



of Xenakis' existing buildings, such as François-Bernard Mâche's Greek holiday home, provide useful references.

Chapter Seven, 'Some Closer Looks', continues the discursive breadth that was introduced in the opening chapter. In excerpts from Roger's notes, there are brief, evocative vignettes; sipping kitrone with Marie-Luce and François-Bernard Mâche on the island of Amorgos, or musings on a boat journey across the Mediterranean. It is clear that Karen and Roger Reynolds formed enduring friendships with their musical colleagues. Letters between Xenakis, Karen and Roger include philosophical questions about life and art, discussions of the serious illnesses that affected both Roger and Iannis and contemplations of friendship. In another setting, this could all seem a little saccharine – happy, successful couples, travelling the world yet cocooned by the prestige of their achievements. This is not the case in this book. Instead, personal reflections, anecdotes and expressions of feeling serve to underline the touching honesty, even idealism, at the heart of this project. All this supplementary material suggests that the Reynolds Desert House was not just a plan for a building, but an idea that grew with and from human connections and the exchange of ideas.

The final 11 pages of Chapter Seven are a transcript of a public discussion between four composers at Delphi Computer Music Conference/Festival in 1992. Although this could seem like a digression, it provides a fascinating insight into the thoughts of Paul Lansky, François-Bernard Mâche, Roger Reynolds and Iannis Xenakis. The pivot towards more generalised musical and philosophical themes sets the scene for Chapter Eight, 'Creation: A Personal Assessment'. Three of Xenakis' works are considered: *Achorripsis*, *Thallein* and *Tetras*. The authors state that they do not intend to provide a musically detailed study of these works. Nonetheless, the analysis provided is thorough and informative. References are supported by relevant score excerpts. Discussion of *Achorripsis* acknowledges similarities with Xenakis' writing in *Formalized Music*, presented here in ways that are 'less detailed and more carefully illuminated'.<sup>3</sup> Complex materials, including mathematical formulae, tables of probabilities and a copy of the matrix that Xenakis used in *Achorripsis* are explained clearly and succinctly. Similar precision is demonstrated in the section-by-section discussion of *Thallein*. Analysis of *Tetras* usefully focuses on how a listener might comprehend

the work. Throughout the final chapter, architectural analogies and parallels with the Reynolds Desert House link musical materials to previous chapters.

The closing section returns to Xenakis' music. As elsewhere, evocative scenes and incisive summaries make for an engaging read, yet I was left feeling that there were unanswered (or perhaps unasked) questions. What is the authors' final assessment of the Reynolds Desert House project? Given the candid tone of previous chapters, the absence of a definitive evaluation is striking. Although the Reynolds Desert House was never built, the book bears witness to the creativity and friendships that grew with the project over 30 years. As a catalysing force, the strength of its impact is surely reflected in the richness of supplementary materials, including letters, journal entries and photographs, that bring each chapter vividly to life. The very existence of this book indicates that the absence of a completed building need not be seen as a failure. Perhaps the conclusion is necessarily open-ended while the house remains unbuilt. The idea of the Reynolds Desert House provides a frame through which the authors invite us to view decades of artistic endeavour and friendship. This book is an affirmative testament to the abundant creativity of lives lived to the full.

Edmund Hunt

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Sanne Krogh Groth and Holger Schulze, eds, *Bloomsbury Handbook of Sound Art*, Bloomsbury, 2022, 592 pp., £35.99.

I have long held the view that the impact of recording technology is far from adequately appreciated in the critical discourse on music. Every new book or paper that brings a fresh perspective on the revolutionary change in the art form is worth celebrating. I was very pleased, then, to read the opening lines of the introduction to the *Bloomsbury Handbook of Sound Art*, the opening gambit of the whole volume:

The voice I hear is strange. It is too intimate, too close, too alluring – and still it keeps an almost professional distance. I hear waves rushing in and fading away under sounds of various, unclear origin. I like to listen to this voice. Many people are listening these days to rather intimate or more vivid and invigorated voices on a daily basis. Voices from a lively conversation podcast...

That podcasts, or sonically mediated 'para-social relationships', are the first example sets the terms

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 188.

of the discussion very clearly. Are we talking about music? Are we talking about discourse? Do we need to worry about the distinction? I believe the answer is no; some claims are made about the topic, sound art: it is young and new and tech-savvy; it includes podcasts and art installations, and field recordings and much more.

The term 'handbook' immediately paints a picture: convenient, practical, likely fits in a back pocket, but most importantly is decently comprehensive. None save the last can be said of this volume, recently published by Bloomsbury along with the companion *Handbook of Sonic Methodologies*. Quite an impressive amount of knowledge production is contained in these 24 chapters: it is a dense, broad, substantial and thorough book. A group of musicians, commentators, musicologists and activists have been collected in order to provide a snapshot of the 'state of the art' in the year 2022 – or, to be more precise, a snapshot of the state of theorisation of the art form.

Each author and their chapter bring a different understanding of the term 'sonic art' to the fore. The protean nature of sound art underlies its vitality and makes it so fascinating. Some basic observations begin to narrow the aperture and bring the topic into focus: sound art typically does not operate with a distinction between composer and performer mediated with notation. Rather, it typically mediates between artist and performance via technology – a microphone, an audio interface, one or several speakers. The advent of relatively inexpensive consumer-grade technology and electronics is a precondition for the majority of this work to exist. Sound art utilises field recordings in all manner of ways from simplistic to sophisticated: a fraught geopolitical event (Chapter three pertains to Sao Paulo, Brazil, in 2016, during radical student protests and the following reactionary protests) or a specific symbolically charged place (Chapter one describes glaciers melting at the moment of a recording, still melting at the moment of presentation, even now at this very moment). *My impression from this book is that* sound artists have a very strong sense of social and political justice and tend to express it explicitly rather than symbolically in their work. Sound art has a major hub in Berlin. Cultural programmes such as DAAD (Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst) Artists-in-Berlin, funded by the German government, have a particularly powerful influence, and the history of the city and of Germany – fascism, partition, neoliberalism – exert a clear influence as well. Sound art is typically not particularly concerned with

aesthetic considerations – beauty or ugliness. Or, if it is, it is by way of a dispassionate and naturalistic process of capturing 'what is there' through field recording or otherwise. Sound art is, in the most general sense, suspicious or even hostile to established institutions of artistic influence, support and patronage. All these characteristics remind me of the punk scenes that I have spent time with, in Chicago and Buffalo. But a question tugs: does this book critique an established musical world or is it justifying itself to that very institutional establishment using the language of the latter?

Six divisions structure the volume. The first two of these ('After the Apocalypse. The Desert of the Real as Sound Art' and 'Journeys across the Grid. Postcolonial Transformations as Sound Art') and the fourth ('De-Institutionalize! Institutional Critique as Sound Art') are in significant dialogue with each other. The general contours are probably familiar to most: the politics of representation and the importance of supporting and uplifting diverse voices, the manifestations of climate change and the obviously unequal distribution of its effects throughout the world, and the vitality to be found in grassroots music-making. While there are many interesting chapters here (the interviews with Elke Moltrecht, co-director of Ensemble Extrakte and Julia Gerlach, former head of the music section of DAAD are particularly good), I find that these topics often require fluid conversations better served in a dialogical format with subjective framing rather than the univocal format of the positivistic academic paper.

The remaining half of the volume, the third section ('Come Closer... Intimate Encounters as Sound Art'), fifth ('The Sonic Imagination. Sonic Thinking as Sound Art') and sixth ('Making Sound. Building Media Instruments as Sound Art'), is, as far as my personal interests go, the more interesting. Particular highlights include the three interviews concluding the volume, with Marianthi Papalexandri-Alexandri, Yuri Landman and Morten Riis, and Holger Schulze's 'Intruders Touching You. Intimate Encounters in Audio'.

This is not a book to sit and read cover to cover – it is a collection of academic papers that cover an incredibly wide swathe of research interests. Should the topic of a given chapter be in fruitful dialogue with a reader's pre-existing research interests, it will be riveting. However, if that is not the case, that chapter might be, frankly, rather tedious. With the exception of the introduction, each contribution follows the same style guide: academic, positivistic, scientific, dry. That there is such diversity in the identities of the contributors, mode of artistic

expression being discussed, motivating thematic nexuses and more is laudable. That every author utilises the same style of prose simply feels wrong. Was no one tempted to write an artistic diary? No one wanted to write a symbolically weighted fictional history of their craft? Did the editors proactively avoid contributors who

would have taken such an unorthodox approach? Doesn't such an editorial stance contradict the ethos of diversity so thoroughly incorporated into the fabric of the volume?

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