FRANCE

SCHIZOPHONIA
Centre d'Art Contemporain
La Synagogue de Delme

In the early 1980s, Adrian Piper toured American universities teaching college kids how to get funky. One of these sessions, at UC Berkeley in 1983, is captured in the short film *Funk Lessons* included in 'Schizophonia'. 'Our aural sensibility', Piper explains, 'is probably the most intimate sense we have.' But she is also aware that music can be a source of what she calls 'trauma' – those adolescent embarrassments that we carry through our lives which can inhibit our unselfconscious enjoyment of music. Both history lesson and dance class, *Funk Lessons* attends as much to the pleasures of music as to its politics. Piper will dance to Talking Heads, but she's wary of the way white musicians have made money by exploiting the innovations of black pioneers like Bootsy Collins. These multiple layers of reference resonate throughout the works included in 'Schizophonia'.

Curated by Anna Colin and Sam Thorne (who was, until recently, associate editor of *frieze*), 'Schizophonia' brings together a number of works by artists engaged with sound and music – in all their sensual and traumatic excesses. The Otolith Group's *People to be Resembling* (2012) is an affectionate tribute to the Codona jazz trio; Lawrence Abu Hamdan's papers and posters in *Conflicted Phonemes* (2012) detail the way the sound of an asylum-seeker's voice can become a site of political contestation; Sharon Hayes's *An Ear to the Sounds of Our History* (2011) builds new meanings from the juxtaposition of old spoken-word recordings. The exhibition's title comes from the essay 'The New Soundscape', written by acoustic ecologist R. Murray Schafer in 1968. 'Schizophonia', for Schafer, referred to 'the cutting free of sound from its natural origins', setting out to record the changing relationship between our bodies and the sounds around them.

We were beset by sounds even before we step through the door of Delme synagogue. Amidst the noise of the wind in the trees and the passing traffic, a highly dissonant piece for solo piano drifted out of concealed speakers (the instrumental source, *pace* Schafer, was nowhere to be seen). The sound would undoubtedly have pleased the composer Christian Wolff, who instinctively developed his own version of Arnold Schoenberg's 12-tone system and encouraged his mentor John Cage to play piano with the window open to let the street noise in. The sound is a sonification of a piece by Latifa Echakhch, *Resolutions (in progress)* (2009), which, on the walls inside, records in charcoal the numbers of every UN resolution on the Israel–Palestine conflict. The numbers seem to expand deliriously, climbing up to the first floor, even intruding into the next level. Like memories, they are also steadily disintegrating, their dust collecting on the floor. But by rendering them musically, otherwise obscure relationships become clear. As inSchoenberg's 12-tone technique, their dissonances are never resolved.

Upstairs, more conflicts were rendered in sound. Franck Leibovici's *evenings of poetry and other inspiring speeches* (2013), specially commissioned for the show, extends his ongoing 'mini-opera for non-musicians' with a set of nine music stands, each bearing the distinctive off-white sheets of music manuscripts. The French artist has transcribed the collective music of special forces troops, comments threads and jihadists, all found online, taking care to spare no *sforzando*, no carefully notated nuance *espressivo*. In the extensive text beside the installation, Leibovici highlights the parallel between his scores and the so-called fake books of old which reified the oral tradition of jazz into something objectified, lifeless, commodifiable. But the lack, in these scores, of all the slides, slurs and microtones which you would expect from directly transcribed untrained voices – subtleties which were once excluded by written music – suggests Leibovici has himself reduced the living tradition of written music that he seems to criticize. Today, music

1

manuscript is a far more agile beast than the straw man propped up on these stands. A true chamber work, however, Leibovici's piece is more contrapuntal than that: he knows that, in recording these songs on paper, he is also giving them a permanence, a place in history from which they would otherwise be excluded.

Schafer's original soundscape project was ultimately a conservative one. He feared the encroachment of the noises of modern life, and the opportunities provided by recording. But once sounds are cut from their sources and objectified as recordings, they can open up a wide variety of new uses, meanings and pleasures. *Playhead: A Parallel Anthology* (2013), by Open Music Archive (a.k.a. Eileen Simpson and Ben White), plays selections from Harry Smith's legendary *Anthology of American Folk Music* (1952) along with later recordings and remixes of the same songs. Compiled from recordings made between 1926 and 1933, the original *Anthology* collected vernacular songs performed by rural singers. I have a great deal of affection for Smith's *Anthology* and many of these remixes (particularly those by Leafcutter John and Beatrice Dillon). But Simpson and White accompany their video with a booklet detailing which recordings are currently in the public domain. The leaflet's heavy black lines, scoring out songs still under copyright, imply that there's something inherently censorial about authors' rights. At a time when many of the world's biggest corporations are doing everything they can to erode them, this aspect of the project seems to do little more than reiterate a now-mainstream techno-libertarian common sense.

'Schizophonia' tended to work best when the artists were focusing less on music itself, and more on music as a means of viewing the world. 'I do not feel that a musician himself makes the music,' says one of the interviewees in the Otolith Group's film. 'The musician is only a filter.' For Piper, Echakhch and others, music can be just such a filter – one that reveals more than it occludes.

ROBERT BARRY