

Art

MONTHLY

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Noises Off

Soundings from a Summer of art in Austria

No Damien No Gary No Tracey

The alternative art from Britain show

New Contemporaries

The very new art in Britain show

Manifesta 2

The ultimate euro art show

Noises Off

Mark Harris sounds out a Summer season of art in Austria



'Today everything is somehow culture. When we speak of culture, we mean the new Batman film as well as a play directed by Luc Bondy, a commercial for Reeboks, a new spectacular shopping mall, as well as a restaurant which presents itself in a witty form as a dramatic experience.'

Installation view of
fashion photos in
'Lifestyle' 1998



Erwin Wurm
Untitled 1997
in 'Lifestyle'

The publicity for 'Lifestyle' made me think for a moment that the ICA had set up summer quarters in Bregenz, Austria. The lobby of the Kunsthau was plastered with alluring fashion shots and ads for, of all things, the Warhol show at the Barbican. Elsewhere was a tempting selection of artwork including hot-pink fur from Sylvie Fleury and vegetable hairdos by Natacha Lesueur. There was techno music and beanbags kindly provided by Angela Bulloch, sex-doll websites courtesy of Jochem Traar and Gaultier perfumes arranged by Haim Steimbach. Clearly I'd arrived in consumer heaven, the guiltless realm of satiable desires, at least if the press release was to be believed. I blinked, hesitating before the open door of unforeseeable pleasures, as it told me I

Websites aside, perhaps sound art is the last frontier of the dematerialised artwork and thus irresistible to a provocative curator like Fetz.

was free to gratify my wishes for 'surfing labels ... logos ... and cult marketing' since by succumbing I would only be expressing myself in a 90s way and would no longer be the victim of bad industry – whatever that was.

But upstairs I got awfully confused. I didn't find these artists the best exponents of post-guilt shopping. Yasumasa Morimura seemed caught in a vogueing nightmare, his Asian physiognomy peering out at me from Audrey Hepburn's and Sophia Loren's clothes. Cindy Sherman had gone and got the facelift to end all facelifts. She looked terrible! What was she doing in that George Washington outfit? And Erwin Wurm's models had their clothes on all wrong – that one definitely had her legs through the armholes, and why was he wearing his underpants on his head? Danielle Buetti was ruining these terrific fashion photos by scoring the back of them so that the models were all disfigured and, because Traar's workstation was in this huge red Kleenex box, I felt totally sleazy logging on to order my pliable *Real Doll*. I was starting to feel guilty about not feeling guilty. I wondered if it was possible after all that these artists were really critiquing consumerism?

I strolled down to the basement for reassurance from some early Pipilotti Rist videos I'd never seen before. Wow, these were great! Omnivorous singing bodies unashamedly consuming everything in sight, including other bodies, fruit, jewellery, TVs, music. After a while nothing in Rist's videos seemed that differentiated. In this pantheistic consumerism, TVs and rock music, plants and water, were already part of her body, subsumed by a guiltless pleasure, subservient to nothing. Forget witty restaurants and surfing labels, I wanted some of this, right now and forever.

Like a time capsule from an all too familiar dimension, 'UK Maximum Diversity', organised by Vienna's Galerie Krinzinger, was a round-up of predominantly old work plonked down in a disused factory on the edge of Bregenz. In many cases though, hurried selection of available pieces reduced diversity to a very narrow gamut. Science fiction video loops by Graham Gussin and Douglas Gordon seemed lacklustre show fillers. There were familiar photographs by Richard Billingham, Gavin

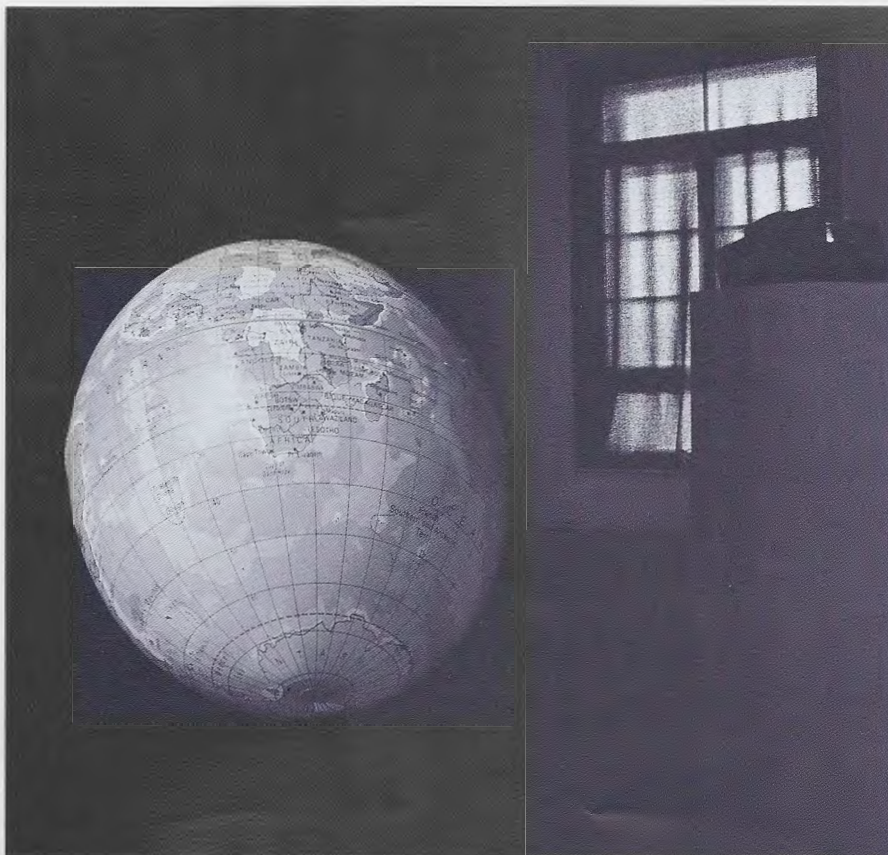


DAVID RAYSON 13 September – 17 October 1998

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Mark Wallinger

A Corner of the Earth
1998 in 'UK Maximum
Diversity'



Turk and Gillian Wearing. The few paintings (Fiona Rae, Chris Ofili, Peter Doig, Angela de la Cruz) were, with the exception of a tender Gary Hume titled *Willow*, disappointing choices. Of de la Cruz it should finally be said (since all accolades have ignored it) that most of her output is an unacknowledged reprise of the last 15 years of New Yorker Stephen Parrino's paintings. Yet there were some surprises: Mark Wallinger's *A Corner of the Earth*, was a memorable new slide projection of the globe onto a circular six foot canvas and Sarah Lucas' remarkable *Self-Portrait with Skull* teemed with those ideas of morbid, sexually-charged imagery that make her dystopia the counterpart to Rist's delirious bacchanal. Hardly enough however to rescue a show whose commercial basis impeded the possibility of securing crucial work by these artists.

The rest of Bregenz was being overtaken by the sound art projects of 'Kunst in der Stadt', an unlikely combination of John Cage's tolerance for environmental noise and Luigi Russolo's intolerance for audience sensitivity. Some 12 artists/groups had been invited by Wolfgang Fetz of the Kunstverein to intervene in the town's acoustic ambience, pretty noisy as it already was with church bells, Hells Angels, markets, tourists and outdoor bars. Websites aside, perhaps sound art is the last frontier of the dematerialised artwork and thus irresistible to a provocative curator like Fetz. Broadcast in public, it originates nowhere and reverberates into nothing, and that is sure to infuriate unsuspecting passers-by. There was an admirable mischievousness to the whole project, though one had to feel sympathy for café goers putting up with loud broadcasts of Hugo

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Ball's *Karawame* or Lou Reed's unlistenable *Metal Machine Music*, part of an open air programme of historical sound works. Likewise for the poor street vendors who tried to be heard over Paci Dalò's recording of a Neapolitan market. Still more fuss was caused by Bill Fontana's amplified underwater sounds issuing from church towers and by William Furlong's broadcasts of radio stations from a series of megaphones along the lake. Innocuous enough sounds, but inevitably imposed on an audience from whom they didn't originate.

That the organisers appeared to relish the antagonism and had, in Situationist style, published an incorrect map in the back of a bulky catalogue, convinced me that I was in avant-garde territory again. I thought of how much fun I would get from torturing Guildford with disembodied sounds to avenge a dull childhood and marvelled at the Kunstverein's ability to raise funding for such an inspiring project. To be fair they had arranged some more amenable pieces. Stoph Sauter's speaking clock issuing from the drains of the station approach was discrete enough to be untampered with, but then everyone appreciates knowing the time. Jérôme Joy's excellent *Collage Jukebox*, offering a selection from 100



William Furlong
Radio Promenade
International 1998
in 'Kunst in der Stadt'

or so contemporary sound pieces, with the shortest at just one second, was the only installation listeners could actually do anything with. Finally, Simon Patterson circumvented antagonism by choosing complete silence. Using a gothic typeface to mimic the film credits of *Where Eagles Dare*, he added the actors' names, Clint Eastwood and Richard Burton, to the cable cars speeding from town to overhanging cliffs, where indeed eagles circled. Referencing a stunt in the film where characters leap from one cable car to the other, Patterson offered relief from the sound pieces of the town in a quiet mountainous retreat.

Courtesy of the Kunstverein, Furlong's intelligent presence was everywhere in Bregenz, from the lake-side broadcasts of *International Radio Promenade*, to *Collage Jukebox*, to the Audio Arts archive comprehensively documented at the Palais Thurn & Taxis where, on other floors, he had six carefully installed tape pieces. For *Spoken For/Spoken About* Furlong had stopped passers-by in Bregenz for responses about everyday life. Results were edited into a densely-textured sound collage moving across eight speakers in a long daylight gallery. A veteran interviewer, Furlong is clearly fascinated by the relation between expressive intonation and meaning. The basement held four further installations including *What Are You Doing Taping?* using the angry voice of a child who had spotted Furlong recording at a market in Dublin. Here in the fictional *Conversation Piece*, combined with other segments from Beuys, Duchamp and Warhol, Cage summed up the Bregenz sound initiatives: '... so my notion of sounds is all of them, not just noises and not just musical tones but all of them'.

Yet things became confused all over again in Vienna. After six hours in 'Out of Actions' (see

AM214) at the MAK I grew sceptical of the white male performance artist's reliance on the aesthetics of physical trauma. My enthusiasm restored by Rist's new videos at the Kunsthalle, I went to the Kunsthalle's other show, 'Crossings', landing once again in the strange world of sound art. For all Bregenz's efforts to dematerialise sound, here it was re-embody in objects, looking for all the world like regular sculptures and installations. The organisers claimed 'a new intensity and fervour' marked contemporary examples of this periodically important hybrid of art and sound. They began their history with, as one might have guessed, Cage and Fluxus.

It is awfully hard to convey the energy of Fluxus events by a few fragments. Given the flamboyant violence of some of Nam June Paik's performances, the pathetic appearance here of the 1961 *Violin with String*, amongst a couple of other relics, begged contextualisation. Without sound or video accompaniment you could only revere or ignore the thing. Similarly, the display of a Cage score, graphically beautiful though it was, could elicit nothing more than a nod of recognition.

In this show there was to be no noise without a visible object generating it, so clearly all those fascinatingly structured dance/sound records were out. 'Crossings' promised popular music but only included the art bands for whom conceptual rigour precedes invention. Moreover they only played once at the start of the Summer and there was no way to see or hear them in the show. This was an exhibition of often uninspired objects producing, for the main part, uninspiring sounds, and I was to believe that this marked a significant contribution to visual and audio culture? Sorry, I tried but I just couldn't. It didn't help that I was angered by the lack of women (four out of 50 artists). Where were Laurie Anderson,

From Cage's musical experience of silence to rock music's annihilation of silence lay a challenging show, but unfortunately 'Crossings' had a more conventional account of sound history to tell.

Alex Bag, Tacita Dean, Renée Green, Alison Knowles, Kristen Oppenheim, Sam Taylor-Wood and Gillian Wearing, for example? They've all made interesting sound pieces that I'd have had no trouble getting excited about.

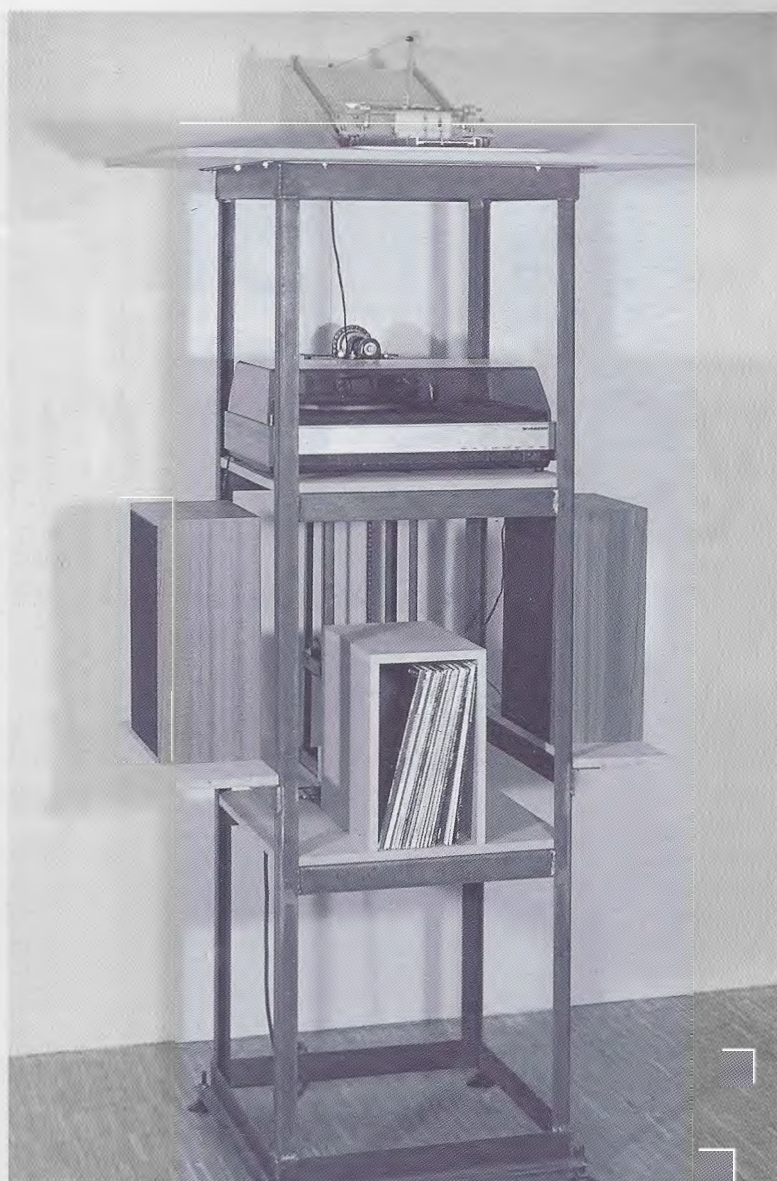
Falling back on the men, Douglas Gordon's 1996 *Bootleg* installation, using silent footage from Cramps and Smiths concerts on facing screens, featured shirtless singers at their most gloriously narcissistic and was a much stronger work than the Bregenz piece. Like Patterson, Gordon understands that the recognisability of cultural icons, rock bands or films for example, brings the sound to mind instantaneously.

Jon Kessler's 1991 *Le Grand Ecran* worked from the other end, using sound to bring cinema to life. On top of a six-foot unit, a small rectangle of wood was pulled backwards into an illuminated vertical position, starting the film score on the turntable beneath. After a few bars, the miniature screen slid down again and the music ground to a standstill before the process started all over again. This melancholic reprise of Hollywood's fictions used music from Gato Barbieri's *Last Tango in Paris* to Isaac Hayes' *Shaft*, with the records racked in a cabinet at the base of the structure. Here, if one needed it, was evidence that in these massive group shows a little humour carries a long distance.

Most intriguing though was Stephen Prina's 1980 absurdist re-pressing of Glenn Gould's recording of Schoenberg's piano music. Prina wanted to establish an equivalence between the duration and vinyl width of the tracks. Playing the new record through headphones, reading Gould's own sleeve notes, and reflecting on Schoenberg's Vienna, while trying to figure out the logic of Prina's equations, led to a fascinating if confounding experience.

But as a confirmed sybarite I really wanted music culture at its most challenging and inventive. In spite of Dan Graham's inclusion with the dystopian music odyssey *Wild in the Streets*, his material from *Rock my Religion* might have been more on the button, since it recounts a history of rock music where its commercial and formal structures are intertwined. Given the engagement of the art bands with dance music, and the importance of rock to the early careers of artists like Prina and Mike Kelley (also in 'Crossings'), this was background material erroneously missing from the show.

After this experience I was pleased to find a translation of Joshua Decker's generous essay from



the catalogue (in German only regrettably). He quotes from an interview he made with Kelley: 'Well my entrance into art was through ... progressive rock. Rock was not supposed to be populist, but rather designed to be a negative aesthetic, a counter-aesthetic. And so for me, as a young person, there was no difference between music which did that job and art which did that job'.

From Cage's musical experience of silence to rock music's annihilation of silence lay a challenging show, but unfortunately 'Crossings' had a more conventional account of sound history to tell. ■

.....
Jon Kessler
Le Grand Ecran 1991
in 'Crossings'
.....

Lifestyle is at Kunsthau Bregenz July 11 to September 20. **UK Maximum Diversity** was at Galerie Krinzinger in der Benger Fabrik Bregenz July 15 to August 16. **Kunst in der Stadt** was at the Palais Thurn & Taxis and various locations around Bregenz July 11 to August 30. **Crossings** is at Kunsthalle Wien May 29 to September 13.

Mark Harris is an artist.

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*Mother's Day 1975 in
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(detail)

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