

Words in Space

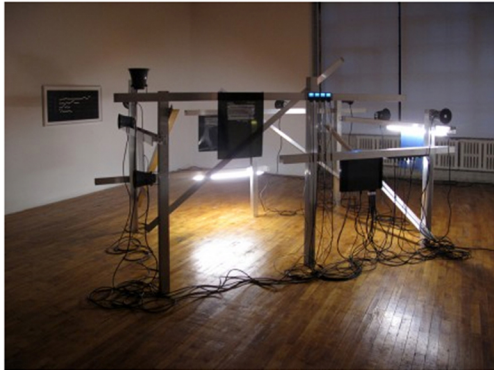
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TOP TAGS	Architecture 12	Exhibitions 19	Multimodal Scholarship 12	Talks 13			
	Archives 16	Libraries 32	Publications 18	Teaching 56			
	Conference + Lecture Recap 12	Materiality 19	Sound 15	All Tags 104			

Finally, **David Schafer's "Four Letters to Mahler"** at Studio 10 in Bushwick plays with similar concepts — specifically the materiality of language, and the intellectual and physical representation of identity — in different modalities, particularly *sound*. Taking as his inspiration a series of letters Arnold Schoenberg wrote to Gustav Mahler in 1909 and 1910, Schafer constructed an aluminum sculpture that serves as both a physical and conceptual framework for that correspondence. Affixed to the struts are four of Schoenberg's letters, rendered in negative on transparent film, illuminated from behind by two fluorescent lights. Here, language in its visual incarnation is transparent; it's **Beatrice Ward's "Crystal Goblet"**: the type that renders itself invisible so we can see *through* it in order to access its semantic content.



Via Studio 10.



Illuminated manuscripts? David kindly sent me some nighttime shots.

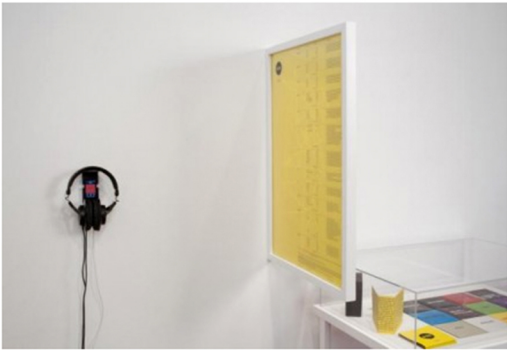


Also attached to the sculpture are four ipods and eight speakers — one on each side of the four text panels, but positioned such that they face in various directions — featuring directed readings of the four letters in English with a German accent. According to the press release:

Each iPod is dedicated to one letter that is repeated with twelve variations. The tracks are processed with electronic treatments involving degrees of delay and distortion that interrogate the language to its collapse.

Given Schoenberg's renown for atonal and 12-tone composition, we might expect that sonifications of his correspondence wouldn't be "easy listening." In contrast to the transparency of the text panels, these audio recordings accentuate the "constructedness," the "composed-ness," of language. Listening thus requires a sophisticated **"audile technique,"** as Jonathan Sterne might say. And the positioning of the speakers at unpredictable intervals and heights around the structure requires that we improvise a choreography as we move around the sculpture, attempting to piece together these auditory fragments into some sort of semantic (or melodic... or rhythmic?) whole.

If such a holistic composition — if sense-making — is even possible. The aluminum sculpture is really what braces everything together; it's what reminds us of the existence of an infrastructure that ties the transparent text panels to the deconstructed audio tracks. This aluminum frame is **Saussure's *langue***, the underlying system of language that allows for variations in its individual utterances — and modalities.



DSENOISE

Similarly, Schafer's companion piece, **DSENOISE**, is a boxed set including 12 CDs — each month Schafer released a recording of his own electronic noise performances — a poster, an insert, and a sticker in a hand-assembled box. As he explains, the project is a "conceptual document that contextualizes this sound work in multiple forms including mp3, vinyl, cd, cassette, and live performances." Again, we're working with language — mark-making, sound-making — representation, and identity in their myriad modalities. This is a refrain we've heard echoed throughout much of this work. It just so happens to be a note I can't *help* but hear in pretty much everything I encounter.