

Kleinnian Feedback: Black Box

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Kleinnian Feedback

The exploration/articulation of the architecture proceeded with:

8.1 channel audio projection system
8 microphones
mixer
audio interface
computer
custom software
wireless headphones

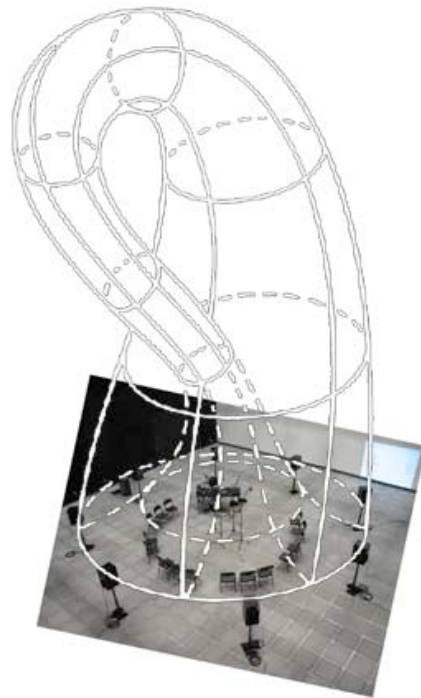
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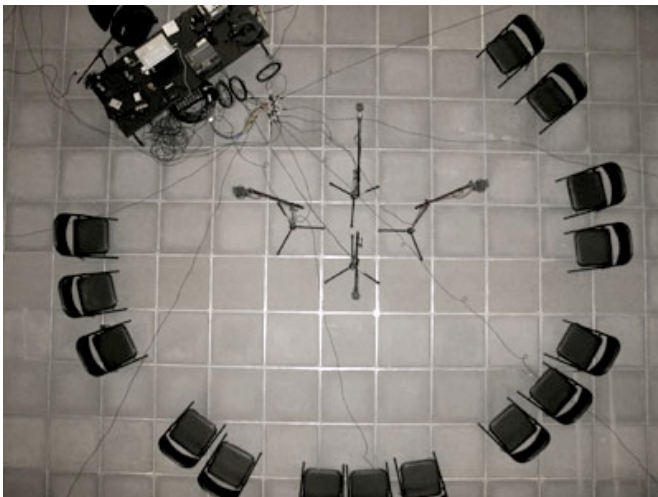
Performance Text for Black Box Performance:

« We are sitting in Concordia's "Black Box", where I am recording the sound of my speaking voice and I am going to play it back into this room again and again until the natural resonant frequencies of the architectural space reinforce themselves creating an acoustic palimpsest of a textural fold of connected space between soft architecture and hard architecture.

I regard this activity not so much as a demonstration of a physical fact, but more as a diagram of smooth space. In particular the topological relations as found in a Klein bottle, where inside and outside are dissolved by one continuous surface. »

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Exploring an Architecture of Transparency

It was Schlegel who first said, ‘Architecture is a frozen music.’ But then we could also consider the inverse, as Deleuze and Guattari do, where “...the literary or musical work has an architecture’ as well. What interests me most is the relation in between these two notions: *how space creates sound + sound creates space.*

Alvin Lucier’s work is a natural site for considering the dynamic relations between space and sound, particularly his “I am sitting in a room” (1970). With this piece, sound articulates a space’s characteristics through the technique of layered repetition. Lucier projects multiple generations of his voice into the same space which in turn filters the initial sound recording, removing many frequencies while amplifying the room’s resonant frequencies. The end result is a sonic imprint of the space, a series of bell-like tones unique to the room’s volume, shape and surfaces. Lucier’s piece brings to the foreground an elemental part of everyday listening, in other words how architecture shapes our perceptions of events.

What happens when we take this technique and apply it to an architecture specifically designed to sonically erase itself? As a fundamental design premise, the Black Box attempts to make its own presence and boundaries as invisible as possible. In search of a history, we could consider the avant-garde cinemathèque as the proto-Black Box. I am specifically thinking of the extreme example of Kiesler’s “invisible cinema” design materialized by Kubelka and others at the original NYC’s Anthology Film Archive. In this experimental cinemathèque, all distractions were removed: decoration, ambient lighting, sounds—even relations with neighbours (due to dividers between seats). This historic cinemathèque finds its contemporary offspring in the ubiquitous multimedia rooms where film screenings, new media experiments and performances occur at universities, museums and galleries. In these places, the contemporary Black Box continues this desire to erase the trace of the interface. Just as the walls are painted black in order to not reflect light and therefore a record of its own existence, so too are the walls acoustically treated to reduce sound reflection in the hopes to point outward to an ‘infinite



free-field'. As a matter of principle, the design of the "Black Box" is premised on the idea of providing the ultimate venue for the non-place of virtuality. In other words, the Black Box aspires to an architecture of transparency, though it should be noted, a phenomenal transparency, not the literal transparency of Modernist architects Le Corbusier and Van de Rohe.

With this fundamental understanding of the concept of the Black Box, what occurs when we perform Lucier's "I am sitting in a room" in a particular Black Box? What does a transparent architecture sound like? The interest in this question is doubled when it requires software to run the performance in realtime, and in effect, process the sound in its invisible architectonic code. With a rewritten text that pays homage to Lucier's original piece and style, I explore the relations between the contemporary issues of virtuality and architecture.

While an original performance was conducted in Montréal's Lucien-L'Allier metro station, *Kleinnian Feedback* as a multichannel work was first performed in Concordia's newly constructed Black Box designed by KPMB Architects/Fichten Soiferman et Associés Architects. The recordings were made during the final phase of construction while the Box was still unfinished, dovetailing the process of architectural construction with the construction process of the composition.

It is my intention that through the invisible architecture of sound that the transparent architecture of the Black Box + virtual architectonics of software are made manifest in an aesthetic form. As a structural device, the concept of the Kleinnian Bottle frames the performance.

A Kleinnian Bottle is a topological form related to the möbius band (their similarity residing with their single sided non-orientable surface, their difference being a Kleinnian Bottle has no edge/boundary). Most applicable in this case, the Kleinnian bottle problematizes definitions of inside and outside. Since the attributes of a Kleinnian Bottle are best appreciated dynamically, the movement between inside and outside conflates a definitive boundary between these areas. With this relational understanding, I suggest that a particular type of feedback occurs

between inside and outside, creating a looping performance that announces an event oscillating between soft architecture and hard architecture.

† Pat Reisterer first suggested to me the idea of considering Lucier's work as topologically connected space. I owe much to his insights as well as his technical assistance in the first performance.

Thank you Lynn Hughes, Steve Bates, Jean-Claude Bustros, and Patrick Reisterer.