

Mapping v a p o r w a v e

In an atmosphere even cosier than usual, with a changed arrangement of the chairs, dimmed lights and the presentation projected directly on the wall, Vygintas Orlovas introduced us to v a p o r w a v e (spelled like this, with spaces in between the letters), a “micro-genre” of music born in 2009 and rooted in an internet-based sub-culture keen on experimenting by pirating, reusing, manipulating and collaging existing tunes. Starting as an ironic joke, v a p o r w a v e evolved into something much more complex, blurring the boundaries between high art and pop culture; it is inspired by John Oswald, who in a 1985 essay argued that audio piracy should become part of the composer’s tools, for him/her to freely practice collage and montage. Vygintas alternated his talk with the listening of v a p o r w a v e tracks, from Chuck Person’s *Eccojams vol. 1* (2010) to James Ferrero’s *Far Side Virtual* (2011) and many others. The original tracks are warped, slowed down, and the result is often that of an eerie, uncanny aura achieved through electronic manipulation, while encapsulating an element of the nostalgia for those original tunes they are derived from (e.g. the hedonism of 80s disco dance music). The debate following touched on issues of copyright, appropriation and artistic freedom, parallels with the visual and verbal arts, from Kandinsky’s attempts to translate music into painting to the use of collage and citation in literature. It is not always easy to initiate a general audience into an artistic niche, yet Vygintas – a v a p o r w a v e composer himself – beautifully succeeded in this while also offering an immersive and mesmerizing experience.

Talk by Vygintas Orlovas, 28 March 2019

Report by Davide Castiglione, 6 May 2019