



FILIPA RAMOS

## MEETING THE BEAR HALFWAY

- AN INTERFACE FOR TUOMAS A. LAITINEN'S THE EARTH IS THE EAR OF THE BEAR

I am writing this text while listening to **Tuomas A. Laitinen's** *Sapiduz*, an album he released in early 2022. In it, the artist brought together the mood and polyphonic entanglements of Early Music, which he digitally disassembled and capsized, placing them atop cosmic sonic backgrounds. Each melody becomes a capsule in which ancestral and future tones, digital and human realms, organic and synthetic matters are enmeshed to create something that is as strange as it is familiar.

***"No person could have created these sounds alone."***

On my favourite track, also called *Sapiduz*, I picture the medieval mystic **Hildegard of Bingen** suffering from an aural migraine, surrounded by bees that hum around her to ease her pain. No person could have created these sounds alone, no machine would be capable of engendering such melodies and no animal would mind composing such tunes. Together, thanks to Laitinen's will, the generative skills of a machine and excerpts of nonhuman agency, a series of compositions were created that belong as much to this world as they open a myriad of parallel, trance-inducing sonic universes.

Listening to *Sapiduz* while writing these words allows me to imagine the environment Laitinen will create for the Ars Fennica Award, which will only materialise itself once the text has been written. My words precede the installation but have the responsibility of fostering the relationship between viewers, artworks and space that will be occur during the exhibition. Thinking of **Laura Tripaldi's** definition of the interface as 'a space of encounter in which two different bodies come together to form a completely new state of matter,<sup>1</sup> I treat these pages as such generative meeting place that emerges out of the materialisation of words that will be read on a printed page.

**HABITAT CASCADE, 2019**

exhibition view: "Tuomas A. Laitinen - Habitat Cascade"  
Wäinö Aaltonen Museum of Art  
photo: Ville Mäkilä / WAM



Methodologically, I am aligned with much of Laitinen's practice, which investigates the generative potential of recipes and its correlation between formula and outcome, preparation and shared content. Laitinen's work engages with how language and sound exist through bodies, imagining the various shapes they assume when the physical and spatial conditions that generate and host it mutate. Similarly, this text is a simultaneous becoming installation and reception: announcing, conducting and adhering to the conditions that led to its existence.

Laitinen's interest in language extends itself beyond the human realm, contributing to disassemble the monopoly of cognitive and expressive processes that until recently dominated the definition of the human. In the installation *Habitat Cascade* (2019), he exhibited the results of his interest in octopuses' sentience, which led him to observe and engage with these animals. One of the ways in which he did so was through the installation of a series of glass mazes entitled *A Proposal for an Octopus* (2019) that the octopuses could explore, traverse and occupy, a

***"Installation Habitat Cascade (2019) exhibited the results of his interest in octopuses' sentience."***

process he documented in the video *Haemocyanin* (2019). In tandem, he designed *CTongue* (2018), a writing system inspired by the movement of octopuses' arms. This system exists as a digital typeface and as a series of modular glass objects whose vermicular shapes resemble other worms and snakes whose life is now independent from the octopuses that generated them. They also recall the scribbles people do when writing in an automatic, unconscious manner. These scribbles are paralinguistic expressions in which quasi-verbal forms emerge from the



**HAEMOCYANIN, 2019**  
still image from a video, 8 min  
UHD, Stereo

hand but exist beyond meaning. Reflecting on the relationship between corporeal and enunciative matters, Laitinen explains how this series 'was also a way to think about the movements of the body as a language, as a complex system of emergence and adaptation, without collapsing into a binary mode where language and signs are separated from the processes of the body.'<sup>2</sup>

***“New mode of perceiving that challenged the tropes of normality.”***

Before interacting with such an outlandish creature as the octopus, the artist played with the possibilities of transformation of the human face, which holds so much of our species' communicative and expressive means. For this, he created a series of glass sculptures, *Sensory Adaptation Devices (2015)*. Worn

as a mask, covering the entire face, they altered and interrupted a person's conventional communication and orientation systems, as they distorted vision and sound for who was wearing them and for those around them. This created a new mode of per-

ceiving and being perceived that challenged the tropes of normality, efficiency and functionality traditionally associated to the human body. Acting again like an interface,

a zone of contact and transformation, they reveal the interdependency of consciousness, experience and perception.

Such an interest in attunement, and in triggering a higher awareness of one's relationship to place and space, is another feature of Laitinen's work. He



**S.A.D. #14, 2022**  
from the series "Sensory Adaptation Series" (2015-),  
cover of Kaukolampi's album "Inside the Sphere"  
photo: Wilhelm Sjöström

pays attention to how agency is equally distributed across humans and nonhumans, living and non-living beings, questioning such taxonomic divisions and inviting people to notice how systems of world-making, bypass the conventional species divide and are found in some many ways. For *The Earth is the Ear of the Bear*, he pursues such understanding of

how to exist is to be a body in relation to other bodies, investigating the role played by sound and the practices of listening. In an immersive environment where a hypnotic video plays in continuum, a series of metallic sculptural beings carrying ultrasonic speakers reverberate sounds that are emitted from the bodies that intercept them in space. Visitors will

incorporate these sounds, grow them out of their bodies and mix them in the space while moving around, creating an experience that transcends the boundaries of the systems that generate and receive them.

The Earth is the Ear of the Bear gets its name from an excerpt from **Roberto Calasso's** book *The Celestial Hunter* (2016), an elegant inquiry upon chasing and metamorphosis, presented as essential processes of becoming human. Proposing that hunting differentiated humankind from other animals, Calasso considers the bear as a figure of in-between – an interface – across humans and the natural world they tried to leave behind. The bear stands for a continuum, a being that is intrinsically

***“Bear as a figure in between - an interface - across humans and the natural world.”***

connected to humankind, to the point that it can hear people's thoughts. The bear also exists as a planetary whole, transcending any physical and metaphorical boundaries.<sup>3</sup>

The bear reveals that to listen is to be listened to. By hearing the bear, the bear hears you. By looking for the bear, the bear looks for you, from within, through their body. Having the earth as its ear, the bear makes humans realise that they have never fully disconnected themselves from the natural realm, that ecology is not an invention of science but a system of togetherness that makes the world every day anew.



**EARTH IS THE EAR OF THE BEAR, 2023**

still image from a video  
UHD, Stereo

**REFERENCES**

<sup>1</sup> Laura Tripaldi, *Parallel Minds – Discovering the Intelligence of Materials*. Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2022, p.8.

<sup>2</sup> Tuomas A. Laitinen in conversation with Filipa Ramos on occasion of the presentation of *Haemocyanin* on Vdrome. Vdrome #182, March 2022, <http://www.vdrome.org/tuomas-a-laitinen/>.

<sup>3</sup> 'Because the bear could also be a man. People

had to be careful when talking, since the bear could hear everything said about it, even when it was far away. Even when it retired into its den, even when it was asleep, the bear carried on following what was happening in the world. "The earth is the ear of a bear," people said! Roberto Calasso, *The Celestial Hunter*. London: Penguin Books, 2020, p.10.