

GEORG KLEIN LAURA MELLO

Dystopian Hopes

When we were planning the third edition of the DYSTOPIE festival in December 2019 – this time with Brazil as our guest country – we could not foresee that, on top of the current political implications, another dystopian dimension would be added: the Corona pandemic.

We feel all the more compelled to use the festival to show artistically conceived perspectives that allow a utopian vision to shine through dystopia – just as in the lockdown of spring 2020, when, for a short spell, the canals of Venice and the sky over Beijing were clear again, and we became acutely aware with unprecedented immediacy of the devastating consequences of our day-to-day consumption and commerce on our environment. But besides the pandemic, the signs of dystopian scenarios are also accumulating, whether in authoritarian states, or in the rising power of global corporations, or through the ever more drastic climate change.

The festival brings together international positions in sound art that expose dystopian moments. With the creation of »atmospheres« (Gernot Böhme) and the presentation of »non-places« (Marc Augé), sound art has the potential to turn the ambivalence of dystopia and utopia into a sensorial experience. Central questions reflecting various dystopian perspectives are addressed and sonified in audiovisual installations and performances.

Dystopian Listening

Prefixes – also called grammatical morphemes – distinguish the words formed with the suffix *-topia*. For the DYSTOPIE festival, topias are morphed: newly created, condensed, rubbed, superimposed, destroyed. If listening is a conversion of mechanical waves into neural information, is listening not also morphing? And if so, how do the iterations of this process influence the making of sound art? What happens when *dys-* (against) becomes *u-* (not), and *eu-* (good) becomes *a-* (without) *-topias*? When the works are then presented in an exhibition space, how do the ears of the

audience transform their impressions and how far do these impressions penetrate our cells or memory? And how can this radical task of listening be defined?

For Peter Szendy¹ the act of listening is always connected with aspects of power. In his foreword to *Making It Heard: A History of Brazilian Sound Art*², Ricardo Basbaum talks about the contemporary artist as a person who »will act as someone who engineers the act of engagement in a conversation, in the sense that s/he recognizes that there is something already going on there that can be heard, but necessarily has to be cut, interrupted.«

With the **symposium *Listening as a tool to blow out the bubble***, a premiere at this year's festival, we wish to open a window on a radical dystopian listening experience in a political time where talking to each other would often seem to be a utopian practice – manipulated by fake news and enclosed in echo rooms.

Sound Art in Bi-national Exchange

After the first double edition of the Berlin-Istanbul DYSTOPIE festival (2018/2019), this year's focus is on Brazil. The festival thus expands through intercultural exchange – beyond this, it also offers a platform to Brazilian sound artists, which seems crucial in the light of the recent political upheaval. The program of the festival was developed in cooperation with the UNIRIO University (Rio de Janeiro) and the collaborative network Sonora: músicas e feminismos (São Paulo). The project is to be resumed in Brazil in 2021, with the works produced here for Berlin.

Topias – spaces and places – have always played a central role in sound art. Often, therefore, it is not neutral concert halls and gallery spaces that are inspirational, but places with an unusual history, patina, and atmosphere. The main venue of this year's festival is the **Alte Münze** [Old Mint] in Berlin-Mitte, which offers a variety of artistic references and an extraordinary atmosphere with its basement spaces and vault rooms. The **Errant Sound** project space serves as a further exhibition venue for presentations, and on the walk between these two locations, along the Spree riverbank and vis-a-vis the Brazilian Embassy, sound art interventions will take place in **public space**.

The DYSTOPIE festival sees itself as a production festival and the works are predominantly new creations – some of them custom developed for the specific locations. The exhibition comprises 22 installative and performative works with the participation of 40 artists, including a concert afternoon with two world premieres by the Ensemble Adapter. Besides the creations of internationally renowned artists from Brazil, 17 projects out of 382 entries were selected by an international jury from a Europe-wide open call. In addition, the symposium, which is on site as well as online, takes a concentrated look at the Brazilian scene, complemented by a showcase of 20 works curated by Alexandre Sperandéo Fenerich, Laura Mello, and Sonora: músicas e feminismos, between experimental sound pieces and audiovisual creations.

The social reality of the year 2020 is not only reflected in the themes of each individual artistic work. Due to Corona, the festival program was shifted more towards an exhibition, artists invited to the residency were not allowed to travel, planned works had to be replaced by others. Despite this, we are happy that the festival can take place and would like to thank the German Federal Cultural Foundation for their great support, as well as the Berlin Senate Department for Culture and Europe and DeutschlandFunk Kultur (Marcus Gammel).

1 Peter Szendy, *Listen, A History of Our Ears*, Fordham University Press, 2008.

2 Rui Chaves and Fernando Iazzetta (Eds.), Bloomsbury 2019.

