



INTERNATIONALES
MUSIKINSTITUT
DARMSTADT

Kunsthalle Darmstadt

Alexander Tillegreen

Fluktuationen

07.08. – 19.08.23

Various voices are raised in the solo exhibition *Fluktuationen* by visual artist and composer Alexander Tillegreen. They fluctuate, unfold, vibrate, and collapse. The exhibition is a parkour, starting with the fragility and intimacy of whispers, intensifying towards speech and singing, and ending with actual conversation.

Throughout the ground floor halls, *Fluktuationen* presents a cycle of three new sound works commissioned by IMD for this year's Darmstädter Ferienkurse. The sound installations play with the participatory engagement of listeners in relation to the various architectural dynamics and acoustic situations of Kunsthalle Darmstadt, exploring the boundaries of language, speech, and the materiality of voices. The three new installations are accompanied by a series of visual works that function as corresponding scores, reflecting, and visualizing the act of listening, sonic qualities, and compositional motives.

Alexander Tillegreen conducts ongoing artistic research into voice, psychoacoustics, and, more specifically, into the phenomenon of the phantom word illusion: a language-based psychoacoustic effect discovered by Diana Deutsch that triggers the illusory sensation of hearing inner streams of words that are not necessarily acoustically present. Instead the words people hear seem to be based on their cultural embeddedness, subconsciousness, language background, and physical movement.

In Studio West and East, two versions of earlier sound pieces are installed and adapted to the occasion. They are both based on archival voice recordings and testify to Alexander Tillegreen's ongoing investigation into the musical, social, and compositional potentials of voice and language.

Program

Opening: August 6th 16:00

Opening hours: August 7th – August 19th 14:30–19:00

Four parkours/listening sessions per day: 14:30 / 15:30 / 16:30 / 17:30

Main Hall

Part I – Fluktuierendes Geflüster, 2023.

Eight-channel sound installation, 8:32 min.

Voice: Kathrine Børlit Nielsen.

The work *Part I – Fluktuierendes Geflüster* unfolds as a fragile and vulnerable soundscape of whispers. They form a multichannel "choir" that moves into more defined moments of highly intensified expressions where the polyrhythmic and musical qualities of the impalpable voices engage and collapse with the majestic and diffusing acoustics of the great reverberant hall. The piece is constantly co-created by the listeners' physical movement and attention in relation to the sound sources. *Part I – Fluktuierendes Geflüster* is in context with Alexander Tillegreen's ongoing work with the phantom word illusion and is his first psychoacoustic work with whispering as a leading motive and material.

The whispering words ebb and flow between the comprehensible and impalpable. In spurts of formations, they disperse into the hall and materialize into massive blocks. In the next moment, they suddenly fade away. The whispering voices are blurred, and identity markers such as gender, age, and health, usually present in the human voice, have disappeared. Whispering may carry associations of the secretive or the intimate. As a social and communicative tool, whispering can be aimed to include a single listener while excluding others.

Cabinets

Part II – Water + Vælge (intermezzo), 2023.

Four-channel sound installation, 2:32 min.

Voices: May Lifschitz & Kathrine Børli Nielsen.

The acoustics and architecture have changed drastically from the main hall to the smaller cabinets. Here the voice is raised from what before was a whispering stage to a more erect and defined stage of speech. More voice characteristics seem to unfold but are still in a blur.

First, in cabinet one, the listener is presented with a more dry and systematic demonstration of the phantom word illusion. A simple panning is initially used to illustrate the original word ("water") that then soon is "phantomized" into the simple stereo speaker setup.

When composing the illusion, a two-syllable word is fractured and played through several loudspeakers in rhythmic displacements. The phantom word illusion is conditionally linked to the listener's personal life. The listener's situation forms the inner streams of words in the meeting with phantom words. Culture, language background, gender, and social experience are defining factors. Furthermore, the listener's bodily movement and engagement in the space can alter the inner word stream. In this way, the listener becomes a co-creator. The gender of the voice also may become difficult to decipher, and often it is also the case that the listener may experience a blurry state and multiplicity of voices coming from each loudspeaker.

In the second cabinet, the work continues with a deconstructed and multilayered use of the phantom word illusion. Having the word "vælge" (Danish for "choose") as the starting point of the departure, several layers of illusion are multiplied at different speeds and at different pitches, which in a short time accumulates to a mass of phantom word illusions.

Main Hall

Part III – Augen & choir (epilogue), 2023.

Eight-channel sound installation, 3:36 min.

The third and final part of the cycle is also a return to the main hall, marking an architectural loop in the building and the structure of the entire composition.

The word "Augen" ("eyes" in German) introduces this final piece. This phantom word illusion was originally used as scientific stimuli in one of the interdisciplinary studies that Alexander Tillegreen conducted with scientists at the Max Planck Institute for Empirical Aesthetics, and it has generated many multilingual meanings for participants over the course of the study. It performs as the baritone backbone of the composition while it is soon accompanied by several singing voices forming a choir. Gradually sighs, stuttering outbursts, moans and groans, and other respiratory paralinguistic sounds are introduced until an accumulative cacophony is held within a few moments. A gentle group of vibrating voices phases out the cycle.

Garden Hall West & Garden Hall East

Fluktuationen is an interplay between sound and image. In the two Garden Halls, visual works are presented in a sequence that visualizes the order of the three

ground-floor sound installations and their compositional motives, rendering their acoustic, spatial, and psychological effects.

The work *Listening score for Fluktuierendes Geflüster (Großer Saal I)* is a large horizontal drawing on cardboard panels depicting a graphic "score" representing the overall compositional structure and sound movements of the words whispered in *Part I - Fluktuierendes Geflüster*. There is a scribbly sensibility in this listening score, a porous fragility in the "imprecise" lines of the markers and pens that seems to mirror the elusive whispers and their intimacy. The different accumulations, build-ups, and different sonic intensities are also echoed in the linework. The piece also carries architectural dimensions with the modular use of repetitive forms.

In a series of four rectangular canvases, a yellow marker on raw hessian lays out delicate abstract lines that simultaneously seem minimalist and intricate. The monumental size of the canvases creates a bodily sensation that is opposed and translated by the airy marker. This series corresponds directly to the sound installation *Part II - Water + Vølge (intermezzo)* in the cabinets. Based on screenshots from sound editing software, the paintings depict sections derived from the compositions. The passages of lines denote the fading in and out of sound waves and illustrate the very nature of the phantom word illusion and how the panning, phasing, and accumulation happen. The act of translation from mouth to sound recording, to a computer program to painting, is thereby made visible.

While some of the paintings are reminiscent of drawings, dry and simple in their lines, other works are more painterly and tactile. In *Central vibrato voice for Augen (multi directionality)*, the paint has soaked into the unstretched canvas, and like a singing vibrato voice, it seems both ethereal and strong.

The work *Spatio-temporal score (Augen + choir)* consists of an elongated, gray frieze-like format. The purple linework seem to refer to the building's architecture and perhaps the remembrance of the parkour itself.

Finally, in the works *Hidden structure (diffusion)* and *Reverberation (Großer Saal II)*, spatial and geometrical forms materialize and create a sense of acoustic awareness.

In both the sound works and visual works, Alexander Tillegreen often engages with a sensitivity towards the exhibition sites. The architecture of Kunsthalle Darmstadt has played an essential role in the creation and installation of both sound and visual works. In *Epilogue (curved adaptation)*, the soft cotton canvas follows the curved lines of the wall and the black marble floors. It seems to go into a direct dialogue with the specific architecture, marking the end of both the image sequence and the cycle of sound works.

Studio West

Correspondence (before thought), 2021.

Six-channel sound installation with subwoofer, 6:56 min.

Voice sample of Mary Vieira extracted from 1969 interview, synthesizer, field recordings. Created for the solo exhibition *Upsweep Paradox* at Museum FuturDome in Milan, 2022.

Archival material: © International Institute of Futurist Studies. Transcript available in Studio West.

A part of Alexander Tillegreen's practice is to create dialogues with artists' works he finds himself connected to. The Brazilian artist Mary Vieira worked with co-creational principles – an idea that Alexander Tillegreen continuously circles when composing his sound installations where the listener often takes part in finishing the work. *Correspondence (before thought)* is based on archival

interview material where Mary Vieira speaks of cosmic forces, natural coherency, and her thoughts on co-creation:

"A person from the audience is necessary, someone simple or educated. People need to participate to finish the work, the conditions are already there."

Studio East

Assimilate (in words), 2015/2021.

Two-channel sound installation, 6:31 min.

Mix and tape recorder by Mike Sheridan. Archival material: © Thomas Lopez.

Transcript available in Studio East.

The investigation of language and communication takes another form in the work *Assimilate (in words)*, where archival material in the form of a recording of Syd Barrett interviewed by Meatball Fulton (aka Thomas Lopez) in London, in August 1967, is transformed into an embodied questioning of the limits and borders of spoken language as interpersonal communication. Also featuring the psychoacoustic octave illusion, discovered by Diana Deutsch, and reworked, manipulated samples from Erik Satie's composition *Trois Sarabande* (1887), the work carries friction and complexity in its use of disparate music historical references.

Index of visual works:

Listening score for Fluktuierendes Geflüster (Großer Saal I), 2023. Marker on cardboard, 16 panels, 200 cm x 560 cm.

Water. Fading in/panning (Kabinett 1), 2023. Marker on hessian, 200 cm x 115 cm.

Water. Full evocation (Kabinett 1), 2023. Marker on hessian, 200 cm x 105 cm.

Vælge. Fading in (Kabinett 2), 2023. Marker on hessian, 200 cm x 115 cm.

Vælge. Accumulation (Kabinett 2), 2023. Marker on hessian, 200 cm x 115 cm.

Central vibrato voice for Augen (multi directionality), 2023. Marker and acrylic on cotton canvas, 2 paintings, 75 cm x 145 cm.

Spatio-temporal score (Augen + choir), 2023. Marker and acrylic on cotton canvas, 73 cm x 273 cm.

Hidden structure (diffusion), 2023. Acrylic on hessian, 65 cm x 95 cm.

Reverberation (Großer Saal II), 2023. Acrylic on hessian, 95 cm x 70 cm.

Epilogue (curved adaptation), 2023. Marker and acrylic on cotton canvas, 149 cm x 127 cm.

The exhibition is kindly supported by the Danish Arts Foundation, the Danish Composer's Society, KODA KULTUR, the Danish Art Workshops, the Sound Art Lab Struer, and the Beckett Foundation.



DANISH
ART WORKSHOPS
STATENS VÆRKSTEDER
FOR KUNST

Kunsthalle Darmstadt

Steubenplatz 1

64293 Darmstadt

Tel. 06151 891184

www.kunsthalle-darmstadt.de

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