ARTFORUM

PARIS

PRINT SUMMER 2018

Michele Spanghero, *Vol.*, **2018**, lacquered wood, loudspeakers, modified microphones, microphone stands, audio cables, audio system, sound, dimensions variable.

Michele Spanghero

GALERIE ALBERTA PANE | PARIS

Michele Spanghero's *Vol.*, 2018, is a minimalist sound installation created with a technique that the experimental composer Alvin Lucier developed. In *I am sitting in a room*, 1969, which has served as an inspiration to Spanghero, Lucier's voice states from the outset the work's rigorous protocol: The artist records his own voice in a space, then plays it back in that same space and rerecords it, repeating the process "again and again," until the words become an indistinguishable amalgam of sound and, to a ghostly effect, end up being nothing more than frequencies of resonance. Edward Strickland has keenly observed that "the featured performer is not the 'I' but the 'room,'" to the point that an alternative title might be "I am eaten by a room"—in other words, the work is a veritable "sonic suicide."

Spanghero pushed this absence, or alienation, of the human presence one step further—without any anthropomorphic voice and directly addressing the configuration and material of the empty gallery space—in his recent show "Blank." After the artist has recorded and layered the frequencies of the space eight times, the sound contained in the apparent silence of the gallery is amplified and takes shape. A dodecahedron in black wood, emitting sounds of the same intensity in all directions, disseminates the audio-stratification of this ambient recording. Added to this are three standard sounds—white noise, pink noise, and brown noise—utilized for acoustical analyses of the space. Three modified microphones with an inserted loudspeaker diffuse the respective noises: They do not absorb sound, but rather emit it, and do not amplify external voices but, like the dodecahedron with twelve cones carved into its interior, appear as sound sculptures. *Vol.* thus manifests the acoustical nature of the architecture, the sound of the void that technology is capable of capturing, or what the artist—who is not very interested in emphasizing technical process—calls "the voice of the gallery."

Visitors reached the climax of *Vol.* by passing through "Studies on the Density of White," an ongoing series of photographs the artist began in 2010, which shows architectural details of European exhibition spaces, above all white cubes, completely disconnected from their specific contexts. Indifferent to any descriptive intention and indulging in an abstract impulse that can be seen in the artist's work overall, the close-up provided by the camera's zoomed lens is so extreme that the subject sometimes appears as just a line that crosses the surface. Only the stainless steel onto which the photographs are mounted gives them a residue of materiality. While four photographs, isolated from the others, were shot in this gallery, the effect as a whole was one of a structured archive of variations in light, shades of white, gray, and black, installed in a manner that brought out morphological similarities among spaces that are envisaged as physically distant. The visitor observed them, one after another, following the rhythmic arrangement of the photos along a double horizontal line, as though browsing through the frames of a film strip from an abstract movie.

Whether Spanghero materializes sound, as in *Vol.*, or proceeds through subtraction, as in the photographs, he empties music of any compositional principle and leaves sculptures and installations devoid of any narrative content. It is only in the interstices that something deteriorates—for example, at the intersection between the acoustic and the visual, between two works in the show. Drawing near the sound, visitors realized that the compositions of the photographs were less orthogonal and more curvilinear. It was as if the sound frequencies spread through the gallery related not only to the space in which they were first recorded and now emitted, but also to the images—as if these extremely algid pictures were attracted by the voice of the gallery, as irresistible as the siren's song.

—*Riccardo Venturi*

Translated from Italian by Marguerite Shore.