

You Are Here: Sonic Crossings and Time Indeterminacy within the Buffer Zone

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ABSTRACT

'You Are Here' is a sound installation that took place on the 24th of March 2017 inside the buffer zone as an attempt to address the temporal indeterminacy that describes the buffer zone during daylight saving time in Cyprus. After a political decision to join different time zones, the island underwent a second division, this time in a temporal sense, which in return raised a question: in what time does the buffer zone itself exist and how does time change while crossing the buffer zone?

This article briefly outlines some of the technical, aesthetic and theoretical considerations that the artist underwent while preparing the site-specific and site-responsive sound installation.



Figure 1. Installation view.

1. INTRODUCTION

As of October 31st 2016, following a political decision¹, the buffer zone that separates the island of Cyprus exists periodically 'out-of-time'. Borrowing what Ignasi de Solà-Morales Rubió describes as a *terrain vague* [1] in urban space, the buffer zone is doubly vague since not only space but also time becomes indeterminate within it; it is, in fact, a unique case of a *tempe vague*.

¹ <http://cyprus-mail.com/2016/09/08/two-time-zones-cyprus-turkey-will-not-turn-clocks-back-next-month/>

2. FROM 'TERRAIN VAGUE' TO 'TEMPE VAGUE'

In his essay, Solà-Morales sought to establish some links between architecture photography to the development of modern architecture, *via* the former's ability to distil the vagueness of certain desolate urban spaces: 'unincorporated margins, interior islands void of activity, oversights' that 'exist outside the city's effective circuits' (p. 120). According to Solà-Morales, the term itself - 'terrain vague' - does not translate to other languages without losing some of its critical value, since both 'terrain' and 'vague' share several meanings on their own and, therefore, in combination.

According to Solà-Morales' translation the French 'terrain' is better understood as having an urban quality that extends the 'precisely limited ground fit for construction, for the city' and 'vague' has a triple signification: it can signify at the same time 'wave', 'vacant' and 'vague'.

Arguing whether Cyprus' buffer zone already is a 'terrain vague' itself is beyond the scope of this article. The definition of what constitutes a 'terrain vague' however is a fruitful starting point to begin to question what a 'tempe vague' would be. 'You Are Here' sought to address temporal vagueness within the buffer zone that divides the island by precisely capturing sound that crossed the border from either side, in real-time, implementing to it temporal transformations and diffused through a multi-channel system.



Figure 2. Event's poster.

3. SETTING-UP ‘YOU ARE HERE’

Deriving its title from what one normally finds as a location indication on maps, ‘You Are Here’ was the first of an ongoing series of sonic interrogations and interventions within the buffer zone.

In collaboration with The Home for Cooperation, I got access to their building’s rooftop and was allowed to set-up parabolic microphones in order to pick up sound from both sides of the buffer zone, transform its temporal structure before diffusing it inside their gallery space across the street.

From the outset of the installation I knew the sound would have to circumvent any form of latency found in network-based transmission, in order to transform sound as closely as possible to ‘real time’ and preserve its temporal structure. Hence, the sound was carried over daisy-chained XLR cables across the rooftop and into the gallery space.



Figure 3. “Sonic crossing” from rooftop to gallery space.

In order to pick up sounds from both sides, which would have been as far as 100m, I repurposed some IKEA pendant lamps to get similar effects that parabolic microphones have. Some socio-aesthetic considerations behind this choice were: i) I did not want to point shotgun microphones to either side, as it would carry some aggressive connotations and even hint at eavesdropping, even though I never ‘listened’ what the microphone picked up, and ii) it was a way of commenting on a political phenomenon that relates to crossing the border; namely, that IKEA has been one of the main attractions for why many Turkish-Cypriots cross the border into the south. Anyone visiting IKEA will notice that it becomes a space where one can listen both languages. IKEA has also been in the past a matter of dispute for both sides, as it did consider opening a store in North Cyprus².

It is worth re-iterating that at no stage there was a recording of unprocessed sound in order to stay in line with a signed agreement with UN that resides across The Home of Cooperation. This was a limitation to be rethought in future buffer zone sonic endeavours.



Figure 4. IKEA parabolic microphones.

4. TIME BECOMES VAGUE ONCE IT CROSSES THE BORDER

The overall idea that informed the transformation of the temporal structure of the soundscape *within* the buffer zone can be summarized in the following manner:

Given that the border delineates two different time zones, sound within the buffer zone picked up from either side would have to adhere to the temporal transformations that the political status quo prescribes.

Hence, the three-day, three-channel sound installation was an aural experiment on time manipulation and an imaginary, admittedly and knowingly falsified, series of attempts on time travelling that carried on until March 26th when the temporal paradox within the buffer zone reached its apex and time zone difference resolved itself, or at least suspended, until the next daylight saving time change.

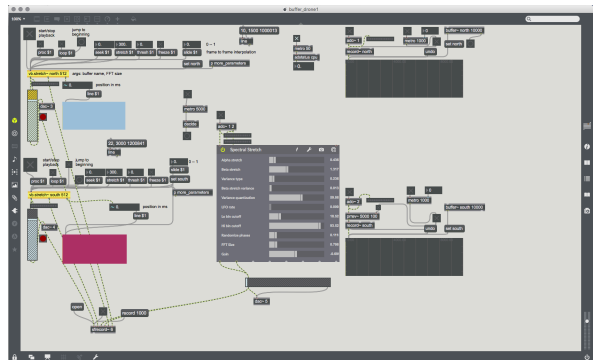


Figure 6. Temporal transformation of sounds picked up

5. REFERENCES

- [1] Davidson, C., & Anyone Corporation. (1995). *Anyplace*. New York, N.Y. : London: Anyone ; MIT Press.

² <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/business/7176583.stm>