

# Erik Lindeborg - Sounding Craft

Lecture at the CraftHub EU Conference Transformation: Effect and affect of craft in society

Video available on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r0wPbDLSqHg>

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Hi everyone, my name is Erik Lindeborg. I am a musician and artist from Sweden. I want to thank the arrangers of CraftHub for this invitation to speak about my current research project at Konstfack in Stockholm, which is titled “Sounding Craft”. In my project, I investigate how craftspersons can use musicality in their making, and how that affects the crafting process.

I am also interested in the opposite, how music performance as well as digital music production are situated within the craft field.

As we move through life, the air around us vibrates. Our bodies and actions produce sounds, which mix with the sounds of others, and with those of the natural and built environment. Our fragmented culture puts labels on different categories of sound. We distinguish between noise and music, and put on headphones while we work, so that we can use desirable sound to drown out the undesirable.

I want craftspeople to take off their metaphorical headphones and actually listen to what the hands are doing. There are many potential benefits to doing so. A musical approach can serve as a way for craftspersons to think about the performative aspects of their work. Music also has a very mature and well understood written language of performance, which might be extended to describe for example the work of a ceramicist in terms of a performance.

The craft practice can be heavy and monotonous, and I have met many tired and aching craftspeople. Using methods of musical performance while working might lead to more joy, and a feeling of lightness in the making. Maybe it could help improve ergonomics for a craftsperson, by stimulating elegance and economy of movement. Or maybe, by focusing on the surrounding soundscape, they might be able to restructure, to some extent, some activity within their practice, which produces a disruptive or damaging sound.

In this conference, we see many different examples of what craft is or can be. But let's take a minute to think about what music is. A commonly used definition of music comes from the French composer Edgard Varese. In response to critics of his own work, he defined music as any "Organized Sound" to finally settle the question "is this really music?".

There are critiques of this definition, which I will not go into, other than to say that my own way of defining music doesn't focus on the source of the sound at all, but on the experience of it. Anything that a listener perceives as music, is considered music. It could be a piano sonata, the melody of birdsong, the rustle of leaves in the forest, or the polyrhythm of footsteps in a transit hall.

Spending time with musicians, you begin to realize that they exist within a musical flow. They are always hearing music in their heads, and sounds in the environment can become part of that music. This sense of musicality can be trained. One of the inspirations for this project was the American composer and musician Pauline Oliveros. She describes her own discovery of what she calls *deep listening* like this:

I simply put a microphone in my window and recorded the sound environment until the tape ran off the reel. When I replayed the tape, I realized that although I had been listening carefully while I recorded, I had not heard all the sounds that were on the tape. I discovered for the first time how selectively I listened, and that the microphone discriminated much differently than I did. From that moment, I determined that I must expand my awareness of the entire sound field. I gave myself the seemingly impossible task of listening to everything all the time. Through this exercise I began to hear the sound environment as a grand composition.

Oliveros, 1984, p. 182

The background to my current research project is a more than decade-long artistic collaboration with the Romanian ceramic artist Diana Butucariu. Through a series of experiments, we have sought ways to combine music and crafts, using instrument making, performance, digital interfaces and material investigations.

This is a picture from our first project, Salonul Magic, in 2012. Diana made more than 200 small porcelain houses, which contained differently tuned bells. During the concert/exhibition, the audience used these house-bells to accompany the music played by the band.

The next picture is of an exhibition in Bucharest in 2018. Together with Diana and the animator Kaoro Furuko, we investigated the visual and sound characteristics of glass. The soundtrack for the exhibition was composed entirely using sounds made with glass objects.

In the exhibition Trying to Connect in 2017, at Galleri LarsPalm in Sandviken, we built sensors which could be incorporated into Diana's ceramics sculptures. Using an algorithmic and generative composition technique, the input from the sensors controlled the character and progression of the music, making the ceramic sculptures digital music instruments.

Next is a picture from a workshop I held at the 2016 OpenSet design symposium in Rotterdam. The participants were primarily graphic designers, and the exercise was to create music together using tools they would normally use in their daily life as designers. So with pens and pencils, rulers, water bottles and coffee cups, keychains and umbrellas, we created a music piece together, which was incorporated into the video about the symposium.

And finally, and approaching my current research, is a screenshot from a video from 2014, Rendezvous Point. During three days, me and another musician, Alexandru Sima, documented the process for three artists, Diana Butucariu, Mihai Coltofean and Dumitru Gurjii, to create a collective art piece. From this source material, I made a music and video piece documenting the entire process.

I believe that listening to your own recordings is a very revealing process. Some people find it scary, they cannot reconcile the recorded sound with their self-image. But if done with an open mind, it is an iterative process of creative self-discovery and improvement. When combined with the possibilities that modern editing techniques offer, the concept of the sound recording as document of a chronology is subverted completely, and new pasts, plausible, but unreal, can be constructed.

During the coming year, I will be recording, editing and listening to music together with craftspersons, and have conversations with them about this experience. At the end of the project I hope to have come to some valuable insights about the potential of musical methods in the craft field, as well as some interesting new music-craft.

You can find more information, as well as audio and video of earlier projects at my website: [eriklindeborg.github.io/portfolio](https://eriklindeborg.github.io/portfolio).

Thank you for your attention!