

## **Soundscape work in Austria – an overview** (projects that are not connected to the Phonogrammarchiv)

by Jürgen Schöpf and Gabriele Proy

### **Tonjäger**

The Austrian Soundhunter Association (Österreichische Tonjägervereinigung) published the journal “Ton-Revue” from 1961-64 (available online [http://www.tbf-austria.org/ton\\_revue\\_otv.html](http://www.tbf-austria.org/ton_revue_otv.html)) and has been a member of the “International Federation of Soundhunters” founded in 1956. Sound hunters worked mainly inside their associations. They swapped tapes over surface mail, conducted competitions in different categories, and exchanged technical experiences. In recent publications the lack of new blood becomes explicit, without satisfying explanations since technological development has continuously facilitated audio (field) recording over the past decades. Even though the “Tonjäger” have followed technological developments and largely abandoned tape technology for DAT and later on flash media, starting to use the internet for exchange of information, they have not been able to pass on their enthusiasm to a new generation. Obviously a new generation has taken up recording technology independently without connection to the “Tonjäger” associations, organising themselves not in associations but through the internet only. The growing existence of online sound maps and sound sharing web sites like SoundCloud prove this point, yet make it difficult to explain the generational change, and why there is so little continuity from the “Tonjäger-Vereinigung” to the “Web 2.0” generation.

### **Linz 09**

The Upper Austrian capital of Linz was the European Capital of Culture in 2009. In this frame work the space planning laboratory “Hörstadt” (listening city) was created as an “Association for Acoustics, Space, and Society” (“Verein für Akustik, Raum und Gesellschaft”). Their mission statement targets to overcome the usual defensive attitude towards acoustics – fighting noise – for an active approach of acoustical planning (Hörstadt 2012). They have produced a Guidebook “Living and Listening. Acoustics in House Construction” (“Wohnen und Hören. Akustik im Hausbau”).

Also during 2009 composer Peter Ablinger presented his “Landscape Opera Ulrichsberg” for the Linz 09 festival, using environmental sounds (Ablinger 2009). It was in Ulrichsberg in 1973 that the venue “Jazzatelier” was founded, which has since developed from traditional Jazz to contemporary music.

### **ORF Kunstradio**

According to information on their web page, the ORF Kunstradio is a weekly programme of the national public radio “Ö1” (ORF 2012).

Heidi Grundmann, producer of the “Kunstradio” from 1993-99, was involved in Bill Fontana's work “Landscape Soundings” (Fontana 1990). This project met with a lot of public attention and was apparently very well received by the Austrian, or Viennese public. The Hainburger Au, a nature sanctuary where Fontana had positioned his microphones to broadcast to a public square in Vienna, is a place of significance in the recent (political) history of Austria.

However, another soundscape project of Bill Fontana two years earlier, “Sonic Projections from Schlossberg Graz” (1988), was not well received and had to be stopped before its projected end. In this project he metaphorically attempted to “clean” places where Nazi propaganda had been broadcast via public speakers with nature sounds from different parts of the world.

The current producer of the “Kunstradio” is Elisabeth Zimmermann:

“She is a cultural manager living in Vienna and has been involved in organizing, coordinating, and curating radio art projects, symposia, CDs, publications, and international telematic art projects. She has held various presentations and lectures on radio art projects at national and international festivals. Since 1998, she has been the producer of the weekly radio art programm Kunstradio - Radiokunst (<http://kunstradio.at>) on the cultural channel of ORF (Austrian National radio). Since beginning of 2010 she is the chair woman of the EBU Ars Acustica group (see references). [...] This weekly program has almost from its beginnings become much more than just that: one of its main functions became that of serving as a point of access for international visual artists, media artists, composers, writers to both the production and transmitting means of the ORF and the international exchange and cooperation infrastructure of National Public Radio worldwide (mainly through the Ars Acustica group at the EBU).” (ORF 2012)

The continuity of public radio structures apparently serves well as a meeting point for sound art in general, and to some extent for soundscape projects. However, the perspective of a public radio often has a tendency towards canonical pieces of art, and big names of “composers”. They do have some latitude for experimentation, and do use it; their democratic legitimisation, however, also imposes some constraints here. Technically, they have possibilities that can only be dreamt of by independent artists.

### **Karlheinz Essl**

Otherwise apparently not active in the field of soundscape, Karlheinz Essl, Austrian composer of electronic music and music curator of the Essl Museum of Contemporary Art, has developed a software „fLOW“ (version 3.4 appeared in 2007, see references). This (shareware) software can be downloaded from his website. It comes with samples of four categories: air, water, fire, earth. Those samples can be mixed together and treated in their pitch as well as with some effects. The author recommends using the auto mode. It thus represents a composition of Karlheinz Essl that aleatorically recomposes itself continuously. In the manual mode, however, the user can point the software to local samples and use those within the structure of the software, that is: mixing, pitch and effects manipulation, thus making a soundscape composition of his own.

### **Forum Klanglandschaft (FKL)**

The “Forum Klanglandschaft (FKL)” was founded in 1995 on an impulse of the World Forum for Acoustic Ecology (WFAE), itself established in 1993. It was formally established in Aarau, Switzerland, with the Swiss musicologist Justin Winkler as the founding father and first president of the FKL. In 1996 the renowned Canadian soundscape researcher and author of the well-known book “The Tuning of the World”, R. Murray Schafer, was invited as guest of honour to the first general assembly in Langenthal, Switzerland. In the Soundscape Forum the countries Germany, Italy, Austria, and Switzerland are represented. Its domicile is Switzerland, the presidency has been held by Austria since 2001, when Gabriele Proy was elected by the general assembly at the “Institut für Musiksoziologie” of the “Universität für Musik und darstellende Kunst Wien” as successor to Justin Winkler. The transnational positioning of the Forum is also mirrored in the full name of the association: “Forum Klanglandschaft, Forum pour le paysage sonore, Forum per il paesaggio sonoro, Soundscape Forum”.

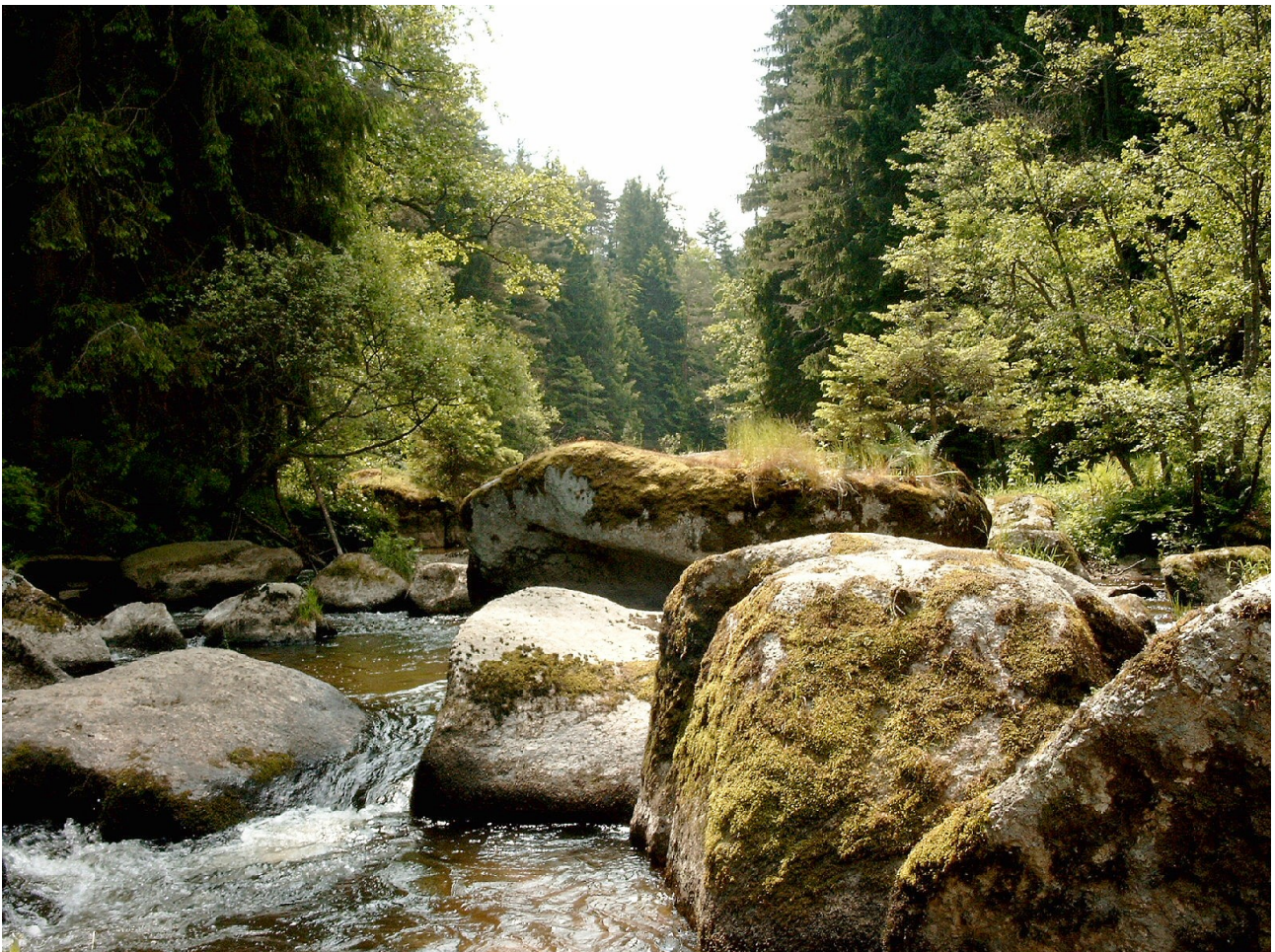
As one of nine members of the “World Forum for Acoustic Ecology (WFAE)” (the others being organisations from Finland, Greece, the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, Mexico, the U.S.A., and Japan) the “Forum Klanglandschaft” has made a significant contribution to the realisation of the Stockholm Resolution in the WFAE-conference “Hör upp! Stockholm, Hey, Listen!” in June 1998.

During three concert tours to Japan, Gabriele Proy has intensified the contacts to the JASE and, as president of the FKL, represented Europe in the conference committee of the international conference of the WFAE “The West meets the East in Acoustic Ecology” at the Hirosaki University in 2006 (Tadahiko et al. 2006).

Since the foundation of the FKL, awareness raising for listening has formed an important part of its activities. As a consequence, the FKL with all its members is pioneering this topic in Germany, Austria, Italy, and Switzerland. Regional activities in the member countries comprise, among others, conferences, workshops, soundwalks, soundscape concerts and radio broadcasts.

The FKL understands its role as a mediator between people from the most diverging disciplines that are working with soundscapes and listening spaces. Its purpose is to prompt activities in academia, arts, and education which raise awareness for the sound environment and promote quality as well as active and open hearing. Being an association without commercial ambitions, the FKL is open to all that have an interest in listening and forming our sound environment.

Biannual FKL conferences serve as a platform for the exchange of ideas among institutions and individuals working with sound environment, e.g. “Klangumwelt: Schon gehört?” (2003) in Merano, “Klänge, Macht und Landschaft” (2005) in Potsdam, “Soundscapes — Landscapes” (2007) in Basel, “Soundscapes & Listening” (2009) in St. Pölten, and “Keep an ear on...” in Florence (2011). See also <http://www.klanglandschaft.org> for up-to-date information.



The river Kamp in the Lower Austrian region “Waldviertel”. Photograph by Roland Hille

### **Gabriele Proy - Compositions on Austrian Soundscapes**

In the Austrian scene of contemporary classical composers, Gabriele Proy is often referred to as a pioneer in the field of soundscape composition. Her way of composing soundscape music refers to the anecdotic music developed by Luc Ferrari in the early days of *Musique concrète* and to the Canadian concept of Acoustic Ecology. In her soundscape compositions, the acoustic environment is the musical material. A soundscape composition, to her, is always a poetic transformation of the chosen place and time. Her interest focuses on the poetic statement, on emotions, and atmosphere: listening to soundscape compositions may evoke emotions – an example is her composition ‘Schlachthof’. In 1992 she had the chance to do field recordings at the well-known slaughterhouse of St. Marx in Vienna. Using those recorded sounds she composed a 24-track tape piece of music on slaughtering, awarded with a promotion prize of the City of Vienna in 1993 (“Förderungspreis der Stadt Wien für Komposition”). A few years later, this slaughterhouse was closed making this soundscape composition an ‘archaeological’ sound portrait of the St. Marx ‘Schlachthof’. A comparable issue arose with her composition ‘Wien West Bahnhof’ (1997), based on recordings made in the Vienna West train station. The rebuilding of that station in 2011 adds a historical perspective to this composition as well.

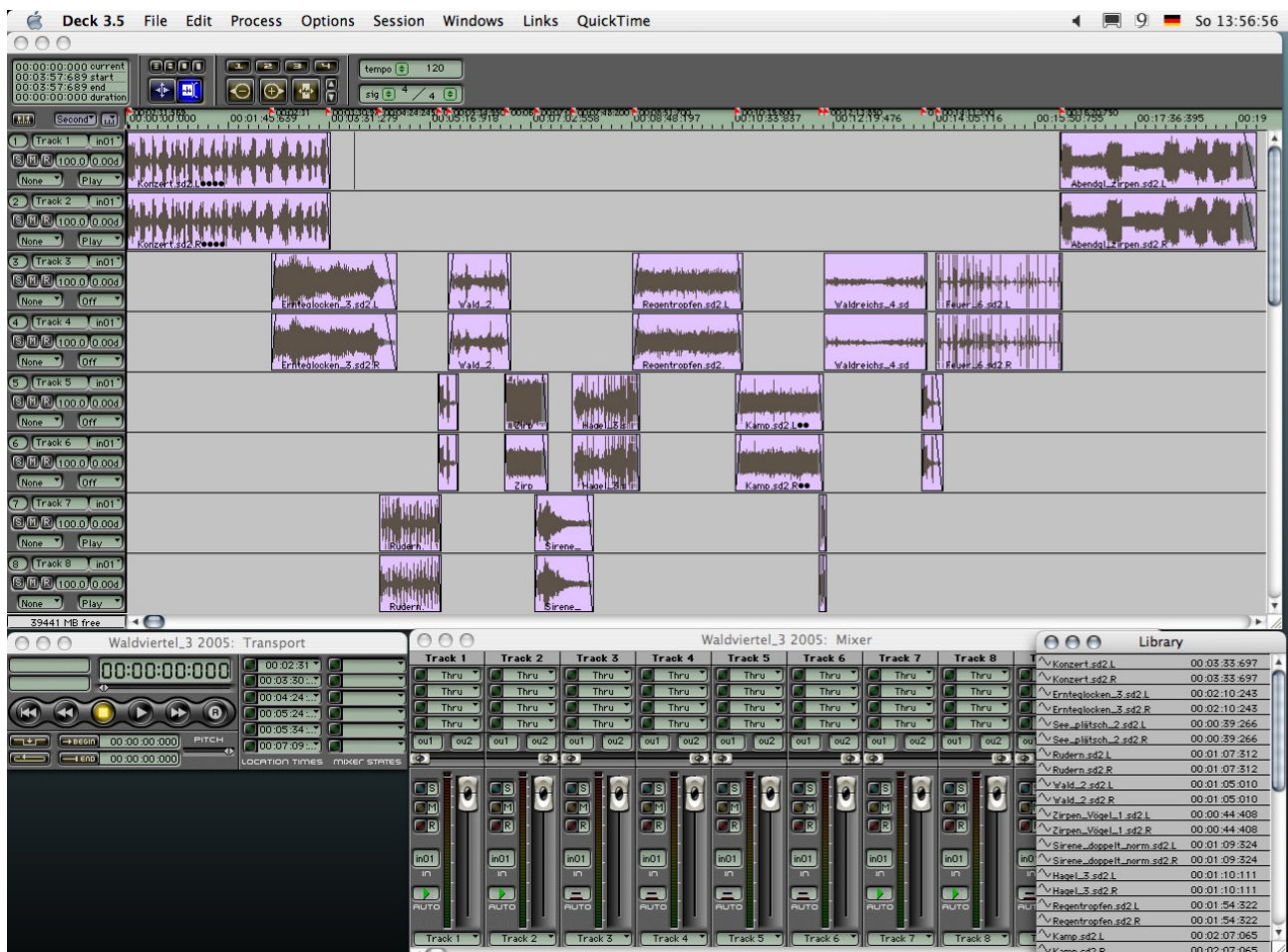
Another soundscape composition by Gabriele Proy, ‘Waldviertel’ (2005), uses sounds of all seasons from the acoustic environment of the Austrian region of the Waldviertel: an early morning spring concert of birds singing in the woods near the small village of Friedersbach takes us into the midst of the Waldviertel’s natural environment. Slow and rhythmical rowing at lake Ottenstein renders sonic atmospheres of a summery day enriched by the chirping of crickets. The typical Saturday test run of sirens at noon and the sounding of church bells speak of tradition and everyday life in the small village, just as the cheery sounds of fire in the grate remind us of long cold winter evenings. During her field work over a whole year in the rural region of the Waldviertel she was especially interested in the different atmosphere of places and times evoked by sounds. Hence she had made sketches of sonic atmospheres and vibrations, distinguishing places of calmness and liveliness, noting dynamic variation and fluctuation, taking time to listen to continuous and repetitive sounds, and finally trying to transfer the mood of these sonic moments into the composition. Besides durations and the rhythmical repetition of sounds, emphasis is put on the complexity of sound colours. Again, the emotions and moods of the chosen places are essentialised through their various sonic characters.

She writes: “Indeed my soundscape composition ‘Waldviertel’ should not be mixed up with field recordings. My composition is an artwork and not scientific sound research. Yet part of the soundscape is absent in my composition, for I presented neither the sounds of farming nor any human voices. Aside from the church bells and the fire siren I focused entirely on the sounds of nature, because I wanted to compose a soundscape that touched my inner idea of the region Waldviertel. My composition is a poetic transformation of the region and not a scientific document.”

Gabriele Proy's Soundscape Compositions:

Kimochi (2009), Waldviertel (2005), Miracle, (2004), Habana (2002/2003), Lagom (1999), Klingende Werkstatt (1998), Wien West Bahnhof (1997), Großstadtschungel (1995), Schlachthof (1993). See also <http://www.gabrieleproy.at/> for more information on her work.





Screenshot of the Master Mix of the Soundscape Composition “Waldviertel” by G. Proy

## Summary

From the variety of projects and activities, undertaken both with or without the Phonogrammarchiv of the Austrian Academy of Sciences, it becomes clear how diverse soundscape work in Austria has been to date and still is. Public institutions (the Phonogrammarchiv itself, with committed individuals like S. Exner and D. Schüller, and public radio “Ö1”), publicly sponsored activities (Linz 09, Jazzatelier Ulrichsberg), individual researchers (A. Jilka, W. Tilgner), electronic composers (G. Proy, W. Däfeldecker) as well as specialists of a certain area (O. Mallat, W. Hensellek, K. Essl) all made their contribution from their individual approach. However, there have always been structures promoting such work, from the early post war days of the “Tonjäger-Vereinigung” to the “Forum Klanglandschaft” that, interestingly, had nothing to do with each other although the decline of the former and the rise of the latter both occurred during the 1990s. Apparently, soundscape work, using the term in the broadest possible sense, had to be re-invented by a new generation from its own approaches, while also several such approaches move in parallel.

It is interesting that the major institutions that have already worked with soundscapes such as Ö1 (part of ORF), the Phonogrammarchiv (part of the Austrian Academy of Sciences), and the Institut für Musiksoziologie (part of the Universität für Musik und darstellende Kunst) all had their own approaches in individual projects, none of them having worked continuously in the field of environmental sound.

While the individuals' work described above has been related to one or more of the institutions listed over time, the individuals themselves appear to be more consistent and more continuous in their work with soundscapes than the institutions. Perhaps this is because continuous investment

into soundscape research appears unjustifiable for publicly financed institutions, whereas on a project level, individual artists or researchers have less trouble to secure funding for project related works.

The dominating concepts for the soundscape projects in Austria were:

- documentation of everyday sounds (perhaps in connection with film production: Mallat, or anthropologically motivated, Schüller in the Phonogrammarchiv)
- documentation of sounds about to vanish (Schüller, Hensellek, also Phonogrammarchiv)
- nature recordings, with a strong bias of bird enthusiasts and biologists (e.g. Fontana, Jilka, Tilgner), and
- more recently, soundscape recording as a resource material for electronic composition (Proy, Ablinger, Dafeldecker, Essl, and others)

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