

Tim Rutherford-Johnson:

Some Recent Silences

Extract from:

<https://nmbx.newmusicusa.org/some-recent-silences/>



Although not a member of the Wandelweiser group, Peter Ablinger was a sympathetic friend and has explored his own path around silence. Whereas most Wandelweiser music (at least that I am aware of) begins from a performance situation, and extends this to extreme lengths in order to interrogate our listening experience, Ablinger starts from the other side of the proscenium arch, with the listeners themselves. Much—perhaps all—of his varied output across multiple media may be thought of as tackling the circumstances of listening. Those works grouped under the title "Seeing and Hearing" are explicitly described as "music without sound," for example, and consist of series of abstract photographs arranged in related groups. Two-Part Invention (2003), from this group, exists as a set of directions (a score?) for creating and displaying a set of 32 photographs. "Seeing and Hearing" exists within a larger subset of works, titled "Listening Pieces." These include "transition pieces," such as Passing a tunnel (2011) and Listening Piece in 2 Parts, in which the listener is required to listen to "the change from the large room to the small one," and then "the change from the small room to the large one." Others are "chair pieces," in which ordered arrangements of chairs are set out in specific locations: the auditorium-like arrangement invites attentive listening, but no further directions are provided. "Not the sound, but the listening is the piece," states Ablinger. The place of the work becomes important: the surrealistic use of chairs in spaces such as parking lots, fields, or beachfronts has an effect on place similar to that of Cage's durational framing on time: the space where the chairs are (and hence the sonic environment that can be heard while sitting in them) becomes separated from the adjacent spaces and sonic environments, and thus sounds differently.