

Bernhard Garnicnig (at)

University for Applied Arts and Fine Art Vienna
MFA Student
bgarnicnig@gmail.com

Gottfried Haider (at)

University for Applied Arts Vienna
Ph.D. student
gottfried.haider@gmail.com

**Production of a Spatial
Audio Narrative****Introduction**

Craving is a site specific spatial sound composition set up by the two artists in the public space of Vienna's Donaustadt district. It unfolds while the audience individually wanders the high-rise area. Wearing headphones and mobile computing devices they physically navigate the piece. Their path is in no way – auditory or visually – predetermined, thereby allowing the audience to let themselves be guided by intuition and the aspects of the place.

Text

The text used draws on *Crave*, a play by British dramatist Sarah Kane. In it, four sparsely drawn characters weave a tapestry made up of quotations and fragments, the cloth of which are their individual traumas, loves, grieves and resignations. Plot and signs indicating temporal developments are reduced to a minimum. It is in repetition and the final defeat of communication of internal landscapes that we come full circle to the urban desert we found in between the towers of Donaustadt. Kane's text, which is filled with elements of subjective meditations on urban surroundings, but devoid of stage directions has been rearranged and expanded using pieces of everyday conversations to work with individual clusters according to the demands of certain places.

Method

The selection and spatio-temporal distribution of sound elements require a detailed study of text and conditions of the space such as architecture, flow of pedestrian movements and the rhythms of everyday life. The technology framing the production plays another very important role.

As environmental influences such as weather or social interaction surrounding the participants or their personal movement patterns cannot be



Fig. 1: Photo: Bernhard Garnicig

foreseen, the sound design is not geared towards constructing a linear narrative. It aims, rather, to create individual, but loosely-connected scenes. To achieve this, acoustic elements are placed on street corners, on wide open spaces or in lively passageways as they relate to a sensation and meaning created by their architecture or the human beings inhabiting it. For this, the artists have developed a software, which enables a composition of temporally and spatially dynamic acoustic scenes.

Sound fragments such as spoken language or music are grouped together, following an internal temporal logic. These groups are distributed all over the area and linked through the recipient's perception as he moves through the space.

Applying their other senses and their feeling for the specific place the participants then put the perceived sensations into a larger context. This ability to freely associate intentional design elements through reflection accepts the spectator in the temporal and spatial complexity of his cognition.

Technology

The participant is equipped with a wearable computer and headphones. Custom software determines his position via GPS and tracks his head- and body movements through a magnetometer. Based on the sensor readings the computer renders the audio composition in real-time. This technology allows us to virtually place snippets of recorded speech and music at specific Latitude/Longitude coordinates, so that the participant is able to walk through them as if the voices in the recordings were actually there.

Site

Craving was envisioned for production in Vienna DC, a modern complex of commercial and residential buildings in the city's Donaustadt district.

This most preeminent area is defined by a branch of the river Danube in the south and the United Nations building in the north. Vienna DC was conceived entirely on the drawing board after plans for a World Fair in this location had been vetoed in a referendum in that same year of 1991. Nevertheless, ten years after its opening, the area is still *urbanity in progress*, as various vacant lots create a layered surface, whose heaps of dirt contrast with the spotless facades otherwise dominating the view. Vienna DC houses numerous multinational corporations and information technology firms in office skyscrapers, but there are also vivid residential zones in between. One can literally walk around a corner to see the number of suits diminished and people leading their lives in a slower and more informal way. There is a bizarre city within, whose 4.000 inhabitants have adopted to the given system of open spaces and the spatial logic of the complex. Unique architectural features strongly influence the way in which the space is perceived: a wide flight of stairs leading up to nothing, surveillance cameras placed at eye level, deserted children's playgrounds, a vast empty space whose floor is covered in glaring white paint. This microcosm allows the artists to use the space's emotional tectonics and possible associations while breaking with the normal patterns of movement, perception and interaction with the environment and other people.