

Köllt/Kulu: the power of sound

In his last publication Francisco López presents us two pieces, Köllt and Kulu, both with an audiovisual and an audio version. In this work, the artist has blurred the boundaries between field recordings and artificial sounds by means of an artful manipulation of sound. As a result the field recordings are no longer identifiable, and have lost all visual association.

Even in the audiovisual version of Köllt, where there seems to be a correspondence between the displayed images of ant activity and the frantic sounds we hear, it is never clear what these sounds really are. But they could not be more appropriate. The complexity, diversity and slow change of the intense and percussive sequences of sound of this track, expresses, better than unaltered field recordings, the intensity, abundance and overwhelming lushness of life.

Köllt/Kulu is therefore no mere succession of field recordings. The composition is elaborated and the sounds obtained have a pristine quality. Even in the heaviest fragments, where fluttering insects and heavy machinery have become one and the same banging noise, sounds appear clear cut and precise.

The audio version of Köllt presents the most complex composition. With an impressive command of sound manipulation López creates a powerful metal-related percussion that gives place to sliding layers of sound, which slow down, change and are reflected in the forthcoming sequence, just to be decomposed again in its changing elements, and dissolved into silence. By way of the carefully displayed composition the constant drumming of metallic and sharp sounds, which initially assault us aggressively, acquire a surprisingly calming and soothing character. The same thing happens in Kulu, which is also very intense, and which consists, in both the audio and the audiovisual version, of a succession of short sequences separated by long silences, where each sequence is a variation of the prior sequence. The name of this piece is therefore appropriate -Kulu is an Australian aboriginal term that means “seed”-, because it is made of small fragments, sound seeds, which develop through an evolutionary process into an unexpected diversity of sounds.

The interplay between sounds, moving back and forth, the sliding of layers of sound over and under other layers and the ever changing aspect of the sounds that construct a sequence, just to dissolve it immediately after, are all so demanding on the attention of the listener, that only when the piece finishes do we realise that we were completely immersed in the sequence of sounds and in the experience it brought forth.

And the experience of sound is definitely something that this work brings us near to. Moving away from representation, from identification of sound sources, and elaborating a composition that is near to an organic development of the sounds themselves, López creates a sonic world of its own. A world where sounds acquire all their intensity, strength and power, and become all there is.

text by S. Porrúa