



Anna Ceeh in Conversation with Franz Pomassl

AC: You've created a highly variegated body of work along the interface between sound and sound-related research. But any one of your activities—be it (to name only a few) the production of your own releases, your operation of the label Laton, sound installations, or your curatorial work as well—seems to be, and to function in a way that is, very rigorously conceptual, consistent, uncompromising.

FP: Sound is the defining medium of my many different activities and works. I make a close study of sound and its interdependencies, its outer reaches and zones of expansion, as well as the medium's future potentials. Using systems of order and disorder defined specifically for each individual modular project, production, etc., I try to tear open the largest space possible for the process of development and creative composition in order to take it to its intrinsic extreme.

AC: You are the curator of *The Morning Line* in Vienna. Which aspects did you consider as you selected the artists?

FP: We managed to bring a number of the most renowned artists and colorful key figures representing an advanced contemporary international sound scene to Vienna for *The Morning Line*. They do creative work in which the medium and material of sound is central and bring highly individual procedures and approaches to the table. When I did the programming for *The Morning Line* Vienna, several crucial programmatic emphases and thematic commonalities emerged—for example, pioneers of sound vs. very young positions (Finnbogi Petursson, Carsten Nicolai vs. Zavoloka, Zsolt Olejnik). The location, Vienna, forms a bridge between Western and Eastern Europe, and so it is especially important that we include the scene in Eastern Europe and the post-Soviet countries in our reflections (Zavoloka, Alexei Borisov, Olejnik, Nicolai); I have engaged with this scene a great deal over the past ten years, for instance in the project *Sonic Zones*. I also wanted to have strong queer and gender positions (Terre Thaemlitz, Zavoloka) be part of the project.

AC: What do you see as the indispensable general framework for your sound installations?

FP: In my space-specific sound installations and performances as well as my audible and tactile interventions, existing architectures, public spaces, and spaces of mass media become the carriers and transformers of my acoustic works and concepts. The point of departure is in most cases marked by the physical parameters and sound-specific qualities of the concrete room, as well as site-specific circumstances. I try to make the physical features and the phenomenon of sound appreciable to the senses of hearing and audio-tactile perception. The particular effect of my works often results from the use of infrasound frequencies. It is also important to me to create static—which is to say, undramatic, non-narrative, and musically unorganized—situations. Unlike most of my colleagues, I eschew visual stimuli altogether, trying to keep the spaces in which I work as neutral as possible, a-visual or dimmed, aiming at a very neutral perceptual situation. Rather than staging the sound system and the generators for the eye, I place them discreetly and use them in a purely functional fashion.

AC: You've brought out only a few albums, and those in fairly large intervals. The press unanimously



being ahead of your time.

FP: I don't want to become repetitive and try to keep surprising myself. Each new production starts virtually at zero, and bringing everything back down to that zero point is what takes the most time. Each of my albums so far was produced in no more than a few days. But beyond what happens during those few days, my publications represent a dense network of relationships and references, there are interconnections across albums (drawing on material from my own back catalogue), to other artists, and back to myself. *Spare Parts*, for example, is informed in part by new elements and in part by the absorption and transformation of my own existing material. The subversive appropriation of practices of pop and the experimental and conceptual expansion of my own forms of making music on the forefront of what is happening, these are my foremost concerns.

AC: The label Laton, which you cofounded with Alois Huber in the early 1990s, has already brought out around sixty releases. You describe it as an interface operation label. What exactly does that mean?


FP: In the early 1990s, it was difficult, even impossible, for Austrian productions to make the leap into the international market, and so several independent labels formed at the time. The first was Laton, which was meant to be an "electronic music operation label," a platform that would be open in all directions, with its own archive, production studios, sound laboratories, a record label, mobile organizational structures, international networks, and its own club, operated by Huber—an original structure that has remained unchanged to this day.

AC: You place great value not only on advanced sound but also on contemporary ways of describing it that are adequate to today's sound. What do you think is the correct term for what you do?

FP: Many definitions of terms people use today derive in part from the early era of sound art (the 1950s and 1960s), and so they are highly imprecise and often quickly lead to misunderstanding—which is to say, the theory definitely seems to lag behind in this instance. In order to foster development in this field, the Swedish sound and conceptual artist and curator Carl Michael von Hausswolff and I founded the International Society for Sonic Arts (ISSA) in 2009—an international research consortium that focuses on the area of advanced contemporary sonic art. Its activities include expert symposia, seminars, the organization of festivals, and the development of engineering technologies; it also engages in permanent collaborative dialogue and an exchange of knowledge with others all over the world.

AC: In recent years, the "sonic turn" has become a catchphrase in media and cultural studies. Sound as a medium and as a material has acquired greater significance. Do you think, or is it your experience, that sound indeed plays a more important role?

FP: Over the past twenty years, sound has emancipated itself as a medium in the domain of art and come to be established as an artistic discipline in its own right. With specialized events and solo and group exhibitions held over the past two decades (*Sonic Boom*, London, 2000; *Frequenzen [Hz]*, Frankfurt am Main, 2002; *See This Sound*, Linz, 2009), sound-based art has gradually risen to greater importance—it has become a matter of course for internationally renowned festivals of contemporary music and media art (*Mutek*, Montreal; *Sonar*, Barcelona; *Unsound*, Cracow) to include sound-based art. The immediate predecessors of today's auditive art can be traced back to around 1900; the sound sculpture emerged in the 1950s; and initial essential conceptions of



the sound installation were elaborated in the 1960s. Sound has now emancipated itself within the conglomerate of complementary media, demarcated its domain as a medium in its own right, and become a permanent element of today's "telematic culture" (Vilém Flusser).

AC: Do you see potential there with regard to current developments of new terminologies and transfers of knowledge?

FP: We have already entered a sort of "age of sound"—in various areas of the sciences, of research, medicine, etc., procedures of sonification are superseding imaging technologies, for example in medical diagnostics, or in the area of seismology.