

## Hecker

### Articulação

Editions Mego CD/DL

*Articulação* begins with a 25 minute piece titled *Hinge*\*. A voice – Joan La Barbara – speaks against a heavily distorted echo of itself, reading aloud a complex tract by Iranian philosopher Reza Negarestani. After a couple of minutes the echo disappears and is replaced by another recording of La Barbara's voice, reciting a different section of the same text. Both break into a melodic lilt, half-spoken, half-sung, at once playful and arch. The tone of the piece changes immediately. The text's maze-like postulations and clusters of academic jargon are undercut by an almost comic style of delivery, while the superimposition of the two voices amplifies the text's complexities, conveying an amount of information which is difficult to parse.

After 11 minutes, the register shifts again. The two voices begin to read the same text simultaneously at similar speeds and in similar styles. As they overlap and shift in and out of sync with each other, continually converging and diverging in an erratic, undulating rhythm, the text and its representation in sonic form are set in a dynamic, volatile relationship. The slippages and crossovers between the two voices both mirror the text's complexities and refract them back at it. *Hinge*\* renders Negarestani's text as a living entity, eluding interpretation, its meanings shifting within a single reading or from one reading to another, depending on physical or environmental contexts: how, when, where or why we read it; whether we read it or hear it read; and if the latter, by whom, in what accent and tone of voice, and with what choices of emphasis and delivery.

Originally presented as a sound installation in a Lisbon gallery – hence the Portuguese album title which translates as *Articulation* – *Hinge*\* is a complex hybrid of text and sound, of a kind which has come to characterise Florian Hecker's recent gallery work. As a trilogy of pieces produced over the past few years in collaboration with Negarestani shows, Hecker has expanded the scope of his earlier work radically, retaining its rigour of sound design and execution, and its interest in psychoacoustics and sound spatialisation, while expanding its focus to incorporate texts, and embellishing it with an enhanced ambition in application and reach.

His recent interest in text can be seen in parallel with his long-running investigation of psychoacoustics, the perceptual process of hearing. Both are aesthetic analyses of the ways in which we process and comprehend sonic information. This development first became obvious on *Speculative Solution* (2011), a commission from theorist Robin Mackay's Urbanomic organisation to produce a sound work in response to a text by Quentin Meillassoux, which, in Hecker's words, "suggests that there is no logical necessity to the persistence of natural laws, and that a pure logical 'hyperchaos' underlies nature." Meillassoux is one of the proponents of speculative realism, a radical strain of contemporary European philosophy. Mackay introduced Hecker to the work of Negarestani, whose work is tangentially linked to speculative realism, from whom Hecker commissioned the texts which form the basis of this trilogy.

*Articulação* is its second part. The first was 2012's *Chimerization*, where recitations of a Negarestani libretto in three

different languages – English, German and Farsi – were recorded in an anechoic chamber, then subjected to computer treatments in a process Hecker terms decomposition. This technique found visual parallel in imagery – which appeared in the installation, as well as on the sleeves for Editions Mego's vinyl editions of the three *Chimerization* pieces – modified using an algorithmic programme called SIFT Flow, a customised version of which Hecker commissioned for the project. When the libretto was published in book form, its type was decomposed using software which resynthesises existing fonts into a new typeface, gradually rendering text illegible.

*Articulação* is a sequel of sorts to *Chimerization*. The similarities become apparent in *Hinge*\*\*, an alternate interpretation which offers a rather more drastic reworking. Two voices – Indian historian Sugata Bose and German theatre actor and director Anna Kohler – read the same Negarestani text, yet rather than being juxtaposed, their voices are blurred together. Electronic effects bombard the voices, the text slowly fragments and disintegrates, swamped completely by sound until it's unintelligible. The rewards of Hecker's increasingly multivalent approach become clear: the same piece of writing yields two very different sound pieces, one ostensibly sterile, the other unashamedly confrontational. The two are positioned in a symbiotic opposition to each other, both yielding a range of different registers, from the playful to the deadly serious, and each rippling with conceptual complexity and textural ambiguity.

Though it's increasingly focused on the gallery setting, Hecker's music has lost none of its intensity and abrasiveness, as

anyone who has witnessed one of his recent live performances will attest. For further evidence see *Articulação*'s third track, the 29 minute *Modulator* (...*Meaningless, Affectless, Out Of Nothing...*). Several of its component parts appear in *Hinge*\*\* in similar or modified form, but it's a significant work in its own right, echoing the *Hinge* works in its volatile internal logic and fracturing of the interpretative process. Its succession of discrete passages link together oscillating tones, asynchronous algorithmic shapes, click tones in looping arrangements, arpeggiated pulse patterns and collapsible waveforms. Instances of structural rhyming and sequential connections flash into earshot before abruptly disappearing, and intricate relationships of trajectory, rhythm and pitch develop and mutate, yielding moments of recognition and insight.

The trilogy's final part is CD – *A Script For Synthesis*, premiered at New York arts festival Performa in November. In earlier Hecker installations the speakers were the sole visual element. CD – *A Script For Synthesis* is a fully staged performance piece, complete with outlandish costuming and a psychedelic light show. It polarised critical opinion, yet the ambition it displayed – a new Negarestani libretto recited by Charlotte Rampling, a Greek-style chorus clad in all white sci-fi nun gowns under the direction of La Barbara, textiles and a perfume commissioned for the occasion – explodes sound art's traditional confines. By enlarging his work's conceptual focus through his engagement with philosophical texts, and expanding its material scope to encompass different materials and technological processes, Hecker has opened up for himself multiple new realms of possibility. □



A crash course in decomposition: Florian Hecker

A collaboration between **Florian Hecker** and philosopher Reza Negarestani underlines the ever-expanding parameters of his art. By **Nick Cain**