



“Tagesringe”

1999/2000

Length: 16 min.

Deutschlandradio Berlin, December 31st, 2001

"Sitting quietly, doing nothing, Spring comes, and the grass grows by itself"
from *Zenrin Kushu*, a slim volume of Zen Buddhist teachings.

The theme of *Tagesringe* is the inexorable passing of time and the steady rhythm of the days. A period of 61 days is spanned at a slow tempo, simple piano chords mark the transitions from one day to the next, and the seemingly banal is condensed into an intense experience of subjective time. The idea that days differ from one another in terms of sound characteristics and perceived duration came from the phenomenon of annual rings in the wood of a tree.

Tagesringe was inspired by an idea from Paul Auster's film *Smoke*, in which the main character begins each day by taking a photograph of the crossroads where he lives, building up a collection of photographs of the same subject over years. Translated into the acoustic sphere, this yielded simple 'rules' for the realization of the sound composition: 1) Every morning after breakfast, record the random background sound at a fixed location for two or three minutes. These recordings were scheduled to span a period of two months covering the transition from winter to spring. 2) As a contrast to this extended image of an acoustic environment subject to constant change, play a piano improvisation consisting solely of long chords. For this recording, the following rules apply: one take only, that will then be used and left unchanged; improvisation to be executed with 'empty mind', i.e. with no intentions and no desire for musical expression; only white keys to be played, musical content should be reduced to a minimum. This piano recording was then manipulated in such a way that the tail phase of each chord was extended to infinity, blurring into a cloud of sound. The piano improvisation served as a framework on which to mount the outdoor recordings, with each chord marking the start of a new day and the length of the chord determining the length of the selected passage. *Tagesringe* begins with an introductory endless chord and the first day only begins with the second chord. The piano chords accumulating into a cluster stand for the idea of time extending outwards in concentric circles, where the present contains ripples from the past.

The location used for the recordings was the microcosm of a rear courtyard in Berlin, as heard from a top floor balcony, where the sounds of the city beyond are always audible across the roofs. Each new day/chord is marked by a single random event: children playing in the yard, someone emptying their rubbish, workers renovating an apartment, a plane passing overhead. As the days succeed each other, minimal changes in the basic sound structure can also be detected: it is as if every day had its own individual atmosphere. Weather features like wind or rain make for more drastic contrasts. On some days, radio broadcasts from the nearby television tower are captured on the left channel, a type of 'interference' whose unforeseeable occurrence

finally became a characteristic element within the piece. Over the period of 61 days, the arrival of spring makes itself felt: songbirds return from their winter locations, leaves grow on the trees and rustle in the wind. In this compressed form, the imperceptible action of time's inexorable progress is revealed to the senses. The steady rhythm of the days appears as the return of the similar, as daily renewal within apparent sameness, comparable with the concentric rings radiating outwards from a stone thrown into water.

Translated by Nick Grindell