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QO2 Field Festival Program Notes
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It was 1993. I was living in Berlin and had managed to scrape together enough money to buy a DAT recorder and some binaural microphones from a shop nearby my house which was making them. Years before I had encountered the music of Pierre Henry, Pierre Schaeffer and Luc Ferrari. The way they employed sounds – any sounds – to be used as material in compositions was very inspiring for me. I came to music as a drummer in rock bands and had no formal background in composition, in the conventional sense of the word, nor in working with sounds in this concrete context. Around the time I managed to buy this recording equipment I also had the opportunity to use a friend's sampler, thus giving me the chance to arrange these sounds in crude compositions. Along side many percussion sounds I also slowly began to integrate recordings I'd made outside my studio. At that time I had never heard of the term “field recording” nor would I have ever thought that this endeavor would blossom into this whole movement or that I would be playing at a festival called The Field Fest eighteen years later.

It took until 1998 for me to finally get around to finishing some compositions integrating environmental recordings, percussion and short wave radio. These pieces became the CD “Analogues,” whose title referred not the quality of the sounds – analog vs. digital – but rather to these pieces being analogous to the life I'd drawn them from, both in a material as well as experiential sense. I'd also acquired a computer by now (though “Analogues” was made with a sampler) and started to focus more on working with these sound recordings as concrete material, sometimes shaping them like clay, other times leaving them unprocessed. It slowly dawned on me that a recording could in and of itself be like a composition, comprised of a system of decisions regarding the way a recording was made. And still, it took another few years for me to realize that, though I hadn't necessarily re-invented the wheel, there were a whole slew of people out there who had been doing this for years, and not just people from the academia, but people like myself with no formal background or training in this field.

Over the next years I continued reading about these other people, listening to their music, even having the chance to play or record with some of them. And I read and read, both about the theory and history of this music, as well as about the technique which went into recording. And slowly, but surely I was able to buy more sensitive, more specialized microphones, better recorders. My ears also became more attuned. I gradually acquired a sense of what to listen for.

By now, as I look around me, the world seems like something I might have only imagined in my wildest dreams eighteen years ago: a computer costs only a fraction of what I paid for my first laptop, which in the context of today's computers, could really do almost nothing at all; open source software means one doesn't have to spend any money on editing or mixing programs; sound recorders have shrunk to the size of a pack of cigarettes and record in pristine high-resolution sound quality, at a price so low that this technology is in reach of nearly anyone in the west; and microphones, still probably the most expensive part of the equation, have also become more affordable. On top of all this, there are huge internet communities focused on phonography, nature recording, microsound, just to name a very few. This translates to lots of advice and general data about all aspects surrounding field recording being widely available; whereas when I was starting I had to diligently hunt down all this information in libraries and bookstores. I didn't even have any friends who were interested in this.

And now, full circle, I've been invited to perform at The Field Festival. In 2007 I was an artist in

residence at QO2. In addition to exhibiting a new room installation I also gave a performance from my series “Unheard Cities,” which focuses on how we perceive sound in urban environments. For my performance in QO2 I spent several days making recordings in Brussels and using these as material for a four-channel improvised musical performance. On the basis of this Julia Eckhardt invited me back to Brussels for The Field Festival. But this time I won't be making any sound, or at least, the only sound will be coming from my voice. What does this have to do with field recording?

In this new series of works, entitled “In Place,” I wanted to address the process of what transpires when I go to a place to make a recording. Of course, I come away with a recording of something. I've made my catch of material or perhaps a stand-alone composition or panoramic still life. But more than this I take back with me the experience of spending time in a place, absorbing that place in all its details: its sights, its sounds, how on emotional and intellectual levels I interacted with this place. When I am back home listening to the recordings a rush of memories accompanies them, much like Proust's famous biscuit in his cup of tea unleashing a torrent of recollections from his childhood. My mind wanders beyond the recordings and their subtleties. I begin to think about the place, how I felt being there, what that place was about in terms of its social context, its function; how people reacted to me being there, to what my mind was thinking while I was making the recordings—all this mental and emotional material existing alongside the snazzy sound files I'd managed to make with all my shiny equipment.

So I decided, why not just write a text about this process, about my time spent in a place making a recording? And the text itself would be the field recording, with my reading the text a presentation of the place. My words and the emotions they convey...will this reveal more about the place I've spent time in than an actual sound recording? Or just something different? What does it mean to spend time in a place and just being there? Not doing anything there. Not making a recording. Not taking notes. Not making photos or doing anything at all but just being there?

I have to thank my friend Manfred Werder for helping me to move along in this direction. We recently worked on a realization of his composition “2005(1) : 'ort / zeit / (klänge),” which involved me standing in Zurich's main train station fifteen minutes every day at the same time for one month. Ostensibly, the realization of this piece involved just standing in the train station; but we also settled on recording this as, in the context of generally accepted contemporary musical practice, a recording is made as a kind of document of a composition's realization. The upshot of me spending so much time in the train station, aside from making a very nice set of recordings, was the process of learning to perceive a space in an extended and very focused fashion. And, perhaps more than this, I had the sensation of beginning to perceive my perception itself as a kind of object to maneuver around. The space became less the main hall of the train station than the thoughts in my head while standing there. Which led me to think, perhaps I should try writing a text about this process—a sound recording does not convey this at all.

“In Place” is also to a large extent influenced by my reading of the works of Henri Lefebvre, in particular his two books “The Production of Space” and “Rhythmanalysis.” Lefebvre dissects the issue of space, what constitutes a space, how we can create a space, what the social elements are of a space and how we interact with a space on these different planes. The daily rhythms of life, the dynamics of time passing and spaces changing over time, both on the grand historical scale from erection to ruin, as well as on the daily level all shape how space is formed and experienced. And these are precisely the issues I want to explore in spending time in different spaces, investigating them, experiencing them and then reflecting about them. “In Place” exposes what remains at the juncture between the space's physical presence and the presence of my voice, embodying my experience of that space on all its planes.