

## **Seize the Minute**

Annika Haas, May 2019

*Minute/Year* is a work by the artist duo Kovács/O'Doherty, which has been occurring daily, for one minute each day, since the beginning of 2016. The title gives the two core units of time that are central to the work. Since it began, the sound happening in a particular space each day has been recorded for one minute with two microphones, while simultaneously playing back the recorded sound of the previous day with two speakers. Every day, this procedure has been repeated, and then archived in the form of sound files, with an accompanying visualisation in the form of spectrogram images. These are made available each day through several online platforms, in different formats — video, image, audio, weekly podcast. And then, each year, the work alters location. Currently, it is installed in the performance art space grüntaler9 in Wedding, Berlin. It runs each day at 20:19 — the time of the minute following the year.

### **Archiving the Specificity of the Everyday**

What sounds like a challenge of performative endurance of repeating a daily routine is carried out with the help of computers. The steps that create and archive each day's minute are automated, and the artists (together with their technical collaborator, Kris Slyka) act as facilitators of its daily process. They fix bugs, maintain equipment, and find locations for the work to 'live' each year. If anything, the contribution of the artists to the existence of their piece is to care for its 'home' and maintain its infrastructure. Their interest is in the traces that result from this repeated indexing and layering of acoustic spaces over time. (This interest extends to assembling derived works from the archived records — among them screen-printed spectrogram images, videos, and an artist book documenting the first year of the work.)

Despite the annual change of location, to speak of different 'versions' of *Minute/Year* would be misleading. The daily repetition is inherent to the continuous and durational nature of the work. This is best illustrated by the fact that the recording from the last day of each year is played back into the new space on the first day of the following one. So the sounds of the New Year's Eve party that were happening at the end of 2017 were played into the new space with which 2018 began, as the first recording of the new year began on the first day of January.

*Minute/Year* allows a remembering of the previous day, while at the same time it spurs thoughts of the following one: what will happen in this space tomorrow, at the exact same time, when today's recording will be played back to it? This particular minute of the day can suddenly become an important moment for those who experience it in the space. Every day anew this minute holds the potential to record the most eventful — or the least interesting — archive of a particular day. Over the course of the year it becomes one of 365 snippets logging the specificity of the everyday.

### **Acoustic Reenactments**

This mode of acoustic logging of a space is also a musical one — or rather one at the point of overlap of sound and resonance, with a clear antecedent in Alvin Lucier's renowned composition *I am Sitting in a Room* (1969). *Minute/Year* similarly relies on a simultaneity between the playback of a recording and the production of a new one, and this process creates acoustic resonance and feedback. This makes the clarity of the recorded acoustic events and their semantic meaning or source of origin slowly vanish over time, with every new recording that they become part of. This effect of acoustic resonance is crucial for that transformation — the recordings are not layered, but rather undergo a potentially infinite process of spiraling and folding in on each other.

For example, a ping-pong ball that is thrown on the tiled floor today will be played back to the space tomorrow, and the day after that. An acoustic reenactment. Audibly, it will bounce back across the floor. The repetition of the bouncing balls will be registered as an acoustic event within the soundscape by the microphones throughout following days, the same but different, slowly fading. As such, it will be audible to those whose presence will coincide with the event, and the sounds that they might make, intentional or unintentional, inside or nearby to the space of grüntaler9: more ping-pong balls, conversations, animals, cars, birdsong, pedestrians. The ball will re-emerge into the space for several days in an ever-alternating way, until it is superseded by new sounds, new resonances. As time passes, it will sound less and less like a ping pong ball. Its resonant contact with the floor will intertwine with the acoustic events of the recorded minutes on

the following days. From day to day, those sounds will slowly become more persistent in relation to the sound of a plastic ball skittering on the floor. The recording of its recording of its recording will recede and become imperceptible.

This process of fading that occurs with the acoustic trace of any one single event is also visible in the spectrogram images that result from each day's recording: loud sounds are identifiable as clear peaks that then slowly melt down over the course of the following few days as their volume diminishes. Nonetheless, listening to the recordings makes it perceivable how sounds from past minutes become sucked in by the acoustics of the space when played back into it. The clarity of their first appearance is warped, and they become more and more alien in relation to their initial discernible appearance as ping pong balls, cymbal crashes, clapping hands, or voices talking, to name just a few. Finally, the skin of these amoebic resonances dissolves, and they disappear, as the daily routine of *Minute/Year* goes on.

### **Social Space from an Acoustic Perspective**

*Minute/Year* unfolds not just over time, but also in space. Listening to minutes that have occurred so far in 2019 makes one aware of how the work's current home, grüntaler9, is a hybrid space, on the threshold of the public sphere. Generally, galleries and other spaces presenting art have limited opening hours, and they exist in a context of social and cultural codes that permit them to be more inviting to some people than to others. But grüntaler9 is a space for projects and artistic experiments (indeed, the space explicitly labels itself as *not* a gallery), with huge front windows that make its interior visible to passers-by. And listening to the recordings from this space provides a perspective on where the 'space' extends to: the sounds include the main room of grüntaler9, but also the footpath outside and the road beyond. In most of the recordings, it is possible to distinguish whether an event occurred in the room or in the nearby public space beyond. This consideration of social space is a recurring theme in the work. Since 2016, it has been gradually moving into more public spheres with every turn of the year. It began in a private apartment (the home of one half of the duo) in 2016, and then in 2017, shifted to Lütticher 5, a shared living space and project space in Wedding, Berlin. In 2018, it was installed in the foyer of the Ladenkino cinema in Friedrichshain, Berlin.

### **An invitation to...**

In parallel with its annual change of place, *Minute/Year* also exists in various forms of media on the internet. The work creates a new entry to an online archive each day, meaning that these entries can be listened to and viewed at more or less any time, in any place. But it is a very different experience to be in the space, with the piece, during the time that the simultaneous playback-recording happens. It may exist in the space for a whole year, but the daily minute can feel deceptively short in person. Various studies have estimated that the average time that people spend paying attention to a given artwork is around thirty seconds, so the sixty seconds of each daily recording from *Minute/Year* does go beyond this average attentiveness. Still, it is a short time in which to make decisions: to perceive and experience the piece as a spectator and listener, to decide whether one would like to perform or contribute within it, or not.

*Minute/Year* implies an invitation to perform. To contribute in a setting facilitated by humans and iterated daily with the help of machines. It is up to every individual listener-performer who is present in the space to decide what to do during that particular moment. With grand sonic gestures, one may inscribe oneself into *Minute/Year* acoustically — which means to also leave visual marks in the corresponding spectrogram image. Or, one may remain acoustically invisible, and just listen to how the sounds of previous evenings feed back with each other and resonate in the space. The architecturally defined space of *Minute/Year* has set rules, ready to be interpreted by the audience. Beyond the spatial and temporal limits of the current minute, no such decision-making is possible.

The microphones capture the fringe of the public sphere and its ephemeral marginalia that may appear more or less eventful in retrospect and to different listeners. At the same time, the sounds of the street challenge the fixed parameters of *Minute/Year* with their own agency of the everyday, which in its complexity neither condenses nor unfolds within one minute. It is up to every single minute whether it includes the banal or the extraordinary, before it becomes sculpted by the temporal-spatial processing of *Minute/Year* creating another layer, repeating another iteration, taking today into tomorrow.