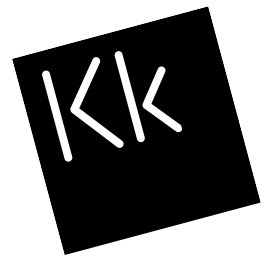




THE CENTRE OF SILENCE

A sitespecific work of sound by Jesper Norda



12 December – 14 Februari 2010

KALMAR KONSTMUSEUM, Stadsparken

www.kalmarkonstmuseum.se, open daily 11-17, wednesday 11-20

The Centre of Silence

A site specific sound-installation by Jesper Norda

Kalmar konstmuseum is for the first time exhibiting sound art, a sound-based installation created for this specific space. It can be described as an auditory play that contains both spoken text and sound. The work is sound but it is also describing what the sound is; in the existing space and in relation to the body. By bringing information to visitors of the exhibition about what the sound is doing to the listener, this work is directly connecting to the work *Marked, unmarked*, a work that is using the same space and can be experienced from the outside of the museum after closing time. In the art work *Marked, unmarked* the body is occupying a central place but in the case of Lindberg/Apelmo it does so as a creator of female identity. In the work by Jesper Norda the body is more of an existential experience. What is the physical experience of sound doing to an individual? How are sound and silence joined together? How does feeling and intellect react when one is faced with a certain experience?

For the occasion each one of the writers Magnus Haglund and Marie Norin have been writing shorter texts on the work of Jesper Norda. Both of them have been following Nordas work during a longer period of time. The two texts, seen as a whole, gives a comprehensive understanding of his work but also an indication on the status of sound art in general, an area that has a wider importance that one would expect. As an artistic genre sound art finds itself hovering over classic art music, pop music and art, performed in the art world since the beginning of the sixties. Its commercial interest is low which may explain the weak presence in galleries and art institutions. In the end of this catalogue you will find the text by Jesper Norda, read by the actor Henric Holmberg for *The Centre of Silence*.

Jesper Norda (b. 1972) has a background as a musician but half way trough his training to become a composer he changed into visual art. In 2002 he graduated with an MA from Konsthögskolan Valand in Gothenburg. Since then he has been working both with music and visual art. In both art forms with the same artistic consistency. In his visual art practice he expands the conceptual base into simple spatial operations made up of objects, text or light, sometimes linked to popular culture and sometimes linked to entirely personal experiences.

For more information, please contact museum director Bengt Olof Johansson, bengt-olof@kalmarkonstmuseum.se, +46 480 42 62 70

When we are taking a step backwards

On the sound art of Jesper Norda

There is a sculptural trait to many of the works created by Jesper Norda, an almost architectural severity that is also a kind of freedom, an acceptance of the human condition. Still, most of the time there not much to see, and often not much to hear. The fields of tension that come into existence, both physically perceptible and sensual, are dealing with what it is that happens within what is not happening. The conceptual challenge lies in the questions that the spectator/listener is starting to pose in relation to his or her own presence in the room. What are the material conditions for my position right here? How is inside relating to outside. What happens if I move, for ten centimetres, for one metre? Who creates the music that actually appears?

As a sound artist Jesper Norda belongs to the dry school; followers of Alvin Luciers: in the focusing on the real and factual, in the reduction of expressions down to only a few, where there arises a friction between the room and the emptiness. But the complexity that is the effect of this has not so much to do with theoretical questions, it gains its strength from an everyday listening, a communicating address, not least noticeable in the many works that take text as its starting point. As with many of the most interesting contemporary sound artists (for example Janet Cardiff, Erik Bünger, Christina Kubisch and Rodney Graham) there is a literary undercurrent in his creativity that makes it difficult to separate what it is that actually sounds from what it is that could sound. The texts are telling us about different ways to interpret, different tracks to follow, as if reality was a forest to lose ones way in. Or a city to live in. In simplicity there is a poetic vein that leads us into an alternative beauty, a way of listening to the concrete world without classifying it. The listener/spectator takes a step back, but not in order to distance him or herself, but to get closer.

This is an investigative method that has not made any decisions in advance about where the demarcation lines are running, and it is in this human ambivalence that the art of Jesper Norda becomes beautiful. It's about mobility in what appears to be immobile, about a multitude of melodies in the disturbing sounds of our closest environment and about electric currents. The thoughts are creating their own secret symphonies at the same time as our everyday life continues around us. It is the poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke, but transmuted into a number of questions about what it is that sounds even when nothing can be heard. The lyric intonation says: freedom can not be owned, it belongs to everyone and then we are wandering out in the world, into whatever happens on the other side of the glass wall. Can you see it? Can you hear it?

Magnus Haglund

Magnus Haglund is a critic and author based in Gothenburg. This autumn he has published a book about Åke Hodell which has attracted much attention. He has previously published *Den nakna staden* (The Naked City), a book on the subject of alternative Gothenburg.

The first morning that I woke up in the desert I was overwhelmed by a sorrow greater than I thought was possible. It was wordless, soundless, and for me therefore frightening. The words, the sounds, time, objects, they are the instruments that I use in order to get my bearings, both mental and physical. In the desert there were for me no readable directions.

If I now afterwards think about that first hour of silence it is more like a kind of movement or a pulse inset into my solar plexus. If this movement is possible; implosion and explosion in exactly the same moment, a place, a room, at the same time smaller and larger than all that a human being can contain.

I first met Jesper Norda in the basement at the Valand School of Fine Arts in Gothenburg. It might have been in 1997. He was a student at the Academy of Music, the Department of Composition, situated just beside Götaplatsen and I was a student on the creative writing course located at the Valand premises. The professors at these courses had initiated collaboration between the two colleges. I think this was the right way forward. To try and break the boundaries between different types of artistic expressions. To try to loosen up the strict demarcations, only as a proposal, a suggestion, see what happens, in the encounters as well as in the students own personal expressions. In the case of Jesper I believe that his first step in to the art academy was essential. As a matter of definition. As when one is stepping out of a tradition, out of one way of relating to things, into another way of relating. As one is then stepping out of other peoples expectations as well as ones own expectations of oneself. Expectations and ideas. And the strange thing that happens then, when true cross-fertilization is made possible, the sudden extent of thought and space, where the notions and ideas, the definitions are starting to bend for real and give way. Just one term later Jesper had moved his entire education from the college of music to the art college.

When I think about Jesper I don't think so much of sound as I think of space. Soundspace. The space that is created by sound but also sometimes by light, how every entity in that space is being defined by the pressure or distance that light and sound are creating. And how, if one

is to separate every note, each particle of light from a greater entity held together, and then carefully is putting the picture back together again, note by note, particle by particle, as one would piece together a jigsaw puzzle or a mosaic, all of a sudden it can make the room emerge at the same time clearer and completely new. It is a physical and entirely concrete reaction but always very rapidly sweeping past: that short moment when the filter that the brain uses to be able to sort and sift through its experiences is out of action. Immeasurable entities of time where the impressions are rolling in unsorted, undefined. And suddenly: my presence somewhere in the middle of this sound-scape. And just as sudden: my presence as a real experience of a space, a Here.

One could also say that it is all about perception. About trying to measure and sharpen ones attention. And also to keep that attention as a physical imprint. To refuse to let it go.

It took many years before I understood this. His focus on trying to adapt or translate all experience into measurable facts, to catalogue more or less everything around him all the time, year after year. Over time collected on a sheet of paper EVERYTHING REMAINS, collected works 1999-2008, it's a striking reading; the exact weight of fear of darkness, the watch of a deceased father where the second hand has stopped working and only irregularly shivers over something still intact in the mechanism inside of it, the exact amount of analgesic in a syringe connected to a timer and a carefully measured dispensing tube, the temperature of the room, the rate of speed of a drip-feed, various attempts of measuring disruption, sorrow, homelessness, always through concrete suggestions of activities: read this or that book under such or such conditions, write the following words on the following page, grow up in the following city, record the following sound in a room and seal it for such and such amount of time, dig these sounds down on this spot, lie down in the grass...

I remember one of Jesper's concerts/exhibitions. There were only a few people in the audience, myself and maybe another fifteen listeners. The piece consisted of a squeak that went on for 24 minutes – one single drawn out tone – followed by over six minutes of “fluttering

squeaks”, quite loud. I now know that the first twenty-four minutes consisted of one sinus tone, and that the six minutes consisted of the same tone that sort of collided with the first one. I held my hands over my ears more or less the whole time. At the same time as the squeak started several spotlights lit up, directed not onto any object on stage but onto the audience. There was a rattling, even white light, as you would imagine a movie recording situation, everything is rigged and set: Lights! Silence! Action!

I remember that there was a discussion afterwards. A man in the front row was extremely provoked, a woman to the right a few rows down from me wanted us to gather in groups and talk about our experience. During the entire concert I saw each and every bobble and strand of hair, speck of dust and smudge on the clothes I was wearing and on the seats around me, the shadow play on the uneven skull of the bald-headed man in the seat in front of me. I wrote about that concert afterwards, words such as “multitudinously democratic” and “an over-explicit illumination of presence, part-taking and lighting” and bla-bla-bla, but now afterwards, when I think about it and remember how we sat, scattered in our seats, pressed against the white light, nailed by a sound that did not really leave room for any thoughts to roam, it suddenly hits me that this piece was called “Butterfly”. I have always thought of a butterfly as that body that was fluttered during those six minutes of “fluttering squeak”, but must not even we, the audience, have resembled butterflies, nailed against the white sheet/light?

I moved from Gothenburg in 2005 and had not met, not even spoken to Jesper for several years when he sent me the web-links to his latest exhibition “Heart of the Matter”. The first thing I see is an upturned piano, the sustain pedal being locked with a wire attached to the wall. The shadow from the wire is creating a thin line on the wall behind. *Horizon release* is the name of the piece, I read. The image on the screen is way too small, after a few moments I notice that I am sitting very close to the computer. I think that I am listening for a word, an almost silent drawn out sound, but I can’t hear anything. Still, I keep on trying to listen to it. Then I think of Tradition. The Great. Monument of Art. The Monument of the Artwork. And I am thinking that it is a quiet, almost tender resistance inset into this upturned body of a piano, chained to the room, to its task. And the skyline, what we call

the horizon, barely sketched in the shadow behind the body, the start of the theory of perspective and of the rainbow, and also its end. When I continue clicking I find myself in some kind of sepia blotch with a line of text down in the left corner: *Little by little, everything will come to normal*, it says. I think my mouth is half open, for maybe five minutes nothing is happening and then there is a crackle, a small disruption, the line of text is flickering and the image, the sepia blotch, is starting to move away from me. But something is wrong because the image is not really changing. Even though it feels as if I am going away, up, towards the whole that my brain is telling me that this sepia blotch is just a detail of, I am not moving. Or I mean: the image is not changing; it is still the same sepia blotch with exactly the same shape and form. After the same length of time the movement outwards stops and it is not until then I realise that what I have previously seen as a still image is instead moving in the opposite direction, downwards, inwards, closer to the sepia blotch. Without getting any closer.

Maybe it was in 2001. I was sitting beside Jesper at the Academy of Music in front of what I believe was some kind of mixing table. A tone generator? He pulled levers, sound came up as lines on a small screen in front of us, it crackled and squeaked, sometimes the tone was quite muffled, barely audible, only deep down in the belly, sometimes so loud that it felt like my head was going to explode. I think we sat there because Jesper was going to show me a sinus tone.

In one of the short stories by Borges there is a description of a labyrinth. It is completely straight. One single straight line, invisible and endless. Every time that Jesper has explained to me what a sinus tone is I am thinking of that labyrinth. It is like the brain has made a decision not to understand. Borges labyrinth is an impossibility. How can a labyrinth be completely straight? It is of course a metaphor; I have to understand it as a metaphor, that's been explained to me. But for me Borges is a very concrete writer. If he writes straight, if he writes labyrinth then that's the two words that he actually means. The sinus tone is the smallest part of a tone. Even though the sound is completely unbroken and can be heard against the eardrum as a straight unbroken tone, it would, if you saw it on a screen, be completely circular. A full circle. As soon it gets up against another tone the circular shape

is broken and the shape becomes squarer and the tone “flutters”. The more tones the squarer the shape gets. But nearest to the centre of every cluster of tones – the words you are uttering, the sound of an aircraft, the music that you are listening to, the toilet when it flushes, the coffeemaker, the cordless drill – there rests an unbroken circle.

Everything that Jesper is working on is in some way relating to the idea of the sinus tone. The idea of every tone as a concrete carrier of time. Unbroken rooms that at the same time are suggestions of activities, experience: try to imagine this, do this, try this... One can find it in Butterfly, in Love Field, in the Pumps and Read then Sleep – in almost every piece, always direct instructions and always few explanations. One can find it in the piece 50 years in a space of 9 days. The text in this piece is a mathematical calculation trying to explain the sound translated into seconds and frequencies. The mathematic calculations are very careful, I am guessing exactly. And it is telling us nothing about who those 50 years belonged to or why those 50 years, translated into 2235, 75 Hertz, must be squeezed into a period of nine days. “Seal the room”, it says, “turn on the sound generator”. Turn it off after 9 days.”

When I am writing this I have not yet heard the piece that is sounding in the room where you are sitting. I suggest that you listen carefully. That you stop trying to listen in a way that you think that the room and the situation and that fact that it is “art” commands. Just listen carefully. See what happens. Are you noticing something? Nothing? Or something small?

Marie Norin

Marie Norin was born in 1967 and grew up in the areas Rosengård and Rörstöjan in Malmö. She now lives in Stockholm. She is working as a tutor on the course Literary Composition at the University of Gothenburg and as a translator.

In 2007 she published her first novelette, Kupa, after previously having published several volumes of lyric poetry. In January 2010 she will publish another two novelettes, collected under the title “Djuraffär” (Pet Shop). She had also published several children’s books.

The Centre of Silence

My voice is moving through the air like waves of sound. You are standing in a room 16 meters and 29 centimetres wide, 14 meters deep and 3 meters and 85 centimetres high. Soon it will become completely silent. In the room there are large quantities of air molecules. 78 percent of those are nitrogen; the remaining 22 percent are mostly oxygen. Those molecules are shaped as very tiny dumbbells and all of them are moving through the room totally uncontrolled with a speed of around 1600 kilometers per hour. Together they are weighing around 1000 kilos. In a few moments I will stop talking and then there will be silence for a while. Your eardrums are then being exposed to a frantic rain that all those millions upon millions of air molecules are creating; they are exerting a pressure of over eleven tons per square meter. However, the rain on one side of your ear drum is exactly balanced by the same kind of frenetic rain on the other side of the eardrum. This means that your eardrum is in a state of perfect balance. It is not moving, it remains still, a thin membrane in a perfect surface, as undisturbed water.

A tone is moving through the air like waves of sound. You are standing in a room 16 meters and 29 centimetres wide, 14 meters deep and 3 meters and 85 centimetres high. Soon there will be a tone. In the room there are large quantities of air molecules. 78 percent of those are nitrogen; the remaining 22 percent are mostly oxygen. Those molecules are shaped as very tiny dumbbells and all of them are moving through the room totally uncontrolled with a speed of around 1600 kilometers per hour. Together they are weighing around 1000 kilos. In a short moment there will be a tone. What happens then is that the chaotic movement of the air molecules for a moment becomes totally regular. There will appear a net of air molecules that has a slightly finer mesh every third meter. Every third meter along the entire room a number of molecules are gathered in a group, they are thinning out and then getting denser again. The temperature is higher in those clusters. This means a difference in the air pressure and you will hear a tone. After a few moments the tone will suddenly die and give way to silence. Your eardrums are then being exposed to a frantic rain that all those millions upon millions of air molecules are creating; they are exerting

a pressure of over eleven tons per square meter. However, the rain on one side of your eardrum is exactly balanced by the same kind of frenetic rain on the other side of the eardrum. This means that your eardrum is in a state of perfect balance. It is not moving, it remains still, a thin membrane in a perfect surface, as undisturbed water.

White noise is the total opposite of a tone. It is all frequencies at the same time, all frequencies that your ear can catch your eardrum perceives at the same time, in the same moment. Of the regularity that is a quality of the movement of the air when a tone is being played remains nothing. A chaos of molecules that each and everyone is moving through the room totally uncontrolled with a velocity of around 1600 kilometers per hour. Together they weigh around 1000 kilos. White noise can also be the opposite of silence, at least from a perspective of perception. The balance between the inside and the outside of your eardrums are totally put out of action. The patterns of movement of the air molecules are however very similar. Soon a white noise will be heard, a strong mass movement, your eardrums will then be exposed to a frenetic rain that these millions upon millions of air molecules are creating, they are creating a pressure of over eleven tonnes per square meter. After a while the noise will die down and give way to silence. The activities in the room that has made its way through your mouth and your nose, that are finding its way into the cavities of your cranium and your soft tissue and has found its way into your internal ear makes the pressure again become the same on both sides of the eardrum. It is not moving, it remains still, a thin membrane in a perfect surface, as undisturbed water. The centre of silence.

The text is the one that in *The Centre of Silence* is being read by the actor Henric Holmberg. It is written by Jesper Norda.