upon which sound art is so dependant, will enrich the medium in radical and unpredictable ways, making room for new forms of conversation and exchange stimulated by the culture of the ear.

The Unyazi Electronic Music Festival (2005-), which is discussed in more detail in Chapter 2, began in 2005 and was a pivotal force in the popularization of sound art in Johannesburg. It was, and is, not only an exhibition of world renowned artists, curators and critics of sound, but also a forum for discussion and debate that gives sound art and electronic music in Johannesburg a platform to invent itself.

Johannesburg as a diverse and digitized city, social networking over Internet connections, the immediacy and expansion of sonic practice, the possibility of resisting spatial formations of the present and demarcated legacies of the past, are all primary and preliminary reasons to review sound art in Johannesburg today. As I have already mentioned, sound art is to a large degree in an introductory phase in Johannesburg, therefore studies such as mine work towards shaping the practice in considered ways and also locates the sound of Johannesburg within global auditory culture.

6. MOTIVATION & METHODOLOGY

Communication ▶ Since I was a youngster, I have been interested in sound. Quite unconsciously, I had been experimenting with the medium, not only to make recordings of my own, but also as a way of communicating with those around me. I recall a moment when my neighbour threatened to smash my speakers if I did not turn the volume down (in not such kind words), of course I never obliged. For me, this moment demonstrated something quite profound that I wanted to make use of in my own art making, to which I speak in Chapter 3, namely: the ability to communicate with sound.

There are various ways of understanding communication, some of which go far beyond the scope of this study. Nevertheless, in the process of writing my research proposal, I formulated a concept called the “conversational loop.” This idea was intended as a simplified means of understanding the ability to communicate with sound. However, over time, as the idea evolved, it included various other media that are not necessarily dependent on the use of sound.

The conversational loop draws both from the Transmission Model and the Ritual Model of communication. [McQuail 2007: p.69-70] The Transmission Model, briefly described, draws a line of communication between The Sender, The Message, The Channel and The Receiver. If we take the moment described above as an example, The Sender was me: A teenager in my bedroom manoeuvring carefully through The Message: a sea of records scattered across my floor and bed. The Channel followed a path from the stylus, to the mixer, to the amplifier, to the speaker and out of an open window. The Receiver, to whom I was quite oblivious at the time, was anyone within the range of the sound broadcast from my bedroom. [McQuail 2007: p.69-70]

By participating in a dialogue with the sonic landscape of Johannesburg, sound artists are not only senders but receivers too. Sonic events are projected into the sonic landscape where the listeners are many. Pardoning the case in which the listener resists, and assuming that the listener willingly listens, this is where the Ritual or Expressive Model relates to the conversational loop.

Ritual or expressive communication depends on shared understandings and emotions. It is celebratory, consumatory (an end in itself) and decorative rather than utilitarian in aim and it often requires some element of ‘performance’ for communication to be realized. Communication is engaged for the pleasures of reception as much as for any useful purpose.

[McQuail 2007: p.70-71]

This kind of communication is rooted in sharing. Interestingly enough, the word communication, roughly translated from the Latin *communicare* means “sharing talk.” [Peters 1999: p.7] The loop is not a one-way street but depends in James W. Carey’s (1935-2006) words upon: “sharing, participation, association, fellowship and the sharing of a common faith.” [See McQuail 2007: p.70]

The conversation loop is a form of dialogue where a message is sent from one point, to many points of reception, and is replied by some, if not all of the recipients. The returning message does not necessarily have to take a sonic form but what is important is that it was initiated by a sound. The responses vary and can be negative, however, what was important to me at the time was that the sonic event prompted a listener to respond.

These are the ideal conditions for the loop. There are, however, many variants and points of compromise. The act of speaking to people, interviewing or simple face-to-face dialogue, in search of information about sound art in Johannesburg is one form of the loop. However, there were also forms of the loop that took place without any sound being present, such as e-mails where only the subject of discussion and conversation was sound. Face-to-face dialogue and written dialogue are “casual” modes of the conversational loop. “Formal” modes are demonstrated by my sound interventions and installations. In this case, the aim of my installations was primarily to produce “relations between people and the world, by way of aesthetic objects.” [Bourriaud 2002: p.42] A work I made for the Masters Exhibition entitled: *Calling All Aliens* (2007) is a good example of this.

Quite simply, it consisted of: a Boom Box that played “alien sounds,” a carpet from my flat that doubled as a landing strip and a microphone stand to which a small torch was attached as a guiding light. The intention as the title suggests, was to “call all aliens.” I believe I succeeded, as the documentation suggests. By channelling my sonic messages, through a Boom Box and projecting them into

the ether, the recipients were many and unknown. The message I was sending was:

'Come here, I want you,' Bell said to Watson in the first telephone call, and this utterance is the symbol and type of all communication at a distance – an expression of desire for the presence of the absent other.

[Peters 1999: p.180]



12. B.J. Engelbrecht. *Calling all Aliens*. (2007)

In conclusion, I was primarily motivated by finding ways in which the sound I used in my installations could be a cohesive, powerful and considered element. The poverty of information pertaining to the use of the medium in Johannesburg inspired me to investigate and consequently write this review. At the heart of this investigation, for me, was conversation, primarily using sound to ask questions and broadcast replies. In this sense, I was using sonic events as a kind of universal language.

Conversation was in part the motivation but what was the methodology? The conversational loop, fuelled by dialogue, with sound at the centre of the discussion, was largely a qualitative method of research. I was conscious of the loop through my interaction with other people. With this in mind I took notes, made recordings, drew sketches and took photographs. These were qualitative aspects of my research methodology. There was a need, specifically when dealing with sound artworks, for a quantitative method of analysis.

Analysing a Sound Artwork ▶ The analysis of a sound artwork is itself worthy of a thorough research project and as was the case above, there was little information that dealt specifically with this area. I consequently drew predominantly from my own engagements with sound artworks and from some basic elements of sound engineering. From this, I created a customized method for analyzing a sound artwork. Explained in the simplest possible form, there are 5 preliminary points to consider: firstly the site, secondly the medium, thirdly the method, fourthly the event and lastly the presence. In no particular order, these are merely starting-points. The questions that these points stimulate, as we should expect, leads to many associated questions. It is not my aim to be conclusive or over technical, but rather introduce us to a way of approaching a sound artwork in terms of measurable phenomena.

- The Site.

Where is the sound and where are you? From where is the sound produced and where it is intended to be received? In the case of this study, of course, the answer to this double-barrelled question is Johannesburg. This urban site is not simple, and as I have already mentioned, is highly compartmentalized. On a primary level this refers to its various zones: the underground, the surface and the edge. [Mbembe 2008: p.17] As it follows, these zones become divided again and again, nevertheless, on a primarily level; this question is aimed at locating the sonic event and the listener within a specific location within the urban geography of Johannesburg.

On a secondary, and more simplified sense, it is a question about inside and outside. When inside, we consider room acoustics: room size, room shape, objects on the room, reflective/absorbative surfaces and the range or reach of the sound within the room. Similarly, outside considerations would be: the range and reach of the sound, objects within the space and reflective/absorbative surfaces.

There are two kinds of sound to consider in terms of acoustics: *airborne sound* and *structure borne sound*. Airborne sounds are sound waves that for the majority of their journey travel through the air. Structure borne, are vibrations in the fabric of the building. [Talbot-Smith 1995: p.33-34] In terms of enclosed spaces, *resonance* is the degree to which sounds are reflected. [Talbot-Smith 1995: p.35] *Reverberation* is the repeated reflection of sound waves until eventually they die out. [Talbot-Smith 1995: p.39] Conversely, sound absorption is the degree to which sounds are absorbed. All materials absorb sound. Hard, inflexible and smooth surfaces tend to absorb very little sound and are reflective. Soft, flexible and porous materials, on the other hand, absorb sounds well as opposed to reflecting them. [Talbot-Smith 1995: p.40]

- The Medium

Is the sound made by acoustic or electronic means? If electronic, is it analogue or digital? Analogue sound, refers to records and tape where the “sound pressure waveform is represented by electrical voltage in a conductor, the strength of magnetic flux on a tape, or by the velocity of a stylus transversing a groove on a disk.” [Watkinson 1998: p.7] Digital sound is stored as numbers on CD, for example. “The [digital] signal[s] are represented by a repetitively sampled sequence of alternating ‘0’s and ‘1’s” [Hood 1999: p.234]

Is it live or pre-recorded sound? If pre-recorded, what kind of device was used in the recording process? A microphone consists of a diaphragm that vibrates when sound strikes it, a transducer that converts these movements into electronic signals and a casing, which is the design that effects the characteristic of the sound. [Talbot-Smith 1995: p.50] Whereas omni directional microphones capture sound from all directions in equal measure, [Talbot-Smith 1995: p.55] shotgun microphones pick up only an acute angle of sound. [Talbot-Smith 1995: p.65]

Where was the recording made? Is it a controlled environment such as the sound studio or is it a less controlled, field recording? What is the length of the recording? Is it a series of recordings? Were the recordings manipulated? If so, with what and how were they manipulated? In the digital sense, what programs were used for this manipulation? Is it a found sound or has it been electronically constructed?

In this study, I have looked predominantly at the recorded form of sound art however; pre-recorded sounds can also be performed within a live scenario, as we see with Teamuncool discussed in Chapter 2. Nevertheless, along with the recording, we should consider the playback device. Can you see it? This is the case in my work and therefore, the medium is part of the message. Is it hidden? This is the case with Siobhan McCusker’s *Sentinels and Sadness* (2006) the

sonic event takes precedence over the playback medium. What format is the device playing: tapes, records, compact discs or any one of a range of digital formats?

Lastly, as I have already mentioned, sound artists tend to work with sound for its ability to activate space. Therefore space is also part of the medium, be it the space between the earphone and the ear canal, the gallery space or the space between receiver and transmitter, space is a fundamental question. How do the artwork and space relate to each other? How do the acoustics of the space determine how it is heard? How does it change, if at all, while moving through the space? Does the artist create virtual space?

- The Method

In the case of this study, the transmission device is always a speaker (headphone or loudspeaker) and therefore we should consider, firstly, what kind of speaker it is. A speaker consists of a radiating surface that moves to produce sound, a transducer that converts electrical signals into movements and the enclosure or the cabinet that effects the characteristics of the sound being reproduced. [Talbot-Smith 1995: p.74] Furthermore, line-source speakers project sound in one specific direction and horn speakers at an obtuse angle of projection. [Talbot-Smith 1995: p.84] Is the sound focused or dispersed?

What is the size of the sound? Loud sounds have a wider range and are bigger than soft sounds that have a smaller range. Loud sounds drown out ambient noise and are opaque and soft sounds intermingle with environmental noise and are more transparent. Sounds that are inaudible are said to be “masked” by other sounds. In what direction is the sound projected? Does the sound pan from left to right, in the case with stereo recordings or across a number of speakers, as is the case with surround sound? How does the sound interact with the environment – does it reflect off any surfaces?

Is the actual playback electronically manipulated, if so, with what kind of device and how? Is it played at interval or continuously? If played at intervals how long are the sounds and how long are the breaks in between?

- The Event

What kind of sound is it? The urban environment, which I am dealing with, has a variety of sonic events that constitute and contribute to the sonic landscape. It is important to have a system of categorization for these events. For this, I turn to a somewhat outdated but still useful description made in 1913 by Luigi Russolo in *The Art of Noises*. It compartmentalizes sonic events into six families of noises as follows:

1. Roars, Thunderings, Explosions, Hissing roars, Bangs, Booms
2. Whistling, Hissing, Puffing
3. Whispers, Murmurs, Muttering, Gurgling
4. Screeching, Creaking, Rustling, Humming, Crackling, Rubbing
5. Noises obtained by beating on metals, woods, skins, stones, pottery etc.
6. Voices of animals and people, Shouts, Screams, Shrieks, Wails, Hoots, Howls, Death rattles, sobs

In this list we have included the most characteristic of the fundamental noises. The others are only associations and combinations of these.

[Russolo 1913: p.13]

- The Presence

How does it sound? What is the colour of the sound: is it high, medium or low-pitched or a combination? If it is a combination, are they consonant or dissonant sounds or noises? What is the texture of the sound? Is it rough – grainy or gritty or smooth – clean and clear? *Timbre* refers to the distinctive and individual quality of a sound. [Talbot-Smith 1995: p.29] What mood does the sound create – what scene does it set or how does it make you feel? Is it gloomy and spooky or cheerful and jolly – for example?

We know that all frequencies have a primary rhythm [Russolo 1913: p.13] but in the case of secondary rhythm, is it fast, pacy and swift or is it slow, sluggish and lethargic? Do any of these elements change in time? If so, how? Are the changes rapid and even sporadic or do they change over an extended period which is more deliberate?

To conclude, as Paul Hegarty proposed, sound art can take many forms. Therefore, my provisional model for analyzing a sound artwork is not a step-by-step solution but rather an interconnected path in which there are many trajectories.

CHAPTER 2: HEARING OUT THE NOISEMAKERS

1. MICROPHONE CHECK

Sound is projected through multiple channels. The mechanisms used for transmitting sonic events, and the spaces that these events occupy vary. As I mentioned earlier, “sound art takes many forms.” The aim of this research is to focus on the sonic elements of artworks. Furthermore, in this review I have chosen four thematic constellations that have become apparent during the past four years namely: space, network, body and time.

- Space: here I have selected three sonic events that have dealt specifically with different spaces within the city namely: the inner city, street and campus. In the inner city, artists and the city merge. Consequently the sound artworks I discuss invoke concerns related to metropolitan life pertaining particularly to the inner city such as “push and pull” in the case of *The Floor Party* (2008) by The Trinity Session, or alienation and xenophobia in the case of *The Conductor’s Fear of the Soloist* (2008) by Halter and Marchisella. The campus, or more specifically the university campus, is a microcosm of the city, it is self sufficient and cordoned off from the city *per se*. It is perceived as a site of privilege and prestige from the outside and a site of safety and separatedness – as my discussion of *Unyazi* (2005-) will show. The street is not only a site for public intervention but is also related to networks that overlap and extend beyond zonal delineation. And the street is not only an interconnected and overlapping space of highways, roads and alleyways but also cosmopolitan network of different kinds of exchange, interaction and communication.
- Network, is therefore a discussion of collaboration as a way of networking within the arts and between sound artists. *The Collisions Project* (2005) by Marx and Loveday, is discussed as a merging of different artistic disciplines. Different

artistic traditions “smash” together on a network of exchange, opening up multiple channels of communication between artists and their respective traditions.

- Body, is a discussion of the voice as a medium in art. Through a discussion of Frances Goodman’s work with sound, the disembodied voice the immortalized voice and ideas around communication surface. *I know what you’re thinking* (2007) and *Stars in her eyes* (2007), not only demonstrates a deep understanding of the recorded voice as enduring and memorializing, but also investigates the decline of the culture of “sharing talk.” [Peters 1999: p.7] *Truth in Translation* (2007) then extends on conversation and the culture of dialogue.
- Time has been separated into Memory and Record. In Time, I use Siobhan McCusker’s *Sentinels and Sadness* (2006) to explain how even single sounds have the ability to stimulate complex memories. This leads me into a discussion of the sonic history of Johannesburg on record through field recording which painted a fantasist’s image of Africa as a whole, and through forgotten legends, resistance on record and banned records. Memory, Record, and Tape call to mind matters such as erasure and amnesia.

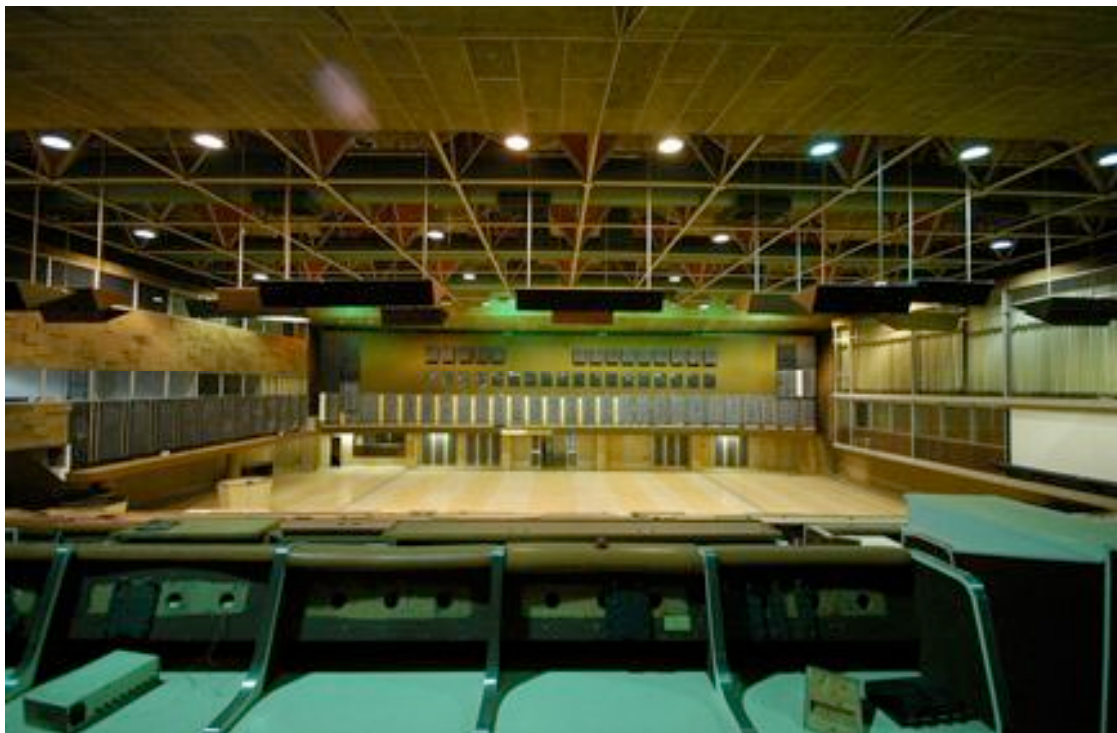
It should not be surprising that these abovementioned categories are not exclusive and aspects of each bleed into the next, this is at times intentional, and at times unintentional.

2. SPACE

Inner City ▶ *The Floor Party* (2008) hosted by The Trinity Session as a sonic event engaged with the polarity between the inner city and its periphery through its choice of site and the context of its occurrence. It was not packaged as sound art or even a happening, but in my opinion, could easily have fallen into either category. *The Floor Party* (2008) took place to mark the ending of *The*

Johannesburg Art Fair (2008) and brought to light and at times further reinforced certain issues raised by the Fair. One of the most important of these issues in question relates to the location of the Fair and consequently the politics of “push and pull.” [See Larsen 2003: p.44 also see Freestone 2000: p.224]

The Art Fair’s stance is shared by many corporate enterprises that moved out of the city centre for various reasons, perhaps the most prominent being the high inner city crime rate. [Beavon 2004: p.246] The most influential move was that of the Johannesburg Stock Exchange, relocating to Sandton CBD in 1998, which represented an economic shift away from Johannesburg CBD much to the displeasure of inner city revivalists. It is for the abovementioned reason that the fair was not located in Johannesburg CBD and, I’m assuming, is part of the reason why the city council had no money invested in the event.



13. *The Floor Party*. (2008)

The Floor Party’s organizers, The Trinity Session, who are actively involved in urban regeneration programs in Johannesburg CBD were, of course, well aware of the politics of “push and pull” and therefore quite ironically chose the former

Johannesburg Stock Exchange as the location for the party. [Bunn 2008: p.160]
The venue served them well and I imagine that it was intended as a celebration of a once thriving inner city.

However, apart from a performance piece that seemed as though it was quickly put together at the last minute, the performers poking fun at the seriousness of stockbrokers and their profession, nothing much else made reference to the site *per se*. The disc jockeys played according to what they suspected people would enjoy, which is no different from attending any contemporary city club, bar or party. They were positioned facing the chalk boards and on an elevated plane above the dance floor; a common strategy in parties. This gave the DJ an elevated status, in control of the audience who need not do anything more than submit to the DJ's choice of songs.



14. *The Floor Party*. (2008)

Sonically, The Trinity Session subscribed to the conventional party strategies of playing ambient music at a low level when people arrive, giving the audience a sense of comfort, calm and reassurance. In a club situation, this would allow for

conversation and interaction between people whilst increasing orders at the bar. As the evening progressed the volume and pace of the music increased, drowning out conversations to the point of discomfort. This seemed unintentional because the irritating magnitude of sound was unrelated to any performance or the style of music selected by the DJ.

Pardoning this acoustical mangle, nothing within the selection of songs had anything to do with Johannesburg. Even later when the DJ's music began to run dry and they reverted to playing seventies and eighties music, I was longing to hear Hugh Masekela or Stimela who are extremely popular and are still widely played and loved in Johannesburg – not to mention that the late Brenda Fassie (1964-2004), was not even part of the play list.

The Floor Party (2008) was a step in the right direction in terms of a sonic intervention that considered site activated through sound but, for me, lacked in certain areas that could have created an all encompassing sonic event and could have been more carefully considered. Minor details that might have seemed insignificant would have made a big difference to the entire experience of the package as a sound artwork.

Firstly, the DJ's could have played music specific to Johannesburg, past and present, considering that a fair amount of the audience came from outside of Johannesburg. Perhaps there could have been more performances throughout the night that would disrupt the continuous flow of music. This would have added different textures to the experience and sustained interest and would perhaps have punctuated the transition between one DJ's set and the next. The placement of the DJ could have been in an unexpected place or different DJs could have been placed in different places. Lastly, by following typical party conventions, the irony of the location of *The Floor Party* (2008) lost its potency. An audience of art enthusiasts could have been engaged with a sonically unusual party format and the songs that the DJ played could have been more representative of inner city culture.



15. Marian Halter and Mario Marchisella. From the Invitation to *The Conductor's Fear of the Soloist: ten small pieces for violin*. (2008)

An intriguing engagement with the city was the recent exhibition and concert by Marianne Halter and Mario Marchisella entitled *The Conductor's Fear of the Soloist: Ten Small Pieces for Violin* (2008). Swiss based Halter, a visual artist, and Marchisella, a musician, worked collaboratively on a performance piece that was finally realized as a video installation shown at The Drill Hall. Briefly described, Marchisella performed ten violin compositions in the middle of rush hour traffic in Joubert Park. This stark juxtaposition of a classical musician vulnerably positioned in the panic-stricken disarray and congested mess of rush hour inner city traffic, explores notions of being foreign and overcoming a sense of alienation. In formal terms, the work is reminiscent of Karlheinz Stockhausen's (1928-2007) composition for a violin quartet entitled *Helikopter Steichquartet* (1993) in which the four violinists improvise while sitting in the helicopter – the inside of the helicopter also the concert hall. [Halter 2009: www.likeyou.com/mariannehalter accessed 04/08/09] In this case however, the violin plays with a horn section comprised of taxi drivers which not only

questions taking the concert hall to the street, but ascribes the role of conductor to the commuter, his raised finger becomes a baton.

The Conductor's Fear of the Soloist (2008) is machine-music for the inner city and obscures the definitions of music, noise, silence and visual art by appropriating elements from each. Inner-city cosmopolitanism is faced with a multidimensional artistic event manifested through sound.

The Floor Party, on a much bigger scale was spectacular but made a lot of noise without saying much. The audience was to a large degree not from Johannesburg but little effort was made to expose them, through sound, to inner city culture. *The Conductors Fear of the Soloist* (2008) also made use of spectacle but on a much smaller scale. The two internationally based artists confront inner city culture as if in search of understanding their misplaced identity within its chaotic everyday operations.

Campus ▶ Space is the matrix upon which sound is manifested. Sound artists engage with space at a primary level. It is paramount to the practice. Space too goes hand in hand with the idea of site. The ongoing *Unyazi Music Festival*, begins to give us some understanding of how space and site can be activated in ways that are both suggestive and explicit. I have specifically chosen the festival as a way of understanding the relevance of space in the sonic arts because it is unique in the site of its occurrence – the campus and within the campus, the context of its display, Wits Theatre.

Unyazi was first held in 2005 at the University of the Witwatersrand. It was a giant leap in the history of sonic events for Johannesburg as “Africa’s first electronic music festival and conference.” [New Music S.A. 2005: <http://www.newmusicza.org.za/unyazi2005.html> accessed 04/08/09] In 2006, it consisted of a collection of performances held at The Wits Theatre Complex showcasing names such as South African, s Brendon Bussy and Warrick Sony

,the ‘father’ of electronic music in Africa Halim El Dabh (1921-) and Madrid-based Francisco López (1964-) to name but a few.



16. *Unyazi Music Festival*. Wits Theatre. (2008)

The thought of positioning such performances in the location of the theatre already seemed strange. Musicians are for the most part not actors assuming a role, they are themselves and musical performances are not plays but concerts, musicians do not work with scripts but with compositions. Instruments are not props but are actually played. For me, this relationship is intriguing in relation to debates around the electronic arts. Digital technology shortens the distance between two points with the aim of making life more efficient by processing otherwise tedious tasks on behalf of a particular user. A mechanical hand can play a note more quickly and consistently, working out the harmonies, melodies and compositions on behalf of the musician. Therefore *The Unyazi Music Festival* (2006), by virtue of where it was situated, raised questions of whether we are the masters of our own technological achievements or if we are merely puppets on a high tech stage. It was John Adams that said: “Technology precedes artistic invention (as much as we artists would like to think it the other way around!) First came the electric guitar and then came rock and roll.” [Adams 1997: p.82]

Essentially the sonic event consists of a series of zeros and ones programmed with the use of electronic equipment and transmitted through wires and broadcast using speakers. The musician is also a computer programmer and the sonic event conducted by copper wire is a set of positive and negative charges. In this sense, the sounds are always a mimicry of the musical note; to draw from René Magritte, it is not a piano but the sound of a piano transmitted by a speaker. In this context, just about anything, in terms of electronic manipulation through a series of live audio equipment, can and usually is, done to the sound of the piano before the binary code reaches the output device.

The collaborative energy that such festivals encourage is much needed. International and locally based sonic artists sharing ideas across different cultural backgrounds and artistic modes works towards the universality and “democratizing” of the arts through a sonic event. Perhaps the next move is to involve artists from different disciplines. We have events such as Arts Alive or the Standard Bank National Arts Festival but these festivals still seek to compartmentalize artistic practice and do not aim to encourage interdisciplinary dialogue. In a general sense there is a poor understanding of sound art in Johannesburg amongst corporate and other institutional enterprises that have the power to sponsor and endorse festivals. There are almost no platforms for sound artists to exhibit and gain experience in real spaces with real audiences, forcing them to the margin.



17. James Webb. Curator of *The Unyazi Music Festival*. (2008)

In 2008, *Unyazi* was held in different locations in and around Cape Town with part of the festival held at the University of the Witwatersrand, curated by James Webb. The Festival included talks, seminars, performances and “open studio” workshops by various well-known international and local artists. It was entitled *Fear of the Known* (2008) with the subtitle reading: “Extreme Listening Symposium.” Once again, Wits Theatre played host to the Johannesburg program and featured artists Webb himself, Lawrence English (1976-), Marc Behrens (1970-), Asmus Tietchens (1947-), Eric LaCasa (1968-), Philip Samartzis and Sudden Infant with a workshop by Marc Behrens held the following day. I believe that we have yet to see the full potential of festivals such as *Unyazi* because it offers a stage for otherwise unheard sound artists to be heard.

Perhaps if the location was given further thought so as to make commentary or question the space through a festival of sound, *Unyazi* could gain more art world credibility – music and sound art could somehow form a coalition. [Botha 2005: p.70]

Lastly, there is a divide between commercial practices and the so-called “extreme” art forms of listening and I believe that more can be done to engage with the public at large and their familiarity to non-extreme forms of listening, as opposed to the discrete performances and workshops for “insular professionals.” [Nuttall 2008: p.215] Lastly, documentation of the event is vital. In this case the publicity was good but the organizers failed to provide some form of documentation to either follow up on their success or to provide a forum for discussion on the particular concerns raised in the seminars. [See *Fear of the Known* 2008: www.myspace.com/unyazi accessed 04/08/09] This would not only have given the respective artists and the event exposure to a worldwide audience but also created a credible source to which critics could refer.

Street ▶ Street culture in Johannesburg is flourishing with the popularization of hip-hop² [see Livermon 2008: p.272] and its associated practices such as graffiti, which falls under the broader category of street art. I have personally worked to broaden this practice in my work for *A Walk in the Arc* (2005). In this instance I proposed a sculptural tagging of the Municipal Building in Braamfontien.

Sound too has played an integral role in street culture that dates back to the invention of the Boom Box in the early eighties, which implies a kind of noise graffiti. [see Morton 2004: p.169] In Johannesburg, Teamuncool, the Johannesburg based art collective established in 2007, have worked in this mode albeit at times unintentionally. Nevertheless I would like to propose we look at their work from this perspective as it speaks to a broader range of

² Hip-hop is a subculture that has its origins in The Bronx, New York in the seventies and is characterized by four predominant activities namely: break dancing, turntablism, emceeing and graffiti art, which I discuss in more detail in Chapter 3.

concerns related to street culture and its surreptitious and clandestine activities in relation to sound.

True to street culture, the team do not use their real names and have invented aliases and hereby fabricated new identities and personalities, with the exception of Chris Saunders, the photographer and director of the collective. m18j92t is an artist, designer, sound artist and researcher, kidu is an illustrator animator, web and sound artist and cling is an illustrator, designer, animator and web artist. The team works collaboratively to exploit each other's talents and consequently question the idea of ownership of a particular artwork having been made by four constructed individuals as opposed to one real person.

Although *The Floor Party* (2008) might have had its flaws, it can be argued that it was the first party, on such a scale, in the history of Johannesburg that catered specifically for an art going audience. On a smaller scale however, the work of Teamuncool and the performances by members mtkidu have been pushing at these boundaries for the past few years. They combine cutting edge electronic music production and live performance with accompanying animation, although it caters for a younger audience of art supporters.

Teamuncool have performed at various art events and have frequent solo performances in gallery spaces, such as the one at The Premises Gallery in 2007, which was basically a showcase of their new sound and animation work. The team all have a background in the arts and their work conjures images of New York in the nineteen eighties where many fine artists, working with sound as a medium, broke into mainstream culture, headed by artists such as Laurie Anderson. Licht refers to this in his chapter entitled *Art and Pop Envy*. [Licht 2007: p.151]



18. Mtkidu performing in Pretoria at the beginning of their tour in 2008

I was lucky enough to attend one of Teamuncool's performances held at a venue in Melville, called Tokyo Star, in 2007 and was not disappointed at all. It was a fresh take on the party experience and the regular acts that usually leave me unimpressed and heading for the door instead of the bar, as is the usual scenario at Tokyo Star. It seems as if the aim of this venue was to attract a crowd of people that are looking for an alternative experience as opposed to other more commercialized venues also situated in Melville, known for its informal "street" culture. However, Tokyo Star has in my view mostly failed to offer such an alternative art experience, based on forms of listening that are not strictly commercial, except when Teamuncool played.

Their multifaceted approach, fusing animation and musical performance, based loosely on a narrative style implicated a party venue into the tradition of theatre – the dance floor is a stage. Their style of music is usually energetic and quite pacey and well engineered. The melodies are usually catchy which I believe is a commentary on the part of the composer commercialism and consumer culture – easily digestible music that, in colloquial terms, has a "bubble gum effect" in

other words, it loses its flavour quite quickly and cannot really be chewed more than once. In relation to street culture, on the one hand Teamuncool's projects invoke a variety of street performance traditions such as busking, opera in the street and graffiti, for example, and on the other hand utilize the mechanisms by which the street operates such as clandestine activities, secretive exchanges and codenames. [Teamuncool 2008: www.teamuncool.co.za accessed 04/08/09]

In conclusion, street culture is built on the idea of interaction. We all know the expression "keep your ear to the street." On countless occasions, I have heard about parties before their advertising reached my car window, clamped by my car's windscreen wiper. Art exhibitions generally tend to approach its audience in conventional ways, placing invitations on coffee tables or sending out e-mails. It would be interesting to see an art exhibition that was only advertised by "spreading the word." Word-of-mouth functions mostly through interaction and face-to-face contact, the message is secretive, whispered into the ear and passed amongst a particular group. One would have to be part of the group or secret society to receive the message.

A venue called The Go-Go Bar, located in Newtown, has secret passwords that entitle you to free admission if delivered correctly such as "I promise not to put my feet on the furniture." This group of like-minded individuals that pass on messages between each other through an informal and underground network points me to the next network, the collaborative, interdisciplinary network.

3. NETWORK



19. Gerhard Marx and Clare Loveday. *Collisions*. (2006)

Collaboration ▶ Ordinarily, it would seem strange for an artist, trained in painting, for example, to work with any other medium. But interdisciplinarity which has its roots in *gesamtkunstwerk*³, is based on the idea that knowledge of a particular medium can still be applied outside of the respective discipline – the painterly installation or the sculpting of sound for example.

An experimental music piece conceptualized by artist Gerhard Marx and composer Clare Loveday in 2005; entitled *Collisions*, showed the true benefits of a collaborative energy and the ways in which interdisciplinary networks, within the university can be mutually beneficial and can “collide” in a plethora of productive cooperation and partnerships. It was a one-night-only event performed by Vusi Ndebele, Sisekelo Pila and Barry Sherman. “*The Collisions*

³ *Gesamtkunstwerk* as described by the Grove Dictionary of Art is a “term first used by Richard Wagner in *Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft* (1849) to describe his concept of a work of art for the stage, based on the ideal of ancient Greek tragedy, to which all the individual arts would contribute under the direction of a single creative mind in order to express one overriding idea. However, the term is applied retrospectively to projects in which several art forms are combined to achieve a unified effect, for example Roman fora, Gothic cathedrals and some Baroque churches and palazzi. [Turner 2000: <http://www.artnet.com/library/03/0317/T031798.ASP> accessed 04/08/2009]

Project plays with the principles on which both classical and traditional string instruments function; in this case however, the vibration of strings are transferred into the body of a car wreck through cello and violin fragments grafted onto the car.”

[Stern 2006: <http://nathanielstern.com/blog/?s=marx+loveday+and+loveday> accessed 04/08/2009]

What I find most significant is how the performance makes fun of tensions that exist between the fairly conservative traditions of fine, dramatic and musical arts. Each discipline draws on its strengths. Marx, who was trained in fine arts but has worked in the dramatic arts as well, directed musicians and Loveday, a classically trained composer, composed for the sculptural wreckage and not a classical instrument. In this case, the acoustics of the gallery are likened to that of a concert hall and musicians become performance artists. This work is a fine example of interdisciplinary collaboration and also demonstrates how these disciplines easily overlap.

That concept of “total art” espoused by Hansen and intermedia practice announced by Fluxus arise from this moment is not surprising, for the very terminology suggests a breaking down of disciplinary borders, or rather, simply overlooking them through collaborative spirit.

[LaBelle 2007: p.59]

Interdisciplinary work raises a question that is not only pertinent to the fine art tradition but the arts as a whole. Cross-pollination and collaboration in this sense can be broadened to include science and engineering. The most productive and creative application of collaboration is when artists collaborate with disciplines outside of the visual arts necessitated by the nature of the work. Sound artists, being involved with electronic media will find similarities and get inspiration from the digital arts, science and engineering. [see Kluver 1994: p.207-219]. It is important to note that the interdisciplinarity of which I speak does not negate the importance of specialization and disciplinary competence, if

anything it is encouraged. The different expertise of collaborators is then applied in a productive way to a particular art experience.

I share with Licht sentiments about collaborative energy and the fact that different disciplines should aim to explore the possibilities of cross-pollination, although his reasoning is slightly different. He draws our attention to the fact that poems are transformed into songs, sculptures become inspiration for set designs and plays become inspirations for paintings. The lines are constantly blurring and as a result, artists realize the potential for joining forces. I am biased in that I believe that artists should be at the forefront of this movement and should be the catalysts for collaboration. I also believe that this energy should be supported by the gallery context and bleed into its surrounding spaces. [Licht 2007: p.210]

4. BODY

Voice ▶ Audio culture is based on an exchange of ideas through the medium of sound. People have conversations using words through vocal means and sound is at the heart of this exchange. “Simply by making noises with our mouths, we can reliably cause precise new combinations of ideas to arise in each other’s minds” [Pinker 1994: p.15] Speaking is not only the domain of structured language but tone of voice, loudness and softness and rhythm of words also have the ability to be meaningful and communicate emotion. The voice is a form of sound making emanating from the body and translates and externalizes that which is internal. These “noises of the mouth” are sonic events and can be words, babbles, imitations, or meaningless noises.

As a medium in art, the voice expands beyond the framework of this study. In Johannesburg however, it is embedded in a long tradition of concrete poetry beginning in the 1960’s of which I spoke in Chapter 1. Frances Goodman

(1975-) locates herself within this tradition with her somewhat whimsical yet socially pertinent work with sound.

I experienced one of her pieces at the Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg, in 2007 entitled *Stars in her eyes*. It consisted of a pair of headphones suspended from the gallery ceiling with a spotlight placed directly above it. Goodman seemed to be telling her life story in a recording played through the headphones although with the duration of 15 minutes and 30 seconds, it was too long to listen to the entire piece. I did however appreciate the idea of the spot-light, the viewer was made to feel as if they were under intense scrutiny, living artworks, when they passed under the spotlight.



20. Frances Goodman. *Stars in her Eyes*. (2007)

Sound Installation. 15min 30sec. Ed of 8.

Goodman's work often documents conversation. For me, her work is about the "inability for people to communicate with each other and not particularly internationally but especially emotionally." [Simon & Garfunkel 1964:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=eZGWWQauQOAAQ accessed 30/03/09] Talking to each other, people can have highly intellectual discussions or mundane chit-chat. Both can be poetic and philosophical or dull and depressing. Talking, at a purely sonic level, connects one internal state to the next. It is different from speaking in that it is a two-way street. Talking is therefore about listening and speaking. In *I know what you are thinking* (2007) presented at Brodie – Stevenson in Johannesburg, the listener is invited to “listen in” on a conversation and although not a participant, “listening in” enables a critical distance.

In *Stars in her eyes*, however, Goodman speaks directly to the listener and the voice is used less to be critical of conversation as such and more to tell a story. It is still documentative in that it is seemingly autobiographical. Recording your voice is also a way of immortalizing yourself [see Peters 1999: p.160] in this sense, *Stars in her eyes* (2007) is reminiscent of Hollywood’s *Walk of Fame*⁴.

In her piece *I know what you are thinking* (2007), the recordings are not played loudly and are discrete. The recorded conversations are intermingled with the noises of the surrounds and people speaking in the gallery space. Although the listener is not required to respond to Goodman’s recorded conversation, the recordings are woven into and extend into its surrounds suggesting that the conversations within the gallery are part of the work.

In the case of *Stars in her eyes* (2007), the headphones bring the listener into the personal and private space of the speaker. The voice speaks to one person alone. This secret story takes place in the private space of the headphones but in *I know what you are thinking* (2007), the secrets are revealed.

⁴ Located along Hollywood Boulevard and Vine Street, The Walk of Fame, was first started in 1958 with the purpose of immortalizing significant characters, real and fictional, within the movie industry of Hollywood. It is made up of a series of cement stars into which celebrities leave impressions of their hands into the setting cement.



21. Frances Goodman. *I know what you are thinking*. (2007). Sound Installation. 10min. Ed. of 5

The voices are played softly and not through headphones into the ambient, public spaces. The space is less personal but are more like whispers and therefore implicitly secretive in feel. Goodman's recordings seem sporadic and unplanned. The anonymous performers speak naturally, unabashed and uninhibitedly about seemingly random subject matter. There are no scripts.

In the work *I know what you are thinking* (2007), Goodman layers different people's confessions, opinions, proclamations and sometimes-absurd contemplations on top of each other. It is reminiscent of artist Pejk Malinovski's *Secrets* (2003). Malinovski walks around in the urban environment recording people's deepest secrets with the promise that their identities will not be revealed, and of course the results are as bizarre as in Goodman's *I know what you are thinking* (2007). The point of the matter is that both artworks operate and are conceived through conversation on a fundamentally oral level and although the listener is not a participant necessarily, they are invited to "listen in" and consider the conversations of strangers.

Oral testimony has been a pivotal force in working through the atrocities, violence and trauma of the past and is conversation in the form of dialogue. The Convention for a Democratic South Africa (Codesa), where the focus was on “talks,” and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which made use of translators, are good examples of this. [See Meer 1993] Not only were translators employed and headphones distributed throughout to those that attended the TRC hearings but booths were also constructed in which testimonials could be listened to by the public. Sound was a crucial medium used in the process of healing and making public information that would in the past never have been heard, been kept secret, corrosive, festering and wearing away at the fabric of society. It was a medium for mediation between victim and perpetrator and vice versa, helping to (at times) facilitate the process of forgiveness and recovery from the past. [see Krog 1999: p.84]



22. Quanita Adams and Bongani Gumede. *Truth in Translation*. (2007)

Truth in Translation (2007) was a theatrical production by director/creator Michael Lessac (1940-), and writer/collaborator Paavo Tom Tammi with music by Hugh Masekela (1939-), that toured many parts of the world in 2007 and 2008. The play was based on the complexities, challenges and difficulties of being a translator in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, forced to translate horrific tales between both victim and perpetrator. Nicola Husband describes it sonically:

Deliberate though this multi-voiced approach may be, it turns an already complex play into a jumble of confusion. Almost a musical and with a hint of comedy, the play's focus on the future through the personal lives of the translators ensures you leave the auditorium with a positive outlook on the possibility of change.

[Husband 2007: <http://edinburghfestival.list.co.uk/article/3810-truth-in-translation/> accessed 04/08/09]

This "jumble of confusion" by layering different voices, introduces sound art and the voice as medium into the theatre. Similarly, concrete poets of the 1960's layered words and created images out of these words although in the case of Truth in Translation, spoken words create a musical mangle could be heard as choral music or a cacophony of rantings.

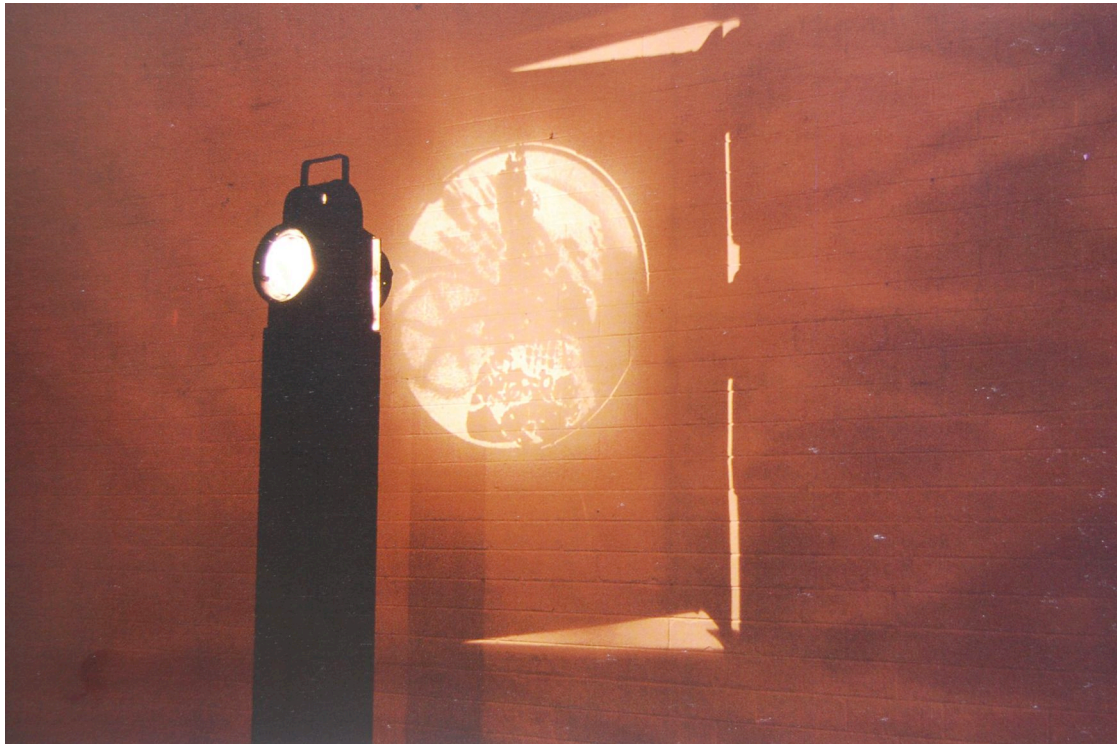
5. TIME

Memory ▶ Sound is one of those phenomena that have the ability to trigger memory and conjure cognitive associations. Sound is similar to smell in this respect. [see Baddeley 1998: p.18-26] Songs are an easy way of understanding this because, when we hear a particular song, we immediately get transported back to the place and time when we first heard it. Not only does the mind possess the ability to store auditory information but also the ability to recall it. In music, this is called pianofortitude. [Baddeley 1998: p.24]

These memories can be both individual and shared. Siobhan McCusker's (1973-) installation *Sentinels and Sadness* (2006) utilized this phenomenon in a very particular way, supported by the visual environment, taking the viewer on a haunting journey into their own past.

The installation consisted of a group of old train signal lamps, McCusker scratched into the glass lens of the lamp. The lamps were lit from the inside and projected strange scratched images, resembling microscopic organisms, in a

row onto the gallery walls. The transmission device was not visible which made it seem as if it was not reproduced but rather a part of the ambient sounds of the space.



23. Siobhan McCusker. *Sentinels and Sadness*. (2006)

The sound evoked a sonic memory. It was dark and walking through the space I felt anxious and unsure of where to place my feet – and then suddenly, a loud screeching sound reverberated throughout the space that reminded me of scuffing a rubber shoe sole against a newly polished floor.

I was running through Park Station and everything was in black and white, as if I was in the train station shootout of Brian De Palma's (1940-) *The Untouchables* (1987), late for the train and anticipating the distant sound the conductor shouting "All aboard!?" At that very moment, as if to snap myself out of this dream, I shuffled my feet around, checking to see if it were my rubber soles that made that sound and then listened for the screeching sound again with the hope of locating the position of the playback device. This displays how even a single sound has the power to locate a person, through memory, in a specific

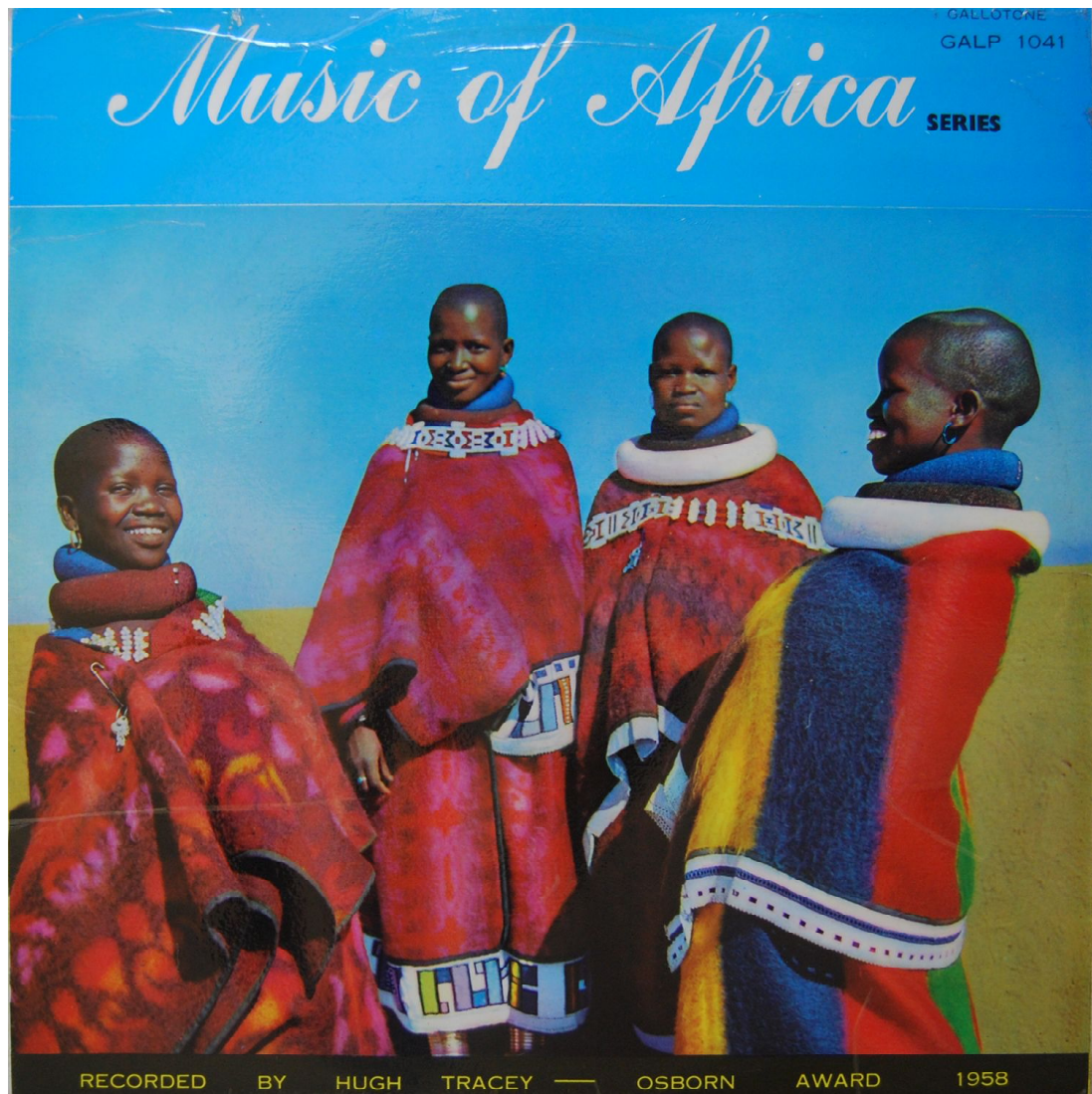
place and time. The lamps and the space are also important in setting this scene.

On a very formal level, the echoing screech creates a sense of anticipation, perhaps one is fearful of what is to come, frightened, and therefore alert. At first, when walking into the space, one does not expect any sound at all and therefore it is all the more surprising when this sharp, high-pitched shriek plays. The sound is played at sporadic intervals with long silent spaces between and secondly, one's attention is predominantly directed to the visual aura that McCusker creates by projecting onto the walls. The sound is an extension of the visual experience.

The sound McCusker used, designed by Ted Loukes, also reminds me of wildlife recordings which Penny Siopis picks up on this in her review of the exhibition. [Siopis 2006: p.86] There is a long history of field recording within South Africa and Africa as a whole, which McCusker's "shriek" conjures. [Roberts 1986: p.790] I presume these recordings were a result of the perspective of foreigners at the time to have an audible glimpse of what an "exotic" land must be like. The most prolific of these artists or Foley artists⁵ as they are known, was the late Hugh Tracey (1903-1977), who recorded a wide variety of music from different parts of the continent. Armed with only a microphone and a recording device, Tracey, and others like him, would travel into "undiscovered" terrain, record audio oddities and the curious music of the locals and bring them back to the "civilized" world. [See Muller 2008: p.11] These field recordings, however much of a colonial undertone they might have, are the only form of audio documentation, apart from oral tradition in existence that gives historians, anthropologists and ethnographers, for that matter, an understanding of the sound of traditional African music of the time. The picture

⁵ Named after its pioneer Jack Donovan Foley (1891-1964), Foley art refers specifically to the reproduction of sound effects for film or record. The sounds are recorded on a sound stage by using a variety of materials that mimic other sounds – shaking a large piece of sheet metal to recreate the sound of thunder for example. The term Foley artist is also loosely used to describe field recording.

is not complete though. The names of artists are often left off the record sleeve and only referred to generically by “tribe.”



24. Hugh Tracey. Front Cover: *Music of Africa*. (1958)

Similarly, there is also a tradition of wildlife recordings, which teeters dangerously close to the racialized perception mentioned above. Recordings of wildlife such as *Dingaka* (1965) by Jamie Uys (1921-1996) that paint an over-dramatized sonic picture of how an explorer might have felt trekking through the bush rather than giving a scientific account of the sounds that animals make.

Today, the majority of individuals that work with this form of recording are from the film industry and there are few audio anthropologists. Their recordings are

made to act as either background noise or sound effects and are located in a tradition that began with *talkies* in the 1920's. [see Chanan 1995: p.71-91]

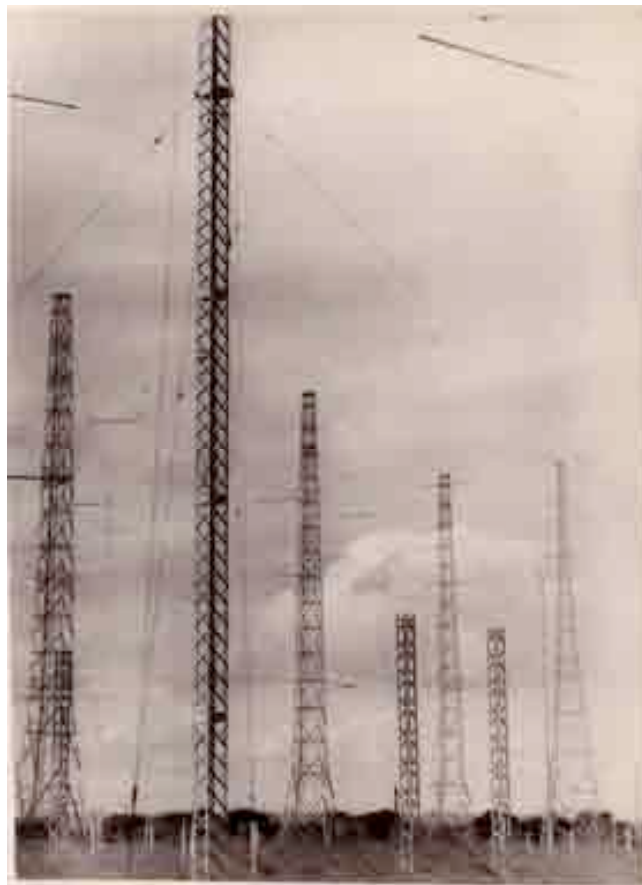
There is much potential in Johannesburg for field recording and Foley art. Although we have witnessed the popularization of sound as a medium in art, field recording and Foley art as an end in itself remains to a large degree unexplored. *Sentinels and Sadness* (2007) begins to delve into this terrain and there are many examples in terms of video art and animation such as William Kentridge's animations. Both are dependent on the accompaniment either of installation, video and animation. Apart from this, I have yet to find sound artists working exclusively with field recording or Foley art in Johannesburg.

Radio ▶ When looking at South African history, we are dealing with a tradition of conservatism and censorship as embodied, for example, The Publications and Entertainment Act of 1975, which in my opinion, aimed to protect society for the sake of shielding the elite from the unknown and unpredictable. [See Coetzee 1992: p.315] This works directly against the intentions that motivate and prompted the use of sound in the visual arts which "questioned the system through which it would pass". [Reiss 1999: p.70] Its physical properties and possibility to call its surroundings into question, bouncing off of architecture, transcending borders and attributes value to the ambience of a particular moment.

It is not surprising that recordings would have been suppressed, taken off the shelves to be replaced with more wholesome forms of leisure, manufactured in favour of an insular, conventional and predictable society. The Publications and Entertainment Act was in many ways an insurance policy, which essentially stated that any material that threatened, called into question, or critique white nationalist identity and political sanctity must be withheld and censored from the public. It is not coincidental that sound art entered the gallery soon after the 1994 elections. [See Lucey 2004: p.67-72] It is likely that many sound artworks were undocumented or never even realized because of the stringent laws at the

time. The emphasis of freedom of expression post 1994 and more so at present is more accepting of art that questions its institutions.

Television is the most frequently used example in terms of censorship. Concerns surfaced in relation to the government's ability to control broadcast material, and, it was only in 1976 when the reigns were loosened and television was introduced. However it was, and is still, government sanctioned and programming regulated by its own legislation. Radio is primarily about audio and gives testament to the fact that this sacred land was not entirely protected from outside influence.



25. Matola Antenna Farm. (1960s)

Radio echoes the sentiments shared about sound's ability to transcend boundaries as many illegitimate stations such as Radio Freedom, or stations that lay beyond the perimeter, such as Mozambique's LM Radio, broadcasted

their frequencies freely into South African airspace that was in itself defiant in spirit. Although the content is difficult for me to speak of conclusively, it had some understandably radical elements. In 1972, LM Radio was sold to the SABC in what seems to be a strategic measure of control. "The fact that homeland governments depend on a system of apartheid for their very maintenance militates against authentic broadcasting independence for the commercial stations" [Tomaselli 1989: p.138]

Regretably, as is the case with field recording, radio as a medium in art is largely unexplored. Firstly, one would have to obtain a licence to broadcast sound on a particular frequency and secondly, I would imagine that commercial radio stations are not too enthusiastic about giving airtime to sound artists as yet. Apart from South African artist Adam Lieber (1976-), now based in London, having hosted a programme entitled Art and Sound on 104.5, there are no sound artists or sound artworks that deal specifically with radio as a medium in Johannesburg. [Lieber 2002: <http://www.openrecord.co.za/adamlieber.html> accessed 14/07/2009] The Internet has potential in the form of Podcasts⁶, although the audience is broader but limited to Internet users and not a localized public as is the case with radio.

Record ▶ The very nature of sound recording suggests portability, a sound is recorded at a particular place and time and moved to another, where this event or moment can be relived reflected upon or contemplated. [See Morton 2000: p.161] Another important quality is obviously its reproducibility. [Morton 2000: p.27] The moment can be relived to a degree, it has the ability to duplicate exponentially and once again transcend borders. However, gramophones were status symbols and the exchange was limited to the middle classes. [Shuker 2001: p.58] Therefore radio, before tape recorders, was the most prolific platform for the majority of South Africans to share and spread ideas that opposed the establishment. It was only in the late seventies and early eighties

⁶ A podcast refers to digital media in the form of video or sound that can be downloaded to be viewed on a mobile device such a cellular phone or MP3 player.

that tape culture became a personalized form of communication and sharing of ideas, beliefs and political views through sound became more commonplace.

It is through historical moments such as these in which we find evidence to support Gunther Grass' (1927-) sentiments about the history of literature being the history of censorship. Sound art and music, rely on recording and a literary culture for their survival. Therefore The Publications and Entertainment Act officially served to limit any legitimate forms of documentation if there were any at all, and made it almost impossible for future generations to engage with such material even after the act was revised to foreground freedom of expression. The historian is forced to invent history.

A discussion of particular forms of resistance is also important in understanding sound art in Johannesburg. One would be foolish to assume that the lack of accurate documentation and archiving of recordings does not mean that they do not still exist or happened then. In fact, it is those recordings that were some of the most powerful contributing factors to the transformation of South Africa into a democratic society.

Unfortunately the records that I speak of have historical significance and therefore are valued as collector's items, kept safe in the strongholds of the collector rather than being shared with the public. This is why the culture of sampling with its focus on uncovering rare recordings is important, discussed in more detail in Chapter 3. I have looked through many record collections in Johannesburg that store records and sell them to the public and my findings have been astonishing. When looking at The Collector's Treasury for example, their collection is vast but unfortunately poorly maintained.

Audio archives, apart from private collections and the sparse collection of recordings in public libraries could be drastically improved. The digitization of sound and the Internet has created an opportunity for recordings to be listened to by the public, however, in relation to Johannesburg and the recordings that

shaped its history, there are no substantial public archives. Lastly, in terms of vinyl records, many have yet to be converted into a digital format. The Wartenweiler Library at The University of the Witwatersrand is a good example. This reasonably large collection of LPs remain unheard because firstly, they do not even have a record player and secondly, nobody has bothered to convert them into a digital format.

Tape ▶ It is useful to go into some depth about audio culture as a whole and the philosophy that governs its operation, “sharing talk,” [Peters 1999: p.7] necessitates face-to-face contact and hand-to-hand exchange. This being said I would like to look at cassette tapes and the revolution that they brought both to music, sound art and audio culture as a whole.

Before tapes became a mainstream commodity, record companies, specifically large ones, possessed control over the music and public reception thereof. Records were luxury items but more than that, could not be duplicated by everyday consumers. If you wanted to listen to another song after the one you were listening to and it was on another record, you were forced to interrupt the needles relentless path, take off the record, place the other record on the turntable and reposition the needle. It was tiresome. The Long Play⁷ format was a way of overcoming constant interruptions but listeners or music enthusiasts were forced to partake in the structure predetermined by the record companies. [see Chanan 1995: p.66]

The Telefunken Corporation introduced cassette tapes in the late seventies without any patent, with the idea that they would open up the way for a globally compatible format and it worked. [See Millard 2003: p.313-327] Power and control over music and sound shifted from the record companies into the hands of the mass consumer, who was for the first time able to prerecord his/her own mixes and play them back without interruption or significant noise levels. With

⁷ The Long Play format is a audio storage medium first introduced in 1948 and had a maximum duration of 22-26 minutes per side and is precisely 12 inches in diameter.

the advent of the double tape deck, consumers could create their own mixes and compositions, by looping instrumental sections. Audio culture, distribution and conversation through audio means, had passed into a new phase, which not only gave the youth a new platform of expression and a voice, but also set in motion the demise of large record corporations. [see Millard 2003: p.313-327]



26. Willem Boshoff. *Épat*. (2007)

In my opinion, artist Willem Boshoff warns us of the risk of jumping to conclusions about the forerunners of sound art in Johannesburg and South Africa for that matter, and even about documenting such a cultural practice in his work *Épat* (2007).

Épat (2007), is roughly translated, from French, into the English exclamation “WOW!” The work consists of a rectangular frame that forms a border within which cassette tape cases have been horizontally stacked on top of each other to fill the frame. The spines of the cassette casings face the back of the framework and within the inner sleeve, the names of avant-garde composers have been written. Between the cases, in an almost pixilated or at least modular form, cassette tapes that also lie flat with their magnetic strip facing the viewer, spell out the word EPAT. *Épat* of course, when pronounced correctly sounds like the Afrikaans word for grandfather “oupa,” making the warning to historians clear about the risks of constructing history without being a part of it. Boshoff is an “oupa” so to speak and understands tape culture on a first hand level.

The work reminds me of a song by well-known emcee KRS-ONE also known as Kris Parker (1965-), from his 2007 album *Hip-Hop Lives* entitled *I Was There*. In response to Jeff Chang's book *Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of the Hip Hop Generation* [Woodie 2007: p.42], Parker warns hip-hop historians of the danger of attempting to document a culture from the outside because, as he says, he was there.

The problem is that these historians attempt to describe, analyze and interpret the culture from a distance when in fact they have not experienced it for themselves. It is not to say that it would be a fruitless endeavour to engage in a study even though you were not necessarily part of a movement. In fact an objective and unbiased view could only be useful and this kind of research happens every day.

However, being conscious of one's position as a researcher is vital. Sound art, music and social history for that matter are significant in this way. Take my passion for collecting hip-hop from the 80s as example. It interests me to understand the historical framework of hip-hop culture, however, as much as I love, admire and respect albums such as *Critical Beatdown* (1988) by Ultramagnetic MCs, even though I was alive at the time, it was only until 2007 that I actually heard it for the first time. There are no memories attached to the work from the time of its release and therefore my relationship to it is different. The same can be said for many prolific works, music and art. Therefore, I can only speak of *Critical Beatdown* (1988) as I know it and can only look at its original context in retrospect.

Lastly, the point that I continually consider is that sound artworks are often ephemeral in nature and documentation ascribes responsibility to careful research as opposed to having an actual experience to refer to. As I have already mentioned, production and documentation, in terms of sound are closely linked; playback itself is reproduction and documentation. However, it is difficult to speak about acoustics for instance, of a sound artwork in a gallery if

you did not experience it first hand. Furthermore, each specific sound artwork needs its own form of analysis and what might seem important in one sound artwork could be irrelevant to the next.

Tape culture teaches us the importance of hand-to-hand exchanges. The mix tape plays an important role in this respect as a personalized message swapped amongst a particular listenership. Home taping, far from “killing music,” expanded the reach of many musicians and was possibly a form of exchanging politically charged messages, through song during the liberation struggle in South Africa. In Johannesburg within the past five years, tape culture is virtually non-existent considering the influence of digital media. The spirit of sharing by hand is only really shared by individuals that were part of the movement during the late 80s to mid 90s and I am doubtful that there will be any significant resurgence of tape culture.

6. CONCLUSION

The availability of relatively inexpensive sound technology in the digital form has inaugurated a new audio culture in Johannesburg. Artists from the visual tradition have gravitated to the use of sound recently, having realized its potential to add an acoustic dimension to visual forms such as installation and video work. Johannesburg-based artists are also beginning to work with sound exclusively and are gradually gaining exposure as an understanding of the medium grows.

Events such as *The Floor Party* (2008) showed that large-scale sound artworks are possible and there is enough of a following of art supporters to attend such an event. More importantly, it raised the debate of “push and pull” quite explicitly which, as did *The Conductor’s Fear of the Soloist* (2008), demonstrated sounds ability to confront the spatial politics of the city.

The undisclosed and secretive mechanism by which the street operates is also a rich area of exploration for Johannesburg's sound artists. Teamuncool's work, fusing electronic music production and animation, is directed at the younger art community specifically. The sites in which their performances are realized are at times informal and literally on the street and at other times decorous, such as their showcase at The Premises. Their collaborative energy shows an exchange of skills amongst experts, each adding value from their respective area of specialization to a single art experience.

Predating Teamuncool, *The Collisions Project* (2005) demonstrated collaborative networks within the context of the university. This interdisciplinary exploration has its origins in the *gesamstkunswerk* of Wagner (1813-1883), who proposed a "total art" in which disciplinary strictures fade and art, music, sculpture and dance fuse into a multidimensional art encounter. It is encouraging to see explorations of collaboration in Johannesburg between 2005 and 2009 that makes use of sound especially because sound as a medium is readily applied to a range of media such as installation and video.

Goodman's work extends on the tradition of concrete poetry and interrogates the ideas related to conversation, dialogue and the very act of recording the voice. Similarly, McCusker's "shriek" not only shows how sound and memory are closely linked but, like Goodman, extends on an already existing tradition – that of field recording.

As much as the recent popularisation of sound has directed artists to explore traditions of sound production such as concrete poetry and field recording, there are however still avenues waiting to be dealt with. Radio, with few exceptions is still relatively untouched as a medium and platform for sound artists to delve into. Furthermore, digital technology, the Internet and a host of new media are rich areas of investigation but only beginning to be looked at as a from of sound making.

I looked at tape, record and the audio culture of the past with the intention of framing the history of audio culture in Johannesburg of which sound art is a part. Hand-to-hand exchanges and sharing based on dialogue were important factors in this respect and it is my hope that digital formats and Internet culture do not diminish the personal nature of tape and record culture in favour of conversation at a distance.

CHAPTER 3: USING DISKS TO SPEAK

In this chapter I will look at my own work, my influences, inspiration and issues that it brings to the fore. It is useful for an understanding of sound art in Johannesburg between 2005 and 2009 because firstly, it is the period within which I began dealing with the sonic aspect of my work directly and secondly, my work was influenced by my experience with sound artworks mentioned in chapter two and are often a reflection on this experience. I have attempted to extend upon what I have learnt from other sound artists in Johannesburg and engage through my sound works, in a conversation with the artists I have studied.

1. REWIND

My earlier work, although not dealing directly with sound, is useful to look at in the sense that it gives an understanding of how I came to work with sound. I would like to look at three examples to chart a trajectory of the work that it preceded.

I have always been interested in the magic of a needle placed on a black disc and the ability for records to transport me anywhere I would like to go. As a child, my mother owned a combination hi-fi system that had a record player and a double tape deck. When she was not looking or not at home, I would open the cupboard doors onto the rest of the world, place the needle tidily onto the groove and go on sonic journeys. I often recorded tapes for my friends, recording golden oldies, as they are now known. I recorded songs from other tapes too and even wired the outputs from the television set to record the audio from my favourite music videos as they played on *Zero Hour Zone*, a locally based music program played on SABC 1, which started at precisely six in the morning every day, before I went to school. I would memorize the lyrics by

playing and rewinding the songs until I knew them before my friends did. At school we would swap tapes and on the weekends we listened to them and pretended, as most children do, that we too were stars. We even went as far as starting our own garage band called SFM, (Struggle for Money) and turned an old dustbin upside down and anything else to hand, to beat with a stick, for percussion. I played an old recorder. Half chewed by my dog, it could still manage half a melody. A friend of mine had a keyboard on which he had an uncanny ability to play any song by ear. The band never crossed the threshold into the outside world but we had a great time nevertheless.

When I reached secondary school level, I attended Jeppe High School for Boys where I was astonished at how many like-minded individuals I encountered and how much more seriously tape culture was taken. In standard seven (or grade 9 as it is now known), my father bought me my first set of turntables and a mixer with an onboard sampler, and I began making my own compositions by sampling and looping songs from records. I also began making my own mix tapes and performed at parties whenever I could. I would skip school with my friends and walk to town where a group of enthusiasts opened a club by the name of Reality. There were graffiti walls, break dancing and DJ workshops where youngsters could interact and perfect their skills. On Friday afternoons we would gather at Gandhi Square, then known as van der Bijl Square, where our friends from other high schools would share their week's efforts. At the centre of this gathering and interaction was the music. We began making tapes at my house on the weekends and called our group Butterfly Effect, with the idea that one small action, such as our own, had the ability to have enormous consequences. When I left Jeppe High School for Boys for The National School of the Arts, to pursue art making in the (moderately) traditional sense, the group split up and I swapped my turntables for beer.

It was only in the second year of my undergraduate degree that I had bought my second pair of turntables and began making my own compositions again. By this time, my friends and I all owned CD-writers and the sharing of ideas through

music was predominantly through this form. Every morning the first person to arrive at our studio would begin by playing music. Music was central to the atmosphere in the studio. Of course, we resided in different parts of the city and had connections to other collectors in our respective neighbourhoods. Our studio collection was a reflection of this. We would bring new music, copied for each other and traded for more music with our friends back home. The process was circular and self-sustainable, not to mention illegal.

Stay High ▶ Throughout my undergraduate work, I have been interested in Johannesburg and I have found that I often refer to it, even sometimes unintentionally. The first time that it became clear at Wits was through my participation in Jean Bernard Koeman's workshop entitled *A Temporary Monument to an Unknown Hero* (2005), in which I chose to commemorate a New York based graffiti artist Stay High 179⁸. Koeman is an artist, author and curator based in Amsterdam. The workshop was loosely based around Koeman's *Temporary Monument for David McComb* (2004). I intended on constructing a sculpture made out of wire, located on the rooftop of the building in which my studio was located at the time. I wanted to make letters that would spell out the word SKYF, a colloquial term commonly used in Johannesburg when asking for a cigarette. My enthusiasm and ambition far exceeded my knowledge of the medium, practical considerations and time constraints. The workshop taught me to respect these things. In retrospect, I think about failure and Johannesburg. The wire framework, half complete still clings to the top of that building today, reaching skyward like the city itself.

⁸ Stay High 179 is a New York based graffiti artists and is known as a pioneer of graffiti having begun spray painting his trademark character borrowed from the T.V. series, *The Saint*. He placed a joint in the hand of the character and it was accompanied by the slogan "Voice of the Ghetto." [Ganz 2004: p.107]



27. B.J. Engelbrecht. *Monument to an Unknown Hero*. (2005)

The City Project ▶ Sculptural tagging is a form of graffiti that uses sculptural forms bolted or even glued to public structures. I was involved in a project that once again used an element of graffiti called *A Walk in the Arc* (2005), hosted by urban designers and artists The Trinity Session, held at The Premises Gallery. We walked through the space that has been designated as The Cultural Arc, which begins in Newtown then runs to The University of the Witwatersrand and then concludes its journey at Constitution Hill. The only time I have ever walked here before was while I was spray painting, marking out my journey as I marched through the city at night. My proposal took this clandestine activity as a starting point and I intended to sculpturally tag⁹ the Municipal building in Braamfontein. In my third year of study, I became more passionate about Johannesburg and began work on *The City Project* (2006).

⁹ Sculptural tagging is graffiti art that makes use of three dimensional objects either glued, bolted or placed onto pre-existing public structures.



28. B.J. Engelbrecht. Detail from *The City Project*. (2006)

Walking through the city one day, I had noticed how many construction sites made use of wood and would simply throw leftovers away or pile it up with the intention of leaving it as firewood for homeless people during winter. I decided to dedicate myself to picking up any beam and off cut that I came across, storing them in my studio.



29. B.J. Engelbrecht. Detail from *The City Project*. (2006)

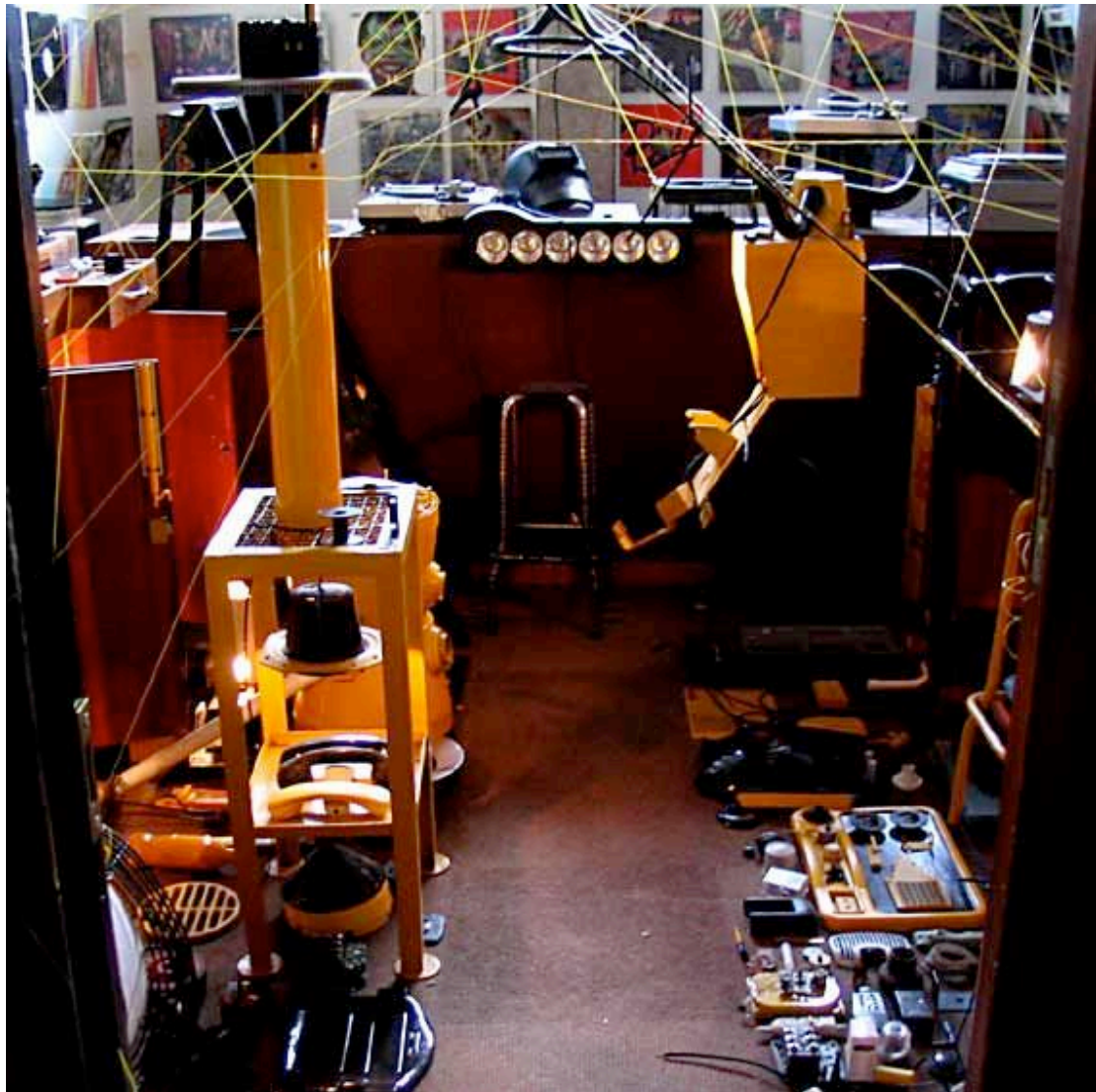
I began gluing them together in a way that would allow them to support each other when placed in a vertical position. The result was a skyline or cityscape that became so high that it reached the roof of my studio. Firstly, I saw it as a commentary on the vertical orientation of the city as being intimidating and impersonal. Secondly, It made a statement about property and possession because I was sharing the studio with two other students who were becoming rather offended by the amount of space that my installation occupied.

The work was intended as a critique on the impermanence of structures in the urban setting, as the unstable towers would collapse on each other like dominos and would have to then be continuously re-erected. The tall beams would collapse without warning in a loud crash and sounded like a miniature demolition. I installed light into various parts of the installation and because of this, various winged insects made it home. The smell of decaying wood could also have attracted living things. This city was truly organic, alive and able to regenerate. [See Register 2006]

My work that deals with the city, although still only partially sonic, was an attempt to deal with the spatial politics of Johannesburg. I first looked at the city and its forms critically during *A Walk in the Arc* (2005) and *A Temporary Monument to an Unknown Hero* (2005). *The City Project* (2006) was a metaphor for the city and the how it regenerates and rebuilds itself. There were small explorations with sound using the pieces of wood such as making a wind-chime out of off cuts and the somewhat unexpected collapse of the beams. Nevertheless, *The City Project* (2006) made me aware of the sound aspect of my installation and I decided to investigate sound in the work that followed.

The Record Shop ► *The City Project* (2006) became unmanageable, I threw all the wood away and began work on *The Record Shop* (2006). This installation was initiated in contemplation of the radio that we used to play our music through in the studio. It barely worked and, by making use of some creative rewiring, I attached larger speakers and a CD player to it. I then quite

spontaneously began by collecting old radios, turntables and any other second hand sound equipment that I could find. This led me to collecting all plastic objects, which included everything from vacuum cleaners to an old Sega Genesis. I found these objects in and around dumpsters in the city and began painting them with black and yellow enamel paint.



30. B.J. Engelbrecht. *The Record Shop*. 2006

I was particularly interested in making reference to the intersection between Jorrissen and Bertha Street as a specific point of reference through which I could refer to transitory spaces within the city. This is an important metaphor which I used to understand the city experience and the sounds which emanated from intersecting spaces. I demarcated an axis within my installation using black

insulation tape and arranged the freshly painted objects according to this axis, suggesting that these objects came from a specific intersection, Jorrissen and Bertha. I wanted the viewer to imagine that the objects I collected were a result of the intersecting of different people moving from one space to the next. Similarly the sounds played in *The Record Shop* (2006) were used to refer to the inhabitants of the city.

This is the first time that I intentionally made use of sound, and further explored the use of light in my installations. Sound and light are both ways of working with spaces that are not tactile. Many of the objects were fitted with light bulbs or speakers and the wires directed to a central point from which they could be controlled. In the final realization of the work, I had connected turntables, brought my entire record collection into the installation and began playing them quite loudly in the gallery. For the rest of the year I continued to work on installations that made use of sound and light. By the end of the year, I felt that I was underestimating the importance and power of the sonic aspect of these installations. These then became a primary focus.

2. CUT 'n MIX

From Schaefer onwards, DJ Culture has worked with two essential concepts: the *cut* and the *mix*. To record is to cut, to separate the sonic signifier (the "sample") from any original context or meaning so that it might be free to function otherwise. To mix is to reinscribe, to place the floating sample into a new chain of signification.

[Cox 2006: p.330]

There are a number of elements from my earlier work which were carried into my work with sound. I began noticing a number of parallels. The idea of "Cut 'n Mix" is the most apt description of the similarities between sculpture and installation and sound art and it summarizes issues raised in my practical work.

Samples of everyday life ▶ My installations refer to Johannesburg in a three ways:

First and foremost is through site-specificity. Objects are found exclusively in Johannesburg and are therefore connected to the people of city as a whole environment consisting of specific sites within the urban landscape.

Secondly, was the way in which those objects were arranged in a precarious way that drew a likeness between the vertical orientation of skyscrapers and their instability, conjuring images of the tower of Babel, impermanent, shaky and constantly being built upon and rebuilt. [see Ronneberger 2006: p.48] Objects are either stacked on top of each other, leaned against the wall or balanced in a vertical position and threaten to fall over at any time. This again brings to mind the precariousness and constantly morphing shape of the urban landscape and “the concept of a city subject to a continuous, active process of construction and decay.” [Ronneberger 2006: p.48]

Thirdly, I arrange objects as if I were an urban planner working according to a floor plan as defined by a predetermined architectural framework of the space in which it is installed. The floor plan is a metaphor for the horizontal delineations within the city and the concept of property and possession.

If one takes all of these factors into consideration my installations can be compared to some post-modern architecture in which regionalism is important:

Regionalism addresses the particulars of place and culture. It mines everyday life and perception for intimations about a truly progressive future...Crucially, it learns from experience. It tinkers, crafts, accepts, rejects, adjusts and reacts. It is immutably rooted in the tangible realities of its situation: the history, geography, human values, economy, traditions, technology and cultural life of place.

[Slessor 2000: p.16]

The use of materials found at a particular site within Johannesburg and the need to blend into the predetermined framework are both strategies used in this kind of architecture. In my work, however, the intention is not to camouflage the artwork in the space by “fitting into” the surroundings, but my installations are more like exclamation marks, dramatizations of the intervention within the urban “situation:” state and evolution of Johannesburg. Furthermore, the accumulation of objects found in Johannesburg was materially specific to this city. It was the site for my artistic investigations at the time. The idea of everyday, seemingly mundane objects glorified and brought into the domain of “high art” dates back to Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968) and his readymade *Bottle-Rack* 1914. [see Britt 2007: p.204-206] Of course, non-art imagery that focuses on city life was seen before in the subject matter of artists such as Courbet. [See Williams 2004: p.127]



31. Dieter Roth. Flat Garbage. (1975-6/1999)

I am interested in this but also the ideas of archiving, collecting and the inferences that can be made about these banal records and the people that use them. [Emmison 2000: p.114] For example: late one evening, I was suddenly struck by playing Uriah Heep's *High and Mighty* (1976) album record that had belonged to a family member that had passed away some years ago. His name was written on the label and on the verge of tears, I found myself inspecting the groove, in search not of the trace of my relative but the relative himself. I placed the needle tidily in the groove and for a brief moment I imagined he was with me in the room.

This is how I have come to view my record collection, much the same way as Dieter Roth's (1930-1998) *Flat Garbage* (1975-6/1999). Although *Flat Garbage* (1975-6/1999) is more ordered and minimalist, the process of collecting is the same. I ritually buy all kinds of records in Johannesburg, I am not exactly sure why I choose the ones that I do. I never listen to a record before I buy it. Something draws my attention to it and I just cannot leave without it. I collect from specific places and revisit them regularly. At times I buy a whole crate of records without even looking through it, at times the cover art makes it irresistible and other times I know about the musician or record label.

Nevertheless, the ones that I use for my installations are all bought from second hand shops and belonged to someone that lived or is living in Johannesburg. They might have even belonged to someone before the person that it belonged to before me. There are "traces" of the people that once owned them and this is important. [Emmison 2000: p.116] A sticker, a scratch or a crackle or a pop is the result or trace of the body acting upon its surface. In this sense, listening to scratches on a record are erosion measures, we are studying "wear and tear on materials." [Emmison 2000: p.135] Conversely, "accretion measures are deposits of material that have built up over time as a result of human activity," [Emmison 2000: p.135] such as dust and dirt in the groove. This "people" centred aspect of my work is primary. Conversation, "sharing talk" [Peters 1999: p.7] and hand-to-hand exchanges are underrated in a city of strangers and

therefore, part of my project is to establish personal links with people, using sound as the catalyst.



32. Christian Marclay. *Footsteps*. (1989)

Christian Marclay (1955-) illustrates this with *Footsteps* (1989) in which empty records cover the floor and the audience is invited to walk over them, scratching their surface and creating a kind of travelling song that mixes together audience and site. The sonic event is not actually there but rather implied.

Traces are also evident in the graffiti on record covers, price tags, signatures and marks placed next to a proud listener's favourite song that all indicate an interaction and personalisation of some sort by a person living in Johannesburg. [Emmison 2000: p.116] Records are passed on from person to person and therefore these personalised markings show record sharing akin to art-by-mail where a message is sent to a distant recipient.

A comparison of sound and installation art shows that they are well suited and I draw from each in my own work. Installation art often makes use of the predetermined architectural framework in order to point the built environment back at itself. The installation is an extension of the architecture. Installation art: "Present[s] architecture as something usable, something which comes and goes, its aspirations to permanence continually undermined." [de Oliveira 1994: p.157]

Sound too works against or with these structures penetrating its crevices and continuously bouncing off and working away at its surfaces. "The sound wave arriving at the ear is the analogue of the current state of the environment, because as the wave travels, it is charged by each interaction with the environment" [Truax 1994: p.15]

In my work I tend to treat object and sounds as one in that I dutifully and ritually collect (record), rearrange and reconfigure sounds and objects into a new composition using a sampler. I sample my environment by picking up a piece of plastic or by sampling sounds. "Samplers are computers that can digitally

duplicate any existing sounds and play them back in any key or pitch, in any order, sequence and loop them endlessly.” [Rose 1994: p.249]

The hip hoppers “stole” music off air and cut it up. By doing this they were breaking the law of copyright. But the cut ‘n’ mix attitude was that no one owns a rhythm or sound. You just borrow it, use it and give it back to the people in a slightly different form.

[Hebdige 1987: p.141]

By collecting objects and sounds with the same intention of reconstructing and creating interesting combinations of my own choosing, It is my hope that by experiencing my installations that the distance between that which is seen and that which is heard is narrowed.

Bettered by the Borrower ▶ The samples I use are from records found in Johannesburg. Within the past five years, sound artists have generally not worked with found sounds specifically. I would like to look at the implications of found sounds as demonstrated by the process of sampling.

Along with sampling records, comes the authorization and clearance of the material that you intend to use. In the case of music, the rules and guidelines are strict. “Copyright is the basis of virtually every music business transaction. Without copyright there would be no protection for musical compositions and recorded music. Without copyright they would have no financial value.” [Gordon 2005: p.1] Home dubbing is the result of a need to share. In many ways, copyright law related to sound discourages sharing; conversation is less important to record companies than consumption.

In Johannesburg for example, many musicians will not allow their work to be cleared at all. Such is the case with Miriam Makeba (1932-2008). Protecting the sanctity and inviolability of their music is primary. They see the act of sampling as brutalizing, disrespectful and an assault on the integrity of the musician. For record companies and artists alike, the economic implications are dire although

they fail to admit that home dubbing expands the reach of the music and promotes the music beyond the scope of radio play and concert performances.

There are various firms that specialize in the clearance of samples on behalf of the artists but generally record labels try to avoid using producers that sample. The procedure involves having someone that represents the artist, or even the artists themselves, to first listen to what you have done with their music and if they are happy; they would take a percentage of your earnings. Often, even if they don't approve of how you used their music, the artists would still allow clearance because the potential to earn is great. Various rumours also exist with regards to the length of the sample that you may use before having to pay royalties, however many companies have a stern principal that insists that even if you use a single note that you must pay.

If we look at *John Oswald's Bettered by the Borrower: The Ethics of Musical Debt*, [Oswald 1987: p.131] he refers to Barthes indirectly, by suggesting a line of borrowing between music played in a studio, recorded by an engineer, sampled by a producer, replayed in a Disc Jockeys mix tape, copied for your friends and so forth. This is similar to my conversational loop. What is more relevant here however, is the idea of cross-referencing. He says,

Jazz musicians do not wiggle two fingers of each hand in the air, as lecturers sometimes do when cross-referencing during their extemporizations, as on most instruments this would present some technical difficulties.

[Oswald 1987: p.133/4]

This is a rather humorous account but no less true. This kind of referencing is called "scare-quoting" and in my opinion needs to be taken back to the very first musical note that was played with the intention of being heard by an audience and *that* musician deserves the credit and royalties. It is a question of originality and is not unique to sound art. The discourse of appropriation in post-modern

practice has to a degree accepted that originality is merely a fantasy. The problem is that copyright law is the primary means by which musicians, and the record companies that hold distribution rights, make their money. If it were a free for all, I would simply record a copy of your song and sell it for cheaper, also known as bootlegging. However, there is not much intellectual integrity in that, therefore sampling has become an art form of its own.

The ability to find a rare sample, also known as “crate digging,” (see below) deserves some credit and thereafter, how it is used, sliced, juxtaposed and reinterpreted and repositioned, to the extent that it takes on a completely different form, is no different from the tradition of borrowing in the visual arts. Cutler elaborates:

And surely, what has been done with “captured” visual images Warhol, Rauschenberg, Lichtenstein-or with directly imported objects (Duchamp, the mutilated poster works of Harris, Rotella, De la Villegle and others)-all of which depend upon their actuality and provenance (as ready-mades)-can equally be done with captured “images” of sound.

[Cutler 1994: p.144]



The BMW SA advertisement.



Gerhard Marx: *Horizontal Figure 2*, cut and reconstituted map fragments.

33. Left: *The BMW SA Advert* Right: Gerhard Marx. *Horizontal Figure 2*. (2007)

Need I mention the case of Gerhard Marx (1976-) who too collaged clippings from maps and then reconstructed these into the shape of figures that was then stolen by BMW for an advertisement and thereafter borrowed by Christian Nerf? The post-modern condition is rooted in Roland Barthes' *The Death of the Author* (1967). Words that are spoken out of my mouth, for example, I had to have heard somewhere before and all I am doing is repeating them within a different context to serve my needs, the same goes for musicians, artists, dancers, actors and so forth.

“Samplers reconfigure time by inserting music from the past into the present” [Lipsitz 1994: p.21] Sampling forms an important part of the reinterpretation and process of translation, from one generation to the next and pays homage to the respective musician or composer. The process of sampling is hardly seen as an art form in itself and is associated with theft, laziness and being uncreative and unimaginative. By sampling John Coltrane (1926-1967) I could include a phrase from a saxophone into my own song without ever having played a single note. In some cases this is true and part of the intention. There is of course a certain amount of skill involved. I could sample each note and replay them in any order I wish for example.

Manipulation is a creative act where something old is transformed into something new. Such is the case with many sample-based producers of which the most influential is certainly Marley Marl [See Keyes 2004: p.73]. At the centre of this is the act of finding those rare and even almost forgotten songs and artists in the depths of basements; the corners of flea markets and untouched crates of pawnshops. Of course many pop songs have been sampled but in terms of crate digging, discussed later, it is more difficult to sample a record that was difficult to find. When these rarities are brought into the studio they are juxtaposed, layered and recycled, critically examined and put into a modern framework and turned into something fresh – a process familiar to the visual arts:

montage, collage, borrowing, bricolage have been endemic in the visual arts since at least the turn of the century. The importation of readymade fragments into original works was a staple of cubism (newspaper, label samples, advertising etc.), futurism and early soviet art. Dada took this much further (Kurt Schwitters above all and the photomontagists) and as early as 1914 Marcel Duchamp exhibited his bottle rack, a work in which, for the first time, a complete unmodified object was simply imported whole into an 'art space.'

[Cutler 1994: p.144]

Durban-based artist Siemon Allen engages with Oswald's *Ethics of Musician Debt* with the work *Records* 2009 at the Bank Gallery. Allen composes a screen out of different record covers from Miriam Makeba albums. It is not only important in how it offers a historical collage of Makeba's discography and the culture of resistance as seen by looking at cover art [See Drewett 2008: p.115] but also, given Makeba's death in 2008, becomes a memorial, or as its form suggests, a wall of remembrance. As I have already mentioned, strict regulations prohibit any sampling of Makeba's music but Allen challenges these in *Records* (2009).

By appropriating Makeba's covers, not only does he give an overall image of how Makeba's music has been packaged over the course of her career, but also alludes to her distinctive sound as witnessed through her body of recordings. Allen is still sampling and more so than Marx in that, like the readymade, the hand has become less important and almost entirely unimportant. Oswald quotes Stravinsky saying that "A good composer does not imitate; he steals." [Oswald1987: p.136] There is a thin line in my opinion between borrowing and stealing which sampling distorts. Appropriation in the context of modernism borrowed or stole from everyday life. Picasso's collages (1907-1914) are influential in this respect.



34. Siemon Allen. *Records*. (2009)

Crate Digging ▶ The most widely used method used for storing old records, is in plastic milk crates, both locally and internationally. Digging alludes to excavation and the fact that old records are very dirty. The term “crate digging,” to which I have already referred was first used within the hip-hop community to refer to the primary objective of audio production for DJs and producers. It has in recent times however permeated sound art. The culture of collecting and crate digging are partners, however, in terms of sound art in Johannesburg between 2005 and 2009, there are no crate diggers that I know of, except myself. Within the culture of crate digging the record is, although not exclusively, the predominant sonic format that inspires the search. The basement, attic, pawnshop, flea market, antique store, garage sale and garbage dumps, are all potential sources for sound. Schloss explains:

The process of acquiring rare, usually out-of-print, vinyl records for sampling purposes has become a highly developed skill and is referred to by the term ‘digging in the crates’ (‘digging’ for short). Evoking images of a devoted collector spending hours sorting through milk crates full of records in used record stores, garages, and thrift shops, the term carries with it a sense of valour and symbolizes an unending quest for the next record.

[Schloss 2004: p.79]

Pawnshops and flea markets are by far the cheapest and most revealing resource for audiophiles and add to the mix a more pronounced element of chance. Often, residents of South Africa will be forced to sell or simply give their possessions away to pawn shops or flea market stall owners. This is the philosophy of “you die, we buy.” I have found many of my most prized records in pawnshops and paid very little for them. What I have noticed is that many recordings are quite common in most collections and I would have to overlook them to find something truly special.

It is also important to be respectful and build a relationship with the dealers over time, speak to them about what you are looking for in particular and they would keep a watchful eye on your behalf. To reiterate my point, I am intrigued more by these relationships and interactions than the music itself and believe that audio culture in Johannesburg is nourished and maintained through dialogue, discussion and the exchange of ideas through the common passion for sound which are all forms of conversation.

These “relational” procedures (invitations), casting sessions, meetings, convivial and user-friendly areas, appointments, etc.) are merely a repertory of common forms, vehicles through which particular lines of thought or personal relationships with the world are developed.

[Bourriaud 1998: p46]

In conclusion, there is a strong culture of sampling in Johannesburg, particularly amongst its hip-hop community. In my opinion it is strongest within the non-commercial or so-called “underground” movement even though, commercial artists have come to realize the potential to be gained from sampling “golden oldies.” Tape decks can easily be used to record and loop another person’s songs and then lyrics added afterwards. Computer software that is relatively low tech, such as Sonic Foundry’s Acid (See Chapter 1) changed the analogue scene in Johannesburg in the mid-nineties and further put the power to manipulate music in the hands of the everyday consumer. Pirated copies of

programmes such as these were and are still exchanged within the hip-hop community and the music and culture grows because of this. Although the music quality is not quite up to standard in the professional sense, emcees and producers are able to get their message onto the streets. As was the case with Goodman and McCusker, by sampling I aim to extend on this tradition although within the context of sound art.

3. CONCLUSION

Sampling demonstrates my point about audio culture being dependent on moments of exchange, sharing, talking and therefore sampling is reliant on conversation and the various forms that conversations can take. My practical work aims to introduce sampling, an already established tradition, to sound art in Johannesburg.

Samples can be captured from a multitude of sources however, the found sound narrows this margin to pre-recorded sounds. Crate digging focuses on so-called “dead media” such as old records and tapes. I place emphasis on rarity and materiality of the found sound. Rarity does not only refer to the collector’s value of a particular record but also to the act of digging, the more time and effort invested in the dig, the more satisfying the find. The materiality of a found sound is firstly about possessing sound as a thing and secondly about what story the thing tells us about the people of Johannesburg. In the former case, the sound quality of a record for instance depends on its surface: pops and crackling draw the attention of the ear to its materiality as opposed to digitally re-mastered sound which filters the sound to make it seem more accurate and “true to life.” In the latter case, traces of human interaction with the surface of the record tell us about how people once used the record. A record that has been significantly scratched was probably played hundreds of times and thoroughly enjoyed by its owner.

“True to life” recordings are true to the life of the sound quality but not to the life that the sound takes beyond itself as an object. Sampling and crate digging is dependant on relationships with people, face-to-face contact and hand-to-hand exchanges which have the potential to create an interactive, human-centred community.

4. CASE STUDY: LAWN CARE



35. B.J. Engelbrecht. *Lawn Care*. (2008)

Urban Concerns was an initiative conceived through the collaboration between young curators from Johannesburg Art Gallery and Bildmuseet in Umeå Sweden, Michelle Harris, based in Johannesburg and her counterpart in Umeå Veronica Wiman. I was invited at the beginning of 2008 to participate in their project and be the first artist to do so. I had been given a space in the gallery to create an installation that raised relevant concerns that related both to their project and my own interests.

From the outset of our collaboration I had noticed that their interest was in the dynamics of social interaction within the park in which the gallery so remorsefully found itself. Joubert Park is an inner city suburb that is cluttered by high-rise buildings, and the actual park is a horizontal plane wedged between skyscrapers to the north and the railway line to the south. This stark juxtaposition between vertical and horizontal as experienced by driving to the gallery takes you from a feeling of being overcrowded and overwhelmed to a feeling of relief and relaxation in a matter of minutes.

For many years now, Johannesburg Art Gallery has been fenced off from the park. The park goers have therefore been forced to use an alternative entrance because the original entrance had been closed off. To me, this represented the unwelcoming, unreceptive and standoffish position that the gallery has assumed and is likely to be part of the security paranoia that structures Johannesburg CBD. Conversely, gallery goers are shielded from the culture of the park and would only have it in distant view through a fence, which further reinforced their aloofness and detachment, relative to the culture of the very environment in which they are situated.

Joubert Park and Hillbrow, the area in which the gallery is situated is well known for being a crime ridden and generally a dangerous place to wander into. The area is home to a cosmopolitan community of African foreigners. Park Station and Noord Street Taxi Rank is within walking distance from Johannesburg Art

Gallery which adds to the mix of commuters from all areas of Johannesburg and its surrounds.

It is for these reasons that I decided to reconstruct the park setting within Johannesburg Art Gallery and began work on *Lawn Care* (2008). Furthermore, an informal publication was composed in which the various parties involved could express their concerns. I contributed on two occasions. The first related to my experience and process involved in the creation of *Lawn Care* and the second was an article pertaining my to personal concerns (see appendix for full texts).

The piece was inspired by artist Walter Batiss' work entitled *First multiple mini-mobile monument on wheels in Africa in the Indian Ocean dedicated to you* (1972). I built the monument in my studio at Wits and transported it to Johannesburg Art Gallery attempting to keep it in one piece. My intention was to recreate the park environment within Johannesburg Art Gallery and place my monument within the reconstruction. I wanted to remind the viewer of the environment in which the gallery was situated because many people simply chose to ignore the park's presence.

Although these articles express my interaction with *Urban Concerns* (2008), neither of them goes into much depth about the sound aspect of my installation. Therefore, I would like to make use of this opportunity to do so.

Firstly, an integral part of my work is the process of collecting. In *Lawn Care* (2008), I collected second-hand sound equipment and at the focal point I placed an old reel-to-reel tape deck that came with a collection of revealing and sometimes strange recordings. I have no idea to whom this reel-to-reel once belonged to but I inferred that it played an important role in the life of this unknown person living in Johannesburg. For me it evoked aspects of the audio culture of the past. The music recorded onto the reel, was by Pepe Jaramillo, a Mexican concert hall musician. I expected that the entire reel was recorded with

Jaramillo's music, however, to my surprise, only three songs were recorded which constituted only about ten minutes of the entire hour-long reel. The rest of the recording was of a conversation that was high pitched and sounded as if it was playing in reverse. It reminded me of the sea of frozen words and sounds in this recording, the language of barbarians. During the process of construction, I stood with my finger on the play button defrosting these archaic words, setting them free from their icy fate. I never played the recording continuously in the final presentation of the work because I did not want it to become a theme song for the installation but rather allowed viewers to interact with the player at their own discretion. Viewers were free to walk into the room and press buttons or move objects around. I believed that this would give them the opportunity to discover the hidden sounds and experience them in the same way that I did as there were numerous second-hand playback devices that could all be interacted with by the viewer.

I also allowed for other sonic events to take the stage. The first was the hip-hop that I played quite loudly on an old Boom Box during the construction of my installation. I had decided to replicate a patch of grass using strips of disposable green garden bags tied to a sheet of mesh placed on the floor. I found myself tying the garden bags and counting beats simultaneously and during the tedious process of planting grass, I soon realized that without this meditative process, I would not have covered the entire surface of the floor without counting simultaneously. For every bar in the song, a blade of grass would be planted. This helped me to focus on the repetitive nature of the piece rather than on the pain in my back or the blisters on my fingers.

At this stage of the process, the audience responded in different ways. A certain security guard was rather offended by my taste in music and paced up and down peering through the doorway with disgust in his eyes. Coincidentally, my play list included N.W.A.'s *Fuck Tha Police* (1988). On the other hand I encountered a gentleman that managed events in Soweto who responded by saying "This is where I want to be." Thereafter we engaged in a long discussion

related to the installation and although it seemed to me that he had a fairly superficial understanding of art, it did not change the fact that he related to *Lawn Care* (2008) and it opened his eyes to a new way of experiencing art. This was significant to my project and demonstrated how even seemingly offensive sound can be a catalyst for conversation, interaction and sharing. Sound opened up a conversation between two individuals that did not share much in common except sound.

After I had completed the planting of the grass, I felt as if the acoustic atmosphere should change. During the evenings, when I was at home and when the gallery was closed, I would work on sound pieces by sampling from second-hand records. I had learnt a new respect for time during the construction of my installation work and I believe that this was reflected in my sound studio work too. In a sense, the preceding events all amounted to this final sonic event that I had been working on at home. It is for this reason that I compiled these pieces onto a compact disc, which then became the final sonic event for *Lawn Care* (2008). The only other recording, other than the sounds found on the reel-to-reel and the ones found on records, was a recording of a cricket that I made with a Dictaphone.

The opening day of the exhibition, however, brought a fourth sonic event because I had been invited to perform. Prior to this, I had been experimenting with recording multiple channels and my plan was to have microphones lying in arbitrary places outside of the gallery so as to interact with and infiltrate the larger spatial urban environment. The microphone cables and the source of their amplification would then lead the general populace to my installation and the Urban Concerns hub. However, there was some speculation that it would rain and this ruled out my plans, as it would ruin my microphones. I decided to DJ instead at the entrance to the gallery, drawing people from the surrounding area into the space through mere spectacle. I was visible but the sounds reach and reverberation was audible in places where I could not be seen.



36. B.J. Engelbrecht. *Urban Concerns*. (2008)

Towards the end of the day young boys from the neighbouring buildings began surrounding the DJ table and I began teaching them some basic scratching techniques. I emphasized that they should be gentle when touching the turntable, as if they were touching their girlfriends, they laughed but understood my point. As the day drew to a close the children refused to allow me to disconnect my turntables even though the evening was drawing near. I had

made copies of my sound pieces onto compact discs with the aim of handing them out at some point, but never got the opportunity to do so. As a strategy to occupy the children while I packed up my equipment, I gave them the task of distributing the discs to the people that still remained inside the gallery and they eagerly obliged.

From my work with *Urban Concerns* (2008), I learnt that sound truly *does* have the ability to cross social and spatial divides in a multitude of ways, even the miserable security guard could not help but muster up a grin as I played a song by The Jackson Five entitled *Ain't Nothing Like The Real Thing* (1972). The overall response was positive and motivated me to continue working with and in the city, working with installation in the visual sense and sound in the sonic. I learnt how sound can be used specifically with the aim of stimulating discussion, interaction and debate that revolves around concerns that surface through urban experience in Johannesburg.

5. CASE STUDY: SLICE ME NICE

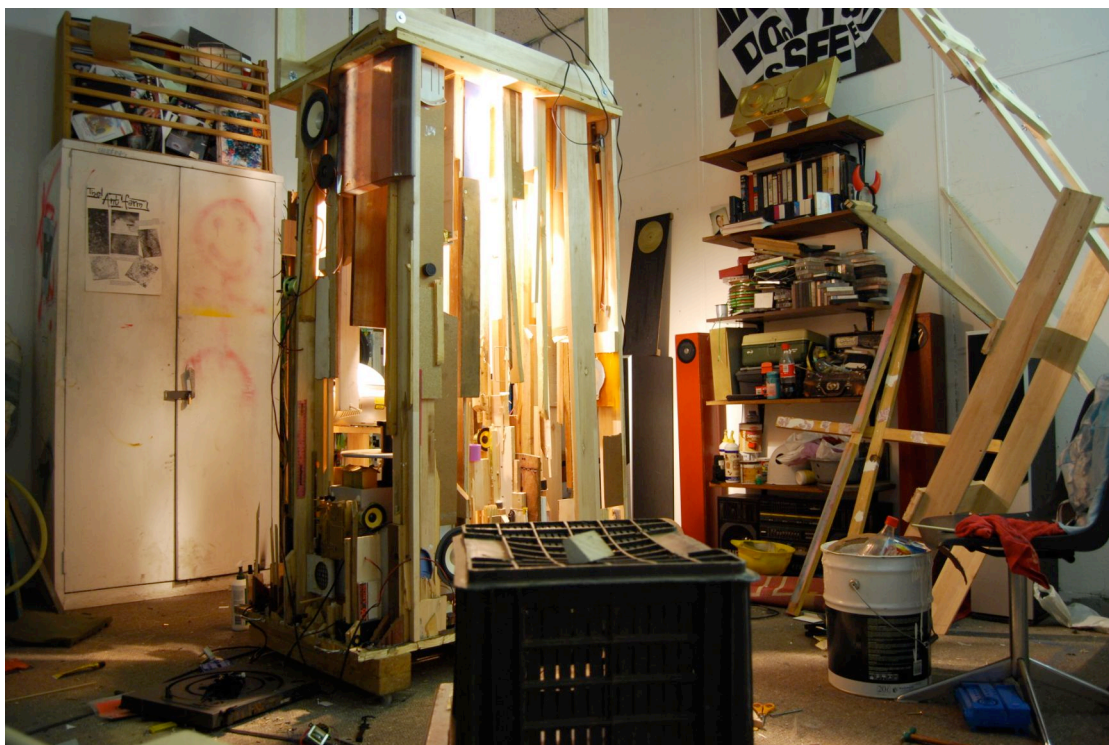


37. B.J. Engelbrecht. *Slice me Nice*. (2009)

First, a contraption on wheels. Samples of the city dissected rearranged and glued together in inventive, contradictory and complimentary ways. The form was initially inspired by Chris Cutler (1947-), and his description of sound samples as “vertical slices:”

[Digital sampling] is a purely electronic digital recording system which takes samples or “vertical slices” of sound and converts them into binary information, into data, which tells the sound producing system how to reconstruct, rather than reproduce it.

[Cutler 1994: p.149]



38. B.J. Engelbrecht. *Slice me Nice*. (2009)

This immediately made me think of verticality and the city and so, wooden beams placed vertically would represent skyscrapers, off cuts and other wooden blocks either represented a suburban setting, a block of flats, a factory and so on. I collected broken radios, took them apart and reconfigured them into the contraption. These parts symbolized the mechanical workings of the city. The contraption, was a slice of Johannesburg. Furthermore, I used only

found sounds that were then manipulated, no voice recordings were used except if they were found on a record.

I pushed and pulled it out of my studio door into the elevator. It took four of us, one at each corner, to carry it to The Substation as if it were some majestic object like the arc of the covenant or the king's throne. The mobility was important and was moulded by the dimensions of the spaces in which the contraption travelled much the same as sound. I placed it in the middle of the space. I had pre-cut wooden beams, to the proportions of the substation and built a framework around the contraption. All parts of the structure were dangerously and unsteadily connected, in fact it collapsed once during its construction and I quickly rebuilt the structure. The precariousness and ephemerality of the structure related to sound as being momentarily experienced, diffusing into the environmental ambiance of the space.



39. B.J. Engelbrecht. *Slice me Nice*. (2009)

The sonic component echoed the same process as the visual. Throughout my research project, I walked around town searching for old records in obscure

places. I would come home and immediately listen to what I had found. I began with a framework (the drum loop), a consistently repeated pattern, placed into a stretch of time. I then began looking for loops¹⁰. The process of recording transforms sound from its form as a spiral groove on a record to a linear visualization on the computer screen. Here the verticality of sound is translated into a horizontal sequence of vertical slices similar to a row of skyscrapers. It is in this state that a vertical slice or loop is cut from. Being a sound artist, I primarily chose loops for their material qualities creating compositions while thinking about how a particular sound would occupy space. To explain further, I selected a sound because of its pitch, amplitude, texture, mood, tone or pace and imagine what it would sound like in the substation. I then tested the sound by playing it in the substation and adjusted its levels accordingly. In this way, my sounds were “tuned” to the space.

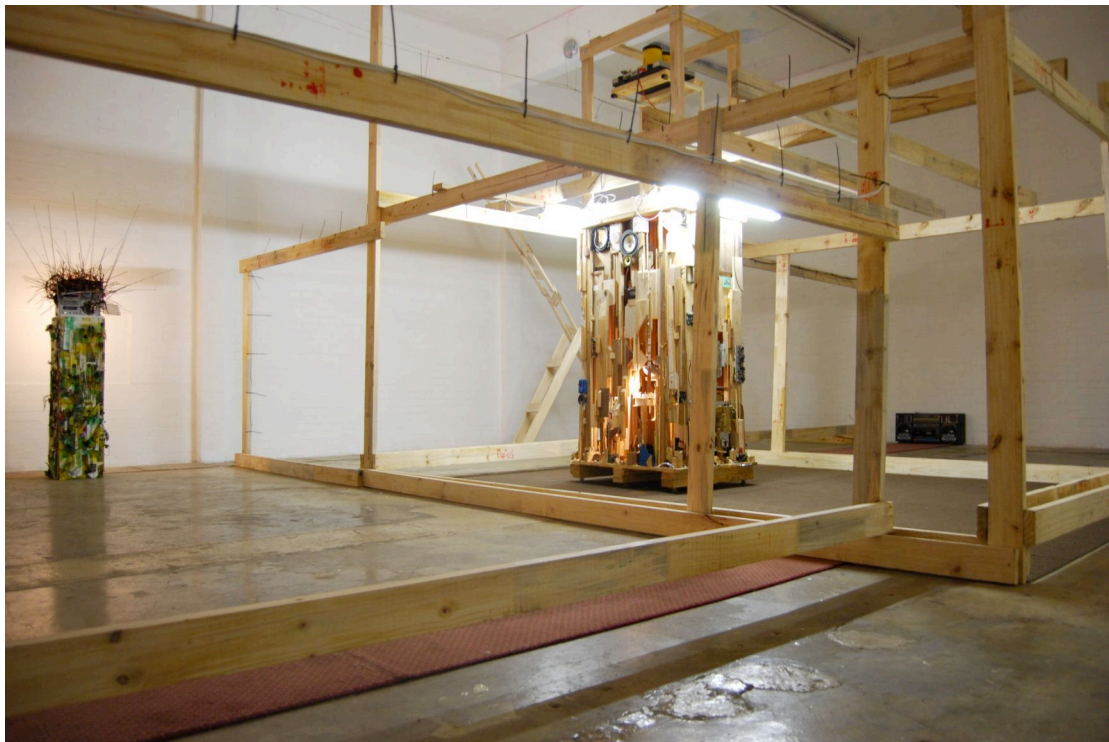
I would foreground certain parts of a sound, change the way it sounded as one walks through the installation and layer sounds on top of each other to create different ambient textures. Francisco López, mentioned earlier, made recordings of La Selva to give a sonic image of what La Selva looks like but, by using sounds found in Johannesburg, I wanted to refer to the sound of the city without making field recordings. The samples from records that real people once owned, and enjoyed, is a way of speaking about the sound of Johannesburg in metaphorical terms without using field recordings.

In its processes, *Slice me Nice* (2009) was about finding inventive ways (and sometimes forcing) objects and sounds to fit into predetermined architectural structures. The objects and sounds, that comprised the installation, were constantly being challenged by the limitations imposed by imposes. The contraption had to fit into the lift that I measured before building it and the sounds were tuned to The Substation, a fairly large space with a high roof that naturally amplifies and creates reverberated sound. The installation stands as a

¹⁰ A loop is a small segment of sound that has been sliced so that the end of the sound progresses unnoticeably into its beginning as it is played repeatedly.

monument in defiance of the urban condition by challenging the architectural limitations in which it was located. I wanted to cheat the composition of a song. Sound instances, that at first seem randomly sampled from records were shuffled around and pieced back into a predetermined pattern – the architecture of the soundtrack as delineated by the tempo and rhythm of the loop.

Before entering the substation one would be able to hear the sounds from the parking space outside, this was intended to draw passers by into the space. You would enter the south-facing entrance and by being in the space, the viewer or listener would be in the installation. The sounds would move between different speakers and its levels would fluctuate. I built a carpeted space within the installation that was roughly three squared meters in which I placed my contraption. The beams stretched to all four walls and touched the roof. There were four stations, which consisted of two Boom Boxes, a shelf and a disco ball which I had painted white.



40. B.J. Engelbrecht. *Slice me Nice*. (2009)

There were a number of sonic events that took place during the exhibition. The first was that of the abovementioned composition that was the culmination of various processual sonic events and was broadcast throughout the final presentation. The piece was intended to weave in and out of the sounds of the environment. There were a number of speakers situated throughout the space and the listener's position would determine how the piece was received according to where they stood. It was about an hour long and consisted of a series of twenty different pieces that were each about three minutes in length. There was no predetermined sequence because I put my playback device in shuffle mode. The pieces seeped out onto the parking lot outside of The Substation for passers-by to hear. Some pieces were louder than others and some of the sounds were also designed so that their levels would fluctuate over time. This created a sense of spatiality in and outside of the space.



41. B.J. Engelbrecht. *Slice me Nice Afterparty*. (2009)

The second event was an “after party” that was held on the opening night. This was an occasion for human contact, conversation and the construction of a provisional community. It was located on the roof of the Wits School of the Arts, a social and institutional site and also the top of a vertical structure. I played a variety of old records and mixed songs from seemingly unrelated genres into each other. There were four speakers that were loud enough to hear from a distance. It offended Wits Security so much that they attempted to shut the party down calling the event “stupid.” A number of people from different walks of life attended, although they were fine art students predominantly. I viewed this performance as audio graffiti, the sounds played in all directions, bouncing off neighbouring buildings, disturbing or delightful, it drove some away from it and attracted others.



42. B.J. Engelbrecht. *Slice me Nice Afterparty*. (2009)

I believe that *Slice me Nice* (2009) was a success in the sense that it was the major work in the culmination of this paper and allowed me to put into practice

my research into sound art. Records themselves are not sonic matter, the rerecorded sound is and when played, becomes a sonic event. Both the after party and the sound installation were sonic events. In The Substation, the sounds were composed using records. Reconfigured and played in a gallery space, listening was an experience based on the social interaction it stimulated. The after party was in an elevated location but sound projected and reached into a larger area and penetrated the horizontal plane by being audible from the ground level. The party was about making noise and listening was secondary.

The sound pieces that I create implicate and mirror Johannesburg's acoustic landscape *and* the actions of the people that contribute to its sound. I am but one of these people. My auditory project is to say to the city what words cannot. Through private productions and public performance, I will continue conversing with the city, and the cosmopolitan networks that I have forged with it, responding to this non-verbal dialogue. I feel that *Slice me Nice* (2009) taught me to do this in a considered, intense and open ways, through the sound that I use in my installations. I would like to develop my live performances quite dramatically. There is much potential here and I plan on interrogating and unleashing this possibility in the future.

CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION

Sound art in Johannesburg is today at the point of coming into its own. This city is finding new ways of defining and redefining itself. Its sonic practitioners, some well established and some virtually unknown, are just beginning to grapple with these spaces of rapid transformation: the underground, the surface and the edge. At the heart of this urban sonic engagement is conversation. In this research I have covered works by Goodman, McCusker, Marx and Loveday, Teamuncool, Webb, Boshoff, Halter and Marschisella and discussed how these sound works necessitate dialogue. The tendency for sound art to reach beyond its disciplinary framework reinforces this and thereby has the ability to draw diverse audiences into contact.

Through multiple formations and arrangements sound stimulates and is stimulated by multiple translations. It crosses thresholds from the gallery to the outside world and from the outside world into the private compartments of the city. It is a powerful force that cannot be refused by ears always open, penetrating perforated spaces. Its reach is virtually limitless resisting and wearing away at the limitations and demarcations of urban order. Works such as *The Conductor's Fear of the Soloist* (2008) and performances by Teamuncool interact with the horizontal plane of the city by locating the performer in the middle of rush hour traffic or on the pavement while in *Slice me Nice* (2009), the vertical structures of the metropolis are replicated with wooden beams and vertical slices of found sound.

Sound's ephemeral instances and signals are sonic enquiries and demand recognition, response and reply. Johannesburg's sound artists partake in a continuous dialogue with the urban sonic landscape. They propel their sound clips into this plethora of mangled mechanic noise. They bravely project their ears into its depths, listening for and seeking an "inner world of sounds."

In Chapter 1, I brought clarity for the reader and for myself, to a seemingly elusive subject, sound art. We saw how the “slippery surface” upon which it stands has become somewhat of a prerequisite of the practice, which in turn allows for cross-pollination and an open-ended discussion. I was however able to make some concrete elucidations about the medium. I began by unpacking its spatial imperative by looking at sonic matter in relation to recording, the urban sonic landscape as a given framework and the sonic event in relation to playback. I found that sound art could be a powerful vehicle of interrogating urban experience. I charted a non-linear history for the development of sound art and worked towards defining the practice drawing from experimental music and installation art. I discussed some of the inherent features of sound art such as the sonic event, sonic matter and the sonic landscape. I made some preliminary comparisons between sound, music, noise and silence specifically from the perspective of a visual artist with the aim of providing a starting point for their interrogation. I looked at Johannesburg and the spatial implications of making sound art for and in the city. Drawing on Johannesburg’s historical foundations, issues of spatial legacies, and the move from mining town to technological hub, I suggested that Johannesburg is an ideal setting for sound art and its development. Finally I concluded the chapter with a provisional model for the analysis of a sound artwork by looking at sound as material.

Chapter 2 drew on a myriad of sonic artworks between 2005 and 2009. Through my conversation with artists and experts, and from my experiences of sound artworks in and around different spaces of Johannesburg, I provided an outline of sorts. These overlapping categories mapped out sound art practices within the last five years. I related these practices within to the sonic landscape of Johannesburg. I looked at *The Floor Party* (2008), *The Conductor’s Fear of the Soloist* (2008), Teamuncool’s performances and the *Unyazi* (2005) and how they engage with Johannesburg on a spatial level. Goodman’s *I know what you are thinking*, (2007) *Stars in her eyes* (2007) and McCusker’s *Sentinels and Sadness* (2005) were placed in their own categories as extensions of the tradition of the voice as medium in the former and field recording in the latter.

Throughout, the idea of sound as a catalyst for conversation surfaced. I discussed *The Collisions Project* (2005) as a collaborative network between disciplines, which was then extended into an analysis of audio culture in Johannesburg as witnessed through tape and record culture.

The city, street culture and the voice are the most dominant areas explored by sound artists in Johannesburg. Space, collaboration, interaction and memory are slowly emerging and the richness of each is beginning to become realized. Of course the record, the idea of recording and sampling are well-established traditions but is to a large degree an unexplored area in Johannesburg's sound art scene. Similarly field recording, the voice as a medium in art and radio art are likely subcategories of sound art but remain largely unexplored. As electronic and digital technology becomes all the more widespread, sound as a medium in art expands by the minute. Online networking, although far from measuring up to its first world counterparts, opens sound art in Johannesburg to the globe and cosmopolitan culture. Apart from being a marketing tool it can in itself be a space into which sound is transmitted or rather, projected.

In the final chapter I looked at my own sound installations developed from a range of experimentation from an early age. Again, this was based on interaction, conversation and a culture of sonic exchange. I went into some detail about specific artworks of my own and explained how they were always motivated by the urban experience. In my earlier work, this was at times unintentional but more recent projects worked quite consciously with sound and Johannesburg as site, such as *Happy Station* (2008). I went into detail about sampling whilst simultaneously unpacking my own work with sound. I drew relationships between found objects and found sounds in my installations, describing the metaphorical connectedness to the site and its users. I concluded by discussing *Slice me Nice* (2009), describing the process of installation but focusing on its sonic events. From this I asked myself what possibilities lie in the performance aspect of my work leaving this open to further thought.

The level to which cross-overs can take place remains to be seen and the range of involvement between distant practices depends almost entirely on the scale at which sound art infiltrates these different practices. We see this beginning to happen in the visual arts of Johannesburg with some hesitation. In this sense literary and institutional support are the two most powerful determining factors that will either ensure the survival or be responsible for the decline of sound art. Forums for discussion, availability of digital media and sound specific spaces, that are readily available in a first world setting, are luxuries without a critical discourse and institutional backing. New avenues are likely to be explored and artists of all kinds are realizing the potential of sound especially as a way of confronting the city and its imposing spatial constrictions.

In conclusion, it was my aim to review sound art in Johannesburg between 2005 and 2009. I was struck by the lack of reliable literature that pertained to sound art in Johannesburg within my period and before. I found that there are many examples from the concrete poets of the 1960's to Kentridge's films from the late 80's to the present and *Poster* (1995). I found forms of resistance through the use of sound such as radio, records and tapes and worker's choirs. I found well established practices such as field recording and radio as closely linked to sound art but that remain largely unexplored by artists between 2005 and 2009. I discovered that digital media and Internet culture is shaping sound art in ways that cause a reevaluation of the methods by which sound is made and shared, forging new forms of conversation initiated by sound.

I believe that there are still opportunities particularly in terms of sound making as a form of investigating the spatial politics of Johannesburg and its horizontal and vertical impositions. As new technologies shape the practice in unpredictable ways, critical literary engagements are developed and institutional support grows, sound art will prosper. There is much room for development in my study. It is my hope that my research will initiate others to engage in this conversation, extend upon what I have learnt and expand the discourse of sound art in Johannesburg.

APPENDIX

Lawn Care Artist's Statement

First, a contraption on wheels, a mobile monument to Johannesburg came awkwardly rolling out of a studio door. Wrapped in fluff and fish gut the precarious cloud made its way down the elevator up the wheelchair ramp and with much effort toppled over into the boot of my car. I had measured the height of the elevator but not the length of my boot and so the clouds hovered over the asphalt, out of the rear end of my motor vehicle as I battled my way to my destination. Once there, to my delight, while attempting to blow this heavy cloud into position, the gut snapped and from the melancholic mist, rained broken gadgets, old tapes, a D.J. mixer, a reel to reel tape deck and old Hi Fi speakers. Nevertheless I happily rebuilt the tower in its intended position. Up and down the ramp, in and out of the public entrance to the gallery piece by piece it was finally reconstructed from the boot of my car. Second was the lawn. In search of an alternative to artificial lawn, I quite spontaneously chose to use garden netting and garden bags. Garden bags are used to recycle organic materials and I assumed that they would be commonly used in the process of maintaining a place such as Joubert Park. From the onset of Urban Concerns I was besotted with the idea of recreating a park setting within the gallery. I believe that many visitors to the gallery deliberately ignore this factor of their experience and therefore Lawn Care, to me, would function as a place to consider this. The grass or shredded garden bags could be said to serve as a reminder of this, a metaphor for the way the space is used by the public, there experience is fleeting, transitory, ephemeral. The process of making my park refers to this, ever changing, shape shifting nature of the park and also its urban context. It is the product of its makers, their ideals and their conversation.

Fanzine Entry

I was never a part of that city with gold paved sidewalks, glitzy night time window shopping on streamlined passageways with the soles of my shoes prints indented into the concrete pathways and metal staircases to mark out my daily route. The Johannesburg that I'm more familiar with was always that which was observed from a distance – a view of the skyline from a balcony or an unexpected delight sinking into the horizon or sneaking in between the branches of trees, its aura undeniable. I have zigzagged through its streets, bought a cigarette from that same vendor and have found myself pasted to one of its walls for shelter on many rainy days. You have to be alert, move in groups of two or more shut down to what's happening around you, hold your possessions tightly everyone is

a suspect don't trust a stranger ignore your name if its called and keep walking. It's difficult for those of us from outside its gates to focus on a magnificence that once was and images that are sketched out either through mythological tales, fictitious reports and fables from overhead sailors that give a birds eye view that compounds and over exaggerates.

There is splendour about the way of life in Johannesburg, a beautiful playfulness that struggles to fit inside self-tailored foundations and rigid outlines. It is important to note that I am speaking about the Johannesburg that has not yet been scraped clean and taped off by the marketing division to manufacture an idealized city that is safe and dirt free, I'm talking about that which lies behind these facades. With this in mind, the concern is with how Johannesburg's mannerisms are portrayed; it will always be a mariner's tale unless we speak honestly about our own urban experience. This would rule out speaking on behalf of another that so dangerously teeters on the edge of an "Ag, shame!" mentality and the idea that Johannesburg needs to be saved from itself. The words we use are of utmost importance and can be just as revealing. When speaking about anything from spaza shops and taxi ranks to shoe salesman and cigarette vendors, in the visual domain, we would quite happily use words like spontaneous, improvised, natural or instinctive and without giving it a second thought and consequently reinforce notions of difference that are undeniably condescending and degrades the cities inhabitants. Another precarious practice is when artists employ this language in their own work. For example, reconstructing a roadside barber shop in the context of a gallery, sure it might be beautiful, the use of materials and everyday objects might be innovative however predicates itself on ethnographic dioramas and as a result unwittingly, unilinealism and social Darwinism.

Please note: Within the text, I have provided specific dates for artworks or particular persons date of birth where possible. In such cases where these dates were unavailable, they were unfortunately omitted.

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www.strange-mecha.com accessed 22/03/09)

Figure 7 **19**

Here's what sound waves look like. The caption reads, "A visible pattern of sound waves. This new technique of studying sound demonstrates the focusing effect of an acoustical lens on sound waves issuing from the horn at extreme left.

Bell Telephone Laboratories photograph from Knight, C. *The First Book of Sound: A Basic Guide to the Science of Acoustics*. Franklin Watts, Inc. New York. (1960) p80.

(<http://www.privateline.com/TelephoneHistory/soundwaves.html> accessed 22/03/09)

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B.J. Engelbrecht

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(Image courtesy the Author)

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Figure 17 **50**

James Webb.
Curator of The Unyazi Music Festival. (2008)
(Photo by Adrienne van Eeden. Image courtesy <http://www.dieburger.com>
accessed 22/03/09)

Figure 18 **53**

Mtkidu performing in Pretoria at the beginning of their tour (2008)
The tour went on to Johannesburg and Cape Town.
(Photograph courtesy Chris Saunders. See
<http://teamuncoolprojects.blogspot.com/>)

Figure 19 **55**

Gerhard Marx and Clare Loveday.
Collisions. (2006)
(Image courtesy Nathaniel Stern)

Figure 20 **58**

Francis Goodman
Stars in her eyes. (2007)

Sound Installation 15 min 30 sec. ed of 8.
(Image courtesy Goodman Gallery)

Figure 21 **60**

Frances Goodman.
I know what you are thinking. (2007)
Sound Installation. 10 min. ed of 3.
(Image courtesy Goodman Gallery)

Figure 22 **61**

Quanita Adams and Bongani Gumede
Truth in Translation. (2007)
(Image courtesy The List. Issue 582. <http://www.list.co.uk/article/3810-truth-in-translation> accessed 22/03/09)

Figure 23 **63**

Siobhan McCusker
Sentinels and Sadness. (2006)
Installation detail.
(Reproduced in *Art South Africa*. Volume 4 Issue 3. Bell-Roberts Publishing.
South Africa. 2006. p17)

Figure 24 **65**

Front Cover: *Music of Africa*
Recorded by Hugh Tracey – Osborn Award (1958)
Gallo. GALP 1041
(Photograph by Kalahari Films)

Figure 25 **67**

Matola Antenna Farm. (1960s)
There were 15 short wave and medium wave antennas which were used to
broadcast the Portuguese and LM Radio transmissions.
(http://www.lmradio.org/more_history.htm accessed 22/03/09)

Figure 26 **71**

Willem Boshoff
Épat. (2007)
Plastic cassette tapes and cassette boxes, paper. 105 cm x 227 cm.
(Image courtesy Michael Stevenson Gallery)

Figure 27 80

B.J. Engelbrecht
Monument to an Unknown Hero. (2005)
Wire sculpture.
(Image courtesy the author)

Figure 28&29 81

B.J. Engelbrecht
Detail from The City Project. (2006)
Installation.
(Image courtesy the author)

Figure 30 83

B.J. Engelbrecht
The Record Shop. (2006)
Installed at Martienssen Gallery. 2006
(Image courtesy the author)

Figure 31 86

Dieter Roth
Flat Garbage, installed at P.S. 1. (1975-6/1999)
(Image courtesy Artnet 2009)

Figure 32 88

Christian Marclay.
Footsteps. (1989)
Installation view in Shedhalle, Zurich.
(Image Courtesy Paula Cooper Gallery, New York City. Reproduced in Licht
2007: p 234)

Figure 33 92

Left: The BMW SA Advert Right: Gerhard Marx Horizontal Figure 2. (2007)
(Image source <http://commercial-archive.com/files/marxvsbmw.jpg>
Submitted by caffeinegoddess on Tue, 03/21/2006 - 19:44.

Figure 34 95

Siemon Allen
Records (2009)
(Image courtesy www.artthrob.co.za accessed 25/03/09)

Figure 35 99

B.J. Engelbrecht
Lawn Care, (2007)
Installation view at Johannesburg Art Gallery.
Collection Johannesburg Art Gallery
(Image courtesy the author)

Image 36 104

Urban Concerns. (2008)
(Image courtesy Same Mdluli)

Figure 37&38 107&8

B.J. Engelbrecht
Slice me Nice. (2007/8)
Installed in Dental House studio.
(Image courtesy the author)

Figure 39&40
109&11

B.J. Engelbrecht
Slice me Nice. (2008)
Installed at The Substation.
(Image courtesy the author)

Figure 41&42 112&13

B.J. Engelbrecht
Slice me Nice Afterparty. (2008)
Public happening.
(Video stills courtesy Thomas Dunn)