

On Understanding Sound Practice in Manila¹

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ABSTRACT

In Manila, from the 1990s until present there are artists—including practitioners of visual art and those who are from conceptual and experimental practice; musicians—including those who have been formally trained and those who are self-taught, including those who use traditional music instruments and those who use electronic, digital or other experimental music media; media artists—including those who are working on more conventional graphics to those who are engaged in new media; technicians, organizers, publishers, curators and archivists, among others, have constantly worked in projects (events, exhibitions, publications and others), talks and other forms of colloquia, and social situations. They are found in artists-run spaces that function as gallery/ bar/ studio/ performance hub; on commercial bars that feature alternative/ independent music, owned by artists or friends

of artists; occasionally in university facilities like museums or auditorium; and more recently in commercial galleries and art fairs. These groups of people who have germinated from different microcosm but have existed in a common ecology is the main focus of this paper. This phenomenon is coined in this paper as *sound practice*. Sound practice is not new. As mentioned, it has been existing for at least 3 decades, but left unexamined as a subject of critical inquiry. Claiming a name for it opens it to scrutiny, encouraging mindful navigation of disparate testimonies of experiences, established histories, and contested genealogies that pertains to and emanates from this loose group of diverse origin came-together, co-exist(ed/ing) and form(ed/ing) a common bond. This paper then is an attempt to theorize the practice by historicizing—or to understand the practice within the historical frame of entangled and allied practices; and by examining the characteristics of the ecology that sustains and is sustained by the practice.

Keywords: sound practice, sound art, new music, Manila, art ecology

Introduction

This paper presents two approaches to understanding sound practice as a discourse. First is by historicizing the practice or by invoking histories and genealogies where elements of the practice can be easily found. Second is by approaching the practice as an ecology, relying heavily on relationship “among” that forges the idea of “within” (the ecology).

Sound practice is not sound art, or at least not only sound art.

Salome Voegelin, in her book *Listening to Noise and Silence: Towards a Philosophy of Sound Art* (2010), defines sound art as an art practice that “has sound as its ‘object’ of investigation [...] within the production of art and the world through a sonic sensibility” (Voegelin, 2010). What it produces, then, are sound works—made of sound, consumed aurally, and are about sound, sounding, hearing, listening, etc.

Meanwhile, I define sound practice as a grouping of practitioners (artists, composers, instrumentalists, technicians, curators, organizer, etc.) in various sonic and non-sonic fields (such as electronic, experimental, noise musics, sound art, soundscape, sound engineering and other sciences, sound anthropology and other sociations of sound, art, archiving, cinema, new media, DIY-makers, etc.), who functions (produce, exhibit, perform, etc.) together for various reasons. In short, sound practice is a term I use when invoking “these ‘artists’” collectively.

To use this term was suggested by Hong Kong media artist and professor of creative media at the Hong Kong Baptist University, Anson Mak, during my dissertation research in 2016.² My earliest encounter of the usage of the term in published material is in 1992, from the book *Sound Theory/ Sound Practice*, edited by Rick Altman, which contains theorization of sound and music that are used in films (Altman, 1992).

I first used the term “sound practice” in 2017 *WSK! Feedback Forum*, a forum of new media art held in the Philippines in November 2017. Merv Espina, my co-convenor for that forum, and I agreed to use the term “sound practice” because “sound art”, which was in the 1990s and early 2000s, have

been used as an umbrella term to include all other music that is covered in this paper, now has its own definition, albeit new, with the influx of literature on sound art, particularly from the West. Sound practice appears to be more inclusive. What is central in this discourse is sound—as the subject and medium of practices.

This paper is premised on the claim that sound practices from 1990s to 2010s can be found: (a) entangled with music, visual, conceptual, cinematic, media and performance art; (b) institutionally linked but independently sustained; and (c) internationally networked. And that the culture and arts experience of the Philippines from 1960s to 1980s, with its abundant pivotal historical moments, seeded the condition for the present sound practice.

This paper's main objective is not to identify what is sound art and what is not. This is a response to "sound art's" inability to capture all the arts/ artists who participate in this "different kind of art or creative practice". I came to ask: What do we do with these ambivalences in labels, groupings, or categorizations in the practice? Is this all there is or could further explorations be done to map out, locate, and make sense of whatever this practice is, within the art world?

This paper then is primarily an assertion for a theoretical shift from (generic use of) "sound art" (and "other music") to "sound practice"—**decentring** the discourse from "what they make" to "what they do". This is not to say that a scholarly work on sound art (or experimental music, or electronic music, or noise music) should not or cannot anymore be done. They remain distinct fields of inquiry. This paper though proposes a field where those from these distinct fields when they come together can be understood together. Such an attempt is intended to create a wider path into better understanding of what seem to be a perpetually emerging art in the Philippines, that in many years had a contested label ("sound art") as a placeholder. I thought that my dual position as a practitioner and a scholar privileges me access to information and analytical tools to find answers to the questions this research posts. I too, however, realize that it is the same position that would determine the restrictions and challenges of my assertions in this research project.

Historicizing the Practice

In the earlier years of 1990s, in the Philippines, the term “sound art” had taken tenure among artists. Particularly, the artists collective **Surrounded by Water**, organized the *Sound Art Festival*. In an interview, **Wire Tuazon**, who led the collective and the project, recounted that he used the term “sound art” because he asked (visual) artists to produce sound (or music) work that was played back in the gallery.³

Another earlier usage of the term “sound art” based on present records at hand, was in the mid-2000s, found on the primer of two major media artists’ groups in Manila—SABAW Media Kitchen and EXIST.⁴ It was used in various documents of SABAW Media Kitchen,⁵ founded by Earl Drilon (aka Tengal), a multi-media artist and curator. It was also present in the name and founding documents of Experimentation in Sound Art Tradition (E.X.I.S.T.)⁶ founded by Lirio Salvador, a sculptor, who later refers to himself as a sound artist.

These three were not-for-profit artist organizations that produced events and projects for artists working with sound and other electronic and digital media. They were, however, fundamentally different as SBW was an artist collective with running an alternative space/ gallery; SABAW positions itself as a platform for creative engagements in the intersections of art and technology, which are mostly expressed in festivals; while E.X.I.S.T. directly claimed that it is a collective, a loose organization for sound artists and musicians.

The usage of the three do not necessarily contradict with Voegelin’s definition. It does, however, missed the particular point that SBW, SABAW, and EXIST are not only organizations of sound artists; they are, instead, a meeting point and melting pot of various types of artists, technicians, makers, among others.

This compounded or generic use of the term “sound art” in the Philippines may be caused by the unexplored history of the term. A review of related literature would tell us that indeed all these are entangled in different theoretical, ideological, fundamental, material manners.

Names and Nomenclature

First is the entanglement as they share the same personalities or historical figures. In his book *Sound Art Revisited*, Alan Licht narrated that when he asks audience to name a sound artist, they would say “John Cage”. He explained, however, that “Cage is a godfather of sound art, but chiefly a composer” (Licht, 2019, p. 7). This illustrates how tight the association is between sound art and music. Besides Cage, many of the avant-garde forerunners may also be considered as godfathers of sound art as well. For example, within the discussion of electronic and experimental music, musicians such as Erik Satie and Claude Debussy were considered the genres’ forerunners, as they both experimented heavily on scales in the late 1880s. Meanwhile, John Cage, Edgard Varese, and Karlheinz Stockhausen were considered pioneers who influenced most of our conceptions of “chance”, “space”, “silence” in music production and listening (Holmes, 2015). In the onset of the 1960s, a few other names emerged, such as La Monte Young, Terry Riley, Steve Reich, and Philip Glass, which David Nicholls claimed to have done “the best-known incidence of extrospective and retrospective radicalism since 1960” (Nicholls, 1998, p.529). Among these names, Cage, Varese, and Young were some of those whose influence reached the territories of visual arts and performing arts—particularly Cage’s various writings, performances, and collaborative works (LaBelle, 2006), Varese’s Philips Pavilion of 1958, and Young’s site-specific installation (Licht, 2007).

Second is the entanglement through nomenclature. This means that sound art shares the same vocabulary with art movements. Literature will show how sound practice got its name and labels for its various forms: *sound art*⁷ (Hellerman & Goddard, 1983) as the general umbrella term is a kind of art that uses hearing as a primary tool for experiencing art; sound sculpture (Marioni, 1970; Ouzonian, 2008; Tedford, 2011) as the name first assigned to performative sound art but later adopted for more appropriate use to refer to sounding objects; sound installation (Neuhaus, 1967) as the label for works that are space-specific; and soundscape (Schafer, 1970) as the term that covers works that deal with sound and its environment.

And finally, music and art movements gave to sound art a discursive platform (Russolo, Varese, and Cage on liberating sound from music towards auditory; Duchamp on musical ready-mades; Brian Eno on visual music;

and Murray Schafer on acoustic ecology) and economy (because it exists in the same art world as visual arts, sound art is exposed to different economies of art, such as art sales, commissions, and grants) and enabled a condition where artists (can) forge their identity (through) and conventions.

Technology

In tracing the history of electronic music, Thomas Holmes (2015) identifies six generations of the genre, starting from the 1900s... such as: 1900-1919 using direct current; 1920-1959 using vacuum tube; 1960-1969 using transistor; 1970-1979 using integrated circuits 1980-1989 using microprocessors (hardware); 1990-present using microprocessor (software).

In another publication, Peter Manning (2004) divided the genre's history into eight chapters, starting from 1945: (1) 1945-1960 Paris (musique concrete), Cologne (elektronische musik), Milan and other parts of Europe and America; (2) New horizons in electronic design focusing on voltage-controlled synthesizer; (3) Works on tape, live electronic music, rock and pop genre in 1960s; (4) Digital revolution or use of computer technology for music in the 1970s to 1980s (5) Characteristics of digital audio; (6) MIDI-based technology; (7) Desktop Synthesizers and digital signal processing; (8) New horizons for computer produced music.

The role of technology to sound practice goes beyond historical. This specific topic deserves its own article. For the purpose of this present article, from these two references—Holmes and Manning—it can be gleaned that an emphasis on the tools and technology by which music is produced is central to labelling a particular music as electronic music. It should be noted that even on a cursory survey, one would notice that sound practitioners use the same electronic audio equipment that electronic musicians use—a fact which I claim as one of the reasons why some people consider sound practice a sub-form or sub-genre of electronic music.

Philippines Case: Internationalization

Focusing my research on the case of the Philippines brought me back to the wider purview of connectedness. In studying the sound practice of the “current decades” (1990s-2010s), one has to start with the “earlier decades” (1960s-1980s) as it would prove to have seeded the conditions where the current sound practice flourished.

The earlier decades are known to have been within the Marcos rule, where cultural projects were part of the state's political agenda. It was the time when the Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP) Complex and other cultural infrastructures were built. It was also when some of the biggest international cultural events happened in the Philippines—including the International Symposium on Musics of Asia in 1966, which brought the country some of the biggest names in the (then current) ethnomusicology and avant-garde music like Mantle Hood, Ernst Heins, Robert Garfias, Tran Van Khe, Yuji Takahashi, Ravi Shankar, Chou Wen Ching, Iannis Xenakis, among others, towards a conversation and cultural exchange with the Philippines' creme like Lucrecia Kasilag, Felipe de Leon, and of course, Jose Maceda. Some of these names, the present sound practitioners claim as inspiration. On the side of visual arts, also weaved with the establishment of the CCP were curators for the galleries Roberto Chabet, and Ray Albano, among others, who championed international movements of contemporary art. Roberto Chabet's influence in the sound practice will stretch beyond CPP when he became a teacher at the University of the Philippines which resulted to a large following of student-artists, some of them are initiators of artists-run-spaces in the 1990s, and sound practice itself by extension.

There was a brief break of huge culture and art events in Manila in the mid-1980s as state support wavered in the new Aquino government in the Philippines. It was a time of political anxiety, but it was also the time when small community efforts, in the form of artist-run spaces, artist collectives, and artist-initiated activities, allowed the art world to continue to thrive. The alternative music scene and the media art field were found to be fertile grounds for accommodating experimentation, innovations, and self-sustained practice during the later years of the 1980s going towards the 1990s. These platforms were claimed by practitioners to have been the reaction to the lack of state support and the emerging art market's favor of more traditional art forms. In my earlier research (2009), I claimed that it was through these organic platforms where more conceptual and experimental art emerged and validated the effectiveness of a community-based ecology for various types of art practices and interlinking art practices.

Philippines Case: Entanglements

In the sense that sound art is historically entangled with music in terms of literature, as discussed above, in the Philippines, this same entanglement can be gleaned from the three books that were released in the last decade.

In realizing the musical lineage of sound practices in Manila the following are useful references: National Artist for Music, Dr. Prof. Ramon P. Santos' *Modernismo sa Sining Musika (Modernism in Art Music)* (2018), Monika Schoop's *Independent Music and Digital Technology in the Philippines* (2017), and Cedrik Fermont and Dimitri della Faille's *Not Your World Music, Noise in Southeast Asia: Art, Politics, Identity, Gender and Global Capitalism* (2016).

Santos' book walks us through a thick historical narrative covering the 20th and 21st Centuries, reading it through the modernist discourse. Directly attributing this phenomenon as an influence of European and American musical practices (Santos, 2018). Favored in this book are musical programs and personalities that were organized from conservatory of music, particularly that of the University of the Philippines.

Relevant to the case at present was his discussion on the Post WWII era. Santos highlighted Lucrecia Kasilag (1917-2008). Kasilag was known for her illustrious career as a musician and as an arts administrator.⁸ But it was through her activities as a composer that made Kasilag inspirational to some of the sound practitioners at present generation. She was among the first in the country to have used electronic music in her compositions (*Derivations I, II, III and IV, 1961-1969*). She was also among those who first engaged in producing multimedia work for theatre, where she created a stage where drama, opera, dance, oration, music, and others will come together (Dularawan, 1969; cited in Santos, 2018).

With equally strong association with the avant-garde movement, and almost the same time as Kasilag (in the 1960s), we can find the works of Jose Maceda (1917-2004) entering the music scene of Manila. Maceda also incorporated in his composition instruments and music structures that he learned from his Western classical training and ethnomusicology research;

he too used electronic machines as music instruments; and he too fostered conversations between Filipino avant-garde composers with those from East and the West,⁹ securing the place of Philippine music in a wider musical discourse.

Maceda became a much influential figure to present sound practitioners,¹⁰ which may be attributed to two of his contributions: first, his treatment of his compositions as a spatial project wherein the musicking is understood and appreciated with relations to the space and the movement within it; and second, his voluminous philosophizing of music, musical practices and traditions, that gives his readers an enchanting image of an always contemporary sonic cosmology. However, like what Licht said about Cage, Maceda is a godfather of contemporary sound practice in Manila, but he is a musician.

What follows are several waves or generations of composers that bares the same creative dexterity as Kasilag and Maceda, and those who subscribed to their musical thinking and practice. Earlier generations in 1970s and 1980s were Ramon Santos (b.1941) and Francisco Feliciano (1941-2014); between 1980s to 1990s, a much younger generation, namely Jonas Baes (b.1961), Josefino Toledo (b.1959), Verne dela Pena (b.1959), Mary Jane Po (b.1958), and Arlene Tiongson (b.1959) (Santos, 2018).

In the most recent two decades, still coming from this progressive academic tradition was Maria Christine Muyco (cited in Santos, 2018), of which among all the names mentioned in this later generation, although not recognized in Santos' book, has the closest connection with the present sound practice as she had been part of some of the events held by and for the sound community.

Monika Schoop's book brings an entirely different narrative from what Santos has shared. I particularly looked at the chapter devoted to Metro Manila's independent (music) scene, which was constructed largely from interviews with music producers, band members, journalists, among others. This is a much younger history starting only from 1970s. It was not claimed that 1970s was the de facto beginning of independent music scene, but like sound practices, conditions that enabled present practitioners may be traced

to have been seeded during this period. I particularly focused on this chapter because a good number of practitioners interviewed in this chapter are those I call sound practitioners.

In a chapter with a title borrowed from journalist and musician Aldus Santos (2012) saying “Everyone is pretty much indie right now,” Schoop (2017) relayed between the discussion of technology and punk culture, as a means or point of production and sustenance for the practice. Schoop’s research captured the availability or unavailability of technology (aka the digital divide) as symptomatic of the social condition and class struggle. She quoted musician and filmmaker Quark Henares and Francis Maria Regalado’s¹¹ description on how social class in the local condition (Third World) is related to affordance of instruments, and in comparison, with that of the First World condition (he used Germany as an example). This is a condition of the community of performers that is shared by the sound practitioners in Manila, which will be further discussed in the later section of this paper about ecology.

Meantime, this book echoes strongly a good number of research from and about Western music that underwent a similar experience. The strength of contribution of this book, however, is that it was able to gather voices that have not been documented previously, academically, and contributed to a very thin scholarship of very thick practice. As far as the present concern, independent music, or indie—as a musical genre and a scene, is one of those that the present sound practitioners’ traces affinity with.

Fermont and della Faille’s *Not Your World Music (...)*, featured historical moments that are most directly linked with the present sound practices. The historical narrative was backdropped against Southeast Asia, not only as a geopolitical boundary, but more as a network of practice for noise music. ‘Noise music’ in this case, like how ‘sound practices’ is used throughout my presentation, is a loose label. It was described as “different sonic practices that may be considered ‘extreme’ or unusual to the uneducated ear” (Fermont & dela Faille, 2016, p. 1). From the introduction as well, it had been made clear that the book will include genres that have cross-pollinated with what is “strictly understood as noise music”, which means to include ambient music, academic electroacoustic music, distorted electronic rhythms or industrial music, among others (Fermont & dela Faille, 2016).

In the chapter on the history of noise music in Southeast Asia, the part about the Philippines started with a concise but substantial summary of the political condition of the country after the (categorical) independence from American colonial rule in late 1940s.

David Medalla, a performance artist, was the first personality recognized in this literature, for his electronic music composition in 1959 (Fermont & dela Faille, 2016). Medalla's prolific art career is known in the art historical discourse. His actual influence on the practitioners, however, is difficult to measure as he spent most of his life and practice abroad and no descendant (apprentice or student in terms of practice, not necessarily biological) to speak of. It does not help too that sound practitioners in Manila, very rarely mention him, if indeed, they ever do, at all (Fermont & dela Faille, 2016).

Fermont and dela Faille also recognized Jose Maceda, mentioning his personal acquaintance with pioneers of Western contemporary and electroacoustic musicians like Pierre Schaeffer, Karlheinz Stockhausen, Iannis Xenakis (Dioquino, 2004; cited in Fermont & dela Faille, 2016); as well as his composition that are comparable to the works of these composers, with the addition of John Cage.¹² **Agnes Arellano**, a sculptor, was mentioned for the 1980s, in view of her sculptural works that composes or makes music (Fermont & dela Faille, 2016). And from the late 1980s, a long roster of artists followed, starting with **Children of the Cathode Ray**,¹³ who are among the first to use audio-visual materials with their experimental music, which is telling of their association with Mowelfund and Goethe Institut's video workshops. In the 1990s, there was **Joselito Sional** and his cassette label Feel Free Prod; **Jason Vizmanos aka Insomnia**, whom the book claimed to be the first noise artist in the Philippines; **Lirio Salvador** and the groups he established in Cavite, where many of the present practitioners started; **Tengal** and his projects under **Sabaw Media Kitchen**; **Arvin Nogueras aka Caliph8** and his monthly initiative, **Subflex**, **Teresa Barrozo**, **Erick Calilan**, among others (Fermont & dela Faille, 2016).

Despite all these names, Fermont and dela Faille (2016) noted that the noise scene in the Philippines is still small (compared to Indonesia). It is, however, loaded with initiatives and is internationally networked.

Although the musical lineage is quite strong, despite the mention of Arellano and Medalla, I thought it would be more consistent if works of other conceptual/ performance artists like Cesare Syjuco, Judy Sibayan, Huge Bartolome, among others, were also recognized. This needs further and additional research in the future.

Besides the contents, I find the context of publication of the three books very interesting. Santos is a senior scholar (Professor Emeritus), and his book was published by the University of the Philippines Press. Schoop is fresh out of PhD in Germany; the book came from her dissertation, published by Routledge, what could be categorized as a commercial publisher. Fermont and della Faille came from different backgrounds—Fermont is a self-taught musician and composer based in Germany, he does not hold any academic degree; della Faille, on the other hand, has a PhD in sociology and a tenured professor in a Canadian University. Their book was self-published with the help of a crowdfunding campaign.

What has this got to do with the genealogy of sound practices? First, that like the sound practice itself, there are different (at least 3) sources of support—the academic institution, the commercial enterprise, and there is always self-sufficiency with a little help from the community.

Second, besides Santos, all these scholars are from Europe, or at least not from Manila. Same case in practice. In as far as recording and (much more on) theorizing the practice, the “locals” who wanted to do it are on the minority. This is opening another point of discussion, which is beyond the scope of my presentation. It should, however, be noted that there is a call amongst the local practitioners in Manila to write about and to study the practice.¹⁴

Third, in as far as sound practitioners are concerned, there is no discrimination between those who have academic degrees, conservatory training and self-taught. Because as mentioned earlier, in this ecology, friendship is the capital, reputation is the currency; hierarchy therefore is formed based on depth of engagement and scope of influence while participating in the practice—by being present on gigs, hangouts, parties, talks and the like.

The Practice as Ecology

In 2013, I curated my first exhibit featuring the ethnomusicology and music composition of Philippines' National Artist for Music Jose Maceda. The exhibit was titled "Listen to my Music" (Yraola, 2014). One of the galleries in this exhibit contained works of Digital Signal Processing engineers, media artists, electronic, experimental, noise musicians in confluence with the Maceda materials. I was criticized for calling them all 'sound artists.' This criticism inspired me to look closer into this genre that obviously lie on some sort of interstice.

Two things immediately became obvious: first, from practice, as described above, we do not have one definition of the term "sound art." Practitioners use them in various ways, and there wasn't enough literature (about Manila practice) that are formally making the claim on how to define it. As a response, I came out with an essay that tried to typologize the various works that might fall under the category "sound art".¹⁵ This essay remained unpublished as I continue to debate in my own head on the efficiency of the typology.

Second, I realized that looking at the community will bring me clearer understanding of the practice, instead of approaching through the forms—focusing on it being a practice more than it being art. I observed that to be able to find the practice is to find where the practitioners are.¹⁶ Sound practice lives in a creative ecology with porous borders, nodal junctures and mobile core.

Porous Borders

Porous borders imply that there is an inside and outside. That what is inside is what belongs, and that what is outside does not belong. Having porous borders means that those who are outside have opportunities to go in, while those who are inside have opportunities to go outside. In short, the discussion about porous borders centers on becoming (or unbecoming) part of the ecology.

Looking at the ecology as such, we recognize now that there are several types of membership—there are new and there are old-timers, with

varying degrees of newness and oldness gradating between the two. This category is extracted from the length and consistency of participation of the member on activities within the site of practice.

Being 'new' or 'old' is not then a measure of age; or virtuosity; or the importance of the position one handles. Membership is measured as to how long one practitioner has been attending to or participating on sound programs, events, projects, research, etc., which makes it that the longer one participates the more senior or old-timer one is recognized. Closely connected to time is consistency. A practitioner who participates more regularly in the activities of the site is considered more senior or old-timer, rather than those who participate only sporadically regardless as to the size of the activity they participated in.

The ecology having porous borders nurtures these dynamics, as it allows people to come in and out of the ecology at any given different times. This continued movement and mobility of practitioners I claim is one of the elements that sustains the practice.

Nodal Juncture

Nodal juncture implies that the ecology is expandable. Units can attach to the ecology without actually becoming part of the ecology. School and universities, museums, commercial galleries, art fairs are examples of the institutions or organization who are actively linking with sound practice. These mentioned are considered related practices as they are from culture and arts sector as well. Non-related practices may be individuals, organizations or institutions that are in the science field, or business and trade, or tourism.

I find this characteristic important as it reveals so much of the practice and its embeddedness to a bigger society. It implies that the practice is independent but not estranged.

One of the relationships I looked at is that of the art market and sound practitioners. In at least the last 5 years, before this current pandemic, there have been a number of sound projects featured in commercial galleries and art fairs, while the works are not exactly for sale. The main question

then is that why these non-selling art present in platforms whose main mandate is to sell. It was so easy to dismiss that this is a case of misrepresentation. However, if examined closely, it would reveal that the relationship is beneficial to both the market and the sound practice. By featuring sound works on art fairs quite regularly, sound practitioners started to look at this as viable or acceptable platform for their work, regardless as to whether they sell or not. The art fairs usually have a huge number of audiences, which delivers the sound works and the practice more exposure. Considering sound works to be part of their non-selling booths, provided the art fairs additional materials to offer their audience. I have claimed that this symbiosis is indicative of how fluid the sound practice is, and how this nodal juncture operates. Linkages with schools and universities are much easier to explain, as institutions like these enhances understanding and appreciation of the form, the practice and the discourse of sound practice. In more sense than one, the schools and universities, generate future practitioners and audience of sound practice.

Mobile core

Another interesting aspect of this ecology is the interchangeability of the core sites of practice. Interchangeability in terms of which platform or site determines the direction of the practice. A core maybe a venue owned by a practitioner (artist run space) or lent by a patron (like bars or studios). For example, the case was Big Sky Mind and Surrounded By Water, two artists-run spaces that have hosted a number of sound projects in the 1990s until the early 2000s. It had hosted a generation of visual artists who have keen interest and influence of conceptual art, media art, punk music, the emerging electronic genres.

The core could also be program or programs like: “WSK Festival of Recently Possible”, and “Ruthless: Expert Trip Mental Music”, and “Subflex”, etc. They are core because of the standard format of these projects and the consistency of the timing of their staging, which are crucial in creating a relationship among practitioners within these programs. It is anticipated by practitioners — they prepare to being part of it and/or look forward to whoever is going to be part of it.

An organizer, or a person who formed an organization or coordinate programs, projects or events, or owns/ runs a venue may also be a core at any point. This is an interesting position with relations to earlier mentioned characteristic of the ecology. One may assume that this is about hierarchy or leadership. It is in some way but it is not a position that is held permanently and consistently. Instead of leaders, they are more like key persons. They are those that are immediately mentioned when asked who the practitioners are. One best example of this is Lirio Salvador.

Currency

What happens inside the ecology once the relationships have been forged? The practice as community-life can be contextualized by earlier studies on Filipino psychology by psychologist Virgilio Enriquez (1986). Enriquez proposes to look at kapwa as base of interaction among people. Kapwa is loosely translated as “fellow being” but the term also signifies unity between the self and others. The act that, manifest this fellow-ness and unity is called, pakikipagkapwa-tao.

Pakikipagkapwa-tao is said to refer to “humanness to its highest level,” making it the most desired virtue in any social situation, including that of ecology of sound practice.

Translated to the case at hand, pakikipagkapwa-tao is a concept that embodies membership through camaraderie that is very prevalent in the sound practice.

It is understood in 3 manifestations:

Engagement is the first manifestation. Engagement refers to attendance to different activities of the ecology. It may be as mundane as exchanging greetings or sharing of promotional materials or sharing of resources (e.g. materials, spaces, gadgets, suppliers, readings, etc.), to participating in events, talks, workshops, etc., to assisting others in time of need (e.g. fundraising for Salvador’s medical needs).

Role is the second manifestation. Role refers to the space that practitioners occupy, some of which are as follows: organizer, performer,

technician, fundraiser, documenter, or counsellor, among others. One's role can be single or compounded (e.g. artist-curator, fundraiser-curator, bartender-curator, etc.). Role, of course, is not limited to actual production of work. The ecology, as mentioned behaves like a community, and to some extent filially. Therefore, like engagement, a practitioner's role is determined by his participation in the production, as much as the space he occupies in other social aspects shared with other practitioners. For example, "spouse of this or that artist", is a role, which means that she should be considered if she were present in a sound project.

Reputation is the third manifestation. One may have the reputation of being trustworthy, or hardworking, or shrewd, or unreliable, among others. Reputation determines the value of the practitioner's participation in the ecology. It measures how much the engagement or how much the role of a practitioner matters to the ecology. And like any currency, reputation has fluctuating value. This is manifested in the economy of x-deals, in situations of crisis, or even on mundane affairs of the everyday.

Given the illustration of the ecology of practice above, it is already understood that coming together of practitioners (and allied institutions) are primarily based on working together, attending to tasks; and that harmony is imperative so as the complex configuration of the many (groups/ sub-groups of) participants will perform as expected or intended. This section now asks, what if it is not what is expected?

Tensions and Negotiations

Mobility of practice is propelled by action and inaction, or performance and non- performance of the practitioners of the agreed foundations of the ethics of practice. This is when tensions and negotiations happen.

Tension is what happens when a practitioner did not attend to the role/ task that is expected of him. Or he might have attended to the role/ task expected of him but not in the manner that was expected. Or he might have attended to a role/ task that is someone else's.

For the first one, a simple example is when a practitioner volunteered to bring an equipment, say a camera to document a performance, and he ended up not bringing one or missing the performance altogether, this could cause tension in the group. The point here is that there is an agreed role. This agreement is between the doer and another party. And that tension happens when this agreement is broken.

For the second type: program for performance is usually each participant will have a solo, and at the end they will all perform together. The artists therefore are expected to stay throughout the performance. If one leaves or get too drunk (to the point that he cannot function anymore) before the “jam”, this will cause tension. This example rarely happens. It is, however, important as it highlights those unwritten rules are rules practitioners adhere to it. The tension here is coming from not being able to achieve an expected output.

A more unusual tension is when a practitioner attended to someone else’s task without consent of the other, or without valid reason is seen as inappropriate. This is rather unusual because most sound practitioners have “other things to do” —they either have a full-time job, taking care of family, other art, which only means that taking somebody else’s work is a matter of time and priority. An example is when an artist “fixes” another artist’s set-up (instruments/ work) without consent. This could happen in a more installative work, when a certain piece does not work (produce no sound, or some parts are falling off), some (especially who are technically knowledgeable) tend to be “helpful”. In these examples then, it does not matter how big or insignificant the task is, the tension here lies in consent or not having consent to do it.

This enumeration above was drawn from actual cases. I do not find it necessary to include the detail of the cases here, as the point being made is that this concept of tension is also emanating from the main point of the ecology formation, which is coming together; that participants of this coming together is contracted by acceptable conduct; that there are anticipated ways of doing things or achieving goals; and these points of order although widely accepted may be negotiated.

Negotiation is when these action, or inaction, or “misaction”, is accommodated back in the practice to either produce an acceptable contribution or create a new path.

Both tensions and negotiations are usefully (or even necessary then) for the formation of the ecology of sound practice as they are able to contribute in the following manner: (1) it maybe a way to form new alliances and/or configure existing alliances; (2) all forms of interaction propels constant mobility in the ecology (i.e. bad publicity is still publicity; or bad relationship is still relationship)—such that practitioners are driven towards the search for ideal, harmonious or desired form; (3) this is a type of mobility that determines the value of this relational currency, which is reputation—such that the positions shifts in the ecology and the scope of influence may change (smaller or bigger).

I have chosen this optimistic position, not entirely to assume that nothing can disrupt the harmony of the ecology of sound practice. On the contrary, looking at the tensions and negotiations as a necessary factor in the formation of the ecology speaks strongly to the experimental and organic characteristic of this social formation.

These initial research findings were presented to describe the Manila sound practices as an ecology. Its system of engagements is determined by the symbiosis of smaller scenes and individual practitioners.¹⁷ This is a kind of ecology that has porous borders where new practitioners may enter; as well as nodal borders, which allow practitioners from other ecologies to interlink. This ecology behaves like a community of practice where practitioners “share mutual engagements, a joint enterprise and a shared repertoire” (Lave and Wenger). It is in this utopic setting that friendship is recognized by practitioners as capital, and reputation as currency. Mastery of the form is not the point of contest, but in the ability of the practitioner to sustain his/her practice. And this has birthed the prevalence of artists taking “compounded roles in art production,”¹⁸ which is the main reason why instead of referring to practitioners as artists, the term practitioner is favored.

Intersections and Tendencies

Specifically, practitioners operate on projects, which may be exchanges between one group or collective with another,¹⁹ or project that are initiated by institutions;²⁰ These I coined as intersections, as they allow practice of one to intersect with another (Yraola, 2018).

Another program or situation where practitioners come together is within something called tendencies (Yraola, 2018). Tendencies come in 4 ways: (1) it could be those that were made available to sound practitioners in the more recent years; (2) it could have been offered to them sporadically or in few instances; (3) it appears to be a transitory site of production; (4) it could simply be far remote from what was the usual situation of the sound practitioners. All these four may be grouped between (a) cooptation to institutional programs; or (b) decentering or availability of other sites of practice outside the geographic dominant, Manila in this case.

Putting these all together, I would like to reiterate the claims that: (1) in the ecology of sound practice, engagement and non-engagement rely on acquaintance and trust; (2) disengagement is caused by breaking of trust; (3) membership relies on friendship; (4) friendship is based on reciprocity; (5) support is measured by presence, attendance, and involvement (degree and frequency); (6) membership is marked by assumptions of dynamic and reputable role in the ecology; and finally, (7) the currency that propels the relationship is relational reputation, wherein the value lies on authenticity and reciprocity.

In the final analysis it is the fluidity of relationship of practitioners that shapes the practice. And within this post-capitalist society, it is not the movement of capital, but that of the practitioners—their highly adaptable sense of self and belonging, that propels the exchanges between ecologies that sustains the practice. With the recognition of the shared characteristics mentioned above, we are seeing possibilities of more active exchanges between sound practice and others, while the practice continuous to take the shape of its perpetually emergent vessel.

Notes on Theorizing the Practice

Sound practices negotiate with music as one of its “ancestors.” It alerts us to the tension as to whether sound practice is to be considered music or something else. It is sounding, it could also have structure, but it could also not have the structure just sounding. It also alerts us on the competencies that musicians have that sound practitioners might or might not have.²¹ But like music, sound practitioners also perform. Unlike music, sound practitioners exhibit. Like music, the sound works produced may be a product of the social condition. Unlike music, a sounding work may just be exploring the sound capabilities of a new instrument. It is in this ambivalence that the excitement of my research lies. I do not find it as contradictions, but rather negotiations, as at the end of enumerating what music have that sound practices do or do not, their differences and similarities, what remains distinct is how these sound practitioners build and perform their ecology.

As a conclusion-in-progress, I claim that the present sound practice in Manila was birthed or originated from the people’s tendency to gravitate towards practitioners of same field and to make it function as a community. This provided a condition that enables them to create sound and sounding projects, which sustains the practice, despite or besides lack of external support. The practice is informed by experiences of avant-garde music, electronic music, performance poetry, sound sculptures, alternative music, moving images, punk, among others, particularly in the aspect of formulating the ethics of the practice.

Sound practices in Manila remains organic, interlinked, networked and fast evolving. In the many forms that already exists and claim themselves to be part of the sound practice, a lot more varieties are coming out. It is not surprising therefore, that besides music and arts, sound practices may claim association with (in the future) other fields where its lineage will be traced from. Hence nurturing this entangled position remains most productive, than determining an exact place, a precise definition, to what is called “sound practice.”

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Notes

¹ This is a composite of presentations done during the author's dissertation research. Some contents were directly lifted from following presentations: *Acoustic Historiographies Workshop*, organised by Transregionale Forum Studien-Berlin, Germany, presentation titled "Listening to Sound Practice in Manila within the region, sources, tendencies and intersections", 12 January 2018; *Hanoi New Music Festival Symposium*, with presentation titled "Genealogy of Sound Practices in Manila", 20 December 2018 at Vietnam Museum of Ethnology, Hanoi, Vietnam; *Musikolokya*, a colloquium organised by the University of the Philippines College of Music, with presentation titled "Porous, Nodal, Mobile: Ecology of Sound Practices in Manila and Hong Kong", 19 September 2019; and for Gwangju Asia Centre Symposium, presentation titled "Contracting Genealogy: Jose Maceda and the Contemporary Sound Practices in Manila", 14 November 2019.

² Interview with Anson Mak in Baptist University Hong Kong, 19 April 2016.

³ Interview with Wire Tuazon on 17 January 2016 in Cavite, Rizal.

⁴ I suspect that the term is used earlier than these documents. But unless and until I get a more tangible proof of existence, I will be using this chronological marker for the usage of the term.

⁵ "S.A.B.A.W. is a non-profit sound art collective that represents a cross-section of sound artists, performance artists, contemporary musician-composers that are dedicated to promoting and releasing the best in avant-garde, experimental and noise music in the Philippines." From *S.A.B.A.W. TENGAL 21st BDAY Personal INVITES*, 9 September 2006, unpaginated typescript.

⁶ "E.X.I.S.T. is a not-for-profit sound art collective and movement. It's a loose organization among sound-artists and musicians." From *E.X.I.S.T. (Experimentation in Sound Art Tradition) 3CD Special Edition cover*, produced by New Art Laboratory, recorded 13 August 2008.

⁷ *Klangkunst*, as coined by musicologist Helga de la Motte-Hager in 1996, could be directly translated as sound art as well. Haber's varies from Hellerman, as hers sought the connection back to music, by posing the question whether sound art

is a new genre ("eine neue gattung?"). Haber's is however relevant as she included artists like Paul Klee, Filippo Marinetti and Wassily Kandinsky in her discussion of this new genre.

⁸ She was at one point head of the music program of Philippine Women's University, director of Bayanihan Philippine Dance Company, and the Cultural Center of the Philippines.

⁹ Through festivals and conferences sponsored by the state and universities between 1960s until they were both old in the 2000s. One of which was Asian Composers' League, mentioned earlier in this essay. Among the first was a concert in November 27, 1964 held at the Philamlife Theatre that featured musics from Maguindanao (group from South Island of Philippines), Nanyin from South China, and a work by French composer Edgard Varese (Santos, 2018).

¹⁰ As Tad Ermitano would like to say: Maceda is like a "spiritual" guru. Mentioned during Maceda International Symposium, September 2017.

¹¹ Quote from Regalado reads: "People higher up in the social ladder are more exposed to foreign media (...). They have more access to different kinds of music, different approaches. And they could learn more about equipment (...)" (Schoop, 2017, p. 44)

¹² Maceda's "Udlot-Udlot" (1975) was compared to John Cage's "Imaginary Landscape No.4" in terms of medium used (Fermont & dela Faille, 2016).

¹³ Children of the Cathode Ray members were Blums Borres, Tad Ermitano, Jing Garcia, Regiben Romana, and Magyar Tuason; founded in 1989.

¹⁴ This is my favourite, quoting Tad Ermitano as recorded in Jing Garcia's blogspot: "I guess the writing problem is inherent in any 'emerging' art form. All we really need are one or two writers who are dedicated and knowledgeable (...) Let's buy him a book or two about avant garde, electronic music, and sound art. Someone should also write an article 'What the fuck is sound art?' and 'Sound art in Manila'." <http://www.jinggarcia.com/2007/08/no-one-writes-articles-about-us.html>

¹⁵ "From Hear/Here, Sound Art in Manila", 2015

¹⁶ Questions may be asked were: Where they are doing their projects, who they are, what they are doing, how are they doing it, etc.?

¹⁷ "Listening to Sound Practices in Manila", (2018), <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1VqGVtQrMtds28atETGbDVS8J3B78J-3A/view>

¹⁸ i.e. artist-organiser, artist-technician, curator-technician, artist-curator, curator-artist, and artist-curator organiser-technician, etc.

¹⁹ like Primal Urge (Pangunang Udyok) between Lirio's Elemento and Surrounded by Water in 1998

²⁰ like the project between Children of Cathode Ray and Ballet Philippines in the early 1990s

²¹ Ability to read notes, play music instruments in classical manner, etc.

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