

## EVERYBODY HAS EARS, BUT FEW CAN LISTEN<sup>1</sup>

Is “Celesta Solaris” a ‘sound-sculpture’? The interpretation of the word found in the usual dictionaries has extended. No longer has it only to be understood as a plastic labour that is the ‘work of a sculptor’ who brings a shape out of materials such as stone, clay or plaster. Many contemporary sculptures underlie a process of development that is exactly contrary - as they are put together from components. Thus for example the video-sculptures by Nam June Paik. Paik’s particular aesthetics, in this, is mainly not conveyed on the sculptural level, even if monitors form beds, ships and chandeliers. And not on the materialistic level - not regarding the visible logos of the companies having monitors - as visualisations of auditive progresses, dynamics and rhythms: music for the eye. What do we have to expect of a ‘sound-sculpture’? A form composed of resonant material, that - through manipulation of the recipient, through natural forces, or by itself - makes sounds, conditioned by its material, audible? Or a structure being obliged to the formal allegory of form to sound? Robert Schumann already adopted the idea that the aesthetics of one art is also that of another.<sup>2</sup> In fact this sound-sculpture can be compared to the intentions of the Italian painter and futurist Fortunato Depero who, around 1916, had created sculptures that “should make their inner dynamics understandable through noises”.<sup>3</sup> But Tilman Küntzel, in his sound-sculpture “Celesta Solaris” and all of his other works of ‘sound-art’, lacks any meta-physical intentions, he rather formally quotes with this a science fiction cult-movie from the 70’s: Stanley Kubrick’s “2001: A Space Odyssey”, where a black monolith represents the central figure. In this film the monolith stays inscrutable up to the end, mysterious and threatening - a power that from computer and man to the whole universe takes over control at last. To with nearly identical measures - and it actually proves to be an attraction to many visitors of the park, who - with astonishment - inspect it from all sides, touch it and listen to it. Like in the movie this monolith is mute too most of the time and only seldom sounds, namely at times when the intensity of the sunbeams lets it. Something mysterious, thus, that makes coming back worthwhile. That this is not a serious attempt to reach the intensity of Kubrick’s movie (and not at all to musically cope with Ligeti’s works) can be seen in a small extending function of Küntzel’s monolith: the folding seat. Küntzel freshly and without respect breaks up with the ‘unimpeachable’ character of the movie and makes the comparison with Kubrick’s monolith become a persiflage. This subtle sense of humour and the playful yet self-destructive handling of items of our society at the end of the 20th century can be found in many of his works. The more, a claim for the psychological process and its reflection in reception of Küntzel’s works is demanded here.

“Celesta Solaris” is not only about producing sounds. It is also about hearing - and the way of functioning and the conditions of the recipient’s perception. For Tilman Küntzel Marcel Duchamp’s idea that the imagination of the observer is as important as the artist’s action is of central meaning.<sup>5</sup> Because of a lack of ‘things being worth to hear’ a great part of society has ‘taken the ear out’ of the everyday continuity of perception.<sup>6</sup> To sensitise auditive perception is a concern of ‘sound-art’ in general. For that purpose T.K. offers a pleasant situation: the seat, integrated in the square stone is directed to the south; the visitor is leaning against a warm metal wall, the sound generators and motors are

panoramicly attached around his head on the inside of this wall. Besides the sounds are physically perceptible through subtle vibrations that continue through the metal. "In situations that are free from compulsion to act, perception can develop unhindered (...)". Resting on the seat, the sculpture has totally vanished from the recipient's view; the visual perception of the sculpture is left out of consideration at that moment. As the sound generators are hidden inside the monolith, the visitor doesn't want to search for the resources generating the sounds and he doesn't expect an 'aha'-effect (respectively a feeling of success - therefore without 'efficiency'). There is a reduction to feeling oneself which can be the precondition of a mental "indifference", verbalised by Kant.<sup>8</sup> The subtle sounds seem to be mysterious and stimulate to enter into the auditive perception as an aesthetically experience and to search for an own inner picture. Even if the 'monolith' is mute by lack of sunlight-intensity, this work can function. A precondition for this is the recipient to be open minded for the perception of the 'soundscape' that surrounds him. Elements of this 'soundscape' are birds, cars that drive past, visitors of the park, children, dogs, sounds of the other sound-objects, church bells, local residents and unexpected things. Within the meaning of John Cage, all acoustical incidents can become musical material and all perceptible occurrences thus can become aesthetically material. The exercise is to notice the appearance of the acoustical incidents in temporal progress and to understand them as a composition. For his "sound-sculpture without sound"<sup>9</sup> Tilman Küntzel requires a "fictitious recipient"<sup>10</sup> who is able and willing to hear, recognise and comprehend and to want a 'soundscape' as a "new definition of the relation between acoustic empiricism and compositorial imagination".<sup>11</sup> For: "Everybody has ears, but few can listen."

Leo J. Silbermann Dec., 1997

See also the essay titled A CD AT THE MUSEUM by Tilman Küntzel, which was published in the same catalogue. It describes the audio pice WIR FANGEN DAS MÖGLICHE, which he composed for the catalogue of this exhibition

1 Quotation. R. Murray Schafer, essay: "Soundscape und akustische Ökologie", in "Klangkunst" catalogue for "Sonambiente Festival", Berlin 1996 back

2 Helga de la Motte-Haber in: "Klangkunst" catalogue for "Sonambiente Festival", Berlin 1996, essay: "Klangkunst - eine Neue Gattung?", p. 13 back

3 *ibid.*, p.16 back

4 "Atmospheres" from '61 and "Requiem" from '65 back

5 In Motte-Haber, *ibid.*, p. 15 back

6 cf. Sabine Breitsameter, "klang (in der) landschaft", central thesis of R. Murray Schafer's "Akustische Ökologie", "Klangkunst" catalogue for "Sonambiente Festival", Berlin 1996, p. 213 back

7 cf. Arnold Gehlen, "Über instinktives Ansprechen auf Wahrnehmung". Quotation from: "Hören im musikalischen Environment" by Sabine Sanio, "Klangkunst" catalogue for "Sonambiente Festival", Berlin 1996, p. 232 back

8 cf. Immanuel Kant, "Kritik der Urteilskraft", ed. by Wilhelm Weischedel, Frankfurt/M. 1975, 2, p. 116 back

9 cf.: "A space without art", three-part exhibition cycle by Klara Wallner '93, "A space without sound-art", "Sonambiente Festival", Berlin 1996 back

10 An allusion on Richard Wagner's supposition that extremely specialising in one sense organ, which is demanded by separate art genres, requires a fictitious recipient; cf. la Motte-Haber, *ibid.*, p. 12. back