

## Sustained Development

All pieces composed,  
performed and  
produced by  
Gerald Fiebig  
from 2007 to 2010

Emerge: art direction  
and photography  
Gerald Fiebig: layout

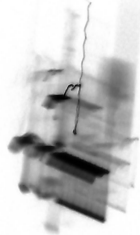
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## Conceptual Drones

My first encounter with drone-based music I have a clear memory of was standing on a dancefloor moving around ("dancing" is probably not the right word) to the Velvet Underground's **Heroin**. Despite Maureen Tucker's drumming that becomes ever more frenzied as the piece develops, I remember clearly that it wasn't the rhythm, but the sustained droning sound of John Cale's viola that gave me a sense of being immersed in music that I had hardly ever experienced before. I knew (and loved) the song, but the high volume at the club and the free space of the dancefloor lent it a physical presence that transcended the merely cochlear experience and made me feel my body in a way that was quite different from dancing to a beat - simply because when you dance to a beat you more or less consciously follow the temporal form of the music, while the drone, if it's loud enough, simply traces the contours of your body in space, even if you don't do anything at all. // This sums up one of the most interesting characteristics of the wide field of musical practices categorised as

drone music: here's music that emphasises the spatial quality of sound in ways that other music doesn't, while making us aware of the relativity of time. In other words: in drone music, an art form traditionally defined as time-based aspires toward the condition of pure space and a state (of the listener's mind) where the passing of time is suspended, an effect I have experienced most poignantly in the drone-rock



performances of Deep, whose work has inspired me in many ways since I first heard them in 1996. // Shortly after the Velvet Underground episode just mentioned, I had the opportunity to see a performance of La Monte Young's Dream Syndicate, thus connecting VU's drone-rock to its precursor in the field of so-called "art music." To me, this is another key aspect of drones: "This is," in the words of Marcus Boon, "an open field of shared goals and a multiplicity of experimental techniques" that unites practitioners from academic musical contexts and rock/punk/dance-derived subcultural scenes in a way that no other musical idiom possibly does. ([en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Drone\\_music](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Drone_music) gives an excellent overview of the diverse strands of drone music that substantiates my argument.) In this way, drone music can be seen as a prototype for an alternative organisation of music that does away with the ideological high-low distinction of musical culture in our societies. (Which is why, for me, drone music also exemplifies the utopian goal of an open-minded music that motivated my two-year curatorship of the concert series **echokammer**, a format devoted to obliterating the distinction between pros and amateurs, "serious" and "underground" music. // Talking about a potential social significance of drone music may come as a surprise, since some of its prominent practitioners have associated themselves with rather esoteric forms of spirituality that are more about tuning into the harmony of the spheres and out of social reality. I do think, however, that it is possible to see the constant increase of drone music practices in the last four or five decades as a countercultural trend opposing the

constant acceleration of modern societies conceptualised by Hartmut Rosa: drone music helps us slow down and think, or feel. // This materialist interpretation of drone music is legitimised by the fact that this music is, in my experience, very materialist in itself - see its immediate engagement with the physical materiality of the body I have described above. Since these effects are best achieved through long performances at high volumes and hard to achieve through the home-listening acoustics of a CD, the pieces assembled on this album confront the issue of acceleration and its dangers on a conceptual level. Rather than presenting "drone-in-itself" (a term borrowed from Seth Kim-Cohen's discussion of "sound-in-itself"), this album offers drone-based "conceptual sonics" (another term borrowed from Kim-Cohen). // My own exploration of drone structures, for which I have chosen the project name Sustained Development, began in 2006 with a visit to Halberstadt. Listening to the extremely sustained organ tones of the "John Cage organ" (see notes for track 1), I experienced the phenomenon of long tones/drones in a new way that made me want to experiment with this phenomenon myself. Around the same time I became acquainted with the work of Phill Niblock, whose compositional techniques have massively inspired the material on this album, even though it most certainly doesn't come anywhere near doing justice to the inspiration. // Incidentally, an earlier version of **6'39" über Halberstadt** was released as a web-only bonus track for my first solo CD release on **fieldmuzick.net**, so the first track on the present CD continues where the last one left off.

**Gerald Fiebig, July 2010**

**Quotes and references: [www.gerald fiebig.net](http://www.gerald fiebig.net)**

# 1 **6'39" über Halberstadt** 6'39"

This piece is based on a live recording made by Gerhard Zander at the festival **Experimentelle Musik**, Munich, 8 December 2007. An earlier version was reworked for this release. // **Original programme notes:** John Cage stipulated that his organ piece **Organ/ASLSP** be played "as slow as possible". In 2000, a performance of the piece set to last till 2639 began in Halberstadt in the German federal state of Sachsen-Anhalt, because "an organ with the first modern keyboard arrangement had been built in Halberstadt's cathedral in 1361. This organ was the first one with a claviature of 12 notes and this claviature is used on our keyboard instruments today. So one can say that the cradle of modern music was in Halberstadt. Subtract 1361 from the millennial year 2000, and the result is 639. In the year 2000, 639 years had passed since the 'Phenomenal day of Halberstadt' (Harry Partch) [...] Cage's 'as slow as possible' will be performed for 639 years. The place will be St. Burchardi, one of the oldest churches of the city." (Source: [www.john-cage.halberstadt.de](http://www.john-cage.halberstadt.de)). Gerald Fiebig's homage to this project consists of recordings he made in August 2006 at St. Burchardi and other places in Halberstadt. It confronts discontinuous sounds of everyday life with the extremely continuous sound of the organ (a', c", f sharp") and attempts to convey the specific spatial quality of this extremely static music in a different context of performance.

## 2 **Kammerflimmern** 7'32"

Thanks to Moritz Wiesenecker, I was able to buy a used and somewhat dysfunctional harmonium in 2007. The harmonium is a completely acoustic home organ with foot pedals for pumping air into the pipes. It allowed me to continue my exploration of sustained organ

tones begun in **6'39" über Halberstadt** while experimenting, as in this piece, with the multi-layering of pitch-shifted instrumental sounds pioneered by Phill Niblock. The title literally means "ventricular fibrillation," a potentially lethal cardiac dysfunction in which the heart twitches very rapidly without being able to pump properly. It could be described, paradoxically, as rapid movement in complete stasis towards a catastrophic climax. The structure of the piece was based on this concept. (I stumbled across the term "ventricular fibrillation" in a first-aid course, so any morbid "dark ambient" connotations of the title are, at best, ironic on my part.) The basic tone on which all the pitch-shifting was done was supplied by a pun on the title: "Kammerton" means "concert pitch," so I chose A as the basic sound. Apart from the tonal impurities of the untuned harmonium, some creaking noises caused by pumping its foot pedals can be heard. In the course of the piece, the "noise" becomes an important structural element of the "signal" and fends off the esoteric notions of celestial harmony often associated with drone music.

## 3 **Melting into Air** 7'14"

This piece was created in response to a call for submissions for the festival **Musica Viva Portugal** 2009. The original programme notes appear on the next page and explain the compositional basis of the piece. It is based on ideas and material from my sound installation **Index**. The installation was commissioned by the City of Augsburg to commemorate the 550<sup>th</sup> birthday of early capitalist banker Jakob Fugger, so I chose his initial F as the basic harmonium tone. The installation was exhibited for four hours at the church of St Moritz in Augsburg on 20 June, 2009 and was accompanied by the video installation **Crisis - What Crisis?** by Eric Zwang-Eriksson. // **Index** had a much more static structure than **Melting into Air** and relied heavily on the acoustics of the church: while the four channels of the installation piece were projected from four speakers at high volume, visitors could change their perception by walking around the church. This allowed me to explore the spatial quality of drone music in a way that is hard to capture on CD and to revisit some of the interesting acoustic effects I had experienced in 2006 walking around "inside" the organ sounds while I recorded them for **6'39" über Halberstadt**.

Thanks are due to Elke Seidel and Michael Grau for commissioning the original installation **Index** and to Gerhard Zander for his suggestions on its composition.

## Melting into Air:

programme notes for  
**Musica Viva Portugal 2009**

This is a piece of programme music about today's global markets and their acceleration towards chaos.

The piece is based on two sounds: that of an organ, representing tradition and stability, and that of a "no-input" feedback device, representing the volatile and highly virtual character of today's financial markets. Both sounds were digitally processed. The numeric parameters used in processing mirror the development of two important stock market indices (DAX and DJ Euro Stoxx 50) between 15 September 2008 (crash of Lehman Brothers) and 21<sup>st</sup> February 2009

(161<sup>st</sup> anniversary of the publication of the **Communist Manifesto**). The **Communist Manifesto** also supplied the title of the piece and its basic idea of acceleration: "All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real condition of life and his relations with his kind."

## 4 Remembrance 4'18"

**Remembrance** was created as a playback track for my vocal performance **geräuschpegel - MeditAtiOn über die Dauer (sound level - MeditAtiOn on duration)** at the festival **Experimentelle Musik**, Munich, 13 December 2008. // The performance was based on varying articulations of the letters M, A and O along the four basic characteristics of sound according to John Cage: pitch, timbre, volume and duration. It consisted of three parts:

Part 1: **Presence** for voice

Part 2: **Vanishing** for whispering voice and amplification

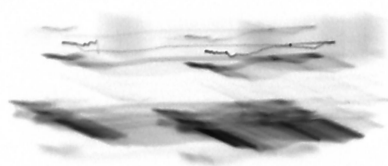
Part 3: **Remembrance** for playback

My idea was that the performer's voice represents a person's passage from living (part 1) through dying (part 2) to being dead but still being present in other people's memories (part 3), so during part 3, I stood onstage with closed eyes while **Remembrance**, a recording of my voice pitch-shifted and time-stretched according to the score of the performance, was played back to the audience.

Thanks are due to Stephan Wunderlich and Edith Rom for commissioning the original performance  
**geräuschpegel - MeditAtiOn über die Dauer.**

5 **A Scanner Darkly** 7'00"

An earlier 8-channel version of this piece was created for the festival **Zeppelin** 2009 and performed at Centre de Cultura Contemporània, Barcelona, in December 2009. In response to the motto of the festival, **Sounds of Power/Listening to Fear** (see call for submissions at [www.sonoscop.net/pop-up/convzepp09ENG.html](http://www.sonoscop.net/pop-up/convzepp09ENG.html)), this piece features a lot of sound material that refers to a (social) reality outside the music itself. (The sources of the sounds are explained in the programme note on the following page.) In this way, it makes audible the references which in the previous pieces were encoded in the compositional structure. Like **Melting into Air**, the piece employs harmonium drones and no-input feedback, but here they are mainly used for their atmospheric quality and with a lesser degree of numerical rigour. // For information on the Philip K Dick novel I borrowed the title from (I have not seen the film adaptation), see [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A\\_Scanner\\_Darkly](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Scanner_Darkly). Dick in turn borrowed his title from the Bible ([www.statemaster.com/encyclopedia/A-Scanner-Darkly](http://www.statemaster.com/encyclopedia/A-Scanner-Darkly)).



Thanks are due to Ulrich Ettinger for the MRI scanner sample and to Emerge for his suggestions for reworking this piece and **6'39" über Halberstadt**.

**A Scanner Darkly:** programme notes for **Zeppelin** 2009 //

The metallic sounds that evoke the eerily "industrial" atmosphere of this piece are, in reality, field recordings of weight machines at a gym and household items: symbolic references to the fact that control of the body and our everyday lives is no longer, as in Foucault's view of the total institution, a matter of control from the outside. Instead, we have internalised a regime of permanent efficiency that is rooted in the demands of the workplace in an environment of accelerating communication, but which has long outgrown the context of work and become the paradigm of our whole lives. With efficiency, flexibility and multi-optionality being the ideal of our physical fitness, sexuality and social relationships, the rare moments of contemplation that allow us to even assess the degree of our alienation may indeed be on the point of vanishing. Meanwhile, our key instruments for organising not only sounds, but our whole lives - electronic devices and the web - lead us to share ever more information about ourselves in public, thus freely offering a rich harvest for state and corporate agents who want to gain power by **scanning** and profiling their citizens and their computers - much more rewarding than listening in to suspects on tapped phone lines, because via the web the powers that be can control a much larger part of the population. This may even extend to the most sensitive areas of our lives, including medical data. The sound of the MRI scanner at the end of the piece - a machine used to scan people's brains - thus takes on a sinister double meaning. The title is taken from a Philip K Dick novel about drug-assisted mind control.

