

Toni Meštrović: *Interleaving – a closed-circuit sound installation*

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The rise of electronic surveillance at the time of the information revolution has become one of the main topics of the critique of social surveillance. Under the guise of regulating the security of citizens, surveillance has spread from the directly surveilled and limited space to public space. In a *risky society*, an individual is under the pressure of responsibility to effectively control and manage uncertainties. As a general place of media rhetoric, the stirring of fear indirectly encourages people to believe the electronic eye. In the period of global economic changes and the adoption of new models of social segregation and polarization.

These are approximately the premises that Toni Meštrović draws on in his series of exhibitions *Hack the System* (2018), *Surveilling Surveillance* (2020) and *Eavesdropping* (2022), in which he examines video surveillance technology, either its characteristics of a technical tool or its social implications. In this, he is as much interested in the power of the surveilling gaze as in its sidetracks, delusions and weaknesses, which are rarely discussed and not even questioned in everyday life. Because he is aware that the people monitored by street surveillance systems mainly remain unknown to the observer and that the ones looking at the screens do not have the possibility of systematically identifying and classifying people in public space, Meštrović leans towards the conclusion that, in itself, surveillance is redundant and that the real threat is not the monitoring of others. It is about something totally different, which can most easily be explained with the often quoted sentence that “discipline proceeds from the distribution of individuals in space” (M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 1977), which, among other things, explains that the power of the surveilling gaze lies in its ability to encourage conformism. Because the feeling that we are under surveillance creates the feeling that we are potential violators. The knowledge that there is information ready to testify at a future moment in time is enough for it to haunt our thoughts with the anxiety of the accused. The perceptive traps that the surveillance system constantly produces are an object of interest in Toni Meštrović’s media research and the reason he questions its dead ends and ecstasies and turns the unknown into the known, all with the goal of a sensory experience of the surroundings we live in. That is why, for Meštrović, the appropriation of the structure of a surveillance system has the character of a further

research of the unexplored possibilities of the *closed circuit*, but, as opposed to his previous works mentioned above, whose basis consisted of a system of surveillance cameras, the Maribor project works exclusively with the medium of sound. By using its intangibility, immateriality and invisibility, he supports the idea of the observer's physical absence characteristic of the surveillance system. Seven directional loudspeakers arranged in two closed circuits, one of which is interleaved in the other, emit the sound they receive via microphones from the surrounding space and create the conditions for a sound experience that sustains the sound *feedback*. Despite the technical stability of the installation, the result is unpredictable. It is probable that *microphonics* will emerge, which should keep the sound form alive without the help of the visitors who assume the role of a listener-observer. It remains uncertain, however, whether the installation will be able to break through the limits of the conceived scheme and exceed expectations. Will it surprise us?

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