

The stance of German “New Simplicity” composers on sound art

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Abstract

For composers of the “new simplicity” movement including Wolfgang Rihm, Hans-Jürgen von Bose and Detlev Müller-Siemens, sound art has always been a difficult subject. In the early 1970’s while searching for an alternative musical language to serialism, they planned a return to the romantic ideals of chamber music, symphonic music and opera. This approach seemed antithetical to the concept of electroacoustic creation; however, if we look at the first manifesto of the “new simplicity” movement from 1974 we discover that the original members Hans-Jürgen von Bose, Wolfgang Rihm and Detlev Müller-Siemens were in fact very interested in the development of electroacoustic creation – but found the evolution of the synthesizers and new sound tools to be too slow. While others continued to research new concepts and sound, they decided to take a more conservative approach. Thus, in the mid-1970s they refrained from using electroacoustic elements in their works and did not compose any sound art installations. If this paper seems to focus on the work of Wolfgang Rihm – though he composed less for electroacoustic elements than Hans-Jürgen von Bose – the reason stems from the controversy he started in an interview when he called the creators of sound art “garden gnomes of music”. Neither Hans-Jürgen von Bose nor Detlev Müller-Siemens ever made any public comments on their position towards sound art. Rihm’s statement on electroacoustic music is the only one from a composer of the “new simplicity” generation. This is why it is of major importance to look closer at the development of the use of electroacoustic music and sound art performances in the works of Rihm, von Bose, and Müller-Siemens. This paper will follow the development of these three composers in the large field of electroacoustic music and explain how their aesthetic points of view changed and were transformed through the years into a more open-minded view on electroacoustic and sound art performances.

Introduction

For composers of the “new simplicity” movement including Wolfgang Rihm, Hans-Jürgen von Bose and Detlev Müller-Siemens, sound art has always been a difficult subject. In the early 1970’s while searching for an alternative musical language to serialism, they planned a return to the romantic ideals of chamber music, symphonic music and opera. This approach seemed antithetical to the concept of electroacoustic creation; however, if we look at the first manifesto of the “new simplicity” movement from 1974 we discover that the original members Hans-Jürgen von Bose, Wolfgang Rihm and Detlev Müller-Siemens were in fact very interested in the development of electroacoustic creation – but found the evolution of the synthesizers and new sound tools to be too slow. While others continued to research new

concepts and sound, they decided to take a more conservative approach. Thus, in the mid-1970s they refrained from using electroacoustic elements in their works and did not compose any sound art installations.

Of the three composers, Wolfgang Rihm ought to have been the most interested in electroacoustic areas, as he studied with Karlheinz Stockhausen. But, according to a recent biography by Eleonore Büning in 2012, the young composer was not much interested in the advice of Karlheinz Stockhausen. Wolfgang Rihm spoke openly about his difficult relationship with Stockhausen:

Mich hielt er sowieso für ein verlorenes Schaf. So gerne, wie ich dabei war damals, so hatte ich doch immer das Gefühl, dass er mich nachsichtig betrachtet hat, mitleidig fast, als denke er: Bei dem ist ja Hopfen und Malz verloren, da kann ich reden, was ich will, der macht, was er will.¹

Stockhausen reacted in a manner of “capitulation” toward young Wolfgang Rihm, even as Rihm was not mature enough to understand his teacher’s concepts. But while Stockhausen’s direct influence on Rihm is almost imperceptible, the result of their musical conflict – and Rihm striving to break away – brought forth an interesting new aesthetic. If this paper seems to focus on the work of Wolfgang Rihm – though he composed less for electroacoustic elements than Hans-Jürgen von Bose – the reason stems from the controversy he started in an interview when he called the creators of sound art “garden gnomes of music”. Neither Hans-Jürgen von Bose nor Detlev Müller-Siemens ever made any public comments on their position towards sound art. Rihm’s statement on electroacoustic music is the only one from a composer of the “new simplicity” generation.

This is why it is of major importance to look closer at the development of the use of electroacoustic music and sound art performances in the works of Rihm, von Bose, and Müller-Siemens. Rihm began using tape music for the choral parts of his operas and musicals at the end of the 1980s. Hans-Jürgen von Bose scored for cello, accordion, and electroacoustic in his 2012 musical *Nacht Zeit Mord* (written in Munich), replacing an ensemble that had strong interaction with the actors, singers and video-projection. This presentation will follow the development of these three composers in the large field of electroacoustic music and explain how their aesthetic points of view changed and were transformed through the years into a more open-minded view on electroacoustic and sound art performances.

1. The use of electroacoustic elements in the works of new simplicity composers

To understand these composers’ use of electroacoustic music and sound art it is crucial to examine where these elements appear in their compositions.

In von Bose’s works we find 11 examples of electroacoustic elements. They are divided into five categories:

Musicals: 63: *Dream Palace*, *Nacht Zeit Mord*, „*Ein Brudermord*“, *Medea-Fragment* and *Prometheus*;

Opera: *Schlachthof V*;

¹ Eleonore Büning, *Über die Linie. Wolfgang Rihm, ein deutscher Komponist*, Zsolnay Verlag, Wien, 2012; translation by Viviane Waschbüsch: “He thought of me as if I was a lost sheep. As much as I enjoyed being part of the composition class, I had always the impression that Stockhausen had a pitying look on me as if he was thinking: that guy is beyond hope. I can teach whatever I want; he always does what he wants.”

Solo concertos: *Salut für Billy Pilgrim* (Piano concerto) and *Concerto for Violin and Orchestra*

Chambermusic: *Viertes Streichquartett*, *Odd Symmetries* for piano und electroacoustic

Lieder: *Ein Ausflug ins Gebirge*, for countertenor, piano und audiotape

In Wolfgang Rihms catalog we find five compositions with electroacoustic elements:

Musicals: *Die Hamletmaschine* (1983–86) for singers, actors, orchestra, four radios and audiotape; *Oedipus* (1986/87) for singers, orchestra, four sopranos [eventually two from tape]), and audiotape with four sopranos, voices of men, women and children, mixed choral parts, speaking choral parts, four trumpets and four trombones; *Die Eroberung von Mexiko* (1987–91) for singers, actors, orchestra and audiotape with mixed choral and speaking choral parts

Theater: *Séraphin* (1993/94) first version for orchestra and audiotape, second version for orchestra and audiotape, third version for orchestra without audiotape

Chambermusic: *Etude d'après Séraphin* (1997) for ensemble and audio tape

Detlev Müller-Siemens does not include any pieces with electroacoustic elements in his catalogue thus far, so he will not be referenced in this article beyond the fact that he is one of the three “*New Simplicity*” members.

2. Hans-Jürgen von Bose stance on sound art

Of the three composers, Hans-Jürgen von Bose has the most interesting position on sound art. In an interview in May 2014 he said this about sound art: “Leider gar nicht, ich habe nicht einmal jemals genau verstanden, was das bedeutet.”²

But this answer is not the whole panorama on von Bose’s thoughts on Sound Art:

Was den Begriff „Klanginstallation“ anbelangt, habe ich die gängigen Definitionen nachgelesen und fand dort den für mich erschreckenden Hinweis auf die Formlosigkeit der komponierten Dauerberieselung, die mir natürlich ein absoluter Graus ist, und insofern ich mit Wolfgang Rihm bzgl. des musikalischen Gartenzwerchs völlig übereinstimme. Was ich anders sehe und interessant finde, sind räumliche Komponenten (das wollte ja auch schon B. A. Zimmermann und das geht ja eigentlich zurück bis Gabrieli *et al.*) und was ich natürlich – wie beschrieben – sehr interessant finde, sind elektroakustische Elemente im Sinne von Zuspelungen und auch verfremdeten Zuspelungen. Also, um es noch einmal zusammenzufassen: Bezüglich des durchlaufenden Musikgerieselers einer Klanginstallation gehe ich mit Wolfgang Rihm absolut konform, bzgl. der anderen Aspekte der Elektroakustik habe ich höchstwahrscheinlich doch recht andere Positionen.³

² Viviane Waschbüsch, *16 questions from to Hans-Jürgen von Bose on sound art and electroacoustic*, Munich, May 2014; translation by Viviane Waschbüsch: “I don’t have a relation to sound art – as I don’t really know what it should be.”

³ *Ibid.*; translation by Viviane Waschbüsch: “I have read some definitions of sound art and found the scaring hint of the fact that this music is without a form, like a never-ending stream which is an awful idea to me and in this way I agree with Wolfgang Rihm on [calling sound art composers] “garden gnomes of music”. What I see differently are the possibilities of sound in the space (but this was researched by B.A. Zimmermann and goes back to Gabrieli, etc.) and what I found really useful are audio tapes and modified audio tapes that accompany the current piece. To summarize my thoughts: with regard to never-ending sound streams I agree with Wolfgang Rihm, but for other aspect of electroacoustic creation I have my own very different positions.

Bose dislikes the idea of never-ending, static music that is “tiring on the ears”, but he is very open to the idea that electroacoustic elements can provide a real benefit for musical development and sees it as an essential development in contemporary music. Wolfgang Rihm, on the other hand, dislikes the use of the electroacoustic in general. Hans-Jürgen von Bose’s compositions employ many elements that one could place between electroacoustic and sound art. He works in collaboration with a sound designer to realize his sound composition as revealed in this discussion: “Ich arbeite mithilfe eines mitarbeitenden Sounddesigners – in meinem Falle immer Christian Heyne”⁴.

The fact that von Bose works with a sound designer is of major importance because he utilizes sound technology without working directly on it. He is not experimenting with the sound material – but composing an idea which is realized later by the sound designer. There is no direct interaction between the composer and the electroacoustic material. To give an idea of how this works in the compositions of Hans-Jürgen von Bose, we’ll analyze extracts of two different pieces: the opera *Schlachthof V* (1998) and *Nacht Zeit Mord* (2011).

2.1. Analysis of *Nacht Zeit Mord* (2011)⁵ in comparison to *Schlachthof V*⁶ (1998)

Bose has starkly different aims towards electroacoustic music than Detlev Müller-Siemens and Wolfgang Rihm. He is not only interested in the development of the electroacoustic but has also tried to integrate the technological possibilities into his language. Here it must be said that von Bose’s language has evolved over the years and that sound collages and diverse musical influences have gained importance in his later works. He has said that there has been no one factor on his decision to use the electroacoustic in his music, but he points to Zender’s and Zimmermann’s conception of mixed music:

Als rein elektroakustische Musik hatte mich seinerzeit Stockhausens „Gesang der Jünglinge“ recht beeindruckt. Ansonsten gibt es keine echte Beeinflussung, vielleicht noch die Verwendung der Zuspieldungen in Zimmermanns „Soldaten“ und in Zenders „Stephen Climax“.⁷

Hans Zender’s *Stephen Climax*⁸ impressed and influenced von Bose in his decision to work on his opera *Schlachthof V*. To focus on the stance of von Bose towards sound art an analysis of *Schlachthof V* is essential. The beginning of the opera is probably the most interesting place to analyze the electroacoustic effects used. The first scene of the first act has sixty-six different electroacoustic elements that can be characterized as “musical signals”. These “musical signals” are not parts of the music – they are used in different ways to organize the musical expression:

⁴ *Ibid.*; translation by Viviane Waschbüsch: “I work together with a sound designer – in my case always Christian Heyne.”

⁵ The recording of *Nacht Zeit Mord* can be found on YouTube: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j__9fWnWoE (30.08.2014).

⁶ The recording of *Schlachthof V* can be found on YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n066XYaIV-0> (last accessed 09/14).

⁷ Viviane Waschbüsch, *16 questions from to Hans-Jürgen von Bose on sound art and electroacoustic*, Munich, May 2014; translation by Viviane Waschbüsch: “Regarding electroacoustic creations, I was at the time really impressed by Stockhausen’s *Gesang der Jünglinge*. There has been no real influence of electroacoustic work [on me] besides the audio tapes in Zimmermann’s *Soldaten* or Zender’s *Stephen Climax*.”

⁸ *Stephen Climax*, opera in 3 acts (1979-1984).

- “musical signals” to interrupt a scene

Synth I

Synth II
(1 / 4 Ton tiefer)

Figure 1: Hans-Jürgen von Bose, *Schlachthof V*⁹, p. 3.

- “musical signals” to underline an action on stage

Sampler I

Verdi: Requiem: Dies irae, Takte 1-3, Originaltonart, - sehr laut, aber hallig, fast Mono - Klang, wie schlechte Schallplatte.

Takte 3-4, Sampleraste niedergedrückt halten. Angegebene Notenswerte wie Morsecodieren mit Hilfe des Lautstärkereglers erzeugen.

Takte 5-8, Tritonus hoher transportiert beginnen, dann mit Hilfe von Pitch Wheel langsam und kontinuierlich auf Ausgangstonart zurückglissandieren.

Sampler II

Sample: Mozart: Requiem: Dies irae, Takte 50, 2. Hälfte und 51, Originaltonart.

Takte 50, 2. Hälfte und 51 / 52: Beginn in Originaltonart: Glissando und Tritonus abwärts mit Pitch - Wheel.

Synth I

Flugzeugmotorengeräusch

Schritt

cresc.

$\text{f} - \text{ff}$

5/4 $\text{♩} = 84$

Figure 2: Hans-Jürgen von Bose, *Schlachthof V*, p. 7.

- “musical signals” to make an ironic comment

Sampler I

Sampler: Weckerticken

f dim

Arzt

ih- r Sohn, ah... al - so... hat sich so - zu - sa - gen von der Zeit, ja von der Zeit los - ge - lost.

Figure 3: Hans-Jürgen von Bose, *Schlachthof V*, p. 10.

⁹ All scores of Hans-Jürgen von Bose are used with kind permission of Ricordi Berlin.

- “musical signals” to announce a happening

Figure 4: Hans-Jürgen von Bose, *Schlachthof V*, p. 13.

- “musical elements” to look back

Figure 5: Hans-Jürgen von Bose, *Schlachthof V*, p. 16.

It is evident that these uses of “musical signs” are not a new element in music history – if we think back to the *Leitmotiv* of Richard Wagner. Contrary to Wagner, Bose uses “musical signs” as they are typically used in films and in *Hörspielen*. In this way, his artistic approach is more in line with pop culture than with typical contemporary music. Bose himself describes his relationship with and his use of electroacoustic elements:

Fast gänzlich zum Zweck, die musikalische Form und die damit artikuliert Zeit anders zu fassen, zu beleuchten. In der Oper/im Musiktheater auch dafür, bestimmte Zuspelungen als Unterstützung eines imaginären Kameraauges (signalartig etwa die Aufmerksamkeit lenkend) und in sogenannter absoluter Musik z. B. Zur kompositorisch-architektonischen Schaffung von Labyrinthen durch Vorechos, Echos, plötzliche Einblendungen von bereits Vergangenen, Aufhebung des Zeitpfeiles durch via Sampler eingestreute Fragmente von Vergangenen etc. etc.¹⁰

The “musical signals” had another effect on Bose’s musical language: while starting off as mere narrative signals, they later became musically indispensable and completely embedded in the composition itself.

¹⁰ Viviane Waschbüsch, *16 questions from to Hans-Jürgen von Bose on sound art and electroacoustic*, Munich, May 2014; translation by Viviane Waschbüsch: “I use electroacoustic elements to transform the musical form and to transform the time. In the opera and in musical theater I use audio tapes as an imaginary eye of a camera (to focus the [audience’s] attention). I use electroacoustic in absolute music to create musical labyrinths with pre-echos, echos, sudden overlaying of old music, transformation of the impression of time by fragments of music that are integrated via sampler.”

The electroacoustic and sound elements are indicated in the score on the line for the two synthesizers and samplers. The effects are graphically composed and then realized live by a keyboarder who starts the actions. An interesting example therefore is the graphical notation of the birds singing that appears quite often in the first scene:



Figure 6: Hans-Jürgen von Bose, *Schlachthof V*, p. 5.

Noises such as the ticking of an alarm clock are rhythmically defined by von Bose in the score:

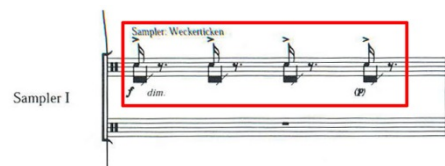


Figure 7: Hans-Jürgen von Bose, *Schlachthof V*, p. 10.

But alarm clocks are not the only sound elements used by von Bose; he also uses the sound of a machine gun:

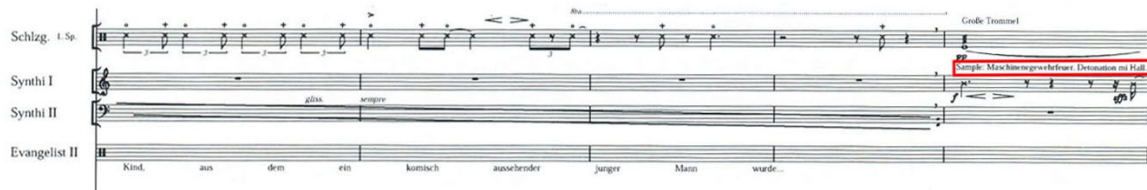


Figure 8: Hans-Jürgen von Bose, *Schlachthof V*, p. 13.

In some cases, von Bose uses overlapping “musical signals” when, for example, three simultaneous actions happen in the sampler 1, sampler 2 and in the synthesizer. These musical signals can in this case also be extracts of ancient music by other composers such as Mozart or Verdi.

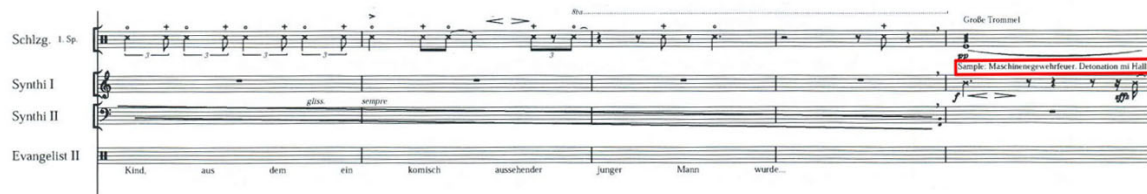


Figure 9: Hans-Jürgen von Bose, *Schlachthof V*, p. 16.

This is the moment when von Bose’s music becomes a kind of sound collage of electroacoustic elements. If we look at the definition of “sound art,” von Bose’s collage technique seems to be a kind of integrated sound art: a synthesis between traditional writing and the adding of technical elements. Von Bose describes his way of proceeding with sound art elements as a part of his composition process: „Ich experimentiere nicht, ich komponiere,

sind doch die verwendeten Zuspierungen Teile des kompositorischen Materials. Das, was klanglich verfremdet wird, erarbeite ich mit dem Mitarbeiter zusammen.¹¹

Another interesting example von Bose's use of electroacoustic elements is his work for musical theater *Nacht Zeit Mord* that was created in Munich in 2011. He uses elements similar to the ones in *Schlachthof V*: in the line for audio tape (*Zuspierung*) we find descriptions of noises that should be realized such as the noise of a flying knife.



Figure 10: Hans-Jürgen von Bose, *Nacht Zeit Mord*, p. 12.

What differentiates *Nacht Zeit Mord* and *Schlachthof V* is the fact that the musical is composed with several *Zuspierungen* – prerecorded recordings played along with live instruments – including prerecorded accordion and the violoncello. As this musical is composed for only two instruments and singers the polyphony is much clearer for the listener than in *Schlachthof V*:

Ich verwende in *Nacht Zeit Mord* keine verfremdeten Zuspierungen der Originalinstrumente. Das einzige, was dort gesampelt zugespielt wird – von geräuschhaften Anteilen, die rhythmisch und als Zeitgeber eingesetzt sind – verwende ich eben Fragmente, vom Zeitpfahl losgelöste Bruchstücke, die dann mit der live gespielten Musik in eine Art zeitliche Polyphonie treten.¹²

Von Bose's compositional evolution brought him to work more and more with differentiated sound elements in his compositions. They are used as an echo, as a comment and as a semiotic extension of the meaning of his music. Another interesting example of von Bose's use of electroacoustic is his *Concerto for Violin and Orchestra*. In this piece prerecorded parts of the concerto are played simultaneously with the live playing soloist and orchestra. This gives the listener a different kind of polyphonic impression of the piece.



Figure 11: Hans-Jürgen von Bose, *Concerto for Violin and Orchestra*, p. 20.

¹¹ *Ibid.*; translation by Viviane Waschbüsch: "I'm not experimenting, I'm composing. The used samples are part of the compositional material. The transformed material is prepared together with my assistant."

¹² *Ibid.*; translation by Viviane Waschbüsch: "I don't use in *Nacht Zeit Mord* any modified sounds of the original instruments. The only fragments that are sampled are noisy sounds that are used as rhythmical indicators of time. I use fragments, prerecorded pieces, which realize a kind of polyphony in the time with the live music."

The prerecorded material functions in the same way as the prerecorded samples of the musical *Nacht Zeit Mord* with one tiny difference: in the *Concerto for Violin and Orchestra* the samples sometimes appear in transposition – for example, by a quartertone – thereby displaying a strong departure from the original music, something not explored in the musical.

3. Wolfgang Rihm's stance on Sound art

Wolfgang Rihm has different approaches towards sound art and electroacoustic music. As mentioned before in the introduction Wolfgang Rihm is totally opposed to any conceptual music and sound art. What is interesting about Rihm's approach to sound art is the fact that he is using electroacoustic elements in some of his works and at least in three of his musicals and one theater piece. A closer look at the catalogue of Wolfgang Rihm is quite interesting, considering his opposition towards sound art creation. To better understand Rihm's conception of the use of electroacoustic it is useful to have a closer look at his musical *Die Eroberung von Mexico*. Here we can analyze very well Rihm's use of the audio tape. Rihm's use of the tape in the music theater is similar to von Bose's use of audio tapes in chamber music. Rihm uses the audio tape to mix with the live singers: on the audio tape are recordings of a choir – the singers on stage are then dialoguing with the prerecorded chorus on the audio tape. This is an interesting sonic effect – because most of the musical action comes from the audio tape and is not visible to the audience.



Figure 11: Wolfgang Rihm, *Die Eroberung von Mexico*, p. 132.¹³
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Rihm never saw the electroacoustic material as musical material in itself. But he tried himself in the decade of ten years 1983 – 1993 to include electroacoustic elements in his musicals and even wrote one piece for ensemble and electroacoustic entitled *Etude d'après Séraphin* in 1997 for the ZKM in Karlsruhe. This proves that Rihm is not in fact entirely against any kind of electroacoustic support, as he himself has used these elements in his compositions. The probable reason for his extreme, negative position on sound art is that he sees electroacoustic music only in conjunction with live playing instruments. He views these technical possibilities more as a garnish for normal, traditional writing.

¹³ The excerpt of *Die Eroberung von Mexico* is used with kind permission of Universal Edition Wien.

4. Comparing von Bose's and Rihm's approach toward sound art and the electroacoustic

The first thing evident is the fact that von Bose has composed twice as many works using electroacoustic elements than Rihm. Furthermore, von Bose uses electroacoustic in his musicals, operas, solo concertos, chamber music and in his *Lieder* – Rihm only uses electroacoustic support in some of his musicals and works for theaters. This shows that for Rihm electroacoustic is only useful for special cases, while it is a common element stylistically in the music of von Bose. Moreover, von Bose was tempted to introduce in his music different elements of electroacoustic creation: he uses noises, extracts of pieces of other composers and modified sounds extracted from his own compositions. In this way von Bose is closer to sound art creation than Rihm and – from the technical point of view – much more modern. Another interesting fact is that von Bose tries to speak in his teachings about the general possibilities of electroacoustic music as if he had not studied it himself: „Da ich keine fachliche Qualifikation auf dem Gebiet der Elektroakustik besitze, weise ich allenfalls auf kompositorische Möglichkeiten, die darin liegen, hin.“¹⁴

Wolfgang Rihm in his teachings also encourages young composers to explore the possibilities of electroacoustic music and even helps them to study electroacoustic music after their classical composition studies. We must recognize that the “New Simplicity” composers are not so opposed to the electroacoustic possibilities of contemporary music as generally thought. The main distinction that remains is that Rihm dislikes the concept of sound art, while von Bose dislikes a particular kind of “garden gnome” aesthetic associated with sound art.

Conclusion

Only two of the three “New Simplicity” composers explore electroacoustic creation. The composer that worked most with these elements is von Bose. He even sees a future for electroacoustics in the evolution of music:

Ja, glaube ich, soweit ich dies bisher überblicken kann, liegt die Zukunft, also eine weitere Zukunft, einerseits in verfeinerter Verwendung von Zuspierungen im Sinne einer permeablen Zeitlichkeit der musikalischen Form und andererseits in immer schneller reagierenden Computersystemen (siehe z. B. Philippe Manoury), die primär sich den live exekutierenden Musikern „unterordnen“ und nicht das Umgekehrte notwendig machen.¹⁵

Furthermore, von Bose sees even an essential future of music in sound art: „Klanginstallationen alleine bestimmt nicht, aber wenn Sie auch Zuspierungen und andere Weiterungen der Elektroakustik mit meinen, wird diese sicherlich ein integraler Bestandteil der zukünftigen Musik sein.“¹⁶

¹⁴ Viviane Waschbüsch, *16 questions from to Hans-Jürgen von Bose on sound art and electroacoustic*, Munich, May 2014; translation by Viviane Waschbüsch: “As I don’t have any qualification in the field of electroacoustic I only introduce to my students the possibilities of these new technologies”.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*; translation by Viviane Waschbüsch: “I believe, that as far as I have an overview, that the future, will be on the one hand, the electroacoustic transformation of samples to realize a moving impression of time, and on the other hand, the evolution in fast computer programs (see for example the works of Philippe Manoury) that are subordinated to the live playing musicians.”

¹⁶ *Ibid.*; translation by Viviane Waschbüsch: “Sound art probably won’t be the only form in the future, but other forms of electroacoustic such as samples, will certainly be a part of the music of the future.”

Bose is the only “New simplicity” composer who believes that electroacoustic elements not only provide a real benefit to – but also are also essential to – the development of contemporary music. This is in contrast to Rihm, who dislikes the use of the electroacoustic in general, and Müller-Siemens who has not composed for electroacoustic at all.

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