

# The expanding fields, practices and histories of technology-based music

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Creative practice has historically been defined in relation to a given medium, and this has also been the case with technology-based music and art. Today, many of these music technologies are so fully intertwined with practice that we no longer consider them to be technologies. Where does that leave sound-based or technology-based art? What are the characteristics that we should talk about? Are the practices bound up in technological innovations, are they bound to situations and actions, or are they bound to ideas or perceptions? Or to all of these?

This paper seeks to examine the technology-based musical practices which have become prolific since the 1990s. Practices that spring out of, yet diverge from, the historical genres of acousmatic and computer music. The discussions in this paper draw on findings from an ongoing research project focused on technologybased musical practices among Norwegian composers and artists.

The term post-acousmatic (Adkins et al., 2016) attempts to encompass the wide range of new practices that have developed in the wake of acousmatic music, a music which is characterised by the broken link between the heard sound and the sound source. However, the large diversity in artistic aims and practices in technology-based music found today makes it impossible to discuss technology-based music and art within the confines of the history and tradition of acousmatic music. In-depth discussions of specific works or genres will be essential for unwrapping artistic intentions, perceptions, the role of technology, and the artistic results.

Electronic music technology is now in the hands of a record-number of people, and this proliferation has given rise to new socialities around music, where new sonic genres readily mix with other types of media content. Tradition-bound hierarchies of gate keepers are of less importance than previously, and several of the new genres have achieved institutional acceptance and inclusion in museums and festivals. Some practitioners deliberately maintain their independence and remain rebelliously close to what we can loosely label a “new” folk music – developed outside of institutionalised funding structures, and in informal contexts such as artist-run galleries, maker spaces, or club stages.

It is the innovations that follow from the broad migration to digital technology that fuel these developments. The binary mode facilitates flexibility in representation, direct combinations of information from different fields, and the ability to control complex co-variation of arbitrarily combined parameters. In combination with communication media and portable computation devices, new practices result in a range of technical, aesthetic, and social developments around music – interfaces for application of a technicist logic to human experience (Hansen, 2004). The proliferation of media and the dissolution of genre boundaries mirror Rosalind Krauss’ theorising of what had become the expanded field of sculpture, with its steps away from being object-centred and towards land art, installation art, and, later, “media art” (Krauss, 1979).

This expanding field of practice does not merely refer to its own materials or technologies (Waters, 2000) but extends the music and adds social perspectives. This expansion and turn towards an expanded sociality is evident in artists’ selection of sound materials, their processing and interacting with them, or the presentation in contexts that extend their meaning. The essential finding is that new technology-based practices find their meaning in broader contexts that involve composers, musicians, and audiences beyond traditional listening, and that conceptualism plays an important part when moving the music away a focus on medium and material.

## References

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