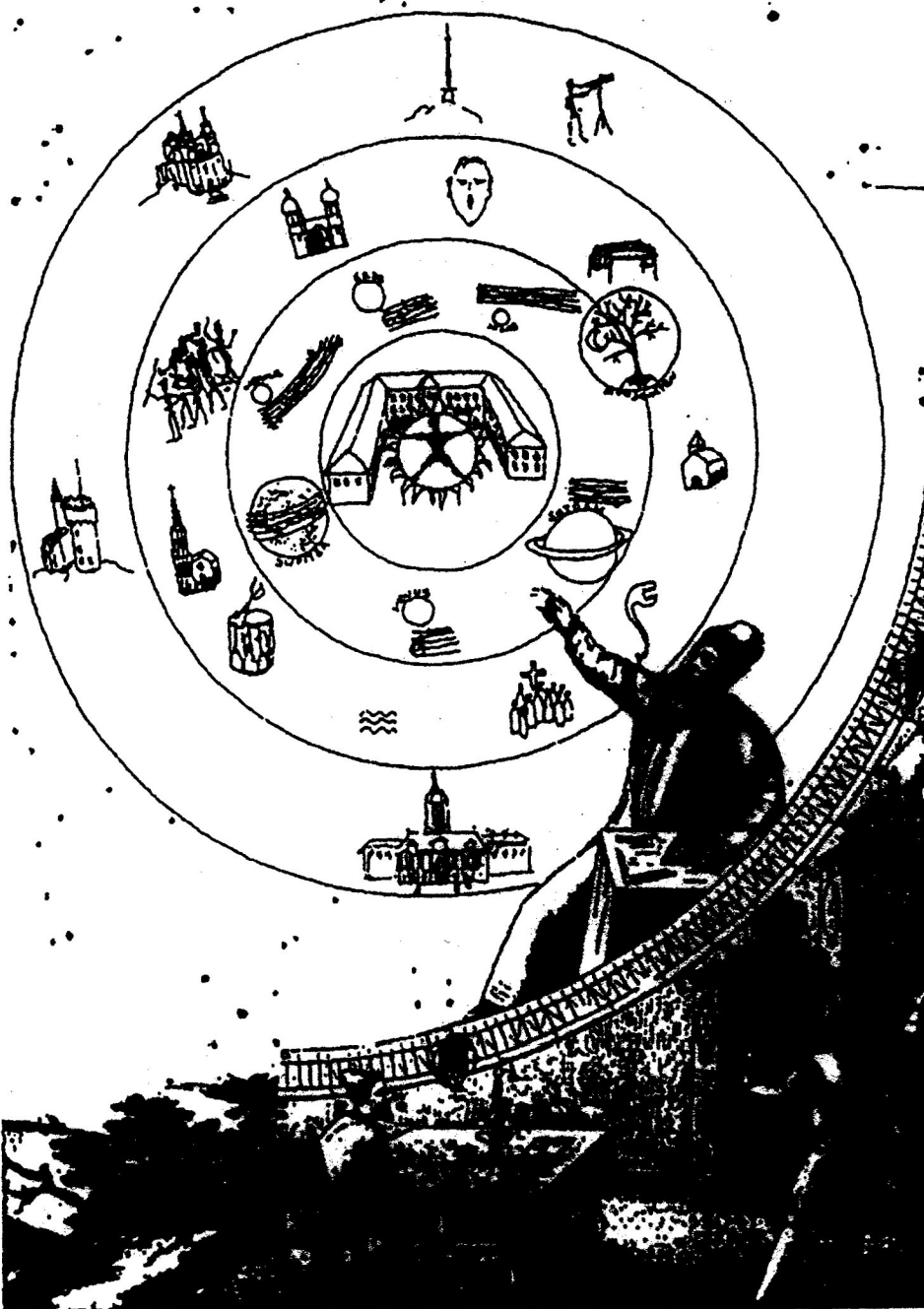


Listening to the Universe

It's mid July and a milky haze hangs over the city. The heat clings like the body of a lover waking in the bright light of late morning. The garden of the Castle of Linz, on a hilltop above the Danube, has been transformed by composers and sound artists Bruce Odland and Sam Auinger into the *Garden of Time Dreaming*, where the past slips into the present and whispers in the ear of the future. "Time, time, time," it repeats, "falling through time." A nasal incantation stretches into an electronic buzz like a snore. Bells chime. A gong is struck. Unseen footsteps follow you, time stalking the universe, Kepler's ghost strolling through the cosmos. In Jupiter's orbit. Brückner's organ at St. Florian's resounds in exaltation, the sound of light flooding Heaven's cathedral. A disconcertingly familiar voice in English and German pulls you back to Earth, grounding you in the moment. It's Laurie Anderson talking about Hansel and Gretel living in Berlin, where she's a cocktail waitress and he's in a Fassbinder film. "What is history?" she asks. "History," he says, "is an angel falling backwards into the future...a pile of debris...a storm...called progress." The castle, an emblem of monarchies and empire, stares across the Danube, which is now brown not blue, at modern industrial Linz, outlined against a white sky.

Odland and Auinger's sound installation is dedicated to visionary scientist and the father of modern astronomy, Johannes Kepler, who wrote his greatest work *Harmonices Mundi* while living at the Castle of Linz during the Thirty Years War nearly 400 years ago. A skilled astrologer, he was mystically devoted to musical harmonies, and he sought to find them in the cosmos. At the same time he scientifically proved that the planets move around the sun in elliptical not circular orbits, publishing the 70 chapter *New Astronomy* in 1609. Kepler marks that pivotal moment in Western civilization when the schism between spiritual understanding and scientific methodology occurs.

Kepler posed the question: "Can Man find a harmonious way to live in the Cosmos?" In the light of our time, when the fate of the planet hangs in the balance, Odland and Auinger grapple with the same question. Art is the means by which they seek to reintegrate the spiritual world, the natural world, and the technological world (with which we have tried to replace the other two). They



Cosmology drawing by Martina Kornfehl. From catalog of the Installation.

treat technology as something "organic," a brain that processes and transmits the frequencies of the universe, a partner in alchemy, not a conqueror.

The artists are translators, time travelers, magicians, dreamers, scribes gathering particles of information from a continuously changing environment and transmitting them back into it via their electronic prostheses, speaking in the language of music, sound and poetry. In this garden, "voices" of the world meet and mingle. Visitors from other moments and places resonate across time and space as living presences. They are joined by the sounds of the city in any given moment.

A Taramuhara drum, Incan stone bells, harps, flutes, falling stones, whispering trees, birdlike warbling, a story from a Linz native about the fall of the Third Reich, shimmering metallic vibrations and percussive clinking, along with coyotes and crows, recorded in a parabolic shaped ancient city of stone in Chaca Canyon, New Mexico, where 5,000 people once gathered on the solstice to make harmonic music for the heavens, are just a few samples from Odland and Auinger's vast sound palette, to which numerous colleagues made contributions.

Bypassing the linearity of language, *Garden of Time Dreaming* propels you backwards and forwards through shifting perceptual dimensions of sonic architecture whose structure is determined by planetary alignments, the laws of physics, and the spiritual/historical vibrations of place.

Cement cube speakers marked with the symbols and qualities of the planets define the geometry of the site. Speaker balls in ceramic bowls atop spindly stalks stand at the edge of a steep incline. Strange flowers singing plaintiff little melodies in the urban wilderness, or alien visitors chattering in soft gurgling voices, they are both receivers and transmitters. The sound is generated by the automobile traffic below, the wind in the trees, and the river. Meanwhile, in Kepler's room in the castle itself, the word TIME travels back and forth from Earth (floor) to Mars (ceiling).

The *Garden of Time Dreaming* goes far beyond an aural equivalency of a visual history. The artists' use of sound is not simply descriptive in visual or literary terms. Unlike the visual field, where the landscape is overcrowded with and dominated by already manufactured images and signage, and

unlike the textual field where language has been debased by advertising and politics, the aural landscape is still rich with unmediated source material. It still has the power of evocation that has been neutralized in our visually saturated culture.

Sound is a vibratory force that occupies space, a tonal energy that acts upon you physically, emotionally, psychically, the companion element to light. Odland and Auinger understand and employ sound as another way of "knowing." They invite you to enter the world by a different door, and they provide a path. Listen closely, for it will lead you to a more holistic comprehension of existence.

—Jacki Apple

Exhibited in the garden of the Castle of Linz as part of Upper Austria's *Landesausstellung 1990. Man and Cosmos*, May 6-November 4, 1990.

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High Performance #52
Winter 1990 volume 13 number 4