



Pieter Gyselinck (Belgium) interviews Agricola de Cologne on “curating soundart”.

Interview questions answered by Wilfried Agricola de Cologne, director and curator of artvideoKOELN <http://artvideo.koeln> and curator of SoundLAB – sonic art projects <http://soundlab.newmediafest.org>

Some questions would be - Feel free to share your thoughts if you want to:

- Is there a way you selected the sound art? Do you have any rules of standard to which an artwork must comply? Is subjectivity very important?
- What would you consider to be the role of a curator of sound art. Is it the same as curating other art?
- From all the soundclips you received, are they mostly just self-educated home-cooking sound artists or rather all academics?
- Do you believe in a kind of general study for education potential sound art curators?
- If you are curating, do you have a kind of theme that you use?

Is there a way you selected the sound art?

- ➔ Curating sound art is just one field of art I am curating, and, generally there are as many ways of curating as curators are. Since one never knows, what might be expected, in terms of soundart, an honest way of curating is certainly to listen and compare, thus, extracting the works to be selected, also for a certain topic, by listening and comparing. That’s how I was curating soundart.

Do you have any rules of standard to which an artwork must comply?

- ➔ I do not think it is helpful to have (dogmatic) rules, because one would miss the soundart piece to be valued completely. If one is accepting, that any soundart piece is potentially an experiment, then the curator needs to be open for it. He will always follow certain internal rules depending on his personal skills and experiences. While I have personally a multi-faceted musical education, from my point of view, for judging and curating soundart it is not requested to have such an education, it is more relevant to recognise the creative potential by using the non-visual sense, whether they were made in the musical or any other artistic field. From a child, I was always interested in experimental forms of art, and when I was learning musical instruments like violin, experimenting with the instrument as a tool for creating something new, found my main interest instead of studying classical repertoire, so when I was listening for the first time to a soundart piece, it was nothing new to me. Even if soundart is defining itself not as a musical form of art, but in the recent musical history, especially after World War II, there were a lot of composers who were using “sound” as essential components for composing musical pieces. Sound art is not soundart, I do not think it is possible or that it would makes sense to set up such rules. Many people always want that art can be (scientifically) measured, but it can’t. But such rules also block the freedom of perception, the curators’ perception, as well as the perception of the listener, they cause dogmas, and the death of art.

Is subjectivity very important?

- ➔ Judging art is always a matter of subjectivity, since there is no objective in art. It would be horrible, if there would be objectives, since there would be no art. So each curator is following his very own subjectivity according to his professional background and personal preferences. This does not only give the guarantee for a diversity in art by also a diversity in judging art. While it is possible to find criteria for estimating classical music, it is nearly impossible concerning classical contemporary music, and even less possible concerning soundart.

- What would you consider to be the role of a curator of sound art. Is it the same as curating other art?

- ➔ I think curating as such is generally following similar rules, i.e. taking responsibility. While curating “art”, if art is understood as a visual medium, is using the dominant visual sense, curating music and sound is using a non-visual sense. Another kind of imagination is needed therefore, to be able to give the sensually perceived a meaning and judge it. So, the conditions for curating especially soundart are fundamentally different than curating “visual” art. As a kind of “primus inter pares”, the soundart curator has not that kind of dominant role.

- From all the soundclips you received, are they mostly just self-educated home-cooking sound artists or rather all academics?

- ➔ I did not make a poll, but according to my experiences most sound artists have their roots in music or dealing with music, and soundart is either a certain consequence of their doing, or they do soundart in a complementary way, eg as an activity complementing other artistic activities. Most sound artists work in different art disciplines, and, from my personal point of view, the interdisciplinary approach is a most relevant aspect in doing and judging soundart. Like music, using sound as a basis for an art creation it is a non-visual way of art creating. According to a new understanding in using one’s creative potential, many visual artists feel the need to express themselves also by addressing to the non-visual sense. It is then an interesting question whether artists from different disciplines use sound differently. The merging of the arts via the new technologies is causing new types of artists whose artistic output is not restricted to one discipline only. I do neither believe in the “home-cooking”, nor the academics.

Do you believe in a kind of general study for education potential sound art curators?

- ➔ I think a good soundart curator needs skills is using and judging all senses in a creative way, very likely a good soundart curator would be a practicing soundart himself. Probably, a general study would make sense, if the future curators would be educated in the basics of many art disciplines, and recognize their artistic potential. But, one must not forget, a good curator needs to be talented, like a good artist needs to be talented, as well. The education may be an occasion to train the skill for using one’s talent, and I do not think that one can learn to be a good curator without any talent. But how can the talent of a soundart curator be measured?



Archives

If you are curating, do you have a kind of theme that you use?

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- It depends, some times yes, sometimes no. It is more complicated to have a theme, because one needs to listen more carefully, if a submission is hitting the theme. A theme might be a problem, if curators and artists would perceive the soundart piece in terms of illustrating the theme.

Agricola de Cologne, January 2014