

Enrique Medoza's 'Words over Swords / *Worte statt Schwerte*' commissioned and produced by TONSPUR Kunstverein Wien presents in its 8-channel sonic field meandering sound, undulating, rising and falling in frequency as well as in volume. At first glance no stable meter or repeating rhythmic structures are discernible. Still its progressions in time are guided by relationships listeners can easily relate to. After a while it becomes apparent that many of 'Words over Swords' sound structures build on temporal patterns and sonic developments found in the speaking voice.

From time to time voices seem to shine through, but not that they would be drowned out by other, louder sonic events; they present themselves in reduced forms; vocal structures rather than human speakers emanating from the loudspeakers. Abstracted aspects clearly evoke that audible human presence so closely and intimately known to us. Cropped from their origins and contexts they resound in isolation; amplitude envelopes, formant structures, timing sequences of fricatives, etc. While clearly hinting at human actions and utterances somewhere behind these mediated traces, speakers remain unintelligible.

While there is no steady meter in 'Words over Swords' sonic scape, there is steady resonance to these fragments of recorded, de- and reconstructed voice, a stable virtual resonating body enveloping these voices' traces. They resonate in very different ways compared to when they were firstly spoken; in front of masses of people, exciting them in wholly different ways to how a recorded sound resonates in the 'body' of a reverberation algorithm.

Volume envelopes and formant transitions evoke shadowy existences transporting us into the presence of speakers and spoken acts long bygone. In his statement to his work Enrique Mendoza describes historical events around the Anschluss of Austria to Hitler's Germany in 1938 that the artist's country Mexico was the only nation to formally object to. This act of political violence found one of its culmination points in a speech of an audibly excited man

resonating in an audibly excited crowd of thousands on the Heldenplatz, only a few minutes' walk away from the installation's site.

'Words over Swords' is based on archival recordings of political speeches as well as sounds of weaponry of that time. Enrique Mendoza's treatment of these historic recordings does eliminate the semantic level of the spoken word. In doing so it motivates people to listen to trajectories of human communication and patterns of resonance between the single voice and those of the many. At several points in time in the installation's soundtrack the traces of a single voice excite resonators which thereafter – as if by magic – keep up the energy, whereas sounds seemingly stemming from the masses rise from noise simply to disappear back into it. Remnants of single voices resonate; textures from the chanting crowds emanate and dissipate.

Words not Swords opens up a sonic space between its 8 loudspeakers as well as an open field for playful search for sources, historical acts and human utterances that - in the context of this artwork - resurrect in rather new sonic shapes.

Volkmar Klien, January 2021