

Listening to the Architecture, Kiasma, Helsinki February 2001

Installation Notebook

1Feb01

From what I've heard so far the space has a tendency to reduce differentiation between the different artists' pieces because of the predominant resonances.

Major problems. Steen and Michael are debugging and defragmenting the hard disc on the ProTools system and trying to set up a master playback program for all installations in a rotating sequence. Glitches appeared this morning in audio playbacks - my sequence is fine because no recorded audio is involved.

By the time of the opening at 18.00 everything works.

31Jan01

The same version of the ProTools programme is running as yesterday. It is very quiet in the Museum and the system is very quiet. Ambient noise increases slightly about 14.00 but the feedback becomes disproportionately loud with the gate cutting in once a minute or so.

At a seminar today only 2 students turned up. Organisation is loose and mostly hit and miss. Key people are very tired and overworked.

I initiated a difference of opinion within the seminar in my questioning of the use of gallery spaces for playback of recorded sound (something that in my opinion is well catered for elsewhere). I tried to cover myself by stating that this is a personal use of structure and I'm not being judgmental about others.

The others, notably Jem, offered an simple response. All the work has been made specifically for the space. Jem, in particular, researched the space very thoroughly. The work, it seems, also offers an intelligent response but I've only heard Patrick Kosk's playback on Monday.

My piece may be picking up low frequency vibration from the café or air conditioning. It is pushing out a lot of something inaudible between 40-80Hz.

Minus 12° outside.

30Jan01

A basic installation up is and running.

I have to make a final decision about mic placement - the system controls feedback in an interesting way but very quiet compared to the likely sound level in the space

when the gallery is open to the public.

Moving the microphone involves awkward negotiations with technicians. Concealing the cable is both a priority and a major design challenge for them. Finnish aesthetics - not mine, I prefer to expose as much of the technology as is possible.

The principle here is to expose and demystify. The argument against this might be the obvious reaction of some visitors who tend to shout into an obviously placed open microphone.

Current solution, move the microphone about 3/4 metres up to the 'reading area'. This also minimises the pickup from the entrance area where the main doors are the dominant noise.

The feedback volume gradually increases after 17.00 when the museum closes - reduced ambient noise and temperature (humidity?).

Later a drink with Jem Finer discussing the relationship of our work to the public and comparing it to our very different performance histories within the music industry. Our strategies have a relevance to my current reading - Stephen Pinker's 'Words and Rules', specifically what Pinker calls 'contingencies of reinforcement'.

29Jan01

I have written a ProTools mixer page for the central control system to function as an automated mixer to route a microphone signal to the speaker system in a gradual build, a moving sustain (which modulates the sound) and decay of feedback along the wall.

The idea is that the feedback sustains and 'moves' through the space, remodulating and shifting as the sets of speakers are activated and deactivated along the concourse. A noise gate is set across the system as a safety measure in case something causes the system to go into full blown feedback.

The space is huge, 4 floors high and the wall on which the speaker system is mounted is around 40 metres long. Opposite this wall are stairs and walkways to the galleries. Plenty of reverberation, a shifting pattern as one walks around the concourse which is irregular and curved. My task is simply to foreground this.

Helsinki is very dark, for some reason all lightbulbs are 40 watts or less.

28Jan01

Arrival Helsinki. There are 7 artists in the exhibition, all the others are already here: Joe Banks (Disinformation) (UK), Jem Finer (UK) Patrick Kosk (FI), Mikko Maasalo (FI), Oivind Weingaarde (N) and John Wynne (UK).