

Pablo Sanz: PORTAL PHONOCENE

By Jacob Eriksen

The work 'Portal Phonocene' by the sound artist Pablo Sanz, which we celebrate today, consists of recordings of sounds collected by the artist himself in the Amazonian rainforest. Through a process of carefully selecting from these recordings, Pablo Sanz have edited them into a 60-minute-long composition playing out in the 8 channels loudspeaker setup in the TONSPUR_passage, which can be listened to daily until the beginning of May. Seven posters in duotone black and yellow accompany the sound compositions as abstract snapshots of the frequency spectrum over short durations of time visualising some of the material from the sound recordings. What the visitor then will experience is the spectral and rhythmical diversity of the wildlife in the Amazonian rainforest both in concrete sound and in abstract images. Pablo Sanz has not only selected between the large number of recordings, but he has treated the selected parts spectrally and thus been able to zoom in to single voices of bats, and frogs, and birds, and other animals, and insects appearing in the recordings. What is interesting here, other than the immediate aesthetic quality of the recordings, which certainly can be enjoyed in themselves, is that the multiphonic soundscape where a large array of species simultaneously sound together. At first this might seem to be disorderly and random. But when studied for example through spectral analysis it becomes clear that each voice of the species inhabits their own temporal and frequential space. This is much like how humans are communicating through shortwave radios, where you need to tune in to a certain frequency, transmit a signal at a certain amplitude, hope for that someone will hear you, someone who is willing to reply to you and that their signal strength is then strong enough for your antenna to receive it. This form of radio communication between humans can be a bit stiff and static and doesn't play a big role for most of us nowadays. Back in the rainforest the sounding species need to order their communication by transmitting clear signals that fellow species will be able to hear. The soundscape is highly structured through organic sounding and listening *to* each other. But the species must also be able to sound and listen *next to* each other, separately, simultaneously, *in* and *out* of each other, *with* each other. There is no pre-given, 'natural' order of this interspecific communication. It is an interwoven, codependent, intertwined, entangled, organically structured vocal communication, which coexist through sonic patterns and thereby without masking each other.

Pablo Sanz uses the term 'phonocene', which suggests a geological era where sound and listening is understood as the dominant force shaping planet Earth. This might be a weird, quirky, maybe even impossible geological era, and maybe less an all-encompassing description *of* the world, as a mere hope *for* a world. A world where listening, is a highly valued asset. Listening together, listening with each other, listening despite conflict, listening in order to co-exist.

When walking around in central Vienna on a cold February afternoon the sound of wildlife is, if present at all, drowned and masked by the ambience of the cityscape. Cars, trucks, busses, trams, motorbikes, scooters, bicycles, airplanes are filling the air with a constant hum of motors accelerating, brakes squeaking, horns honking, sirens wailing, and tyres roaring as the consequence of the friction between the street and the vehicle in motion. Locals and visitors are walking in various paces from a to b, speaking with their partner, their friend, their colleague, speaking on the phone, listening to music or radio through in-ear noise cancelling headphones accompanied by the sound of busking street musicians and hooves hitting the ground from horses pulling carriages with tourists through the streets, while crossings are ticking fast and slow, and church bells sound from afar. A few birds are present. But it is difficult to hear the sonic biodiversity within a large city such as Vienna. Vienna has for example 135 protected species of butterflies, 20 species of bats, 450 types of wild bees, 100 species of breeding birds, around 4000 foxes, and in addition to that are badgers, beavers, otters, hamsters and 19 species of fish present.

We should not fall into the trap of understanding the Amazonian rainforest as idealised “pure nature” and Vienna as the hyper modern postindustrialized society outside of nature. All places on earth are interconnected on multiple levels. What Pablo Sanz is serving us with his work ‘Portal Phonocene’, is, as the title says, a portal. Not as in teleportation. You are still in the MuseumsQuartier in Vienna while encountering and experiencing the work. But as in phonoportation. You enter a portal of hyper real sounds from the other side of the globe as they might sound right now or might never have sounded. It’s an invitation to listen to how bats, and birds, and frogs, and amphibians, and insects are listening to each other, are listening together, while sounding. The composition blends into the soundscape of Vienna, the sound of footsteps from bypassers echoing in the passage, becoming knowingly or unknowingly passengers in a portal of sonic realisms, sonic imaginations, and sonic hallucinations. The portal is simultaneously real and unreal. It is simultaneously very concrete and utmost abstract. It is creating a situational apophenia where supposedly heard patterns maybe only existed within the mind of the visitor. And still the phonocene is real in the Amazonian rainforest as well as in Vienna.