

Sonotop Ireland 2005/2006

Installation "Sonotop" and live performance in the "Magdalena Laundry", St. Fin Barre's Hospital in Cork, Ireland 05

1. Searching for place and historical background to the "Magdalena Laundry"

The large, light-flooded main room, the dark over-heated room next to it and the bed storeroom immediately fascinates me. A very special place was shown to me here...If an unmarried woman in Southern Ireland became pregnant she had to give up her child to the local authorities "for adoption and protection" and soon afterward the child would be adopted. Her personal destiny was preordained- a lifetime working in the laundry. These ghetto-ised areas which exist throughout the convent, hospital and laundry can now be found some distance outside the town. In 1986 there was a change in the law in and the "Magdalena Laundry" also had to close its doors for good. The washer women detained there received a pension and were granted their freedom.

2. Seismograph as artistic basis

As an artist, I relate to this work, whose contents are an alien world from the past but to which one can be receptive at the present time, as a type of seismograph.

During a good week we are busy cleaning and tidying and come into closer contact with the history of the "Magdalena Laundry." Amidst stubborn, oily dust we find prohibition signs, reports and work manuals, but also letters, lucky mascots and encoded messages from the washer-women. The workers tell us stories. The curator Charlotte Donovan and I carefully save and take away with us everything that we find interesting.

uniforms



letters and signs



woolies only



3. The sound material: water, women's voices, machines

Each day I spend many hours in the "Magdalena Laundry" and record my voice improvisations, which represent a reaction to the space. At the same time, I let myself become involved with the partly puzzling material I find. With a space and contact microphone, as well as a hydrophone (underwater microphone) I record vocals **through the air, underwater and on the boundary between air and water**. The voice is only **distorted during the underwater recording**. The semantic orientation of the speech then becomes fluid. In this way, new musical, emotional and human references are created. I take women's voices and water back into the laundry through complex, multilayered sound.

4. Visual aspects of the installation

We have very consciously kept the floor and surface structures in the building, some "zones of dust," as they were originally, thus giving the Son-Icons additional resonance. In this way the characteristics of the space flow once again into the structuring of the sound materials.

Son-Icons & zones of dust



5 "Sonotop" a concert installation

In Rushbrooke harbour near Cork I find a place that is in some respects a counterpoint to the "Magdalena Laundry," but which also has poetic connections to it. A **key visual theme** of the installation is the quintessential washing tub that can contain up to 200 bed sheets. One of them, the historic washing tub from the laundry, a very similar vessel, I found in the harbour of Rushbrooke, overgrown by algae. At low tide it is visible and every day it is pacified once again as the tide comes in and it is flooded and apparently made to disappear.

A video loop, projected onto the wall of the laundry, shows this appearance and disappearance of the containers at low and high tide.

a half-flooded container



Sound intervention

For the installation "Sonotop" I restricted the musical material to women's voices, water, motor noise and pump noise which illustrate a reference to the past of the "Magdalena Laundry." I lost the "central sound perspective." We are in a different world. It is not a matter of linear activity or a loop in time with a beginning and an end. I compose sound modules through which random generators constantly create new combinations and the richest overlaps, as well as moments of quietness and calm.

Changeable sound spaces

In the installation I have very intentionally created virtual and changeable space structures. Consequently, it can be the case that the acoustics in one of the existing spaces temporarily clarify or are rendered.

Performance for viola & voice in the installation "Sonotop"



7. The political aspect of Sonotop

"Sonotop" attracted a lot of people to St. Fin Barre's Hospital- it touched people and politically aroused them. For those who worked in the hospital, patients and numerous visitors, the former "Magdalena Laundry" was temporarily taking on further, new associations. In the meantime, the laundry has been rebuilt as a canteen.

UA Laundry St. Fin Barre's Hospital in Cork, a composition commission from Cork European Capital of Culture 05 Premiere in the version for viola, voice & underwater sounds. Ambisonic version with video projection performed in the Musikforum für neues Musiktheater der Staatsoper Stuttgart 06

