View of Pavel
Büchler's installation
Studio Schwitters,
2010, loudspeakers,
table and computer;
at Max Wigram.

PAVEL BÜCHLER
MAX WIGRAM

Pavel Büchler's recent show, "Studio Schwitters," consisted of a single work of that title, featuring 75 horn speakers interconnected by electrical cords and covering a wall of the gallery. One cord trailed across the floor to a table bearing a laptop and other bits of audio equipment, on top of which perched, choirmaster-like, a sole horn speaker. From all these speakers, a single German-accented, computer-generated voice declaimed a stream of indecipherable nonsense in the reasonable tones of a railway announcement informing passengers of their departure platform. In case the title didn't tip you off, the press release informed visitors that what they were hearing was a German digital speech program reciting Kurt Schwitters's famous sound poem "The Ursonate."

This lightness of touch is typical of Büchler. The Czech-born artist (who now lives in the UK) often describes his work as the practice of "making nothing happen." "The Ursonate," a sort of joyful battle against meaning, has obvious relevance here. *Studio Schwitters* courts nothingness in a variety of ways, distancing Büchler's hand through the multiple agencies of software engineers, speaker manufacturers and Schwitters himself. The computerized voice further suggests a distancing of human involvement: Schwitters's ghost, speaking here unknowingly, is dehumanized enough to take up residence in a Stanislaw Lem sci-fi story. The arrangement of found speakers across the wall nods to Schwitters's own collage

and assemblage techniques, suggesting a further gesture of auto-erasure on Büchler's part, as he steps back to allow Schwitters's weird robotic avatar to occupy center stage. Schwitters is in turn somewhat rubbed out by this computerized doppelgänger.

This structure of sustained emptying manifests Schwitters's intention with "The Ursonate" to purge language of conventional meaning, opening new opportunities. Recordings of original Schwitters recitals are zippy, exhilaratingly silly stuff. What happens when the human performer is replaced by a machine is quite odd and multifaceted. The computer's synthetic intonation implies the neutrality of reason, but is also run through with glitches that reveal the unreasoning machine behind it. The text, displayed on the laptop's screen as it is recited, reveals that a stuttering sound like a skipping CD is meant to represent a string of O's, a burbling underwater noise an attenuated set of A's. There's a deadpan humor and musicality to this (as if the electronica duo Matmos were sampling C3PO), which, though audibly different, is in keeping with the original. On the other hand, spoken through a gang of horn speakers—which carry references to all manner of institutional spaces—this Ursonate, severed from its human source, flips into a more sinister mode in which "reasoned" discourse carries no meaning yet demands to be attended to: a reminder of how political extremism generates its own violent brand of nonsense. In the unstable field of *Studio Schwitters*, playfulness and authoritarianism collapse into each other, complicating the relationships between joy and malice, freedom and nullity.

—*Lee Triming*