

FYTA: Conceptual Songwriting

FYTA (meaning: plants) first came into being in 2012 as a musical duo, producing DIY digital albums that were provided free of charge on fyta.bandcamp.com. They have been giving interviews in which they present themselves as mysterious personae (F78 and F89) being photographed with their faces covered in plants. On their website it is stated that their albums revolve around metaphors on the concept of ‘nature’, ‘natural’ and ‘naturalised social relations’, aiming at sabotaging distinctions such as those between the traditional and the modern, high and low brow, exposing the self-importance of the avant-gardist and mocking the white-male concept of the precious outsider artist.¹ The greek etymology of the word ‘FYTA’ does not only relate to the concept of nature, but also connotes the colloquial derogatory term ‘fyto’ (plant/nerd):

“FYTA are nerds. They’re dorks. We’re “nerd pride”, that goes without saying. We never tried to be cool and lofty and such. Besides, we very much deal with nature.[...] The concept of denaturalisation has always been of interest to us.”²

Assuming that naturalisation is among the ideological strategies that render the beliefs held by a dominant social group so ‘natural’ that they appear as universal, what do FYTA wish to ‘denaturalise’ on an artistic level? And why do it through singing? Given the fact that FYTA describe themselves as ‘conceptual songwriters’, whose songwriting methods are also taught in their workshops,³ I shall focus on ‘conceptual songwriting’ as an artistic strategy of denaturalising specific music ‘myths’ that leads to the creation of a distinct sonic/verbal world.

Roland Barthes wrote his *Mythologies* because he could not stand the “naturalness” with which “newspapers, art and common sense constantly dress up a reality which, [...] is undoubtedly determined by history.”⁴ Barthes himself, however, ascribed a mythical and ahistorical space to music, returning to the ‘untranslatability’ of the ‘musical body’ in his later works.⁵ Music seems to evoke exclusive access to an arcane world that cannot be represented through words and images. Jonathan Sterne defines this notion as ‘audio-visual litany’⁶ and relates it to the romantic concept of ‘absolute music’:⁷ by idealising hearing over vision, while also disregarding the rest of the human senses, ‘pure’ music emerges as the most ‘impossible’ of all arts, unaffected by time, space, history, politics, power and social relations.

1 www.f-y-t-a.com

2 F78 interview.

3 Much of the following information comes from my personal involvement in FYTA's workshop at the Athens Museum of Queer Arts in May 2016: <http://www.f-y-t-a.com/conceptual-songwriting—object-oriented-synthesis.html>.

4 Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972) 10.

5 See Barbara Engh, ‘Loving It: Music and Criticism in Roland Barthes’, *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship*, ed. Ruth A. Solie (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993): 66–79.

6 Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003): 15.

7 The term ‘absolute music’ was first used by Wagner in 1846 as a reference to ‘pure’ instrumental music that assumed independence from verbal meaning. Wagner believed that ‘absolute’ music (and especially its most representative form: symphonies) was concluded by Beethoven’s inclusion of voices and words in his Symphony No. 9, see Sanna Pederson, ‘Defining the Term ‘Absolute Music’ Historically’, *Music and Letters* 90, Vol. 2 (1 May 2009): 240–62. Daniel Chua mentions that Wagner’s ‘absolute music’ was inspired by Feuerbach, hoping to echo the latter’s critique to Hegel, see Daniel Chua, *Absolute Music and the Construction of Meaning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999): 225.

The myth of ‘absolute music’ is one of the core myths that FYTA turn against: ‘Absolute music has no words, but there is no such thing as “absolute music”’, says F78.⁸ The ideology of absolute music is historically and conceptually interwoven with what Lydia Goehr described as “the imaginary museum of musical works”.⁹ That is, a musical canon consisting of masterpieces compiled by white western-european men from the 16th until the 20th century, thereby formulating and establishing a framework of hierarchical distinction between art, popular and traditional music.¹⁰ Although the ‘imaginary museum of musical works’ may have lost its glory, it still relates to a series of attitudes towards music that are still extremely common: the perception of music as notes, as a sonic product whose idea is trapped within musical notation; the innate musical talent that pertains to creativity (the genius composer) and virtuosity, as far as instrumental and vocal performance is concerned.

Conceptual songwriting, as defined by FYTA, denaturalises the universal concept of musical talent and the hierarchical distinction between ‘in and out of tune’ of western tonal music:

“Conceptual songwriting places the concept of performing a musical composition above the composition itself. While in tonal music success is determined by the degree of conformity or deviation from a tempered harmony (dividing people in discordant and harmonious), conceptual songwriting can only be analysed through the complexity of ideas and contexts that flow through the performer. Famous example of conceptual songwriting: Yoko Ono. Obscure examples of conceptual songwriting: F89 and Nitsa Tsitra.”¹¹

This particular definition constitutes an explicit reference to ‘conceptual art’, the starting point of which is usually considered to be Joseph Kosuth’s manifesto ‘Art After Philosophy’ (1969), in which Kosuth, drawing on Marcel Duchamp, speaks of “questioning the nature of art itself”¹² without specifically referring to music. Composer Henry Flynt first utilized the term ‘concept art’ in 1961. In his homonymous manifesto,¹³ Flynt proposed the use of words as raw materials for ‘conceptual art’, suggesting a nominalist utilization of language as opposed to the idealistic concept of ‘concept’ itself. Constantly using music as a frame of reference, Flynt actually turns against the supposed superiority of absolute music, especially its ‘serious’ avant-garde version (that for Flynt was best represented by Stockhausen). Flynt describes this kind of music as ‘structure music’ and considers it to be ‘boring’ and conceptually poor (since its concept is strictly confined to its structure), even compared to the popular songs of his time. A few years later, in 1964, Flynt went so far as to declare that whatever lies beneath the global domination

8 FYTA, Notes from the “How To Make Conceptual Songs” workshop (Athens Museum of Queer Arts, 2016).

9 Lydia Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works: An Essay in the Philosophy of Music*, rev. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

10 Since the late 1980s, feminist and queer musicology, ethnomusicology and popular music studies have been examining the ways in which sexism, homophobia, racism, capitalism and colonialism are involved in the formulation and propagation of the western-european musical work canon and the disdain for popular music on the part of scientific discourse, see Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002); Philip Brett, Elizabeth Wood and Gary C. Thomas, ed., *Queering the Pitch: The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2006); Sheila Whiteley and Jennifer Rycenga, ed., *Queering the Popular Pitch* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Martin Clayton, Trevor Herbert and Richard Middleton, ed., *The Cultural Study of Music: A Critical Introduction*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2012); Marcia J. Citron, *Gender and the musical canon*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000); Robin James, *The Conjectural Body: Gender, Race, and the Philosophy of Music* (Lanham, Md: Lexington Books, 2010).

11 ‘Conceptual Songwriting’, Lexicon of New Fytinean (FTN, n.d.).

12 See Joseph Kosuth, *Art After Philosophy and After: Collected Writings, 1966-1990* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991): 18.

13 Henry Flynt, ‘Essay: Concept Art’, <http://www.henryflynt.org/aesthetics/conart.html>. Flynt’s manifesto was published in 1963 in a DIY anthology edited by La Monte Young: *An Anthology of Chance Operations*, ed. La Monte Young (New York: La Monte Young & Jackson Mac Low, 1963). The anthology included several other contributions by major figures in or around the Fluxus movement, such as John Cage, George Brecht, Yoko Ono, Toshi Ichiyanagi, Nam June Paik, Terry Riley, Christian Wolff.

of the western ‘Laws of Music’ and all ‘serious’ music, both classical and avant-garde, is nothing more than white supremacy, colonialism and capitalism.¹⁴

Flynt was a close friend of George Maciunas, who was among the leading figures of the Fluxus movement during the 1960s.¹⁵ Fluxus was a rather heterogeneous international art movement, inspired by Dada but without an ‘official line’, whose members objected to the artistic and social beliefs that were considered ‘natural’ in their time by actively questioning the boundaries both between separate arts and between art and life.¹⁶ Within the Fluxus movement, and under the influence of John Cage, there came to be a circle of artists – not necessarily musicians – who focused on sound not as a musical product but as process, as performance.¹⁷ One of the main artistic strategies of Fluxus was the combination of sounds, words, musical instruments and bodies in an unexpected manner, which was instrumental in the formulation of both conceptual art and what was later called ‘performance art’.

FYTA’s conceptual songwriting can be seen through a Fluxus, Dada, post-punk context, where the concept of music as performance is of utmost centrality. What is, however, the relation between post-punk, Fluxus and Dada, avant-garde art and traditional songs, Yoko Ono and Nitsa Tsitra? In the press release for their first album *Anthi (Flowers)*, FYTA introduced themselves as F78 and F89 and went on to name their influences: Dada, Litsa Patera, glasses, Casio, literature; all within a messthetics framework, a kind of DIY post-punk “where someone talks and there is racket in the background”, while the synthesizer “plays three notes”.¹⁸ Simon Reynolds describes post-punk as a chronologically and stylistically distinct musical/cultural genre that had its peak between 1978 and 1982.¹⁹ According to Reynolds, the difference between post-punk and punk primarily lies in the former’s modernist orientation, taking its cue from the avant-garde *dictum*: “radical content requires radical form”. On a musical level, whereas punk had rejected a series of influences ranging from R&B to disco, post-punk drew on various elements from US and Jamaican popular black music (such as disco, funk, reggae, and dub), but also from the avant-garde electronic and experimental tradition, and performance art, while maintaining a DIY punk ethos. Theodore Gracyk considers post-punk to be an exceptionally heterogeneous genre and rather suggests the term ‘movement’, employing the meaning attributed to it by art history.²⁰ Gracyk interprets the experimental nature of post-punk through the Kantian concept

-
- 14 Benjamin Piekut, *Experimentalism Otherwise: The New York Avant-Garde and Its Limits* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 91. In 1964 Flynt, along with George Maciunas, Tony Conrad and Jack Smith, organised a protest against Stockhausen in New York, holding banners that said “Death to all fascist musical ideas!” and “Fight Racist Laws of Music!”, *ibid.* 65.
- 15 Although Flynt is often included in the Fluxus movement, he had distanced himself from Fluxus’ musical experimentation. Flynt thought of early 1960s North American popular black music as political avant-garde, thereby criticising both ‘serious’ avant-garde and Fluxus for their racist and capitalist background in showing disdain towards popular culture, see Piekut, *Experimentalism Otherwise*: 65–101.
- 16 The first monograph on Fluxus belongs to Owen Smith, *Fluxus: The History of an Attitude* (San Diego, Calif.: San Diego State University Press, 1998). See also Ken Friedman, ed., *The Fluxus Reader* (West Sussex: Academy Editions, 1998).
- 17 Michael Nyman was the first to document such experimentations during the early 1970s in *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), devoting a distinct chapter to Fluxus (“Seeing, hearing: Fluxus”). However, George Lewis accuses Nyman of overlooking the improvisational and experimental jazz traditions and establishing a white experimental music canon with Cage on top, see George E. Lewis, ‘Improvised Music after 1950: Afrological and Eurological Perspectives’, *Black Music Research Journal* 16, Vol. 1 (1996): 102. Tara Rodgers also observes that “despite Cage’s own efforts to disrupt hegemonic silences, the centrality of his work in subsequent electronic and experimental music histories has often had the effect of silencing others”, mainly women/POC, Tara Rodgers, *Pink Noises: Women on Electronic Music and Sound* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010): 10.
- 18 FYTA, New release: Fyta - Anthi, MiC, 31 October 2012, <http://www.mic.gr/eidisi/kykloforia-fyta-anthi>.
- 19 Simon Reynolds, *Rip It Up and Start Again: Postpunk 1978-84* (London: Faber & Faber, 2006). Reynolds mentions the following bands as main points of reference: Gang of Four, Cabaret Voltaire, Pere Ubu, Wire, Raincoats, Public Image Ltd, Joy Division, Talking Heads, Throbbing Gristle, Contortions and Scritti Politti. In a separate chapter entitled “Messsthetics: The London Vanguard”, he focuses on Scritti Politti, London Musicians Collective, Flying Lizards, This Heat, Raincoats, Red Crayola, Pere Ubu, Young Marble Giants, John Peel.
- 20 Theodore Gracyk, ‘Kids’re Forming Bands: Making Meaning in Post-Punk’, *Punk & Post Punk* 1, Vol. 1 (2011): 76.

of the ‘genius’, the artist challenging and breaking the traditional rules to the point of his work being considered “unmusical”.²¹

Gracyk has actually overlooked the playful neo-dadaist spirit of most experimental post-punk bands that on the one hand wished to ‘break the rules’ and on the other tried to ‘laugh at themselves’ and primarily at the humanistic concept of “genius” as innate talent of the serious artist / universal man. For instance, many of the bands that came to be known as “Neue Deutsche Welle” emerged from the short-lived “Geniale Dilletanten” scene in the early 1980s, whose name was inspired by the homonymous, deliberately misspelled, title of a festival that took place in Berlin in 1981.²² Heavily influenced by Dada and Fluxus, bands such as Die Tödliche Doris, Der Plan, Palais Schaumburg, FSK (Freiwillige Selbstkontrolle), Malaria!, Einstürzende Neubauten and DAF (Deutsch-Amerikanische Freundschaft) mainly consisted of leftist and anarchist Fine Arts students who experimented with hybrid artistic forms in a DIY aesthetic framework, utilizing the increasingly accessible electronic equipment that was novel at that time. FYTA paid tribute to DAF with their 2013 album *List-en*, which bore the description “Ein Produkt der Deutsch-Griechischen Freundschaft” (a product of german-greek friendship), thereby echoing DAF’s 1979 de-but album “Ein Produkt der Deutsch-Amerikanischen Freundschaft”.²³

The kind of post-punk that FYTA are inspired by is closer to the concept of what Gavin Butt described as an “expanded cultural playground”, referring to the New York no wave scene.²⁴ FYTA’s albums include sounds as diverse as ones from children’s toys and musical instruments, field recordings of home appliances, kitchen and bathroom noises, electronic sounds, samples ranging from early Baroque (such as Monteverdi and Vivaldi), to Nikolas Asimos and the greek alternative scene, EDM and traditional ‘balkan’ irregular time signatures, minimalist motifs and expressionist, atonal or aleatoric interludes. It is a playful looting of the classical and modernist, pop and folklore “imaginary museum of musical works”, which sonically and verbally disorganises the seemingly rigid distinction between art, popular and traditional music.

The messthetics sound production of F78 aptly joins the poetic aesthetics of F89’s lyrics. FYTA’s lyrics explore the boundaries between people, plants, objects and the relations between senses (particularly emphasising smell and taste) and emotions. Plants and ephemeral objects trigger multi-sensory episodes, which in turn trigger emotional tensions (“I feel onions”, “we eat distress”) and existential crises (“why don’t you boil, lil’ potato? / why do our days go by?”). Familiar household spaces, such as kitchens and bathrooms, develop into stages for introspective monologues that echo Lacanian psychoanalysis, digital culture’s rhizomatic links, or nature itself as ‘social construct’, as artistic form. Here’s how F89 comments on the lyrics of ‘Onions’ from FYTA’s sophomore album (*Fried Plants*, 2012):

“taking minor details from this boring and mundane reality in order to speak about these deeper existential issues, for example how we relate to our emotions and how [...] onions cause us to cry, something that is mere form and nothing more – it’s not an emotion to cry when peeling onions.”²⁵

21 Gracyk, ‘Kids’re Forming Bands’: 83.

22 See Leonhard Emmerling and Mathilde Weh, ed., *Geniale Dilletanten: Subkultur der 1980er-Jahre in Deutschland | Brilliant dilliantes: Subculture in Germany in the 1980s* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2015).

23 DAF largely shaped the NDW sound by combining the DIY post-punk ethos with electronic sounds, minimalist use of musical instruments and a *Sprechgesang* that borders both on speech and song. They were also influential in the emergence of genres such as EBM (Electronic Body Music), electro-punk and techno, see Mathilde Weh, ‘D.A.F. - Deutsch Amerikanische Freundschaft’, in *Geniale Dilletanten: Subkultur der 1980er-Jahre in Deutschland | Brilliant dilliantes: Subculture in Germany in the 1980s*, ed. Leonhard Emmerling and Mathilde Weh (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2015): 46–53.

24 Gavin Butt, Kodwo Eshun and Mark Fisher, ‘Introduction: Gavin Butt, Kodwo Eshun, and Mark Fisher in Conversation’, in *Post-Punk Then and Now*, ed. Gavin Butt, Kodwo Eshun, and Mark Fisher, 2016.

25 FYTA, ‘Fried commentary’ (*Fried Plants*, 2012).

F89's (self-)psychoanalytic lyrics violate both the prevalent english-speaking conventions of greek alternative music (which FYTA caustically comment on in their song 'Inner Ear')²⁶ and the poetic self-seriousness of greek art music. His lyrics revolve around casual and seemingly shallow methods and means of communicating with people and objects (and, of course, plants) that surround the poetic agent, which can very well also be a plant. The use of greeklsh, internet slang and whimsical coinages developed into the creation of literary group that functioned as an online forum called 'The Such' (tatetxoia.forumup.gr):

F89: "The way I write has influenced and has been influenced by an online literary group, where I collectivised my dyslexia on a certain level and we appropriated several online modes of expression (like YouTube comments, trolling etc.) for poetic use."²⁷

F89 explains that among the sources of inspiration for this particular writing style that disrupts naturalised linguistic conventions and creates new verbal communication forms is Gertrude Stein's *Tender Buttons*:

"What Gertrude Stein does in this work is compile a long catalogue of the objects around her in her home. And she writes a short piece about each object. Some of the pieces are strictly descriptive. [...] Others are completely poetic. So she starts talking about this vase and then she talks about her lover and then about random images."²⁸

I have been claiming that FYTA's conceptual songwriting diverges from the usual notation-centric approach to music as a sonic product and treats the combination of sounds and words as performance, with Fluxus, Dada and post-punk references. Since, however, FYTA write songs that are digital sonic products, and they perform rarely as a 'live band', how can we approach their songs as 'performances'? The term 'performance' is employed here in reference to Philip Auslander, according to whom the act of listening to a recorded piece of music is an embodied experience that occurs within a particular socio-cultural context and thus constitutes a performance as well.²⁹ This manifold theoretical and practical concept, to which a whole academic discipline is devoted (performance studies),³⁰ contains a series of parameters that pertain to the analysis of FYTA's performance: (a) the instrumental and vocal execution of their songs, (b) the playback of their songs or videos, (c) their online posts, interviews, self-reflective or meta comments on their own songs, (d) their album cover art, iconography and video poetics that often accompany their songs, (e) their 'live acts'.

FYTA invite us to listen to their songs in a different, performative manner, as anti-monolithic sonic/verbal microcosms that are constantly open to (mis)interpretations and rhizomatic links between explicit and implicit contents. Were we to engage in this 'non-musical' conceptual/performative way of listening, what would then be sonically and verbally 'denaturalised' in FYTA's songs is the very relation between music and nature. The dominant discourses that greatly determine this particular relation were best exemplified in the Rousseau-Rameau dispute in the mid-1700s. The content of the dispute pertained to the question of whether melody or harmony

26 FYTA, FYTA Greatest Hits (2014), <http://fytini.bandcamp.com/album/fyta-greatest-hits>.

27 FYTA, 'Plants for Home, interview with Helmet', *Ough*, 10 December 2012, <http://www.ough.gr/index.php?mod=articles&op=view&id=1202>.

28 FYTA, Notes from the "How To Make Conceptual Songs" workshop (Athens Museum of Queer Arts, 2016).

29 See Philip Auslander, 'Performance Analysis and Popular Music: A Manifesto', *Contemporary Theatre Review* 14, Vol. 1 (February 2004): 1–13.

30 Performance Studies is an interdisciplinary field of study mainly based on the work of director and theatrologist Richard Schechner, who shaped his theoretical approach through his involvement in the Fluxus movement and his collaboration with anthropologist Victor Turner, see Richard Schechner, *Performance Theory* (London: Routledge, 2003). Understanding culture as a process and art objects as practices, events and attitudes through their interrelation with people and their inducement of several reactions and meanings is of primary significance to anthropology of performance and performance studies in general, see Richard Schechner, 'Foreword: Fundamentals of Performance Studies', in *Teaching Performance Studies*, ed. Nathan Stucky and Cynthia Wimmer (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2002), x.

ought to be of primacy in music, each of them correspondingly expressing a different concept of 'nature' and its relation to music. On the one hand, Rameau bases the superiority of western art music on the rules of tonal harmony, which he considers to be an artistic/scientific accomplishment that seeks universal 'natural laws' in the combination of sounds³¹. On the other hand, Rousseau emphasises the relation between melody and language, attributing the cultural differences between northern and southern European music to the immanent relation between language and song, and also natural environment or climate³². This set of beliefs on the nature-music relation were later integrated in both the artistic and scientific discourses on music and the nationalistic discourses on popular music and national culture in general, which ought to draw inspiration from 'national' nature.³³ The aforementioned beliefs are still very much present in contemporary popular music and even within its 'alternative' variations: nature as a "musical mood" is usually represented through ostensibly universal, 'harmonious', mellow sounds, field recordings that evoke natural landscapes, or through mixing 'world music' and 'traditional' sounds and rhythms.³⁴

One would consequently expect a greek 'alternative' album titled *Anthi* to utilize minimalist, mellow and pleasing sounds, field recordings of rivers, creeks, buzzing bees, references to greek nature and samples or abstract reworkings of traditional melodies. Indeed, *Anthi* does contain sonic, verbal and rhythmic references to greek traditional music, but the lyrics are all about 'gay flowers'; it does contain field recordings, albeit of bathroom and kitchen sounds; it does contain flowers, but either not 'indigenous' ('Ficus') or 'disgraceful' ('Thorns') ones; it does contain minimalist songs, but they are neither 'pleasant' nor full of 'natural' sounds.

'Ficus' is the album's first song. The cling-clang sounds of the synthesizer are accompanied by the tak-tak sounds of the typewriter, the modern symbol of the Symbolic, according to Kittler,³⁵ and the Dadaists' favourite sound for musical experimentation in the early 20th century. The song's intro creates an impression of the lyrics being written at that particular instant by a ghost-poet (the unconscious? ficus?). The typewriter stops and F78 starts singing "I'm so sorry for ficus" over a mournful baroque motif. Another whispering voice 'haunts' the first one. When words disappear, the typewriter sound returns and its texture gains a transient density with a

31 The belief that all people perceive particular sound combinations as pleasant or unpleasant based on universal 'biological' factors is so widespread even in contemporary scientific study of music that researchers appear stunned when no such thing happens, see Josh H. McDermott et al., 'Indifference to Dissonance in Native Amazonians Reveals Cultural Variation in Music Perception', *Nature* 535, Vol. 7613 (2016): 547–50.

32 See Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Essay on The Origin of Languages and Writings Related to Music*, ed. John T. Scott, The Collected Writings of Rousseau, vol. 7 (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1998). Derrida, commenting on western philosophy's 'phonocentrism' (the belief that sounds and speech are superior to written language), showcases the Rousseau-Rameau dispute as a typical example of Rousseau's naturalisation of the primacy of speech, see Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), chapter 3. I believe that Derrida fails to understand that, from a musical perspective, it was Rameau's views, not Rousseau's, on the establishment of a specific cultural phenomenon (western tonal harmony) as universal in the 'laws of nature', that ultimately prevailed as western music's epistemological 'voice'. According to Robin James's comments on Derrida, "If speech represents full presence and self-reference, then it is harmony that functions as Western musical 'speech', for music can be self-referential only insofar as it divorces itself from all extra-musical associations (text, words, program)", see James, *The Conjectural Body*: 44.

33 Michael Herzfeld underlines the significance of the association between nature and greek language by the demoticists in the early 20th century, thereby producing a new nationalist discourse opposing that of archaeolatry. Demoticists' new nationalism was based on the representation of modern greek nature through the 'living' modern greek language. See Michael Herzfeld, 'National Spirit or the Breath of Nature? The Expropriation of Folk Positivism in the Discourse of greek Nationalism', in *Natural Histories of Discourse*, ed. Michael Silverstein and Greg Urban (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 277–98. In the interwar period, the rejuvenation of greek nationalist discourse on art also turned to 'national' nature: "in order for someone to understand modern greek art, he must first experience greek nature", said T.D. Tsatsos in 1933, adding that 'art without fatherland is incomprehensible', in Dimitris Ksifaras, "greek nationalist ideology in the interwar period: Aspects of national theory formulation. Part B", *Theseis* 54 (1996), http://www.theseis.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=525.

34 See Philip Tagg, 'Nature as a Musical Mood Category', Göteborg: IASPM Internal Publications, 1982, <http://www.tagg.org/articles/xpdfs/nature.pdf>.

35 Kittler relates Lacan's triple methodological distinction (Symbolic, Imaginary, Real) to the three major developments in modernity's technological means of communication: the typewriter, the film and the phonograph, see Friedrich Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1999): 16.

synthetic choral ‘aaa’. The singing voice seems to be trying to evade its spectres, evoking what Mark Fisher called ‘hauntology’ of the 21st century digital culture: the nostalgia for the lost future which the modernist 20th century had taught us to anticipate³⁶.

In the song ‘Doily’, the lyrics are sung/recited twice. The first time they are accompanied by bathroom field recordings (a tap dripping, a toilet flush, a blow dryer). Just prior to their second coming, a short sample from Marietta Fafouti’s (alternative greek artist mainly inspired by “nature and love”)³⁷ song ‘Kookoobadi’ is heard in the distance, as if coming from an old radio. The sample abruptly stops at the words “hate me” and gets stuck there: “Oh, why either day or night / (Hate me, love me...)”. The song’s tension climaxes and there are suddenly glasses clinking and a children’s toy screaming (possibly a rubber duck) over the “hate me/hate me/hate me...” loop. The lyrics speak of flowers embroidered in the doily, concluding that: “each time I rip out the hem / the floor is full / with bullshit I forgot / each time”. This is how a feel-good anthem of the greek alternative scene gets ‘ripped-out’ and reveals itself as a nightmarish sonic backdrop, menacingly prefiguring FYTA’s “enemy-art”³⁸.

The song ‘Gardenias’ starts with a minimalist motif over which F89 slowly recites: “my cultivation sprawls to the metallic grounds”. When the spoken-word lyrics turn from “first-plant singular” to “first-plant plural”, F78’s voice joins that of F89, accompanied by a muddy, hollow bassline (“since we grew up in broken pots... our sickness / erratic revelations”). F89’s voice then stands alone once again, while there is a childish horn/noisemaker in the background (“we smell, we smell / and we’re behind curtains”). The return of the “since we grew up in broken pots...” verse is accompanied once again by the overdubbing of F78’s voice and a multitude of children’s toys that shriek like hoarse horn over digital tupans.

The distinctive voice overdubbing appears in several other songs: in ‘Bouquet’, along with electronic static sounds and an unexpectedly short explosion of distorted percussion, playfully teasing the anticipation for a crescendo that never comes; in ‘Fireworks’, a dance song where the Dadaist lyrics materialises its title through onomatopoeic words; in ‘Gay Flowers’, a post-traditional song where the double F78-F89 schizo-voice sings “oh in this society all flowers are gay” over a series of synthetic tambourine/toubeleki asymmetric rhythms.

According to Freya Jarman-Ivens, overdubbing is one of the most distinctive technologies of the ‘queer voice’, since it recalls “the unfamiliar of the double, the clone, the Doppelgänger”³⁹. Borrowing from Mladen Dolar’s psychoanalytical approach, Jarman-Ivens illustrates that every voice is a potentially queer voice, especially when overtly rendering the technologies through which it is constructed conspicuous, i.e. when illuminating the ways in which it was never ‘natural’ to begin with. Dolar rejects both Barthes’ “grain de la voix” concept (as a physicality that attaches an “authentic” stigma to the voice)⁴⁰ and Derrida’s distinction between speech and writing (the phonocentrism of western philosophy that constantly seeks the “holy voice of nature”⁴¹). Dolar sees voice as always inclusive of difference, as always unfamiliar, belonging neither to nature nor to culture, neither to the body nor to language: “The voice stems from the body, but is not its part, and it upholds language without belonging to it, yet, in this paradoxical topology, this is the only point they share”⁴².

36 Mark Fisher, ‘What Is Hauntology?’, *Film Quarterly* 66, Vol. 1 (September 2012): 16.

37 <http://inner-ear.gr/el/catalogue/artist/marietta-fafouti/try-a-little-romance>

38 FYTA, ‘Enemy Art’, <http://www.f-y-t-a.com/enemy-art.html>

39 Freya Jarman-Ivens, *Queer Voices: Technologies, Vocalities, and the Musical Flaw* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011): 76.

40 Roland Barthes, ‘The Grain of the Voice’, in *Image Music Text*, transl. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977), 179–89.

41 Derrida, *Of Grammatology*: 18.

42 Mladen Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2006): 73.

Ultimately, FYTA go beyond the denaturalisation of the very relation between music (as ‘absolute’, ‘universal’ or ‘national’ art) and nature, and venture into articulating their own genealogy. Conceptual songwriting claims its place among hybrid, performative artistic practices that explore this ‘absurd topology’ between language and the body; FYTA, in their own manner, sing of this topology in their last song (‘Dear Plants’):

My beloved plants, I want to give you words

Small gifts to fit your bodies in

I’m listening. Tell me where you come from and where are you heading

Nikos Vourdoulas is a PhD student at the Department of Music Studies (Sector of Ethnomusicology and Cultural Anthropology), University of Athens, Greece. His research involves online and offline fieldwork that focuses on experimental popular music and queer cultural production.