A History of Sound Art

I listen, I hear, I obey. Does the exquisitely dissonant institution of Sound Art, and its subsequent ordering of desire, ensure that we subscribe to a genealogy through which it is governed?

In this composition I hear a rhizomic collective, which obeys, albeit contradictorily, a government of past and future time. ‘Tomtomentomtomentomtoum’; the ‘Cage’ of Sound Art’s past. I hear hindsight. ‘Bwwaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa’; the sound of sonic arts future.

I hear silence, an absent sense of knowing, of the heard, that I project into a future. As a listener at the end of this work I feel like a wobbly toddler looking in the mirror and happily hallucinating in my own disunity. I am left with the idea of an uncomfortable wholeness. The reconciliation of sonic arts past with its future seems like an empirical illusion.

Ennioa Neoptolomus
CATHY LANE Composer and sound designer. Works include compositions and sound design for large scale outdoor theatre productions, film and video soundtracks, live performance and installation work.

CHARLIE FOX has been involved in the growth of the media arts in Canada, having produced a large body of video, sound, film and visual art. Fox currently resides in Regina where he is an Assistant Professor of Film and Video at the University of Regina.

JOHN CAGE American composerphilosopher, poet, music theorist, artist, printmaker, and amateur mycologist and mushroom collector. A pioneer of chance music, electronic music and non-standard use of musical instruments, Cage was one of the leading figures of the post-war avant-garde. Critics have lauded him as one of the most influential American composers of the 20th century.

BRANDON LABELLE is an artist and writer. His work explores the space between sound and sociality, using performance and on-site constructions as creative supplements to existing conditions.

JANET CARDIFF is perhaps best known for her signature audio walks, which she has made in London, Florence, Pittsburgh, San Francisco, St. Louis, and elsewhere. Her gallery installations—often made with George Bures Miller, Cardiff’s husband and artistic collaborator—use the narrative and technical language of film noir to create lush, suspenseful sound and video works.
THOMAS EDISON was more responsible than any one else for creating the modern world... No one did more to shape the physical/cultural makeup of present day civilization. He invented the phonograph and recording.

MARCEL DUCHAMP French artist whose work is most often associated with the Dadaist and Surrealist movements. He famously presented ready-made found objects as art objects in galleries.

HUGO BALL was a German author, poet and one of the leading Dada artists. He was an inventor of dadaist phonetic poetry and maintained that we must withdraw into the deepest alchemy of words, reserving to poetry its most sacred ground.

LEON THEREMIN was a Russian inventor and innovator of electrical devices. His 1919 invention of the Theremin, the world’s first electronic musical instrument gained him worldwide notoriety.

FILIPPO MARINETTI The poet and guiding light of Futurism. Marinetti issued the first “Futurist manifesto”. He pronounced himself in favour of the destruction of the traditional syntax, the abolition of adjectives and adverbs.

KURT SCHWITTERS worked in several genres and media, including Dada, Constructivism, Surrealism, poetry, sound, painting, sculpture, graphic design, typography and what came to be known as installation art.
WALTER RUTTMANN had a background as a painter, filmmaker, a cellist and violinist he made Weekend in 1928. The work was commissioned by Hans Flesch, director of the Berlin Radio Hour. he was concerned with exploiting the aesthetic and technical opportunities of time based media.

HARRY PARTCH American composer and instrument creator. He was one of the first twentieth-century composers to work extensively and systematically with microtonal scales, writing much of his music for custom-made instruments that he built himself.

ANTONIN ARTAUD French playwright, poet, actor and theatre director. He believed that theatre should affect the audience as much as possible, therefore he used a mixture of strange and disturbing forms of lighting, sound, and other performance elements. “Words are suggestive sounds and should be delivered for the sake of their sonority, explosiveness, sensuous and associative properties.”

PIERRE SCHAEFFER French composer, writer, broadcaster, engineer, musicologist and acoustician. His definition of the sound object was that, through the process of reduced listening, one should hear sound material purely as sound, divorced from any associations with its physical origins. He coined the term musique concrète and by innovating recording and sampling techniques.
Iannis Xenakis, composer, music theorist and architect-engineer, pioneered the use of mathematical models in music, and was also an important influence on the development of electronic music.

Louis & Bebe Barron, two American pioneers in the field of electronic music. They are credited with writing the first electronic music for magnetic tape, and the first entirely electronic film score for the MGM movie Forbidden Planet.
MORTON FELDMAN  American composer whose works are characterized by notational innovations which he developed to create his characteristic sound: a generally quiet and slowly evolving music.

PAULINE OLIVEROS  American accordionist and composer who is a central figure in the development of post-war electronic art music. She has written books, formulated new music theories and investigated new ways to focus attention on music including her concepts of “Deep Listening” and “sonic awareness”.

GEORGE MACIUNAS  established strangely radical modes of presentation in the name of Fluxus. Traditional works of art were to be replaced by Fluxus. Art was to be so uncomplicated that it could be realized by anyone, anywhere.
RICHARD MAXFIELD A composer of instrumental, electro-acoustic, and electronic music and active member of the Fluxus group. Among his innovations with tape music were the simultaneous performance of improvised instrumental solos with tapes based upon samples of the same soloist, re-editing of tapes before each public performance so that the pieces were not fixed in a single form, and the use of the erase head of the tape machine as a sound source.

DICK HIGGINS Composer, poet, printer, and early Fluxus artist. He was an early and ardent proponent and user of computers as a tool for art making, dating back to the mid-sixties, when Alison Knowles and he created the first computer generated literary texts.

SPIKE JONES A popular musician and bandleader specializing in performing satirical arrangements of popular songs. Ballads and classical works receiving the Jones treatment would be punctuated with gunshots, whistles, cowbells, and ridiculous vocals.

GROUP ONGAKU Japanese collective exploring musical improvisation in the late fifties and early sixties using found objects, random instruments, tape machines, and radios.

BRION GYSIN Performance artist best known for his redevelopment of the cut-up technique used by William Burroughs and the invention of the Dreamachine, a flicker device designed as an art object to be viewed with the eyes closed.

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**BBC Radiophonic Workshop** One of the sound effects units of the BBC. Created to produce effects and new music for radio. The innovative music and techniques used by the Workshop made it one of the most significant influences on electronic music today.

**Karlheinz Stockhausen** German composer, widely acknowledged by critics as one of the most important and controversial composers of the twentieth century. He is known for his groundbreaking work in electronic music, aleatory (controlled chance) in serial composition, and musical spatialization. He called for new kinds of concert halls to be built, “suited to the requirements of spatial music”.

**La Monte Young** pioneered the concept of extended time durations in contemporary music, his work has played a central role in the development of the use of Just Intonation in twentieth-century music and the growth of the Minimalist style.

**Tod Dockstader** A self-taught American audio-visual specialist and early practitioner of musique concrète. His early tape splicing music is multifariously rich and highly spatialised using both electronic sounds and concrete sounds.
GEORGE BRECHT  American conceptual artist and avant-garde composer. He was a key member of the Fluxus movement. It did not fundamentally matter if a score was executed, or if, when executed, it would be perceived as such by anyone other than its performer(s). Only the idea counted.

MAX NEUHAUS  percussionist and interpreter of contemporary music who moved on to become a pioneer of work that extended sound as an autonomous medium in the domain of contemporary art. He created numerous sound installations in public spaces and on the radio.

LUC FERRARI  French composer, initially classically trained, he was influenced by Varèse and Pierre Schaeffer and created work placing sound objects in the time and space, from both an audio and psychological point of view. His use of field recordings mixed with electronic sounds created abstract narratives and developed compositions which he called ‘concepts’.

ALVIN LUCIER  American composer of experimental music and sound installations that explore acoustic phenomena and auditory perception. Much of his work is influenced by science and explores the physical properties of sound itself: resonance of spaces, phase interference between closely-tuned pitches, and the transmission of sound through physical media.
BRUCE NAUMAN is a pioneer of video art but also used performance, sculpture and neon. Sound in his artistic practice has been used as pure audio works, sometimes incorporated as an element in videos or in large-scale architectural installations. Language has always been a key element in his work.

BERNARD PARMEGIANI is best known for his electronic and acousmatic music. He joined the GRM in France early on and collaborated with notable composers and filmmakers.

FRANÇOIS BAYLE French composer of musique concrète and acousmatic music. He was put in charge of Groupe de Recherches Musicales (GRM) through which he organized concerts, radio broadcasts, seminars and events celebrating individual composers and supported technological developments.

R. MURRAY SCHAFER Canadian composer, writer, music educator and environmentalist perhaps best known for his World Soundscape Project and concern for acoustic ecology.

TREvor WISHART has contributed to composing with digital audio media, both fixed and interactive. He has also written extensively on the topic of what he terms ‘sonic art’.

BARRY TRUAX Canadian composer who developed the first ever implementation of real-time granular synthesis and uses it often for sampled sounds, and soundscapes.
DENIS SMALLEY Composer of electroacoustic music, with a special interest in acousmatic music. Source sounds for his works may come from the environment and are often the starting point for his pieces but he may also develop highly sophisticated timbres from scratch using computer software. He describes his approach as ‘spectromorphological’, featuring the development of sounds in time.

HILDEGARD WESTERKAMP’s career as a composer, educator, and radio artist started by joining The World Soundscape Project and creating for the Vancouver Co-operative Radio. It focuses on environmental sound and acoustic ecology. Her compositions deal with aspects of the acoustic environment: with urban, rural or wilderness soundscapes, with the voices, with noise or silence, music and media sounds, or with the sounds of different cultures.
TERRY FOX Visual, performance, sound, video and installation artist. He was an important figure in post-minimal sculpture, conceptual art, performance, and video art on the West Coast.

LAURIE ANDERSON American experimental performance artist and musician who plays violin and keyboards and sings in a variety of experimental music and art rock styles. She has invented several devices that she has used in her recordings and performance art shows. In the late seventies, she created a tape-bow violin that uses recorded magnetic tape on the bow instead of horsehair and a magnetic tape head in the bridge.

THROBBING GRISTLE An avant-garde music, visual arts and performance group which developed tape sampling techniques and were forerunners of what later became known as Industrial Music.
LIMPE FUCHS Composer of acoustic and visual happenings who creates sound with unusual instruments. Based in Munich she has created along with her partner sculptor unstructured performances using esoteric homemade instruments such as audio-visual machines: light-ray oscillographs and movement holograms.

BILL FONTANA creates sound sculptures that use the human and/or natural environment as a living source of musical information through networks of simultaneous listening points that relay real time acoustic data to a common listening zone.

JOHN OSWALD Composer and media artist. Inspired by cut-up techniques of William Burroughs, he coined the term Plunderphonics to describe his practice of using a recognized musical quote and manipulating it in a mix with other recognizable musical quotes.

GREGORY WHITEHEAD creates remarkable sound for radio, the stage and the gallery. Writing extensively on the unique qualities of Radio Art. “Radio happens in sound, at a perceptual level, but the guts of radio are not sounds, but rather the gaps between sending and receiving, between transmission and audition.”

WARREN BURT Composer, performer, video artist, sound poet, writer, instrument maker.

DAVID CUNNINGHAM His installation works explore the real time experience of the acoustic qualities of a space. Other work has ranged from pop music to work for television, film and contemporary dance.
LEE RENALDO Best known for his role as guitarist with Sonic Youth. He creates gallery installations using sound film and text.

GORDON MONAHAN works for piano, loudspeakers, video, kinetic sculpture, and computer-controlled sound environments spanning various genres from avant-garde concert music to multi-media installation and sound art. As a composer and sound artist, he juxtaposes the quantitative and qualitative aspects of natural acoustical phenomena with elements of media technology, environment, architecture, popular culture, and live performance.

WILLIAM BURROUGHS An American novelist, poet, essayist and spoken word performer. Burroughs was a primary figure of the Beat Generation and a major postmodernist author who affected popular culture as well as literature.

PAUL DEMARINIS has been working as an electronic media artist since the early seventies and has created numerous performance works, sound and computer installations and interactive electronic inventions. One of the first artists to use computers in performance, much of his recent work deals with the areas of overlap between human communication and technology.

CHRISTIAN MARCLAY His work explores the fusion of fine art and audio cultures, transforming sounds and music into a visible, physical form through performance, collage, sculpture, installation, photography and video. A pioneer of using gramaphone records and turntables as musical instruments.
DAN LANDER Electro-acoustic composer and writer, his activities as a radio artist, sound art speaker, and promoter make him an important figure in Canadian musique concrète.

GILLES GOBEIL His work focuses on acousmatic and mixed music. His works fall close to what is called ‘cinema for the ear’. Many of his pieces have been inspired by literary works and attempt to let us ‘see’ through sound.

CHRISTOF MIGONE A multidisciplinary artist and writer. His work and research delves into language, voice, bodies, performance, intimacy, complicity and endurance.

ZBIGNIEW KARKOWSKI He is convinced that it is a responsibility of an artist in the present day to travel and work around the World in order to learn and understand different cultures and traditions and discover truth about ourselves and our planet. In his latest work, his main concern is to realize drama with sound - electronic and acoustic walls with the architectures of ruins transcribed in the scores.

TRIMPIN KINETIC sculptor, sound artist, musician, and composer, most of whose pieces integrate sculpture and music in some way, and many of which make use of computers to play these instruments. His work extends the traditional boundaries of instruments and the sounds they’re capable of producing.
NEGATIVLAND have been creating records, CDs, video, fine art, books, radio and live performance using appropriated sound, image and text. Mixing original materials and original music with things taken from corporately owned mass culture and the world around them, Negativland re-arranges these found bits and pieces to make them say and suggest things that they never intended to.

FRANCISCO LOPEZ Creates sonic universes, absolutely personal and iconoclastic, based on a profound listening of the world.

JONTY HARRISON Electro-acoustic composer, currently the director of the Birmingham Electro-acoustic Sound Theatre. He plays an active role in the musical life of Britain, serving on a number of committees, as well as conducting various ensembles.

KIM CASCONE Composer and sound designer. Started out as music editor for David Lynch. He often works with computer coding as a compositional tool.
BERNHARD LEITNER Creates sound-space explorations through architecture and sculpture. Trained as an architect and urban planner, he considers sound and its movement, rhythm, and intensity as events in time.

PAMELA Z Composer/performer and media artist who works primarily with voice, live electronic processing, sampling technology, and video.

STEVE RODEN. His work process uses various forms of specific notation (words, musical scores, maps, etc.) and translates them through self invented systems into scores; which then influence the process of painting, drawing, sculpture, and sound composition.

PETER VÖGEL A pioneer in the field of interactive electronic sculpture. The interactive sensitivity of his constructions utilizes photocells and microphones that react to spectators, creating an experience of seeing and hearing unique improvisations triggered by light and shadow.

CHRIS WATSON A sound recordist with a particular and passionate interest in recording the wildlife sounds of animals, habitats and atmospheres from around the world. Previously a founding member of art punk group Cabaret Voltaire.

TERRE THAMELITZ Multi-media producer, writer, public speaker, educator, audio remixer, DJ and owner of the Comatonse Recordings record label. Her work combines a critical look at identity politics - including gender, sexuality, class, linguistics, ethnicity and race - with an ongoing analysis of the socio-economics of commercial media production.
DAVID TOOP Writer, composer, improvisor and academic with significant presence in the British experimental and improvised music scene and writer of several acclaimed books on various aspects of sound and music.

DISINFORMATION A project by noise DJ and installation artist Joe Banks who pioneered the use of electromagnetic (radio) noise from sources such as live mains electricity, lightning, industrial and IT hardware, laboratory equipment, trains, magnetic storms and the sun as the raw material of musical and fine-art publications, exhibits and events.

ATAU TANAKA Composer and performer in the field of technology and music. His work often includes gestural data and application of sensors on body movements and spaces.

PHILIP JECK works with old records and record players salvaged from junk shops turning them to his own purposes.

CARSTEN NICOLAI seeks to overcome the separation of the sensual perceptions of man, e.g. by making sound and light frequencies perceivable for both eyes and ears to sensitise the viewer to the connection of the different sensory levels.
JUSTIN BENNETT Artist and composer working with sound and visual media.

PROJECT DARK Experimental group who created limited-edition seven-inch singles made with hair, glass, steel, cheese and other strange recording materials; these tracks were collected and manipulated further.

STEPHEN VITIELLO Electronic musician and sound artist Stephen Vitiello transforms incidental atmospheric noises into soundscapes that alter our perception of the surrounding environment.

JOHN BISCHOFF An early pioneer of live computer music. He is known for his solo constructions in real-time synthesis as well as his ground-breaking work in computer network bands.

MARYANNE AMACHER Her major pieces have almost exclusively been site specific, by using many diffuse sound sources (either not in the space or speakers facing at the walls or floors) she would create the psychoacoustic illusions of sound shapes/“precence”.

CHRISTINA KUBISCH Her work displays an artistic development which is often described as the “synthesis of arts” - the discovery of acoustic space and the dimension of time in the visual arts on the one hand, and a redefinition of relationships between material and form on the other.
ANDREAS BOSSHARD He conducts sound research in urban outdoor spaces, explored and subsequently produced several large, partially globally networked media projects. He explores soundscape architecture for sounds that create new spaces in order to emphasize the vertical dimension, especially such as his Kaleidophone sound spiral.

ANDREA POLLI Her work addresses issues related to science and technology in contemporary society. She is interested in global systems, the real time interconnectivity of these systems, and the effect of these systems on individuals.

STEVE BARSOTTI His various approaches to art making include photography, printmaking, performance, invented instruments, improvisation, object recording, location recording, phonography, electro-acoustic-pull-strange-sounds-from-everyday-objects.

PETERCUSACK Sound artist, musician and environmental recordist with a special interest in environmental sound and acoustic ecology.

IRIS GARRELFS Composer/performer intrigued by change, fascinated with voices and definitely enamoured by technology. She often uses her voice as raw material, which she transmuted into machine noises, choral works or pulverised into granules of electroacoustic babble and glitch.
DJ SPOOKY Paul D. Miller A composer, multimedia artist and writer. electronic and experimental hip hop musician.

JAMES WEBB Pioneer of sound art in South Africa. But his production extends far beyond that of gallery installations. Webb also works as a sound designer, curator and teacher.

NICHOLAS COLLINS Pioneer in the use of micro-computers in live performance, and has made extensive use of ‘home-made’ electronic circuitry, radio, found sound material, and transformed musical instruments.

RAINER LINZ Composer and sound artist with a long involvement in radio, music theatre, instrumental and electronic music. He is also an author and publisher.

SALOMÉ VOEGELIN is concerned with the practice and philosophy of sound. Her work investigates truth, reference and fiction of identity and place through sonic documents and narratives.

KARLHEINZ ESSL Composer and developer of software environments.

MATTHEW MULLANE is a guitarist and sometime computerist from Ohio.
JENNIE SAVAGE seeks to transform people’s perception of place.

DAVID LEE Myers is a sound and visual artist.

DAVID CHESWORTH & SONIA LEBER Australian based sound, video and installation artists.

JODI ROSE Sound artist, writer, broadcaster and composer.

DANIEL SIMPSON Artist involved with recording and performing binaural soundworks.

FM3 A Chinese musical duo who created the miniature loop player the Buddha Machine.

ULTRA-RED An art collective who pursue a fragile but dynamic exchange between art and political organizing.

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DAN SENN Composer of experimental classical music, electronic and acoustic, a sculptor of kinetic instruments for exhibition and performance, an experimental video artist for installation and proscenium play, and a documentary filmmaker.

TONY HERRINGTON Editor in Chief of music magazine The Wire.

JOHN WYNNE Sound artist whose work is often research based and made for galleries, museums and public spaces.

SUSAN PHILIPSZ Originally a sculptor, she is best known for her sound installations. She records herself singing a cappella versions of songs which are replayed over a public address system in a gallery or public space.
A History of Sound Art

Duration: 85min. Stereo audio.

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For more information about sound art you can visit our associated online project www.soundartarchive.net

www.newtoy.org
www.wetsounds.co.uk

All music and image rights remain with the artists

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