

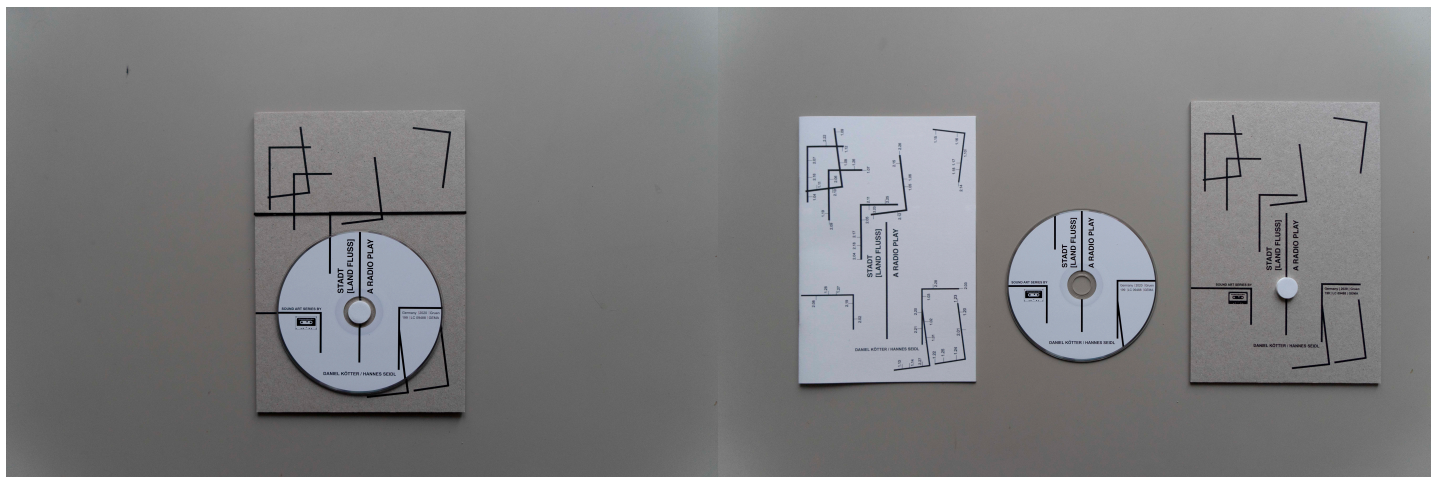
Daniel Kötter & Hannes Seidl

STADT [LAND FLUSS] : A Radio Play

Hannes Seidl interviewed by Raphaël Belfiore¹



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Raphaël Belfiore –

STADT [LAND FLUSS] is originally the title of a music theatre piece. Even if I would like this interview to be more about the radio play, I think it's relevant to talk about the music theatre (and the trilogy) from which it comes. As a listener of the CD and having only had access to video trailers², I am particularly curious about what was left out of the radio play. I also think that this will be interesting to have in mind when we will talk about the "translation" process leading to the CD. I would then suggest that we start this discussion with your general introduction to the whole project.

Hannes Seidl – So, STADT [LAND FLUSS] is the first piece in the STADT LAND FLUSS trilogy that filmmaker and music-theatre-director Daniel Kötter³ and I created together. Its premiere took place at the Sophiensaele in Berlin in 2017. It is not our first collaboration and as we usually do, we start with an extra-musical idea. So for this trilogy we decided to deal with ways of living together. Very briefly, STADT [LAND FLUSS] is about the city, LAND [STADT FLUSS], which in German means both country and countryside, and the latter FLUSS [STADT LAND] deals with living in isolation.

These matters then have in each piece an impact on the treatment of the music theatre space: in STADT [LAND FLUSS], many different parallel processes with different temporalities take place simultaneously in a space whose configuration changes over time. In LAND [STADT FLUSS], the audience sits for five hours on a real meadow installed in the theatre space and in the case of FLUSS [STADT LAND], the members of the public sit alone on chairs, equipped with virtual reality glasses.

To speak more precisely about STADT [LAND FLUSS], I can start by talking about the principle with which its sonic component is organised. The whole theatre space is wired. Every member of the audience is equipped with special headphones designed by sound artist Christina Kubisch⁴, that allow them to hear the sound that goes through these wires via electromagnetic waves. All that the public hears in the piece can be accessed exclusively through these devices. The audio broadcasted in the cables is not the same everywhere and the proximity of the listener to them has a direct influence on the amplitude of the signal heard. The sonic result then depends on the position and movements of each individual.

What one hears consists of live music played by three musicians placed in the hall, different types of field recordings and interviews. It is not however an installation: the piece has a clear beginning and end and the sonic events are synchronised thanks to a score.

As for the scenic aspect, you have to imagine that the room looks like a building still under construction. At the beginning of the piece, the audience moves through a kind of labyrinth of grey plaster plates and cables. As the work progresses, the walls of the structure are dismantled by three performers (other than the musicians) who place the plasterboards on the floor. From an opaque labyrinth-like situation, the space becomes progressively transparent and resembles a concert, the piles of plates becoming benches on which to sit.

In addition, 60 smartphones are attached to the structure and present a film shot in the district of Hafencity⁵ in Hamburg. The film shows the Hafencity project in its early days. The area looked like a wasteland with containers and was home to a refugee camp, whose lifespan was conditioned by the possibility of a more lucrative use of the space.

The film documents a kind of neighbourhood party with food and music that Daniel and I organised, to which we invited all the inhabitants of the camp, people familiar with the area, as well as the owners of the future houses that were to be built there. The idea was to bring together these different people for one evening. In the film, we see guests hanging out together, playing music, football, etc...

The film is recorded with seven smartphones arranged in order to film a 360° panorama. The sixty smartphones in the performance space present each a slightly different framing of the panoramic shot.

Finally, after the music theatre was presented, we realized that this was the one in the trilogy that seemed to have the potential to become an auditory experience only. The superposition of disparate elements, fading in and out in the headphones, made us want to compose our own version of the piece, one of all the combinations offered to the audience during the performance. The idea was then to create a radio play, which was subsequently commissioned by Deutschland Radio. The play had been broadcast only once at 11pm and we thought it would be a pity if the story ended there. We then decided to make a CD with it. So we asked Gruenrekorder⁶ if they were interested, which they were. And here we are...

RB — I briefly researched the title of the trilogy, it seems to be a german phrase that pre-existed your work. What is it about ?

HS — The title comes from a well-known game (simply called *Categories*⁷ in English) in which a number of categories are decided in advance such as a city, a country and a river as well as any other thing. A letter of the alphabet is then chosen and the players' goal is to name a member of each category that begins with the same letter. Although the choice of categories is free, the game is called Stadt Land Fluss in German.

It started as a joke. But more and more, it seemed that far from being three words arbitrarily placed next to each other, there was something about them that interested us. Each of these words seems to imply a different way of living and that's where the idea for the whole trilogy started.

RB — You said earlier that it is, among the three works of the trilogy, the one that had the potential to become an auditory experience only. Could you detail what happens in terms of sounds in the headphones?

HS — The first sonic layer of the piece, which I have already mentioned, is the live music played by three musicians. Sebastian Berweck⁸ uses a modular synthesiser and analog tapes, Martin Lorenz⁹ vinyl records specially pressed for the occasion and Andrea Neumann¹⁰ her characteristic "inside piano".

The three musicians do not hear each other at the beginning of the piece, and their audio is clearly spatially separated. However, at a certain point in the performance, the audience's position no longer matters and one can hear all three musicians at the same time. From three separate soloists, they then become a trio. At the end, the sound becomes generalised in the space which itself is more and more unified thanks to the action of the performers who manipulate the plasterboards.

A second sonic aspect of both the music theatre piece (and the resulting radio play) is the series of interviews. We met people who were theoretically involved in various issues concerning the city, its environmental impact, its future or the role of its inhabitants. We also talked to people living in autonomous communities and we even asked an actor to pretended being a potential buyer of a luxurious apartment in Hafencity to collect an interview with a promoter praising the neighbourhood...

Moreover, we can hear the field recording of the party documented in the video, usually when close to the smartphones but not necessarily.

There is finally a fourth layer, present only during the first half of the piece. It consists of electromagnetic waves transformed into sounds that we can pick up thanks to the special headphones of Christina Kubisch when we walk in a city, like those of the train or the automatic distributors.

RB — The musical personalities interpreting the work and the material used seem quite specific. This reminds me of another project of yours, Salim's Salon¹¹, in which you also worked with musicians with very personal setups. If I remember correctly, they improvised and the performance was framed by a recording of texts recited by the performers themselves. Because of the specificity of each musician, I imagined (apparently mistakenly) that STADT [LAND FLUSS] used the same principle. How did you go about the score in such a case?

HS — One really good thing about creating a music theatre is that we spend a lot of time together working with the musicians. The orality in the guidelines is therefore an option for composing, not like a classical concert piece where the rehearsal phase normally already requires a finished score. As I said before, I composed a structure between solos and trios. It contains a very precise rhythmic structure, but the sounds are indeterminate and left open to be determined during rehearsals. The score fits on seven pages. It has maybe something like 50 bars, but there are indications as to how many times the bars have to be repeated. For example, at the beginning of the piece a 4" to 10" long bar contains two sounds. In the next one, another sound is added, and further on, the first of the three must disappear and another one is introduced, etc...

It was during the rehearsals that we decided together which sounds to use at which point in the piece. In the end, the musicians developed their own personal score, of which I myself do not even have a copy.

There is, however, a moment of about 10 minutes in the piece that is left completely free to the musicians. This is the moment when the musicians, after having played alone through their headphones, hear each other as a trio. It is very different every time. This completely improvised part ends with a specific drone that signals the end of the section. The rest is also composed, even more precisely, because I sometimes ask for particular sound characteristics or pitches, without assigning them to a specific musician or instrument. One can say that this piece requires musicians who know how to improvise since they have to make a lot of decisions, but the result still ends up being quite precise.

RB — I don't know if this way of working was chosen independently of the "theme" of the work, but in a way this approach to creating the score could be related somehow to the work of the urban planner, who only gives the structure in which the citizens act more or less freely within a given framework. I also think of a phrase in the booklet with the CD: *"planning the unplanned"* that could apply to this method. Were these considerations taken into account from the start in the elaboration of the work?

HS — My approach to the score depends greatly on who I work with. In our collaborations with Daniel, we establish a basic concept of music theatre in relation to the chosen theme from which we will work. By this I mean that we make decisions about the configuration of sonic, spatial and visual aspects in the music theatre.

In the case of STADT [LAND FLUSS], we wanted something quite heterophonic, involving somehow isolation while allowing connections and density in analogy to the city, in which people's private trajectories are articulated by the public space, whereby those paths can also intersect.

We then had this idea of using the special headphones by Christina Kubisch for this purpose and this involved the use of electronic instruments. But, as the musicians were not necessarily

able to hear each other, we had to find a way to synchronise them. The idea of a certain form of score was then adopted. But, as we had already worked with Andrea and Sebastian in 2013 in our music theatre KREDIT¹² (and I had been working with Sebastian as a pianist before as well), we knew that it was possible with them to really build the piece during the rehearsals and therefore not to specify the musical material too much in advance.

Also, even when I work with very precisely written scores, I try to leave room for adaptation until the end so that the final music fits the player perfectly. This requires naturally different techniques depending on whether one is working with an ensemble or a soloist.

There is something else that can be said about the connection between the city and sound in STADT [LAND FLUSS]. Another aspect of the city that was important to us to integrate into the work was the automation that it implies, as in the case of traffic lights and street lamps as well as laws for night's rest or other time structuring elements. The city is in a certain way an attempt to make ourselves autonomous from natural rhythms such as that of the weather with covered spaces or that of daylight with urban lighting. This idea of non-natural rhythm is implemented at a certain point in the piece in the form of a very clear pulsation. This pulsation, which can be heard very faintly at first despite the fact that it applies to every sound, becomes more and more pronounced from the middle of the performance. It ends up drastically structuring all the sonic elements of the work. The sound of the musicians is amplified in a pulsating way no matter what they play, subjecting their sound to an external control.

RB — I would now like to discuss more specifically the content of the texts in STADT [LAND FLUSS]. There are several mentions of the Hamburg district of Hafencity, which is, as you said earlier, the place where the video of the music theatre was shot. Why this particular site? Actually, when I visited the web page of the district, I realized that it was where the famous Elbphilharmonie was built. So I wondered if the choice of Hafencity was in reference to the relationship between the musical institution and private interests or as a way to hint at some kind of institutional critique of the musical sector or something along those lines...

HS — It doesn't have much to do with a kind of musical critique actually. The reason we chose Hafencity was its unfinished state at the specific time of the realization of STADT [LAND FLUSS]. It was the largest construction site in Europe and therefore a perfect opportunity to observe its development and urban planning according to a capitalist logic. So there is of course a question of the use of the Elbphilharmonie as a symbol of a 'cultivated' area that is supposed to promote luxury buildings, these having been built first. However, Daniel and I work more usually in open performance spaces than in philharmonic halls. So this issue did not appear to us to be more important than others in the work.

We have produced 10 music theatres in recent years. In each of them, we tried to do something different, especially compared to opera for example. Our idea of music theatre is to create new configurations of media. We have however never started from texts. We want to base ourselves rather on the simple temporal extension of a situation. If a work is based on text, it seems clear that its understanding becomes very often of primary importance, which is not the case for music or video, which allows for more equality between media. The question for us is: how to redefine the relationship between these different media, especially audio and video which are respectively the ones we work with the most. And this question finds in each production a different answer according to the chosen theme. I would then say that our reflection on the musical field is rather at this level of the work.

Coming back to Hafencity, we were actually looking for a model location that could be found anywhere in the world. Being a documentary filmmaker, Daniel has traveled extensively in different parts of the globe and one of his interests is to know what is typical of a city under

construction now and what will be the city of the future. Hafencity is a district created from the ground up on an old harbour and a wasteland where refugees were located. It has in fact very little in common with the city of Hamburg. Moreover, there is no public space in it. The area itself is semi-privately owned. From the moment it was clear that the harbour was going to be decommissioned, the decision was made to sell it secretly to various private companies in order to build residential units. It's a bit like a gated community. Everyone can go there but the law is not quite the same. You can't beg on the streets and if you want to demonstrate or play music in the street, you have to get permission from Hafencity GmbH. Who buys the properties and at what price as well as which restaurants or clubs are located there are also subject to corporate decisions... In a way, it can't work... This is also the opinion of one of the speakers you can hear in the CD. It takes spontaneity for a community to develop. Actually, people are apparently already bored and leaving the area. It seems that managers are now trying to find the optimal level of spontaneity to tolerate in order to make the district viable...

RB — In a way it seems to me that both the word "music theatre" and "radio play" are used for lack of a better term to characterise both versions of STADT [LAND FLUSS]. As you said before, there is no storyline that would determine the course of the work but rather an extra-musical theme. So it seems that this narrative aspect is replaced by a documentary one. In this sense, the question of the relationship between text and music is posed in a different way. How do you imagine it in the work? Do you think of music as a carrier to transmit discourses?

HS — I would like to start by making a distinction. On the one hand, one can create a work mixing text and music with a very specific aesthetic goal concerning their relationship, such as the fact that the music serves the text or that it makes it explicit, illustrates it or even contradicts it. On the other hand, one can also imagine a coexistence between the two (and any other media) within a situation in which they have no specific hierarchy. This is how Daniel and I see music theatre. There is a space, and there is a specific time in which the performance takes place. Our shortest work is 50 minutes and longest piece is no more than 5 hours. It has always been our attempt to keep the timeframe short enough for the audience to grasp it in its entirety.

On the subject of documentarity, we can indeed make a few remarks about it. In the films that Daniel makes, camera as well as editing are always approached conceptually. Both for his projects and for our collaborations, he tries to make the reality of the camera palpable. In the case of STADT [LAND FLUSS]'s videos, there is no editing. However, the music theatre takes place at the exact duration (and for the first two projects even at the same starting time the film is shot). This way, the screens become a window into the street party that was being held. The fading luminosity of the video is also mirrored by the lights in the performance space. Moreover, the field recordings extracted from it, bring a more concrete impact on the situation. At the premiere, it was around the same time of year. So there was a fairly accurate equivalence between inside and outside.

There are of course also the audio documentations of the interviews I mentioned above. These were based on the same question: How do we want to live together in the city of tomorrow? In a certain sense this does have a certain documentary nature. However, all five texts are broadcasted in parallel in the cables. So you can't always hear them clearly and grasp the content of all of them in its entirety. It is in this sense that I wanted to say that text and music coexist. The listener in the hall cannot help but make associations. However, each element follows its own logic from our initial idea, without there being any goal regarding its relationship with the other elements. In a way, this is also a phenomenon that is often experienced in an urban context. For example, if I look at people crossing a street, I immediately make connections despite the fortuitous nature of the situation.

In the CD, we have kept this way of doing things. The excerpts of texts that are heard are not selected fragments put together according to the criteria of a discourse, although in the end

they may still form one. But, as in the music theatre, the five discussions follow their course in parallel and virtually, even if only one is heard at a time. The CD version is therefore a virtual version of the audience's movements in the room.

To answer your last question, I think that art opens up a space in which new experiences can emerge by means of structural relationships and concrete formal solutions. I think that when art succeeds in opening these interstices, it is actually very easy to change things that previously seemed blocked. Questions like the ones we are asking in STADT [LAND FLUSS] are about obvious states of affairs - the relationship between living and income for instance - that need to be revealed as non-necessary. In this sense, the artistic context for certain discourses seems useful to me.

However, the opening up of these spaces of reflection is as I said not only due to the discourse integrated into the work, but also structurally, for example in the relation that the different media have in the space of presentation. One could then say that there is a form of oscillation between art and the non-art that we deal with: Our attempt to see the city in a new light has structural repercussions on the music theatre, which in turn produces experiments and reflections on urbanism.

RB — Regarding the documentary question and in particular the interviews, there is something that also in my own practice is often subject to questions: Should the aim of the work be didactic or pedagogical? More generally, how to avoid giving the audience the impression that it is being fed information?

HS — What we really try to avoid is making works that present a ready-made answer to take home with you. Ideally, there are fewer questions for the viewer before the performance than after. At least, we would like the work to initiate a reflection on several levels thanks to the different media used. The video in STADT [LAND FLUSS] for example does not propose a specific argument. It just shows something that happened. The audience sees another meeting of people that echoes the one they are participating in. In fact, the piece could be better summarised as an exploration than an explanation.

In STADT [LAND FLUSS], one can certainly learn different things, whether it is about the relationship between sound and visuals or one's own behavior in such a performative environment or other people's opinions about urban life. It is not, however, with the aim of providing an unambiguous answer, nor is it with the aim of being objective. The layering of elements in STADT [LAND FLUSS] implies that the audience has a choice. They may even decide to listen only to the musicians in the room. There is no forced pedagogical perspective.

RB — Do you consider your art as political? It sometimes seems that so-called "political art" as it is sometimes practiced in the field of fine arts has a relationship on the one hand with the educational aspect we were talking about before and also a moralising side, which does not seem to me to be the case here. You seem to be opening up a space in which multiple perspectives are welcome.

HS — One could indeed call it political or perhaps critical art. I must say, however, that in FLUSS [STADT LAND] for example, the political and moral aspect is much more pronounced, in the sense that we deal directly with the migration crisis in Europe, which we describe as catastrophic, and where we criticise European countries. In the case of STADT [LAND FLUSS], the question is perhaps too complex to have a moral content. The question is not only, as I said before: how do we want to live in the city of tomorrow, but also who should decide? There are some elements of answer of course in the music theatre. For example, we

were talking before about Hafencity and the degree of spontaneity that it takes for a community to develop. In that case, we can say that it is perhaps wise not to adopt a "top-down" strategy in which only the elites decide. In general, we also emphasise the fact that we consider being together to be of primary importance, both in the theatre space and in the discourse on the city.

RB — In many of the projects I know of you, there appears to be something that goes against the traditional idea of the composer, who should be solely responsible for every decision about his work. For example, you tend not to speak for the people but rather to include them directly in the work. I already mentioned Salim's Salon, in which the musicians' own voices are replayed on stage while they perform. I'm also thinking of Good Morning Deutschland¹³, a radio program that you organized. If I understand correctly, refugees were responsible for hosting the show. Also, your collaboration with Daniel is quite extraordinary and could perhaps be the subject of a separate interview on its own. It's actually quite rare to find collaborations that work for as many projects as yours does. How do you envision collaborating with others ?

HS — When Daniel and I work together, naturally, not everything is self-evident and there are disagreements in the creative process. But instead of settling them by opting for one or the other's solution or meeting halfway, we try to find ideal situations that are consistent with our respective artistic visions. This naturally requires trust in the other person's ideas and, above all, the belief that their wholehearted involvement will benefit the project. It is ultimately very fruitful artistically. Also, in STADT [LAND FLUSS] for example, the musicians we work with are not considered as servants of an artist's idea. They always have a role and a voice of their own. In this work in particular, it seemed important to us to keep an analogy between the discourse and the ideas we presented and the coexisting musical aspect.

We had a very interesting discussion about the position of the composer during the Darmstadt Summer Course this year. It is true that the idea of a composer whose score must be served by performers is still very much present. But this has begun to change in recent years. In the case of music theatre, it is almost impossible to do everything by yourself, although some people try... Besides, there is always a team behind it anyway. It is therefore more a question of taking into account the views of the various parties involved. What also changes is the fact that it's one or more people who get credit at the end.

For this kind of work, of course, you have to find the right people. But a certain mindset is also necessary. Even when I'm not working with Daniel, I try to keep the collaborative aspect. You mentioned earlier Good Morning Deutschland which involved a lot of people. You had to trust them to continue broadcasting. I didn't want to be the composer in this project but a listener, and as such I was giving feedback. I really wanted to know what music they wanted to hear.

In the new music world, people want to have their name written down somewhere, that's fine, but I'm not sure that it always represents the real structure of the creation.

RB — By the way, I find it interesting that you also credited in the CD the people who didn't participate, like for example the person in charge of the scenography. This seems to reveal the somewhat special status of this release, between autonomous work and documentation or at least "derivative work". What questions arose and what decisions were made when "translating" the music theatre?

HS — First of all, if we really wanted to document the piece, we would have made a film about it to make it clear what was happening on stage. Instead, we chose to make a standalone work. Another thing that seemed pretty clear to us was the fact that it would be a binaural piece for headphones since that was a component already present in the music theatre. In the performance, we decided that the sentences of the interviews would be repeated in order to reduce what the listeners missed by moving to another place and then coming back. The 40-minute interviews were thus extended to an hour and a half. This did not make sense for the radio work.

Other decisions were made when we started working with the material we had collected. We had not only the recordings of the performance, but also those of the rehearsals. So we had a lot of possibilities. It was really beautiful work. We didn't actually have to add layers on top of each other, but rather remove layers and manage their coexistence. Daniel took the vocal tracks first and I took the musician tracks and we started to create transitions between them. It still took over four weeks to edit, although after a while this process came into a very clear focus.

In the music theatre, the sound result was less refined. In general, two layers were heard, the others being emitted at points too far away to be picked up. Also, the volume of the layers changed uniformly because each movement involved a reorganisation of the relationships between each element. In the radio piece, we took the liberty to work more finely on the transitions, creating results that would not have happened during the performance. We felt this was justified since the listening situation was completely different. We also added some sounds like those of airplanes, maybe to compensate for the absence of the visual. Having worked for a year and a half on this project, I could talk about a lot of decisions involving details that maybe nobody noticed... In fact, you could say that we have created a world with STADT [LAND FLUSS] that can be manifested as a music theatre, a film, a CD or other things. However, the medium of each of these manifestations is ruled by other principles. So we had to firstly understand them and then implement them in a satisfactory way.

RB — I must say that if it is not fundamentally a documentary of the piece, I find it a good example of a documentation that could be called "non-objective" in the sense that it makes manifest the subjectivity of its making. The way in which concerts are usually documented tends to place the point of view and of listening - often separated - in specific places that do not correspond to those of any spectator (for example microphones very close to the instruments and elevated cameras). In this sense, one could perhaps say that this non-subjectivity gives it a form of objectivity. In the case of STADT, however, it seems that such an approach would have been both misguided and impossible to achieve. A neutral point of view in this "world" as you call it does not exist. There can only be the perspective of a subject internal to the situation. Subsequently, one could have imagined a simple recording of a personally chosen itinerary thanks to binaural microphones inside the headphones for example. However, it seems to me that this trajectory would have been guided by decisions not always related to what is heard (looking at smartphones, avoiding a group of people, looking at a musician's instrument, etc...). So I find your "translation" process admirable in the sense that the fundamental "failure" of any non-subjective documentation is turned around and becomes the motive for a new work in its own right.

HS — Thanks. It is very clear that there is a reason for the creation of this radio play. One can say that it is an auditory experience based on music theatre. But it is meant to be seen as a standalone work with its own logic. We have made what you just described, namely an explicitly subjective recording of the music theatre with a camera and binaural microphones mounted on someone. We use it when we submit the project to curious programmers. It gives to potentially interested institutions a very clear idea of what the whole situation looks like and what can happen, but it's not what we wanted for the CD...

RB — I would like to talk a little about the object itself. It seems to me that graphic design is to the CD what scenography is to the music theatre, that is to say, a significant part of the artwork.

HS — Nafiseh Fathollahzadeh¹⁴, the graphic designer has not been the theater's scenographer but she attended one of the performances. As a graphic designer, her interest was to imagine an object that would go beyond the simple "sound carrier", as much in terms of the purely visual as the material. So there was a whole reflection on the aspect of the CD. Thus, the cardboard of which the packaging is composed refers to the plasterboards handled during the piece. Moreover, the plan of the music theatre's scenography is used as a cover. The lines we see there refer to the metallic structures supporting the plaster and the numbers are in fact a part of the "score" of the performers in charge of moving the plates. These lines are a kind of material extension of the elastic band linking the CD and the booklet.

One can also say that the simple presence of the CD is constitutive of the work. Having an object in the hands changes, in my opinion, completely the listening experiencing of the piece. That's why it's not an audio file simply posted on the internet. Also, having a booklet in hand, that you can flip through or read also offline or without listening is different from having a text on a screen.

We had also thought of different things, such as a QR code instead of the CD. But somehow it seems here that the computer, or more precisely the screen and the interactivity and dispersion it implies, would also have changed the listening situation to the disadvantage of the audio.

However, it is still possible to listen to the piece in streaming, even if nobody does it. We actually sold more CDs than we had plays... This maybe proves what I was saying earlier about the physical medium.

RB — Did you have a clear vision of the listening conditions you wanted for the work? I did some experiments myself just before this interview. On one hand, I listened to it without the text at home in a fairly casual way, sometimes doing other things. On the other hand, I sat outside and listened to it while browsing through the booklet but not following the text word for word. It was quite interesting. I had a panoramic view of Zürich and I couldn't always distinguish which sounds were really coming from the city or from the recording. Then again inside, this time following closely the "booklet".

HS — I think that the least relevant way to listen to the CD is probably to put it on speakers while doing something else or chatting with people. It seems to me that under these circumstances the piece would even have a rather annoying effect... As for the other ways of listening, I don't have a precise vision. The CD as an object allows repeated listenings. There is not the same risk to "miss" something as in a performance. For me, the CDs that I find most interesting are

the ones that change with each listening and where you always find something new after 5 years or more.

However, I have a preference for listening to STADT [LAND FLUSS] with headphones and not loudspeakers, as the piece contains a lot of work on the panning. This stands out better that way. I guess it could also be interesting to listen to the piece while riding a bike for example, assuming that the piece, with all the different sounds in it, does not make the ride more dangerous...

RB — Listening is sometimes defined as an oscillation between attention and reflection rather than a continuous intense focus on the finer details of sound. I find that this definition somehow fits the experience that STADT [LAND FLUSS]'s form implies. The textual parts somehow emphasise the moments when the music is alone. It is actually quite balanced and there is no real "semantic saturation", where the listening would be directed more to the concrete characteristics of the vocal sound rather than to the reference of the words.

HS — Form is naturally a crucial aspect of the piece. It seems to indeed enable this oscillation between a very active listening based on the understanding of the text and something more contemplative. The listener is however guided through these states and can come back from his "immersed" listening when a new speech or particular musical element comes up, like for example the pulsation or the drone at the end of the free part. The form then effectively does something to the listener.

RB — When you were talking about the performance earlier, you said that the unusual situation of the music theatre was gradually transformed, thanks to the dismantling of the plaster plates, their use as benches and the fading light, into a kind of concert. I then automatically make the connection with the last 20 minutes of the radio play in which there is only music left. Is this explicitly an analogy to the "stage" performance?

HS — This is an interesting question. On the one hand, the material has not been reorganised between the performance and the radio play. There is actually a kind of intensification of the music in the music theatre as well, especially after the drone that signals the end of the freely improvised part. When listening to this part, we felt it was difficult to return afterwards to the texts. The music is so unidirectional at this point that it would have seemed to really accompany the discourse. The idea of coexistence inherited from music theatre would therefore have become less clear. Also, Daniel and I just felt that after the middle, it was a good time to propose a different, less discursive type of aural experience. So there is indeed a kind of analogy between the two STADT [LAND FLUSS] events, but not especially in relation to the moving of the plasterboards.

RB — Reaching almost the end of this discussion, I still want to talk about Gruenrekorder the label on which the CD was released. I haven't examined their entire catalog but it seems to me that this release is not typical of them. In fact, when I ordered your CD, I was expecting something more explicitly related to acoustic ecology and that would have been "against", or at least critical of the city in general.

HS — This label is indeed specialised in field recordings and more particularly in those in which special techniques of audio capture are used. Lasse-Marc Riek¹⁵, one of the two founders of the label is a sound artist focusing on sound art and environmental music. They are however open to other things. There is for example, a CD¹⁶ by Mark Lorenz Kysela in which he plays pieces for saxophone, which is also very special in this context. It seems to me that there is the idea of proposing something that moves away from standard contemporary music and that somehow has a more experimental approach. For our part, we approached the label thinking that our piece could interest them despite the differences with many releases on their catalog. Which was the case.

Regarding the question of being "for" or "against" the city, I would say that the question itself is a bit absurd... Cities are here anyway, whether we like it or not, and half of the world's population lives in them. Instead of refusing or ignoring the city, we should listen to it and use our experiences to shape it.

RB — To finish on something more concrete, I would be curious to know what you are working on at the moment. This interview is going to be published quite soon, so I guess it could be of interest to some readers...

HS — I am currently working on a very reduced music theatre consisting of two long solos for which I have collaborated with the author Anselm Neft¹⁷. The piece revolves around the question of patriarchy and what it does to women, men and also children. The first part is performed by Diamanda La Berge Dramm¹⁸ who will sing, play the violin and the bass drum. The second part will be performed by one of the three musicians in STADT [LAND FLUSS], Sebastian Berweck on voice and piano. The two parts together will be presented at the Mousonturm in Frankfurt at the end of January 2022.

I have also started writing music for ensembles again. But also, the next two years will be busy with a project about underground shopping spaces in subway stops. This will take place in several places and with different musicians. I think these places have a great potential for music theatre. There are all kinds of things, citizens passing by each other, sometimes meeting, places to drink, eat or shop, street musicians, homeless people, etc...

¹ The following text has been written after an online video call with Hannes Seidl on the 07.10.2021. The text presented here does not correspond verbatim to the discussion between both parties. It was formalised subsequently to an informal conversation. The resulting text has been reviewed by Hannes Seidl. Daniel Kötter was also invited but could unfortunately not join.

² <https://vimeo.com/249777415>

³ <http://www.danielkoetter.de/>

⁴ http://www.christinakubisch.de/en/works/electrical_walks

⁵ <https://www.hafencity.com/>

⁶ <https://www.gruenrekorder.de/>

⁷ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Categories_\(word_game\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Categories_(word_game))

⁸ <http://www.sebastianberweck.de/pages/de/home.php>

⁹ <http://www.martinlorenz.ch/>

¹⁰ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andrea_Neumann_\(musician\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andrea_Neumann_(musician))

¹¹ <http://www.hannesseidl.de/pieces/salon/>

¹² <http://www.hannesseidl.de/pieces/kredit/>

¹³ <http://www.hannesseidl.de/pieces/gmd/>

¹⁴ <http://www.nafisehfath.com/>

¹⁵ https://www.gruenrekorder.de/?page_id=21

¹⁶ https://www.gruenrekorder.de/?page_id=9585

¹⁷ <https://www.anselmneft.de/>

¹⁸ <https://diamandadramm.com/>