

TONSPUR 81:

Natalia Domínguez Rangel
L I S T E N

Eight-channel sound work and seven-part series of images
22.7.19 – 21.09.19
TONSPUR_passage / Q21/MQ, Vienna

Acoustic Folds: An Infra-Ordinary Monument to a Passage

L I S T E N is an eight channel site-specific sound sculpture including a series of seven monochrome posters based on a photograph of the space and printed in a different saturation of yellow. The piece was produced for the TONSPUR passage at MQ, Vienna. It draws on its acoustic qualities, spatial orientation, and engages with the history of the surrounding area. The sound composition weaves together different types of material: field recordings made in the passage in July 2019 by the artist, archive records of ambient sound of the areas around, excerpts from Gustav Mahler's *Piano Quartet* (1876), sound fragments that resonate with the history of the complex of the MQ, and fragments from Bill Fontana's *Landscape Soundings* (1990).¹ Domínguez Rangel's composition is punctuated by a series of cues stating a particular time of the day, or a year, recorded in her own voice, rendered as split in a male and female version, and played together in a synchronous resonance to establish a rhythm composed by a series of incisions in time that cut forward and step back in a non-chronological sequence.

L I S T E N explores the virtual sonic boundaries of the public space of the passage offering passers-by an experience of listening choreographed from south to north, which folds several past moments into the ephemeral *now* of passing. The sound excerpts used by the artist compose an internally heterogeneous constellation: some are field recordings, some are excerpts from journalistic reportages, which carry a trace of the ambient sound of the urban space around MQ, some belong to the space of fiction – a musical quotation, or a sound artwork, and some are sound illustrations to an imagined event. This constellation of records writes through montaging, a history of the place, an acoustic history, a strange history, in other words. When one says history, one thinks of chronology of events and the narrative interpretation of a set of records, or documents. There are many different ways to tell a historical story, one can use fiction and a variety of ways to compose a sequence. L I S T E N invites us to listen to a composition of acoustic fragments that cut through the texture of chronological time to become a micro-monument to the passage. Monuments are site-specific symbolic representations of events of historic importance. But they, in a sense are always an abstraction, and every abstraction flattens lived experience with its deeper texture. L I S T E N is a site-specific sound sculpture that draws on the

¹ Live sound sculpture made for the spaces around Museum of Art History and the Museum of Natural History in Vienna.

acoustic history of the passage. It poses the question - how can one make a monument to, or of, the passing, the ephemeral? It is a question of considering another mode of historicising, which has to do with the delicate texture of lived experiences and memories, which belong to the non-visual, to the acoustic.

The site specificity of sound is different than the one of sculptural objects. They are either monuments specific to a place, or a mark made on a landscape or an intervention in an architectural object. Sound can be said to be specific to a site as a record of its ambient acoustics. In a second sense, it too, can be used to sonically mark the place, for example by playing a sound to bring out the resonant qualities of an architectural space. L I S T E N is both composition of site specific records and an a spatially choreographed intervention, which is faithful to the liquid, one could also say micro-monumental quality of sound and its capacity to render present distant moments in time. Sound resists an installation in the sense of framing, for the simple reason it is not a still, the way a photographic still is, or even a film still. It spills and it resonates. As Jean-Luc Nancy puts that:

The sonorous [...] outweighs form. It does not dissolve it, but rather enlarges it; it gives an amplitude, a density, and a vibration or an undulation, whose outline never does anything but approach. The visual persists until its disappearance; the sonorous appears and fades away into its permanence.²

Field recordings are in a basic sense an imprint, or photographs of the acoustic texture of the space. L I S T E N grafts such records onto the acoustic past of the space of the passage and its surrounding area. This operation can be compared to editing a photograph, or perhaps to creating a photographic collage. Still, it is a sculpture, because it works with space articulation, volume, and establishes itself in a relationship to its environment. It is however, immaterial, as it addresses itself to the sense of hearing and it invites critical listening. Acoustic texture when it does not involve speech, implies a particular intensity of perception, which can make memories present in a powerful way. It touches upon the affective texture of lived experience and it has to do with presence in a strong sense, with making things present again, but without exactly re-presenting them.

L I S T E N invites every passer-by to become a listener and the simple act of passing is framed, even if is for a moment by an acoustic augmentation that juxtaposes several temporalities. The time of experiencing the sound sculpture as the time it takes to walk through the passage, next to that the actual duration of the piece, but also the personal duration of the time every passer-by who becomes an active listener, takes to experience the piece. This time is characterised by duration is co-present with the deeper past carried of the archive records and the music fragments. This collage of times, both as durations and as historical times, is punctuated by a voice announcing the time in a non-chronological sequence. This is the only speech fragment present in the piece, it

² Jean-Luc Nancy, *Listening*, translated by Charlotte Mandell (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), p.2

is a specific device, which I can compare to defining an object in a photograph in a sharp focus. Speech solicits listening *and* understanding. The voice-incisions also establish the documentary weight of a record by saying this happened there and then. But they also mark the temporal horizon what Georges Perec called the *infra-ordinary*:

What speaks to us, seemingly, is always the big event, the untoward, the extraordinary [...] How should we take account of, question, describe what happens every day and recurs every day: the banal, the quotidian, the obvious, the common, the ordinary, the infra-ordinary, the background noise, the habitual?³

This is an important question. What qualifies as a significant event that is worthy of recording? The texture of the everyday as witnessed by Perec tells us - everything counts! Series of openings, series of micro-events, series of statements, fragments. They have the power of the specificity of insignificant facts and form very fine dust of the everyday. Their strange significance is bound to precisely this, or that moment of time. I found this in the notes made by Natalia "four-fifty-eight am: mic up, right facing TONSPUR in MQ (from here increasing birds)."⁴

The time of listening is the time of passing. The place irrupts onto itself and time layers in a strange intensity creating a palimpsest of acoustic traces in a gradation from harmony to its opposite. The virtual sonic reality of L I S T E N is the opposite of soundscape for architecture; it starts from the articulation of the space of the passage and how it sounds, then invites the listener to experience amplification, and then to stay and listen to the shadow of the acoustic event.

Alena Alexandrova 21 July 2019, Vienna

³ Georges Perec, "Approaches to What?", In: *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces*, translated by John Sturrock (London: Penguin, 2008), p. 209-10

⁴ Notes on the field recordings made by the artist.