

Preface

Somaesthetics and Sound

The intertwining of sound and the body is fascinating and multifarious. Until fairly recently, sound has mainly been studied in terms of listening, sound reproduction technologies, and acoustical measurements. In turn, the body, especially that of someone producing sound with their voice or with an instrument, has commonly been approached as a physiological entity. Lately, however, the embodied and experiential aspect of sound has increasingly gained ground in research and pedagogy as well as in the arts. In a short period of time, studying the experience of listening or producing sound has generated a number of fruitful approaches and methods for sound studies. The field has, so to speak, “come of age.”

However, the advancement of this field in recent years does not mean that it would not have existed before. Numerous pioneering studies focusing on the sound experience of human beings have been published, some well before the turn of the millennium and some more recently (e.g., Benson, 2003; Bicknell, 2015; Burrows, 1990; Eidsheim, 2015; Ihde, 1976, 2007; Jankélévitch, 1961/2003; McCaleb, 2016; Neumark, Gibson, & Leeuwen, 2010; Vitale, 2010; Welten, 2009; Winter, 2009). The number of published articles and books on the subject is increasing, as exemplified by extensive anthologies such as *The Oxford Handbook of Sound Studies* (Pinch & Bijsterveld, 2011), which considers sound and music to be experienced “in such diverse settings as shop floors, laboratories, clinics, design studios, homes, and clubs, across an impressively broad range of historical periods and national and cultural contexts” (Pinch & Bijsterveld, 2012, para. 1).

Research of speech and singing is another field of sound studies that was almost completely focused on exact sciences, such as phonetics, anatomy, physiology, and acoustics. During the last decade, however, the spectrum of approaches has expanded considerably with publications such as the *Journal of Interdisciplinary Voice Studies*; a book series called *Routledge Voice Studies*; and a number of carefully crafted articles, anthologies, and monographs. An impressive example of the broadening of this field, which would have been unimaginable ten or twenty years ago, is the recently published *Oxford Handbook of Voice Studies*. This book identifies six modes or domains of research that may be transferable to other fields of embodied or experiential sound studies as well as somaesthetics:

- 1) *prompts* (texts, artistic forms, everyday practices that the voice performs or executes),
- 2) *performance* (what comes into being during vocal engagement, including sounds, their character, silences, and the trajectory along which these elements unfold),
- 3) *material dimensions and mechanism* (the physicality of the voice and its function),
- 4) *auditory/sensory perception* (the part of the vocal feedback cycle that is concerned with auditory and any sensory perception of voice, including auto-perception),

5) *documentation, narrativization, and collection* (the modes of research that focus primarily on voice in the form of the secondary forms of documentation and data collection), and

6) *context* (the meta-context within which we understand the other domains, and, equally importantly, the domain that affords and limits insight into a given phenomenon). (Eidsheim & Meizel, 2019, pp. xxiv–xxvi)

As Eidsheim and Meizel (2019) note,

initiating the process of mapping the territory and naming the six domains is only a first step in a much larger project: the collective work of charting voice-related areas of scholarship and practice for the purpose of facilitating new entry points for scholars and illuminating connections across fields. (p. xxvi)

Substituting “voice” with “sound” might make the six modes or domains of research, as well as this statement, relevant to broader study of the sound–body relationship.

A journal issue on sound and somaesthetics is an ideal medium for disseminating some of the subjects of research, approaches, points of view/being, and methods for studying the embodiment of sound. As the field is in the process of expanding and researchers are finding new options for interdisciplinary study, such a journal issue is only one of the numerous platforms through which this fascinating area can be developed. It will be interesting to see how the increasing interest in the embodied experience among sound and voice researchers will change the utilization of somaesthetics as part of these approaches as well as how this tendency towards the body in sound studies will encourage scholars of somaesthetics to address sound-related themes in their work.

In this issue of the *Journal of Somaesthetics*, contributors from various fields explore sound as manifested in the body, as originating from the body, or as a meaningful, embodied experience. The focus is on the body-aesthetic or somaesthetic dimensions of sound, music, and the voice. The articles deal with improvisation, playing instruments, singing, theatre, and the philosophy of sound. In most articles, sound is approached from the embodied experience of the sound producer (i.e., the player or singer). Some authors base their reflections on their own experiences, while others use research material they collected through interviews and discussions.

In her overview article, Anne Tarvainen maps out the most interesting writings in the field of somaesthetics, music, sound, and the voice. She introduces Richard Shusterman’s texts on these subjects and presents the writings of other scholars who apply somaesthetics with sound-related approaches. The aim of Tarvainen’s article is to offer some entry points for readers interested in applying somaesthetics to research and/or artistic practices involving music, sound, and the voice.

In his article, Stefano Marino focuses on jazz drumming and improvisation. He links his analysis to somaesthetics and pragmatist aesthetics and points out that improvised music can be understood as somatic knowledge. Marino articulates the bodily nature of improvisation, highlighting the thoughts of numerous theorists without neglecting musicians’ perspective on the subject. Marino concludes that jazz drumming is comparable to other somatic activities, such as yoga, because it is equally practiced for cultivating somatic consciousness and exhibiting sophisticated use of the body.

Focusing on the lived experiences of two professional musician-teachers, Grace Han studies the essential role of the body in practicing the cello. Traditionally, becoming a professional instrumentalist in the field of classical music has been conceived as an endless repetition of instrument-specific skilled movements. These ideally result in automatic, habitual routines that allow the musician to shift his or her attention toward abstract musical ideas. In her interview-based study, Han questions this conventional dichotomy, instead understanding the everyday work of a musician as a vehicle for self-understanding through imagination, bodily awareness, and liberation.

Drawing upon the currently growing body of research on music as an experience of embodiment, Salvatore Morra focuses on the Tunisian lute, *‘ūd ‘arbī*, and its “sounding Tunisian.” Understanding the senses as inseparable from one another, he explores “the notion of Tunisian sound in relation to touches and bodies of *‘ūd ‘arbī* players and the meanings they construct.” Morra first introduces the *‘ūd ‘arbī* and the tradition of playing it and then describes the embodied process of building, hearing, and touching the instrument.

In her article, Charulatha Mani describes the artistic process of composing “Sonic River,” a vocal piece co-performed with another singer. This work is based on the Karnatik (South Indian classical) musical tradition. During the vocal and somaesthetic process, Mani explores the development of her own bodily awareness and links these reflections to the yoga tradition. Mani criticizes the patriarchal tradition of Karnatik music, which ignores the bodily experience, and discusses how to democratize the vocal practices of this prestigious music culture.

In his article, composer Peter Bruun looks at the theater project “Sound of the Audience,” which he executed in Copenhagen with two directors, a musician, and a group of local residents. For three months, the group rehearsed a performance in which the performers acted like an audience, producing audience sounds such as speech and coughing. Then, the work was performed in front of an actual audience. The article is based on the composer’s own experiences as well as conversations with one of the participants. In it, Bruun ponders whether there can be music without sound. He looks at the function of music in community-making and discusses the function of music between and among people in a world where music distribution is largely digitized. He concludes that music is a fundamentally communal bodily activity that “begins in the flesh.”

Based on interpretations of *Klangfiguren* (“sound figures,” commonly known as Chladni figures) by the early German Romantics Novalis and Johann Wilhelm Ritter, Alexis B. Smith traces the universal language of nature, described by Novalis as the “true Sanskrit.” This language, which is closely related to music, contains sound, writing, and meaning simultaneously; like in Sanskrit, there is no longer a separation between objects and their names, nor between humans and nature. Drawing upon the properties of Sanskrit and Ritter’s scientific and poetic narratives about the sound figures, Smith argues that sound figures have a prominent role in *The Novices of Sais*, in which Novalis develops Poesie as a universal language and sound figures are alluded to through poetic, metaphorical imagery.

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