

## But If It's Not Music, What Is It? Defining Interstitial Artistic Practices

### Mais si ce n'est pas de la musique, qu'est-ce que c'est ? Définir les pratiques artistiques interstitielles

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Article abstract

*We often think of art as structured in art worlds. But what lies between art worlds? Do we find spaces of undefined practices, or are interstitial practices also clearly defined? For this text, we interviewed 11 French artists with sound-based practices who situate themselves in the spaces where music overlaps with the visual arts, instrument building, performance art, and poetry. How do these artists define themselves, given that the available labels do not satisfy them? How do they actually use established categories when they do not want to make their artistic practice conform to them? Three positioning strategies came up recurrently in our interviews: so-called negative, additive, and generic definitional strategies. We show here that each of these definitional strategies implies related artistic choices, which make it possible for these artists to both legitimize their sense of belonging to an interstitial space and to use this belonging as a powerful means to develop a unique identity. Beyond a simple, sometimes superficial, refusal to be labeled, the strategies we identify appear to be the true markers of “interstitial” artists and their careers within and around art worlds.*

# But If It's Not Music, What Is It? Defining Interstitial Artistic Practices

Clément Canonne and Annelies Fryberger

We often think of art as structured in art worlds.<sup>1</sup> But what lies between art worlds? Do we find spaces of undefined practices, or are interstitial practices also clearly defined? For this text, we interviewed eleven French artists with sound-based practices who situate themselves in spaces where music overlaps with the visual arts, instrument building, performance art, and poetry. These are artistic practices where centers of gravity are unclear and orbits are irregular. Two factors act as common denominators for our sample: the artists we interviewed all use sound in their artistic practice<sup>2</sup> (Figure 1), but they do not claim to be musicians, or they have a complex relationship with this label.

Crucially, the fact that “sound art” exists as a category, even if it is difficult to define, fails to solve the issue of categorization for artists who use sound but do not want to be seen exclusively as musicians. Artists who fall broadly into this category must still make certain choices to position themselves. The same could be said for the labels that have emerged to designate interdisciplinary practices in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries—sound poetry, new media art, and performance art, for example—in large part because this interdisciplinarity is not mirrored at the institutional level. In other words, the existence of a category such as “sound art” does not stabilize artistic practice. Max Neuhaus would be the first to agree:

If there is a valid reason for classifying and naming things in culture, certainly it is for the refinement of distinctions. Aesthetic experience lies in the area of fine distinctions, not the destruction of distinctions for promotion of activities with their least common denominator, in this case sound.<sup>3</sup>

Sound art, at least in France, does not (yet) have the historical and institutional depth to act as a center of gravity: it is not (yet) a field that can create its own

1. Becker, 1982.

2. All interviews were conducted in French. We have chosen to publish this text in English to give these artists visibility outside of France. All translations are our own. See Figure 1 for details on these artists.

3. Neuhaus, 2000, p. 2.

periphery. Its canon is not (yet) developed enough to provide a lexicon of proper nouns that would enable artists to situate and describe their practice exclusively in relation to this field. This means that more established disciplines, even though they are themselves ever-shifting constructions, have to do this work.

How, then, do artists position themselves when they belong to a field that is not (yet) a field? How do these artists define themselves, given that the available labels do not satisfy them? How do they actually use established categories when they do not want their artistic practices to conform to them? To answer these questions, we will analyze how these artists position themselves and their work—what interests us here is the subjective ways these artists define their practice, and the consequences this has on their career choices. Three definitional strategies will be investigated: negative definitions, additive definitions, and generic definitions. These three ways of framing a position should not be seen as mutually exclusive, as they are successively or even simultaneously explored by the artists we interviewed. We will show here that each of these definitional strategies implies related artistic choices, which make it possible for these artists to legitimize their sense of belonging to an interstitial space and to use this belonging as a powerful means to develop a unique identity.

4. This is how these artists described their practices to us during our interviews—but, of course, as this article intends to show, none of these artists use these labels in a non-reflexive, uncritical manner.

**FIGURE 1** Interviewees (for the interviewers, CC refers to Clément Canonne, AF to Annelies Fryberger).

Name	How they present themselves <sup>4</sup>	Interview date, place, interviewer	Personal website
Frédéric Acquaviva	Composer and sound artist	25.10.2018, Paris, CC and AF	<a href="http://www.frederic-acquaviva.net">http://www.frederic-acquaviva.net</a>
Tarek Atoui	Artist of sound and composer	7.11.2018, Paris, CC	<a href="http://www.kurimanzutto.com/en/artists/tarek-atoui">http://www.kurimanzutto.com/en/artists/tarek-atoui</a>
Charlotte Charbonnel	Artist	13.12.2018, Paris, CC and AF	<a href="http://charlotte-charbonnel.com">charlotte-charbonnel.com</a>
Anne-James Chaton	Maker of sound poetry	14.1.2019, Paris, CC and AF	<a href="https://www.annejameschaton.org/">https://www.annejameschaton.org/</a>
David Christoffel	Poet, composer, radio artist	5.11.2018, Paris, CC and AF	<a href="http://www.dcdb.fr/">http://www.dcdb.fr/</a>
Octave Courtin	Sound artist	27.2.2019, Paris, CC	<a href="https://www.octavecourtin.com/">https://www.octavecourtin.com/</a>
Yann Leguay	Sound artist	26.10.17, Paris, CC	<a href="http://www.phonotopy.org/">http://www.phonotopy.org/</a>
Violaine Lochu	Musician, performer, artist	14.1.2019, Paris, CC and AF	<a href="http://www.violainelochu.fr">www.violainelochu.fr</a>
Thierry Madiot	Artist	14.12.2016 and 12.10.2017, Paris, CC	<a href="http://madiot.free.fr/">http://madiot.free.fr/</a>
Sébastien Roux	Composer	11.6.2019, Baubigny, CC	<a href="http://www.sebastienroux.net/">http://www.sebastienroux.net/</a>
Samon Takahashi	Artist	6.11.2018, Paris, CC and AF	Not interested in having a website

## Negative definitions

To be an “interstitial” artist means, first and foremost, to refuse to be identified with a specific artistic space. This way of presenting oneself and one’s practice, by rejection rather than adherence, is a sign in and of itself of the existence of an interstitial space. It shows that artistic identities can be defined by situating oneself outside established spaces. In our interviews, it became apparent that these artists all risked being identified with another field, and that they all took pains to make sure they did not accidentally fall into this field. In this text, we will call such a field a “repulsive field” or “repulsive discipline,” as opposed to a center of gravity/attraction. Some examples will clarify this point:

The figure of the singer is precisely what I have to avoid. There’s a piece on the last album where, because of the way Andy Moore played, I’m almost at the limit of singing. But that’s really a limit for me. And, furthermore, I think I would be completely incapable of writing a song. And I don’t know how to sing, either (Anne-James Chaton).

For me, the way to avoid taking the stance of a musician was to create sound objects that were as easy to manipulate as possible. I actually used the medium of sound to further address questions that I had been exploring in my performances (Octave Courtin).

I’m only just starting to be able to say that I make music, but I really have a problem calling myself a musician (Yann Leguay).

There’s a confusion that makes people think that I’m a poet, and I constantly correct people on that point. Now I don’t know if I’m going to keep correcting them, because I’m a bit sick of it, and if people think what I do is poetry, that’s their problem... [But] it’s not that it’s poetry just because I’m making a book (Frédéric Acquaviva).

These quotes show the crucial tipping point in each of these artists’ practices, where a danger of being seen as part of an established discipline is perceived. This perception leads them to develop a number of strategies to ensure they will not be seen as part of these repulsive fields. The most obvious among these is to claim incompetence: as above, “I am not a singer because I cannot sing.” These artists often celebrate their status as non-experts in certain disciplines, which implies that they explicitly refuse to develop the technical skills or learn to use the technological tools that are commonly associated with those disciplines.

This intentional incompetence appeared frequently in our interviews. Sébastien Roux used an argument of this type to dismiss the idea that he could be seen as a visual artist, or even a sound artist—labels often used by the institutions that finance his work. Here, he describes an installation he did with designer Olivier Vadrot:

5. This work can be found here: <http://www.sebastienroux.net>, in the category “Works” under “Sound Environments/Installations” (accessed November 19, 2019).

The visual side of it does interest me, but it’s really not part of my practice, I really don’t know how to do that. For example, for the installation *Succession of timbres with one partial in common*<sup>5</sup> (2016), it was my friend Olivier Vadrot, who is an architect and designer, who made a bench, calculated the dimensions, everything—even the choice of blue for the speakers! (Sébastien Roux).

Similarly, Charlotte Charbonnel defends herself against the “accusation” of being a musician or composer by highlighting the rudimentary nature of the software she uses:

I do a lot of things with Audacity. Before, I used more sophisticated software, but it started to get on my nerves, because at a certain point there were too many windows, too much stuff... for what I wanted to do, that wasn’t necessary. [...] And my partner is pretty good with programming with Max/MSP, so when it comes down to it, he helps me a bit as well from time to time... there are things I don’t know how to do, or which I’m not interested in doing, and I’m very happy to let someone else do them for me (Charlotte Charbonnel).

We might also note the difference in how these two individuals present their work on their respective websites: Sébastien Roux systematically includes sound files, whereas Charlotte Charbonnel, who does not wish to be seen as a musician, includes only images of her sound installations. Both artists, however, create sound installations that engage the spectator visually and aurally.

It is striking to observe that this “amateur” or “outsider” relationship to the tools of a repulsive field is even used by some artists as a central part of their artistic singularity. For example:

Actually, I think that when you’re a novice in something, you can have a cheeky way of appropriating a medium or technique... you don’t have any qualms about doing things that purists wouldn’t dare do, to put it simply (Charlotte Charbonnel).

I didn’t want to acquire too much technical ability, or be too much of an expert in sound processing, because if I did that, I would risk creating the same... I would erase this strangeness, which comes from my own user or processing errors... It’s my craftsmanship that creates this kind of strange sound. If ever I got too comfortable with these tools, I would create fewer accidents, and I think that would weaken my writing (Anne-James Chaton).

Thus, lacking certain technical abilities is seen as an advantage, both for the artworks produced and for the way these artists are able to position themselves.

More generally, the artists we interviewed give their artistic production enough ambiguity that they cannot easily be categorized in the field that could be seen as their “natural” center of gravity. In other words, these artists ensure that their work does not meet all of the criteria that are generally used to assign artworks to one category or another. This is how we could analyze

Anne-James Chaton's refusal to call what he does singing. His performances with the guitarist Andy Moore are indeed dangerously close to the world of music, because of the set-up (voice and guitar), performance spaces (new music scene, improvised music festivals), and the way they are distributed (vinyl singles). In this case, insistence on the spoken word gives this object a minimal level of ambiguity such that it may resist being seen as music. An inverse example is that of performer Violaine Lochu, who makes abundant use of singing in her performances. These performances have all the trappings of a typical musical performance (execution of a score, precise control of sound and vocal aspects, virtuosity, etc.), yet the spaces where she performs (most often visual arts spaces) make it difficult to attach the label "music" to her work. The idea is to play with spectator expectations through framing, by presenting an object or a performance that does not completely match these expectations:

"Performance" or "score," these are words that I use but which aren't actually quite right. When I talk about a "score," people expect something specific, but I'm actually constantly thwarting those expectations (Violaine Lochu).

This focus on categorical ambiguity was one of the strategies we encountered most in our interviews. Defined, established categories thereby become artistic material, and in some ways, this is precisely what unites these artists: the transformation of artistic disciplines into material to be manipulated. By moving practices that would have their natural place elsewhere—a musical performance into a gallery, for example—these artists address the nature of how we categorize these practices, and, in so doing, reveal borders and preconceptions that might otherwise go unnoticed. They question the human need to create "distinct islands of meaning"<sup>6</sup> in the world around us, and show how these categories are by no means natural, they are rather purely social constructions.

### **Additive definitions**

Being an "interstitial" artist may also mean situating oneself at the crossroads between different artistic fields, being able to move from one to another. This second definitional strategy implies that these artists think of their artistic practice as belonging to two artistic fields simultaneously: in this case, music and another artistic field, specifically visual arts or poetry. These artists claim "equal" belonging to two fields. The following citations nicely illustrate this strategy:

6. Zerubavel, 1993.

I like it when the improvisers I work with say, “but you’re not [just] a visual artist, you can really play!” That’s great. Here’s what I say now: artist of sound and composer. Not one without the other (Tarek Atoui).

When I started out, I really tried to position myself in both scenes equally, taking an agnostic stance. I defined myself via [both] fields, meaning [I was] a poet and composer. I didn’t choose, actually... If my first spoken opera had a tape and I played flute with it, it’s because I don’t like the idea of just playing the flute on its own, that’s not a good fit for me; and I also don’t like just being on stage as a poet and nothing else, even though I do end up doing that sometimes (David Christoffel).

This kind of positioning results, at least partially, in hybrid logics: text and music, for example, are combined in performances of different names—“sound poetry,” “poetry with music,” “spoken opera,” “vocal performance,” etc.—or sculpture and sound are brought together in the production of sound installations. Maintaining an identity at the crossroads of distinct art worlds makes it possible to enact a two-fold differentiation strategy, for example, being seen as a poet amongst musicians or a musician amongst poets, which gives these artists unique resources for creating a singular identity.

This should not be seen as a pure hybridization strategy—it is rather a bridging one, as we shall see. Hybridization did not take pride of place in the narratives of the artists we interviewed, even though they all have artistic practices that are hybrid on many levels. There are two possible reasons for this. The first is an institutional explanation: “hybrid” productions tend to fall under a parent discipline (for example, opera in music, sound poetry in poetry, sound art in visual arts), and therefore it is not through hybridization that the “interstitiality” of these artists is manifested. Secondly, under the overarching trend of pluri-/inter-/trans-disciplinarity, the logic of hybridization dominates a large swath of contemporary artistic practices. Thus, since it is everywhere, it is nowhere; it is not a resource that lies solely in the hands of interstitial artists.

At root, then, the idea for these artists is not to produce hybrid artistic objects, in the sense that they would blend or juxtapose characteristic properties of distinct art forms. Rather, the idea of the “additive” definitional strategy is to produce *ubiquitous* artistic objects which, because they carry the “right” properties or can be activated in different ways, exist simultaneously in two (relatively) distinct artistic fields. In our sample, the artistic projects that involved the creation of instruments or sound production devices perfectly illustrate this strategy—and it is revealing that more than half of the eleven artists we interviewed have at one time or another done projects of this type. Octave Courtin’s works wherein he produced instruments derived from the model of a bagpipe

are exemplary in this respect.<sup>7</sup> Here, he discusses how instrument making gives him the ability to exist simultaneously in different artistic fields:

I would say that it's more about tinkering, or transforming an instrument... or performances that are really musical, with instruments that are identified as musical instruments, but which ask the kinds of questions we ask in a visual arts school, but applying them to music, which can be a bit risky. I had a distinct, strong relationship to the object, to installation, and to performance, which means that my first concern was how things would look... or, in any case, the visual aspect was as clearly identified as the sound (Octave Courtin).

Clearly, sounding objects produced this way can be seen as musical instruments in the most traditional sense—they are relatively controllable and capable of producing a set of sufficiently varied sounds. They can therefore be used as such in the music world, solo or in interaction with other musicians. But they also have other possible ends. According to Tarek Atoui:

The situations that I create [...] use performance and the voice as moments for experimentation, quite literally. They then create knowledge which will lead to the creation of an instrument or a tool, or a process, a set of instructions, things that will generate other performative moments. [...] I see instruments as tools for my pieces. [...] They are not static or silent like in an ethnomusicology or anthropology museum. They are active agents. Of course, they have a certain materiality, sculpturality, a very strong presence, and we might think that the goal of the project was to create an instrument, but that is not in fact the case (Tarek Atoui).

Instruments can be used for sound performances in museum spaces, as long as they are “deinstrumentalized” by the artist’s gestures, or proceduralized in such a way that spectators focus their attention not only on the sound produced, but also on elements such as a critical relationship with the technical object, the choreographic nature of the instrumental gesture, the way the instrument constrains the performer’s body, etc. Instruments can become sound installations, whether interactive or not, or can be exhibited purely for their visual aspect—as a sculpture or as a material trace of a past performance. Our interviews underscored how instruments can allow an artist to move surreptitiously from one domain to another. The instrumental object holds multiple meanings which may be activated in diverse ways, depending on the artist’s intent. Thus, this object can act as a master key to open the doors of various artistic domains.

However, an instrument is not the only way to do this. Performance may be the ubiquitous artistic form *par excellence*, because it can be made to fit almost any artistic space. For artists who use this form, they must find the right “balance” and “surface” to help their performances find their place in

7. See, for example, his *Capharnaüm*, which can be both a performance and an installation (<https://www.octavecourtin.com/performance>, accessed November 19, 2019).



the different fields they might address. Thus, Yann Leguay is careful to leave open the possibility of multiple entry points for his work:

There are many different ways to read this performance [*Unstatic*]. Geeks are fascinated by the purely technical side of things. Then there are people who are less interested in the music, who are surprised by the way I'm using unexpected objects. And some are more interested in the social side of it, the scrapping and resalvaging—using the waste society produces in a new way, etc. This kind of work with multiple entry points interests me (Yann Leguay).

*Unstatic*—a performance built around the amplification of sounds made by four spinning hard drives—was presented in both visual art and concert spaces.<sup>8</sup> Changing spaces means that the performance is named differently by different organizers, even though the content is absolutely identical: “I get a kick out of doing the same thing in a gallery and in a squat—in one it's called a performance, in the other, a concert” (Yann Leguay). In the same way, Violaine Lochu presented her performance *Babel Babel*<sup>9</sup> several times over the course of a few days, once in an exhibition on sound poetry at the Palais de Tokyo, then in a radio program on improvised music (*À l'improviste* on France Musique), and finally in an event organized by a multidisciplinary space with a strong visual arts component (Mains d'Œuvres in Saint-Ouen). This performance, an assemblage of vocal improvisation and field recordings of babbling, can be performed solo or in a collective, and can easily be inserted in one world or another.

This additive, both/and strategy used by these artists is less a question of hybridity than ubiquity—an assemblage of signifying elements that can be differently activated depending on context. These artists can focus on different layers of their practice depending on the context. They create objects or performances that will be labelled differently in different artistic contexts, even if the content remains identical. In so doing, they push these different artistic worlds to expand to include material from other domains, instead of actively questioning the tenets of these contexts, as the negative definitional strategy would have it.

### Generic definitions

Finding a home in the interstices is also a way of rising to the rank of “just” an artist. The denomination “artist” is first and foremost used in this case as a way to step outside of existing categories:

“Artist”—I like that because it's so vast. When you say you're an “artist”... it bothers people because they don't know who they're dealing with exactly. At the same time, it gives you space to develop things a bit further without immediately

8. See: <https://vimeo.com/121717527> (accessed November 19, 2019).

9. She presents two different versions on her website: [http://www.violainelochu.fr/?page\\_id=1845](http://www.violainelochu.fr/?page_id=1845) (accessed November 19, 2019).

categorizing or pigeon-holing... with “artist,” everyone sees what they want to see, according to their own referents (Charlotte Charbonnel).

The label “artist” allows these individuals to transcend categories and, for some, to free themselves from their initial training. This emerged very clearly in our interview with Thierry Madiot, who sees his trajectory as a long process of emancipation from his role as a trombonist to the profession of artist, with a series of projects that were increasingly difficult to include in his field of origin (music). This includes intimate “sound massages,” where the artist manipulates small objects near (or even inside) the ears of the listener, which are more like primitive psychoanalysis sessions than concerts for one person,<sup>10</sup> and the construction of 15-meter-long telescopic horns which cannot be accommodated by most concert halls:

When I was a trombonist, my space was the concert hall... For a musician, it's the concert... But when you become an artist, it simply explodes [...]. Musician is included in the artist thing, but I could not be just a musician. Because when I find myself in a room with a bunch of trombonists, I'm bored out of my skull (Thierry Madiot).

For Frédéric Acquaviva this takes on a similar flavor:

Music is part of something called art, which is part of life, so I don't want to produce, quite simply, to produce any “thing,” and in particular to produce music. The term “sound art” seems more vague to me [than the term “composer”]. And so, since music is an art, that works for me (Frédéric Acquaviva).

The main strategy for achieving the status of “artist” is to ramp up conceptual thinking so that it transcends individual productions. This does not imply that these artists produce purely conceptual pieces; rather, once they have emancipated themselves from the question of medium, the essence of their work resides in exploring a certain number of “questions” or “ideas” which can be the impetus for multi-layered projects using various mediums at different points along the way. Tarek Atoui's trajectory illustrates this strategy perfectly. In order to understand how he went from the status of a musician (with a practice between electroacoustic music and improvisation), to that of an artist represented by three different galleries, we have to recognize the fact that his current artistic practice is not about producing performances or installations, but rather about developing concepts which preside over the different production processes. So much so that it is sometimes the concepts themselves, presented as instructions, that are now acquired by galleries and other institutions. This is the case of the *Reverse Collection*,<sup>11</sup> a multi-stage project in which Atoui commissioned instrument-builders

10. “I call them “sound massages” because it's not about music, we don't tell people it's music. If I were doing the same thing with a nurse at my side, it would suddenly become much clearer for people!” (Thierry Madiot). See: [http://madiot.free.fr/IMG/pdf/17\\_05\\_massagesmadiot.pdf](http://madiot.free.fr/IMG/pdf/17_05_massagesmadiot.pdf) (accessed November 19, 2019).

11. See: <https://www.moussepublishing.com/?product=/tarek-atoui-the-reverse-collection-the-reverse-sessions/> (accessed November 19, 2019).

and sound artists to create new instruments freely inspired by recordings of improvisers playing historical instruments from the collection of Berlin's Dahlem museum:

These instruments, as I see them, are versions of larger ideas or concepts, and they depend heavily on the people who make them, the technological environments of the time, the aesthetic tastes of the moment, but they can change or transform. That's the real potential of this project. It's not just about producing a fixed object. And this piece, now, these instruments, they are being acquired by museums, and they have value as objects, but an important part of my work is to accompany these pieces with instructions, elements that will guarantee that this creative gesture will be repeated. For example, the institution that acquires these instruments, once there's no longer anyone who can repair it, or it is no longer possible to preserve it so that it can be played, the institution can then activate the initial creative gesture and commission a new instrument from a different instrument builder. For this, I specify profiles of instrument builders. They buy a piece, which is a script, which includes this object for the time being, which gives it a certain materiality, but which can be substituted for another (Tarek Atoui).

Such projects typically lead to integrative approaches, in that the artistic work consists of exploring a concept by integrating a succession of processes which may result in "works" that can be exhibited (or performed) in different artistic fields. This integrative approach is clearly exemplified in the way Samon Takahashi describes one of his projects:

I did a concert in South Korea, with a group that I put together over there, with people who played noise music and a *gayageum* player... we played a concert and I did a multi-track recording of it, and then this recording was played in the stairwell of a museum, with a different track on each floor. So, it was a restitution of the concert in an installation version... which matched the space: there were six floors, so I had chosen six musicians, because I was thinking about the installation before I did the concert, it was premeditated (Samon Takahashi).

This definition strategy—calling on the generic category of artist—allows these individuals to think beyond medium and organize their production around concepts. In this way, they can adopt a *modus operandi* where the plasticity of a concept can be expressed in multiple mediums. A given artistic project may therefore have several steps, each of which may (or may not) result in a work which can explore the specificity of a given medium or artistic space. This strategy is different from the additive strategy discussed above, in the sense that these artists are not trying to create artistic objects which might be equally at home in different artistic worlds. Rather, they conceive a global project which includes specific stages, each of which might respond to a specific problem (posed by the artist or by a call for projects, for instance).

In other words, their aim is not so much ubiquity as it is integrating different, sometimes incongruous productions into an overarching concept.

## **Conclusion**

Artists in interstitial spaces do not have undefined or undefinable artistic practices—on the contrary, we found that these actors clearly define their practices in relation to strong dichotomies (for example, music vs. visual arts) and articulate their positions in these interstices. In this text, we have explicitly avoided terminology of center/periphery or notions of marginality, because this is not, as one might think, a study of artists situating themselves on the margins of the music or contemporary art worlds. The centers of gravity and repulsive fields are different from one artist to the next and over the course of their careers, but none of our interviewees sang the praises of marginality or claimed a peripheral position.

Three positioning strategies came up recurrently in our interviews: so-called negative, additive, and generic definitions. Each of these strategies is associated with specific actions or behaviors that regulate these artists' artistic practices. The first, negative definition, goes hand in hand with a willful refusal to develop certain skills that predominate in the repulsive discipline and an intentional ambiguity of the objects produced. The second positioning strategy is that of additive definitions, which imply hybridization logics, meant in the sense of creating ubiquitous artistic objects which can exist simultaneously in distinct artistic fields. We used the example of instrument creation as a particularly illustrative example of this strategy. Our last strategy—the use of the “artist” label in generic definitions—implies a focus on concept, which artists use to generate multi-level projects using different mediums. These different strategies clarify our initial impetus for this research, which was to see how the label “sound art” is used in practice for defining artistic production by the artists themselves. We quickly realized that this label had not resolved much for the artists we interviewed, and that a much more complex game of interrelation was at play.

We have chosen to focus here on how these artists perceive the works they produce, rather than conducting an analysis of the artworks themselves. We were interested in their subjective meaning for their producers, and how this meaning leads these artists to construct their careers in more practical terms. This focus on the actors over their artworks forces us to reconceptualize interstitial artistic practice, because artworks are always somewhere—they can be multiple in media, approach, or discipline, but at the end of the day, they are instantiated in places with histories that anchor them. Actors, on the other

hand, can straddle and move between artistic fields. This means that an artist can develop an interstitial identity, because of their mobility, whereas works cannot be interstitial, in the same sense that institutions are not interstitial—their (explicit or implicit) function is precisely to create stable and permanent centers of gravity in order to allow different art worlds to develop.

At a time when omnivorousness is on the tip of our tongues<sup>12</sup> and generic “crossovers” are seen positively,<sup>13</sup> it is not unusual for artists and consumers of cultural products to refuse to categorize their practices into a single category. We “insist that [our] tastes are unclassifiable.”<sup>14</sup> This resistance is typically discussed in relation to genres, but our interviews show that it also applies to artistic forms and the media used within them. This shift in interstitiality logics from genre to form is more than just a change in scale: it forces artists to develop new strategies to circumvent both the unavoidable materiality of media and the pull of institutions around which art worlds orbit. Beyond a simple, sometimes superficial refusal to be labeled, the strategies we identified here—negative, additive, and generic definitional strategies—are the true markers of “interstitial” artists and their careers within and around art worlds.

12. Bryson, 1996; Peterson and Kern, 1996.

13. Brackett, 2016.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 1.

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