

“Any sound intentionally uttered within an enclosure is more or less private, more or less connected with the cult—whether this be the cult of the lover’s bed, of the family, of religious celebration or of clandestine political plotting” (R. Murray Schafer). How, then, do we perceive sound when it is dispersed across multiple spaces and shared terrains as in Jan St. Werner’s Glottal Wolpertinger? Upon playing this record a female voice announces the various frequencies pertaining to “feedback band 1”: “285 hertz, 382 hertz, 764 hertz, 11.6 kilohertz, 22.3 kilohertz, modulated.” A kind of listening coordinate, different bands and frequencies are announced throughout the piece, demarcating the sections and with them the various locations that constitute the work: Athens, Milan, St. Werner’s home studio, and the documenta 14 Radio Program, which previously aired select feedback bands as discrete tracks. The frequencies that are uttered not only delineate a structure for the seemingly perpetual and sprawling composition but produce the very sounds themselves. What is heard and felt, however, is not as sober as the woman’s inflection might suggest, rather she ushers in a constant flurry of sound, a push and pull achieved by a unique modulation technique that St. Werner employs.

“Space affects sound not only by modifying its perceived structure through reflection, absorption, refraction and diffraction, but it also affects the characteristics of sound production. The natural acoustics of different geographical areas of the earth may have a substantial effect on the lives of people,” Schafer again notes. Space—whether experienced in or created by editing software, or heard as the rooms and public places featured in these recordings—but also a kind of nonspace characterize Glottal Wolpertinger: hushed voices of a crowd, Greek radio hosts in front of a broadcasting microphone, the persistent buzzing of microtonal tunings emanating from various directions, and an ethereal guitar section, all multiply throughout the work, in turn diffusing our sense of the here and now into a present that stretches beyond ideas of time and place and their ordinary constituents. Something I was also interested in making palpable when conceiving the documenta 14 Listening Space program in Athens, for which another version of St. Werner’s composition was commissioned. The program sought to offer

“Frequency,” Wikipedia will tell you, “is the number of occurrences of a repeating event per unit of time. It is also referred to as temporal frequency, which emphasizes the contrast to spatial frequency and angular frequency.” Spatial frequency is a characteristic of any structure that recurs at regular intervals across space. Considering the composition’s many iterations to date, the purposely entangled configuration, and, more specifically, the various localities and mediums that incalculably coalesce on this record, I wonder whether a spatial apprehension of the piece might be just as conducive as that of a cyclical determination based on time. Further, how a different reading of frequency affects orders of the private (and of the public) that form one’s own sense of expanse.

experiences of sound that extend beyond the usual aural signifiers and illuminate other implications—social, physical, political. If St. Werner’s Athens performance equally determined the possibilities for material space and the nonlocal of the broadcast, this record attests to an understanding of the nature of sound as ever-evolving, a phenomenon permeating the everywhere and the nowhere, all the time and without time, in the lover’s bed and during political plotting. An encompassing listen, every time, guaranteed.

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thanks to Laura Preston