

Stasi (First Study on Jakob Ullmann's Horos Meteoros)

by Giulia Bini

A disciplined progression punctuates the pace of the two voices. The appearance of the sound reveals its origins: a recording on magnetic tape then subjected to digital filtering, an operation of sculpture and alteration of the initial material, of which *Stasi (First Study on Jakob Ullmann's Horos Meteoros)* is the point of arrival.

Two performers, Letizia Fiorenza and David Sautter, whom Francesco Fonassi asked to maintain a constant tonal emission for 50 minutes, lend themselves to an exercise of physical exhaustion, without looking at one another, joined solely by the resonance of their voices. The carnality of the human voice maintains its unmistakable acoustic identity, and at the same time becomes the substrate for an operation which – by sculpting the sound digitally – leads it to a plastic dimension, a perceptive re-modulation which is a precise poetical choice.

That of *Stasi* is a hermetic space, constructed on the basis of a dilated sense of time, the same as that of the rendition of the two performers: an audio track, the duration of which calls for a willingness to listen and reflect. A work which in the career of Fonassi seems to represent a moment of calm, a point of suspension, of passage in which the references that return in the artist's research emerge in their primary, elementary state from the same sidereal distance as that from which the voices themselves emerge.

There is no silence, *Stasi* is essentially configured as a taut cord, a continuous sonic fabric in which a process breaks down the sound and pieces it back together again; filter after filter, it determines its timbric intensity and vibration, emphasising the female voice, which immediately emerges as the driving force. "In order to emancipate herself, the voice of a woman needs the living presence of the body to support her," wrote Adorno in 1927, in his reflections on the gramophone as a tool with which to faithfully reproduce the 'natural and original image' of the voice, when there was still the illusion of the 'specular function' of the means of reproduction. An awareness of a different kind lies at the basis of the operation implemented by Fonassi: that proposal is not the reproduction of a recording, an act already technologically mediated in its own right, but the result of a process of elaboration and post-production which, by intensifying certain qualitative characteristics of the sound, by dissecting it, taking it apart, makes *Stasi* a *representation* of the event from which it originated, adding variables of perception and sense that belong to the work solely by virtue of how it is displayed and listened to. While a testimony of those bodies, of that encounter, may manifest itself in the space, this cannot but be implemented by presenting them in their dissolution into pure vocal forces.

The emission-reception cycle, so crucial in the dialogue between the two performers, spreads across the acoustic field, through a pondered positioning of the loudspeakers. In this way, the basic frequencies of the two voices ensure that that intimate dialogue goes as far as to include the listener as a third interlocutor, defining the final act of a study on the voice that the artist has investigated in his previous works. In *Aerial* (2012), a number of performers were asked to tune into the sound module of a plane landing, recorded and manipulated, and blend into it, reproducing it live in the exhibition space. In *Stasi*, on the other hand, there is no 'liveness' but an ambiguous

acoustic backdrop, in which the evocative power of the human voice – sculpted and transformed – takes on more abstract connotations. The male timbre, gradually tapered, seems to shift back to an inorganic state, retracting into an underground, primordial concretion, serving as a sounding hollow, portraying the figurative landscape which the visitor enters. A space full of acoustic energy, the conditions of existence of which are determined by an intervention of distortion of the original information. In its gradual coldness, in the volumes that are progressively turned down, *Stasi* is reminiscent of the atmospheres evoked in the music of the minimalist German composer Jakob Ullmann, whose production provided the artist with the initial inspiration for his own work. Fonassi is well aware of the *affective* qualities of tonality, the power of their impact on the receiver; nevertheless, his interest does not concern the ‘sensual mathematics of the codes and vibrations’, or rather the sound in his works becomes a device through which to affirm one’s presence and to carry out analyses of the social dynamics regulating behaviours, as well as the means by which to demand the visitor to take up a position. While an element of disturbance recurs in *Stasi*, it lies in the tension generated by the duration of the audio. There is no climax; the force of the composition is not displayed here as turbulence, but rather in terms of grasp and stamina: the following of the two voices, the effort made – perceivable in the moments in which they take breath once again – corresponds to the commitment asked of the listener.

In the recording room, a liberating laughter finally broke the tension accumulated by the performers during their performance. A detail which the artist decided to omit from the final rendition of the work, aware that the geometrical rigour of its development, the limits that mark out its extension, do not restrict the power of that field but rather accentuate it. *Stasi* in this sense delegates to the visitor the choice whether to stay put or not. Through one’s permanence in the space – that condition evoked by the title, not elucidated in its historical concreteness but deliberately left as a hint – serves as a subtle reference to a meditative spiritual and mental state, and at the same time as a metaphor for a contemporary condition. A hypothesis to bear in mind, trying to see the work on the basis of the plastic approach that characterises it and the rules of listening that determine its fruition. An imposing sound horizon, an acoustic shadow to enter, to experience or to undergo.