Sound Art and Pandemic: A Documentary Soundscape

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Abstract: *The pandemic has temporarily changed our lives; there is no doubt that we are rapidly moving into a digital and virtual society; however, we so far do not know when this change will end, despite the emergence of post-pandemic terminology. Sound art is a form of art that has developed across disciplines since its emergence to contemporary times. And as a soundscape, what can be recorded during a pandemic, and as a composite of music and sound, can sound art be used as a digital archive during a pandemic? This paper hopes to explore the possibilities of sound art as an archive through artistic practice, reflecting on the changes and flows of soundscapes in the context of the pandemic..*

Key words: *pandemic; soundscape; sound art; art practice; digital art.*

> *The dead people don't come back*
> *Is gloomy and painful*
> *Lock your desires in a maple sugar jar People never refuse compassion*
> *But they jointly raised the executioner's knife*
> *This is a terrible tool for cooperation*
> *But it's not a collection method for prehistoric humans The ice age disappeared*
> *The dead people don't come back*
> *corn*
> *vegetables*
> *Flesh and a cute cat*
> *Soul wandering aimlessly in the cave He raised his mast*
> *Said to move towards a new era*
> *He is permanently suspended*
> *The universe that never disappeared*
>   A poem by Peirui Yang written during COVID-19.

The soundscape under the pandemic is regional and temporal, and, as with all sounds, we can hear, every second that passes indicates that the past is unrecoverable unless we resort to some other means. Soundscape research is a new approach to exploring the acoustic environment and the potential challenges of response (Li, Liu and Haklay, 2018). The soundscape referred to in this paper is seen more in terms of recording, art, and music. The five elements, water, earth, fire, air, and time and earth, water, fire, metal, and wood in China, contribute to soundscapes and are used in various ways in sound art, which the ear can enjoy while also learning about the education, sensitivity, and environment created for the other senses (Botella Nicolás, 2019). Naturally occurring soundscapes deserve our attention as recorded material in the pandemic.

Sound art combines music, composition, and installation; in the context of the epidemic, artistic practice is not only personal, but also serves as a personal memory and emotional vehicle. The pandemic is not only a symbol of the suffering of humanity, but also of personal pain and trauma. During the pandemic, photography, film, poetry, documentaries, and many other forms documented these afflictions because it was the memory of all of us as human beings. The simultaneity and ephemerality of sound is central to sound art, suggesting that the process of subjectivity is multiple and polyphonic (Pardo, 2017). The need of documenting is since we cannot predict when a pandemic would end.

Since landscape represents the genuine nature of recording and sound has the existential character of recording, sound art and landscape do not contradict one other and have a therapeutic purpose. For example, when museums in China had to close due to the COVID-19 outbreak, a sense of connection was created between audiences through online art exhibitions (Snels, 2021). Sound art opens connected paths in artistic practice and soundscapes. In my artistic practice, the creation of digital images also records visually the social landscape during the pandemic. It is these artistic avenues that allow personal emotions and senses to serve as records when looking back at the history of the pandemic in the future.

Landscapes under the pandemic: sound and reality

Despite the absence of a definition, landscape is a notion that has been relevant in both prehistoric and modern times. Since a result, the background of COVID-19 is one of historical landmarks in landscape change and documentation, as the natural and social landscapes in which people have lived altered substantially because of the pandemics. Gibson et al. (2021) describes a series of changes to the industrial landscape and regional heritage caused by the pandemic. In fact, the landscapes in the context of COVID-19 are intertwined. Boškić and Hausknecht (2021) describes the changes in the educational landscape, for example online modes of teaching and

learning as well as changes in traditional teaching systems. The landscape exists on a larger scale that encompasses society and ecology.

When the industrial and educational landscapes changed because of the pandemic, with impact on industry and shift in educational models, the soundscape we live in was also altered, and, on a larger scale, the real-life soundscape completely dissolved, mirroring, in a larger sense, the dissolution of people's spirits and senses.

The concept of soundscapes should not be ignored in the context of a pandemic but should carry more connotations. During COVID-19, the impact of quarantine measures highlighted the changes in sound and noise that existed in everyday life (Bartalucci et al., 2021). Governments across the globe adopted to a greater or lesser extent policies to combat pandemics, such as banning going out at certain times forcing people to stay at home. When the familiar streets are free of noise, we are during a 'quiet' soundscape.

The repercussions of a pandemic are complex and panoramic, and whether it is an industrial or educational landscape, or a soundscape, we must acknowledge the significance of what the landscape symbolizes. And it is the soundscape that this article focuses on. Providing important clues to understanding the perception and design of multimodal environments, and how humans are affected by sound psychologically, physiologically, physically, and socially, and how other organisms are similarly affected, soundscape research has made a constructive and often underestimated contribution (Lenzi, Sádaba and Lindborg, 2021). Several researchers have previously observed and investigated soundscapes throughout the pandemic period, and these data-driven and scientific investigations have offered substantial support for the documenting of the pandemic and artists' artistic work.

Artistic practice in the context of the pandemic

With many physical art exhibitions moving online and more opportunities for artworks that can be exhibited online, the presentation of art practices and exhibitions are also somewhat restricted in the context of a pandemic, despite certain restrictions on our real lives, such as isolation, social distance, and so on. Art practice represents individual and collective experiences and senses, and in a state of extreme situations such as a pandemic, one's mental world can be biased in a positive or negative way. Artists' virtual relationships during a pandemic, how the linkages between art, writing, and actual human challenges and technologies may lead to a truly helpful interchange (Mandalaki and Daou, 2020). During a pandemic, we are frequently unable to contact with the real outside world.

However, this quandary has not prevented artists throughout the world from producing, but rather has resulted in a vibrant art ecology and art market, with institutions and galleries presenting shows via internet exhibitions and artists reacting via a digital shift in art production.

A more tangible embodiment of this is the proliferation of virtual and online exhibits, which necessitates the ability of artworks to participate in digital exhibitions. That the pandemic has driven the digital process is undeniable. As Dumitru (2021) wrote, "COVID-19 has accelerated the processes of digitalization not only in businesses but also in people and public entities." We cannot access the real outside world in a pandemic, then online classes for students, and online offices for businesspeople become necessary.

Radio Aporee is a platform dedicated to the recording, phonography, and the art of listening of global sound maps and it is publicly accessible. On this platform you can listen to sounds from all over the world as a listener and viewer. The public can also upload sounds from their location by following the instructions on the platform.

The *Soundscapes in the Pandemic* project is managed by *Radio Aporee,* a website where we can listen to soundscapes from across the world during COVID-19 and see how they are evolving. The soundscapes are effectively and extensively gathered and made available to the public, making this a fascinating initiative.
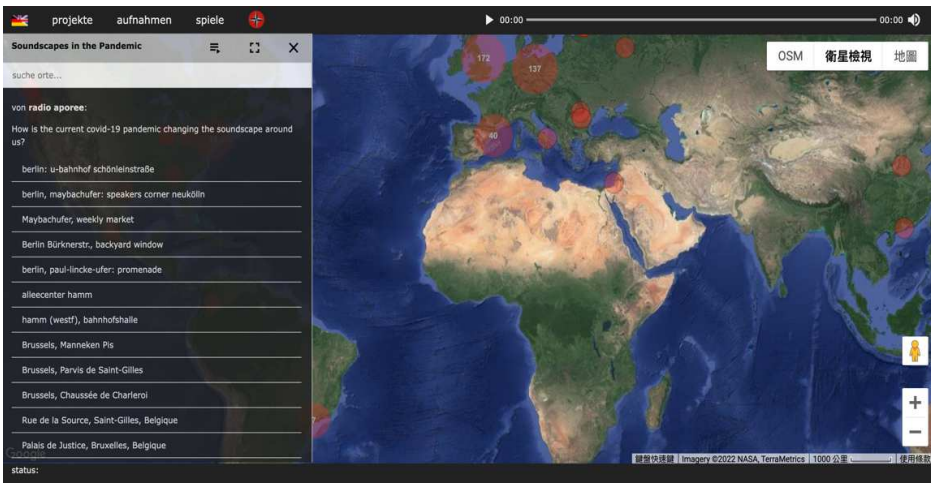

Fig. 1. *Soundscapes in the pandemic* project
https://aporee.org/maps/work/projects.php?project=corona

While documentation is important, creative activity is even more crucial in the face of the epidemic for the public and artists. During COVID-19, art events throughout the world are going online, as I said in my previous post on the digital push, and digital art is blooming even more.

Sound Art and Soundscapes: *Metamorphosis Series*

Sound Art has long blurred the lines between music, electronic music, and experimental sound. This blurring of lines is the result of creative doubt rather than theory. Sound Art, on the other hand, mixes aspects of recording, composition, communal and personal memory in this piece of paper and art.

The emergence of new media and technology is inextricably linked to art and experimental music. Contemporary art would not have as many levels if it were not for technology. As a result, these limits and integrations are purely technological. Technology's ideological manifestation may already be visible in a wide spectrum of modern artworks. Art practice frequently has an influence on the original theory, which then diffuses back into art practice. In any case, it is worthwhile to put out the effort.

It appears to me that there is a coincidence between experimental music and sound art, and that this also occurs in artistic practice, which is a source of confusion. I also attempt to explain it as mental doubt, and I believe that my work is influenced by this ambiguity to some level. This enormous ambiguity manifests itself on various levels, most notably at the mental level, as multidimensional combinations of vast areas. Because of the way the work is presented, this information may appear to be nihilistic. Because of their indeterminacy, experimental music and sound art have a lot in common.

The conceptualization of sound as matter plays an important role in the experimental electronic music genre (Hofer, 2014). The material idea of sound, on the other hand, has a long history in our culture. Limits and combinations are redefined because of the uncertainty of sound and music, which is made up of many factors such as the viewpoint of hearing and the truth that much of this world, even other unknown regions, is not something we can hear on our own. Human hearing is limited; we can't even pick and choose which noises we want to hear.

Uncertainty is inconvenient, but it is also an artistic accident, because we filter sound through our brain after it reaches our ears. We continue to process sound and music as valuable messages derived from emotion and reason. In the end, it's just an unintentional experience.

As a result, under this idea, uncertainty vanishes and becomes reliant on machines and technology. In many ways, nature, sound art, and experimental music achieve the same outcome regardless of theme.

My artistic approach is generally focused on a single subject. Furthermore, the presence of the notion is, in my opinion, a philosophy, something based on words rather than deeds. To cleanse my creative process and work, I use a variety of conceptual art ideologies and theories. However, there is a conflict between "existentialism" and "non-existentialism," because experimental music and sound art exist today.

The creation of the *Metamorphosis Series* has its roots in the impact of pandemics on individuals. As in the Soundscapes in the pandemic project, the public can record

soundscapes if they have a sound recording device. As an artist, the combination of recording and creation during the pandemic is also the feedback of personal history on collective history.

The *Metamorphosis Series* was developed during the pandemic, when I was confined to my house for an extended period, cut off from the outside world. The metamorphosis series is made up of digital pictures and sound art.

Fig. 2. Treatment of images taken from the window during the confinement in COVID-19
(photo by author)

Sound artworks may at times intervene in some theoretical discussions and debates about demarcations, identities, and definitions (Cobussen, 2019). In the context of the pandemic, sound art is more of a personal response. And the *Metamorphosis Series* not only records photographs of the time's streets, but also gathers and uses noises from the streets as a foundation. The meaning of *Metamorphosis* stems from social and physical changes in the setting of the pandemic, but it replies electronically and digitally, which relates to digitalization indirectly.
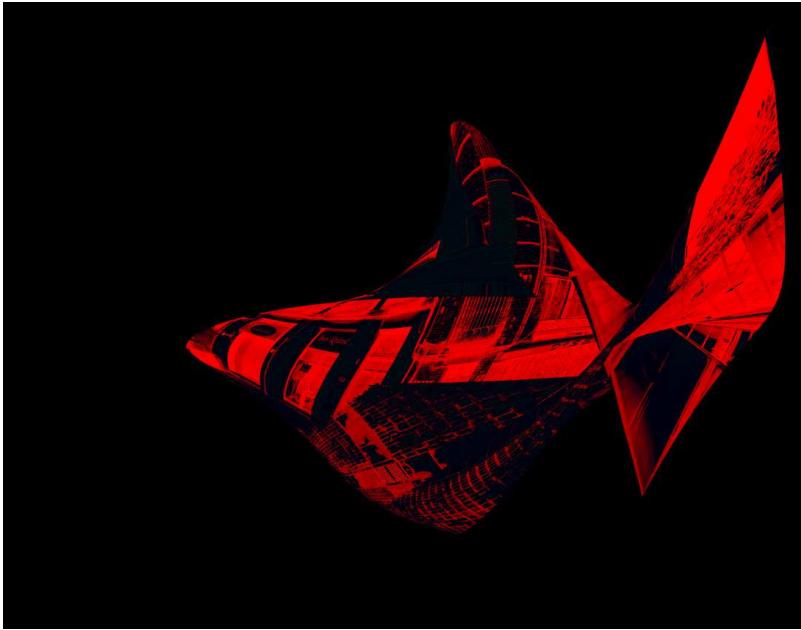
Fig. 3. *Metamorphosis Series,* digital image, dimensions variable (Artist: Peirui Yang)
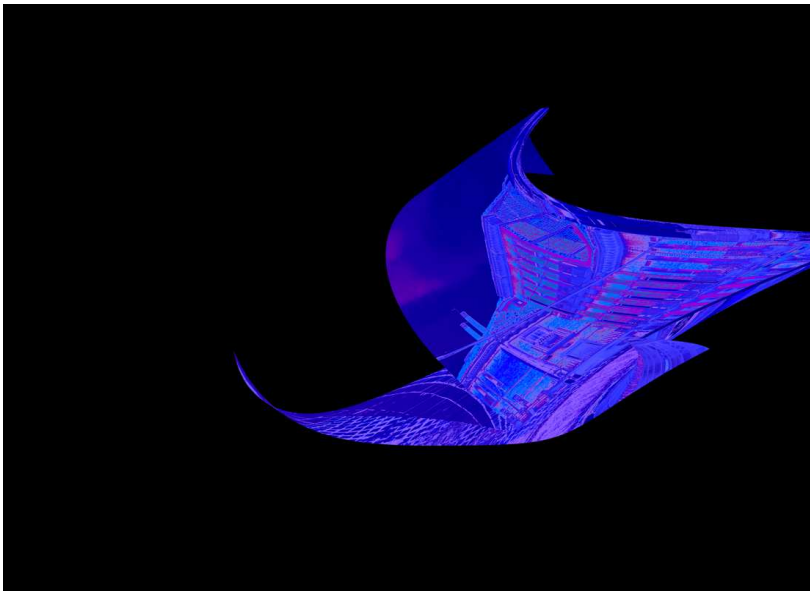

Fig. 4. *Metamorphosis Series*, digital image, dimensions variable (Artist : Peirui Yang)

The digital images are transformed through a series of digital means, and it is through digital means that it is hoped to convey the changes that occurred during the pandemic.
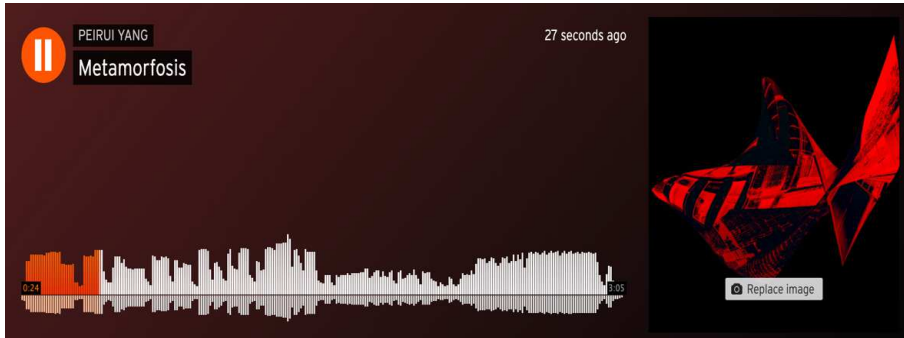

Fig. 5. *Metamorphosis*, Sound art (Artist: Peirui Yang)
https://soundcloud.com/user-446665100/metamorfosis

Sound art is a more intimate response to the pandemic. And the *Metamorphosis* Series not only records photographs of the time's streets, but also collects noises from the streets and uses them as a foundation. *Metamorphosis* takes its meaning from the social and physical changes that occur during a pandemic, but it also responds electronically and digitally, which is related to digitalization indirectly.

Discussion

As Wadley (2021) writes, "Art is often a response to social crises. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed fault lines in societies worldwide, unveiling fractures in the social fabric that became more visible in this time of crisis." With sound art and soundscapes, I believe that both individual and collective experiences are important. For example, collective soundscape projects can be used as data and archives. And individuals, such as artists' work, can also reflect the changes of mind and spirit in an epidemic. Different identities represent different landscapes, such as neighborhoods, cities, and countries. Being part of the landscape is an important part of our future understanding of the history of the pandemic.

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