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Album

Various Artists - Fifteen Sounds of the War on the Poor, Vol. 1

Label / **Public Record**
Cat # / PR No. 2.06.002
Released / November 2008
Style / Experimental
Rating / 1 2 3 4 5



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North-American-European art collective Ultra-Red has long made a point of the polemical statement. Their previous projects have included critical audio exegeses (called Militant Sound Investigations) on alfresco sex, queer public spaces, migration, public housing, HIV/AIDS, needle exchanges, etc. They liberate electronic music, alternately, from uncommitted vagueness or lofty idealism, and instead gift the tools of the trade with critical faculty—Ultra-Red insists you listen hard to what's happening in their compositions. It's no surprise they can count American electroacoustic composer Terre Thaemlitz as an ally, as both parties share an emotionally divested, politically hyper-aware approach to audio.

With *Fifteen Sounds of the War on the Poor, Vol. 1*, Ultra-Red invited artists to contribute a one-minute piece that addressed the question, "What is the sound of the war on the poor?", to be released as part of an ongoing series via their online label, Public Record. There's a great breadth of audio material and aesthetics going on in this first volume, from the impossibly moving reinvention of Veikko Lavi's "Lasijuaolaivakailia" ("Glass Powder Ship Unloading Job") by Helsinki's Anton Nikkilä, where a subtle sheath of digital alteration renders the original performance even more fragile and lulling, to Rural Racism Project's audio verite documentation of a single mother feeding her son in emergency accommodation while waiting to relocate into a new home.

There are a few musical interventions here, like PS Beuys's "Fifteen Bars at Sixty Beats Per Minute" (groggy, fuzzy electronica, fighting with its own wooziness), or Thaemlitz's spiky "1980's Christian New Wave" edit. But the most powerful moments on *Fifteen Sounds* are the audio verite documents and edited field recordings—particularly Ultra-Red's own, closing "En La Frontera," which works with sounds drawn from the US/Mexico border gate, and the maquiladora zone (factories employing sweatshop labor). Ultra-Red mangle and manipulate those sounds into a kind of agit-glitch, though they also leave enough trace material so you can't forget context, particularly when an obsequious voice announces "Welcome to the United States of America—you are about to apply for admission" over the border gate's speaker system.

Ultra-Red's history is marked by engagement with techno, electronica and house—witness, for example, their exceptional singles for Thaemlitz's Comatonse and Matthew Herbert's Soundslike Imprints. *Fifteen Sounds of the War on the Poor, Vol. 1* jettisons those immediate structural frameworks, but it's of a piece with the militancy and intellectual provocation that's Ultra-Red's trademark. And if you've ever asked, or been asked that question "is electronic music apolitical?", well, here's proof plenty to the contrary.



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Words / Jon Dale

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Published / Mon, 15 Dec 2008

Tracklist: Various Artists - Fifteen Sounds of the War on the Poor, Vol. 1

01. Alejandra & Aeron (Malmo)
02. Knut Asadam (Oslo)
03. Checkpoint 303 (Ramallah/Paris)
04. Christopher DeLaurenti (Seattle)
05. Michelle Dizon (Los Angeles/Paris)
06. Ashley Hunt (Los Angeles)
07. Jack Tactio (Los Angeles)
08. Anton Nikkilä (Helsinki)
09. Isabelle Noël (Toronto)
10. Elliot Perkins (Torbay)
11. PSBeuys (Toronto)
12. Jennifer Rarick (San Francisco)
13. Rural Racism Project (Devon)
14. Terre Thaemlitz (Tokyo)
15. Ultra-Red (Los Angeles)

Comments

Various Artists - Fifteen Sounds of the War on the Poor, Vol. 1

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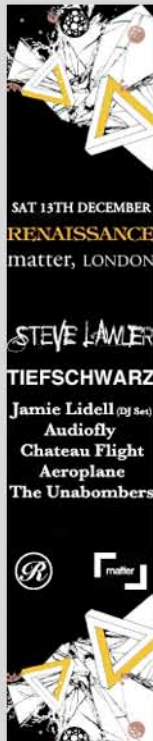
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