

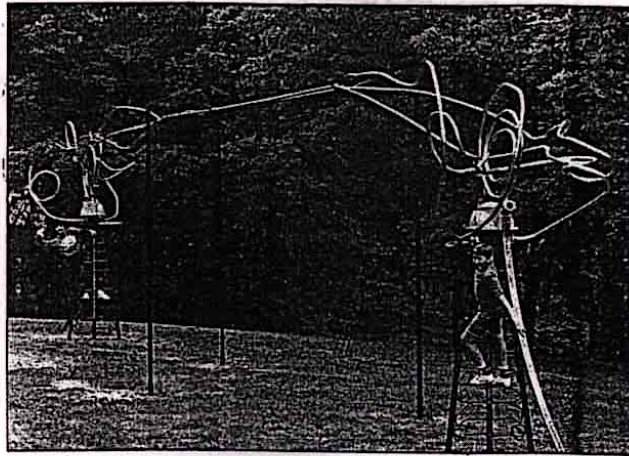
NOISY SCULPTURE HEARD IN TORONTO PARKS - SOUNDSCAPE

Entertainment - The Globe and Mail, August 12, 1987 - Review including "Nirvana" (1987) - Robert Everett-Green

THE GLOBE AND MAIL, WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 12, 1987 C5

ENTERTAINMENT

Noisy sculpture heard in Toronto parks



Mantled Voice, by Toronto sculptor Cecilia Varga, attracts the attention of Tony Matta and Terry Chittle.

BY ROBERT EVERETT-GREEN
The Globe and Mail

It sounds like a good idea for a children's book: a park bench that talks. Why not, with gods of animated latex prattling through films for Spielberg and Co?

This bench exists not in a book or a film, however, but in Toronto's Grange park. And though some may take it for a joke — sitting on it can certainly be comical — it is an artwork, of the hybrid variety known as sound sculpture.

Toronto artist Micah Lexier's (hard) 1, the bench is one of 10 sound sculptures from across Canada on display in five Toronto parks until Sept. 8. Entitled Soundscape,

the exhibition was produced by the Music Gallery, with works chosen by a three-man jury (Michael Snow, Nobuo Kubota and Allan Mattia) with funding provided by three levels of government and Citibank Canada.

Why make noisy sculptures? The answer depends mostly on the maker's primary discipline. For visual artists, sound sculpture is primarily a species of public art, and as such offers an alfresco escape from the closed circuitry of small-gallery exhibitions. The introduction of sound (especially speech) provides a built-in means for grabbing the attention of passerby, and of implying the communications media that figure in much socially aware art-making.

For composers, sound sculpture provides the most challenging format for chance-oriented music events. The piece itself can be rigorously planned, but once it is up and running, it must contend with every sort of random sound contribution. This situation has obvious appeal for composers concerned with the idea of a sound ecology that extends beyond the concert hall (The current exhibition's title contains a clear reference to R. Murray Schafer's notion of soundscape, the aural counterpart of a landscape or cityscape).

Unfortunately, some of the random contributions endured by the Soundscape pieces have been less than creative. Within weeks of the

opening on June 20, vandals had destroyed one piece and disabled three others.

Halifax artist Michael Fernandes' De Fence (in High Park), for example, started as a two-metre wood fence looping round a long wrapped box visible only through a construction site peep-hole. At longish intervals, a recorded voice sternly announced: "You name it — we can build it. In those trees we see houses, boats and furniture. We just have to go in — and take it out."

That was before thieves, aided by the cover afforded by the fence, liberated the sound equipment (an eminently streetwise response to the idea of going-in-and-taking-out). Now a wall-mounted plaque proclaims Fernandes' text — which in any case had served more as part of a piece of ecological media art, than as a means of random integration with a natural sound environment. Fernandes' more specific theme is controlled presentation, specifically the means of focussing latent desires and fuelling consumerism. This has been a well-tilled field of late, and Fernandes' turn with the plough doesn't expose anything new.

Kingston composer David Keane's Sound Lodge (with sculptor Reinhard Reitzenstein) is a much denser, less schematic work. The shape and materials of the Sound Lodge — a pre-industrial teepee structure built of stainless steel and rubberized canvas — suggest a new ecology of the natural world with the technological, while gaining some of the meeting-place warmth of an Indian lodge. Set by a lake in High Park, the Lodge contains a computerized sound production device, programmed to produce random elaborations as its exterior surfaces are touched.

Unfortunately, the full effect of the work has never been realized, due to invasive bugs (a rare problem for teepee builders) and vandalism. The Lodge's sound synthesizer is now set on automatic, making the structure a tad less interactive than it should be. Still, it's a surprisingly successful attempt to define a

symmetrical circle of community amid the civilized anarchy of the

A PROJECT OF THE
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(article not original layout)

music design technical problems beset Halifax sculptor Donna Hiebert's For the Time Between... at Queen's Park. A large copper vessel, shaped like an onion-bellied watering can, it is essentially an ear trumpet for amplifying the sound of a falling drop of water. A defective filter, however, has repeatedly clogged the works, and a visitor-induced crack at the base of the vessel has made it incapable of holding water. While it was operational, Hiebert's piece in any case seemed expressive of a rather blindered interest in perception for its own sake.

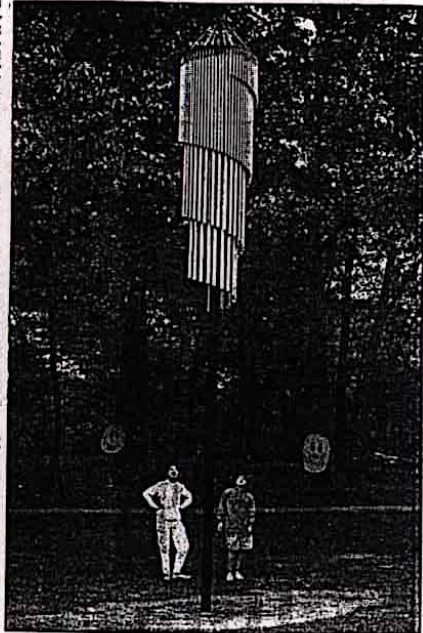
Calgary artist Steven Heimbecker's Nirvana (also in High Park) takes a similarly modest route, this one mapped out millennia ago by the maker of the first wind chime. Nirvana is a 1,200-pound circular chime, suspended from the top of a flagpole. Unlike the lightweight chimes sold in Chinatown, this one needs a hefty breeze to make any sound at all, so that listening to it quickly becomes a matter of listening to the many more urgent noises surrounding it.

This band-switch method of tuning the oblivious ear has been current ever since John Cage wrote his "soundless" compositions in the early fifties. In Heimbecker's hands, it is allied to an intriguing, introverted physical shape that could be taken for an up-ended quotation of Vietnam Tet's Monument to the Third International — the premier symbol of a braver, newer age than our own. And yet the piece as a whole feels a bit meagre, not much more than a stylish reworking of familiar ideas.

The humorous side of this show shows up best in Toronto sculptor Cecilia Varga's Mantled Voice, at High Park. This is a fabulous, extravagant structure consisting of two baroque ornamented ladders, set roughly nine metres apart, and connected by an overhead tangle of copper pipe. Anyone can climb up and (as Bernie Miller was exhorting everyone last summer) throw his voice to the person on the ladder opposite. Some have climbed more exuberantly than Varga would have liked, tearing down a 12-foot stretch of pipe, which has recently been replaced.

Mixed up with the old-time ventriloquism of Mantled Voice are overtones of antiquated sci-fi, as well as the steely fluidity of industrial Art Nouveau. Allusions to more powerful communications lie just under the surface; the supports for the copper tubing, for instance, resemble telephone poles, or electrical transmission lines.

Toronto sculptor Micah Lexier's bench, temperamentally similar and with a comparable degree of fun, takes in other respects a directly opposite approach. In place of Varga's flashiness is a meticulous



Angela Matta, 9, and Michelle Portelli, 12, examine Nirvana.

concern for self-effacement, for avoiding any obvious claim to being "art." Only when someone sits down do they hear the recorded snippets of conversation Lexier has stored inside, which are played out across the back-mounted stereo speakers at a walking pace.

Aside from the effect of mimicking the sort of things one routinely hears while lounging on a park bench, the piece has some interesting social effects. It's a bracing experience to observe the reactions of a passing stranger when the bench announces, from your direction and in a very distinct voice: "You're secreting constantly," or "It's been nice talking to you." Usually, there is no observable reaction, doubtless because the passerby knows a park loony when he (or she) hears one.

Things like that keep Soundscape from getting too worked up with the sober subject of Public Art, and make it an engaging treasure hunt — especially in High Park,

where the pieces are none too easy to find. Victoria artist Rudy van der Ham's Koin in Black and White is now altogether invisible, since it had to be removed after being ruined by rain and vandals. Along with the other small woes and accidents of this show, the fate of van der Ham's piece has doubtless given the Music Gallery organizers a much clearer idea of how to plan, finance and supervise a public-space exhibition (another edition of Soundscape may be in the works for next summer).

In addition to the works of Lexier, Varga, Hiebert, Keane/Reitzenstein, Heimbecker and Fernandes, the show includes pieces by Haligonian Gordon Laurin (Nathan Phillips Square) and Montrealers Charles de Mestral and C. Paul Mercier (Allan Gardens) as well as a maquette designed by Toronto's Gordon Monahan and Thaddeus Holownia (the Music Gallery). For more information on site locations, call 534-6311.

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Beat Apostles blend art with rock



THE BEAT APOSTLES

By James Muretich

(Herald writer)

Steven Heimbecker

Calgary's art and rock communities began sharing a common creative ground nearly a decade ago when punk-rock began to invade the city.

Steven Heimbecker not only remembers the early days when art and rock first came together in Calgary, he embodies it.

Heimbecker is a graduate of the Alberta College of Art (ACA) who has had one of his works (a 22-foot, 1,200-pound wind chime called Nirvana) exhibited in Toronto.

He is also a member of The Beat Apostles, a Calgary band that has just released an independent cassette entitled *Here Comes Tomorrow*.

"I remember when the whole punk thing started up in Calgary and bands like The Verdex, The Rip Chords and Tim Campbell and The Sandwiches would perform at the ACA.

"It was a creative period and ACA was actively involved in the underground music scene at the time," says Heimbecker.

That spirit of visual and aural art coming together lies at the heart of The Beat Apostles.

Not only is Heimbecker a graduate of ACA, but drummer Mark Walton holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts from the University of Calgary. The trio is rounded out by songwriter, singer and guitarist Paul LeBlanc.

"Because Mark and I are still involved in the visual arts we often see the band as an extension of those ideas. The way we arrange our songs, in a lot of ways, is very visual.

"We try and work that quality into our music and lyrics."

The visual dimension to the sound of The Beat Apostles comes in the form of audio tracks taken from the radio and

lyrics that manipulate words to create an emotional, intellectual and visual response.

Its music is angular, guitar-rock with sensibilities both borrowed from the '60s and shared with current Canadian art-rock bands like Bob's Your Uncle.

Heimbecker says the cassette (available at The Record Store, Happy Hair and Studio A Go Go for \$8) is another stepping stone.

ROCK LEGEND DIES

(Associated Press)

HENDERSONVILLE, Tenn.



Roy Orbison, the Grammy winner whose piercing voice on songs like *Pretty Woman* pioneered rock 'n' roll and made him a legend with ballads of lost love, has died of a heart attack at age 52.

The singer-songwriter was taken to Hendersonville hospital late Tuesday but couldn't be revived, said a hospital spokesman. He died just before midnight.

Artists' Profiles

ON THE FOLLOWING PAGES, WRITERS KATHERYN YLITALO AND MARY-BETH LAVIOLETTE HAVE SELECTED TEN ARTISTS WHO THEY FEEL ARE MAKING AN IMPORTANT CONTRIBUTION TO THE VISUAL ARTS IN CALGARY. ALTHOUGH THESE ARTISTS MAY NOT HAVE RECEIVED THE RECOGNITION THEY DESERVE TO DATE, THEY STRONGLY REPRESENT THE DIVERSITY OF ART ACTIVITY IN THAT CITY.

STEVE HEIMBECKER



Steve Heimbecker: "We're finally realizing we do good work, and we're receiving some national attention."

"We have so much electro-magnetic energy floating around in our city, it must affect us. Since we're basically electronic beings, it must affect our ability to perceive."

In early December, as part of the Media Blitz at the New Gallery, Steve Heimbecker presented "The Au.", a performance involving two people talking to each other on the telephone. Their voices were amplified as they were transmitted to the gallery on CJSW radio with a very slight delay. The author's split ego talked through the two voices about dreams, life and art. Their dialogue flipped between the romantic and the pragmatic, the conscience and the actor, the earnest and the absurd. The private conversation was broadcast to the gallery audience and also to a wider, but invisible, radio audience.

Heimbecker came to Calgary in 1977 from Biggar, Saskatchewan, to the Alberta College of Art along with six of his high school classmates.

While at the A.C.A. in 1980, he was president of the Cultural Board. The experience of organizing plays and concerts introduced him to new ideas in music, media arts and video integrated with music. His interest in sculpture, kinetics and music eventually led to time-based work, performance and audio art.

He left ACA twice to become more independent in his work. The "lack of paper education" made it difficult for him. Many times he considered leaving Calgary, but he realized that rent is cheaper in Calgary than in other centres. Also, owners of commercial properties, like the Bank of Commerce where he has a sound studio and a work area for paint and steel, were starting to realize that artists could be good tenants.

A few years ago, Heimbecker formed a company, The Qube Assemblage Company (for art, science and music), a loose structure through which he organizes his fees as an artist and income from contract welding and special deliveries. In 1988, he began to work at the University as the metal sculpture technician in the Art Department, and things began to open up for him.

Now he enjoys the friendship, mutual support and dedication of a group of people in the artist-run spaces. Their association makes it possible to "stay contemporary", and Heimbecker is glad to see their activity spill-

ing over into more "official spaces". A video of Heimbecker's was screened at a national video exhibition in Halifax, and more recently at the Muttart Art Gallery in the "Video West"-program. "We're finally realizing we do good work and we're receiving some national attention."

Recently, Heimbecker sat on a special events committee at the New Gallery, ran a recording project, "All Audio II", for EM/Media, and established a commissioning process for audio work by artists at EM. He is scheduled for an exhibition at the New Gallery in the fall, 1990.

Heimbecker notes that audio is playing a more and more important part in Canadian art, evidenced in the recent Festival of Canadian Contemporary Music at the University, the Convergence Conference at the Banff Centre, and festivals in Montreal and St. John's.

Two years ago Heimbecker was interviewed on CBC radio four times because of his art activities. One was a performance at Graceland, a junkyard in southwest Calgary that has been the site for a number of art events, and another was a sound sculpture that was in the "Sound Escape" exhibition at the Music Gallery in Toronto.

The outdoor sculpture, "Nirvana", consists of a graceful spiral of 145 chimes of galvanized steel that resonate when a gentle wind moves them. Plans to install the piece, which weighs about 1400 pounds, outside the Foothills Hospital fell through. Heimbecker is still hoping to find a permanent location, but it can be seen now in this temporary, but appropriate site outside of the music building at the U of C until May 1990. The installation is part of the exhibition of work by technicians at the U of C Art Department Gallery in January.

Heimbecker feels that growing up on the prairies has shaped his work by giving him a large perspective and a tendency to construct in a landscape fashion. He sums up the style of media arts in Calgary as very honest, very open and quite often very narrative. "Questions of identity are important because we're a small fish in a large sea. We're finally at the point of realizing that the place we came to is the place we're staying. This is the place where we're going to make our art." □

Sound and visual form come together in *Nirvana*

by Susan Tinker

When Steven Heimbecker designed and built a seven-metre, 600-kilogram wind chime, he wasn't the least bit concerned with traditional music scales. *Nirvana*, a kinetic sound sculpture, was designed more from a visual concept.

"Sound is a relative thing. The tuning comes from the visual form."

As it turns out, the sound *Nirvana* makes while moving gently in the wind constantly delights the artist and anyone else lucky enough to hear it.

Heimbecker, a metal sculpture technician in the U of C art department, says

Steven Heimbecker
— *Sound is a relative thing*



his interest in sound sculpture comes from his work with kinetics, primarily the torsion qualities of steel.

"From there, moving into audio and percussion was a natural progression," he says.

In a complex piece like *Nirvana* — a three-phase compound spiral — the visual concept was translated into a mathematical formula.

"Originally, it was intended to have 35 chimes, but when I calculated the complexity of the spiral, it was obvious the sculpture would have to be bigger."

Instead, *Nirvana* contains 145 chimes. Heimbecker made the sculpture's chimes from pieces of galvanized pipe that

***To hear Nirvana's song,
viewers sometimes have to
be patient. The reward
can be an unusual
experience.***

range from 15 centimetres to three metres in length.

Nirvana has some special construction qualities that allow the 600 kilograms of chimes to sway in the wind like the branches of a tree, even in relatively low wind. Heimbecker built the sculpture so that the mast — the supporting structure — bends just enough to oscillate in the wind. And that's all it takes.

Nirvana was commissioned for the

Music Gallery's national sound sculpture exhibition, *Soundescapes*, a show held in Toronto in the summer of 1987. Heimbecker was paid \$5,000 to design and build *Nirvana*, and then move it to Toronto and install it there. He estimates the cost, including the current installation at U of C, is actually more than twice that much. And that doesn't take into account an estimated 500 hours of labour by Heimbecker and volunteers.

Nirvana is temporarily installed on the university campus, in the courtyard on the north side of the University Theatre. The U of C installation is in conjunction with an exhibition by Department of Art technicians that ran in January in the department's main gallery.

Nirvana will be removed in May and permanently dismantled unless Heimbecker can find an interested buyer.

It's noteworthy, he says, that one potential buyer labelled the sculpture as too innovative and not traditional enough.

"Wind chimes are ancient — they're really very traditional."

Since the sculpture is in the familiar form of wind chimes, people find it very accessible, says Heimbecker. But to hear *Nirvana*'s song, viewers sometimes have to be patient.

"Right now, it's sheltered except from the north side, so it takes about a 15-20 kilometre breeze to make it sound.

"It's very different every time you hear it," he adds. "When several chimes go at once, there is a resonance — a humming — that I've never heard before."

catalyst

REVIEW OF STEVE HEIMBECKER PERFORMANCE

BY CALGARY SOCIETY OF INDEPENDENT FILMMAKERS STAFF WRITER David Jones -
C.S.I.F. ANSWER PRINT (DEC. 95 - JAN.96)

Review of Steve Heimbecker performance.

First impressions. Eight speakers in black six foot containers arranged in a circle. Something solemn about this. A candle burns in the base of each container casting an octagon on the ceiling. A sacred circle, an audiohenge-- and a strangely appropriate visual clue to what is coming. In the centre on two tables are racks of equipment like an altar. We are about to be initiated into a ritual designed to re-invigorate a lost sense.

This is *Octaphonics*, a performance by artist Steve Heimbecker, a concept for total audio environment, an experimental art form, a tactile space of sounds. Steve encourages us to explore the space, to walk about and find our own meanings. He turns out the lights and the eight track reel to reel plays "Roulette." From the dim space within the circle the sounds begin flickering back and forth, circling us, ricocheting, echoing.

Maybe it's the venue, the church hall above the CSIF, but the space within the circle feels... holy, energized, magical. I walk outside the circle and the sound becomes dead. Crossing the perimeter again, I am transported.

Explanation of the process, rational thought about the content, the way the sounds are manipulated, recorded and broadcast try to surface but are pushed from my mind by the emotional effect of the space. The speakers rattle and thunder. Voices seem to float above my head. Dim figures walk past, some swaying to strange rhythms, different from the ones I feel.

Others retreat to the edges of the circle.

The second piece, *Elevator Music* is more mundane, but again, it manages to create a distinct emotional space, a memory we all hold but choose to dismiss, this time the cooler detachment of waiting in the office building lobby for the elevator. Now more people are sitting on the floor, as if the fatigue induced by the real experience can be expressed in this 'other' space. Voices and footsteps pass us and the irony of the reality is echoed in the repetition of "going up," "going down," while we go nowhere but forward in time.

The final performance is an improvisation of manipulated sound accompanied by musicians Steve Nunoda and Mike Fajal. This time the dynamic is different, and to my mind less successful, as it provides a visual focus which competes with the sound. Nonetheless, the swoops of feedback are impressive when Steve catches the crest and surfs the audio wave.

Then it was over and I found myself listening to all sound more closely for days. This was, in part, Steve's intent and I quickly found myself agreeing with his assertion that part of the reason we fail to hear most of the sound around us is that the soundscape is so ugly.

If you missed the performance, keep an ear open for Steve's next gig and give yourself a treat.



Answer Print is a publication of The Calgary Society of Independent Filmmakers. This issue of answer print was put together by Victoria Mallett & John Hazlett. Contributors are Michael Willis, Cathy Edwards, Nowell Berg, David Christensen, Gary Burns, and David Clark.

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CSIF ANSWER PRINT is a publication of the Calgary Society of Independent Filmmakers, Calgary, Alberta, Canada.

THE EIGHT PHASES OF HEIMBECKER,

BY ROB FAUST - VOX MAGAZINE, CJSW CAMPUS RADIO, CALGARY (OCTOBER, 1995)

The Eight Phases of Heimbecker

VOX OCT. 1995

by Rob Faust

Jimmy, I'm writing you from the confines of one of those 17th avenue cafes. Full of the hum of high school kids discussing their first day of school, who wore what to which class, which teacher gained weight over the summer, and inquiring into the whereabouts of that guy last year who didn't quite fit in with the "in." I'm working on my second cup of brewed energy and trying not to remember them goofy things I did with my own summer vacation or for that matter last night under the influence of one too many gins. Things don't change that much Jimmy. I think there's a Sarah MacLachlan tune playing. I'm

Winnipeg, Toronto, Saskatoon, Ottawa, and Montréal, all in this truck packed full of "audio art" paraphernalia. He'll return to this city in October, where, tentatively, he'll give a wrap up performance at the Calgary Society of Independent Filmmakers on October 14. I'm thinking Jimmy, that the last date seems an unlikely place for an "Audio" installation. So I ask, well why there? He says that CSIF

this point, Jimmy, the rest of the space becomes an ambient soundscape, full of the murmurings of the environment, peoples voices, the clanking of glasses, all of these things become a part of the piece. The point is Jimmy, whether you are seriously dedicated to the performance or not you're there, it's up to you to interpret the chaos, the white noise, the art of the audio, a kind of

listeners are going to have, this same principle holds true to the "word music." Steve may "construct" the sound, but the sound comes from someone else's words and then the person is given the opportunity to reconstruct the text when she/he reads it over again. It's a dialogue that adds to the work, a dialogue between artists, between composer and spectator. Everyone's a winner.

(Apologies to Hot Chocolate, Jimmy.) Well everyone gets to be part of the craft, a living "art" thing.

Then I ask him about the progression of Heimbecker? What is it that Steve wants to do with his work? He looks at me, Jim, looks me dead in the eye with that serious look, and says, more or less, "I'm doing it." He adds, though, that he would like to set up something of an art collective, where people could come and gather and learn to do this stuff. Steve adds, that he had to teach himself this craft, it is essentially something Steve worked very hard to learn, which probably adds to the serious way in which he views his craft.

The conversation turns back to the collective thing. Jimmy, Steve has set up QUBE recordings, where young (or

waiting for a man that goes by the name of Heimbecker, Steve. He sounds like a serious lad Jimmy. He is an audio artist in the this here city, the jewel of the prairies, Calgary. Speaking of which it's been a while since you came around this way Jim. Anyway, Steve, well he's a professional "Audio" artist, in the electro-acoustic vein, just like the guy I told you about in August, Shawn Pinchbeck, in fact they are friends. The thing is Jimmy, this Steve fella is about to embark on a cross-Canada tour and has a few gigs coming up that you may want to come and check out in October.

He stumbles into the cafe and its hum, Jimmy, looks at me, at the crowd, then greets me, (ostensibly you as well Jimmy) walks over to the coffee bar, orders for the both of us and brings the coffee back to the table. Steve is in a bit of a rush, tomorrow he says he's going on the road, the first leg of his cross country audio installations. He's got those serious eyes Jimmy, they kind of look right through me, but his smile is warm to this hungover head. We get to talking about life and the turmoil it wreaks on all of us, which leads to the discussion of his tour. He'll arrive in Quebec on the 7th of September and play a series of gigs until the 23rd at which time he's going to move on to Hamilton,

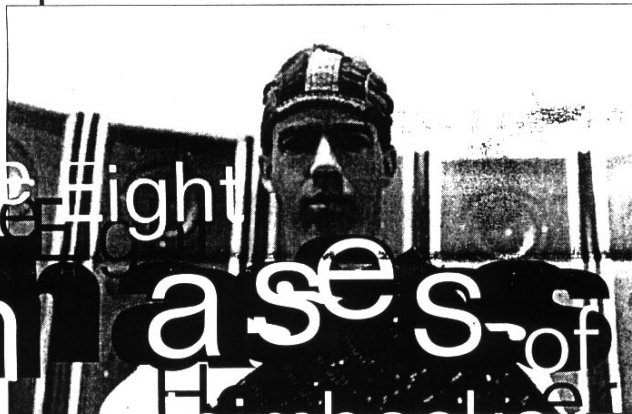
has been very supportive of his work, and that he enjoys the cross fertilization of Audio and Visual disciplines. He adds, that he was a graduate of ACA, in the visual arts field, but his passion fell into Audio, the experimentation in sound, the creation of an "audio" landscape. I think it makes it more of a challenge, Jimmy, to meticulously craft an internal image out of sound, it leaves more to the receiver, makes him or her use the internal reference points.

Steve had a performance back in June, which was billed as a concert in black, it was held in this industrial studio with all the lights off, scary stuff Jimmy, but the environment, the listener was in his control. Steve likes this kind of concept, the "captivated" audience. It requires the listener to play a part in the event and get lost in the sound. This atmosphere is something that Steve works hard at, to a given environment. Steve places eight speakers, each of which is doing something different with the sounds being generated or played, the listener may stand within the environment, at the centre of all eight speakers, or the listener can move from speaker to speaker interpreting what is presented. The other option is to remain stationary and listen to only one speaker, at

interactive composition, interactive art. The individual becomes a living piece of the sound; that's pretty damn cool, Jimmy.

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old) can come and work some time in the studio or contribute time to the maintenance of the studio and then get cheaper recording sessions or whatever. Basically it is the root of Steve's vision for his contribution to the scene. We talk a bit more about the word music, the future, and then get on to the topic of the near future, i.e. when he gets back in October. Well aside from the possible date at CSIF he is confirmed for the Uptown cinema's Halloween extravaganza. There, the Steve Heimbecker Group, will be playing the score for *Nosferatu*. He assures me Jim that he'll do his best to keep that dark German spirit thing alive. I'm sure Steve will scare what little Jesus we have left in us Jimmy, I'm sure he'll take the score as seriously as all his other pursuits. He gets up from the table Jimmy, looks around, we both become aware of the hum of those high school kids, one of them says, I can't believe she was wearing that! Back to the real world, Jim, Steve has got to get ready to go on the road, I pick from my back pack a Klimt postcard and think for a minute about how beautifully serious it will look in your mail box. Steve says goodbye, I tell him I'll see him at the Uptown on Halloween and prepare myself for a little of the Heimbecker macabre.



THE EIGHT PHASES OF HEIMBECKER,

BY ROB FAUST - VOX MAGAZINE, CJSW CAMPUS RADIO, CALGARY (OCTOBER, 1995)

Jimmy,

I'm writing to you from the confines of one of those 17th avenue cafes. Full of the hum of high school kids discussing their first day at school, who wore what to which class, which teacher gained weight over the summer, and inquiring into the whereabouts of the guy last year who didn't quite fit in with the "in." I'm working on my second cup of brewed energy and trying not to remember them goofy things I did with my summer vacation of for that matter last night under the influence of too many gins. Things don't change that much Jimmy. I think there's a Sarah MacLachlan tune playing. I'm waiting for a man that goes by the name of Heimbecker, Steve. He sounds like a serious lot Jimmy. He is an audio artist in this here city, the jewel of the prairies, Calgary. Speaking of which it's been a while since you came around this way Jim. Anyway, Steve, well he's a professional "Audio" artist, in the electro-acoustic vein, just like the guy I told you about in August, Shawn Pinchbeck, in fact they are friends. The thing is Jimmy, this Steve fella is about to embark on a cross-Canada tour and has a few gigs coming up that you may want to come and check out in October.

He stumbles into the cafe and its hum, Jimmy, looks at me, at the crowd, then greets me, (ostensibly you as well Jimmy) walks over to the coffee bar, orders for the both of us and brings the coffee back to the table. Steve is in a bit of a rush, tomorrow he says he's going on the road, the first leg of his cross-country audio installations. He's got those serious eyes Jimmy, they kind of look right through me, but his smile is warm to this hung-over head. We get to talking about life and the turmoil it wreaks on all of us, which leads to the discussion of his tour. He'll arrive in Quebec on the 7th of September and play a series of gigs until the 23rd. at which time he's going to move to Hamilton, Winnipeg, Toronto, Saskatoon, Ottawa, and Montréal, all in this truck packed full of "audio art" paraphernalia. He'll return to this city in October, where tentatively, he'll give a wrap up performance at the Calgary Society of Independent Filmmakers on October 14. I'm thinking Jimmy, that the last date seems an unlikely place for an "Audio" installation. So I ask, well why there? He says that CSIF has been very supportive of his work, and that enjoys the cross fertilization of Audio and Visual disciplines. He adds that he was a graduate of ACA, in the visual arts field, but his passion fell into audio, the experimentation in sound, the creation of an "audio" landscape. I think it makes it more of a challenge, Jimmy, to meticulously craft an internal image out of sound, it leaves more to the receiver, makes him or her use the internal reference points.

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As if this wasn't enough Jimmy, Steve's working on this word music. It's intended to further the direction of spoken word, each word of a given wordsmith is transcribed by Steve. It creates a sound bed of voice, an ambient hum of words, then a spoken word artist speaks over the "music" that Steve has created from their words. He enters each line of the text into a computer, assigns each letter or word a note. After this is done he crunches a few lines of text together then plays in back "crunched" together, giving the words a sense of musicality. What he's doing Jimmy is bridging the gap between music and word, forming as he puts it "word music:" Not completely words and not completely music but both. Steve toys with the accepted standards and when he does this he kind of blows open the doors to what is possible. It's important to him to challenge and create, "I like a collective spirit, where many people contribute to a vision." This spirit plays into his music, think about the octophonic approach, Steve gives the audience the freedom to decide what part that they as listeners are going to have, this same principal holds true to the "word music." Steve may "construct" the sound, but the sound comes from someone else's words and then the person is given the opportunity to reconstruct the text when she/he reads it over again. It's a dialogue that adds to the work, a dialogue between artists, between composer and spectator. Everyone's a winner. (Apologies to Hot Chocolate, Jimmy.) Well everyone gets to be part of the craft, a living "art" thing.

Then I ask him about the progression of Heimbecker? What is it that Steve wants to do with his work? He looks at me, Jim, dead in the eye with that serious look, and says, more or less, "I'm doing it." He adds, though, that he would like to set up something of an art collective, where people could come and gather and learn to do this stuff. Steve adds, that he had to teach himself this craft, it is essentially something Steve worked very hard to learn, which probably adds to the serious way in which he views his craft.

The conversation turns back to the collective thing, Jimmy, Steve has set up

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QUBE Recordings, where young (or old) can come and work some time in the studio or contribute time to the maintenance of the studio and then get cheaper recording sessions or whatever. Basically it is the root of Steve's vision for his contribution to the scene. We talk a bit more about the word music, the future, and then get on the topic of the near future, i.e. when he gets back in October. Well aside from the possible date at CSIF he is confirmed for the Uptown cinema's Hallowe'en extravaganza. There, the Steve Heimbecker Group, will be playing the score for *Nosferatu*.

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SCULPTING SOUND, THE ART OF STEVEN HEIMBECKER

BY TRACEY JOHNSON - CAMEO MAGAZINE #13 (OCTOBER 96), Calgary, AB.



Photo: Martin Hutchinson

SCULPTING SOUND

THE ART OF STEVEN HEIMBECKER

TRACEY JOHNSON

ALL IS NOT QUITE AS IT SEEMS AT STEVEN HEIMBECKER'S MOST RECENT EXHIBITION, "THE MANUFACTURE OF SILENCE." EIGHT, SEVEN-FOOT SQUARE CANVAS 'SPEAKERS' ARE ARRANGED IN A RECTANGLE, CREATING A 'SOUNDPOOL'. THE DESIGN ON EACH HAND-PAINTED CANVAS IS UNIQUE YET FAMILIAR IN A "CAN'T QUITE PUT YOUR FINGER ON IT" WAY. IN THIRTY SECOND INTERVALS A SMALL MOTOR BEHIND EACH SPEAKER STARTS UP, CAUSING THE CANVASES TO THROB AND THE IMAGES PAINTED ON THEM TO SWIM IN FRONT OF YOUR EYES. STANDING WITHIN THE SOUNDPOOL, IT SEEMS SILENT, OTHER THAN THE WHIRRING OF THE MOTORS; BUT AFTER A FEW MINUTES, YOU BEGIN TO FEEL MILDLY UNCOMFORTABLE, AS THOUGH THE AIR PRESSURE IN THE ROOM HAS INCHED UP SLIGHTLY.

All sound is frequency. We not only hear sound, we feel it. When the motors behind the speakers vibrate the canvas, subsonic sound waves are produced at a frequency too low for our ears to hear, but not too low for our bodies to feel. Prolonged exposure to frequencies of sound at this level can be damaging. Obviously the waves produced in "The Manufacturing of Silence" are not dangerous, though several people admitted that after a few minutes inside the soundpool, they wanted to leave. I could understand their feelings. The throbbing canvases cause the psychedelic images to swim in front of your eyes, the motors drone away, and the sound waves washing over your body make your bladder tickle. Silent? I don't think so. Relaxing? Not even slightly.

The use of sound by visual artists began in the early 60s with the performance of John Cage's "Silence" series. By forcing his audience to pay attention to silence he showed that it was in fact made up of the sounds that surround us in everyday life. The use of sound in installation art is increasingly common. What is rare, however, are artists for whom sound is the primary basis of their work.

Heimbecker is one of these. I met him this spring at his home/studio. Before our meeting, the strongest impression I had of his work was of a piece he created a few years ago called "Coffee Grinder", interactive art at its most dangerous. The piece requires two participants: one to hold the contacts, the other to crank the "grinder" until the first person releases the electrical current running through their body! I wasn't sure whether or not I should be afraid of this man and I had questions about his causing pain to his audience.

His studio is in the basement of tiny cottage on an enormous expanse of lawn bordering the Bow River. The studio is a bizarre hybrid of a sculptor's workshop and recording studio: dark and packed with speakers, sound boards, and techy things with lots of knobs. In short, it looks like a place where my brother, the world's last living headbanger, would be very happy. Now that I have betrayed myself as someone not very technically inclined, I have to tell you I went to the interview happily ignorant about the nature of sound and left it in awe. He guided me down the intricate pathways of sound waves and auditory mapping, places I never knew I wanted to go.

To Heimbecker, combining sight and sound seemed obvious. He grew up in Saskatchewan in a musical family and landed in art school in the late seventies, almost due to a lack of anything better to do. While at the Alberta College of Art he became involved in Calgary's thriving punk scene, playing in bands and working in sound production. He pursued his two vocations separately until 1987 when he was asked to submit a piece for an exhibition of sound-based art in Toronto.

The result was "Nirvana" (1987), an enormous wind chime, made of 1200 pounds of chimes suspended in a spiral from a single mast. Although incredibly heavy, because of its intricate construction, it needed next to no wind create sound. It is now permanently installed at the University of Calgary in the Reeve Theatre courtyard. I loved the design, but had never concentrated on its sounds. Upon revisiting the piece, I was struck by how the drone of the chimes lulled me into a semi-meditative state in which my hearing became more acute. The sounds of the birds chirping and the sprinklers off in the distance became urgent, almost deafening.

After "Nirvana", Heimbecker began experimenting with octaphonics. Octaphonics are popularly known as "Surround Sound", but while Surround Sound is created by having the same sound coming out of several speakers, octaphonics consists of eight different sounds playing from eight different speakers. The use of octaphonics can be a much more creative way of using sound since the final product can be altered by the way the speakers are set up and what obstacles are between the speakers and the listeners.

In 1993 Heimbecker was invited to attend *Tuning the World*, an international conference on sound. It was there that he was able to flesh out many of his ideas about the nature of sound. The theme of the conference was that of the soundscape. Each person lives in a slightly different soundscape defined

by his or her "keynote form", the acoustic environment that he or she is commonly used to. For instance if you were to live by the ocean your entire life your mind would be so used to the sound of the waves that it would no longer actively hear them, but would miss them if the sound was taken away. The sound of waves would become your silence and would affect the way you heard all other sounds.

It was also at *Tuning the World* that he first heard the theory of acoustic mapping. Acoustic mapping was at that time being used experimentally by scientists in the Amazon. Several species of birds in the rainforest are extremely shy, making it difficult to catalogue them. By recording the environment around their nesting trees and then eliminating all extraneous sounds, the scientists were indexing the birds by their sound. Hence, the inspiration for "Acoustic Line".

"Acoustic Line, as the Crow Flies" (1993) was Heimbecker's first project experimenting with acoustic mapping. Using digital recording technology and octaphonics he charted a mile of space in four different parts of Calgary: McMahon Stadium during a football game; a busy shopping area; a park along the Bow river; and a residential neighborhood which had a church with a working bell. In each mile he set up recording equipment at eight equidistant points, and recorded the acoustic environment for twenty minutes. He worked on the premise that sound takes 5.5 seconds to travel one mile. If a church bell rings at the beginning of the mile, the sound should be heard at the end of the mile 5.5 seconds later. With this in mind he created a playback area that was 64 feet long, approximately the length a person could walk in 5.5 seconds. Speakers were mounted every eight feet, each speaker playing back the sounds recorded at the corresponding vantage point. So, at time zero, at the first set of speakers, a church bell rings, the audience begins to walk the length of the playback area. Eight feet later, you arrive at speaker number two, at approximately the same time the sound of the church bell would have reached the second recording device. Conceptually, therefore, the audience is traveling at the speed of sound.

The concept of auditory mapping as a form of art is limited only by imagination and technology. Heimbecker has a touch of the mad inventor in him, but insists he is an artist, not a technician. His original ideas are in constant flux throughout the creative process, from the original concept which is usually theoretically brilliant, but unrealizable without a Ph.D. in physics and a million dollars. In the past year he has mounted a number of small pieces dealing with auditory mapping, including a multi-media performance for Alberta Theatre Projects, "Out of Bounds", which is, hilariously, a virtual reality dialogue between two people playing pool. Using octaphonics and eight track recording, he placed microphones at each corner of the pool table and linked each microphone to a speaker in each corner of the performance space. Each time a ball was hit the audience heard it as though they were on the pool table. Interactive theatre: I am the eggman, you are the eight ball.

To the unobservant, Heimbecker's work may seem to be nothing but technical marvel-making. Although his sculptures and installations have a technical component to them, they have many layers of other material meaning, and hidden subtexts. Without that dash of humanity, he could have gone to work at General Electric adjusting the sound of blenders to make them more pleasing to the average housewife instead of becoming an artist. "I think of sound as an object to be shaped and formed, sound is an object as much as water in a swimming pool."

Future plans include attempting to map an object in space, then mapping the space, without the object in it. Removing all extraneous noises, it should be possible to identify the pure sound of the object and then create it in another environment. An ambitious plan indeed, and while it may not turn out precisely as conceived, we can all rest easy that the final product will take us and our ears a place we've never been.

Cameo #13, October 1996

SCULPTING SOUND, THE ART OF STEVEN HEIMBECKER

BY TRACEY JOHNSON - *CAMEO MAGAZINE #13 (OCTOBER 96), Calgary, AB.*

All is not quite as it seems at Steven Heimbecker's most recent exhibition, "The Manufacturing of Silence." Eight, seven-foot square canvas 'speakers' are arranged in a rectangle, creating a 'soundpool'. The design on each hand-painted canvas is unique yet familiar in a "can't quite put your finger on it" way. In thirty-second intervals a small motor behind each speaker starts up, causing the canvases to throb and the images painted on them to swim in front of your eyes. Standing within the soundpool, it seems silent, other than the whirring of the motors; but after a few minutes, you begin to feel mildly uncomfortable, as though the air pressure in the room has inched up slightly.

All is sound frequency. We not only hear sound, we feel it. When the motors behind the speakers vibrate the canvas, subsonic sound waves are produced at a frequency too low for our ears to hear, but not too low for our bodies to feel. Prolonged exposure to frequencies of sound at this level can be damaging. Obviously the waves produced in "The Manufacturing of Silence" are not dangerous, though several people admitted that after a few minutes inside the soundpool, they wanted to leave. I could understand their feelings. The throbbing canvases cause the psychedelic images to swim in front of your eyes, the motors drone away, and the sound waves washing over your body make your bladder tickle. Silent? I don't think so. Relaxing? Not even slightly.

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It was also at *Tuning of the World* that he first heard the theory of acoustic mapping. Acoustic Mapping was at that time being used experimentally by scientists in the Amazon. Several species of birds in the rainforest are extremely shy, making it difficult to catalogue them. By recording the environment around their nesting trees and then eliminating all extraneous sounds, the scientists were indexing the birds by their sound. Hence, the inspiration for "Acoustic Line".

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Exhibition summary text: "Acoustic Mapping Propositions: #101 Child's Play"

The Impact of Technology

April 1 through May 4

Meet the Artists Reception Tuesday, April 2, 5 - 8 pm

treatment of the human/technology interaction would exclude another significant component -- that of sound. Industry and its products have altered the world's soundscape on a global scale. The collaborative participation of sound composer Gerhard Ginader further augments the human/technology exchange. A continuously running two hour tape plays sounds based on recordings at industrial sites and sounds suggested directly by the prints. Ginader uses various sound processing techniques including sound morphing (one sound melting into another rather than a mixing or overlaying of sounds) to reiterate the relationship between humans and technology -- just as the sounds are intertwined and altered by one another, so too is humanity intertwined and altered by technology. The composed sounds, and the prints and paintings on the wall are all played against the constant sloshing and hum of the wringer washer in the installation -- permeating our senses with the continual monotony of machine-made noise, further suggesting our inescapable connection to the technology of our day-to-day lives.



Gerry van Ommen Kloeke
Trike, January 1996, Photo Digital Image on Large Format Backlit Transparency

Steven Heimbecker is a well recognized western Canadian multi-media artist specialising in electro-acoustics, installation and sculpture. He studied fine arts at the Alberta College of Art in the 1970's and has been actively engaged in the creation of art experiences ever since. In 1992 he began creating multi-media sound installations and compositions that physically and conceptually challenge our relationship with sound and time. For the past two years, on a sound system of his own design, he has developed techniques and compositions for octophonic (8 channel) playback. He has exhibited and performed in Europe and

Canada. For The Impact of Technology he has created a sound space "The Acoustic Mapping Propositions: #101 Child's Play." Within a small kinetic sculpture contained in a plexiglass case he has placed eight miniature microphones. This enclosed sculpture stands in the centre of the gallery. The sounds of movement captured by the mikes surrounding the small sculpture are transmitted octophonically within the north gallery representing a scale increase of the space captured within the plexiglass case. The displacement and the augmentation of the sound

space conceptually places the viewer/participant within the space of the small sculpture. It questions the viewer's fit within space, and time, and challenges our relationship to sound.

Vern Hume has been interested in exploring new media as a terrain for artistic expression for the past several years. He's been avidly involved in video production and has most recently been involved in the interactive potential and production of CD Rom projects. He is intrigued with how the meaning of multi-media is

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 April, 1996 by Kathryn Burns - Muttart Director / Curator

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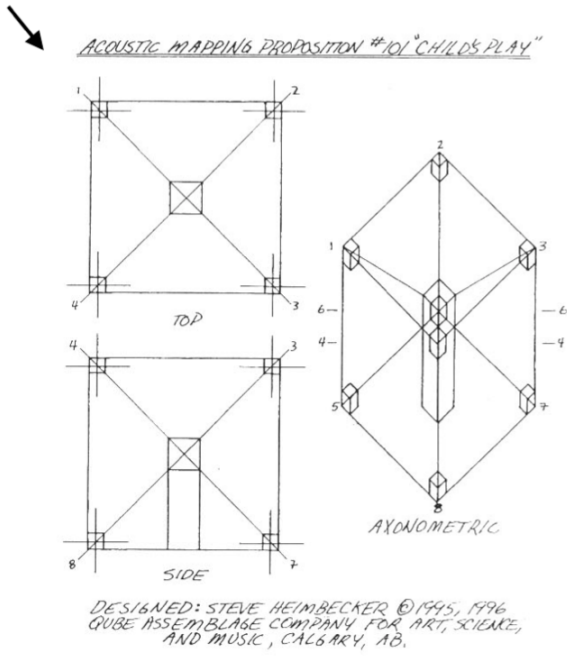
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tion of exploration whereby the viewer is invited to explore the terrain of the program, however, unlike European explorers the user is being lead to places which are already known. In this version, Hume involves the use of external video via a VCR controlled by the computer and incorporates additional audio that Don Stein originally created for the work. As the user navigates through the project they create an audio visual environment from fragments of this material.



Steve Heimbecker
 "Design for Acoustic Mapping Proposition #101 Child's Play" 1996

All of the works in Impact of Technology address the interaction between humans and technology in some way within the conceptual content of the work -- through the ideas portrayed. In addition they all require some form of interaction and active participation from the viewer. Technological works do not offer the same passive viewing experience that the more traditional art forms of painting, drawing, photography etc. tend to elicit. During this exhibition at the Muttart we invite you to experience and participate in these works in an active way and allow these contemporary art forms to expand your understanding of the potential for interactive technology within contemporary art.

Kathryn Burns
 Director/Curator

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April, 1996 by Kathryn Burns - Muttart Director / Curator

Exhibition summary text: "Acoustic Mapping Propositions: #101 Child's Play"

Steven Heimbecker is a well recognized western Canadian multi-media artist specializing in electro-acoustics, installation, and sculpture. He studied fine arts at the Alberta College of Art in the 1970's and has been actively engaged in the creation of experiences ever since. In 1992 he began creating multi-media sound installations and compositions that physically and conceptually challenge our relationship with sound and time. For the past two years, on a sound system of his own design, he has developed techniques and compositions for octophonic (8 channel) playback. He has exhibited and performed in Europe and Canada. For the Impact of Technology he has created a sound space "The Acoustic Mapping Propositions: #101 Child's Play." Within a small kinetic sculpture contained in a plexiglass case he has placed eight miniature microphones. This enclosed sculpture stands in the centre of the gallery. The sounds of movement captured by the mikes surrounding the small sculpture are transmitted octophonically within the north gallery representing a scale increase of the space captured within the plexiglass case. The displacement and the augmentation of the sound space conceptually places the viewer / participant within the space of the small sculpture. It questions the viewer's fit within space and time, and challenges our relationship to sound.

SOUNDPOOL: THE MANUFACTURING OF SILENCE, SOME THOUGHTS ON THE WORK OF STEVEN R. HEIMBECKER

WRITTEN BY PAUL WOODROW, CURATED BY RICHARD GORDON, EXHIBITION CATALOGUE
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...the modern soundscape...divides itself into two domains. It divides itself into the domain that we traditionally associate with silence, the enabling condition in which unprogrammed and unprogrammable events can take place. That is the silence of contemplation; that is the silence where people can get in touch with themselves. ...

-URSULA FRANKLIN.

Within the context of Modernist and Post-Modernist art practice in the twentieth century, the use of sound by visual artists and multi-media artists has a very distinct and complex history. The introduction of sound as a significant element in works of art has been viewed as part of the critique of traditional art activity or as a vital component in an utopian program. The representation of sound has also been perceived as a necessary tool for social and political transformation or principally as an avant-garde activity. Within the context of the Fine Arts, the definition of sound as a musical phenomenon to be experienced in its own right --autonomous, temporal and immaterial-- has yet to be accepted. For the past fifty years, particularly within the boundaries of popular culture, the representation of sound has co-existed with image in the form of movies, television, and computer technology.

The abstraction and liberation of sound from the confines of music is manifested in the work of many of the more prominent visual artists of this century. The list of artists and legitimate composers who have used sound as a component of individual works or as a focal point of larger endeavours is comprehensive.

Beginning with Futurist Luigi Russolo, here are some of the artists who can be cited: Marcel Duchamp, Kurt Schwitters, the Dadaists, John Cage, Edgard Varese, Takehisa Kosugi, Karlheinz Stockhausen, Alvin Lucier, Jean Tinguely, Allan Kaprow, The Fluxus artists, George Macunias, George Brecht, Dick Higgins, Alison Knowles, Yoko Ono, Nam June Paik and Al Hansen; Joseph Beuys, Robert Ashley, Bruce Nauman, Max Neuhaus and Laurie Anderson. Within our own borders, names that spring to mind are R. Murray Schafer, Hildegard Westercamp, Ian Carr-Harris, Michael Snow, Rita McKeough, Micah Lexier, Dan Lander, and the unforgettable Robin Page, whose "second block guitar piece" consisted of kicking a guitar down the stairs from the Hardware Poet's Playhouse, past the Museum of Modern Art and the Whitney Museum and back up the stairs during the Yam Festival, in New York in May, 1965.

It is over three decades since the publication of *Silence*, by John Cage (1961). The collection of lectures, essays, articles and anecdotes has had a profound effect on many artists and musicians. By redefining the nature of silence and making it the material of music, Cage completely reversed traditional (European) thinking. Cage's notion of silence is not constructed in the fissure or pause between musical notes. Silence refers to the world of ambient sound that surrounds musical performance - that is, life itself. Like many of the artists associated with the Fluxus movement, Cage attempted to narrow the gap between art and life. Retrospectively,

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Cage's position can be seen as a critique of Modernist art practice, which had encouraged the separation of art and life through the endorsement of the autonomous art object.

Since the sixties, artistic exploration of sound has resulted in an abundance of activity. Artists' boundaries have been extended aesthetically, socially and politically. We have witnessed, for example, the formation of E.A.T. (Experiments in Art and Technology) as well as the foundation of the World Soundscape Project, an on-going project that studies the relationship between living organisms and their sonic environments. We have seen a significant rise in the production of sonic work, including sound poetry, audio work, texts, book work, sound performance, interactive sculpture, ambitious projects like the Banff Centre's Radio Rethink, the use of digital technology, the establishment of sound archives and the growth in numbers of groups and individuals who are interested in the preservation and conservation of sound. During the last decade or so, we have been in the midst of a sonic boom!

Today it is not unusual to think of the artist as a multi-media practitioner, involved in a diversity of activities ranging from conventional sculpture to installation to production of electro-acoustic environments. Steve Heimbecker exemplifies such an approach to contemporary art making. During the past few years, Heimbecker has completed several pieces that address sound issues such as questioning architectural spaces or investigating problems concerning mediation of the body image. In general, Heimbecker's work covers a wide spectrum of activity including object-making, performance, sound and music concerts, collaborative works and the production of audio cassette tapes. Rather than employing analytical or theoretical models to underscore his work, Heimbecker uses intuition, experimentation and response to events and experiences in everyday life. His work often combines elements and approaches derived from past styles, yet nevertheless conveys freshness, spontaneity and charm.

The Acoustic Field Intensifier (1994), which was exhibited at Memorial University Art Gallery in St. John's, Newfoundland, as part of Sound Symposium 7 *Lend me your ears: Sound City Spaces*, functions by separating the sounds in a sonic field. The piece is fabricated as an apparatus to be worn while engaged in the activity of listening. It is, more or less, a performance costume. Made from recontextualized fuel funnels, its theatrical and whimsical appearance is reminiscent of Futurist sculptural megaphones and other contraptions associated with the Dadaists.

Home Security (1993) is another whimsical yet critical installation that uses a variety of found materials and technological devices: mechanical toy puppies, infrared motion detectors, bird-baths, a plant and miscellaneous household hardware. *Home Security* consists of a series of automated sculptures triggered independently by each unit's motion detector. The sculptural components have been constructed from colourful mechanical puppies perched on posts (recycled closet rods), which are embedded in bird baths. An infrared motion detector is placed immediately behind the soft fuzzy toys. The slightest detection of motion sets off the barking toy dogs. The installation's ironic stance reveals society's fixation with insecurity and possessive behaviours. The absence of idealisation and preciousness (aesthetization) in this particular piece prevents the viewer from experiencing comfort and reassurance. The mechanical barking dogs become a source of irritation. Heimbecker's use of banal materials reveals both the absurdity and pathos of a society governed by fear of attack from violent external forces. In our society, pets

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sometimes double as guard dogs!

Metaphenophone (It's all Greek to Me) (1994), a site-specific installation, was shown as part of the exhibition *The End of Modernity*, curated by Annette Hurtig at the Glenbow Museum in Calgary. She says of the artists in the exhibition, "Employing the new technologies and the detritus of our material culture, they investigate and illustrate the dissolution of conventional categories and canons, and the abjection, dystopia, and vast potential of our times." Heimbecker's installation employs numerous optical and sonic devices such as closed circuit T.V., an audio surveillance system, amber-colored mirrored tiles, and spotlights, arranged as an interactive audio-visual feedback loop. *Metaphenophone* allows the observer to experience the act of viewing. This experience is reinforced when we discover the presence of amber mirrors placed amidst the various spaces and collections throughout the museum. We see ourselves as viewers engaged in an act of recognition. The gallery thus becomes a context for self-examination. Heimbecker uses technology for the purpose of making the viewer more self-conscious. As with all systems of communication, the possibility of developing self-consciousness is always mediated by the way in which the subject is represented in language. In the visual arts, for example, the structure of the image plays a large part in the construction of identity. The system of electronic reproduction in Heimbecker's installation has the effect of distancing the viewer even further from his or her desires. *Metaphenophone* transforms the viewer into a semiotic ghost trapped within the self-perpetuating process of technological reproduction. The viewer's image becomes suspended, fluctuating between the inherent naturalism of the mirror and the disembodied product of the machine (television).

Heimbecker's earlier works have included the fabrication of a number of objects. *Density No.2* (1990), consists of twenty-six "Ariel Harps," or stringed sculptures. Eight of these are free standing while the remainder are wall-mounted. Individual "harps" can be activated by a modified computer keyboard. Sound is generated by tuning sound sources into real time. Each "Ariel Harp" acts as an antenna. As part of the international exhibition *Tuning of the World* (1993), Heimbecker constructed eight sculptural structures containing discrete speaker systems which were suspended from the gallery ceiling at the University of Calgary's Nickle Arts Museum. The work is entitled *The Acoustic Line as the Crow Listens*. The installation reproduces the sound recorded simultaneously from eight sites located along a linear mile. One of the more interesting notions the works plays upon is how the compression of time affects the articulation of space and vice versa. In a world in which time appears to speed up, space appears to shrink, resulting in a miniaturised version of the world.

The subject of Heimbecker's latest project, *Soundpool: The Manufacturing of Silence* (1996), takes the form of a multi-media installation. It combines many of the features of Heimbecker's previous work in a larger and more ambitious format. The piece consists of eight similar sculptural objects, which Heimbecker refers to as "Axis Speakers," built to produce a sub-sonic effect for its audience. As in former pieces, Heimbecker's work utilizes an interactive component. In the construction of each sculptural unit, Heimbecker makes use of recycled hardware materials such as industrial storage shelving. Canvas awning, which acts as a membrane, is attached to large, square metal frames. The surface of the canvas is decorated with designs appropriated from the inside of paper envelopes, where they function to block out the light and prevent inquisitive eyes from recognising or reading the enclosed contents. In the case

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of each sculptural unit, sound is produced by the motion of the electrical motor. This in turn activates the painted canvasses and causes the noticeable movement of air as well as a mechanically produced visual vibration. Heimbecker states that "whatever final results occur, this installation will produce a significant physical, visual and sonic effect, which is intended to bring the audience to the name of silence."

Like many of Heimbecker's previous works, humour and parody play a vital role in the construction of meaning. They are also essential factors to consider in the light of interpretation. The work appears to be formulated as a paradox. Silence is not manufactured by this assortment of disparate hardware. Even the optical vibrations of the canvasses do little to appease our anxieties and offer the peace and quiet of meditation. Heimbecker's installation mimics the industrial and its promise of salvation. In a gallery setting, the sonic sculptures appear like props in a scene from the theatre of the absurd, remnants of a past ritual, bizarre yet intriguing.

When looking at Heimbecker's work in general, I am reminded of two artists from the sixties - a decade with which I am familiar. The artists in question are Jean Tinguely and Walter De Maria. Tinguely was noted for his huge self-destructing machines, such as the piece constructed in the Nevada desert in 1962, *Study for an End of the World*. After the early auto-destructive work, Tinguely went on to fabricate many non-functional machines from recycled industrial materials. Like Tinguely's work, Heimbecker's works are always playful, and they possess a strong sense of humour. The piece I would like to make reference to by Walter De Maria was contained within a small collection entitled *An Anthology*, edited by George Macunias and Jackson Marlow. *Meaningless Work* consists of a paragraph which outlines De Maria's approach to art making. In the true spirit of Fluxus, he outlines a performance piece that consists only of moving information from one file to another, then transferring it back again *ad infinitum*. Heimbecker's work can be viewed as a continuation of the tradition from which these works spring.

In conclusion, Heimbecker's work is the result of a variety of methodological approaches, which are in fact quite dissimilar. The earlier work appears to be a manifestation of an anti-aesthetic and non-precious approach to materials and forms. How things sound and how things look are of course important to each work. The overall effect of the pieces are designed to engage an audience, they appear like works of the theatre or even theatrical machines, whose purpose is to produce effects. As objects to be experienced, the pieces sometimes leave the viewer in a state of ambivalence, especially when the viewer is faced with ambiguity. On the other hand, Heimbecker's public performances and concerts tend to take a more refined and focused approach to music-making. The construction of acoustic spaces seems to be a serious preoccupation. I am not suggesting, however, that the playful and the serious can not or should not exist together in the same space. I am, in fact, an advocate of entertainment. In the final analysis, Heimbecker's work is a consequence of his own particular quest for silence, which incorporates a more inclusive and diverse approach to the fabrication of sound sculpture.

~end~

Marginal Notes on Heimbeckerism, March 25, 1999, Calgary, AB.

Commissioned text by Steve Nunuda MFA (U. of Calgary), on the occasion of the publications of the *Enormousness of Cloud Machines* 2CD 1999.

Marginal Notes on Heimbeckerism

What's in a liner note? For about ten years I have been (literally) following Steve Heimbecker's career. Yet, as I sat down to write this piece, I found myself struggling with a lot of basic concepts. It's difficult for me to separate the artist from his work, although the work itself is not primarily autobiographical. It proceeds from a broad variety of very personal influences. As a result, it's difficult to define the work in an artistic context to include all the interactions of history, lived experience, temperament and place. My only recourse is an admission that any written definition in language will be partial and the only appropriate approach is a tangential one, tracking around the periphery, not the centre of the sound.

track one - place and time

Heimbecker was born in Saskatchewan and was raised within a musical family in the small community of Springwater where he resides today. In the late seventies he had moved to Calgary, Alberta to go to art school where he studied painting, sculpture, video and performance. In Calgary, he was active in the local alternative music and art scene, and when I met him he was working on installation works which dealt with sound, such as *Mono Otto: Absolutely Nothing* at the New Gallery in 1988. His work has been seen and heard locally, nationally and internationally. Through most of this decade he has been one of a very few artists in our local community with a practice including the production, performance and teaching of audio-art.

track two - author and audience

Marcel Duchamp noted that for a work of art to communicate properly it required a degree of equal and active participation -- an interaction of artist, artwork and spectator. In 1989 I had the pleasure of working with Steve on *The Au*. This complex work might be briefly described as a monologue with actions read by two people over the phone, performed and broadcast over the radio in front of a live audience. The text of this piece was a manifesto of sorts, outlining the concepts and processes of Heimbeckerism at that time. The title, *The Au*, in itself is revealing. The abbreviated term suggests the joining of authority, author, audience and audio in a single field in which no term is privileged. There is a definite Duchampian anti-authoritarian aspect to Heimbecker's work. It intentionally requires an interpretive listening audience.

track three - sound and structure

There's clearly a connection between his interest in music and his interest in visual art which goes far in explaining Heimbecker's choice of medium. Both disciplines train us in the perception of meaning and structure in the environment.

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In fact, I believe his techniques of sound sailing, acoustic mapping, octophonics and sound action are informed by visual art as much as sound traditions. Beginning with his visual practice of installation works with audio components, his audio-work has consistently and insistently treated sound as a three-dimensional sculptural material, capable of creating and altering spatial environments and the audience's sense of time. He dubbed the installations "Sound Sculpture," a term which resonates with their sonic, material, and spatial properties and right reason in making. If you listen closely, you'll find that this CD is sound sculpture.

track four - inside and outside

I think of him as something of an outsider, but not in the sense of being entirely unschooled or isolated from an artistic milieu or tradition. Rather, Heimbecker has made choices in the conceptual and physical spaces he inhabits which set him apart. He may not have heard this, but among his friends it's acknowledged that no-one else is wired up like Steve. His isolation is that of an independent thinker who is, nevertheless, finely tuned in to his environment. He's the flip side of the walkman commuter and the cell-phone driver. His degree of separation is a necessary prerequisite of listening. But the work is not about him, he's a filter on the big picture -- music, noise, structure, meaning, space, time. These recordings, unlike these notes, are not about getting into the artist's head, unless you consider the head to be an auditory space created by Steve Heimbecker.

**Steve Nunoda, MFA, University of Calgary,
Calgary, Alberta, 1999**

Heimbecker uses sound as art

If you notice only the 12 completely banal metal 'sculptures' hanging suspended out from the walls, mobile-like, in Calgary artist Steve Heimbecker's show at Neutral Ground, you might be tempted to think that he was using these old machine gears, fridge shelves, bicycle wheels, old buckets and so on, all retrieved from culture's junk pile, simply as an indictment of the unfulfilled promises of technology or as a critique of the tired and rusty authoritarian notions of authenticity and uniqueness promoted by a now-defeated Modernism.

This post-modern critique of the ideologies buried within Modernism is fairly conventional at this point in time. Thankfully, those positions are only the starting point from which Heimbecker proceeds here. Central to this installation, in which these found-object sculptures are only fragments, are the two twin sets of funnel-like objects hanging suspended from the ceiling at eye level near either end of the length of the gallery. Although they look like megaphones, they are in fact wired microphones — 'ears,' if you like — that are positioned to pick up the pulse of the four small Looney Tunes clocks ticking endlessly opposite them. These microphones can be swung back and forth or left and right, whereupon they also pick up the various sounds within the gallery but specifically the nonsensical noises we create when we strike those dozen old metal objects, which we now understand to be not sculptures in a literal sense but some kind of art 'musical' instruments.

Clearly, Heimbecker is interested not in the phenomenal but in the fugitive: his interest lies in sound. Unlike musical 'composition,' however, there is no linear musical score here that takes us, almost narratively, from beginning to end. Instead, Heimbecker's work is

Opinion
At the Galleries
By Jack Anderson

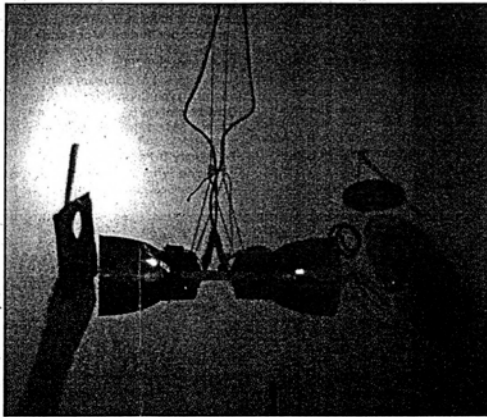
review

Steve Heimbecker: Hell is Just the Opposite
Neutral Ground
Ends Saturday

comprised only of pure, almost abstract sounds connected to each other only serendipitously. Through them he reveals his interest in the way we understand sound and use it to decode space and our position in it; in the way sound or its absence effects our perceptions and experiences; and in the way sound defines the emotional and intellectual territories we inhabit.

Even though we can clearly hear the actual sounds made by striking these found objects (low-tech tools and processes), Heimbecker inserts interventions between us and the sounds we create. We are invited here to become part of a technological loop by donning digital headphones (high-tech tools and processes) which are set to pick up the metallic pings, clangs, and bangs transmitted to them by the rocking microphones. The direct sound we generate and experience in real space thus becomes a misdirection, an experience interfered.

Heimbecker is aware that, in this



Hell is Just the Opposite (detail) by Steve Heimbecker

entertainment age, our sensory experiences are mediated and thus our perceptions of the world are contaminated. As a result of his technological tinkering, a number of interesting things happen when we put on these headphones. As we walk about the gallery interacting with the 'instruments' and swinging the microphones, we start to notice some small though nonetheless curious perceptual fissures: what we should hear on the left ear-piece, we actually hear on the right, and vice versa. We also hear a sound made near a microphone as if it were far away, and vice versa.

Through these simple technological

re-alignments of sound, action and response become disconnected: left becomes right, here becomes there, and now becomes then.

Indeed, it is almost as if time and space are inverted. Heimbecker repositions us within the fixed confines of the gallery space: we are betwixt and between. Through the perceptual disorder that ensues, he challenges our certainties, our 'givens' and our 'knowns.' Here the empirical becomes provisional. We question the phenomenal world as represented by the gallery itself, which, here, does not match our learned experience of it: we begin to disbelieve these objects and, indeed,

objectivity itself.

Through our interactions with these objects within this specific space, we 'score' our own instabilities and implicitly write our own histories.

(I'll warn you all that, despite Heimbecker's best intentions, this technology does not always work exactly here as he intends it to. Although this does not diminish his argument, it does drain some of the subtleties from it.)

Heimbecker allows us to actively compose our own ad hoc aural collages, to scramble dream time, event time and linear time, and to confuse sound and silence (silence being the other kind of sound). Indeed, the perplexing weave that results opposes the limited definition and the cultural norm.

If this work quotes anything, it is the Dada music performances of the early decades of this century, which similarly manifested aural and temporal chaos as a direct challenge to bourgeois regularity. At the same time, those performances mimicked and measured the clamorous psychological pulse of the period. While Heimbecker's approach is in some regards similar, what distinguishes his from theirs is that the Dadaists stood resolutely outside the arena looking in, while with this work, we, the viewers, are positioned simultaneously within it.

By simultaneously immersing us in and removing us from the unstable space, sound and time, Heimbecker reconfigures our relationship to them. He thus locates the subject and the subjective both within and without the impersonal and constructed regimes of the architectural, the technological and the historical — indeed, of culture itself. All outcomes here are experiential and we viewers are not only made aware that we are the locus of our own perceptions but are identified as the manufacturers of our own realities as well.

Heimbecker uses sound as art

The Leader Post - What's On - D1 - What's Up, What's In, What's On in Regina Entertainment, Thursday October 28, 1999, Regina, SK. Opinion - At the Galleries by Jack Anderson - review: Steve Heimbecker: Hell is Just the Opposite, Neutral Ground, Ends Saturday

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**« Songs of Place : Montreal » de Steve Heimbecker
par Guy Laramée, pour Festival Vasistas, Théâtre La Chapelle,
Montréal, QC samedi 2 mars 2002**

Vasistas*

Je doute que quiconque ait pu aimer la pièce de Heimbecker. « Songs of Place » n'est pas le genre de pièces qu'on peut « aimer », ou alors il faut redéfinir le mot « aimer » pour y inclure la saine douleur infligée par les artistes bourreaux qui, comme Heimbecker, nous forcent à constater notre délit de fuite permanent en face de la vie.

Et pourtant, à mon humble avis, s'il y eut une pièce « importante » dans tout ce Vasistas, c'est celle-là. Pourquoi ? Après tout, tout ce qu'on a ici, c'est le film ininterrompu d'une marche de 45 minutes... La meilleure façon pour moi de vous décrire les défis que nous posent cette pièce, c'est de vous raconter l'histoire de mon voyage, l'histoire de ma marche à moi. Mais tout d'abord, le contexte :

Situation :

Trois écrans, un frontal et deux latéraux, avec nous au milieu, sur la scène, dirigés vers l'écran frontal. Les trois écrans reçoivent la même image : huit petits plans fixes de paysages autour de l'île de Montréal entourent un cadre, le seul qui soit apparemment animé. Dans ce cadre central, une personne marche et elle est suivie, à distance fixe, par une caméra à l'épaule. Le son de l'ambiance sonore est diffusé en quadraphonie et il est peu à peu transformé, par étagements et modification de densité, de timbre et de volume.

Étant donné la facture visuelle minimaliste, on pourrait en venir à penser que le locus de l'œuvre est l'ambiance sonore, le « soundscape » comme disent les acousmaticiens qui sont allés à l'école de Murray Shaffer. Mais à mon avis, ce serait une erreur. « Song of place » demeure une œuvre globale, un événement spatio-temporel à caractère initiatique, qui recourt à l'ascèse pour nous rappeler justement que le temps et l'espace n'existent pas hors de nous-mêmes.

Une caméra suit un homme à distance fixe, sans jamais nous révéler

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par Guy Laramée, pour Festival Vasistas, Théâtre La Chapelle,
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exactement de qui et de quoi il s'agit. Le respect de cette distance, de cette ignorance est notre premier indice : Espionnage ? Esthétique ? On suit l'homme mais en fait c'est lui qui nous suit, qui nous traque. Il nous traque dans notre voir, il nous montre notre manière de nous tenir hors du monde en le gardant à distance.

Cette marche, ce n'est rien de plus qu'une marche. Tous les jours, nous marchons. De temps à autre, nous « prenons une marche ». Nous acceptons de passer du temps à ne faire que marcher, sans autre but que de « prendre une marche ». Quand vous prenez une marche, vous savez à quoi vous attendre ; pas grand-chose en fait : des gens, des maisons, des boutiques, des véhicules. Et vous n'en demandez pas plus. Non seulement vous l'acceptez, mais vous le choisissez. *Et pourtant ici, c'est insupportable.* Mais pourquoi ? Vous n'avez même pas besoin de marcher, vous n'avez qu'à rester assis. Et pourtant c'est insupportable.

Est-ce parce qu'ici, c'est comme si la caméra vous tenait la tête entre deux mains en vous forçant à regarder en avant ? Est-ce parce que vous ne pouvez laisser votre regard déambuler à sa guise, à mesure que les distractions latérales l'interpellent ? Est-ce parce que votre regard, ne pouvant plus dialoguer librement avec le monde, est désormais contraint de suivre le dialogue d'un autre ? Tout cela est-il insupportable parce qu'ici vous êtes démasqué ? Vous, voyeur, qui êtes devenu-e un-e addict de « changement » et de « liberté », et qui ne pouvez plus endurer le changement et la liberté d'un autre ?

Et pourquoi est-ce que je parle de VOUS ? N'est-ce pas de ma propre impatience dont il s'agit ici ? Pourquoi est-ce que je me sens prisonnier de ce cadre étouffant, du moment que j'ai compris qu'il ne s'y passera « rien », rien de plus que le spectacle d'une marche quotidienne ?

Mais tiens ! La lumière a changé ! (Où étais-je pour ne pas m'apercevoir du changement?) Je me mets à observer, à remarquer, à isoler les choses les unes des autres. Mais oui ! Ici aussi je peux me promener : les bordures du cadre, les 8 autres cadres, les 3 écrans qui n'ont pas la même balance de couleur. Ah ! Libération ! Ici aussi je suis libre. Libre d'aller et de venir. Libre d'être ICI.

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Mais au fait, où sommes-nous ? Quelle est cette rue, quelle est cette ville ? Los Angeles ? Non je dirais le Midwest américain ; à moins que ce ne soit Vancouver, ou Toronto ? OÙ sommes-nous ? Nous sommes ICI tout le temps. Jusque là-bas ici nous suit. Et tout à coup je me mets à penser que ÇA va être long, très long... (Comment est-ce qu'on peut SAVOIR cela, que ça va être long ?)

C'est une marche, c'est une ville, n'importe quelle ville, n'importe quel jour de n'importe quelle vie, c'est-à-dire : la mienne. Dans la salle, je vois des gens qui pensent à sortir. Or c'est impossible. Qu'y aurait-il de mieux à faire, de toute façon ? (Ce « mieux à faire », peut-être qu'il ne s'agit pas d'une chose en particulier mais du fait de pouvoir la faire soi-même, d'avoir l'impression - l'illusion ? - d'être aux commandes.)

Captifs. Nous sommes captifs. De captivés à captifs. Quelle ironie. Captifs de la directionalité, me dis-je alors. Mais c'est toujours ainsi, non ? On ne peut voir qu'en avant, toujours. À moins de tourner la tête, bien sûr, mais ça ne change rien : on ne voit toujours qu'en avant. Le son n'est-il pas ici notre planche de salut ?

Est-ce qu'on marche vers le centre, un centre quelconque, le centre-ville par exemple ? Tiens, quelque chose a changé. Est-ce moi, juste le fait d'être devenu plus attentif aux micro détails ? Je commence alors à douter de ma mémoire. Si la mémoire me trahit, qui sera le nouveau juge, le nouvel arbitre, pour décider de ce qui change et de ce qui ne change pas ? Tiens, le son a monté. Oui, j'en suis certain, c'est plus fort qu'avant. Ici je commence à stresser sérieusement. D'autres gens autour de moi semblent ressentir cette angoisse montante. Je ne peux pas quitter. Panique ? Non. Au contraire, ne pas pouvoir quitter est la seule chose rassurante, la seule certitude qui me reste. Je suis ici jusqu'à la fin. Pourquoi ? Parce qu'on me paye pour écrire sur cet événement ? J'irais où, de toute façon ? Pour faire quoi ?

Tiens, quelque chose a commencé à apparaître entre les cadres. Depuis combien de temps est-ce que c'est là ? Où étais-je pour ne pas avoir saisi le début de cette séquence ? Y avait-il un début ? Y a-t-il un autre début possible

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que celui que je remarque ? Qu'est-ce qu'un début de toute façon ? Est-ce comme un éveil, un réveil ? (Comment est-ce lorsque je n'y suis pas ? Est-ce que je peux vraiment le savoir ?)

Ça y est, je la vois : c'est une rivière. C'est Ça : nature-culture ! J'ai trouvé. Il veut parler de la ville et de la campagne. Mais non ! Ce ne peut pas être aussi simple ! Il m'a tendu un piège. Pourquoi est-ce que je cherche tout le temps ? Maintenant les pas rythment et pulsent le son de la ville. Le son rend tout ça terrifiant (comme un trip de mescaline sur la *Main...*). L'image de la rivière augmente en intensité.

Contre ce fond « immobile », le cadre du centre a l'air de danser. Il suffit d'en regarder le pourtour pour que ce soit le cadre tout entier qui se torde. Tout à coup, je suis libéré. Je suis libre ! Comme il n'y a rien à regarder, comme il n'y a pas d'histoire à « suivre », je peux regarder où je veux, écouter à ma guise. Cette liberté, est-ce un autre leurre ? Est-ce vraiment moi qui décide, ou est-ce que ce sont les sons qui me tirent ? (Dans l'écoute profonde, y a-t-il même *quelqu'un* qui écoute ?)

Dans cette ambiance, même les spectateurs deviennent terrifiants. Soudain, la porte chinoise ! Je l'ai reconnue. Tout s'ouvre, le cadre de l'image éclate, rien n'a changé dans cette marche mais la résolution de l'énigme géographique a tout transformé, le passé, le présent et le futur. Le quartier chinois ! La rue St-Laurent ! La banale rue St-Laurent ! Et puis un bateau dans une des huit images périphériques. Puis un passant dans une autre, et un plaisancier dans une troisième. N'étaient-ce pas des images fixes ? Non, le problème n'est pas là : trop de synchronicités. Il y a plus d'intention derrière cette marche qu'il n'en paraît. Il y a un, des artistes derrière tout ça, et ils contrôlent tout. Tout ça est une représentation. Mais représentation de quoi ?

Ah, voilà ! La voie maritime. L'homme que nous suivons depuis tantôt se rend au fleuve. Mais que suis-je en train de faire, moi ? Je cherche désespérément une solution, mais solution de quoi ? Qu'elle est la question ? Cette question, si je la trouve, n'est-elle pas la réponse à l'énigme de ma vie ? Fuir le vide à tout prix, par la guerre s'il le faut. Moi, ici, je fuis ce vide par

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l'écriture ; vous, par la lecture. Quel genre de spectateur serais-je ici sans ce projet d'écriture ? À quel genre de projet s'accrochent mes coéquipiers spectateurs pour tenir le coup, ici et dans la vie ? Est-ce parce qu'elles n'ont pu trouver aucun projet à plaquer sur ce film que mes deux voisines ont l'air si découragées ?

On arrive ! Le Vieux Montréal, la côte, en haut de la côte l'église Notre-Dame. Je vois la ville comme jamais je ne l'avais vue. Libéré de l'énigme, je suis à nouveau fasciné par la vie, comme dans la vie. Nous arrivons. Encore quelques minutes et nous y sommes. J'anticipe le soulagement de la fin. Ça achève. Comme dans la vie. De soulagement en soulagement, jusqu'au soulagement final. Le fond de l'image, la rivière, est complètement présent maintenant. La rivière est ici. Mais elle l'était tout le temps ! La rivière, c'est nous.

Tiens, on s'est arrêtés sur la place du square Champs de Mars. Quoi, nous n'allons pas au fleuve ? Les huit images ont commencé à disparaître. Ça sent la fin. Nous n'irons pas au fleuve. Puis l'image centrale « pan-up ». Comme au début. Je me souviens maintenant du début. Sans fin, pas de début. Le début est toujours une mémoire, de toute façon. Il n'y a que la fin qui existe. La fin : il ne reste que la rivière. Oh non ! Le son de la rivière a commencé à se transformer en bruit de circulation ! Est-ce que tout ÇA va recommencer ? Non, s'il vous plait. Et puis CUT. Plus rien. Les gens commencent lentement à applaudir.

Et puis ça reprend ! La rivière encore. J'éclate, nous éclatons de rire. On se joue de nous. On nous a eus. On nous a traqués, on nous a chassés et on nous a abattus. On a chassé le chasseur de « relief » jusque dans sa tanière, et on l'a vaincu. Mais non, le voilà indemne, le voilà qui bondit pour trouver une explication, un nouveau projet, un espoir tout frais - ne serait-ce que l'espoir de faire sens du désespoir et de l'ennui. L'animal vit à nouveau. Cet animal est immortel.

- Guy Laramée

"Songs of Place: Montreal" by Steve Heimbecker
by Guy Laramée, for Festival Vasistas, Théâtre La Chapelle,
Montreal, QC Saturday March 2, 2002
Original French to English - Google Translate - April 2020



I doubt anyone could have liked Heimbecker's play. "Songs of Place" is not the kind of thing you can "love", or you have to redefine the word "love" to include the healthy pain inflicted by executioner artists who, like Heimbecker, force us to note our permanent hit and run in front of life.

And yet, in my humble opinion, if there was one "important" piece in all of this Vasistas, this is it. Why? After all, all we have here is the uninterrupted film of a 45-minute walk... The best way for me to describe the challenges posed by this play is to tell you the story of my trip, the story of my walk. But first, the context:

Situation :

Three screens, one front and two side, with us in the middle, on the stage, facing the front screen. The three screens receive the same image: eight small still shots of landscapes around the island of Montreal surround a frame, the only one that is apparently animated. In this central setting, a person walks and is followed, at a fixed distance, by a shoulder camera. The sound of the sound environment is broadcast in quadrphony and it is gradually transformed, by staggering and modification of density, timbre and volume.

Given the minimalist visual style, one might think that the locus of the work is the soundscape, the "soundscape" as the acousmaticists who went to Murray Shaffer's school say. But in my opinion, it would be a mistake. "Song of place" remains a global work, a space-time event of an initiatory nature, which uses asceticism to remind us precisely that time and space do not exist outside of ourselves.

A camera follows a man at a fixed distance, without ever telling us exactly

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who and what it is. Respect for this distance, this ignorance est notre premier clue: Espionage? Aesthetic? We follow man but in fact it is he who follows us, who tracks us. It tracks us in our seeing, it shows us how we keep ourselves out of the world by keeping it at a distance.

This walk is nothing more than a walk. We walk every day. From time to time, we "take a walk". We agree to spend time just walking, with no other purpose than "taking a walk". When you take a walk, you know what to expect; not much in fact: people, houses, shops, vehicles. And you don't ask for more. Not only do you accept it, but you choose it. And yet here it's unbearable. But why? You don't even have to walk, you just have to sit. And yet it is unbearable.

Is it because it's like the camera is holding your head between two hands and forcing you to look forward? Is it because you can't let your gaze wander as it pleases, as the lateral distractions challenge it? Is it because your gaze, no longer able to dialogue freely with the world, is now forced to follow the dialogue of another? Is all this unbearable because here you are exposed? You, voyeur, who has become an addict of "change" and "freedom", and who can no longer endure change and the freedom of another?

And why am I talking about YOU? Is it not my own impatience that this is about here? Why do I feel trapped in this stuffy setting, as soon as I understand that there will be "nothing" going on, nothing more than the spectacle of a daily walk?

But hold on! The light has changed! (Where was I not to notice the change?) I begin to observe, to notice, to isolate things from each other. But yes! Here too I can walk around: the borders of the frame, the other 8 frames, the 3 screens that do not have the same color balance. Ah! Liberation! Here too I am free. Free to come and go. Free to be HERE.

But by the way, where are we? What is this street, what is this city? Los Angeles? No I would say the American Midwest; unless it's Vancouver, or

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Toronto? Where are we ? We are HERE all the time. Up there over here follows us. And suddenly I start thinking that IT will be long, very long ... (How can we KNOW that, that it will be long?)

It's a march, it's a city, any city, any day of any life, that is to say: mine. In the room, I see people thinking of going out. It's impossible. What would be better to do, anyway? (This "better to do", perhaps it is not a thing in particular but the fact of being able to do it yourself, to have the impression - the illusion? - of be in charge.)

Captives. We are captive. From captives to captives. How ironic. Captives of directionality, I tell myself then. But it's always like that, right? You can only see ahead, always. Unless you turn your head, of course, but that doesn't change anything: you always see only ahead. Isn't sound our lifeline here?

Are we walking towards the center, any center, the city center for example? Well, something has changed. Is it me, just being more attentive to micro details? I then begin to doubt my memory. If my memory betrays me, who will be the new judge, the new arbitrator, to decide what changes and what does not change? Here, the sound went up. Yes, I'm sure it's stronger than before. Here I am starting to get seriously stressed. Other people around me seem to feel this rising anxiety. I can't leave. Panic ? No. On the contrary, not being able to leave is the only reassuring thing, the only certainty that I have left. I'm here until the end. Why ? Because I am paid to write about this event? Where would I go anyway? To do what ?

Well, something started to appear between the frames. How long has it been there? Where was I for missing the start of this sequence? Was there a start? Is there any other possible start than the one I notice? What is a start anyway? Is it like an awakening, an awakening? (How is it when I'm not there? Can I really know?)

That's it, I see it: it's a river. That's it: nature-culture! I found. He wants

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to talk about the city and the countryside. But no ! It can't be that simple! He set a trap for me. Why am I looking all the time? Now the steps punctuate and pulsate the sound of the city. The sound makes it all terrifying (like a trip of mescaline on the Main...). The image of the river increases in intensity.

Against this "motionless" background, the center frame seems to dance. You just have to look around it to make the whole frame twist. Suddenly I am released. I'm free ! Since there is nothing to watch, as there is no story to "follow", I can watch where I want, listen as I want. This freedom, is it another decoy? Is it really me who decides, or are it the sounds that pull me? (In deep listening, is there even someone who listens?)

In this atmosphere, even the spectators become terrifying. Suddenly, the Chinese door! I recognized her. Everything opens, the frame of the image explodes, nothing has changed in this walk but the resolution of the geographical enigma has transformed everything, the past, the present and the future. Chinatown! St-Laurent Street! The banal rue St-Laurent! And then a boat in one of the eight peripheral images. Then a passerby in another, and a boater in a third. Weren't they still images? No, the problem is not there: too many synchronicities. There is more intent behind this step than it seems. There is one, artists behind it, and they control everything. All this is a representation. But representation of what?

Ah, there you go ! The seaway. The man we have been following for a while goes to the river. But what am I doing? I'm desperately looking for a solution, but solution of what? What is the question ? Isn't this question, if I find it, the answer to the riddle of my life? Flee the vacuum at all costs, through war if necessary. Me, here, I flee this emptiness by writing; you, by reading. What kind of spectator would I be here without this writing project? What kind of projects do my spectator teammates hang on to, here and in life? Is it because they couldn't find any project to put on this film that my two neighbors seem so discouraged?

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We arrive ! Old Montreal, the coast, at the top of the hill Notre-Dame church. I see the city like never before. Freed from the enigma, I am once again fascinated by life, as in life. We arrive. Just a few more minutes and we're there. I anticipate the relief of the end. It ends. As in life. From relief to relief, until final relief. The bottom of the image, the river, is completely present now. The river is here. But it was all the time! The river is us.

Well, we stopped on the square in the Champs de Mars square. What, we're not going to the river? The eight images began to disappear. It smells the end. We will not go to the river. Then the central "pan-up" image. As at the beginning. I now remember the beginning. Endless, no beginning. The beginning is always a memory, anyway. There is only the end that exists. The end: only the river remains. Oh no ! The sound of the river started to turn into traffic noise! Will it ALL start over? No Please. And then CUT. Nothing. People are slowly starting to clap.

And then it starts again! The river again. I burst out, we burst out laughing. We are playing with us. We got us. We were tracked, chased and shot. We chased the "relief" hunter into his den, and we defeated him. But no, there he is unharmed, there he leaps to find an explanation, a new project, a fresh hope - if only the hope of making sense of despair and boredom. The animal is living again. This animal is immortal.

- Guy Laramée

Champ de diodes; (Wind Array Cascade Machine) Steve Heimbecker. Oboro, 4001, rue Berri, espace 301. by Bernard Lamarche

E 6

LE DEVOIR, LES SAMEDI 13 ET DIMANCHE 14 NOVEMBRE 2004

DE VISU

Champ de diodes

POD
(WIND ARRAY CASCADE MACHINE)
Steve Heimbecker
Oboro
4001, rue Berri, espace 301
Jusqu'au 11 décembre

BERNARD LAMARCHE

Steve Heimbecker est considéré comme un pionnier dans l'art sonore au Canada. Pourtant, sa nouvelle installation, une première montréalaise, est parfaitement silencieuse. Terriblement silencieuse, même. Grâce à des moyens relativement simples, elle traduit à distance des inflexions au pouvoir évocateur fantastique, celles du vent. Rien ne bouge dans la galerie, seules quelques lumières scintillent.

En pleine noirceur, 64 pôles sont disposés en galerie, comprenant 2880 diodes électroluminescentes passant du vert profond au rouge, selon l'intensité... du vent. Tout est parfaitement calme dans la galerie toutefois, rien ne bouge. Pour répondre à ce champ de lumières, 64 capteurs de mouvements, sur le toit de la Fondation Langlois, à Montréal, enregistrent les fluctuations du vent (la *Wind Array Cascade Machine*, un système télématique de cartographie environnementale et de diffusion en réseau). C'est donc moins des intensités sonores que signalent les diodes que celles de la vitesse des courants d'air.

La pièce a déjà été montrée au Musée d'art contemporain Kiasma à Helsinki, en Finlande, dans le cadre d'ISEA 2004. L'idée que le vent de Montréal puisse souffler sur Helsinki n'a rien de banal. Ainsi, l'échange d'information au-delà des contingences physiques peut gagner des registres poétiques. Ainsi, la pièce relie deux points distants par Internet, proche de plusieurs autres œuvres en ce moment sur la planète cyber (en cela, elle témoigne d'une collaboration entre la Fondation Langlois et Oboro). À l'opposé de la plupart de ces œuvres, toutefois, *POD* relaie non pas une masse complexe d'information sur un canal, mais autant de petites informations simples sur une myriade de canaux, offrant comme un point de résistance.

Par contre, son matériau est porteur de belles évocations. Ces registres poétiques de la pièce sont particulièrement bien développés. Redressant sur des tiges verticales les diodes lumineuses



STEVE HEIMBECKER

Soixante-quatre capteurs de mouvements, sur le toit de la Fondation Langlois, à Montréal, enregistrent les fluctuations du vent (la *Wind Array Cascade Machine*, un système télématique de cartographie environnementale et de diffusion en réseau).

qu'on retrouve habituellement sur une console de son, Heimbecker a créé un véritable champ de diodes lumineuses; on se retrouve devant un champ de blé étincelant, comme si un vent immatériel traversait l'espace. Mais encore, cette référence naturaliste oscille avec une autre, autrement plus urbaine, alors que la représentation métaphorique du vent se transforme en la ligne des toits d'une ville virtuelle, avec ses tours dans la nuit.

L'effet est saisissant, offrant différents points de vue selon notre manière de nous déplacer dans l'espace. Ce qui reste, toutefois, c'est cette impression fugace que passe un courant de matière invisible, auquel on a retiré la matérialité pour ne conserver que le mouvement. Ne reste plus qu'à se laisser bercer. Le vernissage a lieu aujourd'hui, à 17h.

◆ ◆ ◆
Depuis le temps qu'on en entend parler dans les officines du milieu des arts visuels, le fameux Laboratoire nouveau média d'Oboro, un projet dont l'idée a été lancée il y a près de 10 ans, est finalement ouvert. Afin de servir la création indépendante en vidéo, en son ou dans la production, par exemple, de DVD audio, ce studio de petite taille est disponible à coûts modiques, du moins si l'on se fie aux tarifs de l'industrie lourde.

L'ensemble haut de gamme comprend un studio de 1000 pieds carrés, suffisamment grand pour s'ajuster aux petites productions. Un parc d'éclairage professionnel, des équipements audiovisuels complets de même que des services de diffusion en transit (*streaming*) garnissent le lot.

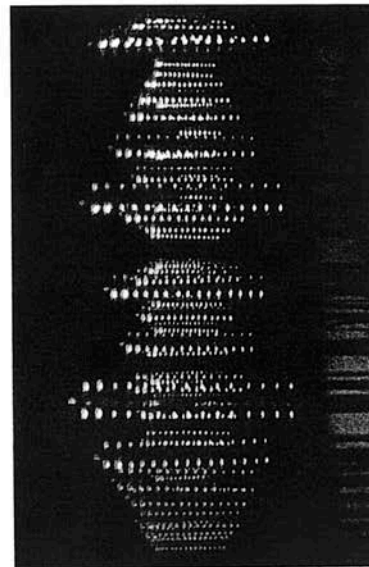
Ce qui distingue ce studio d'autres en ville? D'abord, à cette échelle, la chose est une rareté. De plus, le studio comprend une régie multiphonie 5.1 (*surround*) et deux studios d'enregistrement. Elle permet donc de combler les besoins criants de la communauté artistique montréalaise.

Selon ce que nous en disait Daniel Dion, qui dirige cette nouvelle section d'Oboro, le lieu veut servir «la recherche et la création fondamentales, loin des gros marchés commerciaux». Les ressources pourront être utilisées par l'ensemble des créateurs, que ce soit pour enregistrer un album ou produire des DVD de haute qualité, un secteur en pleine ébullition.

Le centre propose aujourd'hui à la population et à la communauté artistique une journée portes ouvertes où il leur sera possible de découvrir les lieux. Fait à noter, on a tout spécialement fait attention à ce que ces espaces soient agréables à fréquenter, afin de disposer les ar-

tistes à la création. Une touche spéciale de design fait de ces lieux une belle réussite. Portes ouvertes à partir de midi aujourd'hui. Détails également sur le site <www.oboro.net>.

Le Devoir



STEVE HEIMBECKER
En pleine noirceur, 64 pôles sont disposés à la galerie Oboro, comprenant 2880 diodes électroluminescentes passant du vert profond au rouge, selon l'intensité... du vent sur le toit de l'édifice de la Fondation Langlois.

Heimbecker a créé
un véritable champ
de diodes lumineuses;
on se retrouve
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traversait l'espace

**Champ de diodes; (Wind Array Cascade Machine) Steve Heimbecker.
Oboro, 4001, rue Berri, espace 301. by Bernard Lamarche**

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BYLINE: Lamarche, Bernard

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En pleine noirceur, 64 pôles sont disposés en galerie, comprenant 2880 diodes électroluminescentes passant du vert profond au rouge, selon l'intensité... du vent. Tout est parfaitement calme dans la galerie toutefois, rien ne bouge. Pour répondre à ce champ de lumières, 64 capteurs de mouvements, sur le toit de la Fondation Langlois, à Montréal, enregistrent les fluctuations du vent (la Wind Array Cascade Machine, un système télématique de cartographie environnementale et de diffusion en réseau). C'est donc moins des intensités sonores que signalent les diodes que celles de la vitesse des courants d'air.

La pièce a déjà été montrée au <Musée> d'art contemporain Kiasma à Helsinki, en Finlande, dans le cadre d'ISEA 2004. L'idée que le vent de Montréal puisse souffler sur Helsinki n'a rien de banal. Ainsi, l'échange d'information au-delà des contingences physiques peut gagner des registres poétiques. Ainsi, la pièce relie deux points distants par Internet, proche de plusieurs autres oeuvres en ce moment sur la planète cyber (en cela, elle témoigne d'une collaboration entre la Fondation Langlois et Oboro). A l'opposé de la plupart de ces oeuvres, toutefois, POD relaie non pas une masse complexe d'information sur un canal, mais autant de petites informations simples sur une myriade de canaux, offrant comme un point de résistance.

Par contre, son matériau est porteur de belles évocations. Ces registres poétiques de la pièce sont particulièrement bien développés. Redressant sur des tiges verticales les diodes lumineuses qu'on retrouve habituellement sur une console de son, Heimbecker a créé un véritable champ de diodes lumineuses; on se retrouve devant un champ de blé étincelant, comme si un vent immatériel traversait l'espace. Mais encore, cette référence naturaliste oscille avec une autre, autrement plus urbaine, alors que la représentation métaphorique du vent se transforme en la ligne des toits d'une ville

Champ de diodes; (Wind Array Cascade Machine) Steve Heimbecker. Oboro, 4001, rue Berri, espace 301. by Bernard Lamarche

virtuelle, avec ses tours dans la nuit. L'effet est saisissant, offrant différents points de vue selon notre manière de nous déplacer dans l'espace. Ce qui reste, toutefois, c'est cette impression fugace que passe un courant de matière invisible, auquel on a retiré la matérialité pour ne conserver que le mouvement. Ne reste plus qu'à se laisser bercer. Le vernissage a lieu aujourd'hui, à 17h.

Depuis le temps qu'on en entend parler dans les officines du milieu des arts visuels, le fameux Laboratoire nouveau média d'Oboro, un projet dont l'idée a été lancée il y a près de 10 ans, est finalement ouvert. Afin de servir la création indépendante en vidéo, en son ou dans la production, par exemple, de DVD audio, ce studio de petite taille est disponible à coûts modiques, du moins si l'on se fie aux tarifs de l'industrie lourde. Jusqu'au 1 L'ensemble haut de gamme comprend un studio de 1000 pieds carrés, suffisamment grand pour s'ajuster aux petites productions. Un parc d'éclairage professionnel, des équipements audiovisuels complets de même que des services de diffusion en transit (streaming) garnissent le lot.

Ce qui distingue ce studio d'autres en ville? D'abord, à cette échelle, la chose est une rareté. De plus, le studio comprend une régie multiphonie 5.1 (surround) et deux studios d'enregistrement. Elle permet donc de combler les besoins criants de la communauté artistique montréalaise.

Selon ce que nous en disait Daniel Dion, qui dirige cette nouvelle section d'Oboro, le lieu veut servir «la recherche et la création fondamentales, loin des gros marchés commerciaux». Les ressources pourront être utilisées par l'ensemble des créateurs, que ce soit pour enregistrer un album où produire des DVD de haute qualité, un secteur en pleine ébullition.

Le centre propose aujourd'hui à la population et à la communauté artistique une journée portes ouvertes où il leur sera possible de découvrir les lieux. Fait à noter, on a tout spécialement fait attention à ce que ces espaces soient agréables à fréquenter, afin de disposer les artistes à la création. Une touche spéciale de design fait de ces lieux une belle réussite.

Portes ouvertes à partir de midi aujourd'hui. Détails également sur le site <

Champ de diodes; (Wind Array Cascade Machine) Steve Heimbecker. Oboro, 4001, rue Berri, espace 301. Jusqu'au 11 décembre. Jusqu'au 2.

**Champ de diodes; (Wind Array Cascade Machine) Steve Heimbecker.
Oboro, 4001, rue Berri, espace 301. by Bernard Lamarche**

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Steve Heimbecker is considered a pioneer in sound art in Canada. However, his new installation, a Montreal first, is perfectly silent. Terribly silent even. Thanks to relatively simple means, it translates inflections with fantastic evocative power from a distance, those of the wind. Nothing moves in the gallery, only a few lights twinkle.

In full darkness, 64 poles are arranged in a gallery, comprising 2880 light-emitting diodes going from deep green to red, depending on the intensity ... of the wind. Everything is perfectly calm in the gallery, however; nothing is moving. To respond to this field of light, 64 motion sensors on the roof of the Langlois Foundation in Montreal record wind fluctuations (the Wind Array Cascade Machine, a telematic system for environmental mapping and network distribution). It is therefore less the sound intensities that the diodes signal than that of the velocity of the air currents.

The piece has already been shown at the <Museum> of contemporary art Kiasma in Helsinki, Finland, as part of ISEA 2004. The idea that the wind of Montreal can blow on Helsinki is not trivial. Thus, the exchange of information beyond physical contingencies can gain poetic registers. Thus, the play connects two distant points via the Internet, close to several other works currently on the cyber planet (in this, it testifies to a collaboration between the Langlois Foundation and Oboro). Unlike most of these works, however, POD relays not a complex mass of information on a channel, but as many small, simple pieces of information on a myriad of channels, offering as a point of resistance.

On the other hand, its material carries beautiful evocations. These poetic registers of the play are particularly well developed. Straightening the light-emitting diodes usually found on a sound console on vertical rods, Heimbecker has created a veritable field of light-emitting diodes; we find ourselves in front of a sparkling field of wheat, as if an intangible wind crossed space. But still, this naturalist reference oscillates with another, much more urban, while the metaphorical representation of the wind is transformed into the line of the roofs of a virtual city, with its towers at night. The effect is

Champ de diodes; (Wind Array Cascade Machine) Steve Heimbecker. Oboro, 4001, rue Berri, espace 301. by Bernard Lamarche

striking, offering different points of view depending on how we move in space. What remains, however, is this fleeting impression that a current of invisible matter passes, from which materiality has been withdrawn in order to keep only the movement. All that remains is to let yourself be rocked. The opening takes place today, at 5 p.m.

Since the time we hear about it in pharmacies in the visual arts, the famous Oboro New Media Laboratory, a project whose idea was launched almost 10 years ago, has finally opened. In order to serve independent creation in video, sound or in the production, for example, of DVD audio, this small studio is available at low cost, at least if one relies on heavy industry prices. The high-end set includes a 1,000 square foot studio, large enough to accommodate small productions. A professional lighting park, complete audiovisual equipment as well as streaming services fill the lot.

What sets this studio apart from others in town? First, on this scale, the thing is a rarity. In addition, the studio includes a 5.1 multi-channel control unit (surround) and two recording studios. It therefore makes it possible to meet the glaring needs of the Montreal artistic community.

According to what Daniel Dion, the director of this new section of Oboro, told us, the place wants to serve "fundamental research and creation, far from the big commercial markets". The resources can be used by all creators, whether to record an album or produce high-quality DVDs, a sector in full swing.

The center now offers the public and the artistic community an open day where they will be able to discover the places. It should be noted that special care was taken to ensure that these spaces were pleasant to frequent, in order to arrange the artists for creation. A special touch of design makes these places a great success.

Doors open from noon today. Details also on the site <

Diode field; (Wind Array Cascade Machine) Steve Heimbecker. Oboro, 4001, rue Berri, Espace 301. Until December 11. Until 2.



Heimbecker posing in front of a speaker membrane as part of the audio art installation, *SoundPool: The Manufacturing of Silence*, 1996.

PHOTO © STEVE HEIMBECKER. USED WITH PERMISSION.

Sculpting with sound
and creating audio-visual
alchemy

ste ve heim beck er

BY ANNA FRIZ

at work
and
play in
the
sound
pool

I first encountered Steve Heimbecker in the summer of 2000, at what was then his home in Springwater, Saskatchewan. I was driving back to Vancouver from Winnipeg with two friends, and on the recommendation of a mutual friend we stopped in for a visit with Steve. Springwater is a farming village of just a few houses surrounded by fields. Everyone lives on the edge of town.

We had drinks on the front stoop of Steve's house as the storm we had been driving towards all day gathered momentum on the horizon. Impossible sky. A dirt track with twin ruts, on which we took turns riding up and down on a semi-functional bicycle, the electric voices of summer insects; Steve's house a luminous turquoise at dusk. These are the fragments of place that I recall from that day, my only time in Springwater.

Now some years later, encountering Heimbecker's audio-visual portrait of home in *Songs of Place: Springwater*, I am immersed in his deep sense of place in this intimately rendered portrait, while retaining the attention of a first-time traveller gazing out the dusty windows of a vehicle passing through. The piece includes a surround-sound track of densely edited recordings from multiple sites in the fields outside Springwater, and a single-channel split screen video composed of three

Selected Career Events — Steve Heimbecker

Have You Ever Thought to Ask? 1988. Audio art performance video for the *Camera Obscura #6* video-art television series. Em/media-Rogers Cable 10 (N. Henricks and C. Kerr, co-producers). Heimbecker's first use of noise gates in audio art performance.

Engine. 1992. Octaphonic synchronized audio art composition. Em/media, Calgary, Alberta.

continued next page

views from a van driving down the only paved road crossing the village. This layering of knowledge and discovery, of time passing and time sustained, of the mapping of audible and visible space, characterizes Heimbecker's groundbreaking work in sound sculpture.

Steve Heimbecker grew up in Springwater. His mother was a musician who played piano in small-time prairie dance bands, while his grain-farming father's spare time was taken up with tinkering and building. Heimbecker learned how to weld and how to drive a car by the time he was ten. He also became interested both in music and in creating things from miscellaneous treasures from the junkpile. He carried both these influences with him to Alberta College of Art and Design in Calgary in the late 1970s, where Heimbecker studied sculpture and played in punk rock bands.

"My career from the early days," notes Heimbecker, "has been full of found objects." Trips to the junkyard and hardware stores in Calgary yielded raw materials for visual work, and by the mid-1980s Heimbecker had also begun to cultivate an interest in industrial music and noise. Found, bastardized, and invented instruments infiltrated his artistic and performative practice. He began to develop a trajectory that would continue through to his later pieces: a fascination with the relations of space, time, frequency and sound, made manifest in the creation of sonic sculpture. As Heimbecker notes, "To me, sound itself is a tactile, plastic material to be sculpted and shaped over time."

The early modern avant-garde was a significant influence for Heimbecker. His own early sculptural instruments and later sound-production systems harken back to the Dadaists and Futurists in the unorthodox materials used, the interest in the fluctuating (urban) soundscape displayed, and the absurdist sense of humour at work in them. Though Heimbecker often worked with low-tech gear in the early days, by the late 1980s he had taught himself enough sound production and engineering to turn his full artistic focus to unorthodox sound creation. Artist-run centres supported his work, and together with EM/Media in Calgary, he co-produced a compilation tape of Calgary artists entitled *All Audio II* (1989), with support from the Canada Council for the Arts in the newly minted category of audio art.

crow's ear view

Heimbecker has continued to create unique instruments and sound production systems, heard in quadrophonic, octaphonic, and soon sixty-four-channel sound. He engages multi-channel systems to map, present, and represent immersive sonic environments, resulting in extremely high-resolution impressions of audible phenomena and/or daily life. An early foray into immersive sound work is *Engine: An Octaphonic Movement* (1992), which Heimbecker developed during a residency at EM/Media. Here audio collage inspired by James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* formed the basis of a surround-sound setting, with eight channels arranged equidistantly along the circumference of a circle—essentially two quadrophonic squares overlaid to create a circle. Heimbecker describes this arrangement as "squaring the circle," a technique he employs to create an immersive "sound-pool." Heimbecker notes that he has long been fascinated by the alchemical concept of the squaring of the circle: "In eight-channel sound design the speaker placement can be seen as two squares placed on top of each other at forty-five degree angles, creating a circle. Those eight points, which also represent the four cardinal directions, can be used to divide the circle like a pie to find a centre, which is the sweet spot of the surround-sound system." Squaring the circle has become a kind of iconic shorthand for Heimbecker's artistic philosophy and method of working in four dimensions (three spatial dimensions, the fourth being time). His philosophy is also reflected in the name of his production company—Qube Assemblage for Art in Motion.

Subsequent works such as *The Acoustic Line as the Crow Listens* (1993) and *Soundpool: The Manufacturing of Silence* (1996) all built

Heimbecker posing with video and quadraphonic sound recording rig, *Songs of Place: Vienna*, 2004.

**Video stills, (from left to right)
Songs of Place: Springwater, 2000-2004,
Songs of Place: Halifax, 2001-2004,
Songs of Place: Vancouver, 2002-2004,
Songs of Place: Île de Montréal, 2001-2004,
Songs of Place: Vienna, 2004-2005**

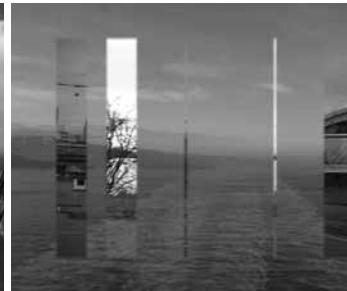
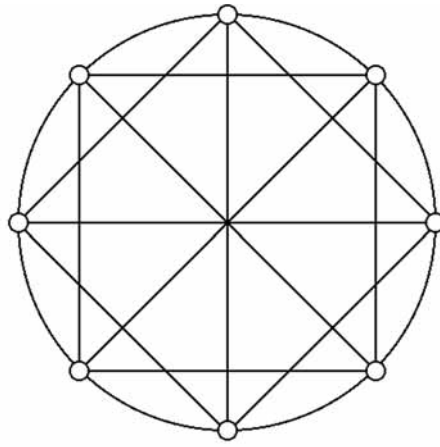


PHOTO © STEVE HEIMBECKER. USED WITH PERMISSION.

upon the techniques developed for *Engine*. Heimbecker created his acoustic mapping piece *The Acoustic Line as the Crow Flies* as part of an exhibition that was associated with the first international acoustic ecology conference, *The Tuning of the World* (1993), the title honouring R. Murray Schafer's important book of 1977. *The Acoustic Line as the Crow Listens* allowed Heimbecker to affect the perceptions of the listener by manipulating sound gathered simultaneously at eight points spread equally along a mile of prairie. By placing eight speakers in the gallery with each speaker representing one recording point, Heimbecker facilitated gallery-goers' experience of the rural soundscape on a completely different (non-human) scale. The listener heard a mile of sound condensed into the sixty-four feet of the model, and could thus conceptually travel faster than the speed of sound, since the acoustic mile had been reduced dramatically and enclosed inside the gallery space.

"With this system I had designed a process of sound recording and broadcast where the physical scale experienced by the listener could be changed conceptually by manipulating the spatial boundaries of the broadcast system relative to the original acoustic environment and recording ... It's a sculptural space and it's an immersive space. The speakers are designed as a corridor. They are exactly eight feet from the floor, and eight feet apart to create sixty-four feet, and they are eight feet across. The corridor is eight by eight by eight times eight (or eight by eight by sixty four). These proportion have continued in my work—and will continue, I am sure. This is also a strategy that I used from the beginning: increasing the density of the resolution by looking large and replaying small." Heimbecker's attention is not just on the soundscape itself, but has also turned to the expanded subjectivity of the listener.



Heimbecker's diagram of the square circle system he used for his octaphonic concerts since 1992, and later for his *Acoustic Mapping Process* resulting in the *Songs of Place* series.

songs of place

From 2000 to 2004 Heimbecker composed the *Songs of Place* series: four portraits of four Canadian cities, each averaging forty minutes. These are works of visual and auditory art that fully engage the senses and sensibilities of the audience. Here Heimbecker operates at the juncture of electroacoustic composition, soundscape, and acoustic ecology, video montage, and sonic sculpture. Over his career as a sound artist specializing in quadrasonic and octaphonic surround systems, Heimbecker has developed unique framing and editing techniques that enable these intense portraits, essentially high-resolution audio-video representations of place and sound space.

The places themselves—Vancouver, Springwater Saskatchewan, Île de Montréal, and Halifax—are not represented at times of high festival or unusual activity. They go about their business on average days, but the resulting portraits are far from banal. Instead the everyday becomes extraordinary when rendered audible in such high resolution. Heimbecker applies his signature mapping system (Acoustic Mapping Process) to each place, locating a geographically determined centre point and circumference: "I look for a sweet spot, the centre space, that is the most obvious centre point of the architecture of the city. The city is developed over decades or centuries by the people who have lived there, so it is an organic process of growth as far as I can tell, even though it is

continued from previous page

The Acoustic Line as the Crow Listens. 1993. Eight-channel acoustic mapping project achieved by recording a linear mile of synchronized sound space as part of the Tuning of the World exhibition, The Nickel Arts Museum, Calgary, Alberta.

Improvisation in Octaphonics. 1995. Canadian concert tour using a TEAC 80-8, ending with a residency at La Chambre Blanche, Quebec City, Quebec, and the creation of the octaphonic composition *Spin Cycle*.

Soundpool: The Manufacturing of Silence. 1996. First exhibited at Illingworth Kerr Gallery, Calgary, Alberta.

The Enormousness of Cloud Machines. 1999. Stereo reductions of Heimbecker's octaphonic and quadrasonic compositions from 1992 to 1998. Ohm Éditions CD (ohm/avtr 015-016), Quebec City, Quebec.

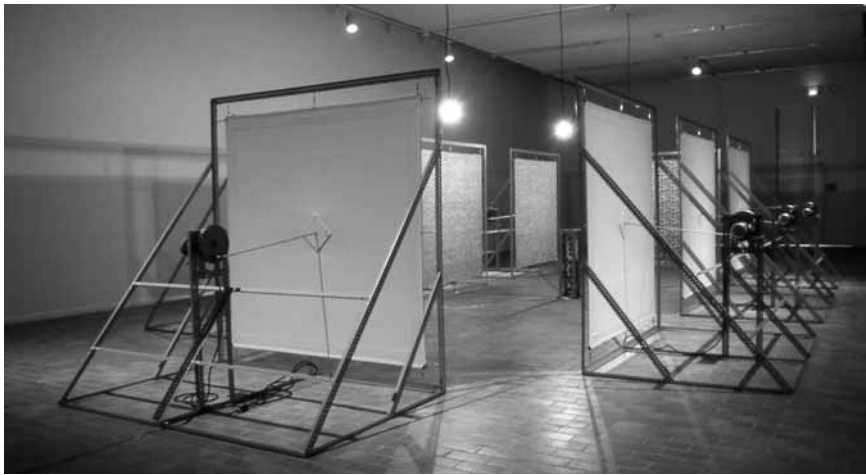
Songs of Place (then called *Songs the City Sang*) first produced. 2001. Earful Audio Art Festival, Centre for Art Tapes, Halifax, Nova Scotia.

Wind Array Cascade Machine and POD. 2003. Created through residency at Les Productions Recto-Verso, with electronic and software systems co-produced by Avatar, all in Quebec City, Quebec. Honorary Mention, Interactive Media: Prix Ars Electronica 2005.

Sound Can Fly. 2005. Site-specific composition using wearable sound equipment, with Neil Cadger. Sound Travels Festival, New Adventures in Sound Art, Gibraltar Point Art Centre, Toronto Island, Toronto, Ontario.

Songs of Place. 2005. The first four DVD 5.1 audio art portraits and bookwork of the *Songs of Place* series. Artist residency, 2004, OBORO, Montreal, Quebec.





SoundPool: The Manufacturing of Silence, 1996, servo mechanical audio art installation which produces a low amplitude 3 hertz vibration, Illingworth Kerr Gallery Exhibition, Calgary.

systematic and measured.” Eight to ten equidistant recording points are chosen according to the cardinal directions, and a quadraphonic omnidirectional audio recording is made at each point.

Heimbecker’s applied mapping system for each site functions essentially as a compositional score that employs both artistic intention and chance. The recording locations are all outdoor public spaces: on streets, at intersections, in parks, at water’s edge. The mapped sound space is not composed into a singular perspective but rather organized into a complex, spatialized, temp-aural experience. Heimbecker invented a method for editing the recordings into surround-sound—Dynamic Voltage Mapping, which employs the dynamics of one sound source as an editing template for another; and moments from each of the eight or ten recording sites cycle through the surround system. This results in a strobe effect, so the audio collage manifests a dense, intense sonic space in which sounds surface and recede.

The videos that accompany the audio collage serve as reference points of place and as visual drones. The *Songs of Place* series began in Halifax with an audio-only portrait of the city (though Heimbecker eventually returned to shoot the video component), so *Songs of Place: Île de Montréal* was the first in this series to have visuals combined with the audio. *Île de Montréal* includes a video with nine windows superimposed over an image of water flowing in the Lachine Rapids. The video is shot looking outward along the circle’s edge at the same sites where the audio is recorded,

so each “window” in the *Montréal* video is from one of these sites, with the ninth window being a moving camera following Heimbecker as he walks along St-Laurent Boulevard, recording the street ambience. The *Vancouver* portrait features the video most complementary to the audio mapping and editing process: video from each of the mapped sites is superimposed in six vertical slits over an image of moving water in Georgia Straight. The video in each of the vertical windows is tightly edited to strobe through the different locations, resulting in unique and remarkably coherent documentation.

More than capturing an audio-video impression of a particular location at a particular time, these portraits are ultimately meditations on the flows that infuse places with life, as reinforced by the images of moving water in the backgrounds of the *Vancouver*, *Montreal*, and *Halifax* videos, and by the prairie ocean—wind in the grass—of *Springwater*. Human subjects are not the protagonists here: our attention is also drawn to surging cars, staccato jackhammers, *kri*-ing birds and gathering thunder. The persistent currents of commerce and industry (heard in traffic, construction, and the passing train) are joined by flows of human and animal activity, weather, and the turning seasons. Heimbecker comments that his ideas for “these large-scale sound gathering projects, which are the *Songs of Place* process, are about synthesizing and distilling something new from a large pot.”

Heimbecker was invited to create *Songs of Place: Vienna* during an artist residency with ORF Kunstradio (a radio program on Aus-

tria’s national cultural channel that also initiates on-site and online works). The portrait premiered in Vienna in September, 2005, and was Heimbecker’s most ambitious yet. He adapted his mapping techniques to suit the nuances of an older European city: since Vienna’s twenty-three districts spiral out from the central or first district, he chose the centre of each district as a recording site. This meant twenty-three rather than eight individual image and omnidirectional sound sources. The video was adapted so that instead of showing multiple sites on the screen at once (using different techniques for each individual portrait), *Songs of Place: Vienna* features a single video square floating over a shot of the sky taken with the camera pointing straight up in the first district. Video from each of the other twenty-two sites was cut together at one edit per frame in sync with the audio. Whereas the Canadian portraits were shot with the camera facing out from the centre of town, in Vienna the camera remains oriented inwards towards the centre of the first district. “The result is a video with 54,000 edits, strobing on top of a calm blue sky,” Heimbecker notes.

wind array cascade machine

Parallel to the *Songs of Place* portraits, Heimbecker created the *Wind Array Cascade Machine*, a device made of sixty-four motion sensors which interprets the effect of the wind on roof-mounted sensors, and streams the resulting data online for use in installation works such as *POD* (2003–2005). Time spent living on the prairies and recording wind in Springwater led Heimbecker to meditate upon wind as a unique dynamic force in the environment generally and for soundscape in particular. He had the “realization that we do not actually hear the wind, but rather we hear and see objects as they are affected by the wind, such as the wind in our ears (and our microphones)... a field of mature grain blowing in the wind.” Thus Heimbecker set about creating an eight-by-eight square sensor grid measuring approximately twenty-five by twenty-five metres, which he mounted first on the roof of the Méduse complex in Quebec City, and later on the roof of the Fondation Daniel Langlois in Montreal. The sensor array sways and dips, each sensor rod moving in response

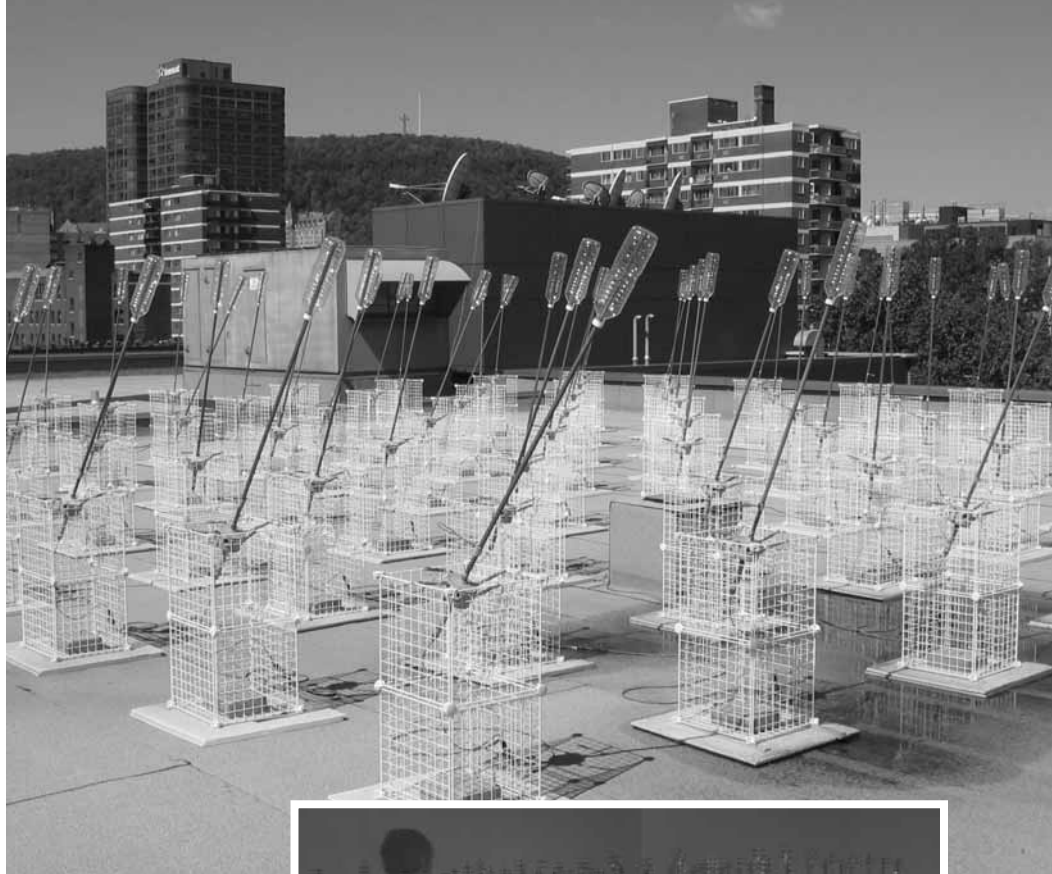
to the waves of wind across the roof, measuring wind pressure and intensity. The mechanisms are weatherproof and have even withstood the sub-zero temperatures of winter in Quebec City.

POD is a silent installation, a symbolic section of land (containing 640 acres) made of technological “wheat”. *POD* consists of LEDs mounted on sixty-four copper rods or stems to portray a real-time, four-dimensional picture of the wind, where each of the LED pods functions as an amplitude meter corresponding to one of the sixty-four wind sensors of the *Wind Array Cascade Machine* data network. The *POD* installation is about the height of an adult person, and adorned with green, yellow, and red LEDs, which are activated by the wind’s strength: green by a gentle breeze, yellow by a bit of bluster, red by a hard gust. Since the data is transported from the roof-top online to the installation space, the system is able to send information about the wind blowing across the rooftop in Montreal to the *POD* installation in remote locations like galleries in Helsinki, Linz, Austria, or Edmonton. The electronic and software systems for *POD* were designed, developed and co-produced by Avatar, Quebec City, and Heimbecker won an Honorary Mention in Interactive Media at the Prix Ars Electronica 2005 for the work.

Though there are no sounds created by the installation, some people experience synesthetic sound when viewing *POD*. Fittingly, Heimbecker is expanding the system to work with sound for a work-in-progress entitled *SIGNE*. This sound installation will use the *Wind Array Cascade Machine* data and a sine wave generator with sixty-four channels, controlled by a programming environment linked to a corresponding multi-channel sound system.

The audience will be reminded again of their own fluctuating subjectivity in the soundpool of Heimbecker’s creations.

Anna Friz is a sound and radio artist who divides her time between Toronto and Montreal. She has broadcast and performed across Canada, and in the U.S., Mexico, and across Europe. She is a doctoral candidate in Communications and Culture at York University, Toronto. Her past contributions to Musicworks have included reviews and two feature articles, one on the Montreal silophone project in issue 83, and the other on sound designer Nancy Tobin in issue 88.



***Wind Array Cascade Machine*, 2003, 64 channel wind sensing network designed to move like a field of tall grain.**

***POD (Wind Array Cascade Machine)*, 2003, the first 64 channel installation produced for the WACM data network, OBORO exhibition, Montréal.**

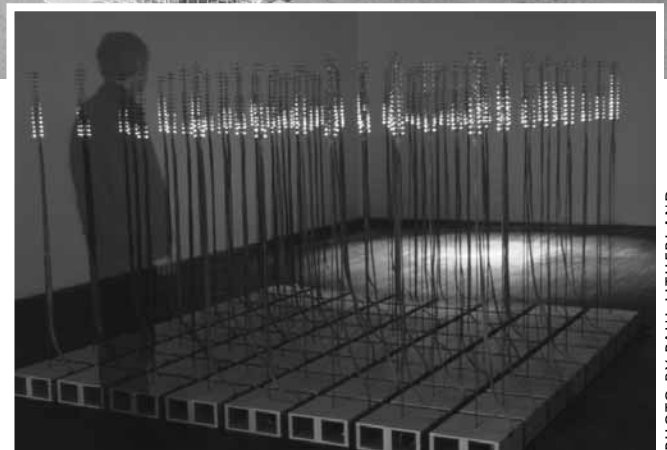


PHOTO BY PAUL LITHELAND

résumé français

Steve Heimbecker crée des instruments et des systèmes de production de son uniques que l'on peut entendre en diffusion quadraphonique, octophonique et, bientôt, sur un système à 64 canaux. Il travaille activement sur des systèmes multicanaux permettant de distribuer, présenter et représenter des environnements sonores immersifs pour créer des impressions à très haute résolution de phénomènes audibles et/ou des sons du quotidien. *Songs of Place* est une série de quatre portraits de quatre villes canadiennes et d'une ville européenne. Ces œuvres, qui engagent les sens et la sensibilité des auditeurs, se situent à la jonction de la composition électroacoustique, du paysage sonore, de l'écologie acoustique, du montage vidéo et de la sculpture sonore. Elles remettent en question le champ de perception des auditeurs par le biais de la création de portraits multicanaux uniques où le temps peut être étiré, suspendu ou comprimé et l'espace non seulement représenté mais créé. Heimbecker ne s'intéresse pas qu'au paysage sonore lui-même mais également à la subjectivité élargie de l'auditeur.

On Screen Films & DVDs

Irène Schweizer: A Film By Gitta Gsell

In 1968, Swiss piano player Irène Schweizer was cast as the wild woman of European free jazz – her tempestuous performances appeared to be relentless physical assaults on that most bourgeois of instruments. In the course of Gitta Gsell’s excellent 75 minute documentary, Jost Gebers, founder of the radical German FMP label, remarks that it was brutal music responding to brutal times. Schweizer, daughter of Swiss innkeepers, found a home amongst FMP’s revolutionary cadre of angry men. Now aged 65, she has grown more relaxed as a person and a musician, although implacably opposed as ever to all forms of social injustice. Without making excessive claims for the political agency of music, Gsell does show that in pursuing her own musical development Schweizer has contributed consistently to emancipatory causes. And the music itself has been consistently exhilarating.

Gsell sketches an active Swiss jazz scene that shaped Schweizer’s formative years, but the character of her playing was transformed by exposure in 1964 to exiled South African musicians The Blue Notes. Their uplifting blend

of kwela, township jazz and free blowing has continued to flow through her music, especially, as the film shows, in her long-term collaboration with drummer Louis Moholo. Equally important was her participation in the Feminist Improvisation Group. Performing with other women she found that emphasis shifted from competitive displays of accomplishment to exuberant fun and openness to different kinds of discovery. Gsell incorporates a wonderful sequence where Schweizer, singer Maggie Nicols and bassist Joëlle Léandre play together as Les Diaboliques.

Schweizer readily acknowledges that her playing is emotional, rather than cerebral. She describes herself as a percussive pianist and has clearly loved working with drummers since her first serious musical association, with fellow countryman Pierre Favre. The DVD proves that point magnificently, offering two supplementary films extracted from concerts: 34 minutes in Zurich in 2003 with Dutch master drummer Han Bennink; 22 minutes with percussionist Hamid Drake and saxophonist Fred Anderson, Chicagoan visitors to the 2004 Willisau Jazz Festival. Both extracts are compelling to see and hear.

JULIAN COWLEY



Irène Schweizer



Snails, Matmos style

Slomo Video

SLOMOVVIDEO.COM DVD

Self styled ‘media director’ and Bay Area hellraiser Ryan Junell was last seen having a pint with John Kerry on his 2003 campaign trail in Iowa. At the time, Junell’s six-minute on the road documentary of the Democratic US presidential candidate circulated film festivals, political rallies and the Net alike. Before attempting to break into politics, Junell has been involved with the Bay Area electronic music community as a member of multimedia team Sagan with Lesser and Blevin Blechtum, and as video director for artists such as Soft Pink Truth and Gravy Train!!!

Junell’s latest venture is a slow motion video festival. After a call out on his Website for one-minute contributions experimenting with the slow motion button, he put together this *Slomo Video* DVD, with the self-explanatory subtitle *100 One Minute Long Slow Motion Videos by 85 Film Makers & Video Artists*. A stoner’s dream show, the ton of films contains everything

from aesthetically pleasing freeze-dried roses breaking against glass with Spanish guitar accompaniment, to the hilarious *Four Kid Tenors* – children’s happy shrieks that in slow motion become scary wild boar roars, and an insect’s wistful stroll on a toilet seat. *Slowplayer* by British sound artist and former Pogue Jem Finer features a record deck revolving at snail speed with a sinister thump and clang making it sound like a rusty hulk of an industrial machine. Matmos’s contribution is a snail writhing next to a theremin, while Keith Fullerton Whitman and Robyn Belair take a slow look at an aquarium. Unfortunately you have to wade through a fair number of dumb-ass high school slow motion footage of kids drinking beer or eating with their mouths open to get to the more inventive films like the ones mentioned above. The *Beavis And Butthead* effect has gone into override on *Dildo Face*, featuring a man spraying his caboose with flammable liquid and setting fire to it. Classy.

ANNE HILDE NESET

Steve Heimbecker Songs Of Place

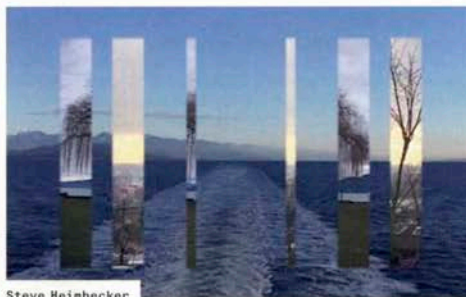
OBORO, OUBE ASSEMBLAGE 2xDVD

The movement of the wind across fields of tall grass has always fascinated Canadian sound artist Steve Heimbecker. It creates wavelike patterns that resemble each other, but are never quite the same – an illusion of repetition, as he likes to call it. Illusions abound in the four video and surround-sound pieces brought together on this double DVD. In these elaborate portraits of rural and urban environments, mundane places and sounds bathe in a magical, timeless aura, taking on new meanings and a new lease of life.

Each track recreates a complex spatiotemporal environment extending over considerable distances, thanks to Heimbecker’s trademark mapping system: he identifies the location’s geographical centre, traces a huge imaginary circle around it and then selects eight equidistant locations on its circumference corresponding to the cardinal points. Audio recordings are made at the eight

sites, which are also filmed by video cameras. These onsite recordings introduce a live element into Heimbecker’s mapping system. On the most compelling track, “Springwater”, video images of rural expanses flash across horizontal bands of varying widths, evoking an endless journey through remote countryside. Accompanied by a dense, hypnotic tapestry of sound, made up of bird calls, rustling, hisses, wind-like sounds and enigmatic tinkles, these images create an impression of floating in a timeless limbo. Although “Vancouver” works less well – the images of a bustling city flitting across four narrow vertical bands are reminiscent of a travelogue more than anything else – “Halifax” more than makes up for it. Each of its eight juxtaposed images depicts an incessant flow of cars, suggesting the passing of time. As one car takes the place of another, they create an impression of perpetual motion. The illusion of repetition, as Heimbecker would say,

RAHMA KHAZAM



Steve Heimbecker

The Wire—Adventures in Modern Music, # 270, August 2006, London, UK.
“On Screen” review – page 72, by Rahma Khazam

Steve Heimbecker, Songs Of Place, OBORO / QUBE ASSEMBLAGE 2X DVD

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– Rahma Kkazam –

The Montreal Gazette – Sonic Boom (examines four artists), Saturday, January 13, 2007 by CAMERON SKENE Freelance,
Steve Heimbecker on page 2-3

Sound isn't just noise or music - it's the raw material for a growing number of audio artists, and Montreal is building a strong international reputation for this form of creative expression. This is the latest installment in the continuing series In Profile, which looks at a cross-section of art being produced on the island and the people who make it.

~

Diversity is a prominent feature of Montreal's current art scene. Previously dominated by the strong tradition of Quebec's modernist painters, the realm of art making has expanded beyond what is coyly called "the dirty arts" (painting, drawing and sculpture) to include photo and mixed-media, web-based installation, performance, sound, even smell.

This fourth edition of the In Profile series, Sonic Boom, examines four artists who are working in what could be called a booming field in the art world: sound, also called audio art or sound installation. To some it is just noise, albeit with banks of computers, high-tech speakers and jumbles of tangled wires, and playing to esoteric-looking crowds at performances in barns or obscure festivals.

But sound work, unlike video or web-based work, draws on a long history dating from the early 20th century. Artists in movements like Dada and the Italian Futurists - one of whom, Luigi Russolo, wrote the seminal 1913 sound manifesto, *The Art of Noises* - made the observation that the sound landscape of the modern age is entirely new, marked with a technological urbanism: the clangs, yelps, squeals and groans of machines. The first noise performances by early sound artists were received in confused silence - one dissatisfied Futurist compared it to "showing the first steam engine to a herd of cows."

But technologies - and the public - seem to have caught up to the concept. Desktop studios and trips to Radio Shack have increased the access to recording and editing. And as everyone knows, anything an artist can get his hands on is fair game. Mutek and Elektra, support from and access to such art centres as Quartier Ephemere, and ambitious installations like the Silophone, a disused grain silo in the Old Port that in 2000 was turned into a kind of musical instrument, sound in the city is booming. With the visual getting most of the aesthetic coin in museums and galleries, it is easy to forget the other senses - or dismiss them as devoid of content serious enough for

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aesthetic investigation. Yet artists are increasingly exploring sound, smell and taste as vehicles for content.

During a stint as a bicycle courier in this city, I ran the usual range of adjustments to the haste, pace and danger of a job that is carried out in a panicky sensory jumble. One adjustment was particularly telling: since you can't swivel your head all the time to look out for traffic, you put your head down, stare fixedly ahead and listen hard. Your eyes are for steering, but your ears are for navigation, and they become the predominant tool for self-preservation.

~

"We use (sound) like a radar - we think we know where we are with the space in front of our eyes, but if you ever have an ear problem, it's amazing ... blind people walk with a stick, tapping it. It's not to feel out things, it's setting up echoes."



photo: Dave Sidaway

Steve Heimbecker is a thickset, methodical man in his 40s. He stares - as most sound artists necessarily do during interviews - into a computer screen, going through DVDs of his work. Heimbecker explores, among other things, the sculptural dimensions of sound. His work with what he calls "acoustic mapping" situates the observer in a multi-channel sound environment.

In *The Acoustic Line as the Crow Listens*, the artist plotted a mile through the landscape and recorded simultaneously at eight sites placed about 200 metres equidistant. For the resulting installation, speakers are placed together in a line that

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compresses the mile into 64 feet. The result is a time-warped stereo experience: environmental sounds that travel a mile, like a car horn, move and fade rapidly in a squished sonic environment, bending perception. "So conceptually, if you walk really fast, you would be travelling faster than the speed of sound," the artist says.

He fabricates most of his installations himself; his studio is a jumble of speaker boxes built to spec for his next show. His work travels widely to sound festivals and galleries in Europe and North America.

A Saskatchewan native recently transplanted to Montreal, Heimbecker is most known for his sound work with the Silophone and a 2003 installation titled Wind Array Cascade Machine, where a field of 64 wheat-like stalks of electronic sensors bent with the wind on the roof of the Ex-Centris building on St. Laurent Blvd. The data stream from the rooftop sensors was transmitted to galleries in Toronto and Europe, where other installations, called Pods, translated the data into rows of upright LED readouts on poles, reinterpreting the wind as a field of oscillating lights in the gallery. "I realized that the wave patterns of a wheat field caused by the wind were exactly how the sine wave works ... so it's a metaphorically perfect thing."

If music is, as American composer John Cage said, "organized sound," then Heimbecker displays how sound, transcribed by technology, can be made into an aesthetic replication of experience: not music, but something altogether new. Heimbecker's eyes light up at the elegant idea: "So the wind in Quebec was blowing in Toronto ..."

~

"I don't really work with data like Steve does. Steve is really more into programming, how data inputs and then outputs differently. It's totally another way of working ..."

Jean-Pierre Gauthier, preparing for his exhibition at the Musee d'art contemporain de Montreal in February, is distracted and intense, with a furrowed brow, constantly looking elsewhere. A maker of sound-producing kinetic installations, Gauthier starts up a piece that's waiting to be shipped from his east-end studio: a piano with wires running from the keys to a swarm of more wires, switches and sensors stuffed into the seat.

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The piece is activated by motion sensors. As the viewer moves, the piano twitches into action, plucked notes sputter here and there, initially startling me into thinking that I had stepped on something accidentally.

'There are three microprocessors. I program the sequence. (The computer) chooses randomly the note ... Each sequence is tripped by motion sensors.' The effect is unsettling and twitchy at first. As you move, the volume of notes gains mass, cascading into a nervous symphony.

"I like it to be random, so at one point I lose control of the result. ... The composition gets free, like this one - I select the notes ... but the rest is out of my control. To me, the 'order' of this is about trying to get the work free from my control."

Gauthier, represented by the Jack Shainman Gallery in New York, was the 2004 winner of the Sobey Art Award, a \$50,000 award given to Canadian artists under 40. Gauthier's noisy, kinetic installations have received lots of notice and justifiable acclaim. Usually working with everyday objects like skis, mirrors or hammers, Gauthier fashions these into robotic instruments that sing: "Basically the objects are quite insignificant, they're quite normal - but the sound they can make is quite amazing," he says. "(They're) just amplified, no (added) effect. I use as much as possible the pure sound of the object, and (try) to find an object that has its own colour."

In his 2002 installation Echotrisme, Gauthier combined mirrors with dangling industrial coils that scored the mirrors' surfaces to create ethereal sounds suggesting an eerie human chorus - home-made music that gives a nod to the Futurists themselves, who encouraged artists to create their own instruments."I loved electronics when I was a kid - I had a Radio Shack electronic kit. The work brought me to this. It was quite natural for me to do this."

~

"Jean-Pierre (Gauthier) and (I) have the same background - we both did our master's at UQAM - a real visual art background. When I think about Pierre, he's a craftsman: He builds stuff."

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Jean-Pierre Aube started as a photographer, but instead of visual images now captures sound. "There's not a big difference. ... I go around in the woods with my VLF receiver and bring something back with a technology device - the camera is a radio receiver for me (now)."

Aube is a tall, gregarious man who works out of his home in the north end. The interview is occasionally accented by the staccato wails of his new baby in the other room. Leaning back on a thrift-store couch, we watch a video projection of a performance piece he did at the Quartier Ephemere this past summer. A huge mass of giant speakers sits in the middle of a room. Titled *Save the Waves*, the system - built out of plywood, old computers and scrap material - showed that he is not averse to building stuff, either.

"A critic wrote that the exhibition isn't really about the object, it was more about the sound - which surprised me a little bit because those speakers weighed 3,000 pounds..." Aube often works with a VLF (very low frequency) receiver that he makes himself: "It's basically (like) a hula hoop with 300 feet of cable, ... a simple radio receiver that allows you to grab all natural electromagnetic phenomena."

Very low frequency was inadvertently discovered in the 1800s when it became apparent that telegraph lines picked up signals from atmospheric phenomena like the aurora borealis. VLF receivers also pick up what Aube considers to be the frequency of modernity: "60 hertz is the soundtrack of domestic life, because 60 hertz is everywhere. Your fridge hums at 60 hertz."

Save the Waves is a reflection on Aube's difficulty with getting far enough away from the interference of 60hz electrical lines to record the aurora himself. In the piece, a series of receivers pick up all electromagnetic signals in and around the building, while a performer runs a hand-held receiver over various appliances: a fluorescent light, a sound board, the computers themselves. The effect is an eerie accidental modulation coming from the giant speakers, like a mass of chanting Buddhist monks, all produced by our own electromagnetic pollution.

Aube, a darling of the electronic festival circuit, has shown his work in such far-flung places as Latvia, France, the Philippines and Germany. Sound art, like a lot of technology-based work, seems to have more of a receptive audience outside North America: "Let me put it this way: (on this continent) I've never shown my work outside of

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Quebec, but I've shown 20 times in Europe in the past few years." He adds: "Montreal has a big scene. ... Mutek - it's huge and known all around the world."

"Sound is big nowadays."

~

Christof Migone agrees. But while the audience is growing for such work, he, like a lot of others, finds that more traditional museums and galleries are taking time to adjust to the medium: "Some galleries are starting (to show more sound work) ... but it's also not an ideal space ... they've done shows, but the result is a cacophony - they just don't take into account that it's a radically different medium."

Migone - tall, slight, and reticent - sits at the kitchen table in his modest Little Italy apartment. He displays a more multidisciplinary bent in his work, but sound is his base: After starting in radio at CKUT in the 1990s with his show *Danger in Paradise*, he pushed the envelope of experimentation with recording and broadcasting, and has written extensively on the subject of audio art. "I think sound is something I keep returning to, I guess because I have a certain level of skill. Once I get an idea it often translates into sound, because I guess I can sort of see how it can materialize."

In his work *Crackers*, Migone solicited volunteer performers through radio and print ads, seeking individuals who were willing to make cracking sounds with various parts of their bodies. Some were more than willing, cracking necks, wrists, toes and jaws - and providing Migone with enough recording material for years. *Crackers* started as a sound installation in 1998, but was redone in performances and installations in Paris, Geneva and Los Angeles and as recently as this fall in Montreal at UQAM's gallery. One of the recordings was a string of cracks from various parts of the body, edited closely together, bristling and alive with varying notes and textures: the music of wet popcorn, and strangely compelling to listen to.

"When presented in artists' talks or things like that, people have a dual reaction. Some kind of wince, and other people start cracking," he says. "What interests me is also the 'uncontrollable-ness' of that action. When you crack, it's a habit, it's a compulsion."

Some of his other work displays a penchant for recording obsessive-compulsive behaviours and bodily functions - like *P*, where the artist recorded 1,000 moments of

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urination while saying "P." "Crackers really helped me focus, and I did a fart record afterwards which kind of applied the same kind of restrictions and focus."

Creating with a blend of old-fashioned microphone recording and software editing, Migone keeps the technology simple to focus on the product and the idea. "I try to downplay sound, in a sense, because (the work) gets pigeonholed. Most of the time it's not necessarily about the medium. I'm much more interested in the initial idea."

Steve Heimbecker agrees: "I think a lot of sound artists are really involved in the process as much or more than the outcome. ... Many of the ideas themselves are based on expanding technologies, (and) sometimes result in a piece that's interesting, sometimes not. ... The big discussion now is, 'What is the content?', because the technology's kind of flatlined - everything you can do with it has been imagined. "

But with the plethora of noise in our world, and since part of the artist's job description is to absorb and reflect human experience, the genre is constantly brushing up against the definition of music.

"(John) Cage thought everything was music," Migone says. "There's no such thing as silence - and he incorporated everything into music. And that's dangerous for sound art, because how does it carve out its own territory outside of (music)?"

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TATE ETC, Issue 12 – Spring, January 01, 2008, UK.

Next to Nothing, by Steven Connor, selected quote – WACM (2003)

<https://www.tate.org.uk/tate-etc/issue-12-spring-2008/next-nothing>

Quoted text from last page of TATE ETC article, 2nd last paragraph. Paragraph quoted in this representation is split in 2 to highlight Steve Heimbecker – Wind Array Cascade Machine (2003) segment. Footnote is provided post-article.

More recently, art has returned to this manner of representing air displaced into objects. A number of examples are discussed in the recent collection *Going Aerial*, edited by Monika Bakke (2006)¹. Not surprisingly, the most interesting hybridisings of air are to be found in its section on breath-works, since breath embodies the transcoding or compounding of air much more readily than the volatilisation of things into the (imaginary) condition of air. Whether in the *Breath Cultures* (1999) of Sabrina Raaf, which grew into visible form the oral flora from participants who had breathed over Petri dishes, or her project *Translator II: Grower* (2004–2005), in which a small robot moved around the walls of a room drawing shafts of “grass” in response to the fluctuating levels of carbon dioxide in the space, the air seems to mean the necessity for translatability, an existence only in the mediations of objects.

Steve Heimbecker’s *Wind Array Cascade Machine* (2003) arises out of the artist’s experiences of the wind in the western Canadian prairies where he grew up, watching the progress of storms for hours as they drew near, and his recognition that “we do not actually hear the wind, but rather hear and see objects as they are affected by the wind, such as the wind in our ears (and our microphones), the wind through the leaves of a tree, a field of mature grain blowing in the wind, or even the swirling detritus around a city building”. *The Wind Array Cascade Machine* is 64 wind-pressure sensors covering an area of 25 metres square, which are designed to mimic the behaviour of a field of grain. The data collected by the sensors can be streamed, or recorded for later processing and transformation. In this work, air is not an empty ultimate condition, but a sort of “white box”, a transition from a variable but always determinate input to a variable but always determinate series of outputs. The machinery embodies the indefinite process whereby the air becomes itself by being made exterior to itself.

¹ 2006 • *Going Aerial - Air, Art, Architecture*, Editor: Monika Bakke, Publisher - Jan van Eyck Academie, Maastricht, NL, ISBN-10: 90-72076-77-x, ISBN-13: 978-90-72076-77-9

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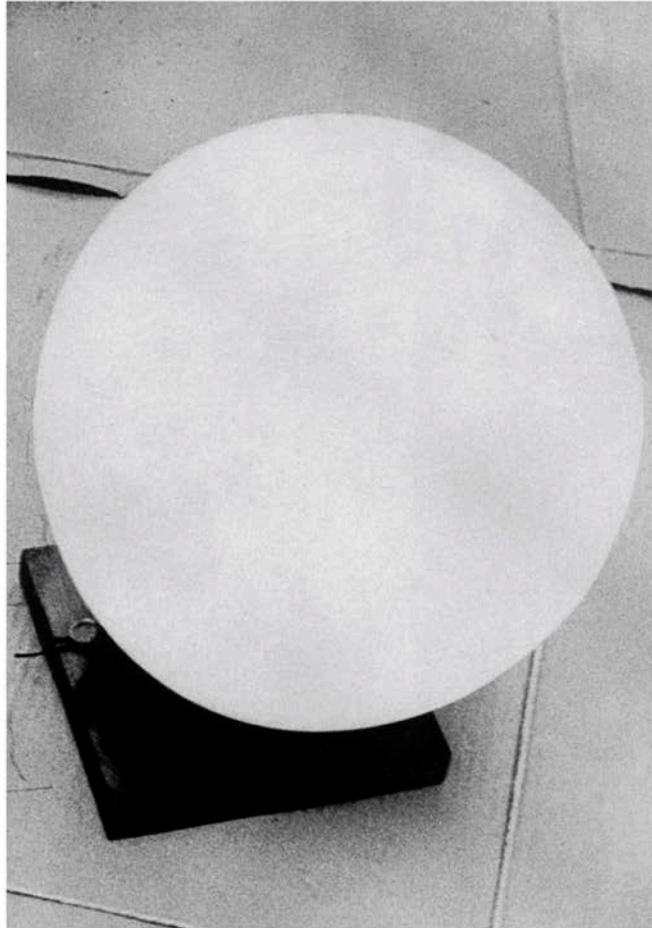
Note: HEIMBECKER - WACM 2003, last page

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Next-to-nothing

STEVEN CONNOR

In 1935 Gertrude Stein wrote that in a painting there should be “no air...no feeling of air”. As Steven Connor explains, air has become as much the subject of art, as that which it surrounds.



Piero Manzoni
Artist's Breath 1960
Balloon, breath
© Courtesy Tate. DACS, London, 2008

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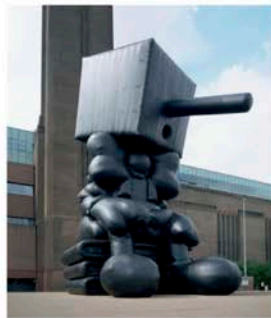
Coop Himmelbl(l)au
The White Suit project 1969
 Courtesy Coop Himmelbl(l)au



Hans-Rucker-Co
Oasis 7 at *documenta 5*, Kassel 1972.
 Photo: Günter Zamp Kelp
 Courtesy Hans-Rucker-Co

Gertrude Stein wrote in her 1935 essay *Pictures* that in a painting there should be "no air... no feeling of air". Ruskin disagreed, on the grounds that "everything that is needful, nourishing and delightful about the earth comes from its capacity to take up oxygen – to rust: it is not a fault in the iron, but a virtue, to be so fond of getting rusted, for in that condition it fulfils its most important functions in the universe, and most kindly duties to mankind. Nay, in a certain sense, and almost a literal one, we may say that iron rusted is Living; but when pure or polished, Dead". Ruskin preferred an art that responded to the qualities of colour and texture imparted by this mingling of earth and air, for this reproduced the rusty variegations of nature's own primary pigmentations:

All those beautiful violet veinings and variegations of the marbles of Sicily and Spain, the glowing orange and amber colours of those at Siena, the deep russet of the Rosso antico, and the blood-colour of all the precious jaspers that enrich the temples of Italy; and, finally, all the lovely transitions of tint in the pebbles of Scotland and the Rhine, which form, though not the most precious, by far the most interesting portion of our modern jewellers' work; all these are painted by Nature with this one material only, variously proportioned and applied – the oxide of iron that stains your Tunbridge springs. Ruskin, 1878



Paul McCarthy
Blockhead
 Installation view at Tate Modern
 Courtesy Hauser & Wirth Zürich London
 © Paul McCarthy

Air has a privileged relation to the struggle of art with, or rather its striving to find ways of doing without, objects. More and more, and most conspicuously in the conceptual arena, art must refuse to be reduced to or mistaken for the objects which it has traditionally been called upon to bring into being. For more than a century it has struggled against the idolatry or enchantment of objects, preferring processes, especially vanishing, decomposition or

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evaporation to the precipitation of forms. Air has often been the carrier of this immaterialism. Perhaps the inaugurating work in this tradition is Marcel Duchamp's *50cc of Paris Air* 1919, a glass phial which he made for his friend Walter Arensberg, buying it from a pharmacist, after asking the chemist to pour away the liquid it contained and re-sealing it. In this work, both the container and the air inside it is a readymade. The gesture of emptying out the original contents of the flask substitutes nothingness for the original commodity on sale in the shop, a lesson insisted on in the parody of consumer choice offered by the designation "Paris Air", as though its place of origin gave it a particular value or distinctiveness, in the same way as eau de cologne. So perhaps the air is not so much a readymade as a ready-to-hand emblem of unmaking. Because what the flask contains is absolutely arbitrary, the air here bringing forward the idea of not being there and, by extension, art's capacity to summon and sustain this condition of the not-all-there, the next-to-nothing.

No object embodies art's desire to have done with objects more than air. In fact, air has become a kind of allegory of art, or of its allergy to objects. "Immaterial sensibility is a gas," Nicolas Bourriaud has written. To work with air is to wish to become it, to evaporate every particle of what would betray art into the condition of an object, while yet remaining exquisitely, infinitesimally intact in that very operation. If air is, as the seventeenth-century Irish scientist Robert Boyle put it, the "next Degree to nothing", then art aspires to insinuate itself into that differentiating chink. For the ability not only to work with air, but also to identify with it, gives warrant to the claim that if art can even be nothing, then it can be anything. Art, like air, consists of nothing in particular; it has, and need have, no consistency with itself or anything else. Of course, this is also the thing that secures the distinctiveness of art. Everything else is stuck with the miserable finitude of having to be something in particular.



Damien Hirst
What Goes Up Must Come Down 1994
Ping-pong ball, hairdryer, Plexiglas container
30 x 30 cm
Courtesy Parkett, Damien Hirst

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Air is neither on the side of the subject nor of the object. It has neither objecthood nor essence. It has no objecthood because it has no single form of being, manifesting itself in a multitude, and never less than a multitude, of traces and effects – the hiss of a tyre, the breath of a zephyr, the buffet of a gale, the vortex of leaves on a street corner. But these appearances are not the secondary expression of an essence any more than they are the properties of an object. The air is impression without presence. As art has sought to expand infinitely the range of its applications and operations, it has also sought to assume what might be called the illocative pull of the air away from the particularity of this or that place, its wish to propagate into everything. Much air art can trace its lineage to the *Dimensionist Manifesto*, published in Paris in 1936 in the form of a single-page insert in the magazine *Revue N+1* by the Hungarian poet Károly Sirató and signed by Arp, Delaunay, Duchamp, Kandinsky, Moholy-Nagy, Picabia, Kandinsky and others. This manifesto aimed to extend art into all the available dimensions of space, in the interests of "Cosmic Art Vaporisation of Sculpture", and the requirement that "rigid matter is abolished and replaced by gazedified materials". The most unpleasant associations of the idea of vaporisation were as yet still in the future in the mid-1930s, and the imperial cast of the demand that "instead of looking at objects of art, the person becomes the centre and the subject of creation" was perhaps less irresistibly evident than it may now appear. Nevertheless, for much of the twentieth century, the apparent relinquishment of being involved in an art of air has also been able to be an exercise in actual or imaginary conquest.

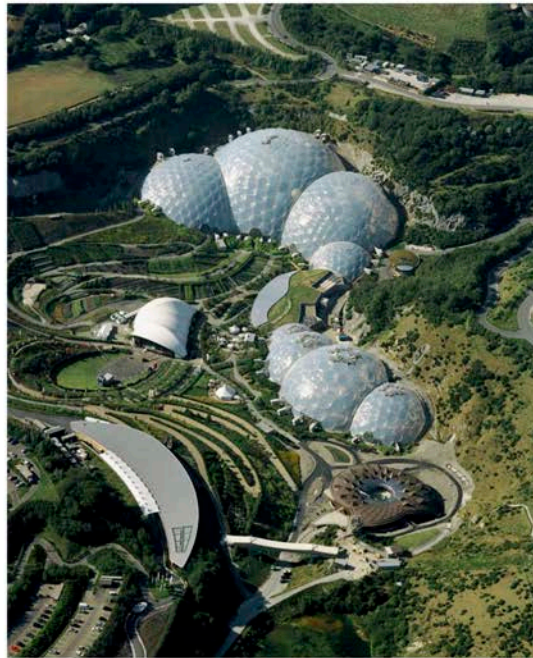
In much recent art, air has become the marker not of the difference between art and life, but of the aspiration of art to trespass beyond its assigned precincts, to approach and merge into the condition of "life". One of the most influential post-war proponents of this idea was Yves Klein, fourth dan judo expert, Rosicrucian and Knight of the Order of St Sebastian, showman and occasional painter. From an early age, Klein had longed to join himself to the universal vacancy imaged in the overarching, cloudless blue sky, even resenting the flight of birds for vandalising the sky's immaculate emptiness. The governing principle of his mysticism was the yen for expansion and dissolution, in an effort to dissolve all differences and distinctions in an immense cosmic unity. Realising that it was not possible for this condition to be simply or non-contradictorily given in art, he saw it as his duty as an artist to find images that could both materialise the immaterial and "impregnate" the viewer with a sensitivity to what lay beyond the bad dream of differentiated material existence, sensitivity being defined as "what exists beyond our being and yet always belongs to us". Initially, he saw single colours, and the particularly pulsating shade of ultramarine blue he dubbed International Klein Blue, or IKB, as the best way of activating "zones of immaterial pictorial sensitivity". But he realised within a couple of years (one wonders how it could have taken longer than a couple of minutes) that the transparency of empty air would be an even better aperture on to the void. *Void* was, in fact, put on at the Galerie Iris Clert in Paris in 1958. Though *Void* was universal, it was fortunately not homogenous, since this enabled Klein, like an estate agent of inspired canniness, to exchange zones of immaterial pictorial sensitivity for specified weights of gold leaf.



Andy Warhol
Silver Clouds 1966
Installed at The University Art Museum, Long Beach 1997
© Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / DACS, London
2008

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Nicholas Grimshaw
Biome conservatories at the Eden Project, Cornwall 2001
Photo: Sealand Aerial Photography

After his meeting with architect Werner Ruhnau around 1957, Klein entered his "pneumatic period", which was consolidated over the next two years with a series of projects for and fantasies of a global "architecture of air". In a pair of talks at the Sorbonne in June 1959, jointly entitled "L'évolution de l'art vers l'immatériel", Klein set out his plans for all existing solid architecture to be dismantled and stored underground and for the climatic conditioning of all regions of the earth, which would allow human beings to live in a state of Edenic, if somewhat breezy, repose, reclining on sofas consisting of jets of compressed air. The house itself "must be built with the new material of 'air' blown into walls, dividers, roof, furniture". The most important thing about his architectural programme was the stripping away of the roof.

Architects such as Ruhnau had been hindered, wrote Klein, "by the last obstacle that even a Mies van der Rohe hadn't been able to overcome: the roof, the screen that separates us from the sky, from the blue sky". In the artist's visionary pneumatic architecture, the office of the roof would be performed by a layer of compressed air that would deflect dust and rainfall. His idea was to create a state of planetary pneumatic bliss, which would conduct human beings to a stage of universal levitation. As he promised in a speech in Düsseldorf: "We will become aerial men, we will experience the force of attraction upward, toward space, toward nowhere and everywhere at the same time; the force of earthly attraction thus mastered, we will literally levitate in total physical and spiritual freedom."

Since Klein, it has increasingly been assumed that working with air is a good way to relinquish the dominative relation to objects that has contaminated art of the past. Robert Barry produced in 1969 a work called *Inert Gas Series*, which consisted of him releasing into the atmosphere above the Mojave Desert cylinders of xenon, helium and other so-called noble or unreactive gases. The point of using inert gases was evidently to have as little impact on the environment as possible: "I try not to manipulate reality," Barry has said, "not to impose my preconceived grid or preconceived system on to reality. I, to use Heidegger's phrase, let things be. What will happen, will happen. Let things be themselves." Like the gas itself, the action distinguished itself by making no, or next to no, difference.

Other artists have given the imagined immateriality of the air a more spectral aspect. Ewa Kuryluk's distinctive paintings on cloth suggested the title 'Air People' for the retrospective of

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Next to Nothing, by Steven Connor, selected quote – WACM (2003)
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her work in Warsaw in 2003. The Polish art critic Andrzej Wirth identifies these "air people", cloth figures draped over bushes and trees, with the partisans who parachuted nightly into occupied Poland during the war, and takes them as emblems for the drifting, frameless, volatile nature of Kuryluk's work, as "silhouettes of 'people of air'... seem ready at any minute to fly into the unknown".

Ann Veronica Janssens, who has turned in recent years to the creation of sculptures and environments made of mist, has said: "What interests me is what escapes me, not to try to keep it from escaping, but on the contrary to experience the 'imperceptible' and offer that experience to others." The soft, virtual volatility of mist, clinging, but drifting, offers a virtuous "absence of authoritarian materiality, that effort to get out from under the tyranny of objects". Janssens emphasises not the isolating characteristics of the artificial fogs she creates, but rather their capacity to dissolve: "Fog has contradictory effects on our vision. It makes every obstacle, all materiality, all contextual resistance, disappear, and at the same time it seems to bestow materiality and tactility on light... Bathed in light, we find ourselves transformed, blindly, one might say, and yet with no constraints or apparent limits."

If air is "pure", it is in a special way, for it is purely and specially compound. As Gerard Manley Hopkins put it, air is "fairly mixed/With, riddles, and is rife/in every least thing's life". It is in the nature of air not only to surround everything, but also to pervade everything, mixing and mingling with other gases, entering into compounds through the copulative appetite of oxygen.

There is another kind of work done on and through the air that, because it is less concerned with prolonging itself in its objectless integrity, allows air and art to compound in the advent of objects. One example is the inflatable. In comparison with the ethereal poesis of the art of the open air, the rhetoric of the inflatable associates it with ironic and bathetic corporeality. The inflatable object is frail, delicate, but also ridiculous, always on the point of abject eruption and collapse. Paul McCarthy's huge inflatable sculptures *Blockhead* and *Daddies Bighead*, installed outside Tate Modern in May 2003, were sinister, sleazy, parodic, cartoonish, melancholically deformed. *Blockhead* looked like a cartoon character on whom a sledgehammer or a saucepan has violently descended; but now the weapon has become the character's head, and it seems to peer through the handle as though through a tank's gun or Dalek's periscopic stalk. One could enter the giant sculpture and buy sweets; in the interior there was a loud and cavernous hiss from the air that was pumped in to keep the thing wheezily erect. Combined with the bizarre blowhole that formed part of the head, the suggestion seemed to be that the sculpture was struggling asthmatically to catch its breath.

Grandier claims have sometimes been made for inflatable art and architecture, perhaps nowhere more, or more surprisingly, than in the exhibition 'Structures gonflables', mounted in March 1968 at the Musée d'Art Moderne de a Ville de Paris by architects associated with the *Utopie* group of urban theorists. The show gathered together an array of inflatable objects and structures, offering them as images of pop emancipation and ephemerality. Perhaps it is in part true that, as architectural historian Marc Dessauce maintains, "the inflatable ethos possessed a subversive constitution which recommended it to avant-garde practice", for perhaps inflatable art was indeed an answer to the pervasive flatness of Marcuse's era of one-dimensional man, since "it is as if the propensity to describe the epoch as lacking in relief had reflected itself in an exactly inverse manner, in an image of perpetual roundness and turgescence". The French protests of May 1968 broke out just days after the exhibition closed, though a direct connection seems improbable. The associations of bubblegum and bouncy castle are never far away from inflatable air, and Dessauce is nearer the mark in claiming that pneumatic art and design ought to be seen as a grotesque exaggeration of the "pneumatic penetration of everyday life", in automobile transport and air-conditioning:

Thus the formidable equalising power of air-flow, and our insatiable appetite for its therapeutic and uplifting value, could also be held accountable for a loss of texture, and the deep, aerodynamic stretching of urban fabric to the point of its separation, dispersion and constriction – like the shrivelled debris of a popped balloon strewn at the periphery of a defunct centre.

Inflatable art seems to forbid the unfettered dream of the immaterial. In inflatable art, air enters into composition, is folded or forced into new kinds of object, rather than invoking the spaces of the un-object. Earlier artistic allegories of the air were bulging with material forms, often those of birds, as, for example, Joachim Beuckelaer's *The Four Elements: Air, a Poultry Market With the Prodigal Son in the Background* 1570. More recently, art has returned to this manner of representing air displaced into objects. A number of examples are discussed in the recent collection *Going Aerial*, edited by Monika Bakke (2006). Not surprisingly, the most interesting hybridisations of air are to be found in its section on breath-works, since breath embodies the transcoding or compounding of air much more readily than the volatilisation of things into the (imaginary) condition of air. Whether in the *Breath Cultures* 1999 of Sabrina Raaf, which grew into visible form the oral flora from participants who had breathed over Petri

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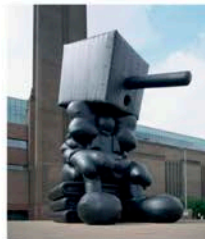
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dishes, or her project *Translator II: Grower* 2004–5, in which a small robot moved around the walls of a room drawing shafts of “grass” in response to the fluctuating levels of carbon dioxide in the space, the air seems to mean the necessity for translatability, an existence only in the mediations of objects. Steve Heimbecker’s *Wind Array Cascade Machine* 2003 arises out of the artist’s experiences of the wind in the western Canadian prairies where he grew up, watching the progress of storms for hours as they drew near, and his recognition that “we do not actually hear the wind, but rather hear and see objects as they are affected by the wind, such as the wind in our ears (and our microphones), the wind through the leaves of a tree, a field of mature grain blowing in the wind, or even the swirling detritus around a city building”. The *Wind Array Cascade Machine* is 64 wind-pressure sensors covering an area of 25 metres square, which are designed to mimic the behaviour of a field of grain. The data collected by the sensors can be streamed, or recorded for later processing and transformation. In this work, air is not an empty ultimate condition, but a sort of “white box”, a transition from a variable but always determinate input to a variable but always determinate series of outputs. The machinery embodies the indefinite process whereby the air becomes itself by being made exterior to itself.

Air offers art two forms of being and becoming. There is first of all the annihilating dream of air as the ultimate refinement, the transcendental promise of matter subtilised to thin infinitude. But, after barely 300 years, the materiality, and therefore the finitude of the air has become unignorable, even as it has taught us that there are many more kinds of object, and ways of being an object, than we might have thought. Air is exchanging its ulteriority for exteriority. Instead of being the embodiment of a world beyond objects and bodies, air has become the mediated arena of the object. Air is no longer an ideal image for art, but an object for it to work on, and by which to be itself worked out, worked loose even from its self-identity. In its phantasmatic assimilation of itself to the uniform dream of air as pure dematerialisation, of matter terminally rarefied into space, art keeps itself narcissistically but anxiously entire. In propagating the air into objects, art stands a chance of propagating into something beside itself.

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Earth, Wind and a Banana

Bernard Schütze

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Earth, Wind and a Banana

To seize the Earth (*geo*) with its forms and phenomena through a description or writing (*graphein*) that permits one to orient and situate oneself spatio-temporally within an ever transforming planetary movement is at the heart of the geographic sciences. It is not my aim, however, to discuss geography as a synoptic undertaking with its overlap of the physical sciences and the human sciences but rather to investigate how three artists, Jean-Pierre Aubé, Steve Heimbecker and César Saëz, deploy distinct geographic approaches in their practice. Approaches that gaze through the lenses of art to reflect upon the contemporary configuration of our errant celestial body and what role we may play upon it. The three artists will be evaluated under the sign of travel, of a constant transformation not fixed in a set path, and this with the aim of gaining some sense of orientation from their respective vantage points that may indicate alternative trajectories to our current anthropologically overdetermined global course.

The contemporary state of the planet is one that is characterized by what McKenzie Wark has termed a 'virtual geography' made up of a vast array of globe-spanning information flows that supersede any sense of fixed territory and which has led to the emergence of a 'third nature.'¹ First nature comprised the natural world in its raw state, and second nature that of humankind's gradual 'civilizational taming' of nature to stake out a territory that has culminated in the reification of culture as 'our' environment; while third nature is born of a new relationship to the Earth marked on the one hand by a blurring of inherited territorial boundaries and the instauration of a globalized reign of ubiquitous connectivity and propinquity, and on the other by the conflation of first nature and cultural second nature into a mutually impacting entity, the most prominent features of which are climate change and ecological crisis. Third nature thus envelops both second nature (accumulated human impacts) and first nature (as both an impacted and active/reacting system) and this has given rise to a geography in which cultural and physical geography can no longer be clearly dissociated as was the case in classical studies in the field. It is within this turbulent planetary configuration that the artists respectively set out to find their bearings.

For his journey, Jean-Pierre Aubé wandered forth with a device known as very low frequency or V.L.F. radio apparatus (hence the title of the project *V.L.F.*, 2000) to track electromagnetic waves generated by the Earth's magnetosphere. Steve Heimbecker's approach is based on a rigorous mapping process that allows him to extrapolate data from physically and naturally manifest phenomena such as wind which he then transposes technologically to craft original multimedia work. In a different vein, César Saëz points his compass towards geographical regions that have more to do with geopolitical territories and the search for as-of-yet uncolonized spaces for art. With his never fully completed *Geostationary Banana Over Texas—GBOT* (2006 – 2008) project the artist launched a far-reaching allegorical critique of our globalized geography.

Wave Paths Far and Near

Jean-Pierre Aubé's approach can be likened to a romantic explorer-scientist who sets out into an unmapped wilderness to capture phenomenon that escape the attention of ordinary urban or rural dwellers. This is the impulse behind the *V.L.F.* (2000) project, the objective of which is to render the electromagnetic activity generated by the Earth's magnetosphere—and in particular northern lights—perceptible through the use of V.L.F. radio (a.k.a. natural radio). This quest has led Aubé to travel to remote boreal areas for two geographic reasons: one being that natural electromagnetic waves are mainly present around the polar regions, and the other that the increasing third nature emission of electromagnetic waves (carried by electrical power lines, submarines, and other signaling

devices) have made it very difficult to capture these phenomena. Though Aubé's art can be analyzed in terms of a contemporary form of landscape art, as André-Louis Paré has cogently argued,² such an appreciation needs to be contextualized in regards to both the genre's art historical categorization, and the particular geographical context in which Aubé undertakes his wave captures. Firstly, in regards to the landscape genre Aubé is in affinity with the romantic conception of nature in its sublime form, i.e. in the Kantian understanding that the forces of raw nature (for instance earthquakes, hurricanes, polar deserts) are something beyond our imaginative grasp and as such inspire a mixture of awe and terror. The highly energized electromagnetic waves, which pass right through the inner core of the planet and via the polar caps to the borderline between space and the Earth's atmosphere, are clearly of this order. Whereas the classical landscape genre provides a window on the natural world that references human mastery over it through single point perspective and other framing devices, the natural force that Aubé translates cannot and will not be fixed in such a manner. It is at this level that one must also situate the fact that Aubé makes use of techno-scientific methodologies to make manifest not so much a landscape, within its inherent sense of fixity and limits of visibility, but a phenomenon of constant flux that cannot be neatly territorialized or encompassed by our perceptual or conceptual apparatus. His project is thus not so much about inhabiting a world as it is about 'riding the waves' about traveling along the planetary itinerary of constant flux; and this is best seized in a time-based media such as sound. And it is principally sound (though the project also contains video and photographic material) that Aubé brings back into the gallery space where he offers it not as scientific data, but as the basis of an aesthetic experience mediated by technology. From a scientific point of view this same material could be put forth as data to be interpreted objectively, i.e. separated from direct experience. However, presented as art the sound waves sweep the spectator in a sensing of a sublime phenomenon that inscribe him/her in a planetary wandering which bursts the frames of landscape representation.

In the *V.L.F.* follow-up and sister project *Save the Waves* (2004) Aubé shifts the focal point by indicating how the intermeshing of first nature and second nature transpose one into an irremediable third nature geography. In this project, the artist set up an elaborate speaker system to diffuse V.L.F. captured sound of ambient electromagnetic waves produced mainly by the electrical power grid. The artist thus draws attention not only to this habitually inaudible sonic drone, but also to the fact that these waves are interfering with telluric electromagnetism. Hence the tongue-in-cheek eco-activist title which references the fact that the sheer scale and spread of technologically generated electromagnetism has a planetary impact. In aesthetically highlighting this Aubé makes one cognizant of how deeply human activity is now embedded with that of raw nature. The great value of Aubé's artistic interventions is to awaken our senses to this shift in itinerary and the necessity to pay heed to the Earth's loud and low whispers that now involve all of us before awe and terror inspiring matters the extent of which we have barely begun to grasp.

Moving the Wind

Artist Steve Heimbecker homes in on more defined geographical territories with a particular attention given to the phenomenon of wind and its effects on structuring sound spaces.³ Unlike Aubé's 'deterritorializing' explorations, Heimbecker proceeds in a more classical manner characterized by rationality, symmetry and proportion. His initial step is to apply a rigorous cartography upon a physical territory that he then reworks artistically to capture phenomena occurring within it. For instance for the *Wind Array*

Cascade Machine—WACM (2003) project Heimbecker took his inspiration from the movement of wind across the vast grain fields in his native Saskatchewan, and how this wind produces sound without itself being audible. Based on this metaphorical intuition he devised the WACM by applying the standard survey grid network of dividing a 640-acre square into 64 sections each measuring 8 x 8 miles. This second-nature territorialization of a geographical area was transposed by Heimbecker as a blueprint for the WACM. The system—first set up on top of the Méduse rooftop in Quebec City—consists of “an array of 64 motion sensors controlled by individual pic micro controllers, designed to work collectively from a grid of 8 units.”⁴ The WACM’s function is to capture the motion of the wind as it sweeps across the grid, and in this sense it acts as an analogue of wind moving through a field of grain. The data collected by the joint movement of the sensors is “a multi-channel serial data stream that can be recorded...or streamed over WWW in real time.”⁵ As such the wind data constitutes an abstracted diagram of an actual physical phenomenon (the wind blowing across the sensors) which can be transposed as a console or information controller for any multimedia input; for instance for sound input the silent wind diffuses sound data by affecting various diffusion parameters such as the dynamic sound pressure range at the speaker output. The influence of the wind as an information carrier and controller has been applied to both visual installation such as *POD* (2003)—in which LED equipped rods or ‘Pods’ light up in direct correlation to the amplitude captured by the WACM (in real-time or recorded form), or for the *Turbulent Sound Matrix* (2008) which used the WACM data to diffuse a musical composition on a 64-channel surround speaker matrix. In regards to the art and geography conjuncture, Heimbecker’s work is interesting in that it takes a primal phenomenon (the first

nature wind) in order to apply as second nature territorialization (cartography) and then unleashes the extrapolated wind data to diffuse sound or images in third-nature virtual geographies such as the Internet. In this process the originary phenomenon is never actually lost or denatured, even if it is moved/delocalized and amplified through techno-artistic intervention it nevertheless continues to carry the force and dynamism of the wind and its sound producing impact. This aesthetic rendering reveals that technology can amplify and enhance our sensory experience of natural phenomenon and their geographical location, while also calling attention to what extent it can harness both first and second-nature elements into a resolutely third-nature in which localized physical phenomenon can be uplifted and circulated within the infinitely malleable territories of virtual geographies.

Bananas and Geopolitics

Whereas Aubé and Heimbecker work with what are initially first-nature phenomenon and rework them through second-nature technologies in relation to our contemporary third nature geographical contexts, César Saëz is more concerned with questioning the shifting geopolitical boundaries of our globalized world and exploring free spaces for art’s expressive potentialities. The title of the project *Geostationary Banana over Texas* —GBOT (2006-2008) in and of itself encapsulates its spatial position, its geographical target and geopolitical innuendos, as well its humorous inflections. Saëz’s artistic venture exhibits marked baroque traits: an extravagant display, a preference for curves and folds, and the use of an allegorical mode. Despite the fact that the project was never carried to full fruition (due to a funding shortage in 2008) through its conceptual audacity, the various research stages, website and live presentations, development tests, and the planetary discussion it triggered in the traditional media





and on the internet the GBOT concept and process merits to be considered as a successful artistic gesture in its own right.

The drive behind the GBOT was to launch an allegorically potent object—a 300-meter, banana-shaped helium filled blimp made out of balsa wood and bamboo—into the stratosphere over Texas for a period of about a month. It is an enticing artistic proposition that speaks with eloquent humour to dead serious issues such as advertisement, spectacle and the geopolitics of visibility.⁶ Though his project involves various techno-scientific measurements of wind patterns, features of the stratosphere and so forth, its concern is not with natural phenomenon as such, but more immediately with the current third-nature configuration of global geographies and the potential role that art may have in redrawing its contours. It is from this point of view of a harmless, but by no means innocent, artistic geographical intervention that one must consider the implications of the GBOT project.

For Saëz space is a “canvas for expression” and a means to explore “territory as sovereign within the social context of today’s global society.”⁷ The project thus has everything to do with the search for free spaces that are not bound to the constraints of global planetary planning and control. A signature feature of Saëz’s art practice has been to artistically intervene in spaces outside of officially-sanctioned art institutions and thereby to critique them and the system they uphold.⁸ In this sense, the GBOT is a consequent development that takes this logic to the sky by drawing the issue of visibility/invisibility large and bold over a geographical area that is highly symbolic of much that is awry with current a current global planning premised on maximized profit, war mongering and ubiquitous control. Now, launching a 300-meter banana-like airship furtively (to use the artist’s expression) from Mexico into Texas does entail some forethought regarding the kind of reaction this airborne fruit-object may elicit in the official overseers of the lone star territory. To counter any possible resistance Saëz hired a legal team that determined that there are actually no international laws governing the occupation of the stratosphere, and hence this space is free for the taking. The next question is, why a banana? In regards to his choice of fruit iconography, Saëz is clearly in the realm of allegory in which as Benjamin states “any person, any object, any relationship can mean absolutely anything else.”⁹ Saëz refuses to ascribe any direct symbolic meaning to the object and instead offers a multiplicity of possible interpretations ranging from: “Useless and absurd. —that is what it is.... The Banana is a Joke to Stupidity... A Symbol utilizing symbolisms ... The banana is ‘pop’ (and a foreigner)... It is a common thing, and yet, it

comes from far away... because bananas do not grow in Texas.”¹⁰ It is precisely this open-ended spectrum of allegorical readings in combination with the equally allegorized Texas that enables Saëz to yoke the sublime and ridiculous inherent in the GBOT, which is both meaningfully humorous and absurdly dead serious. The GBOT is meaningful in its visionary envisioning of near-space altitudes as a space for expression not bound to the constraints of spectacle and the laws of value, sublime in its ambition to make a work of art visible in the heavens that can potentially be seen by millions of people; ridiculous in the sense that a banana is a fruit that by way of its shape and form inherently solicits laughter; absurd because bananas don’t fly, nor do they come in such large sizes. Of course the banana is also a derogatory symbol of Latin America that points to pressing inequalities and consequent economic migrations which are clearly tied into Texan and North American geopolitical realities. In his attempt to inscribe the GBOT into the Earth’s errant movement over a specific geographic area, Saëz highlights art’s capacity to imaginatively signal geopolitical situations. On this last point it must be noted that GBOT was indeed a success, and this despite the fact that it was never launched. Beginning with its website the proposed GBOT incursion led to a worldwide discussion in the traditional media and on the internet that though mostly positive also raised some controversy. As such the project traveled through the networks of our virtual geography, and judging by the magnitude of the reactions ignited the imagination of many and went some way to opening a path in which such visionary near-space art will eventually become fully realizable.

Jean-Pierre Aubé, Steve Heimbecker and César Saëz, each in their own way are travelers who in the course of their journeys deploy artistic means that reassess and re-invent ways whereby to perceive and inscribe oneself differently upon the errant star we call Earth. With his focus on the vast electromagnetic waves, both in their primal telluric and in their technologically generated manifestation Aubé brings these phenomena to our perceptual attention and questions the drowning out of planetary/cosmic waves through the increasing spread of electrical and communication networks. For his part, Heimbecker invents cartographies whereby to harness the dynamic potential of primal phenomena and to channel them into techno-artistic works that create novel perceptual experiences in which the connection to the originary source material and location, though technologically amplified and refashioned, are never entirely lost. Through his proposed launch of a giant-banana into the planetary stratosphere César



Steve Heimbecker, *Turbulence Sound Matrix Elektra*, May 8, 2008. TSM installation in Elektra theatre with audience. Photo: Camil Scortecanu, Conception Lévy – Elektra, Montreal.

Saëz has us looking upwards at the heavens to recognize the potential of reinvention and downwards to take stock of the absurdity and cruelty of our current geopolitical predicament. These various geo-artistic vantage points do not so much redraw our existing maps, as they invite us to invent and imagine new maps to guide us on an uncharted planetary itinerary more promising than the one-way flight path that the current era of globalized planning with its destructive depletion of the Earth's vital energies has us locked us into.

BERNARD SCHÜTZE

Bernard Schütze is a media theorist, art critic and translator. He has contributed presentation and catalogue texts for galleries and art events, among them Galerie B-312, Berlinische Galerie (Berlin, Germany), Le Centre Clark, the 11th Biennale of visual arts (Pančevo, Serbia), Observatori (Valence, Spain), SKOL and VOX centre de l'image contemporaine. His essays and reviews have been published in journals such as *C-Magazine*, *Espace Sculpture*, *Parachute* and *Spirale*. As a translator he has, among other things, translated works by Jean Baudrillard, Félix Guattari, and Heiner Müller into English. He lives and works in Montreal.

NOTES

- 1 McKenzie Wark, *Virtual Geography: Living With Global Media Events*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1994.
- 2 André-Louis Paré, "Espaces, paysages, frontières," *Parachute*, Montréal, no.120, oct./nov./déc. 2005, pp. 93-113.
- 3 Rather than focusing on Heimbecker's lengthy involvement with place and acoustic mapping in general we limit our focus here to his *Wind Array Cascade Machine-WACM*. For more on his geographically inspired approach see: Steve Heimbecker, *Songs of Place*, DVD 5.1 box set and book (with texts by Vincent Bonin, Anna Friz, Steve Heimbecker, Christof Migonne, F. Scott Taylor, and Barry Truax), co-published by the artist and OBORO, Montréal, 2005.
- 4 Heimbecker quoted at: www3.sympatico.ca/qubeossm/WACM.html.
- 5 *Ibid.*
- 6 In an interview with the *Globe and Mail*, Saëz stated that with the GBOT "We address advertisement, we address entertainment, we address political issues...> "Why not a banana over Texas," *Globe and Mail*, September 7, 2007.
- 7 César Saëz quoted in the editorial "That's Bananas" at: <http://rhizome.org/editorial/fp/blog.php/531>.
- 8 For more on Saëz's practice see: www.Césarsaez.com/English/CÉSAR_SAEZ.html.
- 9 Walter Benjamin, *The Origins of German Tragic Drama*, Verso, New York 1998, p.175.
- 10 Saëz quoted on the GBOT website at: www.geostationarybananaovertexas.com/en.html.



Steve Heimbecker, *Turbulence Sound Matrix Elektra*, April 8, 2008. TSM complete, final testing of the composition "Signe", afternoon light, east view in the artist's Montreal studio. Photo: Steve Heimbecker.

ETC Revue de l'art Actuel #85, Geographies: Earth, Wind and a
Banana – excerpt: Steve Heimbecker
Spring 2009, Montreal, QC/CA by Bernard Schütze
<https://www.erudit.org/en/journals/etc/2009-n85-etc1136555/34813ac.pdf>

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<https://www.erudit.org/en/journals/etc/2009-n85-etc1136555/34813ac.pdf>

In regards to the art and geography conjuncture, Heimbecker's work is interesting in that it takes a primal phenomenon (the first nature wind) in order to apply as second nature territorialization (cartography) and then unleashes the extrapolated wind data to diffuse sound or images in third-nature virtual geographies such as the Internet. In this process the originary phenomenon is never actually lost or denatured, even if it is moved/delocalized and amplified through the techno-artistic intervention it nevertheless continues to carry the force and dynamism of the wind and its sound producing impact. This aesthetic rendering reveals that natural phenomenon and their geographical location, while also calling attention to what extent it can harness both first and second-nature elements into a resolutely third-nature in which localized physical phenomenon can be uplifted and circulated within the infinitely malleable territories of virtual geographies.

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La rencontre de l'artiste avec la chorégraphe Marie Chouinard en 1996 marquera un point tournant dans sa démarche alors qu'il est appelé à programmer un élément technique pour le spectacle *L'Amande* et le diamant. D'autres projets suivront dont la réalisation d'une partition électronique pour *Le Cri du Monde* en 2000. L'extension corporelle d'accessoires technologiques dans les œuvres de Marie Chouinard (et on pourrait parler presque d'ingestion tant la machine est métabolisée par une grande organicité technophysique) singularise l'esthétique d'une pratique unique et acclamée sur la scène internationale. La série *Cantique* en constitue un des exemples les plus évidents : gestuelle et musique dialoguent à partir d'un programme informatique où le son et la vidéo sont manipulés en temps réel. *Cantique no 3* créé en 2004 (et qui complètera *Cantique no 1* et *Cantique no 2*) démontre comment un dispositif interactif peut être simultanément convivial et brutal : les utilisateurs sont invités à jouer avec la voix et les mimiques des deux interprètes qui apparaissent à l'écran en recomposant ce duel et en déstructurant cette performance orale. Dufort s'est impliqué dans d'autres productions telles que *bODY_rEMIX/LES_vARIATIONS_gOLDBERG* (Grand Prix du CAM 2006), œuvre créée à la Biennale de Venise en 2005 et qui a connu un immense succès, tout comme dans la récente création *LE NOMBRE D'OR (LIVE)* qui y fut également présentée en mai 2010. Entre danse et musique, on décèle une grande connivence entre les deux artistes. « Avec Marie Chouinard, mon travail est plus ludique, plus interactif, c'est comme une poupée russe, explique Louis Dufort. Je migre d'un espace à l'autre, d'une fonction à l'autre, de l'écran à l'objet, avec d'autres applications formelles. Le corps devient un canal qui filtre tous ces sons et qui les organise. » En conjuguant leur énergie créatrice, les deux artistes ont même inventé le terme *Connectix* pour illustrer leur symbiose. « Les œuvres doivent nous dépasser. Avec cette chorégraphe, nous sommes toujours dans l'exploration. Nous fonctionnons comme des vases communicants. »

Un terme approprié qui coiffait l'exposition e-art : nouvelles technologies et art contemporain de la Fondation Daniel Langlois pour l'art, la science et la technologie, pour souligner les dix années d'actions de ce centre de recherche sur le terrain des arts numériques sous la direction de Jean Gagnon. Réalisée en collaboration avec le Musée des beaux-arts de Montréal au cours de l'automne 2007, on pouvait y voir les installations d'artistes ayant bénéficié du soutien intellectuel et financier de cet organisme privé. On se rend compte, aujourd'hui que la Fondation a mis un terme aux programmes dédiés aux arts numériques, que sa présence à Montréal a été capitale. En effet : à l'exception de la Fondation DHC/ART et de sa directrice Phoebe Greenberg, rares sont les entreprises de ce type à se consacrer au développement et au soutien de cette discipline. Le travail de diffusion passe par des points de suture pour apporter un surplus de visibilité aux artistes numériques qui doivent se tourner vers d'autres espaces d'exposition. Ils sont nombreux, ici, à accomplir un travail de titan pour faire rayonner le travail de nos créateurs. Les collaborations sont encouragées également afin de solidifier le réseautage intersectoriel comme ce fut le cas entre la Fondation Daniel Langlois et OBORO qui ont accueilli, en écho, une pièce majeure de Steve Heimbecker intitulée *Wind Array Cascade Machine (WACM)*. Récitant une mention d'honneur en médias interactifs au Festival *Ars Electronica* en 2005, formée de capteurs de mouvement et de diodes électroluminescentes (DEL) fixées sur de longues tiges verticales, l'œuvre a été vue au Musée d'art contemporain Kiasma, à Helsinki en Finlande, dans le cadre d'ISEA 2004. Elle rappelait une ville balayée par des courants lumineux et des vents, les deux sources devenant des ready-made inusités au souffle poétique indéniabie. L'installation qui utilisait le système DEL (POD) fut la première d'une série à fonctionner selon les données du temps, en temps réel.

Marqué par la riche tradition en beaux-arts de l'Alberta College of Art and Design de Calgary, Steve Heimbecker commence, dès la fin des années 70, à travailler avec des groupes de musique et des performeurs sur scène : fasciné par le son, il réalisera des sculptures cinétiques qui intègrent la peinture au mouvement comme ce fut le cas avec *Soundpool: The Manufacturing of Silence*, en 1996. À l'époque, en Alberta, puisqu'il est difficile d'avoir de l'équipement, l'artiste démarre sa propre compagnie qui va appuyer financièrement et techniquement ses projets artistiques. Il innove, invente des systèmes technologiques pour présenter un objet dans un espace sonore aussi bien intérieur qu'extérieur, dans ce cas-ci, vastes étendues saturées de défis et de détails acoustiques où il enregistre des bruits qu'il traitera et recomposera par la suite. Il cartographie le paysage, urbain et naturel, par le biais du son qui devient la matière première de ses œuvres.

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Sound becomes Image - Page 32 - from English version The Digital Arts in Montréal – Creation / Innovation / Dissemination

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this oral performance. Dufort was involved in other productions such as *BODY.REMIX/LES VARIATIONS GOLDBERG* (recipient of the CAM Grand Prix in 2006), a work which was created for the Venice Biennale in 2005 and which was highly successful, as well as in the recent creation *LE NOMBRE D'OR (LIVE)* which was also presented there in May 2010. Between dance and music the complicity between the two artists is clear. "With Marie Chouinard my work is more playful, more interactive, it's like a Russian doll," Louis Dufort explains. "I move from one space to another, one function to another, from the screen to the object, with other formal applications. The body channels filters all these sounds and organizes them." In combining their creative forces, the two artists have invented the term *Connectix* to illustrate their symbiosis. "The works most surpass us. With this choreographer, one is always in an exploration mode. We work like communicating vessels."

An appropriate term which headed the Daniel Langlois' Foundation exhibition *e-art : nouvelles technologies et art contemporain* to underline this research centre's ten years of activity in the field of digital art under the leadership of the director Jean Gagnon. Produced in collaboration with the Montréal Museum of Fine Arts during the autumn of 2007, the exhibition showed the installations by artists who had received intellectual and financial support from this private organization. One realizes, now that the Foundation has put an end to its digital arts program, just how crucial its presence in Montréal was. In fact: with the exception of the DHC/ART Foundation for Contemporary Art and its director Phoebe Greenberg, organizations dedicated to the development and support of this discipline are few and far between. The dissemination work will have to look for new bridges to bring a surplus of visibility to digital artists who have to turn towards other exhibition spaces. Many, here, have accomplished a Herculean task in order to ensure that works of our creators enjoy wider visibility. Collaborations were also encouraged to solidify intersectorial networking such between the Daniel Langlois Foundation and OBORO who in return obtained a major work by **Steve Heimbecker** titled *WindArray Cascade Machine (WACM)*. This work, which received an honourable mention at the Ars Electronica Festival in 2005, consists of movement sensors and LEDs fixed on long metallic rods. The work was also shown at the Kiasma Museum of Contemporary Art, in Helsinki in Finland, as part of ISEA 2004. It is evocative of a city swept by luminous currents and wind, the two sources which here became unusual readymades with an undeniable poetic impetus. The installation which used the LED (POD) system was the first in a series that functions using weather data in real time.

Marked by the rich fine arts tradition of the Alberta College of Art and Design in Calgary, Steve Heimbecker began to work at the end of the 70s with music groups and stage performers: fascinate by sound, he created kinetic sculptures which integrate movement into painting as was the case with *Soundpool: The Manufacturing of Silence*, in 1996. Since it was difficult to obtain equipment in Alberta at the time, the artist started up his own company to financially and technically support his artistic projects. He innovates and invents technological systems to present an object in a sound spaces both indoors and outdoors, in the latter case, these are expanses full of challenges and acoustic details where he makes field recordings to subsequently recompose them. He maps out the landscape—natural and urban—by way of sound which becomes the raw material of his works.

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Lynn Hughes

Née à Vancouver (Colombie-Britannique, Canada) en 1951, doyenne associée à la recherche à la Faculté des beaux-arts de l'Université Concordia, codirectrice de plusieurs groupes de recherche dont Interstices qui conçoit des jeux interactifs de grandes dimensions à contenu artistique, Lynn Hughes a également été la tête pensante de l'Institut Hexagram : le plus grand laboratoire de recherche sur les nouveaux médias au Canada.



Louis Dufort

Né à Montréal (Québec, Canada) en 1970 et issu de l'électroacoustique, Louis Dufort développe une expertise en musiques mixte et multimédia et collabore régulièrement avec la Compagnie Marie Chouinard depuis 1996. En 2007, la Société Radio-Canada et la CBC lui commandent un « remix » vidéo et un « remix » acousmatique sur Glenn Gould pour le 75^e anniversaire de naissance du célèbre compositeur.



Steve Heimbecker

Né en Saskatchewan (Canada) en 1959, Steve Heimbecker est un sculpteur sonore reconnu pour ses créations qui mettent en valeur et en scène l'art audio et la musique électroacoustique par le biais d'installations et d'œuvres sonores à canaux multiples. Primé au Prix Ars Electronica de Linz, il a exposé dans de nombreux événements en Europe et aux États-Unis.



Nicolas Reeves

Né à Ithaca (New York, É.-U.) en 1957, détenteur d'une maîtrise en architecture du Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Nicolas Reeves enseigne au département de design de l'UQAM. Cet architecte travaille en réseaux avec de grands laboratoires internationaux, développe de nouveaux objets numériques et oriente ses projets sur l'architecture évolutive.

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The digital arts in Montreal: creation/innovation/dissemination 45



Lynn Hughes

Born in Vancouver (Canada) in 1951, Lynn Hughes is Associate Dean, Research and International Relations in the Faculty of Fine Arts at Concordia University, codirector of several research groups such as Interstices, which designs large-scale interactive games with an artistic component. She has also been at the helm of Hexagram, the biggest new media research laboratory in Canada.



Louis Dufort

Born in Montréal (Québec, Canada) in 1970, Louis Dufort, comes from the electroacoustic field. He has developed an expertise in mixed and multimedia music, and he regularly collaborates with the Compagnie Marie Chouinard since 1996. In 2007, the Société Radio-Canada and CBC commissioned him for a video "remix" and an acousmatic "remix" about Glenn Gould for the famous composer's 75th birthday.



Steve Heimbecker

Born in Saskatchewan (Canada) in 1959, Steve Heimbecker is a sound sculptor recognized for his creations which highlight and stage audio art and electroacoustic music by way of multi-channel sound works and installations. Recipient of an award at Ars Electronica (Austria), he has exhibited in many events in Europe and the US.



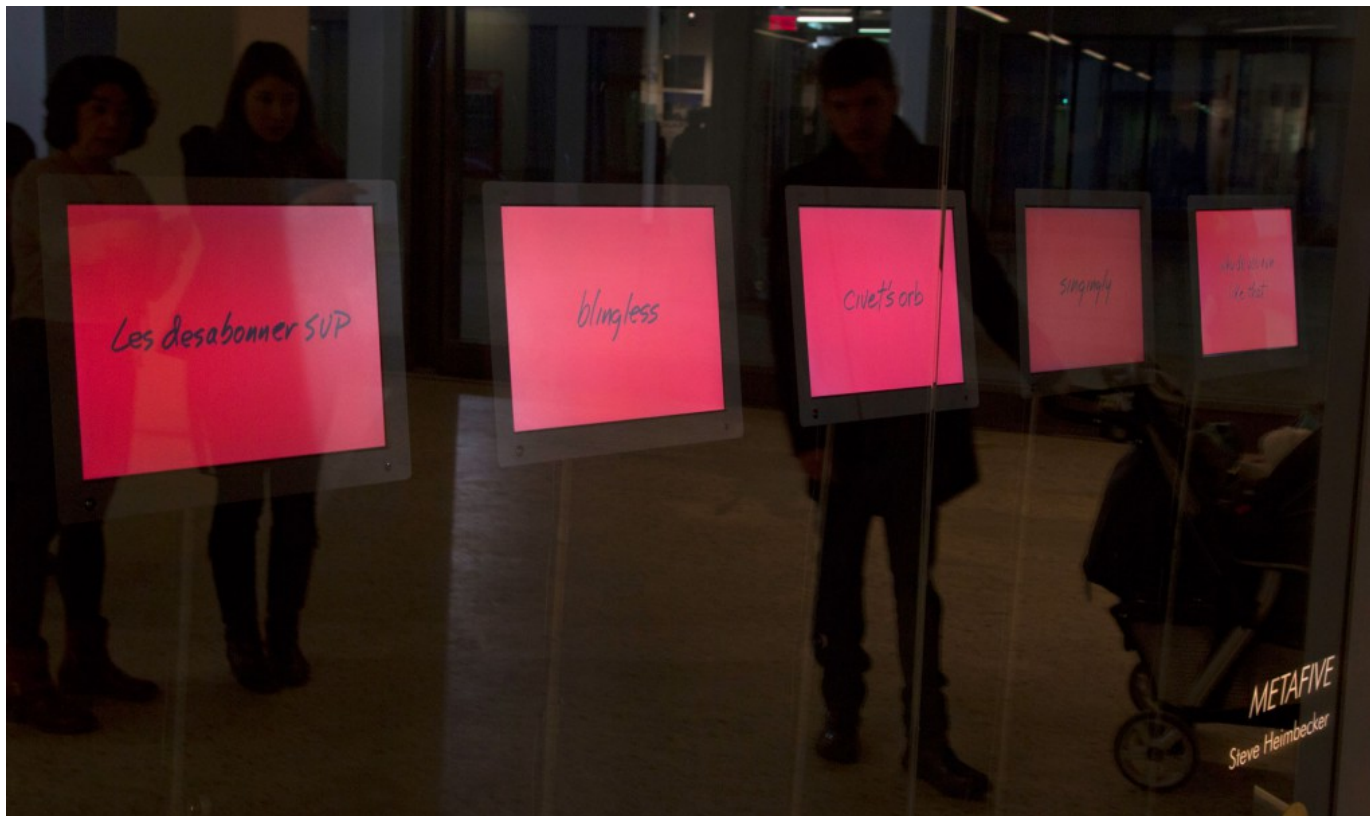
Nicolas Reeves

Born in Ithaca (New York) in 1957, Nicolas Reeves holds an MA in architecture from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He teaches in the design department at UQAM. This architect collaborates with big international laboratories and develops new digital objects. His current projects focus on evolutionary architecture.

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METAFIVE – Steve Heimbecker – 12 décembre 2015 au 16 janvier 2016

21 décembre 2015



Texte de

Paule Mackrous

Un quintette s'active derrière la vitrine. Il est formé de cinq écrans juchés sur des trépieds, à hauteur humaine. On le regarde. Il nous regarde aussi, en quelque sorte, alors que la vitrine nous renvoie notre propre reflet. On définit le quintette comme un ensemble de cinq chanteurs ou musiciens, mais aussi comme une écriture musicale à cinq parties solistes. Avec METAFIVE, Steve Heimbecker met en scène ces deux aspects du quintette tout en les transcendant, offrant un poème en mouvement qui envoûte.

Chaque fond d'écran est coloré d'un rouge distinct assurant la singularité des figures anthropomorphiques. La différence de tonalité est subtile, consolidant du même coup l'effet d'unicité de ce petit orchestre qui « joue des mots », littéralement.

À l'occasion d'une performance antérieure ayant pour titre *Ripaliper*, l'artiste avait rédigé des centaines de jeux de mots sur des cartons. Remixés pour METAFIVE, ils apparaissent successivement et de manière asynchrone sur les cinq écrans. Oscillant entre l'écriture et le dessin, les notes manuscrites

dépeignent le rapport au monde et à l'art vécu par l'artiste. On peut rester longuement attaché à l'une d'entre elles, réfléchir sur ses significations. On peut aussi lire les notes d'un écran à l'autre, les envisager comme des « cadavres exquis » et chercher leurs intrications improbables.

Seul le visiteur attentif remarquera que les jeux de mots ne sont pas codés seulement au niveau sémantique : ils renferment un système de notation. Chaque lettre de l'alphabet est associée à une note de la gamme de b mineur. Les mots sont joués simultanément par deux violoncelles, deux pianos et une contrebasse.

L'infrarouge qui devait détecter la présence des visiteurs afin d'activer l'oeuvre n'a pas passé l'épreuve de la vitrine qui la protège. Cela change-t-il vraiment quelque chose? L'interactivité de METAFIVE ne repose pas exclusivement sur ce mécanisme action-réaction. Elle s'en remet bien au contraire sur une mise en branle de notre imagination : là est le véritable déclenchement de l'oeuvre. L'aspect génératif, programmé, est aussi renvoyé du côté du visiteur. C'est lui qui génère les liens entre les mots et, aussi, avec les sons. L'illusion de réseau entre les solistes automates est renforcée par ces mêmes liens imaginés.

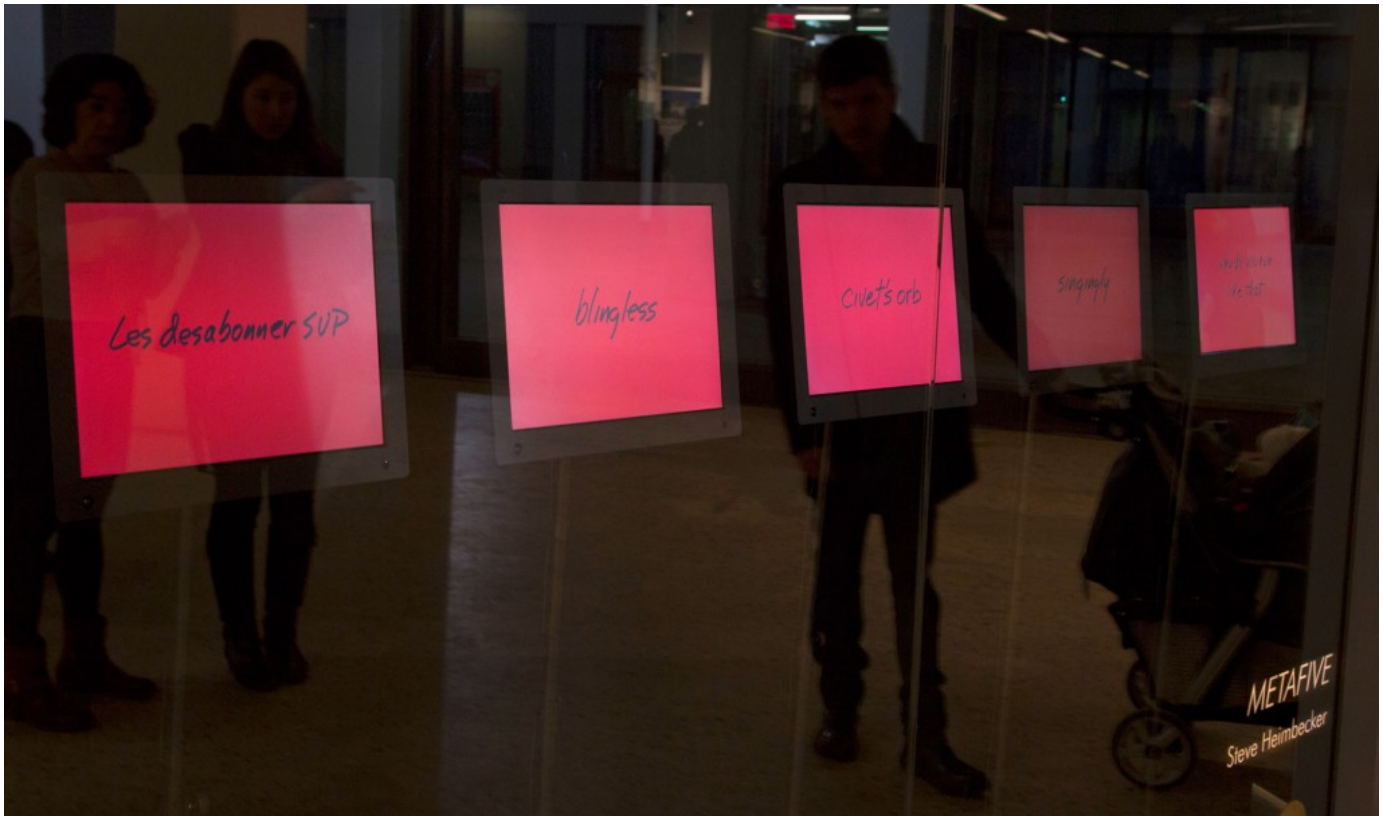
La mélodie est inquiétante, dissonante et ses tonalités mineures créent une atmosphère mélancolique. Trop souvent perçue comme un trouble mental ou un état dépressif, la mélancolie est entendue ici dans son sens positif. Aristote croyait qu'elle était l'état par excellence des hommes d'exception. Au Moyen-Âge, elle représente « l'attribut de ceux qui ont le désir de savoir, de méditer, de réfléchir [1] ». Voilà ce à quoi nous convie ce concerto infini sur l'art, le monde et le travail de l'artiste : savoir, méditer, réfléchir.

[1] Ursulla Garrigue, « La mélancolie dans l'art », *Société*, vol4, no. 86, 2004, p.134.

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METAFIVE - Steve Heimbecker - December 12, 2015 to January 16, 2016

December 21, 2015



Text by Paule

Mackrous

A quintet is activated behind the showcase. It consists of five screens perched on tripods, at human height. We look at him. He looks at us too, in a way, while the showcase sends us back our own reflection. We define the quintet as a set of five singers or musicians, but also as a musical writing with five solo parts. With METAFIVE, Steve Heimbecker portrays these two aspects of the quintet while transcending them, offering a poem in motion that captivates.

Each wallpaper is colored a distinct red ensuring the singularity of anthropomorphic figures. The tonal difference is subtle, consolidating at the same time the uniqueness effect of this small orchestra that "plays on words", literally.

In a previous performance entitled *Ripaliper*, the artist wrote hundreds of word games on cards. Remixed for METAFIVE, they appear successively and asynchronously on the five screens. Oscillating between writing and drawing, the handwritten notes depict the relationship to the world and the art

lived by the artist. We can stay attached to one of them for a long time, reflect on its meanings. One can also read the notes from one screen to another, consider them as "exquisite corpses" and look for their improbable entanglements.

Only the attentive visitor will notice that word games are not coded only at the semantic level: they contain a system of notation. Each letter of the alphabet is associated with a note of the minor b range. The words are played simultaneously by two cellos, two pianos and a double bass.

The infrared which was supposed to detect the presence of the visitors in order to activate the work did not pass the test of the window which protects it. Does this really change something? The interactivity of METAFIVE is not based exclusively on this action-reaction mechanism. On the contrary, it relies on a setting in motion of our imagination: there is the real trigger of the work. The generative, programmed aspect is also referred to the visitor side. It is he who generates the links between the words and, also, with the sounds. The network illusion between the automaton soloists is reinforced by these same links imagined.

The melody is disturbing, dissonant and its minor tones create a melancholy atmosphere. Too often perceived as a mental disorder or depressive state, melancholy is understood here in its positive sense. Aristotle believed that she was the state par excellence of men of exception. In the Middle Ages, it represents "the attribute of those who have the desire to know, to meditate, to reflect" [1] . This is what this infinite concerto invites us to do on art, the world and the work of the artist: to know, to meditate, to reflect.

[1] Ursulla Garrigue, "The melancholy in art", *Society*, vol4, no. 86, 2004, p.134.