

"When cursing was working" — "5 Listening"

Hans Peter Kuhn

"When cursing was working"

Sound installation for the Hauptplatz of Linz

For the duration of Ars Electronica a microphone will be installed in one corner of the main square of Linz whose cable will lead into a gully nearby. In the opposite corner of the square there will be a loudspeaker fed by the cable coming from the gully.

Passers-by are invited by a sign attached to the microphone to voice their frustrations, their anger into the microphone, to pour their bad temper into the gully.

As if by magic, in the underground of the sewerage all their curses and insults are changed into praises and good wishes for their fellow-beings and can be heard from the loudspeaker at the other end of the Hauptplatz.

"5 Listening"

In six short and unpretentious scenes the sound performance 5 Listening deals with basic concepts of listening. The audience should be familiar with the titles of the scenes beforehand, e.g. from a program folder.

Scene 1: You can hear a pin drop

On stage: a table and a chair. The performer enters, sits down on the chair, stares into the audience and waits for silence to set in. When everybody is quiet the performer keeps his mute and motionless position until the audience starts to get restless again. When, after a short while, the audience has quieted down again, the performer slowly picks up a pin from the table and drops it on the floor in front of him. Due to the extraordinary silence in the auditorium, the sound of the dropping pin is perfectly audible.

Scene 2: Dialogue

On stage: two chairs, with a microphone stand in front. A magnetophone has been placed on one chair, the other one is occupied by the performer. The performer opens an everyday dialogue with the words "Good evening", and turns on the tape, which answers "Good evening" in the performer's voice. Subsequently, the tape keeps repeating the performer's words until the latter indignantly says, "Aw, shut up!", whereupon the tape snaps back, "Don't get smart!".

Scene 3: Furniture

This scene and the following two require a second performer who can be instructed on the spot.

On stage: two creaky chairs on which contact microphones have been installed. The first performer makes every conceivable effort to sneak noiselessly onto the stage; he finally sits down on the chair which loudly creaks in every joint. When he has finally managed to keep the chair from creaking, which causes him to sit in a terribly uncomfortable position, the second performer sneaks in. It goes without saying that he has the same problem. Both performers join in this "concert for chairs" for a while before they sneak off-stage together.

Scene 4: Music 1

Again, there are two chairs on stage. The first performer enters; he is equipped with a walkman blaring Frank Sinatra's "My Way". The performer sings along with the music in the way we are all familiar with from public transport. The second performer, who has entered the stage shortly after the first one, acts in the same way. The song is, however, played with a little time-lag. The audience hears the music in its transformed state, as sung by the performers, only.

Scene 5: Music 2

In this scene, the performers carry ghetto blasters blaring at maximum volume instead of walkmen. They also play Sinatra's "My Way" with a time-lag. The two performers, of course, sing along again; only this time the audience can't hear them due to the enormous din the two tape players produce.

Scene: 6: The Museum

On stage there is a white stand resembling the ones used in museums to display small sculptures, with a walkie-talkie on top. Over the loudspeakers in the auditorium the beautiful twittering of birds slowly fades in. Spring morning atmosphere. Schubert's Sonata for piano Nr. 21 in B sharp gets more and more distinct. When the birdcalls and piano music have reached normal volume, a voice is heard from the walkie-talkie, saying "Hello", and after a prolonged pause again "Hello". This is repeated a couple of times, followed by a fade-out of Schubert's music, then by the birdcalls, until silence has set in.