

***Lebensraum* (2018) – Francis Heery**

“Who was born first, before the names? Which one saw the other come to this place, so long ago? Who will have been the first occupant, and therefore the master? Who the subject?”

Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*

This work is entirely comprised of the song of one nightingale, made available by the Tierstimmenarchiv at the Berlin Naturkundemuseum. It is a type of sonic habitat. It features many interwoven layers of this bird’s calls, with various degrees of processing. The main technique used was simply slowing the song down to different speeds, so that the human ear can catch the timings, pitch contours and variation of timbre. Sometimes I also sped up parts of the song and layered them, so that the result was not unlike insect calls. In fact while experimenting with only the speed of playback, it was surprising how the nightingale song seemed to ‘contain’ a host of other bio-acoustic phenomena within it – monkey calls, tropical birds, a variety of insects, sub-aquatic animals and human-like vocalizations began to emerge while experimenting in this way. Other types of modulation and time stretching effects were also used, and occasionally in the work I used a flocking simulation algorithm, which can be heard as dense swarm-like sonorities that emerge and quickly disappear.

Although there are many occasions where we hear the song of this nightingale in its unprocessed form, for example at the beginning and subsequently nestled within the layers of the piece as it progresses, more often it is transformed in different ways throughout the work. I was interested in retaining, or at least conjecturing on the internal *character* of the song, something of its hidden, esoteric essence.

The way we ourselves experience the nightingale’s call is obviously somewhat constrained not only because of our differing perception-world, but because we are only a passive audience to this spectacle and not the actual performer. The question of the subjective experience of non-humans is one of the most interesting philosophical issues and it was the main motivation behind composing this work. In a sense the composition is an attempt to begin to grasp how the nightingale itself might experience its own song, creating sound as a type of fascinated, superfluous (*i.e.* non-functional), but also deep and serious form of ‘play’.

In this way the work was also an attempt to provide an alternate route to understanding (and maybe ‘understanding’ is itself too strong a word...) the expressive activity of one species, and indeed one individual of that species; an understanding not guided by ideas of survival strategies, but rather by ideas of the uncanny, the weird, the unfamiliar – which is to say the aesthetic.

Francis Heery is an Irish composer and sound artist, living in Berlin.

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