

# for the website Catalogue, Paris/London, 2010 in the section Exhibition Memory

English version translated from the French

## Dominique Petitgand Staring into space

*Catalogue experiments in each issue with an exhibition chronicles written years after the show, shaped by the remembering process. Invited by the editorial team, Dominique Petitgand confessed being a mediocre exhibition goer. The artist best known for his sound installations intertwining voices, noises and silences, doesn't remember artworks but spaces, progressively appropriated. For him, an exhibition is first and foremost a place.*

From my exhibition visits, I remember spaces shaped like U, H, L,  
old apartments, large warehouses,  
fake mazes, partitioned places,  
cubes, rectangles, with no window or hideaway,  
successions of rooms, staff only areas,

floors covered with earth, concrete slabs, wooden floorings,  
a row of posts dividing the space,  
an angled corridor delaying my progression,

numerous floors, layered like a slice of cake,  
an elevator as big as a waiting room and as noisy as a river lock,  
a wide glasshouse overlooking the city, and the cars, with their engines running,  
shaking the building's joints,  
a long narrow corridor leading to a miniscule white room with an half-opened  
window letting in the noises from three floors below,

a heater's blowing sound,  
a voice going through the galleries,  
echoes, hubbub,

chit-chat bouncing on the walls, the tiled floor, the ceiling and gathered in a overhanging and totalising blanket, in a plural white noise, uninterrupted and moving,

I'm a mediocre exhibition goer, amnesic and ungrateful,  
I have to confess,  
I only care about the place itself,  
I almost set aside the artworks,  
I project myself into the space, imagine living or (consolation) having an exhibition there,  
I take the space for what it is, with its possibilities and difficulties,  
for what I can get from it, hear in it,  
I survey the place,  
and start this mental exercise:  
where would I put this, place that ...

living or (consolation) having an exhibition there,  
I feel that it's somehow the same thing,  
that what is at work in me when I'm preparing and installing an exhibition,  
must be – at least to some extent – close to the things I'm concerned with, that make me dream and worries me  
when I have to think about living somewhere,

I progressively set up a binary typology  
in which I dispatch spaces in different categories:  
I immediately know if I'm dealing with a single space, or with a space split in different bits,  
a space for circulation, or a space to stay in,  
an open space, a closed space,  
filled with outside noises, hermetic,  
big, small,  
central, peripheral  
reverberating, muted,

I progressively domesticate the places,  
it's a naïve, intuitive appropriation,  
the space I'm going through is an entrance hall, a corridor, an airlock,  
the one I settle in is the bedroom,  
there is also the dining room, the living room,  
the kitchen, the storage room, the cellar,

This division of the place turns into a point of entry for a possible sound installation,  
an installation which would create links between sounds, voices – that I like to broadcast in bedrooms (the protected, muffled spaces) –  
and others that I prefer installing in more resounding spaces,

one rule: leave the doors open,  
because the time a sound takes to reach us is also the time we need to approach it,  
mentally or physically,

I then focus on the different levels, the distances, the thresholds one has to cross,  
on what can be heard from afar, on what can only be understood from close,  
on what one hears when one is here and which mingles with what comes from there,  
on what can be heard when moving over there, and on what one can remember  
previously heard here,  
on the mix and the hierarchy between different kinds of sound layers that the mobile  
visitor sets up each time he stops and dissolves when he moves,  
each sound in turns perceived as remote, close, a foreground, an accompaniment,  
as remote again,

lastly, I think about the empty spaces,  
the hollows as well as the silences,  
because it's not about filling everything up,  
(these are my dotted-line shapes).

Dominique Petitgand is an artist.  
He lives and works in Paris and is represented by gb agency (Paris), e/static (Turin)  
and Motive Gallery (Amsterdam).