

crow with no mouth

## the idea of fields

By jessewgoin / November 18, 2014 / music writing / Leave a comment



([https://crowwithnomouth.files.wordpress.com/2014/11/infodashboard\\_0416.jpg](https://crowwithnomouth.files.wordpress.com/2014/11/infodashboard_0416.jpg))

People should accustom themselves to the idea of fields, and to look upon everything, even an abstract idea, as a centre, surrounded by zones, auras or spheres of the same nature as the centre, only more attenuated and shading off into indefiniteness.

J.C. Smuts, *Holism and Evolution*, Gestalt Journal Press (1996)

Tomas Korber has surfaced, following a considerable hiatus. Korber had a fecund and frequently brilliant period lasting from 2003-2010, in which he appeared on about 20 recordings. It has been nearly a decade since *Effacement*, his last solo document, over four years since his superlative collaboration with Ralf Wehowsky, *Walkurnen Am Dornenbaum*, nearly four since his pairing with noise-meister Gert-Jan Prins – I can report Korber's lacunae with such specificity because I have written about all these prior works, and several others. Such has been my regard over the last decade for Korber's creative output; and so there was the concomitant piqued anticipation for the release earlier this year of his 2011 composition *Musik für ein Feld*, realized by Korber and the Konus Quartett.

After a number of listens I thought about the title; the premiere of the work in 2011 indeed took place outdoors, in a field. That pleased me to discover nearly as much as the tangent the music and its title triggered – recalling the metaphoric language of fields I learned of 40 years ago when I elected for a major in psychology. That is, the sense of fields found in gestalt theory – how all things live and function in spatial fields, in environments of contingency and interpenetration, shaped by many other things, appearing one way but being quite another way. Of course the core principles of perceptual relationships articulated so elegantly in Gestalt theory and practice in the mid-70s seem much less radical now. Gestalt notions about *figure/ground*, *continuity* and *closure* were applied chiefly to visual art, and, occasionally, tonal music; today, in many branches of experimental music, the language and practice of fields is being worked out, with interesting sonic results.

*Musik für ein Feld* is a long-form piece, a field of considerable expanse, teeming both with life and with powerfully felt silences; the field takes shape in the fantastic synergy between the Konus saxophone quartet and Korber's electronics. This is a suite with wildly variegated parts – sections in which the quartet's reed tones are splayed, granulated and refitted beyond recognition by Korber; sections of gorgeously sustained, clustered timbres reminiscent of Radigue; a lovely episode of rising

and falling sine-like tones referencing, at least covertly, Lucier; stretches of the sort of mulched audio that pelts and stings like an ice-storm, the needle-y noise that is a leitmotif heard across many Korber releases; and, heard in their masterfully placed positions in the field, those silences.

Broken down this way, as a sequence of discrete events, only adds to the illusory nature of the field; it again brings to mind the Gestalt principles I first encountered in the encounter-epoch 70s, principles that subvert and upend the seeming solidity of what we perceive. It seems to me that Korber (and of course I have no idea from his side what he intended) set out to create a field in which 1) he composes notes on a staff (more or less) for Konus to sound (a centre), 2) he processes and mutates those sounds, often beyond recognition (the saxophone pitches attenuated, shading off, Korber's electronics surrounding the quartet with zones, auras, and spheres), resulting in 3) a new field in which the centres are unified, and the Korber/Konus gestalt, what Kurt Lewin would call their *form-quality*, is sounded.

Gestalt talks about trickster perceptual phenomenon like *continuation* (see figure above) – the intuitive sense of direction, of flow, in what is perceived/heard, despite obvious breakages, interruptions and, in *Musik für ein Feld*, episodes in which it seems Korber *has* allowed the whole to collapse into the sum of its parts ; and *similarity* – the intuitive sense of likeness in difference (try to maintain your grip on when the saxophone tones become sine tones, for example); and, of course, *figure-ground*, perhaps the most malleable element at play in much of this music.

I alternated my many listens to *Musik für ein Feld* with another recent release featuring the Konus Quartett, *Jürg Frey / Komponisten-Protrait*; I mention this in this context to simply point out that hearing the Quartett's recitation of canons and chordal harmonies , with their beautifully focused sound enlivening Frey's work, made me appreciate more deeply how much these musicians subsumed their playing to Korber's vision, how they joined their sound field with his own to make one of my favorite pieces of music in a good while. I'd prefer Korber surface again before 2018 or so, but I am cheered to hear what has come from that considerable silence, a new entry in field music I encourage you to hear.

Tomas Korber / Konus Quartett

Musik für ein Feld

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Kurt Lewin, *Defining the "Field at a Given Time"* (1943)

Picture: Carlos Pedroza, *Visual Perception: Gestalt Laws* (2007)

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