

## **Visual Art, Not Music: Seeing Sound Art in Japan, Indonesia and Vietnam**

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## **Introduction: Reconstructing My Premise from Music to Not Music**

*Not music* as a description for sound art is a prominent matter I encountered at an early stage in Japan. Hearing this description from scene participants of both musical and non-musical background relates an established basis by which sonic practices are explored. This perspective became a catalyst in my fellowship activities. Sound art not being music largely disagrees to my previous perception of its practices, yet it confirmed that sound art as a term, has been loosely used even at times referring to matters largely different. After comparisons to other countries in my fellowship including my own, *not music* increasingly made sense.

There are similarly sounding descriptions regarding the connections of sound and visual art which can mislead towards the meaning of sound art. Sound explored in music presented in a contemporary art platform and, music as a subject for visual art are inaccurate but natural tendencies for making sense of sound art if without specific knowledge. Sound in art, sounding elements in art, and the audiovisual qualities in art are other descriptions that blurs the essence of sound art. The fact that all artworks has sound quality if silence is considered part of sound perception, and that the main material of media art normally attributed with audiovisual quality is information, cancels out the prospects of specificity in describing sound art. These nuances though logically convincing upon impression as immediate definitions, prove that sound art can easily be misunderstood. Sound art is more specific than inclusive, but it can integrate well and be a part of mixed media or interdisciplinary artworks. Sound art can still be in the same spaces where sound and art connects but its presence will be weak, especially in scenes where outlets for strictly sound art is rare or not established.

Japan represents developed practices embodied by having artists, artworks, historians, critics, organizers, and exhibitions that are clearly identified to sound art as not music. Having a complete cast of participants and elements in a setting, states the visible differences from a younger sound art platform. In scenes that are in its early stages, the meaning of sound art is ambiguous not to the perspective of being progressively open ended, but to that of having lesser distinctive presence. As a result it is so hard to hear from participants regarding the meaning of sound art, its basis, its presentations, its discussion and its education. In addition, there are minimal if no historian/ critic, recognized aesthetics and published material that points directly to sound art. This is the reason why at the beginning, I was looking more into experimental music and other art forms with sound elements but of different concentrations, than sound art itself.

As an artist, my goal is to gather materials from the specific ideas of sound art for generating visual art projects. I initially believed this to be a cross-disciplinary strategy thinking that sound art is of music. Encountering the perspective that it is not, led me to restructure my approach. Finding the roots of sound art to be more from the conceptual extensions of visual art, makes it a historical subject than cross-disciplinary. To state another aspect of shift, collecting sound art aesthetics through interview is a method by which I intended to gain concepts for visual art projects. However, those who can say they work on sound art are so rare. Clearly there is a lack of creative intention for making sound art from most of those engaging in sonic practices who I encountered. This is probably because the concepts of sound art are less known or unclear to most and, it can follow that their creative concerns are in other concentrations.

The most pressing matter on sound art for me, in context to the areas I visited, is to pursue the establishment of its meaning, presence and the basis by which it can be progressively practiced, appreciated and explored in younger grounds. I believe responding to this agenda will be relevant and meaningful for projects relating to sound art. Much more if this agenda will connect to social, cultural and scene specific situations in respective locations or networks.

## **The Significance of Establishing Fundamentals for Sound Art**

### Responding to a Global Practice

Sound art is currently rising in popularity but its actual practice remains rare in areas of younger practices. As a term, it became commonly used in relation to creative activities with sound components. The trend of highlighting sounding elements in visual arts platforms are common responses to the global recognition of sound art. Not all that uses sound though, is sound art. It can be seen if a work, despite having sound, does not prioritize sound as its main agenda. In a sense such non-sound centered works fits in a trendy form at most, but doesn't connect to the concerns of sound art.

In 2010, the winner of the prestigious Turner prize art awards is sound artist, Susan Philipsz. In 2017 Hong Kong's representative to the Venice biennale is sound artist, Samson Young. At Documenta 13, Florian Hecker exhibited sculptural sounding objects. Sound art, though relatively new among the more known disciplines in contemporary art has been present longer than it seems. The progression of its practices and its appreciation in the art world is what's on the rise. Being given attention in key artistic events inspires artists and art professionals to respond. Sound art became associated in conversations and events about everything that somehow connects to the element of sound and art even if it was just a play of words.

There are various practices earlier in popularity than sound art. Examples of these are relational art, media art, performance art, art-related projects (DIY, research, science based) and experimental music. These various disciplines are often combined with each other to realize a concept or in themselves a combination of materials that in totality lead to a dominant expression of a particular medium. Sound in a video for example, contributes to the expression of being a video. The inclusion of sound elements has long been existent in hybrid formats yet they are now highlighted as a response to the emergence of sound art. Fitting the trend of connecting to sound art by mere presence of sound in a work gives an uninformed response. It also diminishes the value of a work that can be seen as less of sound art than more of its strongest content. In most of the areas I visited, experimental music has a bigger population among practices with sound. Sound art being not music is definitely not the priority in these scenes or spaces. That is not to say that it is completely absent, but clearly the basis of their respective forms in totality are not of sound art.

Responding to developments in art contributes to education, culture, and artistic practice. In the perspective of education, art is pursued like all forms of knowledge. It is continuously advanced, enriched and propagated. It is an intellectual exercise that enables individuals to do activities based on established and imagined concepts, that result in new physical forms or ideas. Art as a body of knowledge will be used as basis for things to come. Giving an informed response to sound art means having the knowledge to be able to receive specialized developments in the world, being able to facilitate its education through the presentation of artworks or projects and, being able to contribute to its further development.

In perspective of culture, art has always been a means by which an individual or group of individuals express their humanity. It is a platform of communication that uses full sensorial possibilities which transcends written and spoken language through experiences. It is a place where differences are welcome to be expressed. Sound Art is not only a bridge for this kind of communication, it is by its own a cultural expression of today. To respond is to cultivate a means to further enrich the lives of people through new experiences and meanings it will produce.

In view of artistic practice, responding to sound art means giving space for individuals who are cultivating this kind of practice with an informed creative intent. It is a means whereby this particular discipline can take roots and develop under different cultures and conditions. It is a means whereby artists and other professionals can explore careers beyond their borders, through a platform shared by others in the world. Hence an informed response is key to the selection process involved in the dynamics of artistic opportunity.

### Developing Scenes Need to Establish Ground

A discipline is based on concepts that define it. These concepts enable artist to perform their creative work. It is also used in operations that allow opportunities to develop a scene. Along with the artist, the critic is a gate keeper of the conceptual structure that defines its discipline in established platforms. In some cultures where sound art is developing there is a need to establish fundamental concepts for it to grow in its location. Yet in this case where there might be minimal or no critic in this specialization, the artist must be the one to layout the grounds. It can be compared that unlike developed scenes, places with young practices in sound art needs an established conceptual ground to support a fully functional art system. The main agenda of this system is towards the cultivation of sound art. To realize effectiveness, there should be a value for representation and recognition of the discipline, facilitation for education, and sustained platform for the presentation of its creative practices. Without putting importance to established meaning that serves as basis for sound art, it will be difficult to address these concerns that constitutes the operational mechanism of a discipline. This is a factor on how sound art will cultivate its own scene or be a recognized part of a bigger one.

Japan is among countries wherein there is complete cast of participants with regards sound art. There is Shin Nakagawa who organized and brought sound artist from all over the world in Japan during 80s-90s. He also supported founding sound artists such as Akio Suzuki in their early works. There is Nakagawa Katsushi, who recently published about the history of sound arts in Japan. There is NTT ICC (Inter Communication Center) an institution for media art and also a space for the practices of sound art. The presence of these organizers, critics and places of presentation, demonstrates how it is possible for sound art to take roots through the agents that must relate about descriptions and conceptual grounds. These roots became the basis of exploration that aids in progressing the practices of sound art, including education, programming and appreciation.

Sound art is among the more progressive directions in art globally, it is also a relatively new type of artistic practice in particular cultures. It is common to hear that artists don't care about definitions, this pertains to an attitude of breaking limitations. However, when scenes are young there is first a need to establish ground to break. The establishment of descriptions and conceptual foundations of sound art can support key aspects in the cultivation of this artistic discipline. It can help increase the presence and representation of sound art as independent medium, as well as when integrated with other disciplines. Awareness of dynamics behind how sound art functions, enables the ability to better witness the strength in its presence. It helps in connecting local and international networks. It can be used to communicate to art and cultural institutions who also have a developing understanding about the discipline and its significance. Established foundations can support younger scenes with informed responses to improve their chances for opportunities in line with sound art.

In Indonesia and Vietnam I encountered comments on the issue wherein short meetings between critics/organizers and artists lead to less meaningful exchanges, misunderstandings and as a result misrepresentation. Being equipped with proper descriptions and conceptual grounds on sound art will support the speed and depth of communication, This is in view of the physical limitations such as time and resources, of agents who are quickly scoping possibilities or working for projects.

Education as part of artistic practice, functions to enrich itself and affect society. Fundamental ideas of sound art as educational ground encourages progression and expansion. In young scenes, having less roots in sound art is both reason and aftermath of the scarcity in facilitating its education. Education is a space where specific art histories are recognized and built through descriptions.

Dealing with fundamental concepts in an educational platform enables learning and confidence as an individual realizes and tests ideas among other people with the same concentration. In my encounters only very few can say that they are working exactly on sound art probably because the confidence for knowing its concepts is low. In addition non acknowledgement can be indicative that the initial creative intent to actually work on sound art is weak if not there. I remembered a very open minded comment from an experienced organizer, that "if the artist say his work is sound art then it should be seen as sound art". Declaring your own work is a minimum for its identification.

Presentations and exhibitions are educational platforms wherein art participants and society can learn and appreciate art. These spaces and events represent opportunities in sound art. The sound artists needs to describe the uniqueness and strength of his activity amidst other projects with sound to be selected. At the same time, the institution needs to understand the basis and difference of sound art to see its possibilities. In the artist economy wherein selection is key, artistic descriptions and conceptual basis of sound arts are needed tools.

In view of the activity programming by a space or institution, the curator would need established concepts to build and introduce programs on sound art that can sustain its practice over time and explore its different dimensions for the consumption and benefit of the public. On the other hand, the sound artists must be progressive to respond to varieties, context and developments to be able to respond to state of sound art locally and globally including how it can contribute to culture and society.

### Sound Art as Material for Visual art

Establishing ideas that describe the characteristic of sound art is important for audiences who intend to take deeper interest as a manner of appreciation. Being a visual artist, I gravitate to express an active kind of audienceship. Initially, I'd like to know what sound art is all about like any other interest. This understanding will then provide me materials to form other creative reactions that are participatory to its scene.

The popularity of sonic experimentation which includes sound art as among its products is a new craze in the art scene. Other than being trendy it is critically recognized in circles of higher appreciation in art. Sound art responds to critical advancement in art because of its conceptual value. Many can appreciate it in an experience level with open-ended interpretation. However not all, will be able to understand how it works in its own dynamics, in the way they understand other established forms of art. This is a matter of familiarity and of widely accepted definitions.

Sound art's critical value though, lies in the concepts it proposes, that extends the known boundaries of current art practices. As an audience it will be more stimulating to both experience sound art and manifest a kind of reading through definitions that are established. As an artist intending to work on sound art as subject matter, it would be prolific to locate and work on its value in the global scheme of art. With fundamental knowledge, there is a bigger source of inspiration towards building a creative intent leading to an informed response to sound art.

Visual art in its explorations deal with subjects within and outside its territory. In a cross disciplinary process, the artist learns from non-visual art disciplines to gain materials such as aesthetics, images, concepts, processes and physical material to be applied in the form of visual art. For example, if a visual art project is strongly based or inspired by biology, it means it integrated both derived conceptual or physical material into creative intent.

On the other hand visual art has its own vast world continually being explored. It includes disciplines within it such as drawing, painting, sculpture, ceramics, video, design and many more. These disciplines inspire or are sources to each other, leading to natural integration. In the process they share of common agendas, histories and cultural context. The current forms of practices in visual art involves layers of ideas, integration of materials and combination of processes.

Inter disciplinary exploration often involves consideration for the adaptation of diverse ideas that constitute respective medium. These unique characteristics from differing disciplines to be carried out in a single visual art project is in itself among the main motivations for creative intent. That is to contribute to the advancement of visual arts through developing new grounds.

The fundamental ideas of sound art is important for a visual artist who wants to adopt its core characteristics into a creative intent. The search for these core characteristics led me to an understanding that sound art not being music, is actually from the realm of visual arts. This development changed the approach I am taking. Initially I intend to adapt sound art into visual art in a cross disciplinary strategy. After discovering shared roots I find it more appropriate to employ an inter disciplinary approach.

The main foundation of being able to build a visual art project that reflect sound art, for me, is to base it from its shared history and common formats. This will eventually show that sound art has aesthetics akin to visual arts. This foundation can lead to various explorations. It can go to a cultural trajectory which can address why some cultures have less sound art. It can relate to education in engaging the concepts that will help its propagation. It can go to a direction leading to politics in art, by relating it to the market and its relations to other non-traditional forms in the arts scene. It can address its main agenda which is to relate its specificity as key to extending our notions of visual art. Finally it can be directed to more expressive and experimental directions such as seeking combinations towards abstraction.

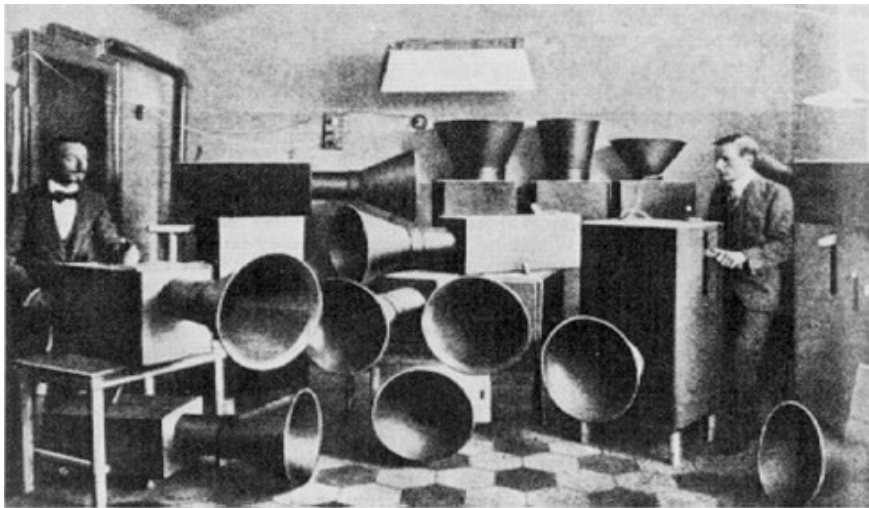


## Sound Art in Contemporary Art

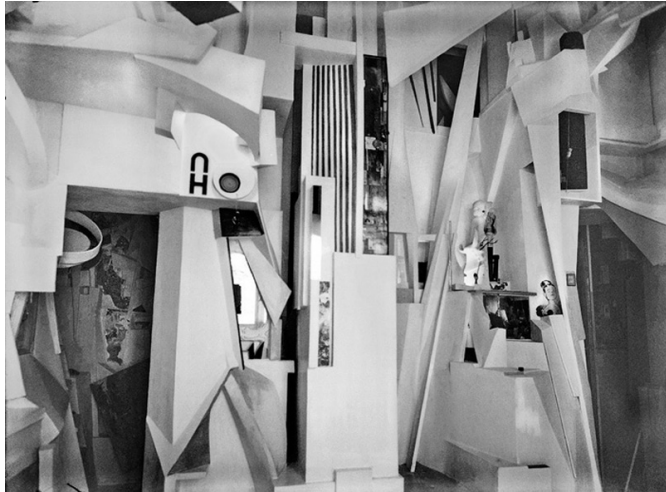
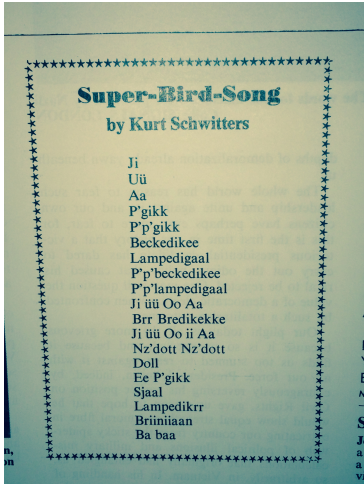
### Roots in Visual Arts

The literal interpretation of respective root words can be the biggest obstacle in seeing sound art as part of visual art. In reality, since artists began exploring the progressions of abstraction into concepts, visual arts has been involved in all manners of materials, processes, spaces, meanings and sensibilities, wherein some are actually non-visual. Relational art, a known practice in visual art, for example, uses public participation as main material. In general knowledge, visual arts include several audio visual practices such as film, video, media, kinetic and performance art. Visual art in its conceptual structure offers infinite possibilities that enabled artists to expand its boundaries including that into sound.

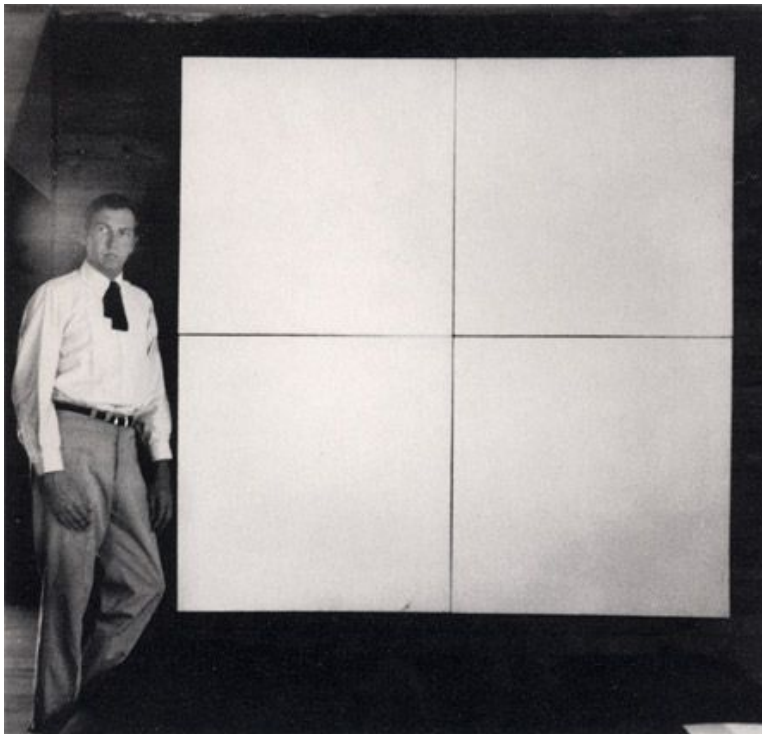
Understanding the scope of explorations in visual arts makes it easier to understand, how the earliest experiments in non musical sound are located in its history. In 1910 Luigi Russolo a futurist painter created the “Intonarumori or Noise Intoners”. Kurt Schwitters, a post impressionist painter who later on became involved with the avant garde made concrete poetry and the influential installation Merzbau. His exploration of sound is in the perspective of voice and spoken word. Still another famous artist John Cage released his famous 4’33” silence composition after being influenced by Robert Rauchenberg’s white paintings. Vasily Kandinsky whose paintings became what is first known as abstract has worked on his reflections not only on sound but music.



Intonarumori, Luigi Russolo



Merzabau, Kurt Schwitters



White Paintings, Robert Rauschenberg

Abstraction and conceptualism in visual arts define the creative environment that provides foundation for the exploration of sound in visual art dynamics. The artistic pursuit of articulating shapelessness in abstraction, that leads to expansion through the abolishment of boundaries and openness to include disparate elements, is a path by which sound can enter its visual art exploration. Its strategies of production such as deconstruction, reconstruction of form, its non commitment to representations and collage can be applied on sound to work with a non musical creative intent.

Abstraction progresses into Conceptualism by operating on the creative explorations of meaning as material and priority, more than a finished product. This practice has given rise to several types of outputs such as object, installation, process, performance, happenings, and relational art. In this mode of artistic work that deals with ideas everything can be material and subject as everything has meaning attached. Sound art moves within a dynamics that uses the conceptual exploration of sound in the form of object, image, installation, process, performance, happenings and other forms where its perspective can be presented. The abstraction of meaning is a significant element here.

As a visual artist, I initially intended to work on sound art as material in a cross disciplinary perspective. In the process, I learned that abstraction and conceptualism in their structural dynamics paved the way for visual arts to extend its territories including that into sound. In turn, I reflected on the development of my own practice in visual arts abstraction and conceptualism and how in natural progression, it included aspects of sound. My realization here is that even in my personal history of art making, it didn't require a cross-disciplinary method for visual art practitioner to touch on sound. In my case, I was mostly not intending to prioritize the expression of sound or its ideas. My works that has elements of sound does not produce a substantial sound art profile only because in the aspect of creative intention, I was not working towards it, until now. This demonstrates that visual art on its own world naturally extends to sound elements that if focused upon as creative intent produces sound art.

The impetus to reflect on my own practice regarding sound art in visual art, is in part triggered by my conversations with sound artist Nao Nishihara. In visiting his studio at Yokohama, his works reminded me of Jean Tinguely's sounding kinetic sculpture I witnessed at the Sezon Museum of Modern Art at Karuizawa in 2006-07. Nao related that he also saw it during this period. As I make sense, it occurred to me that there is a possible connection in Nao, who is into sound and myself who is into visual art both seeing the sculpture in the same year, and both currently working on sound art as interest. Witnessing Tinguely's artwork may or may not have deeply influenced us towards sound art but it stimulated my thoughts on how modern visual art can be ground to cultivate sound art.







2005, School Yard Fight, a.k.a. Vision After the Vision

Inspired by a painting of Paul Guaguin, I worked on a performance art piece by basing on wrestling with two freshly painted canvases. This single performance extended to a *happening* situation as other participants join to articulate roles. This includes two individuals who played with their guitar and violin randomly. This activity transitioned to video with some parts highlighting the sounds made during the performance. Conceptualism is an open platform by which sound can be incorporated naturally.



2006, Single Round Bolt Action Bull Barrel

This installation responded to the site and space of Mag:net Gallery, the exhibit venue. Being a place for music and visual arts with an elongated rectangular interior, the installation took off from imagining the experience inside an exploding gun. In this project sound is a large part of the impetus to construct a scene.



2007, Enjoying Sunday at Yoyogi on My Wall

This painting juxtaposes an image of a street musician to an interior. The painted refrigerator image presents the home Interior as a space wherein thoughts could be projected. In parallel John Cage was inspired by the white paintings of Robert Rauschenberg, seeing it as a background which makes everything in front it much visible. His 4'33' silence composition works as a background to present an existing soundscape.



2007, Ready

This painting inspired by a culture of singing, presents text rendered in lyrics style as top layer to imagery in a scene possibly from karaoke videos. At the utmost front is a mirror image imagined to be reflected on the TV screen surface. There are lots of sound concepts here from the text that suggest singing, the video as background for sound and the mirror image suggesting the spaces where sound bounces.



2014, There is No Room for Forgiveness in My Heart

This is a painting of an imagined installation scene that includes sound as element. More than the representation of sound waves into visual form, the idea that a created space with textured surfaces and the presence of sound relates to a sonic angle. During my fellowship I witnessed the presentation of Sound Meccano at Bar No Kitty in Osaka. The sound artists from Latvia explained how they activated the texture of an abandoned space through physical processes to get field recordings. I believe that this relates a similarity of approaches as to how texture or space can be converted to forms or sounds by means of artist intervention.

## Sound Art as Visual Art Form

Beauty through craftsmanship and technical skill for specific materials in earlier practices of art, the more popularly understood reference for appreciation, aided the current consumption of value and meanings of art. As visual art developed, it extended its territories by breaking away from the literal confines of traditional craft into directly using meaning as material. Visual art practices progressed into the use of all types of materials, and have placed value not only on the resulting product but in the processes and the concepts it relates.

Sound is literally not a visual material especially on its own. Many who engage in sonic practices, even say that sound is time based to relate a differentiation from visual arts. However, this quality is not exclusive to the physical material of sound because film, video, performance art and media art, all included in visual arts umbrella are also time based. Moreover, sound art I believe is not concentrated in craft mode production like how music and visual art is separately viewed before. Sound as a physical material is an abstract entity that can be combined or used towards the expansion of practices dealing with abstraction. As a matter that embodies ideas or meanings, it is a material that can be used in concept based works.

Conceptual art can manifest in all forms under visual art as long as the concept or meaning takes optimum importance in the creative intent and overall effect highlighted in the work. This means that in conceptual art the finished product is not necessarily the main manifestation of the work, it could be the process or the experience involved that are fleeting, temporary or ambiguous. In connection, the meanings or ideas formed in conceptual art are more open ended and towards abstraction, as meaning by itself is shapeless and relative to respective interpretation. Although conceptual art can take form in any discipline that advances abstraction, there are formats that are more inclusive in terms of the variety of physical materials that can be used. Installation, objects, combined materials, media based platforms, performance, happenings, participatory art and sound art are among these practices.

Meanings relating to sound is the agenda that describes sound art's integrity in the variety of conceptual platforms, just like environment and experience through space is that of installation. Sound art can relate itself to other platforms resulting to sound installations, sound objects, sound happenings among other possibilities. Conversely other platforms understood to have their own agenda can include sound but not necessarily end up as sound art.



The element of performance for example is being utilized in many practices like sound art, participatory art, happenings, minimal art and performance art. There are descriptions wherein the performances involved in producing sound art and often experimental music are confused with performance art. This may have been in context to the literal notion of a performance that leads to art. In actuality performance art's respective agenda is about the meanings that can be articulated through the human body. Sound art can relate itself to this agenda of performance art but will maintain its own priority. In this case, where the use of performance is in line with the concerns of the performance art as unique discipline, the product is both sound art and performance art. In the case of playing an instrument, such action is not innately considered performance art. Moreover, to be considered sound art, playing an instrument should be more towards the exploration on the ideas of sound than that of music.

Content is an important aspect to embody sound art given the many elements it shares with other forms of concept based art. Soundscape, construction of sounds, articulation of the meaning and presence of sound, culture of listening, creative means of listening, the development and progression of sound art, articulation of sound in relation to other forms of art, processes in connection to sound, narratives in connection to sound, sound in society and human culture and the exploration of abstraction through sound are some of the subjects pertaining to sound that are explored through sound art.

Making an instrument is not automatically sound art, it is not only about the craft of making a product but much more on what is being created in the level of ideas, relating to meaning of sound through the, materials, process, experience and the way it functions. In contrast, there are projects that use art forms including sound elements as a tool to express research on various topics such as science, society, culture politics and environment. In this case it may appear advanced because of the research based content, but art here functions like a book illustration. The content here may be strong but it is not of art. Artworks function differently to the demonstrative capacity of presentations in science experiments or research report visuals. The organization EAT (Experiments in Art and Technology) is a good example on how technology works with art. In their collaborative projects the artists makes art and the engineer creates the engineering. Conceptual art relates more to mental images of abstract possibilities directed towards creation and imagination. Sound art relates conceptualism through materials, meaning, experience and the expanded territories of sound.

## Not All Contemporary Art Practices with Sound are Sound Art

The effect of an artwork's totality and artistic intent are perspectives that inform its integrity. Recent productions in art may give an impression of being similar, familiar, ambiguous or not new. This results from the current manner of art construction such as combining elements, layering, transitioning from one form to another, blurring boundaries and being related to a visual art history, where everything seems to have been done already. That is if the artworks being witnessed are not actually too influenced by other artworks or lacking in creative or imaginative qualities. What makes art progress is not only the construction and presentation of new images but also the development of new ways of seeing, interpretation and meaning. Sound art just by the nuances in the words that address it, can easily be misunderstood. Its various physical manifestation in the form of installation, object, media and other formats makes its presence hard to identify at times, as it is confused with other artistic practices. It is through creative intent and the effect of an art project's totality that meanings pertaining to sound art can be seen.

When I encountered the idea of *not music* during my fellowship, I initially regarded it as a preference in artist perspective, included in the variety which creates the spectrum of sound art. Later on, I saw that being of music or not, is a key idea in meaning for a work to be sound art. I have witnessed and discussed some presentations intended to be sound art together with Motohide Taguchi, a musical composer and scholar. In our conversations he raised the idea that for some of the performances meant to be sound art, the effect in totality is more of music than of sound. Given his expertise in the field of music and knowledge about its contemporary forms, his comments clearly state the difference in the presentation of sound by its own and that of a musical presentation. Another important aspect here is that such opinion is unbiased, having no issue as to which practices are inclusive in sound art. Many among sonic practitioners who are from musical backgrounds find the idea of sound art not being music to seem partisan. With a perspective of sound art as not music coming from a musician, it only confirms that the value of music is not validated or diminished by its association with sound art.

Experimental music and its practices are popularly associated with sound art. In the perspective of sound art as not music, differences should be expected. Placing the context of creative intent and totality of a project's effect, it is possible to have a grounded judgement towards whether it is of music or of sound. Sound art though, can transition into experimental music in many ways. The creation of alternative instruments, sounds and other materials of sound art can be used in a musical perspective. In this case sound art becomes a means towards experimental music. Conversely, experimental music and music in general can transition into sound art. Music can be seen as a space to locate sounds towards a perceived effect. Some musical pieces as sound images can describe matters such a cultural periods. If music is purposely utilized to highlight meanings and overall artistic effects that relate to sound, then it is more sound art.

Media art is another sphere where sound art intersects. Both sound and music maybe present in the scheme of its audiovisual nature and use of technology. However, the main material of media art is information not sound. What information is being highlighted in an artistic composition? What kind of creative output can be made with the use of

information? How can information be used towards creative expression? are some questions that could be answered by the creative intent and overall effect in media art. Information in the form music or sound art can be a priority in a media art work but it is not always the case. Not all sounding elements in media art can be attributed to these practices, in the same way as not all artworks including sound art that uses technology are media art.

Relational or public participatory art is a popular practice which seems unlikely to be the confused with sound art. The priority in this type of art is on how the public, or those who are non-art contribute in the production and meanings in art through participation. Non-artist participation which forms relations in a group or collective is an aspect that can be seen in sonic practices. There are many who experiment with music and sound who are not trained in the arts. These experimental bands constitute a big part of the sonic platforms wherein sound art is expected to exist. There are also others from active communities or collectives with multidisciplinary background that are involved with specific concentrations which are not of sound art or music. These groups engage in art related projects to express research, technology and other subjects that are utilizing sounding elements in their presentations.

The non-artist qualification became attractive for organizers who are more interested in the public participation or community production context. To my observation, the highlights involving collectives is that of social, cultural or political context as a result of the main material which is human relations and participation within a group. These organizations may come up with sounding elements in their projects but unless they prioritize the exploration of sound then the effect of the totality of a project is not of sound art. For example an artist-run community based radio program may be using sound as material but it relates more to having congregation and dialogue than prioritize the progression of sound as material in art.

The perspective of artistic intent and the effect of the totality of an artwork, appears to disconnect from the non-artist-made quality. It is unreasonable to expect the non-artist to always have an artistic intention and for them to actually produce artworks. In the scheme of public participatory or relational art, the non-artist is just material to the artist position who guides or facilitates them towards production. Facilitation is an artistic tool that enable non-artists to be contributors towards art. As community art became popular, the non-artist makers became known as artists on their own. They still work under the impression of having non-art quality despite the contradiction of now actually being regarded as artists.

In connection, sound art has innate non-art connotations, primarily because it seems that there is a lack of formal training with the exact concentration. However, if we view sound art from the platforms of visual art where it is presented then we can see that it is not so non-art at all. In reality cross-disciplinary strategies and inventiveness are taught in formal visual arts training so it doesn't require non-art participation to get outside of the box. Sound art is in the context of art and it should be about sound that functions as art, whoever and however it was produced.

## **Sound Art in Japan, Indonesia and Vietnam**

### **Japan**

The up-to-date practices of contemporary art in relation to sound art is central to my fellowship objectives. Exposure to the evolved art scene in Japan enabled me to observe an understanding of sound art, its relation to other sound practices, and the conditions for its continuity. The ideas and resources I gathered are useful towards my intention to explore the ideas of sound art as material for visual artworks. It is also useful in formulating projects that would respond to younger sound art scenes.

I first became interested in the name sound art when as an artist I wanted to use the element of sound in installation. In using varying disciplines for a work, I always consider the respective characteristic of each as a means of utilizing the full effect of the medium. It is from this perspective that I wanted to know the dynamics of sound in art, hence I encountered the term sound art. I began an independent initiative to interview selected artists about sound art, at a time when there is a visible group heading a festival of media art in Manila. I have seen and participated in other sound related presentations years before, but it seems this time the participants are much more recognized in their practices than how it was more experimental on the side. In these interviews I use the term sound art loosely and for convenience to understand it better from those I am interviewing who have more expertise. I gained a lot of information in these interviews regarding the specific practices of artists. I noticed that sound art as a term has no established meaning recognized by practitioners as fundamental.

I began my fellowship having a mindset that sound art is inclusive of many sound practices. In same manner done in Manila, I interviewed participants involved in the exploration of sound in Japan. When most gave an ambiguous answer to what sound art is, a few are very sure on the matter of difference between the concentration in sound and music with regards sound art. This is key to my understanding that sound art is more particular than sounding elements in artworks and is different to experimental music.

Sound exploration is performed in different practices in Japan. These practices are the spaces where we can openly hear the name sound art. However, like echoes, the bouncing sound doesn't give out its location immediately. Sound art though popular in name and an evolved practice here, remains to be relatively fewer among other sound explorations. There are a few artists who specialize in it as a result of a built career defined by sound art. The rest might have sound artworks but are also much active in other activities such as music, other forms of visual arts and still others from much more distant backgrounds.

There are two major streams wherein sound related practices can be found, experimental music and contemporary art. Experimental music can be found at schools and universities, live houses, recording labels and through individuals who circulate in local and international network of live performers. The contemporary art stream referring to the platforms of visual art and its extended practices can be found in standard museums and galleries. They can also be located in schools and universities, publications, art in spaces intended for public access and artist studios.

The spheres of experimental music and contemporary art can intersect minimally and occasionally in their standard venues. Alternative venues though, have much more access to openly present music and visual art as they often have multi-purpose spaces. These venues include artist initiative spaces, artists residencies, community related spaces, events and online spaces. There are several universities that are strictly music or art but there are schools that have both such as the Tokyo University of Fine Arts and Music. In most schools there are clubs and venues, where music and art can be practiced minimally regardless of the school's central focus of studies. Some artists found their way to sound exploration through the openness of courses to express learning in art related presentations. For example, artist Atsunori Kihara, currently working in the IT industry acquired his sound related practice through the encouragement of his professor while taking up Literature at Waseda University.

To locate sound art in these spaces where sound experimentation exist, let me mention what I believe are the fundamental ideas of sound art and then the forms that manifest it. Sound art has to prioritize sound. It means that this priority is located in the artistic intention and in the most significant effect of an artwork. Sound art being art, involves itself in the exploration and advancement of ideas pertaining to sound as art. This relates that meanings such as social, cultural political and other connections should only be secondary to ideas that define and redefine the possibilities of art through sound. Sound art is much more located in visual arts because it identifies itself from music, it moves within the dynamics of conceptual art where all materials are possible and, it uses the known platforms of visual art.

In the stream of contemporary visual art or plainly contemporary art, sound art may be in the form of installation by means of setting up an environment, presenting a soundscape, addressing specific sites and spaces. As long as sound or ideas pertaining to sound creatively defines or address a space, an environment or an atmosphere, these are sound installations. Sound art can be objects which relates to sound. Art objects are fundamentally objects devoid of utility. This means literal instrument making is not art object making. Making an object that produces sounds is, especially if the sound is not logically for music. Sound art as a form of conceptual art can be in the combination or any of the possibilities provided by existing materials, processes and presentation as long as it prioritize sound as the main point. For example a non-sounding medium such as painting or drawing can be sound art as long as it relates more to the ideas of sound.

The forms I mentioned relate purely to a sound art perspective in a work. Current art making though, involves the result of combining different platforms and how one form can be transitioned to another. Hence, the fundamentals of sound art can be seen integrated or transitioning to other art forms with a different priority. This means that at the end, the sound art component in a work will not be recognized as sound art anymore, if the main effect or the creative intent is not exactly towards building sound art. This doesn't mean by any chance that a work like this will be insignificant, its just that its not sound art.

In the musical stream sound is obviously a material but here the composition of sounds relate to the standards of known music. In sound experimentation there are works that lead to sound images as the main point. I believe that in this condition it is more sound art than music. This is the situation where everything seems to become tricky. When a musician abandons making music then at that particular work he is not a musician. The artist becomes a creator of sound images that relate more to the meanings of abstraction than standard music.

This is when performance leads to sound art but is not performance art if without a concept in relation to the human body. There are lots of improvisations that happen in this kind of live activity that often leads to musicality. If it does, then it becomes a musical performance not sound art. Such is the liquid nature of performed sound art that some artists such as Ryu Yoshizawa prefers his sound art material recorded and finalized under editing perhaps to maintain concentration on building sound images that are not music. Sound art in visual art is more constant and observable than what can be found in the experimental music stream especially in live performances. However there is much strength in performing sound art amidst music, especially if a piece has the ability to distinguish itself from its musical platform.

Sound art in Japan is relatively smaller than other existing practices but it has its own scene given that it shares spaces with other forms of contemporary art and experimental music. It defines its own by having a recognizable cast of components that completes a scene. Sound art in Japan has its own artists, audience, history, historian, criticism, organizers, platforms, education, economy, international exchange and culture that supports it.

Practitioners are the first audiences of sound art. It then resonates to other artists, institutions and to people outside art. There are casual art lovers and there are those who have more awareness in appreciation. The artists are very aware of the history consisting of Japanese practitioners who paved the road before them. They see them as roots, influences or take off points. The names of Akio Suzuki, Merzbow, and Aki Onda for instance can be heard commonly from those who experiment in sound. The local history of sound art is not solely what is being observed. There is also an awareness regarding sound art in its international development. Nao Nishihara, among the sound artists I met, translated the book *Sound Art* by Alan Licht with Kazue Kobata into its Japanese version. The history of sound art includes other histories that provided the conditions for its development such as abstraction and conceptual art. The awareness of these practices are prevalent as it could be seen through artworks and publications easily. Part of the Japanese sound art scene is its exposure to International practices. Professor Shin Nakagawa is famous for his contribution of bringing sound artists from other countries to Japan during the 80s and the 90s. Currently there are several individuals from many countries who come for exchange in relation to sound art. It is made possible by the generosity of granting institutions such as The Japan Foundation who values and appreciates the positive effects of cultural and educational exchanges. The importance of History and criticism in the appreciation and development of a practice, is activated by historians and critics who explore, proliferate interest, and establish ideas of sound art

through writing in publications. Nakagawa Katsushi is a researcher who recently published his work on the history of sound art in Japan with a concentration on the 80s.

Platforms for sound art are spaces where all operations happen. In general, it is a gallery, space or event where sound art is being presented. It is a place of education for artists, involved art professionals and pure audiences from the public. It is a presentation area for artists and an observation ground for scholars. Sound art platforms are the center of economy for practitioners who intend to partake of the opportunities in the scene. Finally it is a venue where sound art appreciating community thrives.

The varying platforms for the possible inclusion of sound art includes big international contemporary art shows such as the Sunshower at Mori Art Museum and Yokohama Triennale. The NTT Inter Communication Center an institution for media art type of works, present sound art pieces. Tokyo Wonder Site a space that includes residency programs has exhibitions involving sound art. Artist initiative spaces such as Bar No Kitty and Figya are active in sound related practices that involve both local and international artist participation. Artist initiated series of events such as Jizaikan by artist Tsiseido is a constant platform for performed sound art. Live houses like Superdeluxe has an open stage facility and programming for the possibilities of performed sound art. The Cocoroom, a multipurpose space for art, alternative education and community is where people from varying backgrounds can become audiences with sound appreciation.

The economy in sound art can be seen through the opportunities it gives its professional participants. Grants are common sources that fuels the activity of artists, and curators. In Japan, international art professionals are given opportunities to do their activity. Some Japanese artist conversely also get opportunities abroad. Because of the current trend of sound and music festivals, those who experiment in sound art and music have found more activities that enables them to be in state of travel and tour. Other sources of opportunities are produced through self funding. Some artists have regular jobs while others find sustainability through artist initiated multipurpose spaces where they lease spaces, trade, sell or offer services that are possible. Most of the artists who engage in sound art don't do this exclusively, many have been doing other some forms of art that are more collectible such as paintings, drawings or sculptures that are being sold through galleries. Others work in commercial art industry by means of musical and technical sound services they can supply. Spaces that provide as platforms partially earn through charging entrance tickets from audiences and through the space rental of artists who wants to use their facility for public presentation. In some live houses artists receive part of what is earned from entrance sales.

The evolution of sound art in Japan can be observed not only through its history and the cast of components that completes a scene, it can also be viewed through ideas that manifest in its current practices. Still in momentum of gaining popularity as practice, many new artists are discovering themselves and what sound art is. For those who are experienced, creating sound art works is not about merely reaching a fit into a fundamental form. Some explorations have an expressive direction, others have observational focus, and others moves towards a structural approach.

Nao Nishihara build various forms of works with the impetus of sound. When the sound he presents is already interesting, he works on his structures, whether objects, installation or performance with equal exploration. Even without sound his artworks is rich in the use of materials that connects to other ideas of art and culture. This makes his artworks potent.

Kazehito Seki performs vocal sound articulation mainly with the use of the in-mouth and external microphone. His work is one which is performance art as well as sound art. The performance art aspect is the aspect wherein he needs to engulf the mic in his body through his mouth to produce work. Sound art comes by way of focusing on the production and articulation of sounds. The quality is very abstract, having a strong feel of presence due to texture and sound gesturing. His works contributes expressiveness and its capacity to build sound form and detail through abstraction.

The sound practices of Toshiyuko Seido known as Tsiseido involves the scheme that he places on a series of events called Jizaikan. Each program is in a *happening* format, where he invites artists to pair randomly with one performing sound and the other performing a visual component. The further complexity of this structure can be appreciated in its arrangement that can be related to old ways of seeing cinema. Silent movies used to be presented with a live orchestra to provide it with background sound. Tsiseido reverses this structure by making the visual support the sound. In the program the sound performer leads while the visual background reacts to the sound. The visuals are made of an ongoing drawing as a sound reaction presented at the background through an overhead projector. In this happening individual artists are being presented including himself. His performances relate to abrupt music that explores the extended definitions of sound into the waves that bounces through the human body causing it to react. I believe Tsiseido's artwork encompass a big scope from the programming through the detail of performances within it. Here the meaning of sound is explored in many forms and angles all manifesting at once while it happens. Furthermore, the participants adds individual explorations. A notable piece for example is performance art based sound work wherein sounds are produced by devices that react through the movement and contacts made through the body.

In the area of Figya and Bar no Kitty in Osaka, a unique culture developed with the help of low price for space rental. Here the room itself is a personal material or tool by which sound practice is developed and learned. Mizutama Araki, founder of Figya narrated that he was advised by mentors to rent a space where he can develop his own works and invite people to present as well. With many artists having a space of their own, This phenomenon can be seen as a response to how sound related practices can being learned outside of formal education. It also forms a unique arrangement in terms of community of artists. When in normal circumstances a community shares one space, here the community shares several yet individual spaces.



Atsushi Nishijima is an established sound artist whose works include the deconstruction of how we usually negotiate sound everyday, such as the culture of listening and playing. For example he dissects electronic players to isolate particular sounds, or to manipulate them by altering the usual timing or the usual standard of architecture by which machinery works. He uses abstract perspectives like chance operations other than the mentioned deconstruction and alterations of elements. Atsushi Nishijima is among the more experienced sound artists who have worked on sound as a means to create varying outputs including non-sounding pieces.

In conclusion, sound art in Japan is a deep resource for study and artistic practice. It has history and its own cast of experts and platforms. Japan's culture of everyday living, technology, open education, and practices of progressive art are factors that influences sound art. These elements facilitates inspiration, materials, awareness and appreciation for artists and audiences. In turn artistic platforms and cultural centers support its continuity and advancement. Exposure to sound art in Japan provides a grounded knowledge on its practiced fundamentals, operations, discourses, artists, historians, organizers and other experts. Given the depth of its own development which includes its contribution and exchange in international platforms, sound art in Japan is a reference with regards Asian involvement in updated global perspectives.

My fellowship in Japan led to an understanding on meanings pertaining to sound art. *Not music* relates that sound art is particular and not vaguely inclusive of all sounding associations. It also suggests a stronger connection to visual arts, by way of conceptual art where all materials are utilized. Coming from a context of younger scene, this is significant as a fundamental ground. It puts to order all related ideas in such a way that there can be a basis towards establishment, contention and progression. It also sets a parameter by which sound related works can be described, studied and appreciated. The knowledge I acquired from observing its scene helped me describe and build an understanding of respective developing sound art practices of countries I visited after Japan. Having experienced the complete array of varying participants that specializes in sound art gives me reference of how sound art can operate and progress.

Finally, in view of gathering materials for artwork, sound art in Japan has brought me to the fact of its actual connection to visual arts. A connection such as shared history and presentation through known visual art formats has been known by few and less explored in younger scenes. As sound art is more vaguely associated to musical performance not only is there neglect on visual art principles such as abstraction and conceptualism as essential elements, it also brings the priority further from sound. I see the opportunity to relate the awareness of abstraction and conceptualism in sound art as a means to highlight sound away from its associations. It will also engage audiences to sound art from the perspective of forms they are more familiar with. Learning abstraction and conceptual art strategies is an opportunity for those unaware who want to engage sound art to its full extent.

## Indonesia

I selected Indonesia as second area of fellowship following information on its big scene of sonic practices consisting of several participants and events being held. At Indonesia, I began to meet individuals and communities in relation to my fellowship intent of collecting varying aesthetics of sound artists as materials for visual arts. Having gained understanding from Japan, I directed my inquiries towards sound art fundamentals and then to respective developments. I intended to see the situation of sound art in Indonesia very curious on how it set its grounds and the current practices that it cultivated.

My activities in Indonesia are held mostly in Yogyakarta and a short visit to Bandung. There are three streams to describe the spaces where sound art can be located in the areas I visited, the musical stream, the visual art stream and the art- related community stream. Yogyakarta is a place of formal education in Indonesia. This results to a big population of students from all over the country. These students developed a culture of grouping themselves into communities. Big communities are sources of smaller communities with more specific interests. In my visit to Yogyakarta practices in sound can be seen stronger through communities that are in the musical stream, and the art- related stream. The musical stream consists of professional and amateur musicians who are either formally or self trained. This stream includes non- musicians who are studying music and music-related courses. I refer to some communities as art-related because these groups are involved with varying interests such as research, technology, history and environment among others, that are not necessarily about art. These groups composed mostly of members who have non-artist background and very minimal artists members don't refer to themselves as art group. These collectives engage in presenting or relating various research through the use or in connection to known art forms. I view their works as art-related because in the level of concept, artworks pertains to prioritizing creative intent of making and articulating artistic forms over subjects that are not in art. Bandung, a center for education as well, also have communities. However, I was informed by the those I interviewed that they are more individual oriented than students in Yogyakarta. In Bandung, I witnessed practices relating to sound art from visual arts stream connected to Bandung Institute of Technology.

In my fellowship activities I was exposed to the vibrant scene in Indonesia. The number of prolific practices were culturally enriching and a pleasure to appreciate. In the scheme of sound art, I witnessed consciousness of sound as material with varying purposes and degrees of priority. I did not find confidence from an individual to admit a concentration on sound art. Furthermore there are no commonly understood sound art fundamentals. There are elements that can be of sound art yet are lost in transition or in combination leading to other concentrations.

Making Music is different from prioritizing sound. In the music stream, there are several means by which sound is explored. There are sound recordings, alternative instrument making, technology aided effects and creative articulations of common sounds such as the human voice. These sounds become elements to fit a standard or experimental musical scheme. To enumerate, some are performed through DJ style playing. Others through orchestra, choir or band type of performance. There is also a common playing format wherein a piece begins with a flow of sound introductions that culminates into a climax of full blast concentration then fade in to end. The presence of sounds are undeniable yet in these cases the pieces find completion in musicality.

Sound art is more than art-related. In the stream of progressive collectives, I cant say that making art is the impetus or priority in the projects they are involved with. In their presentations and in the products of their projects, art formats are used to illustrate, demonstrate and support ideas being presented. Art-like devices here serve like text book illustrations in multi- media way or like science fair model constructions that apply non-art principles. Still in other situations artistic elements serve practical functions. For art-related communities sounds are activated by any means possible. However, it is clear that sound is not the priority because of the bigger subjects being presented. The art-related operations of these groups for me resembles conceptual art dynamics. The biggest difference though, is that in art, the artwork or the project itself is the main text, sometimes supported by written information, and not the other way around. Art-related projects in platforms of art became attractive for their non-art participatory context valued in relational art.

Some possibilities of sound art are lost in interdisciplinary transitions or combinations, ending in favor of other artistic concentrations. In Bandung my exposure is from the visual art stream. Most of the artists I encountered have described their concern of sound as an element used to creatively work on achieving a visual art concept. In this stream of practice, I see sound as a part of an installation, media art, object and performance art. Sound here is articulated as itself with integrity as medium intact, not as music or a representation of other subjects. There are works that largely deal with sound and in others only as sounding elements resulting from involved processes. Here, sound is a legitimate material for visual art, but remains to be not the artistic priority in total. It could be argued that in some cases artworks reached the definition of sound art. However, there is very minimal content pertaining to subjects such as soundscapes, listening culture, recording and other matters pursued in sound arts. A common example for products in this case are sounding objects that functions more as novelty items than offer creative complications in meanings pertaining to sound.

The spaces of sonic practices I visited are rich prospects for sound art development. Indonesia has a dynamic contemporary art scene which consists of elements ready to build a sound art scene . There are artist and groups who are already dealing with practices involving sound such as Indra Menus, Rully Shabara, Kunci, Senyawa, Mes 56, Life Patch, Duto Hardono, and Riar Rizaldi. These individuals are links to others who are in sonic exploration. Some of them produces and perform at events while others display in standard galleries such as Selasar Sunaryo Art space. Other platforms include live houses such as Kedai Kebun and privately owned commercial and foundation

oriented galleries such as Langgeng and Red Base Foundation. There are Government owned platforms that support space and equipment such as Taman Budaya. University related platforms are also open to such activities. Collectives facilitate alternative type of education and hosting. Sound related artworks are included in the programs of big art productions such as local biennales. Indonesia has a developed culture in producing publication for almost all exhibitions, some housed in collection based organizations such as the IVAA or Indonesian art archive. In view of writers, there are several curators who engage in current practices such as Bob Edrian who is currently writing a book involving sound in art.

The artscape of Indonesia involves the strength of the local and regional art market which empowers the creation of platforms such art fairs and individual gallery exhibitions. It also creates a demand for Indonesian art to respond to global art practices by way of hosting international art exchange and by encouraging private collections of contemporary practices in art. International exchange through educational platforms are among the means by which global art practices in sound are introduced and negotiated. Currently there are several foreign scholars from all over the world who are studying ethnomusicology. Conversely the government of Indonesia has several ties with other countries that enable Indonesians to study and participate in international art events. An active global network involves several individual artists to tour international events. In return foreign artists are invited in local artistic events frequently.

In conclusion, the contemporary art scene of Indonesia and the spaces by which sound in art can be found, are very capable of developing its young practices towards sound art. The local audiences from all sectors of society, are immersed in their rich culture of contemporary art, sound and music. This is a very potent ground by which sound art can express as much as it can be accepted in time. However as a young scene, it needs to first establish sound art fundamentals to gain ground with regards developing its own sound art direction. This will enable the scene to work on informed responses to the global practices of sound art. In building sound art fundamentals, there should be a focus on strengthening the abstract and conceptual capacities of artists and professional audiences. This will provide conditions that would allow the deconstruction of sound from music and the restructuring of sound into further abstractions. At current it can be felt that Indonesia is stronger in representational art. The strength towards placing importance in communicating understandable craft in an artwork, is given favor by the art market. At most, abstraction is seen as a matter of signature style and ornamentation than concept based. Sound art is a concept based artistic practice towards building and expressing abstract ideas through prioritizing sound. Given the number of platforms that can be accessed, it is possible to implement various educational facilitation such as seminars, workshops and finally exhibitions. This can create a setting that can help artists and related participants towards their development in sound art. Musicians will be able to concentrate on sound making without it being music. Art-related communities can gain sensibilities of trained artists. Those who are engaging sound in art can extend or challenge fundamentals to pursue progression.

## Vietnam

Vietnam, the third location in my fellowship following Japan and Indonesia, is in a period of particular cultural and artistic setting. I came intending to witness the characteristics of their practices and the conditions that contextualize meanings in relation to sound art. After visiting two countries where my inquiries developed to being anchored on fundamentals, I engage the young contemporary art scene at Vietnam looking towards how it will establish sound art.

As I meet artists and professionals for my fellowship in Hanoi, I always ask about the cultural climate to gain grounded understanding and sensitivity, in connection to information I received beforehand. A response I admire stated that “when an artist is Asian, we are always expected to relate to a political perspective, why can’t we be expected of things other artists, lets say from Europe are expected of”. It is always refreshing for me to hear an artist point of view, refusing to bow down to how most would rather paint them. A cultural setting truly affects artistic development especially in the current case of Vietnam. However, such response reminds us to focus more on the art, rather than feed the stereotypes and exoticism being played that overshadow the artistry they are working on.

The current situation in Vietnam emanates from developments following recent years of embracing artistic liberation. I have been told that formal education still teaches conservative art, but artists outside school are working to implement all possibilities in current global practices in art. The role of those who are back after studying or practicing abroad, and the presence of foreign nationals who live and visit Hanoi, can be connected to how artistic experimentation not being taught at regular school is being developed. The presence of internet to facilitate exposure to those who are staying in the country is a key factor, but language can be a hindrance because only a few know English.

There is law for public gatherings held in big enough venues to secure a permit. This is when exhibitions and events can be subjected to censorship. If no permits are secured then the programs can be stopped. Anti government positions are prohibited. Presentations that can’t be understood can be rejected. Somebody reporting a complaint for disturbance is also a source for cancellation. At the point when an event will be closed down, a law enforcement personnel, who is common to the people in the area will personally ask the event to stop. The program will then disperse orderly to avoid further confrontation.

Other than for obvious reasons, the limited understanding of contemporary art is a major factor for censorship. Society is more accustomed to traditional or standard kind of mass entertainment and with common knowledge for art to be conservative. Practices in contemporary art that developed abruptly after artistic liberation can be overwhelming for audiences to catch up. An amplified grinding sound for example can be a source of disturbance or alert from ordinary people. In this case, the incapacity to quickly process what is being accomplished in contemporary art becomes the cause of cancellation and not entirely of political agenda. As a result, performance art became popular as it has short and automatic preparation. Art programming also developed to include unlisted items in their schedules.

The scene in Hanoi is relatively small but I was fortunate to be there during a period of active programs featuring short films, music, performance, and contemporary art. Some of the events I visited are Doc Fest, Beyond Sound, Sound of the Mountain, the performance of Cao Than Lan and Gregor Seidl, Concert by Tri Minh, and the installation art exhibition of Truong Que Chi. Part of knowing about the scene in Hanoi is through communication with artists such as Vu Nhat Tan, Nhung Nguyen, Trieu Minh Hai, Tri Minh, SonX (Nguyen Xuan Son ), the members of Dom Dom and Kimngoc Tran who is also the Head of Dom Dom. Other organizers I spoke to are Endo Mizuki and Tran Duy Hung.

Platforms for art consist of standard theatres such as the Hanoi Opera House and the Youth Theatre of Vietnam. There are artist initiative spaces such as the Puppets Café, Nha San Collective, and Manzi Art Space. It includes places with facilities such as VUI studio and Bars like DeN and Savage Experimental Hub at West lake area. There are private galleries like the Vincom Center for Contemporary Art and Heritage Space. Last but not the least are Cultural centers Japan Foundation, L'Espace of Institut Francais, and Goethe Institute.

Sound related practices are seen through the musical stream and the visual art stream. The musical stream consists of amateur and formally trained musicians. In this stream there are traditional musicians, alternative music bands and those with experimental music practice. The visual art stream consists of artists who engage in installation, performance art, video, and media art. Explorations of sound in the musical stream involves a musically inclined consciousness of sound. There is experimentation on crossing and interchange between traditional, non-traditional, local and western forms of compositions and practices. There are alternative music bands and DJ type of playing.

In relation to my fellowship focus, there are very few musicians I discussed with who admitted to practicing sound art with principles similar to my understanding. This is the idea wherein sound art prioritizes sound in the creative intent and the characteristic effect of an artistic creation directed towards abstraction. These artists I met, who are working with soundscape are evidence of the presence of sound art fundamentals in their scene.

Some of the sound art related practices I witnessed in Hanoi are visiting Canadian duo *Sound of the Mountain*, who performed sounds in some of their non musical pieces at Manzi art space. Cao Than Lan and Gregor Siedl renders a site specific response in their Hanoi Opera House performance, by taking off with a theatre type of format yet dishing out an array of effects played with an open ended feeling. They produced some articulations of sounds, voice, silence and performance. The totality is quite a play of abstract parts for me which maybe musical in certain perspectives, but is intended to be “more towards sound art” according to the artists.

In the contemporary art stream, the installations of Truong Que Chi at Nha San Collective uses sound as an independent element among other physical elements. Another piece I saw resulted from the performance art workshop also at Nha San Collective. Here the artist Nguyen Nhat Quang implemented his final piece using abstracted sounds. He paired this element with an equally ambiguous movement. He seems to be working on something unknown while being seated with his façade covered in shadow. The effect cast an imagery which gains strength because of the ominous mood and overall unpredictability. Sound may not be the priority in these two works but the potential for sound art is there.

To conclude, Vietnam is currently responding to global practices of contemporary art and music. In Hanoi, I witnessed several activities in experimental music, film and contemporary art. I see this period as a possible time for laying down foundations of practices that emerged after artistic liberation. There are factors that aid this progression. Vietnamese artists who came back from abroad and exchanges from foreign nationals who live or visit, affects the scene as participants. Their engagements in the art scene facilitate knowledge beyond what is offered in formal art schools. For those who remain within Vietnam, the internet is also a potent source of information but English can be a problem to most. Understanding what is current in art is not only for makers but more so for audiences. Misunderstanding is a cause for some events to be censored and for practices to be less appreciated and supported.

In view of sound art I find that there are some artists who have a fundamental understanding of this practice. I also witnessed foreign nationals render their sound art works in local spaces. Sound art being a hybrid of concerns emanating from various physical and conceptual materials, is an example of the complexity of contemporary art today. The exploration of this contemporary art complexity is what makes practices updated and informed. In connection, I feel there are some areas in art that needs to be covered not only by artist but also by audiences as balance. Abstraction and conceptual art are sets of ideas that serve as among the foundations to sound art. In seeing the development of art through the Vietnam Fine Arts Museum, including what is on display in most of private galleries, I do believe that abstraction and conceptual art appreciation still needs to be further discovered and cycled through.

In my visit, I saw through artworks that there is potential for installation and performance art to be gateways for sound art. There is a need though to be able to deconstruct sound from what is known music and be able to prioritize it in creative intent and/or the major effect in a work. In doing so, there will be more potential in making sound- based objects, installations, happenings, drawings, paintings and so on. Deconstruction as a premise for composition is a principle of abstraction. Building abstract imagery as a trajectory for works in sound art, will enable its exploration to go beyond definition.

## Prospects

All practices in art are based on respective fundamental ideas, it is the same in the case of sound art. The common understanding of sound art fundamentals in a scene is key towards progression and realization of its identity. The result of the fellowship for me leads to an understanding with regards ideas that differentiate the practices of sound art in developed scenes and those that are in younger ones. At the end of my term, I was able to gather ideas on the fundamentals of sound art and view the scenes of varying countries I visited in its perspective. I was able to gain practical knowledge on contacts, networks and the actual conditions by which scenes operate. I see the need towards the establishment of sound art fundamentals in younger scenes as an important matter to address. I am aware that the younger scenes in my fellowship, given the existing machinery of operations they have, are capable to negotiate concepts and undergo processes of establishing fundamentals. There are concepts I can propose to facilitate dialogue and reflection regarding sound art fundamentals. My thrust will be on sound arts relation to visual art. This is primarily to address the lack of sound art manifestation in visual art format such as installation, and objects among others in younger scenes. It is also to propose minimally used sensibilities such as abstraction and conceptualism rooted from sound art's history in the visual arts. I believe this can respond to the scenes that are dominated by musically inclined participants, who can be enriched in learning such dynamics for art making.

There are several ways to disseminate these concepts. I can conduct talks, and embody them through the exhibition of my artworks. The way to publicize with most contribution is through formulating cross-cultural events. This will facilitate exchanges between developed scenes and younger ones to address culture specific conditions. Ideally these events will include lectures, talks and workshops leading to exhibitions and publication of catalogue. At current, I am working towards self initiated dissemination such as speaking at talks and also towards future exhibitions of my artworks. However, I do believe that cultural exchange will be the most direct way to contribute in actual scene locations. This will entail the participation of local artists together with representatives from other scenes, and be viewed by audiences as a form of education. If given the opportunity I would like to pursue this next level of project.