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About Sounding Bodies and Talking Clothes

The great author Denis Diderot, one of the founders of the *Encyclopédie Française* has the jewels of the dames at sultan Mangogul's court talking. In "Les bijoux indiscrets" one hears the voices of the jewels of Alcine, Monima, Ismene and some others from under their skirts. In the fourth movement of an opera a whole choir of the precious jewels of thirty (female) singers can be heard, while the orchestra remains undisturbed and goes on playing. This results in some surprising effects and creates fascinating changes of perception in the novel. Mangogul, in order to make the jewels speak, turns the gem of a ring he received by the genius Cucufa.

Benoit Maubrey and Hans Peter Kuhn—in their era of satellites, computers and entertainment electronics—are not forced to rely on a ring's powers. Surprise and irritation of perception is achieved by their media-persons and audioclothes as well. I hear a helicopter fly over the square, and look up into the sky—just to find out that the sound comes from the back of a person not far from me. The person turns over, the sound changes and I start noticing other persons in the nearness, all sounding. They all wear similar clothes, from a tiger- or leopard-dotted skin, suits both for men and women. The sounding persons move around as if following a choreography, separating and coming together again. I hear the word "experience" sounding from seven human bodies. Seven performers move in circles around Berlin's Gedächtniskirche, a word mix repeating itself in the acoustic space, undergoing variations: the word "xxx experience", coming from the distance, then pronounced directly towards me, disappearing again. The sounds move in the shape of a spiral, with the churches' spire as an axis. Passersby follow the performers in the quest to understand exactly what is said. Asking questions to the performers. A turn of the body and from the back a bird's voice answers. This was the Audio-Herd. You heard the Audio-Herd live in Berlin, Breitscheidplatz, on September 1st, 1985. Benoit Maubrey: Concepts, Hans Peter Kuhn: Tapes.

Audio People—sounding human bodies, or are they just walking PA boxes? To cover our nakedness we wear clothes to keep us warm, as well as for design purposes. Clothes serve to stage the person, as uniforms they do so for the presentation and demonstration of importance, strive and power of institutions. Marshall MacLuhan noted that in the clothing of the nearer past the stress from the merely optical has been shifted towards the plastic, the tactile and that a ritual "producing" of our bodies in private and public has developed. The talking clothes by Maubrey and Kuhn enlarge our clothing towards the acoustical and the auditive, and both our bodies and our skin gain a plasticity of sound. The Audio-Herd is felt with all our senses simultaneously, the talking clothes are found out to be a "hot" medium just like radio, by the help of which a personal relationship between the author and the listener, the audioperformer and the audience is created. Just in contrast to the walkman, which isolates the listener from his environment, which makes him a monad.

Simultaneously the audio-people are to be considered loudspeakers in motion. The performers wear the PA units in their clothes and thus the sounds reproduced by them up a staircase, the speakers and the sounds slowly move away and disappear into another room, are turned against a wall, and the sounds reflected there. All in all the Audio-Herd is a sound sculpture in space, a breathing organism of sound expanding and contracting. Naturally, these moving loudspeakers are no robots but human performers able to react spontaneously to the audience's reactions, and to orient their movements and choreography for instance according to the changes of a traffic light or other time structures found in a certain situation.

Hans Peter Kuhn is a musician, Benoit Maubrey is a plastician, and both have emerged from the discussive and operative context of Berlin artists dealing with a space- and situation-oriented art form. Painters, musicians, sculptors do not produce images, compositions or

sculptures in an atelier, a studio any more, just to have them transported from one exhibition to another, from one concert to the next. They rather want to interfere as artists with their personal media and abilities into any situation they understand as spatial, temporal, social, historical, etc., issues and constellations. Their artistic interventions usually work at the periphery, not in the center of a situation, and try to set in motion a perception of personal and material matters, not trying to build up their artistic personality as "genius" and to hail to a egocentric notion of Art, but rather to keep things in the flow of perception. And so Benoit Maubrey and Hans Peter Kuhn use the space, squares, roads and parks they find in an urban context, the uniforms and costumes found there as well as the local everyday sounds. The audio-people are integrated into the situation found, a kind of mimesis is expressed in the different set-up of audio-people for the different situations encountered. Thus a living and virulent germ may be created, able to keep a city and the people living there from barrenness and setting things in motion.

April 1986

The Audio-Uniform Concerts for Linz

Audio Jackets were initially created as a way to install mobile loudspeaker systems in open-air situations. At first loudspeakers and a mini-amplifier were sewn onto second-hand clothes in such a way as to permit spectators to hear cassettes played through a minirecorder. In 1984 the idea for an AUDIO-UNIFORM was conceived: This is a series of suits for men and women equipped with a loudspeaker-corset inside the jacket and a custom-built amplifier mounted on the back. With a group of people wearing AUDIO-UNIFORMS one can create sound environments in public situations.

The first uniform was built for the "AUDIO-HERD" project for the Bundesgartenschau in 1985 (a 100-acre landscaped garden created in West Berlin). The AUDIO-HERD wore an AUDIO-UNIFORM made of fur-like polyester material and played the recorded sounds of animals (cranes, frogs, monkeys, birds, human beings, etc) indigenous to the particular garden area where they were perambulating. In effect a soundtrack and action choreography were programmed for the various vegetation areas within the garden.

This uniform subsequently performed in various cities where the performance of the seven suits were adapted into different urban landscapes: for example, pedestrian traffic signals were used to choreograph the uniforms at a major street intersection in Hamburg and parallel escalators were used to dictate their movements in an indoor shopping mall in Munich.

In Linz, the steel-producing capitol of Austria, 10 AUDIO-UNIFORMS will be built using steelworker's outfits and sounds from the local steel plant.

For the opening night of Ars Electronica Hans Peter Kuhn will create a live concert of vocal, electronic and industrial sounds on the Hauptplatz, Linz's central town square. As opposed to a normal concert situation where a static loudspeaker system is used to amplify the music, this concert will be played live through the AUDIO-STEELWORKERS-UNIFORM (as individual and mobile P.A. systems). This event will happen with the cooperation of the ORF (the Austrian radio station). Two transmission vans will be used: one at the central square will transmit the live vocal and electronic section of the concert, the second will transmit the live sound of a gigantic anvil from the steelwork plant. Both sources will be mixed and broadcast over the radio station. For this event the AUDIO-UNIFORMS will be specially equipped with radio receivers, and will amplify this concert in a choreography within the town square (Hauptplatz). This concert can also be heard naturally by anyone in the possession of a standard radio.

For the following festival days the uniforms will be choreographed into different spaces in the city of Linz (for example in the Botanic Gardens, in the Donau Park, on the local bridges and

in the side streets) using tape recordings with steelworkers' sounds and elements of the live concert.

March 1986

Benoit Maubrey/Hans Peter Kuhn

Benoit Maubrey/Hans Peter Kuhn

Projects in common

1984 Performance AUDIOCLOTHES, Staatliche Kunsthalle Berlin

Installation THE AUDIO CAFE, Art and Media, Staatliche Kunsthalle Berlin

Installation DIE AUDIO BADEWANNE (AUDIO BATHTUB), Kutscherhaus, Berlin

1985 Performance AUDIO UNIFORM, Bundesgartenschau Berlin, Gasteig Kulturzentrum
Munich, Alternativa Lisbon

Installation THE BOX, Gasteig Kulturzentrum Munich, Friedensbiennale Kunsthalle
Hamburg