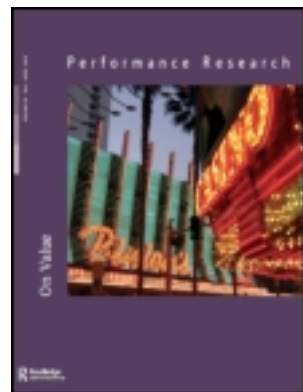


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Audible Scenography

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"for the time being" 05/2012

Audible Scenography

JOHANNES BIRINGER

'This is the theatre that was to be expected and foreseen', I wrote for the first edition of this journal in 1996. I don't remember now what was foreseen, but sixteen years later I propose thinking about scenography through auditory phenomena, shifting attention to what will unfold to be heard to be imagined – be 'foreheard' (rather than foreseen). If lamentation lies at the ritual core of public (political) performative acts of community self-constitution, as artist Monika Weiss suggests in her choral works (*Sustenazo*) and her implicit reference to John Cage's silence (the end of *EMPTY WORDS*), wouldn't we also remember Artaud's preoccupation with aural bodies and the 'indescribable vibrations' he imagined in the alchemical theatre of complete, sonorous, streaming naked realizations? Fortunately we could not see the corrosive, devastating screams and glossolalia in Artaud's radiophonic *Pour en finir avec le jugement de dieu* (1947), we could only hear them in the radio broadcast. But the phantasmatic dimensions of such work, for me, reverberate powerfully in contemporary installations, e.g. *Listening Post* by Mark Hansen and Ben Rubin, setting us adrift into vast suggestive horizons, stray voice-tracks sampled from unrestricted internet chatrooms in which people exchange their opinions, desires and dreams. Or driving us deeper into 'those things', e.g. the material, animated object environment in Heiner Goebbels's *Stifters Dinge* which evokes the incomprehensible beauty and terror of nature described by the romantic writer (Adalbert Stifter) but here translated into a sonic-producing scenography: a composition for pianos without pianists, a play with no actors, a performance without performers.

What do material and alchemical metaphysical manifestations sound like, today, in the era of networks, digital archives, crowdsourcing, transmissions and interactivities? Wouldn't constructions of scenographic space in contemporary performance dramaturgy, or the notion of environment, be inevitably affected and altered if approached from an audiophonic perspective of intermedial composition, from reconsideration of antiphonal structures?

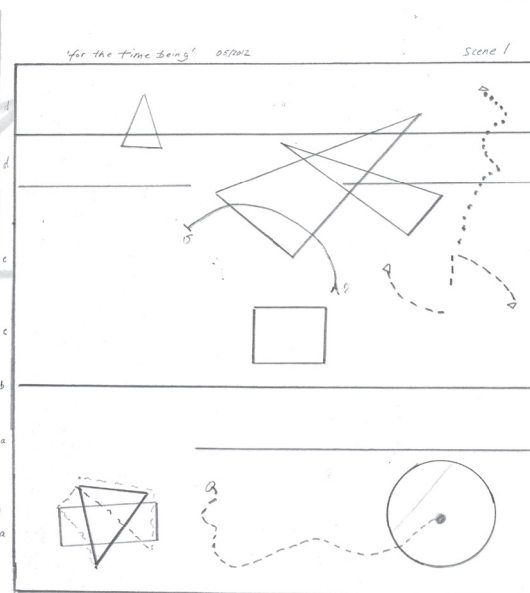
'Silence is the punctuation that forms the space and allows the work to breathe', says Monika Weiss, and sound is always present, like the weather. Challenges to scenography, the scoring of space, have arisen from the sustained experimentation, throughout the last century, of sonic and installation artists and composers. They moved from musical scores to graphic scores and algorithmic design in live coding environments; their sound has vastly impacted our sensorium, and thus our knowledge.

In current work with the DAP-Lab ensemble, we're particularly interested in resonant choreographies of sounding, polyphonal tracking and the potentials of 'wearable space'.¹ Here are some of our audio/visions:

¹ Founded in 2004 by Johannes Birringer and Michèle Danjoux, DAP-Lab's cross-media work highlights convergences between physical movement choreography, fashion/wearable design, and real-time interactive data flow environments. The ensemble has created online performances, video installations and interactive dance-works including *Suna no Onna* (2007–2008), *UKIYO [Moveable Worlds]* (2010), and *for the time being* (2012). See: <http://www.brunel.ac.uk/dap/> and <http://www.danssansjoux.org>

1. POLYPHONY

The environment breathes through generative processes, performers or objects make sound that orchestrate space: we hear the topography of performance. The synchronous layers of sounds and sound sequences, which are complex temporal objects working at different levels of temporalities, may be audible and yet not intelligible. We imagine hearing a multiplicity of fragments, and we connect them into our projective illusions. Such scoring of the scene becomes the 'dream of the audience' (Theresa H. K. Cha) listening to and synthesizing the timbres and cadences of acousmatic space, inhabiting it being ensounded, thus inhabiting the many vibrational layers of modulation.



■ Illustration:
AudioScore for
Scene 1, *for the time
being*, 2012.
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2. TRACKING (INTERACTIVITY)

Resonant dramaturgy involves composing movement choreographies in interactive relations to programmable environments. Interactions are not primarily conceived in terms of spatial concepts or scenography but in terms of notations for audiophonic choreography projecting audible and imaginary architectures for perception. Space becomes audible through multiple tracking, sampling and data processing. These possibilities of analog and digital tools and software combine with gestural expression, voice, movement, action, to play with the instruments of performance (humans, objects, networks).

3. SOUND WEARABLES AND *RAUMPARTITUR*

Sounding of the space is not only the effect of sound design and diffusion which can create distinct and variable acoustic territories, but is also a choreographic effect produced through the articulation of kinetic costumes (with built-in sensors) and inter-action with camera-vision systems (e.g. Microsoft Kinect) actuating audio-visual objects. This implies treating spatial architecture as a score and drawing attention to ways in which the performing bodies 'wear' space and receive/process environmental information. Intelligent-costume design, mobile media transmission and computation combine to create processual architectures (augmented reality) that can ceaselessly readjust relationships between collected data in real-time. Performance within such *Raumpartitur* (spatial score), which can extend to urban, dislocated and networked space, thus involves subjective experiences of a continuously re-generating system, a virtual architecture of listening and composing through participating in 'relationscapes', heightening awareness of sounding-movement and plastic rhythms in 3D, 4D and 5D (floating choreographic forms).

Audible scenography suggests the unfolding of conductivity, of reverberating presences, between all temporal, animated events in the scene. This scene is never static but always dynamic and generative.

References include M. Weiss, *Sustenazo (Lament)* [2010], A. Artaud, *The Theatre and its Double* [1958]; Paulo C. Chagas, *Digital Composition* [2012], Erin Manning, *Relationscapes* [2009], D. Roesner, *Theater als Musik* [2005], T. H. K. Cha, *The Dream of the Audience* [2001], H. Goebbels, *Stifters Dinge* [2007]. DAP-Lab publications: e.g. J. Birringer, "Moveable Worlds/Digital Scenographies," *IJPADM* [2010]; J. Birringer/M. Danjoux, "The Sound of Movement Wearables," *Leonardo* [2013].