

REVIEW OF THE DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

Doctoral candidate: Miruna Gheordunescu

Title: Vibrational Ontology: Body, Space and Sound in Electronic Music Performances

University: Eugeniusz Geppert Academy of Art and Design in Wrocław, Doctoral School

Field: Art

Discipline: Fine Arts and Art Conservation

General Characterization and Scope

I have the pleasure of reviewing the doctoral dissertation by Miruna Gheordunescu entitled *Vibrational Ontology: Body, Space and Sound in Electronic Music Performances*, developed at the Eugeniusz Geppert Academy of Art and Design in Wrocław, in the field of Art and the discipline of Fine Arts and Art Conservation.

The dissertation presents an original and intellectually ambitious artistic-research project situated at the intersection of visual arts, sound studies, performance, and practice-based inquiry. It comprises three interconnected components: an artistic work centered on the installation *Monolith*; a theoretical and methodological written part that establishes the conceptual and contextual framework of the project; and supplementary materials documenting the candidate's artistic and pedagogical practice.

The dissertation addresses vibration not merely as an acoustic effect or sonic phenomenon, but as an ontological, aesthetic, and cultural force that organizes relations among sound, body, and space. The declared purpose is "*to explore vibration as a principle that can reorient both philosophy and practice*" (page 5), while the stated aim is to investigate how vibration functions "*not only as an acoustic phenomenon but as a force redefining objecthood and collective being*" (page 5) experienced by the researcher.

The object of the research is the phenomenon of vibration as manifested in electronic music performance, club culture, and installation practice, considered in its sonic, bodily, spatial, and relational dimensions. The subject of the research is how vibration organizes relations among body, sound, and space, and how these relations can be explored through a combination of philosophical reflection, fieldwork, and artistic outcomes. Although the dissertation does not formulate a hypothesis in a strictly conventional academic format, its underlying proposition can be reconstructed with sufficient clarity: vibration is not only an acoustic or technical phenomenon, but an ontological and cultural force that structures collective experience and can be investigated and communicated through visual-art practice, especially in installation and or sculptural form. This idea runs across the written and artistic parts of the dissertation.

Research Design and Structural Coherence

The dissertation is structured clearly and comprehensibly. The thesis begins by clarifying the origins of the research problem in the author's personal and professional experience, then develops the conceptual apparatus through which vibration is understood, translates that

framework into artistic practice, and finally places the project in wider social, cultural, and pedagogical contexts. Such a design is appropriate for practice-based artistic research, particularly in a project that explicitly seeks to connect theory, observation, and installation practice. The dissertation's methodology combines ethnographic fieldwork, theoretical reflection, and artistic experimentation, and iterative experiments in sound, installation, and performance that function as research tools.

The opening section, "Background and Motivation," performs an important methodological function, because it makes explicit that the framing of the research is not neutral, but arises from the convergence of the author's personal experiences and professional practices. This is a strength, since in artistic research, such clarification of motivation and situatedness is often essential. The dissertation thereby acknowledges from the outset that the inquiry is practice-led and emerges from embodied experience in club culture. At the same time, this section also reveals one of the limitations of the research design: although the author clearly declares her insider position, the implications of that position are not yet fully theorized in methodological terms.

The section titled "Theoretical Frame" is concise but conceptually dense, and it effectively establishes the dissertation's main framework. Here, the author defines an approach that treats vibration, pulse, and resonance as fundamental modes of being and also introduces the club as a "working model" through which vibration becomes publicly and materially observable. The framework built around Marcus Boon, Deleuze and Guattari, and Steve Goodman is relevant and intellectually ambitious. However, because the chapter is so compressed, some conceptual distinctions remain underdeveloped.

The core of the dissertation lies in the chapter "Ontology of Vibration," which is correctly positioned as the conceptual center of the written thesis. Its internal structure is logically designed: it moves from the phenomenon of vibration itself to epistemological implications, then to the rhizomatic model, and finally to a bridge toward practice. This is a strong design choice because it allows the author to gradually widen the concept from sensory-material description to methodological and ontological significance. The subsection "The Phenomenon of Vibration" provides the most direct grounding in the physical and embodied dimensions of the subject, while "Vibrational Epistemologies" makes a particularly important contribution by arguing that vibration may be understood as a way of knowing rather than merely a sensory effect. The extended subsection "Vibration and Rhizomatic Structure: Chaos in Sound and Installation" is ambitious and, in principle, well aligned with the overall project. By tracing the rhizome across literature, sonic theory, installation art, performative art, and club culture, the author attempts to show that vibration is not an isolated property but a distributed field of relations. This broad comparative design is conceptually suggestive and supports the dissertation's claim that clubs and installations should be understood as assemblages rather than fixed structures.

Chapter "The Idea of Vibration in Practice" is crucial because it translates the theoretical discourse into actual artistic implementation. Structurally, the chapter is well composed: conceptual background, construction and technical process, space and audience experience,

and reflection together form a persuasive sequence from idea to embodiment to evaluation. This is a strong research-design feature, since it allows the reader to understand the installation not only as an aesthetic object but as the material site where the research problem is tested. This dimension is further enriched by the pedagogical projects and workshop-based activities associated with the research, which demonstrate that the author treated pedagogy not as an auxiliary task, but as an experimental environment in which the relations between sound, body, image, and collective participation could be explored in practice. In this respect, the pedagogical component strengthens the chapter by showing that the artistic investigation extended beyond the installation itself into formats of public engagement, shared learning, and participatory testing. The principal limitation here is that the experiential and pedagogical material is suggestive rather than deeply analyzed; one would welcome a more sustained analytical treatment of audience encounters, workshop outcomes, and pedagogical interactions as research data.

Chapter “Cultural and Social Dimensions” is an important expansion of the project and demonstrates that the author does not reduce vibration to either private sensation or purely formal artistic experimentation. This chapter gives the dissertation a broader critical horizon. Particularly significant is the inclusion of fieldwork case studies, since it signals an attempt to ground the conceptual claims in observed or discussed contemporary examples. However, from the standpoint of research design, one may note that the fieldwork appears relatively late in the structure. Because fieldwork is central to the methodology, a stronger integration of empirical material earlier in the thesis might have made the argument more cumulative. As it stands, the thesis often moves from concept to practice and only then to social fieldwork, whereas a more braided structure might have yielded stronger analytical reciprocity between theory and data.

The inclusion of pedagogy and public programs is distinctive and appropriate within the logic of artistic research. The didactic materials confirm that pedagogy, curatorship, and public programming were not auxiliary activities but were treated by the candidate as integral methodological environments in which concepts could be tested in interaction with students and audiences.

In evaluative terms, the dissertation presents a coherent and appropriate research design for a practice-based doctoral project in art. Its structure effectively moves from situated motivation and theoretical framing to conceptual elaboration, artistic realisation, and wider cultural and pedagogical implications. Overall, the thesis has a clear tripartite architecture: conceptual foundation, artistic-material testing, and socio-cultural extension.

Theoretical Framework

The author’s theoretical framework is a major strength of the dissertation. Drawing on Steve Goodman’s *Sonic Warfare*, Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the rhizome, and Marcus Boon’s cosmopolitical framing of vibration, the candidate develops a conceptual model that moves beyond a narrowly musical or acoustic understanding of sound. Within this framework, vibration emerges as a connector of bodies, technologies, and environments, and as a force that precedes or exceeds conventional representation. Goodman’s influence is particularly visible

in the dissertation's sensitivity to vibration as affective and bodily intensity; Deleuze and Guattari's rhizomatic model helps the author conceptualize club environments and artistic processes as distributed assemblages rather than hierarchical structures; and Boon's perspective extends the inquiry toward the social, infrastructural, and political organization of vibrational experience.

A significant merit of the work is that this framework does not remain at the level of abstract philosophical reference. Rather, it interacts meaningfully with the fieldwork and with the artistic process itself. The author states that the theoretical framework is complemented by interviews with DJs and practitioners, observations of club culture, and practice-based research culminating in the creation of a sculptural speaker that transmits sound and vibration through touch and proximity. The fieldwork thus serves as an empirical site where theoretical assumptions are tested and translated into artistic decisions. The dissertation's treatment of vibration as something felt through skin, breath, proximity, and bodily threshold is clearly informed by the field dimension of the work, while the installation becomes a material condensation of these insights. This close relation between theory, fieldwork, and realization strengthens the integrity of the project as artistic research.

Nevertheless, it is important to critically note just how extensively the dissertation applies the rhizomatic framework, utilizing the concept across a remarkably diverse array of areas—including literature, theories of sound, installation and performative art, club environments, and educational practices. While this testifies to the author's ambition and intellectual range, it also carries a risk. Using a single concept to explain varied phenomena could turn it into a broad metaphor rather than a precise tool. The author is aware of this, clarifying when her analogies are intended as metaphors and not proofs.

Artistic Component

The artistic component of the dissertation, the installation *Monolith*, deserves a very positive evaluation. The work developed from an earlier maquette shown at the Sound Storytelling exhibition at Bulwary Gallery and was subsequently realized as a full-scale structure approximately 2.5 meters high, built on a welded-steel skeleton and clad in sheet metal. The installation was designed as a vibrational object rather than a conventional sculpture: through transducers, sensors, and sound integration, it responds to the presence or touch of viewers, producing an encounter in which listening, tactility, and spatial proximity become intertwined. The author's decision to adopt a minimalist vertical form, inspired in part by Kubrick's monolith and rendered in matte black, achieves a resonant presence and is conceptually clear and artistically effective. The formal restraint of the piece serves the project well, shifting attention away from decorative detail and toward vibration, tactility, and embodied relation.

The audience reception documented in the dissertation provides useful, if preliminary, evidence of the work's effectiveness. These observations, although informal rather than systematically recorded, are consistent with the project's theoretical claims.

Written Part: Strengths and Limitations

The dissertation contains meaningful elements of self-reflexive positioning. The author acknowledges that the research emerges from her own experience in club spaces as both a performer and a listener, and approaches vibration as a lived intensity rather than as an external object to be observed from a distance. In addition, the text shows methodological caution in its handling of speculative references. There is, therefore, a real degree of self-awareness in the work, and the project should not be described as naïvely subjective. Rather, it is a consciously situated practice-based inquiry.

A balanced review must, however, note certain limitations. First, while reflexivity is present, it is more implicit than systematically developed. Given the author's declared insider position and the central role of lived, bodily experience in the project, the dissertation would have benefited from a more explicit methodological engagement with autoethnography. This would have enabled a stronger reflexive account of the author's own position in the field and a clearer transformation of subjective, embodied experience into analytically usable research material.

Second, the evidentiary status of the empirical material is not always clearly specified. Interviews and observations are identified as key components of fieldwork, but the criteria for participant selection, the scope of generalization, and the relationship between individual testimony and broader claims about vibration's social or ontological significance could be articulated more precisely.

Third, the state of research, while rich in conceptual references, is somewhat more constructive and essayistic than it is analytically mapped in a formal state-of-the-art review. The reader receives a compelling constellation of references and concepts, but less of a sharply differentiated account of how this project departs from, extends, or contests existing work. In particular, the dissertation does not systematically situate itself within the established field of sound installation practice and scholarship. Key figures and references in this adjacent territory, for example, such as Brandon LaBelle's work on acoustic territories and relational listening, Salomé Voegelin's phenomenological approach to sound and silence, or Christoph Cox's materialist ontology of sonic flux, are not engaged. Similarly, existing practice-based research on sound sculpture and vibrational art, as documented in journals such as *Leonardo* or *Organised Sound*, could provide productive points of comparison and differentiation. These omissions do not invalidate the dissertation's own framework, which is coherent on its own terms, but they do limit the reader's ability to assess how the project's contribution relates to parallel trajectories in the field.

Technical Contribution and Authorship

According to the signed technical contribution statement, the *Monolith* was conceptually, visually, and sonically designed by Miruna Gheordunescu, while Marcel Oleszczak provided technical fabrication assistance, including building and welding the metal frame, cutting and finishing metal components, and assisting with assembly under the candidate's direct supervision. This clarification is sufficient and confirms that the doctoral candidate retains full authorship of the artistic work. The collaboration with engineers from Politechnika

Wrocławska on the touch-sensor coding is similarly documented and does not compromise the candidate's intellectual and artistic ownership of the project.

Supplementary Artistic and Didactic Achievements

The supplementary artistic and didactic achievements provide a strong foundation for the positive evaluation of the dissertation. The artistic portfolio demonstrates that the doctoral project is founded on a broader, sustained practice encompassing workshops, exhibitions, research projects, and multimedia experimentation. These activities establish entire stages of the project's conceptual and methodological development, not marginal additions.

The didactic achievements are likewise noteworthy. The candidate states that her pedagogical practice is inseparable from her doctoral research and treats pedagogy as a rhizomatic field where sound, body, and image intersect. The documented workshops, consultations, exhibitions, public discussions, and the MagiC Carpets residency in Nantes all demonstrate that her research was tested not only in studio practice but also in educational and curatorial situations.

Final Assessment and Recommendation

Overall, I assess Miruna Gheordunescu's dissertation as an original, mature, and valuable contribution to contemporary artistic research. Its strongest aspects are the conceptual ambition of its central problem; the coherent tripartite architecture moving from conceptual foundation through artistic-material testing to socio-cultural extension; the successful materialization of research questions in the Monolith installation; and the author's ability to translate embodied and scene-based experience into a sculptural and installation form of genuine artistic force.

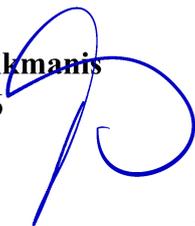
Based on my reading and analysis of the concept and realization of the doctoral dissertation *Vibrational Ontology: Body, Space and Sound in Electronic Music Performances*, encompassing both its artistic and written components, and after taking into consideration the artistic and didactic achievements of Miruna Gheordunescu, I conclude that the dissertation meets the requirements for the award of the doctoral degree in the field of Art.

I therefore recommend, in an unequivocal manner, that Miruna Gheordunescu be awarded the academic Ph.D. degree in the field of Art, in the discipline of Fine Arts and Art Conservation.

Reviewer: Andris Teikmanis

Date: March 11, 2026

Signature:



AI Use Disclosure: The grammar and style of the dissertation were improved with the use of the AI-enabled tool Grammarly. Neither the full dissertation nor any part of it was uploaded to any AI model. The dissertation evaluation was conducted solely by the reviewer.