

Dissertation review by:
Dr Michael Wamposzyc

School of Arts & Creative Industries
Merchiston Campus
10 Colinton Road
Edinburgh
EH10 5DT

16 February 2026

Doctoral student:
Miruna Gheordunescu.

Title of the doctoral dissertation:
Vibrational Ontology: Body, Space and Sound in Electronic Music Performances.

Field and discipline:
Doctoral Thesis in the field of Arts in the discipline of Fine Arts and Art Conservation.

Promotor: Prof. Dr hab. Magdalena Grzybowska.

Institution:
The Eugeniusz Geppert Academy of Art and Design, Wrocław.

Review:
The work submitted for review by Miruna Gheordunescu proposes “vibration” as a fundamental ontological force that unifies the relations between bodies, spaces, and sound. Following her own practice and engagement within DJ culture, Gheordunescu positions electronic music and more specifically the dancefloor as primary laboratory for her rhizomatic explorations. The well explained motivation is grounded in her own interest and observation, focusing on the moment where low-end frequencies dissolve individual biography into a “fluid togetherness” or “collective becoming”. The central argument for the proposed ontology is that sound should not be treated merely as an auditory signal but as mechanical vibration moving through matter, requiring a redefinition of the body not as a listener, but as a “sensor and resonator”. This is an interesting concept, which makes a good foundation for the theoretical and practical dimension of the work.

The methodology of the work is explicitly framed as practice-based research. The goal is not to scientifically explain physicality of vibration, but to create a “visual and spatial equivalent” of sonic insights. The author argues that placing the “living, breathing laboratory” of the club into dialogue with the critical reflection of the visual arts reveals shared properties and unspoken methodologies. Further, Gheordunescu describes how the “performative approach shaped the process” and how her approach “aligns with methods used in music and media, where immersion in the field enables access to tacit knowledge and practices often invisible to outsiders”. The intended outcome is a hybrid form of presentation that challenges the traditional “contemplative encounter” of art, proposing instead an “embodied attentiveness” where sound physically resonates with the viewer's body.

The theoretical framework is built on a “Sound<>Body<>Space” interaction, arguing that these elements form a coupled feedback system. The body registers low sound frequencies through receptors in the skin, while space functions as an active membrane that shapes vibrational encounters. On the side of the theory, the work is limited to around one single page of bibliography and relies heavily on three established concepts: Marcus Boon’s “politics of vibration”, which frames vibration as a connector across political and material planes; Steve Goodman’s “ecology of fear”, which addresses the affective power of unsound (infra/ultrasound); and Deleuze & Guattari’s “rhizome”. The rhizome is used particularly broadly to describe the dancefloor as a decentralised, non-hierarchical system, a “plateau of intensity” where multiple rhythms and timings coexist without collapsing into a single dominant narrative. This “plateau” logic contrasts with the “arborescent” (tree-like) models of traditional music, emphasising the form and character of collective interactions.

The rhizomatic logic is similarly applied to the installation practice. The artwork is intended to function not as a closed object but as an “assemblage”, open to multiple entry points and interactions, much like the example of the book, described by Deleuze and Guattari. As I understand from the documentation provided, methodologically the work employs a practice-based approach encompassing pedagogical workshops, ethnographic fieldwork, and external craft fabrication. It begins with a “Sound Storytelling” workshop, where participants translated auditory experiences into visual forms, treating the classroom as a rhizomatic space of mutual transformation. Gheordunescu’s exploration culminates in the creation of “Vibrational Ontology”, an installation featuring a 2,5-meter matte black steel monolith. Aesthetically referencing Kubrick’s 2001: A Space Odyssey, the sculpture vibrates its steel panels, turning the object itself into a resonating speaker. At the same time, interaction with its surface allows visitors to trigger fragments of pre-recorded interviews with other DJs and scene participants.

From the perspective of professional practice, Gheordunescu’s work translates the “vibrations” into academic discourse and a functional gallery encounter. The author’s dual role as a DJ and researching artist allows for a credible “insider” ethnography, documenting how “sonic governance”, the management of bass weight, room acoustics, chill-out zones, and psychedelics, acts as a form of collective care and culture. The collected interviews with other practitioners reinforce this, but let the viewer in a

potential limbo of participating but not belonging. Personally, I'm not convinced that the separate elements of the final installation achieve the intended synergy although, it must be said, that could be due to the fact that I didn't experience the installation in any form other than its description and documentation.

Artistically, the reliance on the "black box" aesthetic and the explicit Kubrick reference seems to me to reduce the work to a familiar gesture rather than to be a mode of autonomous inquiry. The monolith as a symbol of mystery and the unknown, represents a common trope in sound art, and while the use of transducers on metal seems the most logical and pragmatic technique, the interaction design, via a touch-trigger mechanism, lacks the complexity of the "rhizomatic" systems the author champions in writing. The main point of my critique would be, however, that the sculpture produced seems to be directly described in the same context on page 19ff, in Graham St John's seminal text "The difference engine. Liberation and the rave imaginary" within the compilation *Rave Culture and Religion* (2004), attributing as author Ramy (1999) in "The meaning of a rave" first published in City Heat Magazine:

"Remember 2001 A Space Odyssey? When a tribe of Neanderthals woke up to the giant monolith planted in their midst? Raves remind me a lot of that scene. When I watch a group of sweaty dancers rest their heads on the metallic grill of a giant, black speaker and attach their trembling chests to the gaping mouth of a pulsating woofer, I instantly remember the same ape, 2 million years ago, touching, sniffing and kissing the unfamiliar and fascinating dark object. Raves are about our future. They inspire us to become aware of our selves, our surroundings and our humanity. They are about how we will come together as a species and how we will treat each other. They are about how we will communicate and express our thoughts and emotions to one another (...)

In this extraordinary statement, rave is made synonymous with the black stone, the 'prima materia' or Philosopher's Stone which, in alchemical lore, is capable of transmuting humankind and which, according to interpretation (see Weidner 2000), inspired Stanley Kubrick's black monolith in 2001. While Spurgeon's rhetoric may be obscure, and Ramy's statement relatively unknown, an awakening thesis reappears in the web-saturated 'Raver's Manifesto', where it is stated that 'in the heat, dampness, and darkness' of the womb-like party, we came to accept that we are all equal. Not only to the darkness, and to ourselves, but to the very music slamming into us and passing through our souls: we are all equal. And somewhere around 35Hz we could feel the hand of God at our backs, pushing us forward, pushing us to push ourselves to strengthen our minds, our bodies, and our spirits."

To be clear, Miruna Gheordunescu references the above source and in the following chapters, also critically reflects on the paradox of dancefloor polyphony, and its collapse into one dominant voice. At the same time, it seems to me that the quoted influence and theoretical/aesthetic proximity risks opening the work to the critique of using decades-old and well-established cultural tropes without challenging or expanding them as a new contextual enquiry in the mid-2020s. The intriguing and innovative premise for the work becomes constrained by its adherence to established theoretical and aesthetic models. By relying on the "rhizome" to explain the rave (a theoretical move decades old) and the

“monolith” to represent the unspeakable (a cinematic and pop-cultural move over half a century old), the project creates a feedback loop that reinforces existing knowledge rather than generating new insights. I am saying this not to criticise the individual decisions of the author, but to indicate the potential of the “vibrational ontology” for further explorations.

The last two chapters are in my opinion the strongest parts of the work. Chapter 5 expands the analysis to the “socio-political ecology” of the club, framing it as a site of “collective survival” and “sonic governance”. Governance here is defined not as state control, but as the management of thresholds: the pacing of intensity, the distribution of bass-weight, and the “micro-practices of care”. The concept of the “plateau” re-emerges as a technique of “collective endurance”, where the DJ sustains intensity to hold the crowd in a state of suspended time, avoiding the exhaustion of premature peaks. The reflective flow of the argumentation significantly improves in this chapter, which provides clarity in the concluding chapter.

The final chapter frames the research as an “open work” (Eco) or, to follow Gheordunescu’s analogy, as a “rhizome that has no beginning or end, but only lines of flight”. Self-critically, the author acknowledges the technical limitations (e.g. scale, calibration) as productive constraints that clarified the importance of thresholds in her own practice. Gheordunescu concludes that the process did not resolve questions but “multiplied” them, confirming the generative nature of the chosen methodology. The thesis concludes by positioning vibration not just as a physical phenomenon, but as a “method for staying alive to experience”, making a full circle to the vitalist ontology of becoming.

In conclusion, based on the above observations and in my analysis of the concept and the practical realisation of the dissertation, I hereby support Prof. Dr hab. Magdalena Grzybowska’s opinion that the dissertation meets the criteria required for doctoral work in the field of art in the discipline of fine arts and art conservation.

I agree that Miruna Gheordunescu can be recommended for the award of the doctoral degree in the field of art in the discipline of fine arts and art conservation.



Dr Michael Wamposzyc
School of Arts and Creative Industries
Edinburgh Napier University; Scotland