

2009 NEW WORK

dorsey dunn



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a place in the here and now	3
<i>five atmospheres</i>	
inflection loss	6
bau	12
confessional	18
resonances	24
a sensation of movement	30
<i>scene3</i>	
three recollections	38
ecliptic	44
quarks	50

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*Memory is the greatest of artists, and effaces from  
your mind what is unnecessary.*

MAURICE BARING

*Somewhere in the bands of memory's focus lie the roots of learning, of language, of consideration and work. The collective record of the human species is filled with images of the exercise of remembering, whether through the passage of explanatory stories, the lineal descent of families, the reasons for war, or the final rites of a soul bound for death. It would not be possible to overstate memory's importance, for in a sense we are nothing more than memory, each one of us a lightly-recorded collage of personal and public memory, and the cumulative effects of that memory's forgetting. The ideas and images which exert the greatest pull within each mind are the deepest imprints of experience, and perhaps additionally a set of remembrances bequeathed to each of us before our births. Some of these motivations will evolve with time and further experience: the process of our own internal sculpture; others will remain, much as we found them in childhood, solitary beacons. With each step in time, forward or back, the expansive fractured glass takes on a new perspective, and we are able to trace differently the wandering episodic routes. These are narratives: multiple, multiplying; seeded junctures, ambiguous horizon lines, ends temporarily reached. Within the density we recognize structure and its absence; we regret perhaps a few paths missed or abandoned; we savor certain other unexpected connections. This is the recursive demonstration of ourselves, elaborated by a language which is most often verbal but not always so — the memory of memory. And immediately following this recognition: the divergence of public and private. We recognize certain perimeters in language, certain vagaries in comprehension, both within and without. We recognize distance, and the urge to overcome it. In speaking to another's narrative, we are mining linkages which have perhaps always been latent — in the same way that the brain at birth has yet to close off various pathways. We may use words, images, touch, sound — any means in this construction. We may create whole environments, or messages of the most discrete simplicity. The work then becomes an attempt to find modes of sympathetic resonance within a limitless and partially understood series of reflections.*

In this catalog of new works, I set out to look at all manner of constructed environments with an idea that I might expand in many different directions from my most recent mental home, the 2006 installation in Los Angeles, *A Certain Presence*. Sound was and is the central actor in most of my work: sound that is heard out loud; sound that is located, fleeting, or discrete; sound that directs or is quite still; sound that is spoken only within one's head; sound that is simply imaginary. Sound underpins the atmospheric qualities that I'm after, but it also gives space to the physical elements, the light, and the projected imagery which may fill out each of these scenes. I view the pieces as dramatic works in the sense that they are both narratively active and theatrically set. Though each represents some meeting of art and technology in — typically — a space normally reserved for painting, sculpture, etc., they are installations for which the adorned presence of the theater is a close correlative. They seek to place the art viewing experience in the analog and transient hands and minds of the observer — in a space in which one's observation, consideration and action have a direct effect on the piece. In a space that is absent of modern communicative contrivances but is nevertheless communicatively compelling. In the here and now.



five atmo-  
spheres

# Inflection Loss

hidden music

**Inflection Loss** is a room environment whose subject is the aural history of the room itself. The piece inhabits a space and records in detail the sound of that space over time. During an exhibition, the filtered, resynthesized sound of the space — and the precise date and time on which the original sound was heard in the room — is available for visitors to recall via body position and gesture. This recalled sound is diffused over a multi-channel audio system that maps itself about the ceiling of the room.

Inflection in language is variation in the form of a word to indicate contexts such as person, gender, and tense. In mathematics it is a term used to indicate change in the curvature of some particular geometry. In the world of sound inflection consists of the characteristics of time-based audio — such as localization, timbre, and rhythm — which give particular sounds identity. **Inflection Loss** erases these characteristics so that we may listen to the frequency spectra of a space in a new way.

The system records the sound environment in a given space continuously. With a high-sensitivity microphone running into a computer, the piece does not make a digital record of the sound per se: instead, it records the frequency characteristics of the soundstream appearing at the mic and then sorts this analysis to determine which narrow frequency ranges were dominant in the time analyzed. When recalled, what results is a continuous ambient soundscape of the room's recent acoustic history.

One's memory of place and time is colored by a huge number of variables. To be present, and aware, in a particular space at a given moment does not guarantee a full comprehension of that environment. Our sensory catalog provides a highly filtered impression in 'real-time', and an even more shaded view in retrospect. This is particularly true of our ability to take in environmental sound. **Inflection Loss** provides an alternative sampling and record of sound in public space, and a musical method of revisiting that sound, which visitors may freely manipulate.

Over the centuries humans have developed a very specialized hearing. Our ears are adapted particularly to the frequency range of the human voice, and have a remarkable ability to focus on particular sounds — conversation, for example — amid a mass of other competing sounds. The brain's hearing mechanism constantly refines information transmitted from the ear, looking for relevance. A consequence of this unconscious process is that we filter out combinations of sounds which for us do not 'connect'. **Inflection Loss** attempts to reconstruct some of these possible junctures.

We are saddled with a still greater liability in disinterested listening: we are linear beings, moving from one frame to the next, the narrative of our lives a long unfolding from which we may look backwards and, sometimes, forward, but the cumulative view remains a vague sense rather than a large series of clear pictures. By contrast, **Inflection Loss** is an aural view of the 'wave-front' of time, as opposed to a linear elucidation of that time. The installation captures aspects of environmental sound over several weeks and builds a continuous representation of that sound as one singular, advancing tide.







Inflection Loss – studio view



# Bau

sound labyrinth

*We are obsessed with building labyrinths, where before there was open plain and sky.*

THOMAS PYNCHON

*We stand at the dawn of an era that will see the emancipation of architecture from matter.  
The intuition that allows us even to consider architecture as 'frozen music' or music a  
'molten architecture' comes from a deep and ancient understanding that, in its very essence,  
architecture exceeds building, as music exceeds sound.*

MARCUS NOVAK

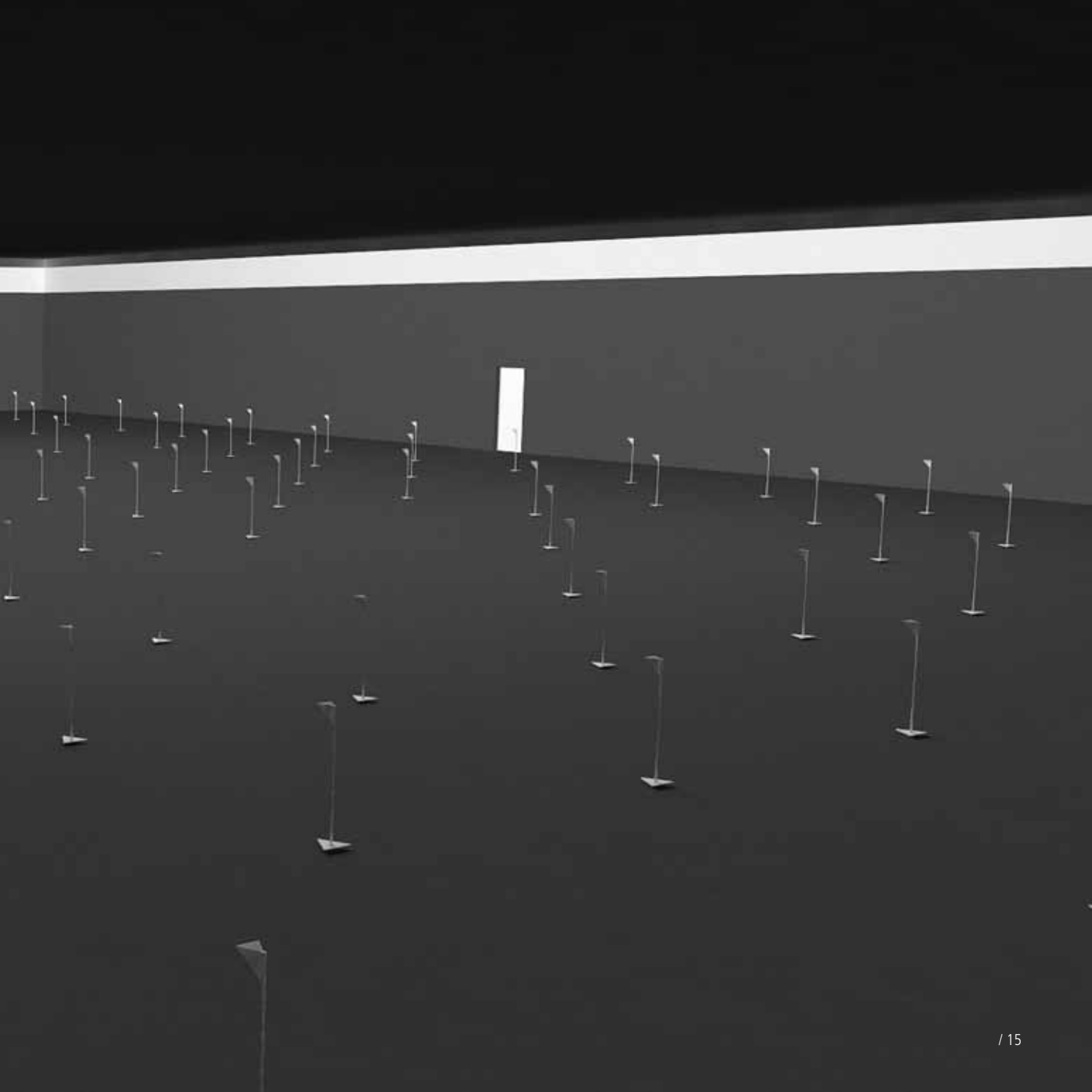
In the distant past, the labyrinth was not only a place of disorientation and fear. Its mesmerizing qualities were as often used for contemplation as for imprisonment. Like the cloister, the labyrinth was a place to walk; like the rest of a fanciful garden, it was an amusement. The labyrinth might be built of stone in an underground dungeon, or it might be clipped out of densely packed bushes. In the case of **Bau**, it is created from sound.

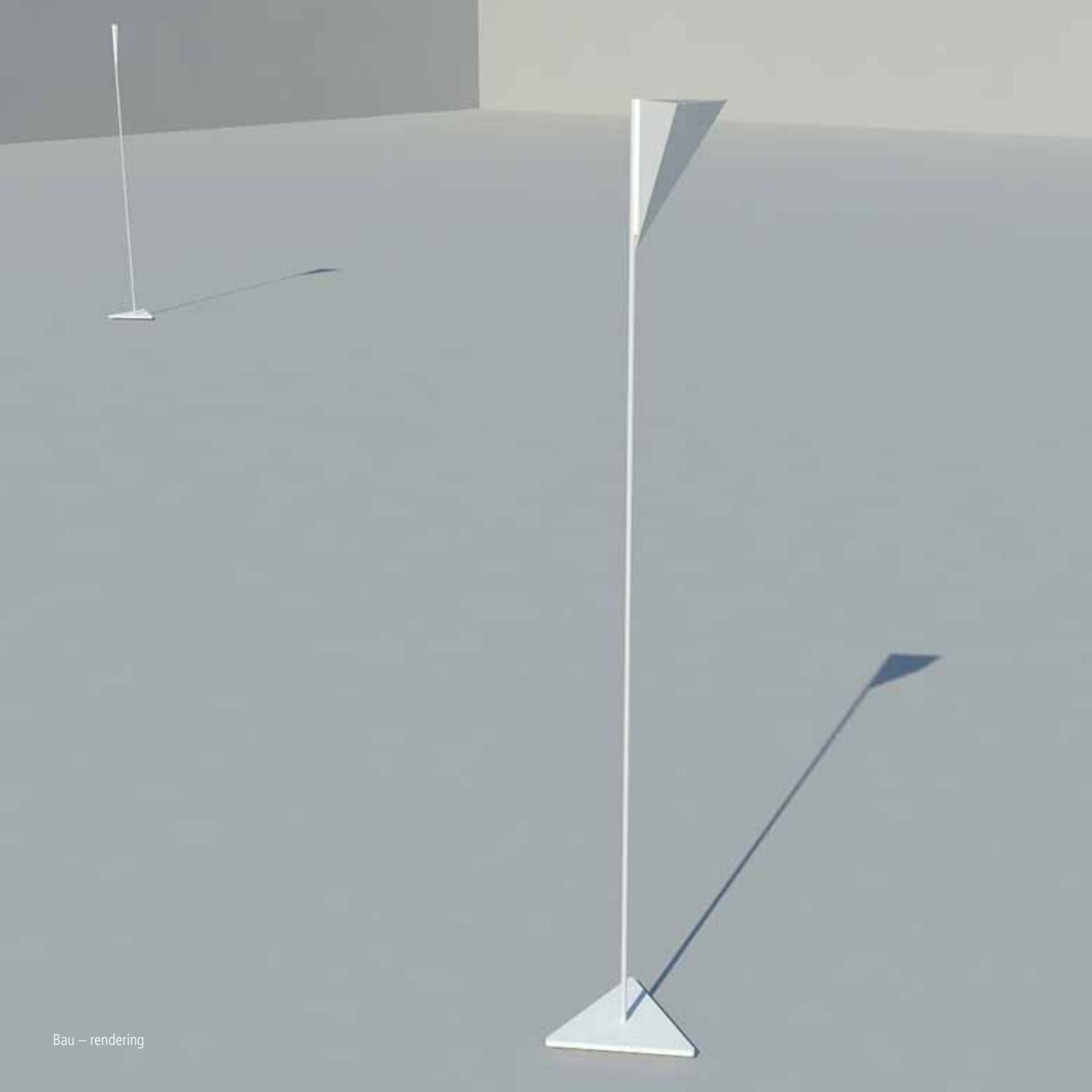
**Bau** is a labyrinthine space constructed of sound waves. Where the traditional labyrinth uses walls and corners to delineate its passageways, **Bau** uses sound, thus: the piece occupies a large walled space in which dozens of free-standing sound generators are placed in an asymmetrical geometry. These devices emit a variable combination of frequencies such that the entire room may be mapped in different patterns. The room itself is half-lit and filled with a synthetic fog. In low visibility, visitors enter through one door and must listen and decipher the frequency map, making their way through the vastness of the room, in order to find the exit door.

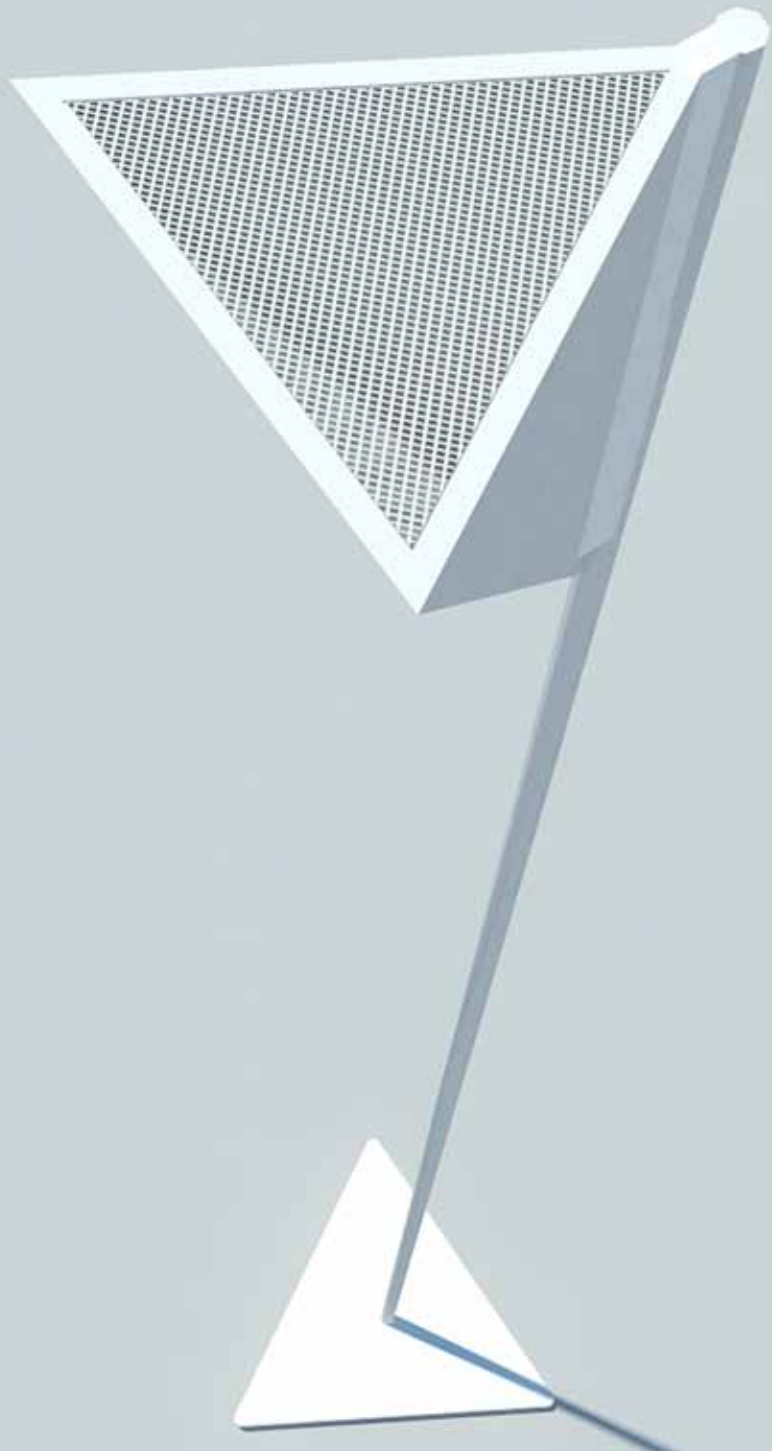
Above the installation, concave dishes are hung. These have the effect of focusing a group of tones on a particular location; the tones are gathered from waves reflecting up from the immediate vicinity, and thus give a layered summary of their respective places.

The intersection of architecture and sound is an under-explored space. Buildings are traditionally constructed with sound isolation or dampening in mind. The idea is that what sound there is which is not under control is a nuisance at best. Since sound elements associated with architecture (wind, street noise, etc.) are often constant forces, their dispersion or containment is an ongoing problem. Coming now is an architecture in which the qualities of complex diffused sound will inform the space and the construction that sound occupies. **Bau** is a mass-less, texture-rich piece of architecture.









# Confessional

body language

*the idea is for anyone to anonymously confess to anything. it actually feels kind of good to know that someone will read it. this is completely confidential. no information about you or your computer is stored. in fact, we only collect the text you type, the date, and a random number... by confessing you give group hug the right to use and modify your submission in any form anytime anywhere.*

WWW.GROUPHUG.US

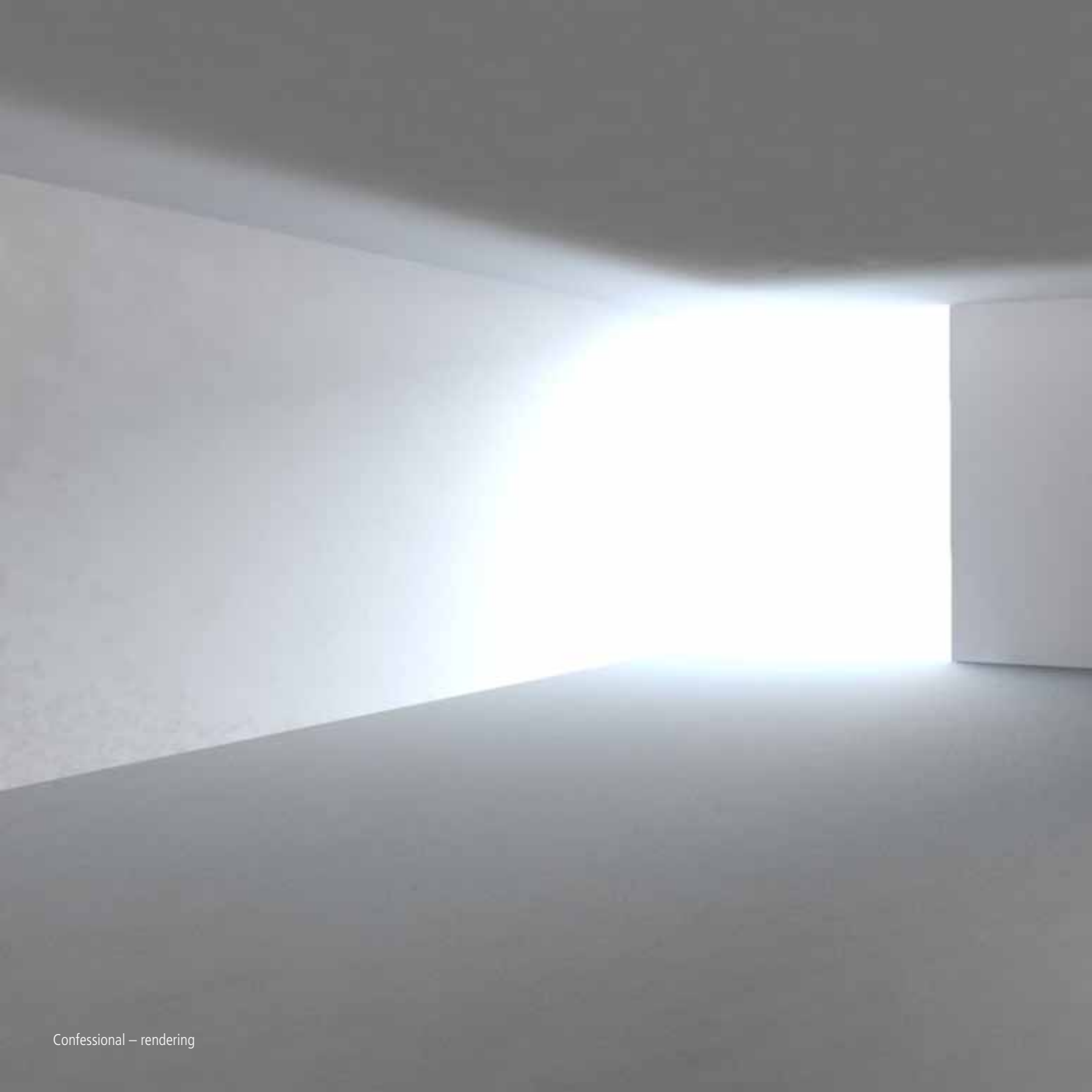
A secluded area within the public sphere, **Confessional** is a modern incarnation of that venerable object in which individuals may release themselves through words, through sound and presence. A sound sculpture alone in a room, the piece consists of seven panels upright in slightly more than a semicircle. Each panel is wired with two or three microphones on the inside. In the middle of the interior area, a pair of wireless headphones hangs. Visitors enter the sculpture singly. The arrangement of the panels forces a participating visitor to be very close to the mics, which are in turn highly amplified. Each visitor, donning the headphones and standing before the mics, hears an extremely detailed aural portrait of his or her own voice, body, clothing, and movement. The sound of their presence, words, and gestures is transmitted through the headphones, along with a single, occasional narrated word: “yes”. In the room itself, the visitor’s aural presence is transformed into ambient tones which other spectators hear via the panel’s external speakers.

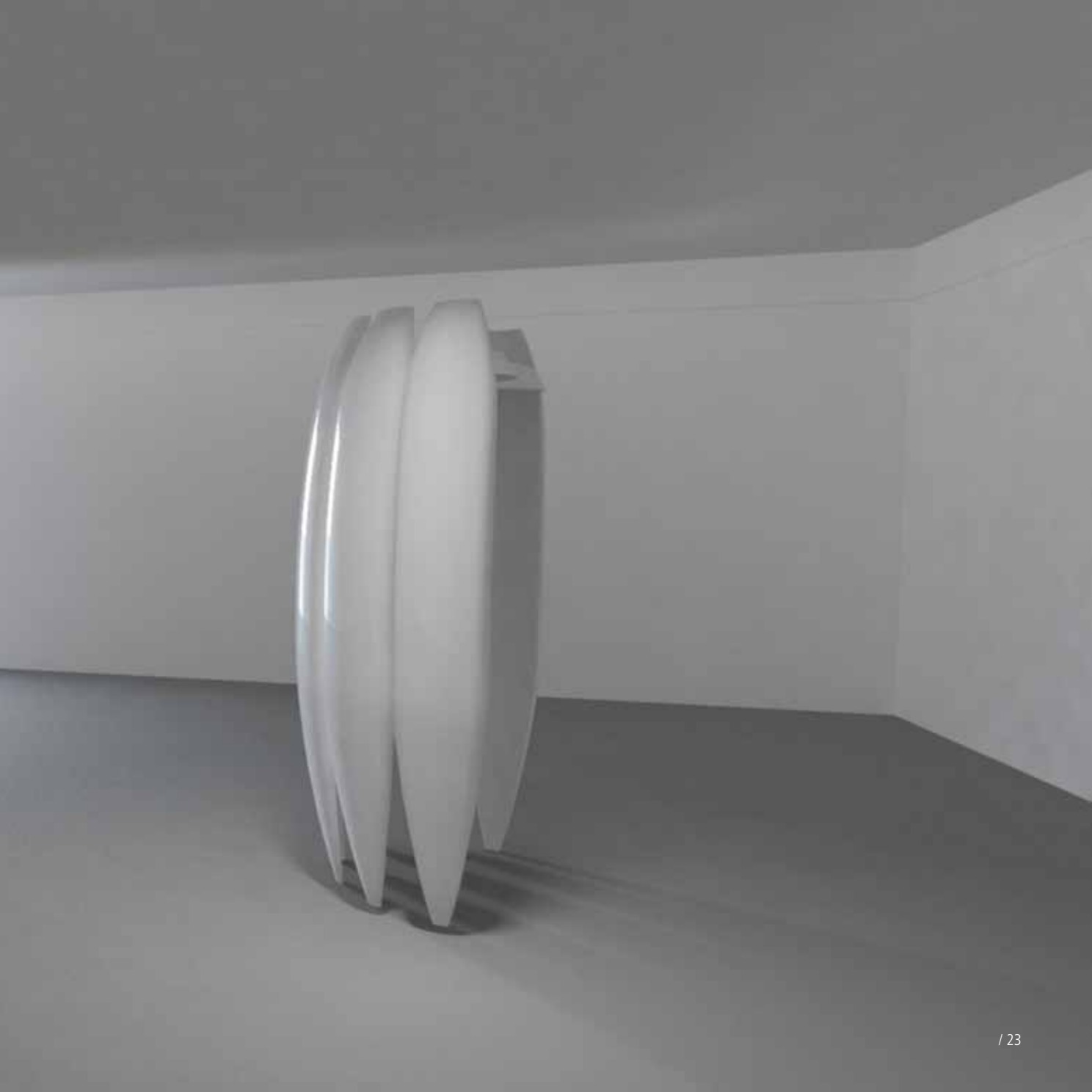
The age of the first-person: singular, solitary, connected primarily via modem. The Internet: awash in personal declamation, revelation, biography. In the high tide of the weblog, it would seem that the last thing needed in society is another method of telling one’s story. The stories proliferate, such that their number increasingly prompts a kind of societal deafness. And yet these uncountable acts of speech are intended for an audience, they are sent out overwhelmingly in the hopes of recognition and contact. They request commentary and express a need — for attention. In the hail of self-expression, we learn again and again that the one story people are generally interested in hearing is their own.

**Confessional** is a confrontation operating according to this expressive need. The **Confessional** environment enforces a loose division between inner and outer voice, as participants and onlookers experience very different versions of the participant’s declarations. For the lone participant, his or her very presence translates entirely into the aural realm: breath, motion, and the innumerable tiny sounds which indicate physical presence. Beyond the confines of the headphones, the intense detail of these sounds is warped and smeared in a manner which elongates and confuses any sense of their original cause.









# Resonances

the quanta of memory

The installation accompanies a live sound performance in an exhibition space. Immediately following a given performance, **Resonances** creates an extended 'dying-away' of the event itself over the course of several weeks, in the same location. Audio source material captured during the performance slowly disappears from the performance space in a long series of sampled reverberations.

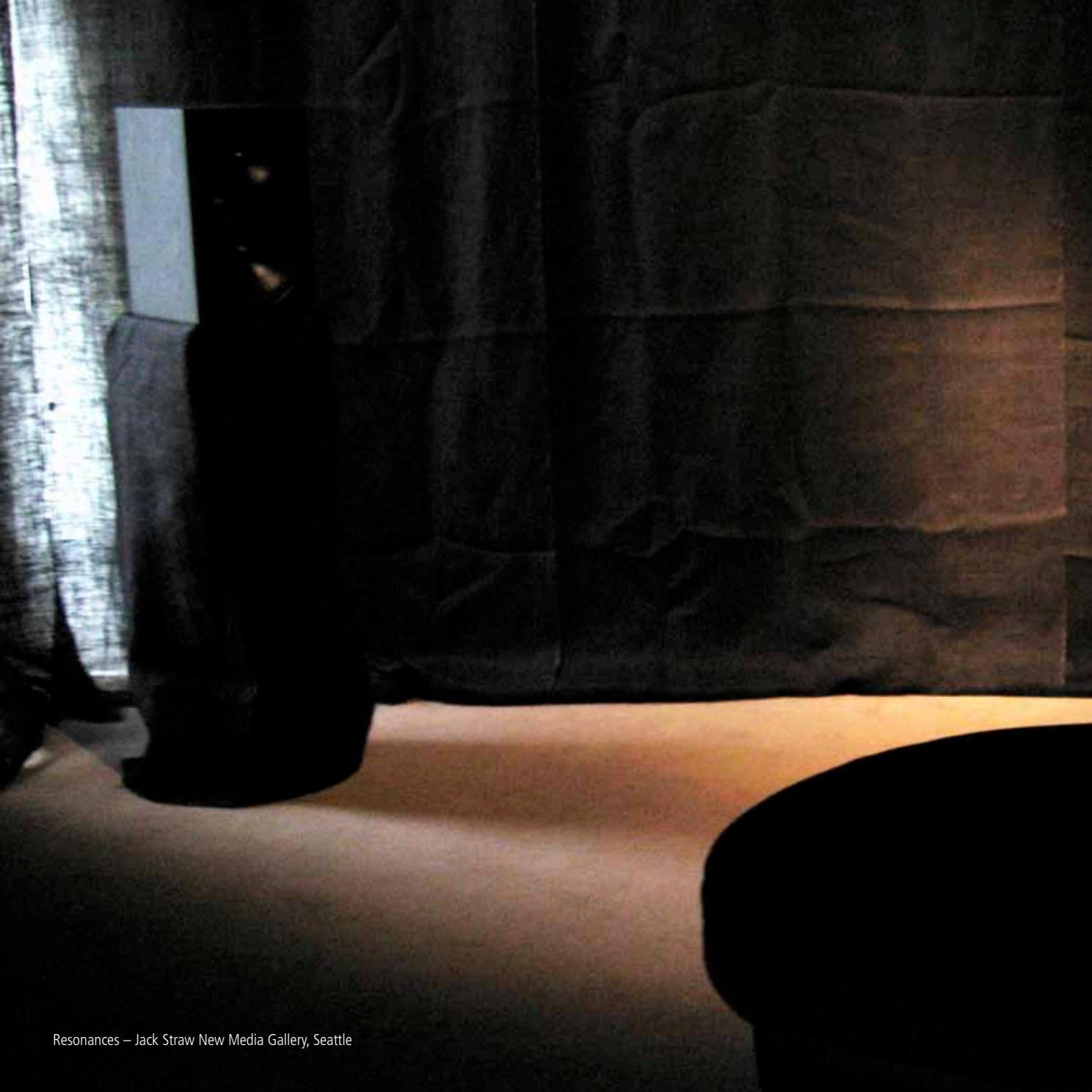
**Resonances** may be presented in a variety of surround sound formats — minimally, 4-channel audio. The overall arc of the piece — which requires at least five days — is from a generally intense beginning to a final period that is quite spare and minimal: the softest whispers of sound indicate the ultimate moments of the event. This reflects the logarithmic nature of decaying energy, in which a great deal of mass and power is shed quickly, and the latter portion tapers gradually to the infinite. The diffusion of the piece simulates the jitter of reflecting waves successively losing their energy. Occasional 'spikes' — fading collections of energy — may temporarily revive certain aspects of the original piece.

**Resonances** is based upon a simple presupposition — that a space occupied for a finite period of time retains the presence of that occupation well after the space itself has been 'emptied'. This presence is a collective and individual memory; it is an energy held in the atmosphere and the material of the place. Having charged the space briefly, the slow ebb of this energy is discernible, but — as a subtle and extended process — not precisely quantifiable. **Resonances** seeks to bring the afterlife of an event into the realm of the perceptible.

Using various models of decaying energy, sounds subside in unstable patterns, the crumbling material of a moment in time. This disappearance is not perfectly linear; it moves from generally synchronized to radically disconnected. 'Moments' of audio appear and sound in altered sequence and at various speeds, segmenting into smaller and smaller pieces. Events recur with new linkages. The source material may run forward or backward, or may hang itself for some time in a spiralling loop. In this respect, **Resonances** is a mirror of the physical qualities of waves in a particular space: over time, initial impulses scatter, reflect, and subside in a complex cloud.

The difficulty with **Resonances** is in its presentation. Continuously unfolding, regardless of whether anyone is there to see or hear it, the installation serves as witness to a disappearance which would otherwise remain unmarked. **Resonances** requires an undisturbed space that may be filled at times with the resonant chaos of layered audio; at other times, the space may be filled with nothing but silence. Durations for the piece may run from a few days to several weeks.

Exhibitions: Tesla, Berlin, 2007 (solo); Jack Straw New Media Gallery, Seattle, 2008 (solo).



Resonances – Jack Straw New Media Gallery, Seattle







# A Sensation of Movement

aural kinetoscope

*You're used to being alone... But solitude comes in different varieties.  
What's waiting for you might be a little unexpected... It might change, depending on you.*

HARUKI MURAKAMI

In a large, quiet room, a long corridor cuts through the space with a double row of tall, gently-curved stelae. Each side of this aisle is composed of seven upright foam resonators, approximately 14" (.35m) by 78" (2.1m); the corridor itself is 22' (7m) long. Attached to each piece is an audio transducer. The result is a 14-channel immersive sound sculpture. The system is a long series of stereo pairs, individually timed via software so that the sound content of the corridor is carried down its length like a river. Visitors move down the length of the piece enveloped in a rush of sound.

What's heard in **A Sensation of Movement** is a flowing environmental soundscape: urban and natural sounds mixed in a long (45 minute) journey from a high level of aural density to low, and back again. The sound of walking is frequently heard, and the timing of the sounds' movement down the corridor matches the perceived speed of the walk.

**Sensation** is an exploration of the spaciousness and movement of time in the context of sound. As such, it is a rethinking of the idea of a 'kinetoscope' from the point of view of sound: a collection of aural cues diffused in a panoramic way, the piece moves with the breadth and space of film, but replaces sight with sound at the center of the visitor's sensory experience.

Exhibitions: Eagle Rock Center for the Arts, Los Angeles, 2008



A Sensation of Movement – Eagle Rock Center for the Arts, Los Angeles





A Sensation of Movement – Eagle Rock Center for the Arts, Los Angeles





scene3

## Three Recollections

gathered scenes

*Reminiscences, even extensive ones, do not always amount to an autobiography. For autobiography has to do with time, with sequence and what makes up the continuous flow of life. Here, I am talking of a space, of moments and discontinuities. For even if months and years appear here, it is in the form they have in the moment of recollection. This strange form — it may be called fleeting or eternal — is in neither case the stuff that life is made of.*

WALTER BENJAMIN

**Three Recollections** is a quietly shifting audiovisual piece that deals with space and memory and the history of incidence. The installation occupies three adjoining walls, each of which are filled (at least vertically, optimally in both dimensions) with a video image (the images join at the intersection of the walls). Cameras in the occupied space capture three distinct perspectives of the visitors present, and those images are projected on to the walls. Visitors to the piece should feel surrounded by the projection walls — the images form three-quarters of a room.

As the installation progresses, the system makes a discontinuous recording of the activity in the space: triggered by motion detectors, the software takes short recordings of ‘moments’ in the space, and stores them. **Three Recollections** then recalls and mixes these cuts into the live audio and video coming from the projectors. Still images are also sometimes used. The cameras are fixed, and the background of their respective images does not change. Thus, visitors will view, and hear, themselves as well as various others previously present in exactly the same space, simultaneously. Both the live video and the recalled imagery are presented in a washed out, ethereal manner, such that all of the people found in the composite image have a somewhat ghostly character. Live and recalled visitors may be found side by side, or perhaps occupying the very same space. Similarly, the system mixes the sound of previous and current activity within the exhibition. Mid-range frequencies — the vocal range — are suppressed, revealing the high and low accents that define activity and rhythm in the space.

Think of a room, one inhabited for long periods by different people; the walls are the same; the floor, increasingly worn; the available light casts a recurring glow upon changeable, transitory forms. This is the atmosphere of **Three Recollections** — an attempt to give shape to the sense of having shared a very particular space with others who have come before, or may come after. It is an accumulating visualization of the layered, disparate perspectives that form the history of a place, as well as a record of the curiosity and expectation which visitors bring to such an environment. The sensed presence of those who previously transited a space, the knowledge of walking in a close area whose encompassing atmosphere has shifted many times due to the movements of itinerant viewers. The piece builds a quality of shared moment in imagined meetings of temporally distant individuals.









## **Ecliptic**

moment stream

*I no longer ask myself where we are making for. The notion of a destination no longer seems necessary to me.  
It has been swallowed up in the immensity of this landscape, as the days have been swallowed up  
by the sense I now have of a life that stretches beyond the limits of measurable time.*

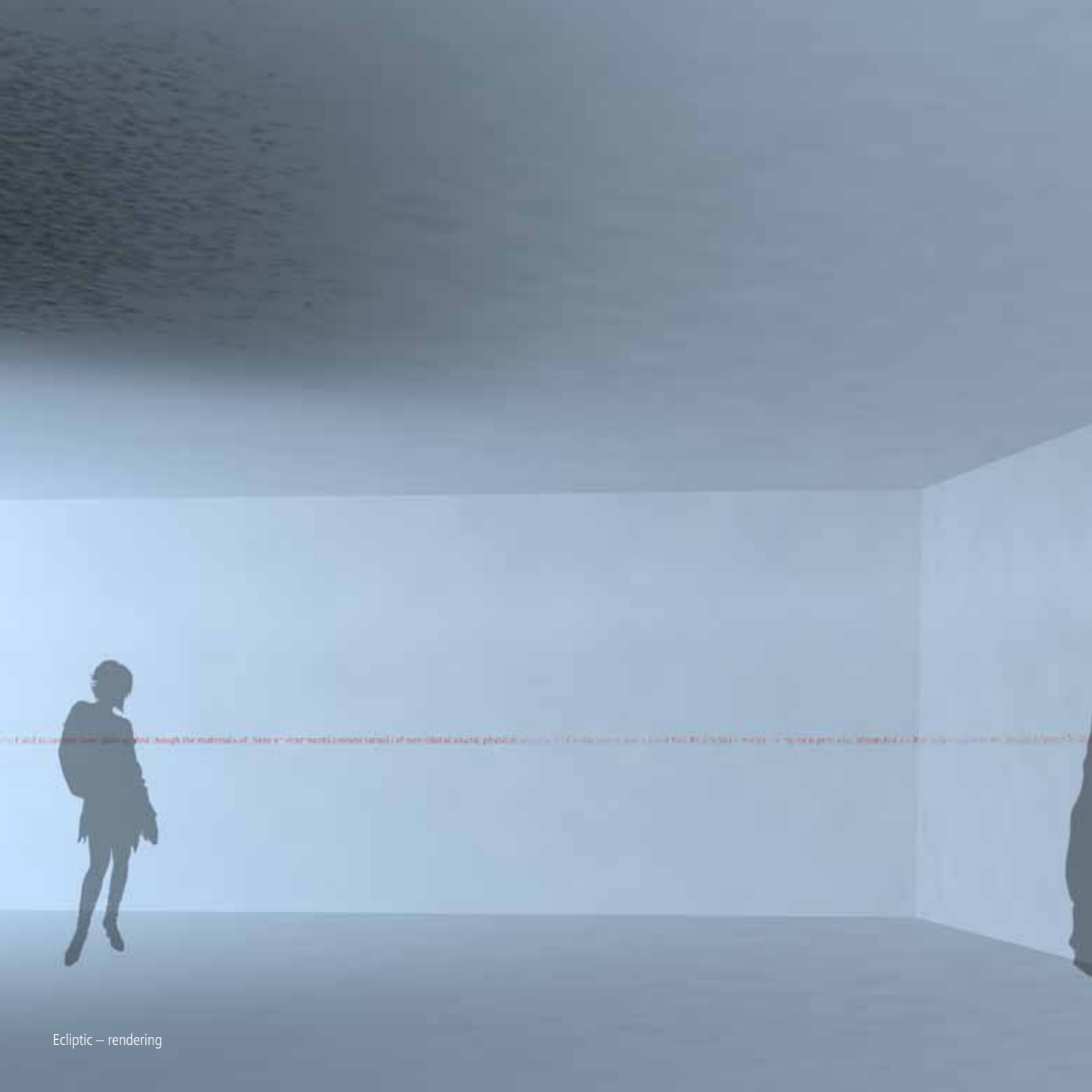
DAVID MALOUF

**Ecliptic** is a silent piece of narrative movement projected upon three adjoining walls. It is a capturing of the interior voice and a visualization of the recessional quality of the mind's present moment. From the right, a discontinuous stream of language pops suddenly into view. The words move leftward at a walking pace, their thin red line of monologue travelling through two shallow corners and eventually fading on the third wall into the ambient light. The words form a twenty-minute, looped interior monologue which is written such that the observer may pick up threads of the conversation's main themes at any time: the text 'updates' itself, and tracks back on itself, frequently. The piece is projected from the front of the room; any visitors walking near enough to the projection walls become an extension of that surface as text travels across them.

So we go. A running narrative accompanies our mute selves, something we each construct in a continuous amalgam of so many observations, exclamations, and reasoned and unreasonable passages, over a blur of days. It is a story told only to one, a story inwardly met, confronted, avoided, occasionally divulged. Depending on our mood, on our biochemical balance, on the estimation of others, on the weather, on — who knows — we have a greater or lesser faith in the cogency of the script. The private monologue can seem like the right story at the right place, in the right time; it may also appear to be the most benighted set of circumstances and actions ever to have transpired. But it runs on, regardless, an instantaneous spoken memory. Pieces, few and brief, linger for more than a few seconds. The rest, the sprawling personal description of a life, disperses in the space of a few moments.







A silhouette of a person stands in a bright, white, minimalist space. The person is positioned on the left side of the frame, facing right. The background is a stark white wall and ceiling, creating a high-contrast environment. The overall mood is contemplative and serene.

...had a life on the page and a parallel but not

## Quarks

angular momentum

*However, this perpetual observer has no stories to tell, no store of wisdom, no knowledge of the grand patterns.  
Locked within a great immutable Now, it has no sense of past or future. Without a memory to give it life,  
events flicker across its image surface with only a split second to linger  
as afterimages, disappearing forever without a trace.*

BILL VIOLA

**Quarks** captures present presence, illuminating the movement of a momentary scene in a whitish glow, and soon discards the instant in favor of another. A fixed observer, **Quarks** picks out the contours of a particular spatial organization of individuals — the audience — and objects; it separates the animate from the inanimate, and reveals this social arrangement in a bifurcated projection which pulls moving pieces forward in a kind of three-dimensional effect. **Quarks** makes observers the subject matter of the piece, and asks that they choose between motion and stillness, thereby pulling themselves in or out of the video process.

This real-time video piece occupies up to three walls of a given space, with a camera and projector dedicated to each surface. The ambient light is low, and the system, which uses movement and change in the audience to determine its image progression, requires cameras that pick up light into the infra-red spectrum. The background image — the room itself — is significantly dimmed in the projected images, leaving visitors seemingly free in space, their arrangement studied from the three camera angles.

**Quarks** is a kind of inverse mirror to its companion piece, **Three Recollections**. Where the latter highlights the lit, observant presence of individuals, the former captures a group of anonymous forms in sequence. The result is an animation of social interaction, in which motion and gesture define expression. And whereas **Three Recollections** proceeds in a non-linear manner, rearranging the timeline of its installation freely, **Quarks** follows a direct path that is triggered at regular intervals by the presence of visitors.









*There is no end to our investigation... its pursuits have no bounds or rules; its food is wonder, search, and ambiguity... It is an irregular and perpetual motion, without model and without goal. Its inventions excite, pursue, and give birth to one another.*

MONTAIGNE



