

A Brief Discussion on the Application of Sound Art in Installation

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Abstract: This paper conducts a practical exploration of the application of sound elements in sculptural installations. By integrating theories of sound art with the developmental trajectory of contemporary sculptural installation art, it analyzes the formal composition and artistic language of sound-installation combinations, while delving into the unique value of sound elements in artistic creation and their inspiration and guidance for the author's own work. Adopting an interdisciplinary approach, this research synthesizes Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of bodily perception, Norberg-Schulz's theory of genius loci, contemporary affect studies, and sound art theory to construct a four-dimensional analytical framework. This framework examines how the interaction between sculpture and sound can evoke affective resonance. With a particular focus on "nostalgia" as a specific affective modality, the study employs dual pathways of theoretical inquiry and artistic practice to reveal the generative mechanisms and realization methods of artistic media in forging emotional connections. This fusion of sound and sculpture opens new possibilities for conceptual expression and multisensory art experiences. Finally, the paper reflects on how sound elements in sculptural installations have influenced the author's creative approach, concluding with practical insights and future directions for the field.

Keywords: sound elements, sculptural installation, phenomenology, genius loci, affective expression

1. Introduction

This paper explores themes of "family" and "nostalgia," examining the use of sound art in sculptural installations and analyzing how auditory elements construct a sense of place through spatial design. Such integration enhances artistic expression and audience interaction. Contemporary sculpture has moved beyond traditional visual forms, embracing cross-media approaches that incorporate sound, light, and technology. Sound, as an immaterial medium, introduces immediacy, emotional resonance, and interactivity, breaking the dominance of visual experience and offering multi-sensory immersion. Existing research on sound art focuses mainly on music, visual media, or sensory studies, with limited systematic investigation into its role in sculptural installations. Addressing this gap, this study employs literature review, theoretical analysis, and case studies to construct a preliminary framework. Sound's fluid and spatial qualities complement sculpture's materiality, creating atmospheres charged with nostalgic emotion and evoking memory and belonging. Environmental or narrative sound designs, for example, can merge auditory and tactile experiences, conveying temporal-spatial interplay and eliciting deep emotional responses. This paper aims to contribute to theoretical and practical discourse on sound in sculptural art.

2. Basic content of moving target tracking in Wireless Sensor Networks

This study constructs an interdisciplinary framework by integrating Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, Yi-Fu Tuan's theory of the spirit of place, affect studies, and sound art to explore how sculpture and sound combine to evoke the "nostalgia" emotion associated with hometown and memory. Based on literature review, theoretical research, case analysis, and artistic experimentation, the research focuses on how the materiality of sculpture and the immateriality of sound interact through space and perception to evoke nostalgic experiences. Phenomenology emphasizes the primacy of the body's perception within a field, where sculpture activates tactile and kinesthetic senses through material, form, and spatial arrangement. Combined with Yi-Fu Tuan's (1974) concept of "topophilia" from **Topophilia**—which views place as an emotional vessel carrying history and memory—it stimulates the audience's collective unconscious connection to their homeland [1]. For instance, Anish Kapoor's **Memory** Figure 1 series, with its profound forms and reflective properties, evokes resonances of loss and remembrance, guiding viewers to reflect on time and nostalgia.

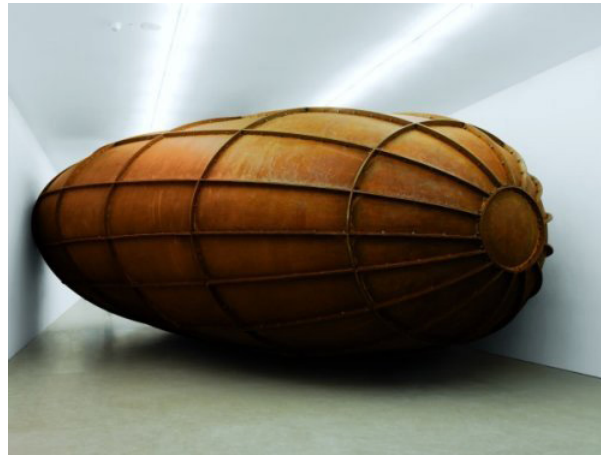


Figure 1. Memory

The introduction of sound further deepens the expression of nostalgia. Its immateriality and fluidity create an immersive effect within space, resonating with the materiality of sculpture to construct a “space of nostalgia.” Through spatial sound arrangement, the audience perceives memory and emotion within interlaced auditory layers of time and space, transcending unisensory experience. For instance, the combination of sound and sculpture can blur the boundaries between past and present, reality and virtuality, forming a multisensory emotional narrative. Through case analysis, this study reveals how sculpture and sound intertwine emotion and space, moving beyond mere nostalgia to respond to both individual and collective historical memory, thereby offering a profound and complex expression of homesickness.

3. Literature Review

Research on the intersection of sound, emotion, and sculpture explores how sound conveys emotions through sculptural forms and spatial arrangements. This interdisciplinary field, which integrates art and technology, encompasses practices such as sound sculpture and interactive art, and has gradually gained academic attention in recent years.

This study systematically reviews literature retrieved from the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) database up to December 2024, using the keywords “sound and sculpture” and “sound and emotion.” The search yielded 14 academic journal articles, 8 master’s theses, and 1 doctoral dissertation, all focusing on the application and value of sound in sculptural art. Additionally, through a systematic review of international academic resources, 12 representative overseas monographs and journal articles were selected as theoretical foundations. These primarily cover core research directions such as the philosophical underpinnings of phenomenology, the spirit of place theory, collective memory, and social phenomenology.

4. Sound Elements in Contemporary Installation Art

4.1 Cross-Media Practice and Emotional Resonance

Contemporary sculpture has transcended the conventional boundaries of materials and forms, progressively integrating cross-media elements such as sound, light, and technology to create works that are more conceptual and interactive. This transformation not only expands the expressive dimensions of sculpture but also enhances the audience’s perceptual engagement. As a non-visual medium, sound is increasingly incorporated into sculptural installations, becoming a pivotal element in intensifying artistic language and emotional expression. This article explores the theoretical foundations and innovative practices of sound sculpture, employing phenomenological and collective memory perspectives to analyze how sound sculpture evokes emotional resonance and creates profound perceptual experiences.

4.2 The Rise of Sound Installation

The concept of sound sculpture can be traced back to artistic experiments in the early 20th century. In 1913, Italian artist Luigi Russolo, in his **The Art of Noises**, proposed an “aesthetics of noise,” challenging traditional musical systems and laying an epistemological foundation for sound as an independent artistic medium. Russolo’s theory emphasized that sound is not merely noise but can be transformed through artistic means into an effective tool for expressing emotions and concepts. This line of thinking influenced subsequent artists and musicians, gradually steering sound art away from traditional musical frameworks and toward the realms of visual art and sculpture.

4.3 Theoretical Foundations of Sound Installation

John Cage's *4'33"* Figure 2 from the 1950s further deconstructed the binary opposition between sound and silence, noise and music. By presenting silence and ambient sounds as essential components of the work, Cage provided a phenomenological theoretical foundation for sound sculpture. His piece was not merely an experiment with sound but also a profound reflection on contemporary art, emphasizing the audience's individualized, embodied perception of sound. This approach propelled the evolution of sound sculpture from a static visual art form into a dynamic, interactive experience.



Figure 2. *4'33"*

With technological advancements, sound sculpture underwent significant technical innovation in the late 20th century. The application of digital technology and electronic equipment, in particular, opened up new possibilities for sound installation art. María Angélica Meléndez argued that sound installations redefine the relationship between the audience and the artwork by constructing immersive auditory spaces. Nicolas de Oliveira further emphasized that sound sculpture requires an integration of interdisciplinary perspectives, such as the phenomenology of space, reception aesthetics, and cultural studies, to highlight the interplay between the audience's embodied experience and their perception of space.

5. Installation, Sound, Collective Memory, and the Spirit of Place

5.1 Phenomenology and Sound Installation

From a phenomenological perspective, sound sculpture reshapes the subject's direct experience with the world through non-visual media. Husserl's call to "return to the things themselves" emphasizes the primacy of intuitive experience, proposing that through direct sensory engagement, individuals can achieve a deeper understanding of their relationship with the world [2]. Sound sculpture operates precisely through this principle, enabling audiences to transcend visual limitations and enter a more immediate, internalized state of perception. As a fluid and intangible medium, sound stands in contrast to the materiality of sculpture, evoking emotional resonance and creating an immersive experience for the viewer.

Heidegger, in his concept of "being-in-the-world," further contends that the relationship between the individual and the world is not merely a product of thought but arises from situatedness [3]. Sound sculpture constructs specific perceptual contexts through the interaction of space and sound, allowing audiences to experience a sense of "place" and "presence." By integrating auditory elements within spatial arrangements, it fosters an environment where the boundaries between the self and the world blur, inviting a holistic engagement that is both visceral and reflective.

5.2 Sound Installation from the Perspective of Collective Memory

Merleau-Ponty further emphasized the body as the primary medium of cognition, suggesting that space becomes a "perceivable space" through physical practices such as walking and touching [4]. Halbwachs stressed that memory is not merely an individual recollection but a process continuously reshaped in society through group identity and symbolic systems [5]. As a cultural carrier, sound materializes the transmission of collective memory, enabling individuals to reconnect with history and collective identity through auditory experiences. Pierre Nora's theory of "sites of memory" further explores how

physical carriers, such as memorials, become symbols of cultural identity [6]. Richard Shusterman's theory of somaesthetics emphasizes the embodied nature of aesthetic experiences. Sound sculpture, by integrating bodily perception with sound, evokes pre-cognitive emotional responses in the audience, transforming the artwork from a static material form into a dynamic and interactive emotional field [7].

5.3 Sonic Practices in Contemporary Installation Art

Contemporary installation art, as an extension of sculpture, has transcended the limitations of traditional forms by incorporating multi-sensory elements, with the use of sound becoming particularly prominent. Below are several representative case studies of sound sculpture practices:

****Harry Bertoia's "Sonambient" Sound Sculptures (1960s) Figure 3:****

Bertoia employed metal rods to generate resonant sounds, merging the materiality of sculpture with the emotional quality of sound. Through the randomness and resonant characteristics of sound, he created an immersive auditory experience for the audience, engaging not only auditory perception but also evoking emotional responses.

****Bill Fontana's "Sound Island" (1994):****

Fontana introduced the sound of ocean waves into the Arc de Triomphe in Paris. By integrating sound with space, he broke through the constraints of visual art, creating an intangible form of sound sculpture. This site-specific work blurred the boundaries between the material and the immaterial, complicating and enriching the audience's perception of sound and space.

****Zimoun's "121 prepared dc-motors, cardboard elements 8x8cm" (2011):****

Zimoun utilized sensors and real-time audio technology to transform audience movements into sound output, crafting a complex audiovisual interactive experience. The work demonstrates the dynamic and interactive nature of sound sculpture, emphasizing the interplay between sound and space.



Figure 3. "Sonambient"

These practices demonstrate that sound sculpture possesses unique potential in emotional expression, spatial perception, and audience interaction. Although such research and creative work have primarily emerged from Western cultural contexts, they nevertheless offer fresh perspectives for cross-cultural studies in sound sculpture.

6. Interpretation of the Sound Installation The Lingering Echo as Graduation Project

This study examines how sound, as a carrier of collective memory, is gradually forgotten—reflecting the replacement of collective memory in human history. Modern life, filled with alerts, rings, and horns, overwhelms auditory spaces, eroding natural soundscapes and nostalgic memory. As a result, individuals grow isolated, detached from cultural identity and authentic human connection. This forgetting signifies not only auditory loss but a rupture in collective memory under modernity.

The research reflects upon this historical amnesia, aiming to reconstruct emotional bonds with nature and homeland through artistic practice. It explores the abandonment of nostalgic sounds and speculates on memory-place relationships. Within contemporary society, normative forces shape individual and collective consciousness. Traditional family conventions exemplify such structural tensions. This artwork uses recurring ceramic pots—arranged in rigid order—as metaphors for familial discipline. When viewers lean close, low-frequency waves inside resonate, creating complex acoustic effects. This simulates discursive circulation within normative systems and evokes cognitive dissonance, echoing tensions between collective memory and personal emotion. Through sound sculpture, the work juxtaposes forgotten nostalgic sounds and regulated social soundscapes, revealing their interplay in collective memory. The resonant pots metaphorically represent memory fragmentation and emotional alienation. By inviting close listening, the artwork encourages re-engagement with obscured collective emotions and local soundscapes, potentially reestablishing connections to homeland. This intervention reflects on disciplinary suppression while opening pathways to reimagine person-environment and memory-identity relations.

6.1 Background Research on the Theme of Nostalgia

Based on field observations in rural Shandong, this study examines how traditional practices persist amid rural transformation. Northern Chinese villages still commonly use agricultural byproducts like corn stalks as primary cooking fuel, systematically stored around residences. This enduring practice shaped the author's understanding of regional characteristics. Using native memories as a thread, the author traces contextual changes over decades: traditional farmhouses replaced by modern homes, upgraded infrastructure, diversified agriculture, and accelerated urbanization through youth return. Yet the enduring culture of stove cooking, heated beds (kang), and preserved courtyards continues carrying memories of slower times, depicting a grounded rural life. The author employs corn stalks and leaves as primary medium for their dual cultural significance: as physical carriers of agricultural civilization, they reference traditional rural living landscapes; as materialized collective memory, they bear unique childhood experiences and emotional structures specific to northern China. This material choice reinforces the work's historical dimension while providing viewers cultural coordinates for understanding traditional normative systems.

In the context of contemporary social formations, the logic of capital has permeated every corner of daily life, leading to increasingly alienated social relations, the rupture of traditional communal bonds, and the gradual fragmentation of collective memory. Against this backdrop, “nostalgia” is no longer merely a personal longing for one's homeland but has become an emotional resource for resisting social alienation. The sound installation art created by the author attempts to serve as a materialized vessel of memory, aiming to reconstruct the resonance of collective memory and repair the social networks fractured by capital.



Figure 4. Corn stalk

The French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs proposed in the early 20th century that the survival of collective memory requires specific social soil—it remains vibrant only through continuous interaction and sharing [8]. In the wave of urbanization, traditional community structures have faced unprecedented impacts, with large-scale population mobility and community disintegration accelerating this process. The decline of “social capital” described by American sociologist Robert Putnam in *Bowling Alone* is a manifestation of this erosion of memory—people are becoming increasingly isolated,

participation in public life is declining, and trust is diminishing. What Putnam reveals is not merely a change in behavioral patterns but also a warning that society is gradually losing its mechanisms for transmitting memory [9].

6.2 Integration of Sound Elements and Sculpture in the Artistic Creation



Figure 5. Lingerin Echoes

Formally, the clay pot serves as both a functional vessel and a symbolic carrier of cultural meaning. Its orderly arrangement in the work suggests familial and social norms, evoking associations with traditional structures. Integrated sound elements expand perceptual boundaries, adding sensory layers that trigger multi-sensory responses. This aligns with phenomenological emphasis on embodied experience—where perception becomes an emotional, bodily process rather than mere cognition.

Through sound and installation, the creator communicates not only visually but auditorily, guiding viewers to deeply experience the work’s emotional connotations within an immersive space. This multidimensional perception enhances expressive power and emotional resonance.

In *The Lingerin Echo*, the artist transformed an abandoned northern pigsty using corn stalks and winnowing baskets to create a “familiar yet unfamiliar” dreamcore aesthetic. This space embodies Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology—where body and world perceptions intertwine. These material remnants witness the past while fragmenting in the present, evoking tension between familiarity and alienation through touch, vision, and smell.

For viewers with northern rural backgrounds, these elements form “pre-reflective” perceptual foundations. The pigsty becomes a liminal zone where reality and dreams converge, creating ambiguous perception. The immersive experience—touching rough textures, smelling earth and corn silk, gazing into dark pot openings, hearing lingerin echoes—connects bodily perception with emotional memory, forming a profound human-environment connection.



Figure 6. Lingerin Echoes

In the processing of sound, the author introduces a theoretical dimension of the collective unconscious through the

manipulation of audio materials. The recorded daily conversations of family members are treated with echo effects, which not only metaphorically represent the mode of traditional cultural transmission but also transform sound into a medium connecting individual experience with the collective unconscious. Carl Jung's theory of the collective unconscious suggests that humans share deep psychological archetypes that lie latent within culture and emotion [10]. The echo effect elevates familial dialogue beyond personal narrative, evoking a resonance that seems to emanate from the depths of the collective unconscious. When viewers approach the installation, the changing sounds create a unique auditory experience, intertwining with the characteristics of family norms and archetypes from the collective unconscious—such as “home” and “inheritance”—in a symphonic interplay. This design excavates humanity's shared cultural memory, deepens the emotional expression, and invites the audience into an immersive artistic field where the individual and the collective intertwine.

6.3 Creative Process and Interpretation of the Graduation Work

As an artistic medium, sound transcends visual limitations to evoke collective memories and emotional resonance. Scottish artist Susan Philipsz's work demonstrates how sound constructs psychological imagery and stimulates sensory connections. This inspires reconsideration of sound's potential: not merely as auditory stimulus, but as a dynamic medium connecting personal experience with collective narratives.

This study employs sound installation to explore how sound-space interaction can reconstruct memory connections between people and their hometowns, responding to collective memory's rupture in modernity.

The installation measures 150×80×80 cm, using clay pots as core visual and acoustic elements. Their hollow forms naturally facilitate sound wave resonance, with dozens of openings uniformly oriented toward the center to create a focused sound field. When activated, vibrations generate echoing effects that deliver immersive auditory impact. Corn stalks scattered at the base provide rural ambiance, while shoes representing different identities placed on three sides invite viewers to complete the narrative by adding their own footwear.

7. Conclusion

This paper focuses on the emotional expression in sound installations, exploring how sound conveys emotions through sculptural forms and spatial arrangements. By adopting an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that integrates four key perspectives—Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, the spirit of place theory, affect studies, and sound art—it investigates the relationship between sculpture, sound, and emotion. These composite elements are further intertwined with the emotional experience of “nostalgia,” providing theoretical tools and practical pathways for understanding the emotionally connective function of art. The creative process of the author's graduation work, **The Lingering Echo**, exemplifies the deep integration of sound elements with sculptural forms and offers a contemporary interpretation of the theme of nostalgia. These explorations not only enrich the expressive language of sculptural art but also provide new perspectives for understanding the relationship between tradition and modernity, individual memory and collective experience. Future research may further investigate the impact of digital technology on the creation of sound sculpture and the practice of sound art in cross-cultural contexts.

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