
TURMOIL

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UNEASY TIMES DEMAND UNEASY MUSIC

BY JAN ROHLF

The world is in turmoil. And so are many of us. No matter what perspective we take, what used to be familiar is becoming increasingly alien, oscillating widely between peril and hope, between regression and progress, between standstill and explosive change. Tensions are running high for us all. But we can't endure this strain for very long; we are worn down by the overload of polarised politics, self-righteous agitation, digital deceit, neglect and unbridled narcissism paired with authoritarianism, unevaluated technologies disrupting the fabric of our communities, environmental crisis, libertarian recklessness, and pervasive violence. All the while, we try to engage with the new complexities of a multipolar world and its increasingly diverse societies, and attempt to distinguish vapid »virtue signalling« from earnest commitment. Squeezed under an almost inescapable regime of permanent excitation, we burn out, we retreat, and we can't help but normalise the madness, the pace, the anxiety. Yet, masking the turmoil comes at a price too – a creeping, subterranean unease gains traction and eats away at us.

And so we need music and sound that unsettles us for a reason. For music and sound that doesn't escape the immanence of our troubles. That mirrors the dissonance of the world and resonates with our anxieties. That aims to articulate discontent and protest. That shakes up our habits by invading our safety zones and transgressing norms. That cracks open fixed identities in order to bring us into contact with each other. Music that calls for empathy to stir us out of the dullness of our apathy, and to question our compliance with, and complicitness in, everyday exploitation and violence. Sound that makes us feel to make us think. Music that cancels out our pains with pain. That deadens inner agitation with external uproar. Sound that provides outlets for our accumulated angers. Music that thrills and exhausts in order to allow a rare moment of rest. Music that mistrusts itself, that challenges fraud with fraud and consumerism with consumerism. Music that simultaneously feeds and undermines our social media-driven self-deception. Music that allows for another kind of distance despite the intrusiveness of its touch. Music that exposes us to forms of life and ways of experiencing that are foreign to us. Sound which evokes future realities that lie in wait on the horizon. Sound that motions toward new trajectories.

Or so we hope.

What is the state of music and sound practice in the face of our confusing and critical present. What is the sound of turmoil? What can such sonic tumult offer? Is answering the world's turmoil with aesthetic turmoil our only viable strategy? Hasn't this long been co-opted by the very forces we try to resist? Should we not, in the face of conflict's escalating logic and capitalism's voracious desire for intensification, move on to explore the opposite: an aesthetics of placidness and disengagement? Or what other sonic and musical responses could we conceive of as an antidote for both the present and the future?

How can we as artists, festival organisers, or music producers respond to the devastating state of our world? Is continuing what we do at all relevant and justifiable? Sometimes, when reflecting on our own festival, it feels as if upholding the activities to which we have now dedicated almost 20 years rather contributes to keeping up an illusion that things are not that bad, and thus provides another brick in the habitual wall that keeps us from demanding and bringing forth the radical change this world so urgently needs. On the other hand, persistence in the face of the ruthless backlash that is turning back the wheel towards authoritarian, plutocratic, and chauvinist rule – a rule that we had, not so long ago, hoped of gradually overcoming – might be equally important. So, how can we, in the limited framework of our music culture, make contributions to resisting and fighting back in the current moment of crisis? And how does this translate into the format of a festival? Certainly, these are some of the questions that nag the minds of many in music.

The current crisis has made obvious and undeniable the fact that we need to push back against the power of the ultra-rich, who have seized positions of power and influence in many of this world's countries – be they authoritarian regimes or liberal democracies. We need to substantially reduce the grotesque economic inequality. We need to stop mindless material consumption that destroys the planet. We must object to puritanism of all sorts, and need to make way for more inclusive societies in which all are entitled to contribute to solving our problems and shaping our communities. And we need to establish radically new relationships between the different regions of the world; readjusting skewed power dynamics, addressing colonial histories, and undoing cultural imperialisms. Of course, we cannot expect to achieve all of this within music culture alone. Of course, we cannot expect to achieve all of this within music culture alone.

A strong point to make is one of hope that music – or the situations within which we create and organise through and around music – has the potential to provide moments of compassion and togetherness across differences. It is certainly also true that, to fill the void so destructively driving the vortex of neoliberal transformation, we need nothing more than the revitalisation of an overarching sense of community and of compassion. In times in which plutocratic oligarchies strategically employ inequality to increase and justify their devastating power and obscene wealth, music might be able to provide a rare context in which we can imagine, speculate on, promote, and sometimes experience, a positive alternative social vision.

However, it would be more than naïve to think of such a vision as a form of togetherness that negates our different histories, experiences, and traumas, or the structural discrimination and privileges that mark our current identities. We simply cannot celebrate such positive potential without facing our own complicitness in the current turmoil of corporate exploitation, environmental degradation, social injustice, and oppression. To understand what brought us here, and to one day overcome the mess in which we find ourselves, it is mandatory to become aware of and assume our own entanglements, contradictions, and confusions. Although it might seem far-fetched and overidealistic given the grim enormity of the challenges we face, this will be the only way out of the polarised discourse that reinforces thinking in extremes instead of fostering dialogue and understanding. It serves as the first step towards more decisive common conclusions that will hopefully enable us to demand and enact change both on a personal level and in society at large.

In this sense, we could also try to see opportunity in the current turmoil. One that allows us to come to a recognition of the fears, pains, and hopes of others, and that offers us new access and insights into our own repressed confusions. The artists and participants contributing to CTM 2018, as well as the contributors to this magazine, have the courage to be honest about hopes and doubts, traumas and despair, their anger and desires, their analysis and critique, and in doing so offer us a chance to learn to listen to each other – and to ourselves.

THANK YOU

We hope that this opportunity to listen and learn will be seized and positively experienced by many who come to visit or participate in CTM 2018. It is an opportunity that would not be possible without the steadfast cooperation of a large number of partners and guest curators, among them Michail Stangl and Johanna Grabsch, co-curators of this year's music programme; Peter Kirn and Ioann Maria, hosts of the MusicMakers Hacklab; Dahlia Borsche, Matthias Hänisch, and Taïca Replansky, who provided crucial contributions to this year's Discourse programme; MONOM, who contributed a special performance programme exploring spatial sound; Berlin's Akademie der Künste and Ensemble Kaleidoskop, who contributed a unique concert evening; and WHITEvoid and Kraftwerk Berlin, who proposed and produced the spectacular SKALAR installation and performance by Christopher Bauder and Kangding Ray.

For their support of our organisation and in particular of this 19th festival edition we – Oliver Baurhenn, Remco Schuurbiers and I – would like to give our heartfelt thanks to our many partners and sponsors: first and foremost, Berlin's Senate Department for Culture and Europe, that is now supporting the festival for a second year and that has also already guaranteed funding for our 20th anniversary in 2019. Special focus programmes this year are funded by the German Federal Cultural Foundation (focus on Music and Artificial Intelligence), the Capital Cultural Fund (supporting »Flexing/Five,« an exploration of the intersections of music and dance), and the TANZFONDS ERBE – and initiative of the German Federal Cultural Foundation, that provides the resources for the long overdue rediscovery of electronic music pioneer, dancer, and choreographer Ernest Berk. We also thank the Goethe-Institut and the Federal Foreign Office of Germany for supporting the participation of the many artists based outside of Europe, as well as the Federal Commissioner for Culture and the Media for supporting the festival's opening concert. Furthermore, we wish to thank our longstanding partner transmediale – festival for art and digital culture; the Creative Europe programme of the European Union; Kampnagel for co-producing and premiering Rashaad Newsome's project, »FIVE Berlin«; all of the partners that provide their fantastic venues to the festival; the many embassies, consulates, and cultural institutions involved; and our media partners and supporters in the private sector. We also sincerely thank the authors of this publication for sharing inspiring reflections informed by their broad range of disciplines and experiences, and our co-editor Annie Gårlid for her essential input. And, last but not least, we thank everyone that comes out to CTM, all the participants and artists, our dedicated team, and the numerous volunteers, as also our dear partners and families. Without all of you the festival could not be realised.

JAN ROHLF is a co-founder of CTM Festival.

THE SOUND OF NEW FUTURES: IN PURSUIT OF DIFFERENT TRUTHS

BY MOLLIE ZHANG

MUSIC HAS LONG BEEN A CULTURAL TOOL WITH WHICH TO ARTICULATE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL DISCONTENT. IT HAS BEEN A SITE FOR PROTEST, CATHARSIS, COLLECTIVE MOURNING, AND EVEN CALLS TO ACTION. TODAY, IN THE FACE OF PRECARITY AND TURMOIL, HOW DOES MUSIC CONTINUE TO CATALYSE MOTION IN ONE WAY OR ANOTHER? HOW MAY IT FACILITATE HOPE, OR HELP US NAVIGATE TURMOIL (AND POTENTIALLY DESPAIR)? THROUGH INTERVIEWS WITH ARTISTS APPEARING AT CTM 2018, MOLLIE ZHANG ASKS THESE QUESTIONS IN AN ATTEMPT TO IDENTIFY WHAT'S STILL AT STAKE IN MUSIC TODAY AND HOW IT MIGHT HELP US PERSEVERE AND PROGRESS.

Mat Dryhurst, Holly Herndon, Colin Self. Photo by Bennet Perez.

»*Popular music can be seen as a catalyst for different truths*« (Sheila Whiteley and Jennifer Rycenga, *Queering the Popular Pitch*).[*1)]

»*Some will say that all we have are the pleasures of this moment, but we must never settle for that minimal transport; we must dream and enact new and better pleasures, other ways of being in the world, and ultimately new worlds*« (José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*).[*2)]

How do you respond to a year such as the one we've just lived through? Horror, shock, anxiety, and despair are feelings that have become all too familiar. Threats such as rising inequality and increasing anxiety levels multiply, whilst power disparities and social divisions expand. Perils mutate, becoming sophisticated to the point that many of us struggle to grasp their newest iterations. So then, how does music evolve to respond to it? What is the potential of music in these tumultuous times?

»Music is the site where the major symptoms of cultural malaise can be detected;«[*3)] this has long been the case, of course. But beyond detecting symptoms, it's also long been a vehicle for action, helping us cope, rehabilitate, and even retaliate. To state its ability to provide relief and respite is surely redundant, and beyond that, the weaponisation of music is also nothing new. But as threats mutate, how can music and sound continue to be deployed effectively?

Different musics today not only exhibit symptoms of the current political climate (be they rage, despair, hope, or disgust) but importantly, in concert with one another, they do more than just this. The most recent symptoms of tumult we know all too well, having digested tales across news cycles, social media feeds and, even still, real-life conversations, and these waves of information often lead to fatigue. For many, this year has been accompanied by despair, and for many, it has been difficult to think of or make art. Thankfully, many persevere, proffering sounds to rustle us out of apathy, providing us with outlets, paths, and communities. These varied sounds insist on a myriad of ways to articulate critique, and to actively disrupt stifling structures and conventions. We must still insist on music to offer much-needed rest, mind-numbing relief, and remedy for our ills, to provoke intense discomfort, articulate discontent, protest injustices, and formulate new futures.

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»Art is the salve to the universal wound,« Lydia Lunch tells me. She describes her work as always having »been about rising above whatever has tortured you.« The seminal post-punk figure and founding member of Teenage Jesus and the Jerks needs little introduction. Since the heyday of post-punk, Lunch has become active in self-empowerment work and is also now part of a trio of singular musicians known as Medusa's Bed. She says of her music that »in all its varied forms, [it] has always been about turmoil, frustration, and anger at the status quo.« All this meets »fury at patriarchal politics and the imbalance of power.« She harnesses the »ability of art and music to rise above the bullshit,« to provide relief and respite, however brief.

Zahra Mani, also of Medusa's Bed, says that »[d]ark, unsettling music can make people uncomfortable,« adding that it may also work at »psychoacoustic levels of communicating things that are hard to formulate in language alone.« This sentiment is also expressed by bandmate Mia Zabelka: »We don't want to play happy sounds that lull an audience or fool them. We want to shake listeners up, disturb them and play sounds that get beneath the skin – no surface-level massages. Music needs to move something deep inside listeners. That sometimes might hurt, but only then is positive change possible.« A confrontational approach may be therapeutic, if music can catalyse special emotions. Dark »words and sounds,« in the words of Mani, may »draw audiences into an uncomfortable space that still feels intimate. This discrepancy isn't a contradiction.

»We are creative protagonists who proffer an alternative to turmoil. Though we embrace turbulence, we also harness it as an energy that propels us towards change and empowerment… art is a salve, but also a mirror. Brutality and beauty, hope and despair are all part of a continuum, not opposites.«

»ART IS THE SALVE TO THE UNIVERSAL WOUND«

– LYDIA LUNCH

Also embracing the multiplicitous ways in which sound may function is Cevdet Erek, the Turkish drummer who was a part of thrash metal band Nekropsi. He recently represented Turkey at the Venice Biennale and also released his debut LP, *Davul*, on Subtext. *Davul* is an album built up from the continuous beat of a traditional drum, which he likens to a form of »short-term soul support.« Meanwhile, Erek's piece for the Turkish pavilion at the 2017 Biennale was titled ÇIN, taking its name from »the root from which the Turkish word 'çınlama' is derived. It means both tinnitus (ear ringing) and reverberation.« In a time plagued by fatigue and burn-out, Erek rightly posits that »[t]he cost of listening to the continuous, aggressive, and carefully-engineered rhythmic noise of turmoil that is propagated by mass media and other sources results in a continuous (but not always felt) tinnitus – perhaps not always in the ears.«

And of course, there can be other costs to listening. The sounds of VIOLENCE, or Olin Caprison, catalyse a range of reactions. Caprison describes their music as »strange… a lot of people find it far too confrontational or painful to listen to – or even stressful.« The artist's recent release, *Human Dust to Fertilize the Impotent Garden*, came out on New York's PTP – or Purple Tape Pedigree – a collective and label who describe themselves as »purveyors of weaponised media and information.«

VIOLENCE's music prompts a wide range of reactions: »I perform at many different kinds of venues: biker venues, concert halls, rock shows, queer spaces. Sometimes, audience members leave, they try to harass me or make fun of the people

Violence. Photo by Angela Fan.

that are there in support of me, but at the same time, I get the inverse reaction. I get people that would seemingly hate each other coming together, coming up to me and telling me how I affected them, how I changed their perspective.«

Caprison maintains that »the artist's role is to inspire people to move, to get up and fight… there is art that is hopeful about the future, and art that drudges in the misery of the now… they are both necessary to create what is to come.«

While they might not describe their work as »hopeful,« acerbic noise duo NAKED are motivated by the thought of catalysing movement. Though skeptical of the word »hope,« Agnes Gryczkowska and Alexander Johnston focus more on sparking energy through their work. Their most recent EP *Total Power Exchange*, released via Halcyon Veil, examines the pathology of power as well as its potential uses and abuses. The duo found themselves feeling increasingly agitated and anxious in today's political climate, with these emotions exacerbated to a point where something needed to be done. In Alexander Johnston's words, »we didn't want to just criticise, we wanted the release to be more empowering than that… I think when you listen to the tracks, sure, there will be people who just don't like them, but there hasn't been anyone who has found it to be devoid of energy. That positive element, to me, is empowering.«

Total Power Exchange is full of blistering textures, saturated with gritty distortion and visceral, bodily sounds. The release is energising, battering, frantic, and raw. »Spit,« the second track off the album, is intensely affective, comprised of the sounds of Gryczkowska vomiting national anthems, and is uncompromising in its searing indictment of the strains of nationalism that plague today. Of the release, Agnes says, »we wanted to create something catalytic, that makes you go for it. There's no moment of hesitation. Action becomes like an instinct.«

In a few frantic moments during NAKED's intense performances, we might find a split from a broadly isolating, individualistic society. The duo hope to create something that draws people into a space together, to orchestrate a »physical experience that's all about the collective. Energy flowing between us as makers and performers to the audience – that embodies everything that's happening politically out there.

»We played this small gig at Vogue Fabrics at a friend's launch, and it was really insane – it was full of angsty young people just going for it. Sure, it's dark and gothy as fuck and it's depressing, but it's such a mirror of what's happening socially and politically. In that moment, it becomes this sheer physical thing.« NAKED pursue affect as a means of uniting people. Transcending language and individual experience to choreograph a collective one, they unite unrest and discontent, mobilising it in a way through which we can glimpse a kind of collectivity, if only for a moment.

Affect is deeply intertwined with the socio-political.*[4)] In the scathing sounds of NAKED, we don't merely listen to critiques, but feel them on an affective, visceral level. At a time in which burnout is rife, this strain of »protest music« arrives in a generous dose of mind-numbing noise, to re-energize listeners. On the idea of protest music, Agnes says: »I feel like now it might be more difficult to achieve as much as you could in the past.« The two lament that protest often gets co-opted into marketing and woven tightly into neoliberalism, an idea also expressed by Caprison; »I like to believe in the idea of weaponised media and information, but it's hard to believe it's possible when every counter-cultural movement is co-opted.«

Vigilant in their pursuit of bringing urgent discussions to a pop consciousness are Holly Herndon and Mat Dryhurst. The two are aware that there are »little means of generating the resourc-

NAKED. Photo by Oscar Lindqvist.

»[T]HE COST OF LISTENING TO THE CONTINUOUS, AGGRESSIVE, AND CAREFULLY-ENGINEERED RHYTHMIC NOISE OF TURMOIL THAT IS PROPAGATED BY MASS MEDIA AND OTHER SOURCES RESULTS IN A CONTINUOUS (BUT NOT ALWAYS FELT) TINNITUS – PERHAPS NOT ALWAYS IN THE EARS« – CEVDET EREK

Medusa's Bed (Zahra Mani, Lydia Lunch, Mia Zabelka). Photo by Tom Garretson.

es required to amass a viable alternative« to »platform monopolies collectively,« though it's something that they have been thinking a lot about. Dryhurst and Herndon critically approach how pop acts as a carrier signal; »where it carries you is worthy of debate and frequent reconsideration.«

During the making of *Platform*, Herndon's remarkable 2015 album, they began to think that »perhaps by opening up the practice to incorporate more populist structural forms whilst still maintaining the core ethical and artistic principles of the greater project, [they] could somehow 'Trojan horse' some really compelling propositions into the centre of cultural discourse… pop music's (and club music's, for that matter) combination of sine/tuned 808 bass and 'hooks' seemed to present this common language that, if spoken, afforded a lot of experimentation around the core fundamentals.«

This in turn, allows them to »stay true to [their] goals of presenting a legitimate alternative logic for seeing and hearing the world,« to focus on »what needs to be discussed now, and what the appropriate channel to convey that meaning through might be.« Catapulting pressing (and evolving) political discussions into the pop lexicon, or a wider music consciousness, their work can be relied on for shrewd analyses and, most importantly, an insistence on change.

During the making of *Platform*, »it became quite clear that there was a new frontier in the battle of ideas, namely the accelerating legitimisation of social media and other media platforms.« When I ask how music must mutate to stay relevant politically, they answer: »This focus on a new form of independence has weighed heavily on our minds for a few years now, and we have spent a lot of time researching and experimenting at how something special might be built. *This* is the necessary mutation. Another factor is of course the importance of live music and congregation – so much emphasis is given to the recorded medium, arguably because the scaffolding of music criticism and discussion was built around that economy, however we have always somehow been live performers first, and being in space with people still somehow retains its radical potential.«

In some way, this sentiment mirrors that of NAKED, though of course Herndon and Dryhurst approach this collective way of being with people differently: »It is no coincidence that we have taken the past year to assemble a group of people to sing and grow with, and we are grateful for the role that kind of support has played in keeping our spirits intact. Ultimately, we do what we are doing because it's how we know how to contribute, for better or worse. If anything, the past year has made us more insistent and uncompromising about certain issues that we have been more accommodating about in the past, as although we have always tried to communicate clearly the stakes of the technical and political issues we care about, the necessity to take alternative strategies seriously and start building on them together feels that much more urgent for what has happened over the past couple of years.«

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»Collectively we have a lot more power than it sometimes feels like we do individually. That is a source of hope.« Though these again are the words of Dryhurst and Herndon, a similar idea shapes the differing words, sounds, and approaches of all these artists; that's what makes them potent in imagining new futures. Mia Zabelka of Medusa's Bed describes the collaboration: »Our musical backgrounds are different, but not our sense of musicality, nor our political attitudes. We are far more alike than it may seem, and we share an anger over the state of the world.« This, of course, is reflected not just in the »meeting of three individual voices,« as Mani puts it, but also across the discourse of contemporary music and its adjacent conversations.

Herndon and Dryhurst go on to express a sentiment that seems intimately familiar, for myself and I'm sure for many others, in this past year: »It has often been hard to write or establish some kind of creative headspace with the daily affronts to sense and humanity. It has often felt really trivial to think about art. It is also quite difficult to sometimes try and conceptualise a long view, or establish a constructive perspective, when the short-term challenges are so imposing and demoralising.« The difficulties of the past year have spurred them to »spend time offline in communion with people [they] care about, and try and somehow contribute in tangible ways to their lives.«

As we might see at CTM and elsewhere, music not only challenges us to collectively maintain our ability to fear, to feel, and to love, but also to progress. In the words of VIOLENCE, »even inside of this black hole that is capitalism, ideas have more value and power than they would appear to, spreading like poison or cancer. People will internalise an idea… and carry it with them, inadvertently planting seeds.«

To make music critically and hopefully is to move; it is to assert one's agency, and to insist on more than we are offered by these crushing, turbulent times. Throughout history, music's threatening potential has been recognised; Jacques Attali famously wrote that music prophesies the future, making audible what is to come, and hence musicians wield a powerful and subversive tool.[*5)] We might turn to these sounds to combat a system in which the arts risk being reduced into exigencies as dictated by corporate and neoliberal interests; we might turn to music to combat turmoil, wielding it as a tool with which to imagine new narratives and different futures.

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*2) Muñoz, José Esteban. *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: NYU Press, 2009), 1.
*3) Broaks, Andrew and Fisher, Mark. »Do you miss the future? Mark Fisher interviewed.« *Crack Magazine*, www.crackmagazine.net/article/music/mark-fisher-interviewed (last accessed December 2017).
*4) Marie Thompson, E-mail interview by author, December 16, 2016.
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THE ABYSS STARES BACK… AND IT'S SMILING

COLIN H. VAN EECKHOUT IN CONVERSATION WITH LOUISE BROWN

AMENRA IS A FIVE-PIECE POST-METAL BAND FROM KORTIJK, WEST FLANDERS, BELGIUM. THEIR BROODING STYLE WAS DEVELOPED AS AN OUTLET FOR GRIEF, PAIN, AND SPIRITUAL CONTEMPLATION, AND AS A TOOL FOR THERAPY AND HEALING. IN ANTICIPATION OF THEIR PERFORMANCE AT CTM, THE QUIETUS HEAVY-METAL COLUMNIST LOUISE BROWN JOINED COLIN H. VAN EECKHOUT, THE BAND'S LEAD SINGER AND CO-FOUNDER, TO DISCUSS HOW VAN EECKHOUT FOUND LIGHT IN THE DARK AND GRACE IN THE GLOOM.

Amenra's Mass VI *album cover.*

If the 1990s were years of optimism, the millennium ushered in chaos, uncertainty, an abyss of terror. New wars, new hatreds, new fears. New technologies would make communication easier and yet demolish the need for contact altogether. Humanity stripped bare. New neuroses, new anxieties, new pills to hide the pain. It was then that Amenra sought solace in music and art.

Starting out as a hardcore punk band in West Flanders as the new centuries met, Colin H. Van Eeckhout and Mathieu J. Vandekerckhove, along with a revolving cast of fellow misers, channelled their crisis into catharsis and the Church of Ra was founded on a bedrock of dark, desolate doom music. Amenra, the collective's mother band, have produced six full-length albums, or »masses,« a growing number of collaborations and split-releases, several DVDs, and even a book. Each mass starts as a bleak reminder of our personal inner turmoil, but as you begin to ponder life's fragility their compositions pulsate and ebb, building unbearable tension that inevitably breaks and begins to crack. On each of their six records, Amenra prey upon your darkness, and when you are forced to submit, they suddenly provide the much-needed salve. Their music is pulled taut, and snaps, and the light floods in.

From the opening strains of Black Sabbath's *Black Sabbath* with its raging storm, ominous bells, and dissonant guitars – and Ozzy Osbourne asking life's great question; *»what is this that stands before me?«* – heavy metal has become synonymous with despair, darkness, and dread. Black Sabbath, psychedelic rock, early heavy metal, noise bands such as Swans and Throbbing Gristle, punk acts like Black Flag and Amebix – all would collide by the last gasps of the 20th century to provide fertile inspiration for new artists looking to build on that tension, and ultimately, to release it. No bands did this more than the American sludge acts Neurosis, Melvins, and Crowbar. It was on this unholy trinity that Amenra would pin all hope, or lack thereof.

This year, CTM 2018 looks for »music and sound that deals with growing strain and that unsettles us for a reason. Music and sound that mirrors the dissonance of the world and resonates with our anxieties.« The first thought is that there is no better festival this year for Amenra than this one; the second thought is that, in a world of turmoil, why would anyone want to spend a week embracing it? Surely, the opposite is needed. That doesn't sound very entertaining or pleasant…

Inviting?

Exactly…

I don't think people look solely for entertainment. Especially people who have an unrest inside their heads. I don't know if all the bands playing have a thematic link with turmoil, but I can really imagine there being an audience for that. For me, it makes perfect sense as a theme, because it's a world that we know unconsciously and when I look to the music *I* like, there's always a certain unrest, or threat, or melancholy, or sadness. It's never perfect, and it's never positive, and that's what draws me in, whatever the style or genre might be. We're honoured to play, as turmoil is what we work with as our base, too.

Do you think that listening to dark music with dark themes can actually enlighten the listener? For example, I've never come away from an Amenra concert feeling drained, even though some of the music you write is emotionally complex and difficult. I may go in drained, but I actually come out feeling like there's some therapy, maybe.

Yes, that's what makes it interesting to me. That's what makes it inexplicable, too. Why is it so? I don't know. Maybe because, in some way, you can take bad energy from people by *really* addressing it full on. On stage, you give the people, or the pain they carry within, a voice. Or you translate it in a certain way, which makes it evaporate. But remember, the dark themes do not necessarily mean that you draw people in more deeply or carry them with you on a downward spiral. Of course, you can have bands who play dark music and channel a negative energy, who actually give you reason to feel like life is futile and not worth living, but I am happy to be a part of the other side of the scale. It makes more sense to me as a human to use this artistic medium to create something, to do something beautiful, to do something good, to mean something to someone in a positive way.

You think that turmoil or despair can be beautiful?

The despair isn't beautiful, but it's the overcoming of it that is beautiful; the chapter right behind it, the growing from it, the growing together, and the realisation of the importance of love and connection. That is what despair and adversity triggers, or should trigger.

Without pushing to talk too personally, unless you want to: do you feel like your art and the music of Amenra, and particularly the performances of Amenra, are cathartic for you, or do you sometimes fear that you are dabbling with, or channelling for the sake of your art, things that maybe you wish that you could just forget or ignore?

No. We don't wish to forget it. You can't forget stuff like that. You just keep on carrying it within you and then those thoughts choose when they pop up. However, if you choose your own moment to work with that energy, then they don't pop up as much as they would if we tried to push them back. That's the link to catharsis, that's the link to it becoming therapeutic. I never mind talking about my personal experience, because I don't fear that someone will misuse that information. I don't really care about that. I don't fear what people might think of me. If they want to think I'm a cry baby, they can. It's my business and it's my story that I tell and I want it to be as honest as possible, because I really appreciate honest music. I can't appreciate music that is strongly built around image or this idea of being macho – it doesn't affect me, it doesn't touch me. I always appreciated artists who are personal and emotional and able to really translate their true feelings into music or art. It makes it more valuable and more real, and I believe that it enters someone's heart a lot quicker. You're able to touch someone when it's truthful.

Have you ever had contact from fans who have told you that your music helped them through dark times?

»THE DESPAIR ISN'T BEAUTIFUL, BUT IT'S THE OVERCOMING OF IT THAT IS BEAUTIFUL; THE CHAPTER RIGHT BEHIND IT, THE GROWING FROM IT, THE GROWING TOGETHER, AND THE REALISATION OF THE IMPORTANCE OF LOVE AND CONNECTION. THAT IS WHAT DESPAIR AND ADVERSITY TRIGGERS, OR SHOULD TRIGGER.«

That's a beautiful thing, in a way because we can only try to make the music as good as we can, and as honest and truthful as we can. But we can never work towards touching someone else – there's no blueprint for that. So as soon as we get these testimonials through the mail, or when people come up to us after a show and we hear their stories, it blows us away that we can mean something to someone at a certain time in their life. It gives you a sense of fulfilment, a sense that you've done something small but great. Fans get our symbols tattooed on them because our music means something to them, and it's probably the best compliment you can get as a musician.

Let's talk about music that has touched you. At CTM 2018, you are billed above Scott Kelly with John Judkins. It's not news to anyone that knows Amenra that you were hugely influenced by Scott's band Neurosis. And then they took you under their wing and signed you to their label, Neurot. It must have been incredible that a band who meant so much to you were giving you such support. And now Scott is supporting you. How does that feel, and how did his music influence you when you started the band?

Ah, but remember it's him performing as a solo artist, so it's not like Neurosis are opening for us. It's a logical move to put an acoustic solo artist before a heavy band. It wouldn't make sense to make him play after us, even though he deserves it more than anything. You have metal bands who have a lot of anger and frustration in their music, and you have others that draw more from the heart, but a band like Neurosis add a more animalistic, instinctive force. They help you fight something inside you. When I discovered them, it was during the *Through Silver in Blood and Enemy of the Sun* era, and they were really a full-on attack on all the senses. It opened my eyes that there could be so much force from music. It had so much power; a tribal commotion.

Were you surprised when they signed you to their label?

It's crazy – if you asked the same question fifteen years ago, or told us that at some point we'd be touring together in a car for a month, I would have called you crazy. It's beautiful, though, and we're really thankful that our paths crossed and that we got support from their end. It meant a lot to us and it helped us grow. In the beginning, we heard a lot of comments that we were ripping off Neurosis and then as soon as they took us under their wing, opinions changed. People were like, ›Oh shit, those Belgians actually mean something.‹ It gave us the street-cred that a lot of people didn't want to give to five guys from Belgium.

Being from the metal and punk world, it's not unusual to deal with the theme of turmoil. But when CTM announced this year's theme with the statement »Uneasy times demand uneasy music,« it seemed so apt. The world is in turmoil, we are reminded every day – almost to the point that I need to switch off the news and delete Twitter from my phone.

Yes, it's so depressing. It's hard on me too. It's hard to see the sunlight between all this darkness that you see being thrown at you all day long, constantly.

When I read CTM's statement that »music allows a moment of rest,« I thought, »this is incredible – it's going to be a gathering in Berlin of people who just need a fucking break«.

Yes. Everybody needs a break. Humanity needs a break but it's fucking it up for itself. But the beautiful thing about this festival is, in my eyes is, that it brings different styles of music together. »Turmoil« is a universal theme and it's not a one-style festival, and that makes it even more unifying. We're all in it together, whatever style you play.

Amenra. Colin van Eeckhout second from left. Photo by Stefan Temmerman.

And I guess for every musician there, it doesn't matter where they've come from – which country, which sub-scene. They read the same Twitter as us, they watch the same news.

They live in the same world as we do. They frequent another scene, but the scene is of the same world.

With that in mind, with the world in turmoil, do you feel like it's necessary to perform and to write? Do things feel a little bit more shit at the moment than they have for a while?

With Amenra, we keep the music really close to us. We never go a lot further than our families and our close friends. That's the world that we take inspiration from. But it does influence you as a human being. Take the terrorist attacks we had in Belgium: it seeps into lyrics or into the overall feel of songs. We'll never be a political band or a worldly band; we're not a band that will take on the universe. We stick to things we know – otherwise it gets too overwhelming. But I remember the day when the bombs exploded in Brussels airport. I was working on a project with a band called A-Sun Amissa, so I wrote about that. About how we lived in fear, but in the end I twisted it, so it's more about rising above. The news definitely influences us. The world is shit, but life also has its beautiful, short moments that are really heart-warming and keep everyone going. Even those faces in the news who we would think are totally in the deepest shit possible probably have moments of joy when they see their kids smile again, for the first time in weeks. It's sad to think about that stuff. It's hard to think those things through and give them a place inside your mind. But you should, so that you always see both sides in life.

I think that's the main theme of this conversation – that even though the music is dark...

The endpoint is light. You work towards the light. That's the thing we do. We use turmoil and darkness as our clay and we try to mould it into something that is hopeful.

So, say you're at CTM 2018 and you see this heavy metal band Amenra listed in the programme, but you've never heard of them. Why should you venture into the venue?

I don't know what would drive people to come and see us, but I hope they do. Darkness is a universal theme. We've had fans who aren't into heavy music, who are interested in what we do, understand what we are doing. I believe we definitely have a place in that line-up, and it will be great to reach new people or shed some light on the metal scene – let them know that it's not all cliché. Every scene has a broad, broad spectrum that crosses over into other things. It's art – it has no boundaries and it shouldn't really be labelled or get pushed into little boxes. I really enjoy festivals that try to pull everything open and get people onto new stuff and to grow as human beings. Everybody has favourite styles of music, that's normal, but it's nice to know that there's other stuff out there that can also be interesting. There's a whole world out there.

You might find your new collaborators.

Maybe – who knows?

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» www.thequietus.com

For more on *AMENRA* and *COLIN H. VAN EECKHOUT*, see
» www.churchofra.com

LATE-PHASE IDENTITY POLITICS

TERRE THAEMLITZ IN CONVERSATION WITH MARC SCHWEGLER

IN THIS INTERVIEW, WHICH WAS FIRST PUBLISHED IN THE 16TH EDITION OF ZWEIKOMMASIEBEN MAGAZIN, ZWEIKOMMASIEBEN EDITOR MARC SCHWEGLER SPEAKS WITH MUSICIAN TERRE THAEMLITZ ABOUT THE FOUNDATIONS OF TODAY'S POLITICS AND THE (IM)POSSIBILITIES OF ESCAPING THEM.

A heated debate around questions of identity, race, and gender is raging in the club and music scene. To pick out just one prominent example: after the online streaming platform Boiler Room produced a documentary about the techno scene in Glasgow, they were met with fierce criticism because they edited out parts of a statement of a woman of color.[*1)] After a flood of criticism, the organisation – which promotes itself as being progressive and multicultural – saw the need to release a lengthy statement.[*2)] The same organisation was attacked about its involvement in live-streaming this year's Notting Hill Carnival in London after receiving a substantial grant from the British Arts Council. Graffiti in the area showed disdain for Boiler Room[*3)] and an anonymous article accused the organisation of exploiting artists and Caribbean culture in general.[*4)] Again, Boiler Room offered a lengthy and detailed statement. There also seems to be a growing, primarily white and heterosexual discourse of »finally« (again) leaving politics behind in dance music, as shown, for example, on the dubious website change-underground.com. Praising the inclusiveness of a profit-driven club music industry, an article against political correctness in the music scene concludes: »Dance music is for everyone. Let's make it about fun and escapism again.«[*5)]

At least since the events in Charlottesville, where a racist rally turned physically violent and one counter-protester died after being hit by a car, identity-related conflicts are now widely discussed in the media. But the 2016 US presidential election already made clear that the now-escalating culture war was imminent. A right-wing movement closely associated with people fueling the Trump campaign started to make headlines as the »alt-right.« Although not a coherent political group per se, people affiliated with it seem to be at least in part the offspring of a nihilistic, seemingly fringe online culture on image boards and sub-reddits whose inside jokes and memes connected with an opposition to political correctness, feminism, and multiculturalism. Above all, in the past few years the alt-right has given birth to a new kind of anti-establishment sensibility, expressing itself in the irony-driven, DIY internet culture and now in an offline political movement, as Angela Nagle points out in her book-length essay on the matter, *Kill All Normies* (Zero Books, 2017).

Nagle argues that not only the Right, but also the Left has become more radicalised and vulgar online. She identifies a »cult of suffering, weakness and vulnerability«, that »has become central to contemporary liberal identity politics, as it is enacted in spaces like Tumblr.«[*7)] »And yet,« she continues, »amid all the vulnerability and self-humbling, members of these subcultures often behaved with extraordinary viciousness and aggression, like their anonymous […] counterparts, behind the safety of the keyboard.« Recently deceased UK culture theorist Mark Fisher deemed this configuration in an essay from 2013 as the »Vampires' Castle.« He wrote: »The Vampires' Castle specialises in propagating guilt. It is driven by a *priest's desire* to excommunicate and condemn, an *academic-pedant's desire* to be the first to be seen to spot a mistake, and a *hipster's desire* to be one of the in-crowd. […] This priesthood of bad conscience, this nest of pious guilt-mongers, is exactly what Nietzsche predicted when he said that something worse than Christianity was already on the way.«[*8)] The »embarrassing and toxic online politics« represented by this version of the left has not only made the left »a laughing stock for a whole new generation,« as Nagle writes – in her view, its »years of online hate campaigns, purges and smear campaigns against others« were also responsible for the attraction and success of the anti-PC, nonconformist and dissident rhetoric on the (alt-)Right.[*9)]

To discuss those phenomena in depth and to locate them historically and socially, Marc Schwegler exchanged emails with Terre Thaemlitz. Thaemlitz not only produces house music as DJ Sprinkles, but has also been insightfully analyzing issues around identity politics in her work as an award-winning artist and writer – most recently, for instance, in her multimedia performance *Deproduction*, premiered at documenta 14, in which she investigates the power dynamics of Western humanist notions of family values and their ties to global neoliberal capitalism.

Marc Schwegler *You have been an activist for decades now – first in the US, in regards to women's reproductive rights, HIV/AIDS, and in the queer nightlife scene of New York, but also up until now in Japan, your country of residence. A lot of the battles I touched on above you have experienced first-hand, and you've always been a critical voice against essentialist identity politics of all sorts. I wonder: is this current escalation of identity politics on both sides something you'd say is new, or is it more or less just another instance of the same rhetoric all over again?*

Terre Thaemlitz I can see what you mean by this »escalation of identity politics on both sides," but I think we would also be in agreement that this is a kind of late-phase and co-opted form of identity politics. In a way, it is similar to the dynamics of co-optation discussed around the Boiler Room. So, to reminisce a bit, I would say it was towards the end of the '80s that the Right first got clever enough to effectively co-opt certain language that Leftist activists and academics had been cultivating around identity politics. And in the US a large part of this was also the Right's response to HIV/AIDS activism – particularly ACT UP – which was generating a lot of graphic design, media interventions, and educational materials that cultivated the language of identity on a kind of pop-cultural level. As a direct-action group, they operated a bit differently from academia, albeit influenced by certain academics. So the Right – which controlled mainstream news coverage, TV networks, newspapers, etc. – gradually began mimicking these strategies. And as those signs and sounds became familiar to the public at large, they also became less effective as tools of resistance. As with the mainstreaming of music genres, for most people who gained access to these signs through mainstream sources, they never really functioned as tools of struggle. But the language of struggle remained, in a kind of parodic manner. And it was eventually absorbed and regurgitated by the Right, as well as corporate advertising (this is very apparent in cell phone advertising, which uses pesudo-political slogans about freedom and liberation in almost every nation now). This was then, in a way, reabsorbed by the young Left from the '90s onward, which was being exposed to these same terms via conservative academia, etc. And it strikes me that an important part of that re-educating or re-exposing of the Left comes with the impossibility of learning from the lessons of identity politics' failures, because all that remains is a kind of positivist echo or »greatest hits.« But failures teach us more than successes, I would say. In particular, the problems of falling into essentialisms. I mean, this is just how I tend to see it.

So from my perspective, it does seem that both the Left and Right are currently performing a rather similar dance, all of which is influenced by the mainstream media's coverage/criticism/appropriation/reselling of those older and minor strategies of identity politics – many of which already had problems of essentialism to begin with. In musical terms, I guess it would be like a reggae band today claiming UB40 as their main influence. That's the phase of identity politics that I think we live in now. So it is not only a question of the same rhetoric all over again, but perhaps even more importantly, of how and why we still gain access to it. And, how has it been filtered and purified over time (i.e. censored)? I think the only useful way to approach those questions is from an actively non-essentialist perspective, which in no way attempts to identify or resurrect an »authentic« identity politic, or »true« interpretation. It has to be about social contexts, and inquiries into when and where such language may still have use value.

At the same time, what else have we been doing all these years? As you pointed out, there is criticism even from within the Left– I would say I am also doing this – and what are our methodologies that have been developing over the past 30 years or so in response to our witnessing and being conscious of that co-option of the language of identity politics? What have we learned, and what are we doing differently, if anything? For me, I focus on deliberately minor strategies that resist or delay co-option by being careful not to employ populist agendas, nor strategies for obtaining power. I personally tend to focus on inquiries into divestments of power, and the reduction of violence through conscious choices (as opposed to essentialist-based legislation of protections for specific, legally defined and accepted types of human bodies).

Marc Schwegler *Has the Left maybe not only not learned, but rather even forgotten about certain issues? One crucial factor for the changing alliances in the current ideological struggle, the rise of the Alt-Right, and the criticism of the Left (*by *people on the Left, in some cases – see Mark Fisher) seems to be the erasure of the category of class. Diversity in terms of race and gender has been a somewhat institutionalized category, even in multinational corporations, and there seems to be a strand of a neoliberal discourse that is based upon some twisted form of PC language – as in the example above, the website change-underground.com and its inclusionary vocabulary of profit. But questions of class (and maybe the aesthetics related to it – and even their appropriation, I guess…) are somewhat being faded out… This makes it all the easier to provide anti-elitist arguments for the new Right.*

Terre Thaemlitz I think questions of class become more easily concealed or dismissed when people focus on essentialisms of the body, which lead to notions of universal experience, and ultimately presumptions around the politics held by certain bodies. For example, the idea that members of LGBT communities must be inherently anti-Right – something clearly disproven time and again, by groups such as the Log Cabin Republicans or Caitlyn Jenner. So when Jenner states she is fighting for the rights of all transgendered people, and that her method of doing so is by supporting the US Republican Party and Donald Trump, it is through essentialist readings of her transsexual body that people can overlook the blatant hypocrisy and absurdity of her politics. Even for those who may think she is not operating in her best interests, few actually step forward to identify her real interests and politics being rooted in issues of class and her own wealth. In reality, she is endorsing and proliferating politics that totally are in her favor economically, but as you mention, for most people this discussion of class seems to fade away in the face of essentialist discussions of the body.

»IN THE WEST, IDENTITY POLITICS RELY ON A FAITH IN THE FORMULA OF VISIBILITY=POWER, AND CONVERSELY SILENCE=DEATH. HOWEVER, IN TERMS OF REPRESENTING AND ACTIVATING THE SOCIALLY MINOR, THAT IS VERY OFTEN NOT THE CASE.«

So for a lot of people who look up to Jenner as a transgendered hero, they are more likely to follow her crazy Right-wing endorsements than they are to criticize her classism. Even if they choose not to personally follow her views, they may feel the dangers and risks of the Right or Trump are perhaps not as bad as they feared. After all, if Jenner thinks it's okay as a trans-woman, it must not be that bad, right? It has a diffusing effect on the public.

I also think there is a connection between the destruction of social services – which is about class warfare – and the re-inscription of »family values« into dominant LGBT agendas (same-sex marriage, monogamy, child rearing, military service, etc.). In my new project *Deproduction*, which I premiered at Documenta 14, I talk about the link between this dominant Right-influenced moment of »traditional family values« and queer countercultures' fascinations with tribalism – you know, mythologies of the respected trans-shaman living at the edge of the village (with no insights into the isolation or entrapment of being socially forced to exist as such figures), blurring the lines between body modifications (tribal tattoos, piercings, trendy surgical procedures, and hormone injections all become vaguely interchangeable trends), etc. Tribalism is, of course, more rooted in tradition and family than any democratic praxis. So I think it is more than coincidence that universities, art museums, and other cultural agencies – as endorsed sites of cultural production in a Right-dominated world – happen to find funding for these particular LGBT agendas at the precise moment when »family values« are increasingly mandated. Despite our desire to see queer studies and things like that as alternatives to, or rejections of, dominant Western heteronormativity, they are in many ways a reflection of our internalization of that neoconservative »family values« agenda. And it comes with a lot of willing blindness to imperialism, orientalism, and poverty – the fetishization and romanticization of third-world gender and sexual struggles, etc.

If living in Japan has taught me one thing, with all of its mainstream transgendered celebrities, it is that trans-visibility does not inherently conflict with or challenge patriarchal interests. There are many forms of transgenderism that actually aid heteronormative and homophobic patriarchal structures. In the West, identity politics rely on a faith in the formula of visibility=power, and conversely silence=death. However, in terms of representing and activating the socially minor, that is very often not the case. In my own experiences, closets continue to perform important roles in my life, at the same time I have been publicly »out« as both queer and trans for several decades. I feel a lot of pain and suffering I felt in my youth could have been avoided if I had been taught how to accept and work with hypocrisies and simultaneity, and understand the functions of shame as something other than inherently traumatic and destructive. In retrospect, the pride of fag bashers having their way with me was just as traumatic and destructive to all involved. This is why I am also utterly uninterested in discourses of Pride™. And by extension, »political correctness,« since I've spent shitloads of effort trying to live my life in ways that the majority of people would deem »incorrect.« When people accept you and consider you »correct,« you know you are in trouble. [Laughs.] When you upset people, you know you have located and transgressed boundaries of power. Identifying and mapping them, knowing how to cross and retreat, and redraw them… that is never going to be a socially correct process.

So this is why I think it's important to actively unpack our essentialist affinities for our own bodies and the bodies of others. It is why I think the humanist practice of legislating around bodies (i.e., which bodies are legally acknowledged and protected as »human« under liberal democracies – typically those who fall under notions of being »born this way« or »couldn't help it,« as opposed to states of being grounded in choices, willing perversity or nonconformity, etc.) has continually progressed Rightist agendas and led to this very state you are identifying and concerned about. It is apparently quite difficult for most people to unpack their essentialist preconceptions about the relationships between their own social experiences and the social codings around their own bodies. Impossible, it seems. Essentialism sells. It is way easier to convince people to endorse legal protections for people who »couldn't help being born a certain way,« than to convince them of what I consider to be a far more social and democratic practice of focusing on conscious choices to change social practices and reduce violence. The former focusses on protecting bodies, the latter on the actual issue at hand, the mechanisms through which violence and exploitation are enacted. So I see the entirety of liberal humanist legislation as a political misdirection. A parlor trick, really. This is how we've managed to continue to have hundreds of years of supposed democratic governing alongside chronic racial, gender, religious, sexual, and economic exploitation, slavery, etc. Our current woes are not a problem of humanism not having spread enough, as many might believe. All of this exploitation is actually part of how humanism spreads.

Marc Schwegler *Amidst the hysteria around Trump, the Alt-Right, and the general rise of right-wing populists, I found myself to be yearning somewhat for a sober (liberal?) »Realpolitik« (Angela Merkel in a nutshell – not sure if there's an adequate English term for this German notion). The whole of France yearned for this, I guess – and voted for Macron. You suggested earlier that you personally »tend to focus on inquiries into divestments of power, and the reduction of violence through conscious choices (as opposed to essentialist-based legislation of protections to specific, legally accepted types of human bodies).« Can you explain how that's a form of politics, how you've been doing this in practice?*

»ONE CRUCIAL FACTOR FOR THE CHANGING ALLIANCES IN THE CURRENT IDEOLOGICAL STRUGGLE, THE RISE OF THE ALT-RIGHT, AND THE CRITICISM OF THE LEFT… SEEMS TO BE THE ERASURE OF THE CATEGORY OF CLASS«

Terre Thaemlitz Well, some of the ways I have been addressing these issues in my own daily actions have been about non-cooperation and self-sabotage as means of social interaction. Trying to minimize my participation in this shit world as a form of damage control, since I recognize that almost every aspect of the standard lifestyles we are led towards are teetering on exported slavery and domestic unsustainability. For example, in terms of employment, making decisions that would generally be considered counter-intuitive to capitalism in order to remain small. Not using regular distribution channels for projects, keeping projects »offline« and avoiding social media as much as possible, insisting upon payment and not volunteering free labor within creative industries, which also means not participating in a lot of typical forms of promotion, not buying advertising, etc. Remaining active in several economies as a freelancer (music, arts, academia), while refusing to isolate myself into one in particular. Basically, consistently and systematically doing everything backwards, as much as possible. And this, of course, affects one's quality of life, and can also conflict with expectations of those around me, partners, etc. Active non-identification with gender and sexual binaries can also create complications in personal relationships, obviously, since most people's methods for determining their sexual object choices rely upon their ability to place a lover within a category of femaleness or maleness, heterosexuality or homosexuality, etc. I am also simultaneously »out« and »closeted« at every turn, which can be confusing enough for me, let alone for others. It means engaging in the labor of constructing social relations, instead of just mindlessly playing a predetermined role within conventional match-making. Many of these actions and strategies have been detailed elsewhere in my various writings and projects. Although I would never define these things as »activism,« I certainly see them as political in that they actively engage the boundaries of social relations in the private and public spheres, and have real repercussions that I accept will at times be quite negative or detrimental.

Marc Schwegler *»Realpolitik« to me means on the one hand an almost technocratic, very down-to-earth form of politics, a practical engagement and involvement in the processes of legislating. When asked by Claire Parnet about human rights, Deleuze once said that all the outrage that is done to people is never a question of justice or abstract laws. Rather, it always is a question of »jurisprudence,« of jurisdiction. Being on the Left, he added, is fighting for jurisdiction, is making law. This passage gets quoted – understandably – far less by Leftists than the one where he talks about being Left as a matter of perception…*

On the other hand, I've started to think about a politics of hopelessness of some sort that does not try to deny existing ambiguities, that does not fall to a growing ideology of ever-present safe spaces, that tries to find solutions in very difficult situations. Those are problems of governmentality, in the end. That's why I came up with Merkel and Macron – those are the (liberal) figures of our time who seemed to get lucky when Trump arrived, being the far lesser of two evils, after all. But one can see their struggle and that of the European Union – while Brexit is still impending and the refugees are still coming – as another attempt to provide ontological moral fundaments to a liberal politics that needs to be grounded in moral neutrality and at the same time is not and can't be. The whole ideological battle now taking place that liberal democracies are not able tame anymore is seemingly heading towards a civil war. And with it, exactly towards those horrors that, as Jean-Claude Michéa argues, led to liberalism in the first place, after the religious wars in Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries.[*10)]

But if Realpolitik would be the way to go, when does one become merely an accomplice of (neo)liberalism? Rather soon, I guess you would argue – that's why you not only suggest but actively follow a »strategy of self-sabotage,« as you called it. It's a practice of deserting, one could say, a very deliberate but nonetheless also forced exodus. But, as Paolo Virno argued, deserting is or can be a political action…

Terre Thaemlitz To be clear, I do not see myself as deserting anything. I actually am quite opposed to that way of framing things, because it is so tied into legacies of transcendentalism,

hermetics, etc. Even in desertion, there is no transcendence. One does not desert into peacefulness. One does not ever escape. Every migrant is also simultaneously an immigrant.

Despite rhetoric of »welfare« and »assistance,« the culturally minor are always governed through processes of abandonment. This is why there is always an interaction between inadequate government and ground-zero struggles for survival and violence reduction. When making laws, it is imperative to remember that simply having laws on the books does not inherently alter a culture. The types of laws we are talking about emerge in response to material crisis – real suffering, not just academics or philosophers pondering how people might be suffering. Then, once a law is in place (often filled with concessions to the Right, rendering it rather useless), a very lengthy and expensive process of court cases around those laws are necessary to establish precedents of penalties toward violators, which in turn discourages future violations. That's the shitty model we are stuck with at the moment. Without those years of trials, which only reflect a microcosm of actual ongoing violations and social abuses, there is no social change.

»OUR CURRENT WOES ARE NOT A PROBLEM OF HUMANISM NOT HAVING SPREAD ENOUGH, AS MANY MIGHT BELIEVE. ALL OF THIS EXPLOITATION IS ACTUALLY PART OF HOW HUMANISM SPREADS.«

For example, here in Japan there have been laws against sexual discrimination in the workplace since the late nineties, yet there were no penalties associated with violating those laws. Gradually, penalties were put in place, but not enforced. We are now at the stage of cases being brought against employers in the hopes of having those established penalties be enforced. However, the penalties are still not large enough to discourage abuse. And so systemic sexual discrimination in the workplace goes on, and on, and on... These processes take decades. Sometimes centuries. As a sobering example, the history of slavery in the US was happening in a country that boasted its roots in the principle that »all men are created equal« (note the gender imperative). And still, even today, the US is rampant with systemic discrimination.

So creating legislation is not an end point. Nor is it a starting point. It is a form of analytical response that must remain under constant revision and challenge. Of course, it is something that people of Leftist inclination are constantly involved in. And rightfully so. But it would be a huge error to look to governance as the »true politic,« particularly in relation to ongoing LGBT struggles for decriminalization, which is a project that is far from over. I see it as an error of the times that contemporary LGBT movements are more preoccupied with legalization and formal recognition (sanctioning of same-sex unions, changing binary genders, etc.) than what I would imagine to be a more promising movement towards non-documentation, the eradication of all legal recognition of marriages and partnerships, putting an end to legal gender identification requirements, etc. There are countless examples where the elimination of existing laws – and not replacing them with something else – would do far more good for far more people, and have a deeper cultural impact. But many of these things will never happen, especially in relation to gender and sexuality under patriarchy. Sadly, we keep going deeper in the other direction, attempting to define and legislate ourselves into existence, filled with self-deluding hope and promise.

In *Deproduction*, I discuss the need for social services as means for those who have been »disowned,« both literally by families in the private sphere, and more broadly ostracized in the public sphere. In particular, thinking about women, gender, and sexual others most adversely affected by patriarchal family systems. I think the mainstream tendency is for people to think about how to socially »re-integrate« people. Get us back into the mainstream. But I also recognize the need for certain people to live alone – and have that state of being alone be understood as about safety, rather than the more conventional tendency to insist it can only be about traumatic isolation. (Clearly, some personal baggage and needs guide my analysis.) As I said earlier, I think the globalizing West's cultural switch away from democratic social services toward »traditional family values« is very much the ideological manifestation of real policies that have eroded social services. There are many feminists working on this theme of being alone. Here in Japan there was even a rather successful pop-feminist book called *Ohitorisama no Rogo* (roughly translated: Aging Alone) by Chizuko Ueno, which was basically about how women can plan for a life outside of familial dependence, marriage, child bearing, etc.

Marc Schwegler *Wouldn't this provide an argument for the reconfiguration of care work, an understanding beyond a simplistic and/or oppressive public/private divide – care as letting-be (»Sein Lassen,« as Heidegger has put it), as providing the space for those who are/want/have to be alone? Couldn't that be a task for a governing of hopelessness? Wouldn't that be a task for a new Left, one concerned with making (or also discarding, as you argued) law instead of policing discourse?*

Terre Thaemlitz In practical terms, this involves responding to the brutality of social isolation by organizing spaces and services for safely living alone. But how one approaches these issues is problematized by the long-standing relationship between »independence« and social privilege. Being alone as a luxury. The major difficulty is in finding ways to respond to individual needs with tools other than petit-bourgeois individualism, or conversion-based community building. Tools other than those designed for possessing a family/clan/tribe, or being possessed by one. It is about facilitating the ability to survive as disowned.

To socially ground some of this stuff with a rather extreme example, think of how many queers in Iran are forced into gender reassignment surgeries in order to avoid a fatwah against homosexuality (the logic being that if men who have sex with men, or women who have sex with women, undergo gender reassignment they are no longer »homosexual« but »heterosexual« in their sexual activities). The result is Iran being the world's second largest economy around gender transitioning, following Thailand. Many people in the West tend to think of those economies as being globally driven by the West, and primarily revolving around Western trans-issues, but no. Of course, Iran is a country that still relies heavily on families as the main site of social support and services. Yet, once people undergo their operations and need recovery assistance and acceptance, they most often find themselves unable to return home to their villages or families. Many would face violence or even death at their own families' hands. So this is a very real example of a situation in which there is a desperate need for social services to help those who are »disowned« survive safely. That is an extreme cultural example, but I bring it up in order to make clear that I am talking social services in response to systemic violence, and not simply some bourgeois strategy for individual retirement or whatever. Of course, there are more sublime forms of systemic violence, domestic violence, familial disownment and public abandonment that are constantly occurring everywhere – including here in Japan.

Ironically, the Iranian model of social services is for the government to financially subsidize those fatwah-mandated transitional surgeries. It's interesting to note that this subsidization began in the '70s, and was one of the first social programs initiated after the Shia Muslim revolt that ousted Shah Pahlavi. I find that amazing. Like, apparently the Shia's felt faggotry was at a crisis level requiring immediate government intervention, even way back then. Infuriatingly, over the years I have heard uninformed people in the West hold up Iran's surgical subsidies as an example of a progressively pro-trans government, and reference it when arguing how far behind the West is in terms of providing trans-oriented social services, if you can believe it! So with regard to the types of services I am talking about, it is often not simply a matter of introducing social services to places that have none, but culturally redefining the very definitions of what it means to assist people. Clearly, many contemporary forms of social services are more about maintaining the status quo than actually aiding the ostracized. From a mainstream perspective, what culture wishes to invest against its own interests, right? This is the impossible situation we are up against.

The types of social service needs I am speaking about are largely unsellable on any mass scale, precisely because they are about services for the taboo and abandoned. In my experience, caring for the culturally minor often comes in the form of very small, direct, and personal assistance and intervention – which, by many social organizers' standards, may not be recognized as »political practice,« since it is not populist in ambition. (And also, in rejection of Alt-Right strategies, not about acquiring political power. Isn't it interesting that what most people accept as »political actions« are only about the acquisition of power?) The absence of language or frameworks for publicly thinking about some of these issues means things become reduced to »personal charity« or private-sphere bullshit that is also really imbued with notions of bourgeois patronage, etc. It's all in the grey.

As someone who used to DJ in a transsexual sex worker bar years ago, I still often think about how »houses« used to function in the trans community – the House Mothers often being the only people helping homeless queer teens who were disowned by their families. City, state, and federal governments certainly weren't helping. I always wondered what would happen if they divested of the familial constellation and metaphors. Is it even possible? Between the metaphors of family (houses) and nationalism (the »house nation,« etc.), it is clear that a lot of underground queer culture has been led by desires for overcoming the trauma of disownment by constructing new families and nationalisms. It's simultaneously heartbreaking, disappointing, and utterly understandable. At times, a quite tragically campy politic. It really left me with an awareness of how trauma gives predictable form to our politics and practices, and inadvertently perpetuates the conservative.

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*1) See, for example: www.gal-dem.com/boiler-room-and-the-issue-of-white-men
*2) See: www.edm.com/articles/2017/8/4/boiler-room-glasgow-apology
*3) www.vice.com/en_uk/article/599qdz/why-there-was-anti-boiler-room-graffiti-at-carnival
*4) www.medium.com/@boil_the_room/babylon-room-ea3eb474d155
*5) www.change-underground.com/time-we-stopped-politically-correct-dance-music
*6) Nagle 2017, p. 73.
*7) Nagle 2017, p. 74.
*8) Fisher, Mark (2013). »Exiting the Vampire Castle.« *The North Star.* www.thenorthstar.info/?p=11299 . Visited last on Sept. 5th 2017.
*9) Nagle 2017, p. 113.
*10) See: Michéa, Jean-Claude (2007/2014). *Das Reich des kleineren Übels. Über die liberale Gesellschaft.* Berlin: Matthes & Seitz.

THE KIDS ARE ALT-RIGHT – TRACING THE SOUNDTRACK OF NEO-REACTIONARY TURMOIL

BY JENS BALZER

»THE WORLD IS IN TURMOIL,« DECLARES THE CTM FESTIVAL PROGRAMME, »AND SO ARE MANY OF US. NO MATTER WHAT PERSPECTIVE WE TAKE, WHAT USED TO BE FAMILIAR IS BECOMING INCREASINGLY ALIEN.« DOUBTLESS THIS SUMS UP THE STATE OF CONTEMPORARY POLITICS, GIVEN THE RECENT ELECTORAL SUCCESS OF RIGHT-WING POLITICIANS AND POPULIST PARTIES, THE RAMPANT VINDICATION OF STRUCTURAL RACISM, AND THE RESURGENCE OF MISOGYNY AND HOMOPHOBIA. EMANCIPATORY GAINS THAT WE LONG BELIEVED TO BE ROCK-SOLID ARE ONCE AGAIN UNDER ATTACK. »WEREN'T WE OVER THIS YEARS AGO?«, WE FREQUENTLY WONDER. AND WE REMIND OURSELVES: »WE MUST DEFEND FREEDOM. WE MUST DEFEND THE LIBERAL, MULTICULTURAL LIFE WE WANT TO LEAD AND THAT ONCE SEEMED, TO US, A GIVEN«. THIS FEELING – A MIX OF ASTONISHMENT, BEWILDERMENT, AND STUBBORN DEFIANCE – HAS LEFT ITS MARK ON MAJOR POLITICAL ALBUMS OF THE LAST FEW YEARS, ON SOLANGE KNOWLES' *A SEAT AT THE TABLE*, FOR EXAMPLE, OR A TRIBE CALLED QUEST'S *WE GOT IT FROM HERE*; AND IT RESOUNDED, TOO, IN THE WORK OF CERTAIN ARTISTS FEATURED AT LAST YEAR'S CTM FESTIVAL, SUCH AS MOOR MOTHER AND THE NON WORLDWIDE COLLECTIVE.

Video still from Xurious »Identity is Unstoppable«, source: YouTube.

»What is the sound of turmoil?« the festival asks, and this is indeed the burning question. Yet it's one that a festival of this sort cannot answer, as it happens, because coming up with a comprehensive answer would necessarily spell the end of the festival in its present form. CTM festival sees itself as an agent of emancipatory art and thus the »sound of turmoil« that it seeks in its current iteration is first and foremost the very sound in and through which »we« – which is to say, we enlightened, liberal, left-wing, anti-sexist and anti-racist bodies who produce and/or take part in CTM – hope to give expression to how contemporary politics leaves us shaken to the core.

But of course that is just one side of the present turmoil – and just one side of the current relationship between pop culture and politics. The other side is the realm of those who see the current political trends not as a rollback but as something to applaud and promote. Such turmoil has not come out of the blue but is rooted in a widespread resentment of liberal society. And anti-liberal politics are made by people, of course; people who also happen to make and listen to music. They too define themselves in terms of pop cultural mechanisms – more nonchalantly and skilfully than any anti-liberal movement before them. One need only look at the American Alt-Right's use of social media, viral memes, and the like. Hence, any serious inquiry into the »sound of turmoil« is compelled to consider the sounds of the New Right: What music moves the Alt-Right movement in the USA these days? What are supporters of the French or German identitarians tuning in to? At the same time, it remains unthinkable for a leading progressive festival to feature artists and musicians who plainly support reactionary political programs, nor would we fans like to mix with their respective followers. A festival such as CTM is, after all, not only a venue for political debate but also a safe(r) space for those among us who are watching the present social turn from a minority perspective and increasingly feeling the heat. Hence, inquiry into the *entire spectrum* of contemporary political music soon comes up against its own principled limits.

Not that a festival of this sort could ever present the *entire spectrum* of contemporary political music. CTM would be hard-pressed even to answer the question, »What is the sound of turmoil?« comprehensively, given the difficulty of identifying »New Right music« and musicians who are open about their political affiliation. A peculiar silence surrounds this movement. The most glaring evidence of this to date was the inauguration of Donald Trump in January 2017. While Beyoncé, Jay Z, James Taylor, Aretha Franklin, and other major lights of the pop cultural scene had gladly shown up to celebrate that of his predecessor, Barack Obama, Trump had difficulty finding anyone at all to perform on his big day, finally mustering only an obscure line-up of rock and country also-rans, such as 3 Doors Down and Toby Keith.

Since then the Alt-Right movement has repeatedly tried to instate one or the other popular musician as its figurehead: Taylor Swift, for example, whom right-wing commentators and bloggers extol as an »Aryan goddess« while avidly hunting out hidden hints of pro-Trump leanings in her texts – although Swift herself maintains an icy silence on the matter. Not so Depeche Mode, whom American neo-Nazi activist Richard Spencer, one of the organisers of the Charlottesville march, declared in early 2017 were »the official band of the Alt-Right«. The band's retort was swift and clear: »That is a pretty ridiculous claim. Depeche Mode has no ties to Richard Spencer or to the Alt-Right and does not support the Alt-Right movement.« Depeche Mode fans, creative as ever, were quick to pour scorn on Spencer, and one brief YouTube clip went viral: it shows a left-wing protestor punching him in the head – in a loop cut to the beat of Depeche Mode's »Just Can't Get Enough.«

»THE NEW RIGHT MAY WANT POP CULTURE – WHICH IS TO SAY, A CULTURAL PROFILE THAT MAKES AN IMPACT FAR BEYOND THE BOUNDS OF POLITICAL ACTIVISM – BUT WHAT IT HAS IS POP CULTURE WITHOUT POP MUSIC.«

Spencer is a great fan of Depeche Mode because the band's music demonstrates – in his view – ethnic purity. In the case both of electro pop and industrial, he claims, we are generally talking about a genre that has completely freed itself from pop's African-American roots and is therefore well placed to give expression to white supremacy. This presumably also explains the popularity of »Trumpwave« and »fashwave« (»fash« here clearly stands for »fascist«) among those who openly promote the ideas and iconography of the Alt-Right: the two electro genres basically consist of minimalist rhythms and 8-bit sounds, so combining a nostalgic yearning for the technical and musical achievements of bygone days with an indeterminate futurism. In essence they are new takes on a genre sometimes called »vaporwave«: a highly ambivalent, quasi futuristic and yet nostalgic-dystopian music decisively shaped since around 2010 by artists such as Daniel Lopatin alias Oneohtrix Point Never and James Ferraro, who have appeared inter alia at CTM Festival.

Yet while Lopatin and Ferraro put together eclectic patchworks of sounds and icons in the spirit of globalisation and digitisation, advocates of Trumpwave and fashwave choose to use symbols that glorify Nazis and Donald Trump to fill in the gaps in this minimalist music – music that is after all compatible with pretty much any kind of content. The most famous fashwave musicians go by the names of Xurious, Cyber Nazi, and Storm Cloak, while their songs have titles such as »Right Wing Death Squads« and »Galactic Lebensraum« (Cyber Nazi), or »Demographic Decline« and »Identity Evropa« (Xurious). Pieces published under the heading Trumpwave – mostly without naming the artist – either have unsurprisingly slogan-like titles (»Make America Great Again«) or so effusively pay tribute to the president (»Donald the Eternal«) that they sound like parodies of their avowed political intent.

So the music of the Alt-Right, like the Alt-Right movement overall, is not only a product of the internet but also deeply ambivalent; and given its conflation of politics and aesthetics, sheer provocative cynicism, and aggressive stance – its blatant racism, for example – it is very hard to get to grips with. That means that if Trumpwave and fashwave can be read as the sound of the current turmoil arising within right-wing circles, then such turmoil characteristically consists not in a clearly formulated political programme but, firstly, in a deliberate blurring of the borders between satire and political sincerity, secondly, in the conscious use of provocation, and thirdly, in a sheer delight in destroying established democratic traditions and values so as to hasten the rise of an allegedly »archaic, pure, and natural« order. To this extent, music of this sort really does reflect Donald Trump's political links with Alt-Right ideology. Yet in reality – and unlike Donald Trump himself – it fails to reach a mass audience. Few tracks, even those by the most successful artist in this field, Xurious, ever gain more than 100.000 YouTube clicks. And the anonymous Trumpwave and fashwave musicians neither give concerts nor play DJ sets. Their sole infrastructure is the internet.

Likewise in Europe, pop music from the New Right barely makes it off the margins. This is true in France, where the Bloc Identitaire and its youth wing, Génération Identitaire (in English, The Identitarians), can look back on an almost twenty-year history. Its leading pop stars are Les Brigandes, an all-women quintet who made a splash (in a certain scene) last summer with the song »Merkel muss weg (Merkel Dégage!)« (Merkel Must Go). As the title shows, Les Brigandes draw more directly on topical slogans and issues and parliamentary policies than their US counterparts do. *Le Grand Remplacement* (The Great Replacement), their debut album from 2014, took its name from the eponymous central policy paper penned by Renaud Camus in 2011 on the allegedly mass immigration to Europe and on the Islamification of western societies. In the case of Les Brigandes, too, it is hard at times to distinguish between irony, cynicism, and serious propaganda. Cheesy organ beats, electric guitars and clipped vocals come over in their videos like a fusion of cabaret, chanson, and New Wave, and the band wears frumpish, twee clothes – but also leather »Zorro« eye-masks, as if they're about to run off to a BDSM party. The video to »Merkel muss weg« features toxic stereotypes of rabid Muslims while the women themselves flit about the deserted narrow streets of a medieval town like scared children – in fear of the »grim immigrant rapist« possibly lurking in every doorway, waiting to seize his chance.

Like Trumpwave and fashwave artists, Les Brigandes strive to remain anonymous, have never performed live, and essentially tread a thin line between earnest message and fake news. So anyone watching the »Merkel muss weg« video with no previous knowledge of the band can't tell for sure whether it's consciously-created propaganda or a bizarrely-overdone caricature. The frontmen in Germany's New Right music scene are similarly ambiguous. An example is Komplott, the »identitarian rapper« from Halle an der Saale. In 2016 with »Europa,« he pretty much delivered an anthem for the identitarian movement in Germany and Austria. Unwittingly comic, he also voices concern in this track for the, in his view, inadequate protection of listed buildings in his homeland: »Ich sehe romanische, gotische, klassizistische Bauten / langsam zerfallen zu 'nem toten abgerissenen Haufen / Europa weint, Europa schreit / nach dem Ende, der Wende« (I see Roman, Gothic, Classicist buildings / slowly falling apart in a dead, demolished heap / Europe's weeping, Europe's screaming / for an end, for a change in direction).

Komplott sings to uninspired gangsta-rap beats of the menace posed by »foreign infiltration«; he complains about »no-go areas« for Germans; and he calls for the »revolutionary awakening«: »Es ist an der Zeit zum Verteidigen des Eigenen / Macht euch bereit« (It is time to defend one's own / Get ready). In contrast to the American New Right, he makes no reference at all to sci-fi or the future. This clearly reflects the ideological differences between these two reactionary currents: while the New Right in Germany is supposedly concerned first and foremost with preserving cultural heritage (hence the emphasis on the protection of historical landmarks) and also combines its racist ideologies – newly dubbed »ethno-pluralism« – with a yearning for bygone days when nations were allegedly still clearly distinct from one another, the New Right in the United States promotes »a racism that comes from the future,« thereby echoing the term coined by their British mentor Nick Land in 2014 in his widely-read virulent text »Hyper-racism.« Their concern is not to preserve a historically-evolved racial diversity, but rather to optimise DNA and hence humanity itself – in one word, eugenics – and this explains their penchant for sci-fi and cyborg iconographies.

The German identitarians, for their part, are attached to the iconography of »classic« German and European culture. Numerous references to Romanticism can be found in Komplott's videos, for example, from the grandeur and transcendence of impenetrable forests through to Teutonic armies in battle. Despite – or precisely owing to – this constitutive obsession with past glories, the German identitarians see themselves as the cultural avant-garde: as the self-declared successors to the allegedly unabated dominance of the liberal left wing since 1968. Many among the latter have recently taken the same view. The author Thomas Wagner, for example, writes in his highly readable study *Die Angstmacher* (The Scaremongerers) that the New Right has hijacked the provocative political strategies of the '68 generation and carried pop culture off into its own camp.

Indeed, the identitarians have copied many of the tactics pioneered by the movement of '68, keeping themselves in the public eye in recent years mostly by disrupting »left-wing« panel discussions and theatre performances. Yet parallels with the »68-ers« pale when it comes to pop cultural foundations: the absence of mass support (or even interest) in identitarian pop is glaring here too. True, Komplott's music blares from the speakers at every identitarian protest march, yet outside the New Right's youth wing no one in Germany has even heard of this supposedly »major« pop star.

So, things in Germany don't look all too different from things in France or the USA. The New Right may want pop culture – which is to say, a cultural profile that makes an impact far beyond the bounds of political activism – but what it has is pop culture without pop music. The New Right has no pop stars, no concerts, no clubs, no soundtrack; its »culture« consists in nothing but protest, in publicly airing political slogans and arguments, and it thus stands in striking contrast to the political turmoil triggered by the real 68-ers. This tumult was orchestrated by Bob Dylan and Jimi Hendrix, by Joni Mitchell, The Grateful Dead, and the Rolling Stones. In Germany there was Krautrock and Ton Steine Scherben, later punk and new wave. Then came emancipatory lesbian, gay, and trans activism (forerunner of today's LGBQTI* movement) with its disco and eventually house and techno explosions.

The »new 68-ers« of today's New Right have nothing at all – or next to nothing; the online operations of a few clandestine producer nerds, a lone rapper from Halle, and a French female quintet do not add up to a right-wing Woodstock. Writing cultural manifestos is complicated, too, in such a cultural wasteland. This is obvious to anyone who leafs through the book *Kontrakultur* published in summer 2017 by Antaios Verlag, the identitarians' foremost publishing house in German-speaking countries. »Activist« Mario Alexander Müller, born in 1988, attempts therein to map the New Right's cultural foundations in alphabetical order, from A as in Gabriele D'Annunzio to Z as in Zentropa. Also to be found there, as usual, are the fathers of the Conservative revolution: Carl Schmitt, Ernst Jünger, and Martin Heidegger. We learn, too, that identitarians enjoy manly muscle and massacre comics such as Frank Miller's 300, also in their cinematic editions.

But ask which music the New Right in Germany listens to, or which beats they like to dance to, and the responses are not only limited in range but also often – and involuntarily – hilarious. The »greatest anthem« recommended at the moment »because it rocks« is a soldier's ditty from the 1920s, and when young right-wingers take to the dance floor, their moves of choice are the Radetzky March and Sternpolka, the »living heritage« of folk dances being in any case preferable to »the glittering stroboscope light of disco;« or so they say. This disdain for club culture in Germany means that opportunities seized by the US-American New Right to take its message to the people via electro beats are out of the question here.

Neo-folk and industrial – the New Right's top genres from around 1990 to 2010 – are also not really the German identitarians' cup of tea. If the *Kontrakultur* book is to be believed,

Video still from Komplott "Europa", source: YouTube.

the only more recent types of pop music acceptable to them are '90s black metal, '70s punk rock, and the straight-edge movement's hardcore wing: Minor Threat, for example. The reason for this is the same as that behind Richard Spencer's enthusiasm for Depeche Mode; the music finds favour exclusively on account of its »ethnic purity,« as apparently it is produced exclusively by white men and is in no way related to the African American musical tradition. This is nonsense of course, at the very least in the case of '70s punk rock. British punk – especially that of The Clash, which *Kontrakultur* particularly highlights – would never have seen the light of day without the inspiration of Jamaican reggae and dub.

One possible reason the New Right doesn't have a leg to stand on, culturally speaking, is that its very ideology, its striving for »purity« – despite the evident interdependence of every last atom in the cosmos! – precludes any true acceptance of pop culture. Pop culture is living proof that hybridity rocks. Without an endless circulation of signs, without the shifting permutation or fusion of every cultural tradition under the sun, pop culture simply would not be. There is nothing in pop that doesn't refer somehow, somewhere, to something else. This is of course also true of hip hop, a genuinely African American style. Accordingly, when interviewing identitarian rapper Komplott, the investigative YouTube channel »Jäger & Sammler« asked whether it wasn't perhaps a contradiction on his part to use a musical genre forged by migrants to call for an end to all immigration. It seemed, for one brief moment, as if a light had gone on in his brain: »Right,« he answered. »Rap is not very German at all, now that you put it that way.«.

Whenever advocates of the New Right turn to pop culture, they leave behind either a cynical-eclectic impression (in the USA) or a clueless, uptight, and dimwit impression (in France and German-speaking countries). And how could it be otherwise? If they hope to transfer their political ideology's rigid requirement for cultural purity to the realm of pop culture, then they have no alternative but to retreat into the tiny and irrelevant residuals of music. If the men of the New Right in Germany – and men are the majority in the movement – reject all the more modern forms of dance music as well as nightclubs, then one wonders where they will ever meet the women with whom they hope to found those families whose »consolidation« and »preservation« they themselves claim is so dear to their hearts.

The lack of pop cultural foundations or roots has little influence on the electoral success of right-wing populists, for the moment at least. But be sure to bear this gaping lack in mind if ever you find yourself succumbing once again to the fascination of the New Right's supposedly »avant-garde« pop discourse. As in the past few decades, right-wing pop in its current incarnation is masculinist and marginal, unsexy and unglamorous. It is in no way »purely of its own design,« original, or even of aesthetic interest. It is merely a bit of plunder that is good for nothing but padding out noxious slogans.

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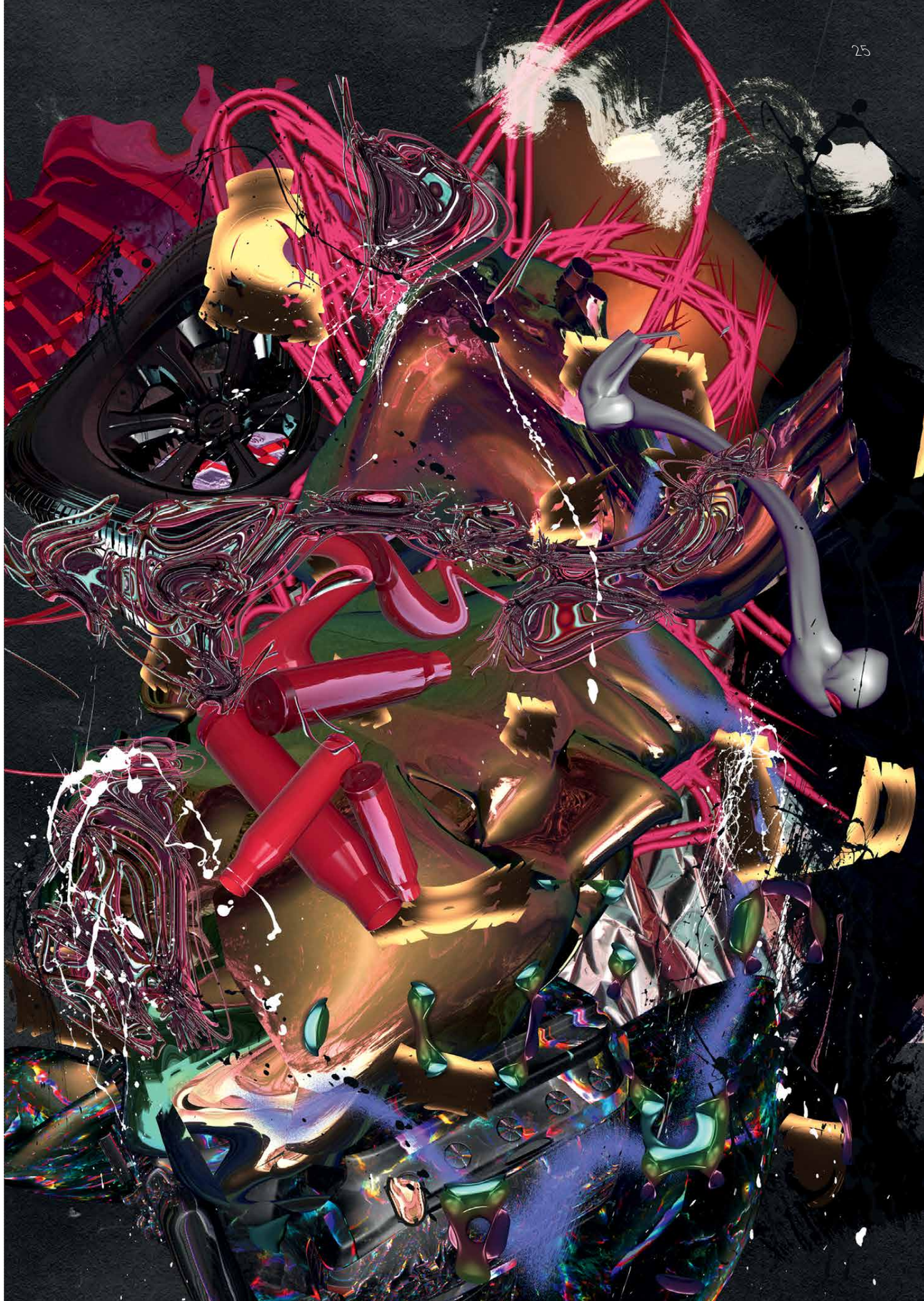

IN SONIC DEFIANCE OF EXTINCTION

BY RORY GIBB, ANJA KANNGIESER, AND PAUL REKRET

IN THIS HIGHLY NETWORKED ERA, THE POSSIBILITIES FOR EXPERIMENTAL SOUND TO COMMUNICATE STORIES ABOUT THE WORLD FEEL PARTICULARLY OPEN. IN THE LAST FEW DECADES, THE EVOLUTION OF ONLINE MUSIC COMMUNITIES, ALONGSIDE COLLECTIVE PHYSICAL SPACES IN WHICH TO EXPERIENCE THESE SOUNDS (INCLUDING FESTIVALS SUCH AS CTM), HAVE CREATED NEW ENVIRONMENTS TO INCUBATE CROSS-BOUNDARY, OFTEN INTERNATIONAL AND COLLABORATIVE SOUND WORKS. SOME OF THE ARTISTS AND COLLECTIVES EMERGING FROM THESE ARE EXPLICITLY CONCERNED WITH, AND MOTIVATED BY, THE USE OF SOUND TO INTERVENE IN POLITICAL AND SOCIAL QUESTIONS: HISTORIES OF OPPRESSION AND SLAVERY, CORPORATE STATES, URBAN GENTRIFICATION, AND THE SILENCING OF MARGINALISED VOICES.

Photo by Anja Kanngieser.

Similarly, in a moment of global environmental turmoil, the sonic arts might also be a made through which to hear about how the legacies of colonialism have affected environments, or how accelerated capitalism has driven many species and ecosystems around the world to the brink of collapse and extinction. Right now both artists and scientists, for example, seem increasingly concerned with listening to ecosystems and their human and nonhuman inhabitants: they suggest that perhaps such sound recordings can offer a window into our collective interdependence. But beyond simply documenting, how can sound meaningfully intervene in environmental crises? And what would a successful intervention look or sound like? As we enter an epoch of unprecedented and rapid ecological, climatic, and social changes, these are urgent questions, and ones that forcefully demand answers from musicians, artists, and listeners alike.

To respond, we first need to think about the relationship between the musical and the natural, as well as reflect on the political valences of music. Listening back through the history of 20th century popular music, it's possible to trace unfolding trajectories of concern for the plight of wildlife and natural environments. As expansive as the issues and stakes were and still are, these often appeared acutely at particular moments in time. In the early 1970s, songs like Captain Beefheart's »Petrified Forest« (1970), Joni Mitchell's »Big Yellow Taxi« (1970), Neil Young's »After the Gold Rush« (1970), and Marvin Gaye's »Mercy Mercy Me (the Ecology)« (1971) were clear examples of a broader shift away from the pastoralism of 1960s psych and folk towards a music that increasingly related to its bucolic spaces as threatened. This aesthetic shift was partly a result of the demise of counter-cultural optimism following the 1960s, but it also coincided with a new loss of confidence in the idea that the developmental path of human society would necessarily be progressive: a shift indexed emphatically by the 1972 publication of the Club Of Rome's *The Limits to Growth* report. This became a prevalent theme over the next few decades, audible in works such as Xray Spex's »The Day the World Turned Day Glo« (1978), Lou Reed's »The Last Great American Whale« (1989), and more recently Bjork's »Naturra« (2011), or Anohni's »4 Degrees« (2016) – all popular musical reflections of widespread anxiety around nuclear war, acid rain, mass extinction, and climate change. Meanwhile their nightmarish, paranoid underbelly was explored through hyped-up visions of an urbanised, ecologically-devastated world, apparent in 1990s rave and jungle cultures or metal's various figures of annihilation.

Outside the popular music realm, it's possible to trace a parallel line of experimental sonic approaches to nature and environments. Beginning in the 1960s, the acoustic ecology practices spearheaded by R. Murray Schafer and his colleagues around the World Soundscape Project spawned many attempts to use field recording practices to reflect on ecosystems in crisis. Schafer's work is notoriously grounded in a questionable aesthetic valorisation of nature, and natural sound, as distinct from human or so-called artificial worlds. But it has nonetheless been influential in taking its sonic material from elements we associate with nature. Current figures in field recording such as Jana Winderen, Peter Cusack, Chris Watson, or David Burraston draw upon Schafer's sonic tropes, but tone down his romanticism, choosing instead to reflect on the sonic intricacies of the nonhuman world: surfaces and textures produced by different microphones, recording technologies, and other media. These recordings are often stunning, opening intimate windows into unfamiliar lives and temporalities: the ultrasonic chirps of whales and bats, the sigh and slough of melting glacial ice, conversations among marine creatures captured using hydrophone technology. But aesthetically they often feel eerily at a distance from their subjects, offering beautifully-rendered audio insights on other creatures' lives through a gaze as carefully and artificially constructed as a high-def wildlife documentary. The effect is unabashedly apolitical, and belies the urgency of the stories they tell: as a listener, you're left with the nagging feeling of a chasm between humans and a pristine, unknowable nature.

The natural world, and relationships between people and rapidly transforming environments, are clearly at the heart of a history of sound and music. Yet so often they appear only as abstractions, and in doing so, reinforce the notion of environmental questions as ultimately external to society and culture. Moving towards meaningful sonic engagement with extinction and climate crisis, then, requires broader acknowledgement of how natural environments are irreducible from social forces. It requires recognising the past and present structural processes – capitalist extraction, colonialism, racism – that link empty forests and bleached coral reefs to communities threatened by sea level rise, poisoned water and land, and urban redevelopment.

Sound has a clear role, then, in exploring and communicating the emotional qualities of living in a rapidly changing and warming world. For example, Andrea Polli's *Heat and the Heartbeat of the City: Central Park Climate Change in Sound* uses razor-edged sonifications of projected future climate data to simulate the agitation and sickened affect of life amid rising summertime temperatures and intense heatwaves. Similarly, one of the most sonically and politically forceful sound projects of recent years is *Financial Trilogy* by Jar Moff, the Athens tape artist whose work renders the affective qualities of living through enforced economic meltdown through seams of dazzling, ruptured noise and fragmented jazz collage. An oblique and moving ecological sensibility is also increasingly tangible around the experimental edges of electronic and club music. Elysia Crampton's *Lake* (2016), Egyptrixx's *Pure, Beyond Reproach* (2017), Anthony Child's *Electronic Recordings from Maui Jungle* (2017), or Mica Levi's *Delete Beach* (2017), each anchored upon field recordings of »natural« spaces, exemplify an expansive reference to »nature.« Yet their sonic form is idiosyncratic, with the texture of an unspoilt nature – captured in the field recordings that refer back to Schafer's idealised soundscapes – quickly buried in synth, drums, and drones. Explicitly natural sound quickly falls to the background as mere accessory or disappears altogether: highlighting the presence of the human as agent within these sonic ecosystems, and suggesting that the predilection for field recordings in club music reiterates the very experience of ecological crisis itself in narrative form.

But while the sonic textures of the natural soundscape gain traction in the outer fields of electronic music, there's also a risk

that such approaches aestheticise ecological disasters, and in doing so, exclude from the frame the experiences of those most exposed to them. This is at least partly inevitable, given the ambiguity that results where meaning is embodied in sound rather than language. Peter Cusack's ambient sound recordings of Chernobyl (from the *Sounds from Dangerous Places* project, 2012) documents an experience of post-nuclear Ukraine, weaving recordings of a dawn chorus with local poems and the sounds of young children to construct an artfully unsettling narrative. On one level it's a reminder of life's sheer capacity for exuberance and resilience in the face of human-induced damage: in the wake of the meltdown, the depopulated area around Chernobyl has become a refuge for wildlife populations, clearly audible in the surging diversity of birds in the recorded chorus. But equally, it does not (or cannot) reflect the grim realities of economic and cultural devastation faced by a region abandoned as a disaster zone. Similarly, Chris Watson's well-known recordings of vultures feeding on *Outside the Circle of Fire* (1998), recorded in the Itong Plains of Kenya, powerfully renders birds of prey decimating a zebra carcass, yet does not comment on the species' extreme vulnerability to poaching practices that have led to alarming declines in African vulture populations and effects on biodiversity.

Field recording practices have also, however, ventured into terrain for soundscape work that is more concerned with the political. Leah Barclay's *Rainforest Listening* (2016) addresses itself directly to environmental summits such as the United National Climate Change Conferences; Kate Carr's *Rivers Home* (2011) features several artists' odes to water; Andrea Polli's work is often directly informed by climate science, such as the stark narratives of *Sonic Antarctica*. All of these artists are less concerned with acoustic representations of natural environments as pristine spaces, and instead are linked by their attempts to sonically intervene into contemporary thought and practices around ecological crisis. Yet even where these generally instrumental or ambient works comment explicitly on these concerns, the sorts of intervention they imply or call for, and the sorts of institutional and social forces that might be involved, are still ambiguous. Crisis still remains primarily an abstract and distant object.

One of the important critiques of the concept of the Anthropocene – the geological sciences-rooted term for our epoch that acknowledges the profound influence of human activities on the Earth system – is its seeming universality: the term's implication that a single, undifferentiated humanity bears equal responsibility for global catastrophes such as climate change. Yet the reality is anything but universal. Both the causes and the slow, violent consequences of climate change and environmental degradation are unevenly distributed, with countries in the Global North causing the vast majority of damage, and the impacts felt most immediately in many economically marginalised regions. Similarly, meaningful intervention via sound requires often moving away from abstractions and universals, and looking towards works that are grounded in specific struggles and contexts, something Anja Kanngieser and Polly Stanton's radio art piece *And then the sea came back* (2016) sought to do by drawing from lived stories of the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami to inform prose and sonic composition.

Works that ground themselves in particular environments may often have a practical purpose. For example, in the field of ecological science, the technologies and tools of field recording and acoustic sensing are increasingly being repurposed by field scientists to monitor wildlife in changing habitats. This kind of approach can be used to study particular species, for example Kate Jones' London-based bat monitoring projects, which detect the activity of bat species and inform the public. Other researchers in the field of ecoacoustics, such as Jérôme Sueur and colleagues, are concerned with using the information encoded in the recorded soundscape (for example, the species diversity of the dawn chorus) as broader indicators of ecosystem health – an approach that explicitly draws upon the lineage of artist practitioners such as Schafer. Yet here, rather than collecting idealised or carefully curated aesthetic snapshots of pristine nature, audio devices ultimately listen to environments for a functional reason. In a scientific context, sound recordings potentially offer a wealth of data about exactly how species and ecosystems are responding to escalating human pressures, which can then inform mitigating interventions and conservation actions.

In the musical sphere, it is in this highly context-specific arena that lyrical music, attended by the intentionality afforded by language, can be potent. This is especially the case where struggles are articulated by the all-too-often economically precarious, racialised, female, or queer communities who bear the greatest burden of environmental damage and resource extraction as imminent and urgent threats. In one example, on the track »New World Water« (*Black on Both Sides*, 1999), Mos Def profoundly weaves together the privatisation of water with the ongoing legacies of slavery and the unequal access to natural resources on a global scale. In another, Teresia Teaiwa unfolds the horrifying aftermath of Pacific nuclear testing on the lives and communities of the Marshallese, decades after the last blast was detonated by the US military, through spoken word poetry, song, and haunting melodies on her album *Terenesia* (2010).

Across Oceania, Indigenous, Pasifika, and black hip hop and electronic music including King Kapisi's classic single »Sub Cranium Feeling« (1999), A.B Original's »Reclaim Australia« (2016), Divide and Dissolve's »Basic« (2017), and Kardajala Kirridarr's »Ngurra (Rain Song)« (2017) actively promote Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination. At the same time as playing across a breadth of musical genres and compositional forms, these artists articulate insightful criticism of the destruction of land and culture through genocide, incarceration, and environmental racism. In Canada and the USA, albums and songs produced by Indigenous artists, such as Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's *F(I)ight* (2016) and Stuart James' »#NoDAPL« (2016), share a focus on supporting Indigenous knowledges, lands, and resources, and have been connected to the No DAPL (Dakota Access Pipe Line) and Idle No More movements to varying degrees. Similarly, Def-I's »The Land of Enfrackment« (2016) challenges the oil industry, starkly iterating the economic and environmental destruction caused by fracking on Indigenous communities. New labels such as Revolutions Per Minute (Canada), are seeking to build platforms to gather and amplify the voices of Indigenous and First Nations artists such as these, promoting a wave of socially, politically, and ecologically incisive music that is as timely as it is acutely necessary.

The point here is partly to emphasise that crisis is not a universal experience, nor are its effects equally distributed. But it bears remarking that in many of these contexts music also serves a practical purpose, such as direct organising or galvanising functions; this is nowhere more clear than in the case of the musicians who met during their participation in the No DAPL protests at Standing Rock and later toured as The Voice of Water: Wake Up the World. Furthermore, once we begin to view ecological crisis as not merely an abstract object, but as a complex set of processes affected by capitalist exploitation of natural resources, then we can start to hear its sonic refractions in works as varied as the experience of crisis itself. This is evident if we look to New Orleans bounce (a local form of hip hop) in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Mostly framed around first-person tropes, it was common for tracks to express the frustrations and humiliations that residents in the city's poorest and most affected neighbourhoods endured in the wake of mass flooding. In the most caustic instance, 5th Ward Weebie's *Fuck Katrina* (2006) begins with the pre-recorded FEMA message that would be frustratingly familiar to a local audience who had experienced abandonment along with the travails of surviving on aid payments. But what's also striking in a lot of post-Katrina bounce is the way in which the crisis is continuously lived as a matter of fact: in the eulogies and images of destroyed housing projects, the experience of trauma and exile, or the ruthlessness of »regeneration.«

This breadth of engagement with environmental crisis through sound suggests manifold opportunities for music to critique underlying social and economic processes. Yet faced with the complexity and multiplicity of these driving forces and their effects, it's difficult to determine what sonic works *should* be doing to achieve this. Music often forms a crucial part of political mobilisation, a means through which to consolidate communities and articulate struggles and demands. But evaluating music entirely through such a functional lens – for example, on its expression of specific demands or its use in protest contexts – is questionable, not least given the dubious aesthetics that can result, but also insofar as it overlooks the diverse strategies and organisational collaborations necessary for political and social change. What is clear, given the massively unequal ways in which climate change affects communities, is that sound and music can provide not only a platform but a catalyst for articulation and communication, and sometimes even action, around the complex realities of life under contemporary capitalism.

However, the effectiveness of this platform is intrinsically linked to the question of whose voices are amplified and how. For example, in the context of experimental sound and music, it's been possible to hear such ideas emerging in the work of individual sonic artists, as well as in recent festival themes and programmes drawing on motifs of societal and environmental turmoil. Yet labels, press, and venues are still dominated by white European or North American artists, and the engagement with environmental questions – as, indeed, with the broader question of intervention through art – is largely confined to an abstracted aesthetic dimension (after all, it's hard to deny that dystopian sonics can make for viscerally thrilling music). For sonic art to be more than mere aestheticisation or self-congratulatory, consciousness-raising requires a serious reassessment of what role the arts, particularly the sonic arts, can play in shifting perspectives on the exploitation of nature and our relation to non-human ecosystems. It also requires an honest appraisal of the motivations and capacities of the arts in addressing local and global inequality.

One route, following the work of pioneering feminist composers such as Pauline Oliveros, might be to identify practices of listening and silence that make space for subaltern narratives to be heard and also amplified: when we view ecological crises from the position of those whose existence they directly affect in daily life, we acquire a different and more situated perspective, one that doesn't defer confrontation because it simply can't afford to. We might also find direction in sonic practices that reject the pretense to nature as detached and abstract, and don't overlook the complexities of human dependencies on resources and ecosystems. Paying acute attention to the specificities of context and to the sociological questions of climate change can inform how we understand and negotiate the intersections of aesthetics and politics. Irrespective of the form through which one confronts these issues, it is clear that neither decontextualised representations of »nature« nor ambiguous calls to action are of much use, especially to those people who are most vulnerable to the effects of capital's ravenous consumption of non-human nature. We'd be better served listening to them.

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DISTRIBUTED HYPOCRISY

BY JAMES GINZBURG

TODAY'S »INDEPENDENT« MUSIC CULTURE IS INCREASINGLY ENMESHED IN CORPORATE AND GOVERNMENTAL INTERESTS. IS IT POSSIBLE FOR US AS ARTISTS AND HUMANS TO FIND INFRASTRUCTURES AND WORKING MODELS THAT MINIMISE THESE ENTANGLEMENTS AND CURB RELATED SOCIAL/ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT? IN TODAY'S COMPETITIVE CLIMATE, WHAT IS THE PRICE OF PROTESTING, OF TRYING TO ABSTAIN OR SAY NO? IN HIS ESSAY, JAMES GINZBURG BREATHLESSLY RECOUNTS HIS OWN EXPERIENCES AND TOUCHES ON QUESTIONS THAT HAVE SURFACED AND ROTATED TUMULTUOUSLY WITHIN ARTISTIC COMMUNITIES AND BEYOND.

When I was eighteen I was living with people that were selling cocaine. Any thoughts I may have had of getting involved ended abruptly when one of my potential colleagues, having hurried back from another city where he was picking up drugs, turned up at our house covered in someone else's blood. This someone else had been murdered – quite tangentially, suddenly, and unexpectedly – by the other dealer's bodyguard. Fortunately (I guess) the drugs were already in the car boot. Being impressionable and out of my depth, I was deeply distressed by this experience, and it was clear to me that participating in this particular industry meant making very close contact and entering into exchange with terrible people who were doing terrible things. The ethical considerations were very quickly and clearly resolved for me without ever having to cast my mind to broader questions about what that supply chain involved – the Columbian conflict with FARC, rainforest deforestation, all the tragedies that come from the movement of narcotics through Mexico or Puerto Rico, etc.

Ten years later I spoke for the first time at a Red Bull Music event. I had been running my music company out of my apartment with a couple friends, and after five years we had finally managed to move into a proper office and studio thanks to providing the music for an international car advert. I was feeling near ecstatic that our vision of creating an economically sustainable creative life running record labels and producing our own musical projects had come to fruition. In the course of this talk the car advert came up, and I was heckled by a member of the crowd who declared that I was complicit in the oil industry and that doing business with such a company was unethical. It did occur to me that this person was sitting in a corporate branded event, but I wasn't thinking quickly enough to draw attention to it, so I murmured something, felt very embarrassed, and walked off stage. I hadn't considered up to that point that I might have been doing something negative in the world with the company, and when I subsequently questioned the ethics of it, I defaulted to the Robin Hood defence, which is something to the effect of, »we are investing in and supporting the livelihoods of many musicians as well as our small community, and we are redistributing wealth from corporate interests into the pockets of independent artists who we have, to the best of our abilities, verified are good humans.« At this time we were also selling a lot of records (made from toxic petroleum products), and we weren't exclusively dependent on external corporate money for second use of the music, but licensing music seemed like the logical way to finance expansion and development, which to us meant initially earning something beyond minimum wage.

Almost another decade later, in the present moment, relatively little of my company's income comes from record sales. A large percentage of it now comes from the American film industry, and is thus corporate money. I have this moment for the first time asked Google which corporation owns Universal – a company we have received money from regularly – and discovered it is Comcast, an entity that incidentally was, according to Wikipedia, awarded the 2014 »Worst Company in America« award, and which employs »the spouses, sons, and daughters of mayors, councilmen, commissioners, and other officials to assure its continued preferred market allocations." Comcast is an internet service provider amongst other activities, so I also imagine that protecting against copyright infringement probably hasn't been a priority for them. In this sense, they directly contribute to the shift in our economy we rely on them now to replace. It is also the seventh-largest governmental lobbying body in America, and was one of the largest backers of Barack Obama's run for presidency.

I have red lines. For example, I wouldn't license music to defence companies, pharmaceutical companies, oil companies, or companies that I'm aware have trespassed against humanity or the natural environment. But then, Universal could just as easily have been owned by Lockheed Martin, Pfizer, or Shell, and I wouldn't have known until five minutes ago. And then who knows what kind of vile people are involved in the decision-making in large organisations, even those that outwardly appear ethical. I ask myself now why I haven't looked in detail at each company I've earned money from, and the only answer I can come up with is that working on films and film campaigns never struck me as evil. But then, the ideological messaging of many Hollywood films is questionable, and is undoubtedly part of the self-perpetuating force of our over-consumption.

The systems in which we live and operate and the infrastructures that support them are all networked into everything good and bad about our civilisation, but fundamentally our civilisation is unsustainable, so that network is oriented towards, at least for the moment, the slow strangulation of the natural world and the structural repression of a large portion of humanity. Is there any way to not participate in this?

Red Bull is made in Austria and Switzerland. A casual investigation on the internet shows that amongst the accusations levelled against them are advertising irresponsibly to children, and the use of extreme sports to advertise their products – advertisements in which stunt men have died with relative frequency. There was also apparently a bizarre lawsuit in Austria in which they were successfully sued for false advertising because apparently Red Bull doesn't give you any more energy than a cup of coffee with the equivalent quantity of caffeine – and a temporary sales ban in 2009 on Red Bull Cola after trace amounts of cocaine were found in the drink. Anyways, I couldn't find anything too juicy, besides a now-notorious interview with CEO Dietrich Mateschitz, a man with a $15.4-billion net worth, in which his comments caused a stir by potentially suggesting ideological alignment with Donald Trump. But the fact remains that this company is a commercial enterprise whose main purpose is to profit by selling a sugary stimulant drink that is unnecessary to the perpetuation of humanity or the world, and there is an environmental price to pay for that. Right now, somewhere out there, the factories are spewing exhaust, as are the vehicles that distribute the aluminum cans throughout the world. I am certain that if we hung a human or two over that exhaust it would have lethal consequence for that person or those persons, but just as the pollution is distributed, its consequences are likewise distributed into the background noise of the slow death that carbon emissions promise for the world as we know it. Up until I saw a dead man's blood on another person's clothes, the destructive potential of the cocaine industry was equally diffuse in my imagination.

Recently I attended an event in Berlin in which the electronic music streaming platform Boiler Room had teamed up with Google to present a new phone, the Google Pixel 2. We all, more or less, have smartphones, and most of us know full well there are disastrous environmental consequences caused by their production and that some of the raw materials used in this process are acquired in very questionable circumstances. The mineral coltan, for instance, is mined in the Democratic Republic of Congo, amongst other countries. Coltan is »sold in private, unregulated markets, unlike metals such as gold, copper, zinc, and tin. This means that there are no standards for mining operations and any safety procedures must come from the mine owners or their home countries.«[1)] Google also has been implicated in many controversies, from large-scale tax avoidance, to being a legitimised monopoly, to censorship and surveillance, to the carbon footprint of its servers, to a potential class action lawsuit based on the faulty screen of the Google Pixel 2. They have also invested a huge amount of money into clean energy, to name one of their virtues. Drawing a veil over all that momentarily, I felt very confused about what exactly the event was. There were a number of acts performing who were all very good and interesting acts, and I imagine that they were invited as part of promoting the product to a particular demographic that Google perceived was an influential body of people in terms of informing buying habits amongst key social groups. So I was, in effect, walking in a three-dimensional advert in which I was both being advertised to and participating in the broadcasting of the advertising by being filmed and photographed being there, effectively becoming a product or advertising instrument myself. I took a free drink.

Perhaps one of those acts had an offer the same night from a local promoter in another city. Chances are this promoter would never be able to match whatever Google paid, so a corporate interest would be served over a grassroots music scene. Or let's say corporate entity *A* puts on an event in a city and can pay: {fee a tickets-based promoter can pay} x 3. They will end up pricing that promoter out, which could be interpreted as a form of cultural/corporate gentrification, which means that an event whose purpose is ultimately to advertise a drink becomes tenable for an artist, while an event that would be organised in order to promote… music… would find it harder to survive. I've taken that money before, for the record. I would be reluctant to take it now, but if I had to pay my rent and that was the only way to do it, I might find myself becoming more flexible. All of these little decisions we make end up feeling like particles in a vast noise, and our complicity in destructive systems unfortunately takes the form of a rather mundane accumulation of these moments, like deciding it's too much of a hassle to put a Snickers bar wrapper into the plastic recycling bin, so we just throw it into the general waste, and it ends up in a sea turtle's mouth.

Apropos gentrification, I wonder if one could interpret Boiler Room as a form of gentrification in which, as urban centres price out anyone but the wealthy and slowly eliminate music venues, it transmits an aspirational lifestyle where those privileged enough to live in urban centres are filmed displaying the artefacts of their lifestyle to people who can not access that lifestyle and who can no longer meet people and experience music culture in physical spaces but only in virtual ones, as »users« who are actually in reality simply the targets of advertising via the pretence of content. Boiler Room, naturally, also gives a platform to talented underground artists around the world and helps propel their careers.

»THERE IS NO REASON TO THINK THAT IF I FOUND ANOTHER FORM OF EMPLOYMENT I WOULD BE ANY LESS INVOLVED IN SYSTEMS THAT ARE ROOTED IN EXPLOITATION.«

I performed at a festival in Mexico recently and in the venue were large sculptures, if you can call them that, that were made up of three-dimensional letters spelling out the phrase »Britain is Great.« Presumably, the festival was taking money from the British Council, and the British Council's agenda now includes involvement in project Brexit, which must now involve building stronger trade relationships with non-EU countries. Without getting into the fact that the British Government and its imperial legacy have a lot to answer for, Brexit is something that is diametrically counter to my own political orientation, but also potentially destructive to my livelihood – in which I ride airplanes on a weekly basis and eat airplane food in disposable plastic trays, objects I have no idea whether or not are put into the recycling bin – as a touring musician living in Germany on a British passport. So. Wealth was redistributed from a former imperial power into a grassroots organisation, so that it could be further redistributed to staff, local and international artists, and to international alcohol companies, alcohol being a substance with potentially enormously destructive social consequences and that I drink on a weekly basis, and a substance I presumably facilitate the sale of each time I perform anywhere – while also, I'm sure, from time to time simultaneously facilitating the sale of cocaine.

I wonder what Henry David Thoreau would say. It's one thing to resent paying taxes to a government that acts in violent and destructive ways in the world; it's another thing to find yourself in an ethical dilemma in which a state is willing to give you money. Many festivals I have performed at are at least partially financed by state cultural funding. This has the wonderful consequence of allowing cultural events to make curatorial decisions decoupled from economic considerations that ticket sales demand, but it also opens up ethical questions around this money and the agenda of those state-sponsored organisations that distribute it. Would you take money from Trump's government? From North Korea's or Syria's? From Netanyahu or Belarus's Alexander Lukashenko? From Poland's current right-wing government? Is taking money from the Canadian government an endorsement of their treatment of their indigenous population? It also entails the problem of giving larger organisations a distinct advantage over smaller groups or individuals who would like to put on events. The latter are more likely to be passed over for funding in preference for more established organisations, and they may not be in a position to pay artists as much as funded events, nor to afford as elaborate a production. This motion in which smaller entities are absorbed or eliminated by larger entities is also one of the defining features of advanced capitalism. Artists are and should be extremely vocal in offering inspiring critiques and radical solutions for these dilemmas, but how to make sense of that while it is happening within a corporation-enabled and -constructed flow of information woven into and born out of an economic system that we are all unable to extract ourselves from, and in which the critique and solutions themselves become content with more of an economic value to the system than to the artists themselves?

As it stands, my label can't sell enough records anymore for me to not license music if I want to invest in and develop projects with new artists, and I enjoy performing, and I need to earn a living, and I want my friends and colleagues who put on festivals to continue doing that and supporting artists, and I don't want to perpetuate suffering, and I'm disgusted by aspects of the world I participate in, and I want to find ways of putting the interests of the world and humanity before my own. At some point, we could ask ourselves, what is enough? For most people in the arts, there isn't ever enough, because there is literally not enough money to be enough to live on. For non-human entities such as corporations and institutions, self-preservation and growth is coded into their DNA. Boiler Room may not need Google to survive, but they very well may feel they need Google to grow. An artist might be able to survive without Red Bull or other corporate money, but they may not be able to invest in upgrading their equipment without it, or they might not be able to live in a city conducive to their livelihood without it. We are embedded in an unfolding system that is moving in line and in sync with broader economic movements – the polarisation of wealth, gentrification, the automation of labour, etc. – and it is becoming harder to create the illusion that we can operate outside of this system successfully and/or spare ourselves from the hypocrisy which comes from being de facto complicit and yet trying to preserve our human dignity and acknowledge and live the fact that, in essence, the vast majority of us would rather see the world become a better, fairer place.

So what, then? Take our best shots at finding a way to participate in exploitation as little as possible and avoid hypocrisy as much as possible? Could we, for example, just stop buying soft drinks? They are completely unnecessary for us to live and survive – no one would come to any harm if Red Bull disappeared from the world. Coca Cola, the only company in America with a license to import and process coca leaves and to legally sell cocaine to the one company legally allowed to buy it, manufactures so many PET bottles that they, according to Greenpeace, account for one quarter of all the plastics that end up in the ocean. It would be a relatively easy matter for me to stop drinking it, despite my deeply conditioned affection for it. The argument »…because I enjoy it« starts sounding a little bit hollow when one is standing on beaches on remote islands covered in bottles from countries thousands of miles away.

And the same is probably true for music. Why do I think I deserve to make music professionally? It's been my life's main concern and fascination. If I were to make a radical change, it would involve giving up whatever part of my sense of identity and purpose in the world is linked to a profession in the arts, as well as giving up the many years it took me to arrive at a point where I was able to work in this sphere professionally. If I were presented with a dataset that demonstrated that my profession was directly responsible for X amount of turtle, tree, or human suffering, I would undoubtedly make radical changes that addressed that. So, suspecting that the likelihood is that I am complicit, why don't I make a radical change? I ask myself regularly whether or not the reason I stay involved is self-serving and bound with my need for acknowledgement, and I ask myself what it would feel like to give it all up. Maybe it would be a relief. At the same time, there is no reason to think that if I found another form of employment I would be any less involved in systems that are rooted in exploitation.

An often-quoted study conducted at Princeton, published in 2014, demonstrated that individuals in America wield effectively zero political power, and that policy is dictated more or less exclusively by what is, in effect, an oligarchy. Where does that leave us in terms of proposing ways of creating systemic shifts in our societies that would begin to address these issues? Obviously we all have the power to work on ourselves, to undermine our aggressive ambitions, to reduce our consumption, to inform ourselves, and to make the best decisions we can, and we have to start there. We can find ways of disambiguating greed from a desire for survival and for personal and community development, but it's an extremely competitive world that tends to be geared towards the greedy, and it's also a world in which many of us lack an understanding of how to organise ourselves effectively to create meaningful change.

Recently, Fis, an artist I've worked with for the last couple years and whose last album – a collaboration with Rob Thorne that was in part recorded for free at Red Bull's Berlin studio courtesy of CTM – my label released, started a record label called Saplings. This label's physical product is the planting of trees; all the money that consumers pay into the label goes to this end via Eden Reforestation Projects, which provides the infrastructure to enable the conversion of money into the planting and maintenance of trees, just as PayPal – another company that comes problematic baggage – provides the infrastructure to receive the money itself. Fis, whose background is in permaculture, envisages a future in which this is a paradigm that many labels adopt, and envisages that this critical mass would begin to overcome the downsides of using infrastructures that rely on non-renewable energy sources.

It's interesting that the onus for making positive change generally falls to the individual whose contribution to the overall noise of pollution and exploitation is microscopic, rather than to large-scale organisations such as PayPal who are responsible for the lion's share. We can only hope that if we collectively make uncompromised decisions, we will create a market for products and experiences that aren't created in polluting and exploitative circumstances.

Ultimately, whether or not it would be possible to hold to account the entities, corporate or otherwise, that are progressively taking over the financing of underground music seems to be simply a question of how many people would be willing to individually or collectively leverage those entities' desire to purchase credibility against a demand that they operate in an ethical fashion, and, if that's not going to happen, to say no. For all my uncertainty, I do believe that any decision we make, however small, that transcends our own individual desires and needs will have a positive effect on our communities, networks, and the world at large.

JAMES GINZBURG is a musician and artist best known as one half of duo Emptyset. He runs the label Subtext and the publishing company Multiverse.
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*1) Wikipedia. »Coltan mining and ethics.« Accessed December 2017. www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coltan_mining_and_ethics

CALLING OUT FOR CONTEXT

BY CHRISTINE KAKAIRE

PUNCTUATING THE POLITICAL MAELSTROM OF THE LAST COUPLE OF YEARS, FRESH INCIDENCES OF SOCIAL MEDIA CONTROVERSY HAVE ERUPTED EVERY FEW WEEKS WITHIN THE ELECTRONIC MUSIC INDUSTRY. AS EARLY ADOPTERS OF TECHNOLOGY, WE WERE ALREADY ACCLIMATED TO THIS; OUR COMMUNITIES ARE DIVERSE AND GEOGRAPHICALLY SCATTERED, SO WE QUICKLY LEARNED TO EXPLOIT THE CONNECTIVITY PROVIDED BY THE INTERNET AND SOCIAL MEDIA. WE ALSO GREEDILY ACCEPTED THE OPPORTUNITIES TO AMPLIFY OUR OWN CAUSES, AND HAPPILY USED THEM TO HELP SELF-PROMOTE AND BRAND-BUILD, BUT ALSO TO VIRTUE SIGNAL, COMMENTATE, WEIGH IN, CRITICISE, SPOUT OFF. FLASH POINTS FLARED UP WHEN A RESIDENT ADVISOR DOCUMENTARY ON NINA KRAVIZ[*1)] FEATURED HER NAKED IN A BATHTUB, WHEN THE WORK OF UK EXPERIMENTALIST WILLIAM BENNETT WAS ACCUSED OF NEO-COLONIALIST FETISHISM,[*2)] AND THROUGH ONLINE SPATS OVER UNCREDITED SAMPLE CREDITS,[*3)] CULTURAL APPROPRIATION,[*4)] AND DISCOGS RESALE PRICES.[*5)]

What has come to best illustrate the full extent of call-out culture's capabilities, however, is the cautionary tale of Lithuanian tech-house producer and DJ Marijus Adomaitis. In the wake of his demise, his best-known artist name, Ten Walls, still elicits scorn as a noun and a verb; to have »done a Ten Walls« is to have witlessly unraveled your reputation and career in the amount time it takes to type and publish a status update. Since firing off three instantly-viral posts on his private Facebook profile that equated homosexuality to paedophilia and bestiality, Adomaitis has tried but not succeeded in shaking off the industry pariah status that those remarks brought him.

In the same year that Ten Walls buried himself, British journalist Jon Ronson declared in his book *So You've Been Publicly Shamed* [*6)] that society was »at the beginning of a great renaissance of public shaming.« Ronson experienced a social media »pile-on« first-hand when he became aware of a stranger's Twitter profile using his likeness and name. He traced the genesis of the profile to a comment on a video he had made for the *Guardian* about spambots, and became perplexed, then aggravated, as his repeated requests to cease and desist were simply ignored. The people responsible for the fake account did, however, eventually agree to a filmed face-to-face meeting, but it was a frustrating encounter that only served to drive the real Ronson's already-increasing fury towards apoplexy. After he uploaded the video of the heated encounter to YouTube, Ronson initially felt warmed by comments from his followers that mirrored his own outrage. He then watched with increasing concern as the tone of tweets directed towards the impostor account escalated from harsh words to harsh insults to threats of physical violence. The ferociousness worked: the fake @jon_ronson profile was neutralised and deleted.

It barely matters that the content of the tweets posted by the spambot, and the motivations of the people who created it, were both bizarre and banal; Ronson's giddiness responded instead to the harnessed community power of this public shaming. First his adversaries, and then increasingly the public enemies of other individuals with their own causes were, he declares, »being brought down by people who used to be powerless.«

Yet not even the spectre of Ten Walls and the threat of being brought down in the court of public opinion have been enough to discourage inexcusable behaviour. The global #MeToo phenomenon struck many sectors of the music industry, including our own niche. In addition to this 2017 was overwhelming for its noise and ugliness. Call-outs ranged from the absurd »Saunagate« scandal revolving around French DJ Jeremy Underground[*7)] to grim allegations of sexual assault against Gaslamp Killer[*8)] and Ethan Kath of Crystal Castles.[*9)] Along the way, the far-right-leaning sympathies of Distal and Funk D'Void were exposed, and there were too many spirit-crushing exposés of misogynistic attitudes, including of course the sexist remarks made by the head of hyped house collective Giegling Records, Konstantin, to a female journalist from Groove Magazine.[*10)] As the year's controversies rumbled on tirelessly and the call-out cycle (call-out / denial / receipts / backtrack & short apology / backlash / news coverage / public apology) continued to turn, predictably and cynically, scattershot opinions began to coalesce around criticisms of call-out culture in general.

The act of calling out is disruptive, and not only to the instigator and the subject; »call-out fatigue« is cultivated every time there is a race to break a story, to reproduce and reshare its offending material, and each time a compulsion to trumpet one's own views in relation to its content is indulged. Much of the criticism against the usefulness of call-out culture is less concerned with the efficacy of the act than the exhibitionist nature of the prosumer outrage cycle it encourages. In a 2011 blog post titled »*Come one, come all! Feminist and Social Justice blogging as performance and bloodshed*,«[*11)] the writer Flavia Dzodan bristled at the »unquestionably reductionist« nature of call-out culture. It was, she wrote, »the most toxic aspect of blogging.« Dzodan continues that »call-out culture might, at times, dangerously resemble bullying. However, unlike bullying, call-out culture is part of the performative aspect of blogging. Unlike bullying, *a call-out is intended for an audience*.«

Several years later, activist Asam Ahmad put forward the alternative approach of »speaking privately with an individual who has done some wrong, in order to address the behaviour without making a spectacle of the address itself,« which he names as »calling-in.«[*12)] The case in favour of calling in of course only functions under the presumption of respectful dialoguing, and under the certainty that the problematic behaviours aren't criminal or threatening. Even so, with no risk of public consequences, assessing any accountability measures becomes the sole responsibility of the transgressed, a strategy that may prove effective in some cases but unlikely in the most reactive ones.

In this pursuit of accountability, the necessary truth is that the originator of the call-out often needs to expose themselves, dredging up uncomfortable moments, circulating offending material, and then girding themselves for repercussion. In the case of Glaswegian DJ and WOC Sarra Wild and her appearance in a documentary produced by Boiler Room about the city's music landscape, her attempts at a »call-in« in a dialogue with the popular streaming platform over their decision to cut a sentence of hers – in which she stated that Glasgow was »no longer a white man's techno scene« – was initially met with silence.

For the individual who experiences exclusion and silencing, or abuse and harassment, the democratising – and viral – potential of a tweet or blog post may be their only means of recourse. »Most of the people labelling call-out culture toxic are white and cisgender, just saying,« wrote Busang Senne in the article »*Man, F*ck Your Pride': Why Call-Out Culture Isn't Toxic' for Cosmopolitan* South Africa.«[*13)] She continues, »The history of call-out culture started with black people, POC, and queer communities using it as the last line of defence in engaging with trolls online. To erase that history and assume it's a space used solely for getting attention is to centre your feelings, and the feelings of trolls, above the trauma of marginalised groups. Derailing the conversation to focus on how you're affected by marginalised groups' reactions to oppression is 0% helpful because FYI, it's not always about you, boo.«

The inefficacy of Sarra Wild's »call in« left her no choice but to call out. She did so on her public Facebook profile, and after receiving a dismissive note from Boiler Room that confirmed they »at no point set out to highlight any negativity« in the documentary and doubled down on the censoring of her words in »the ›white men‹ phrase would have caused all sorts of political repercussions,« she exposed them again. In an official public apology that followed,[*14)] Boiler Room finally acknowledged that »the effect of what [they] did with this edit was to silence the voice of a woman of colour speaking about the history of racial and gender bias in her city. It inadvertently reinforced a discourse where perspectives of marginalised people are erased, while turning up the volume on the inequality and discrimination so prevalent across the music industry.«

As was witnessed with another Boiler Room controversy this year, a chorus of community support can be essential to navigating this messy, incomplete type of activism. The announcement in July that Boiler Room had the winning bid for a grant of almost £300,000 from Arts Council England to broadcast the Notting Hill Carnival was met with ardent criticism best crystallised by an anonymous writer, pen name Boil The Room, in a widely-shared article published on Medium[*15)] that questioned what they saw as »an overt attempt to commodify and profit from a celebration of the culture and heritage of the British West Indian community« while the core organising committee of Notting Hill Carnival remained »criminally underfunded.« The annual two-day free event in West London was born out of the turmoil of race riots in the mid-1960s involving London's Caribbean community, and the gulf between this and the racial and social background of Boiler Room's founder Blaise Bellville – who was once infamously included in a 2011 tabloid newspaper article titled »Britain's 50 most powerful posh people under 30«[*16)] – once again highlighted a long-running criticism of the platform; that its commercial success has come at the expense of dance music's black roots and unpaid artist performances. Boil The Room posited that the Notting Hill Carnival deal would perpetuate »Boiler Room's PR campaign,

whitewashing black culture into a palatable consumer product and creating lucrative marketing opportunities.« The platform's response was to embrace transparency: an extensive statement published on their website announced their intention to suspend the use of funding until the 2018 edition of Carnival, and in the meantime, »to guarantee total transparency over every penny of public funding given to this project [and] operate an open book policy with any interested party over the budget.«[*17] They also pledged to work in partnership and review the budget together with Carnival stakeholders and to »re-approach anything required to ensure that this initiative is of real benefit to Carnival and their respective members.«

In the aftermath of the Harvey Weinstein exposé, as the global wave of #MeToo solidarity resonated with women across all sectors of the music industry, both Björk and Alice Glass of Crystal Castles credited the courage of women who came forth with their stories of oppression and also shared their own harrowing accounts of abuse, harassment, and humiliation at the hands of former male collaborators. Just one of the concrete initiatives that sprung out of broader discussions about gender inequality and harassment was a dedicated UK telephone helpline created for women in the electronic music industry intended to help combat sexual harassment.

Cases of calling out have also appeared to provoke thoughtful recognition of misconduct on the part of the accused. As 2017 drew to a close, a new hosting job secured by caucasian UK grime figure Logan Sama to head up BBC Radio 1Xtra's weekly grime show was snatched away from him just two days before he was due to begin. TwinB, a black broadcaster from the same station, cited a series of tweets by Sama from 2011 that was heavy with offensive words towards women generally and women of colour in particular. Although the call-out was precipitated by a supposed rivalry between the two, TwinB's tweets were direct: »You can't be operating in black culture and be chatting like that freely, especially when in discussion about the cultural origins of the music you play! And especially If you're a voice and communicator within black british culture.«[*18] An apology statement by Sama after his firing was a sober admission of wrongdoing: »I understand [the BBC's] decision and agree that these comments are indefensible, regardless of their context.«

Additional positive changes that have emerged anecdotally may well have been propelled by a broader climate of consciousness-raising that call-out culture has participated in. There is the Berlin-based editor of an online electronic music magazine who implemented his own system to positively advantage writers from underrepresented communities when delegating assignments, and the well-regarded DJ and producer who has a baseline requirement of gender diversity on festival lineups that must be met before he will consider any booking requests. It's not entirely coincidental however, that in both these cases it is a cisgendered European man who holds a position of influence that allows him the freedom to choose to effect for change from within.

Our community's ability to mobilise and amplify a call-out is demonstrably strong, but until we are able to critically engage with some of the myths and outdated truths that we perpetuate about ourselves and our industry – that a capitalist imperative is not welcome, that our taste for nostalgia isn't a fetish, that a marginalised identity in the real world won't marginalise your prospects in our world, that racism, sexual predation, classism, misogyny, and other structures of oppression don't exist, let alone thrive, here – the dragnet of social media will continue to catch, amplify, and then demand a reparative action on our behalf.

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*1) www.residentadvisor.net/features/1765
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*7) www.crackmagazine.net/2017/09/jeremy-underground-responds-hotel-controversy-just-want-comfort
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*14) www.twitter.com/boilerroomtv/status/893020992056459264
*15) www.medium.com/@boil_the_room/babylon-room-ea3eb474d155
*16) www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-1347610/Britains-50-powerful-posh-people-30-From-catwalk-Westminster.html
*17) www.boilerroom.tv/microsite/carnivalacegrant
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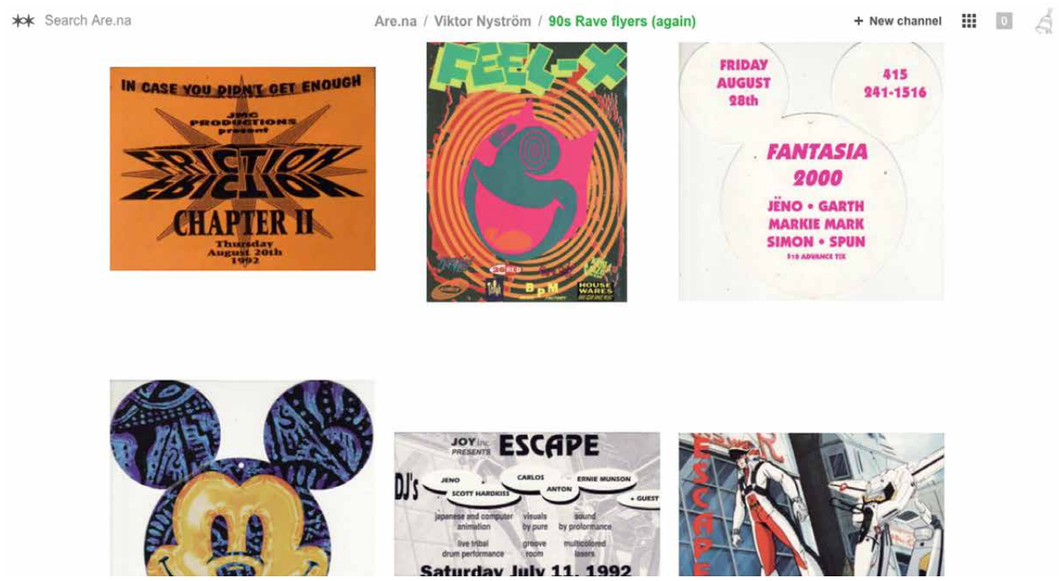
THIS IS NOW A HISTORY OF THE WAY I LOVE IT

COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH ON ARE.NA, COMPILED BY CLAIRE TOLAN



Detail view of Viktor Nyström's »90s Rave flyers (again)« channel on Are.na.

IN DISCUSSIONS OF THE PERVERSITIES OF SOCIAL MEDIA, THERE'S OFTEN AN ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM: WE MIGHT OBJECT IN PRINCIPLE, BUT WE CONTINUE TO QUIETLY ACCEDE IN PRACTICE. IN AN AGE IN WHICH A FLAT-OUT REJECTION OF TECHNOLOGY WOULD CONSTITUTE SOCIAL AND PROFESSIONAL SUICIDE FOR MANY, QUESTIONS OF TECHNOLOGY USAGE AND APPLICATION ARE OFTEN MET WITH MICRO-DECISIONS ON A CASE-BY-CASE BASIS, AND USUALLY ACCOMPANIED BY THE WAVERING BUT STEADY PRESENCE OF HYPOCRISY. IN THIS ARTICLE, ARTIST AND PROGRAMMER CLAIRE TOLAN MAKES A CASE FOR ARE.NA, A SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORM THAT OFFERS A NOVEL, BENEFICIAL ALTERNATIVE TO THE BIG CORPORATE PLATFORMS, AND WHOSE INCLUSION IN DAILY LIFE MIGHT BE A MICRO-DECISION WITH A MACRO-OUTCOME.

»OPEN-SOURCING THE CODE IS ALSO A POLITICAL STATEMENT: IN A TIME WHEN SOCIAL MEDIA ALGORITHMS ARE CLOSELY-GUARDED SECRETS DESIGNED TO MANIPULATE AND ADDICT USERS, ARE.NA'S TRANSPARENCY IS HEARTENING.«

There are many that I know and they know it

Are.na is a collaborative research and social media platform run by Charles Broskoski, Daniel Pianetti, and Chris Sherron that allows users to organise pieces of information – links, text, images – »blocks,« in Are.na parlance – into collections or »channels.« The platform's functionality, which unites and morphs aspects of Tumblr and Pinterest, is bolstered by the ethics and vision of its development and the dedication and curiosity of its user base.

Iterating on community-enabling, utopic computing ventures, Are.na eschews clickbait, »likes,« and ephemeral publishing, championing instead the collection, connection, and retention of data-becoming-information and information-becoming-knowledge. Are.na is a play of links and images – a repository for intuitive connections, an archive for rigorous research, and a lounge for budding collaborations. Over the past seven years, Are.na has developed one of the most engaged, thoughtful communities that I have ever encountered on the internet.

ARE.NA IS MADE FOR COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH

They are all of them repeating and I hear it.
I love it and I tell it.

Are.na is committed to remaining advertisement-free, and thus positions itself as a conscientious contender to Facebook, Twitter, and other networks that profit primarily off of user data, activity, and attention. The ash heap of the internet is strewn with failed »alternative« social networks – rebuttals of Twitter, Facebook, and Tumblr that arise solely in opposition to the existing platforms and offer no differing, compelling functionality.

Are.na's primary functionality – collaborative research – has set it apart from other networks and made it a darling of artists, academics, and researchers. Are.na doesn't do »everything« that a user might require from social media: it provides no direct messaging functionality, for example. Instead, it does research archiving, the collection of content, and the connection of ideas very well. In functionality, it is most similar to Pinterest or Tumblr, but the priorities of its developers and the objectives of its existing user base have allowed the platform to evolve its own niche.

Are.na's architecture is designed to allow the development of ideas over time. »Blocks« on Are.na are allowed to exist in multiple »channels.« When a block is selected, the interface displays all of the channels with which it is associated, as well as – if applicable – the URL from which the block's content originated, and all other channels that contain blocks with identical URLs. These provenance records allow for the contextualization of Are.na content, both for users who are seeking similar channels and profiles, and for researchers searching for citations. This contextualization plays well with Are.na's emphasis on the collection of ideas over time. The social network has a chronological feed, which shows you when users and channels that you follow have added new content, much like other social networks. But content on the feed and throughout the site is always presented alongside a »connect« button, thus encouraging its connection to existing channels: the collation of the new with the old.

The research focus and provenance allowances of Are.na provide constraints that have – thus far – prevented it from sliding into the context collapse and memory loss of the major social networks, which privilege content over context and instantaneity over the time-necessitating maturation of concepts. To further combat the decay of context, Are.na provides privacy controls. In addition to not being required to use their »real« names, users can make their channels »open« to any other collaborator; »closed,« only available to certain collaborators but browse-able by everyone; or »private,« only accessible to the creator and any approved collaborator.

Are.na comes with tools. The platform provides desktop users with a »bookmarklet,« which allows users to add websites to their Are.na channels without opening a new tab. Developers recently released an iOS app, and an Android one is on the way. Are.na provides an API for users who want their channels to serve as a website backend. The code for the Are.na platform itself, as well as that of its apps, has been open-sourced, thus allowing anyone to follow along with and extract from its development. Open-sourcing the code is also a political statement: in a time when social media algorithms are closely-guarded secrets designed to manipulate and addict users, Are.na's transparency is heartening.

Are.na users can opt for »pro« accounts ($5/month), which allow an unlimited number of »private« channels, the ability to hide profiles/channels from search engines, and early access to new features. Free accounts have access to a fully functional version of Are.na, so users who are unsure about or unable to commit to a »pro« account can still properly use the website.

»Pro« accounts are one way that Are.na makes money. The platform has been open about its need to sustain itself and its strategies for doing so, with an emphasis on remaining ethically above-board by refusing to integrate advertising.[*1)] »Pro« accounts will not fund the network at scale (currently, it has about 25,000 active users). Becoming a non-profit brought the continual need to find new grants – many of which would not be for substantial amounts of money or long periods of time. Instead, the network decided to seek capital investment, in one case from an investor whose research, design, and strategy company, Consortia, was already using the platform for its work. By targeting investors who share certain common ground with Are.na (for example, a dissatisfaction with the current state of social media), and who are interested more in long-term goals than short-term gains on their investment, Are.na hopes to secure funding that allows it to continue running the platform with its current vision and ethics.

Many of the major social networks have sought to be all-encompassing. Facebook in particular has attempted to subsume other platforms – by acquiring Instagram and WhatsApp; by adding marketplaces; by creating its own internet service. It is refreshing to see Are.na only iterating on a related series of tasks. This is what I hope the next generation of social media will be: an ecosystem of apps that complement each other while remaining distinct, independent, humane, and respectful of user privacy.

ARE.NA IS MADE FOR MUSICIANS (AND EVERYONE ELSE)

There are many kinds of men and women and I know it.
They repeat it and I hear it and I love it.

Are.na is not a music-specific platform, but the organisational, archival, and playful impulses that it facilitates are useful for any kind of creative thinking. The platform demands content: instead of virtue signaling and self-promotion, you are challenged to connect your ideas with others who find similar ideas compelling, and, together, find new ways of relating to the ideas. When I wrote Are.na for a list of music-focused channels that might be of interest for this piece, they noted that several prominent musicians are using Are.na under pseudonyms – encouraging because it shows people are »prioritizing ideas rather than popularity on Are.na.«

For years, Are.na has been my primary archive for project research. In private channels, I compile YouTube playlists, images, texts, links to Google Books page previews. The platform is an extraordinary tool for drawing connections between pieces of information, tracing out conceptual frameworks. If I feel that my channel is becoming coherent enough to share, or that it might be useful to others, I make it »closed« instead of »private,« allowing others to view its contents. I have used Are.na for numerous collaborations since 2013, and every one of them has benefited from the platform.

Many channels related to the music world seem to grow out of similar impulses.

»Club Architecture,« a channel by Christina Badal, collects images of nightclubs – past, present, and future.[*2)] The images range from photographs of Manchester's The Haçienda to drawings of Berghain to Martti Kalliala's diagrams of club ruins, as created and classified by some future archaeologist. There are several channels devoted to rave flyers, such as »90s Rave flyers (again)« by Viktor Nyström, which contains scans of the fronts, backs, and (sometimes) insides of colourful, absurd advertisements for long-since raved raves[*3)]. There's a Pauline Oliveros channel[*4)]; a Robert Johnson channel (one of a series of nightclub channels by Chris Sherron)[*5)]; a »sound identity / audio branding« channel[*6)], and an »Interspecies Music« channel, containing videos of animals playing human instruments.[*7)]

Charles Broskoski has created a prototype, mac.are.na, which turns channels into playlists, playing a channel's mp3s and YouTube links in succession.[*8)] Efforts like this point to Are.na's potential as a tool for musicians – both as an evolving interface for research and archiving, and for developers, as an open-source infrastructure that encourages any number of experiments.

ARE.NA IS MADE FOR THE FUTURE (EMERGENT IN THE PAST)

I love it and now I will write it. This is now a history
of my love of it. I hear it and I love it and I write it.

One block on the »Arena Influences« channel, which is controlled by users central to Are.na's development, contains the Gertrude Stein fragments from »The Making of Americans,«[*9)] included throughout this article. Others contain PDFs of writing and short quotes from computer and internet pioneers Ted Nelson, Douglas Engelbart, Vannevar Bush, Alan Kay. One block is a link to the Wikipedia article for the »tree that owns itself,« a white oak in Athens, GA, which, rumor has it, was deeded to itself some time before 1890. This early imagination of the subjectivity and agency of objects calls to mind the recent measure in New Zealand to grant a river personhood, and the ongoing debate on most social media networks about ownership of data. Are.na, which explicitly states that it does not make claim to user data and will never breach users' »private« channels, is one of the few centralised social networks to establish itself as a champion of user privacy and agency.

In an article for the Walker Museum of Art about Ted Nelson, Are.na's Charles Broskoski quotes from Nelson's 1974 book *Computer Lib/Dream Machines* the supposition that »›[k]nowledge‹…and indeed most of our civilization and what remains of those previous – is a vast cross-tangle of ideas and evidential materials, not a pyramid of truth. So that preserving its structure, and improving its accessibility, is important to us all.«[*10)] This concept describes Ted Nelson's spectacular Xanadu project – the still-in-progress construction of a structured library of all human knowledge. With Xanadu, Nelson coined terms like »hypertext,« which are still relevant today in describing the linking, non-linearity of information-seeking and information-connecting on the web.

Like Nelson's Xanadu, Are.na allows the »vast cross-tangle« of ideas to be endlessly reconfigured, with blocks shifting into new channels and channels containing channels containing channels. As Are.na notes, »The intention behind Are.na, similar to what Ted Nelson imagined for Xanadu, is that a user is not just passively consuming information, but also continually recontextualizing information into new ideas.«[*11)] Various futures arise out of configurations of the past that are only possible when people have the agency to explore and re-arrange information.

»THE ASH HEAP OF THE INTERNET IS STREWN WITH FAILED ›ALTERNATIVE‹ SOCIAL NETWORKS – REBUTTALS OF TWITTER, FACEBOOK, AND TUMBLR THAT ARISE SOLELY IN OPPOSITION TO THE EXISTING PLATFORMS AND OFFER NO DIFFERING, COMPELLING FUNCTIONALITY.«

ARE.NA IS MADE FOR YOU AND ME

This is now a history of the way they do it.

When developing a prototype of the website, a mentor encouraged the Are.na founders to build in some kind of quality controls. They opted to do this culturally, not technologically, by encouraging their friends to use the network.[*12)] This has, for the most part, proven to work. Are.na now has a strong community behind it, and the development in the past years has tended towards the community's needs, as seen in channels such as »Feedback and Feature Requests,« and »Archived: Feedback and Feature Requests.« The former contains a block of feature requests by users; the latter contains feature requests that have been implemented in the platform.

Are.na actively engages with the community, by inviting users to write blog posts; by offering »micro-grants« for users to develop certain projects on the platform or related to the platform; by offering »pro« users the opportunity to test out certain features (such as the iOS app) before they launch.

In an interview, Broskoski says »The biggest compliment for us is when someone describes Are.na as healthy.« The entries in »How do you describe Are.na at a party?«, a channel open to submission from any user, seem to deliver the compliment again and again: »a place for productive coveillance,« »social media that doesn't damage your brain,« »a toolkit for assembling new worlds from the scraps of the old,« »a site to cross-pollinate research within creative fields,« »Like a mind map between everyone on here. and theres's no likes <3,« »The best dating site in the world.«[*13)]

Are.na's co-founders, who come out of design and art backgrounds, have spoken of the platform as a lifelong project.[*14)] Broskoski first began developing Are.na when, frustrated with his art practice, he came to the conclusion that the most generous thing you can do as an artist is make tools for other people to use. This ethos has carried through to Are.na in its present form. According to Broskoski, Are.na values lifelong education as »the most important thing.« It has already become an integral part of many users' self- and co-educations. I hope that Are.na will continue for years and years. While it exists, and even when it no longer exists, it will provide a great model for other nascent networks, an insistence that something else is possible.

On the dominant social media platforms, time drains away. On Facebook, we react to its passing with infantilizing emoticons, »thumbs up,« »heart,« »angry face.« Are.na demands cognitive effort, and provides much more in exchange than the dopamine rush of receiving »likes.« From Are.na's end-of-2017 blog: »Within the limits of our time and attention, we have access to an incomprehensible amount of knowledge. Our digital tools and communities should help us navigate that diversity of thought in ways that foster our curiosity and allow us to learn from one another over the course of our lives.«[*15)] Here's to Are.na, the social network that deserves the future.

For new users wondering where to start, the »Classic Channels« compilation contains »Timeless classics from the Are.na community«: www.are.na/are-na/classic-channels

This is now a history of the way I love it.

CLAIRE TOLAN is an artist and programmer living in Berlin.

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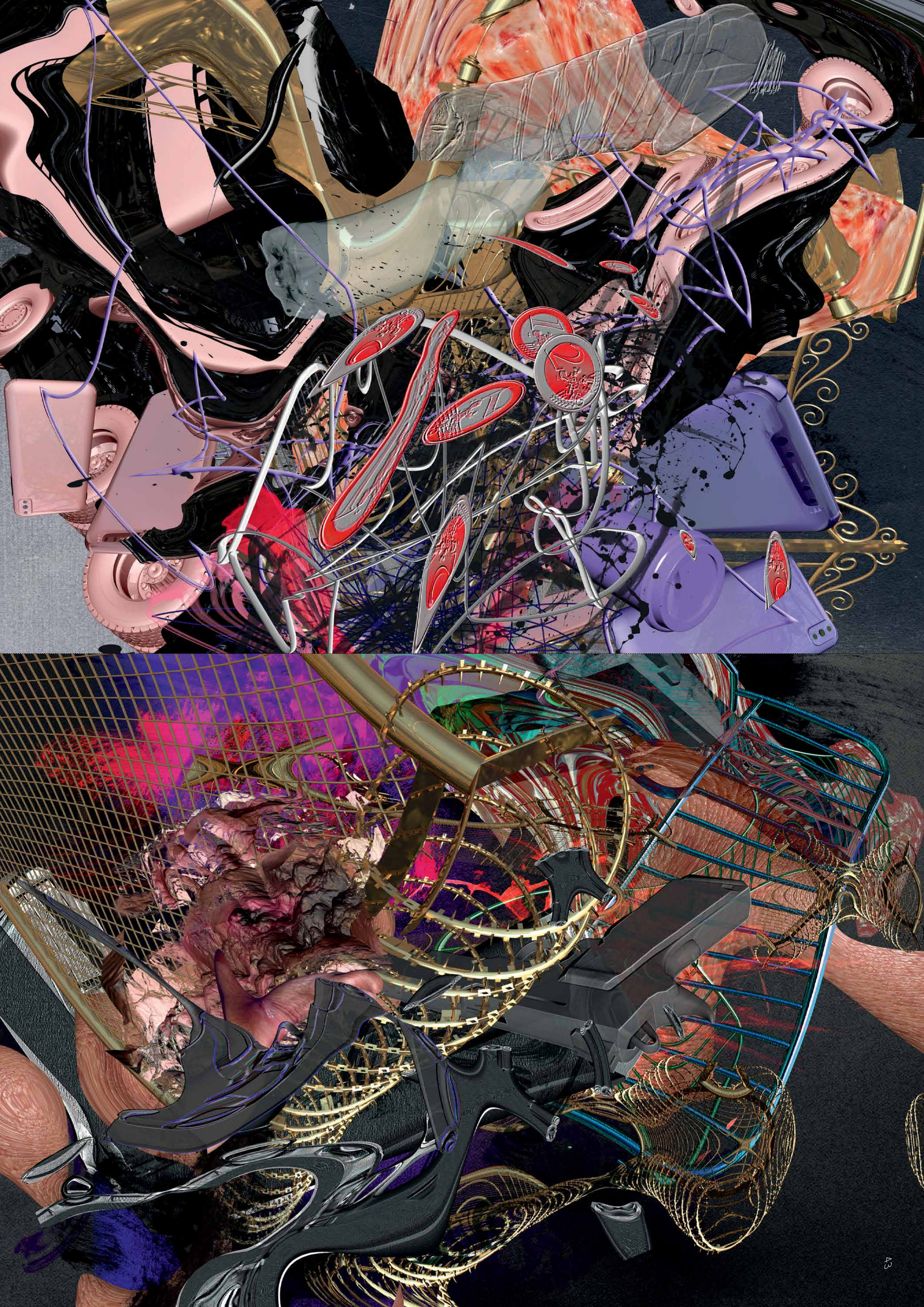
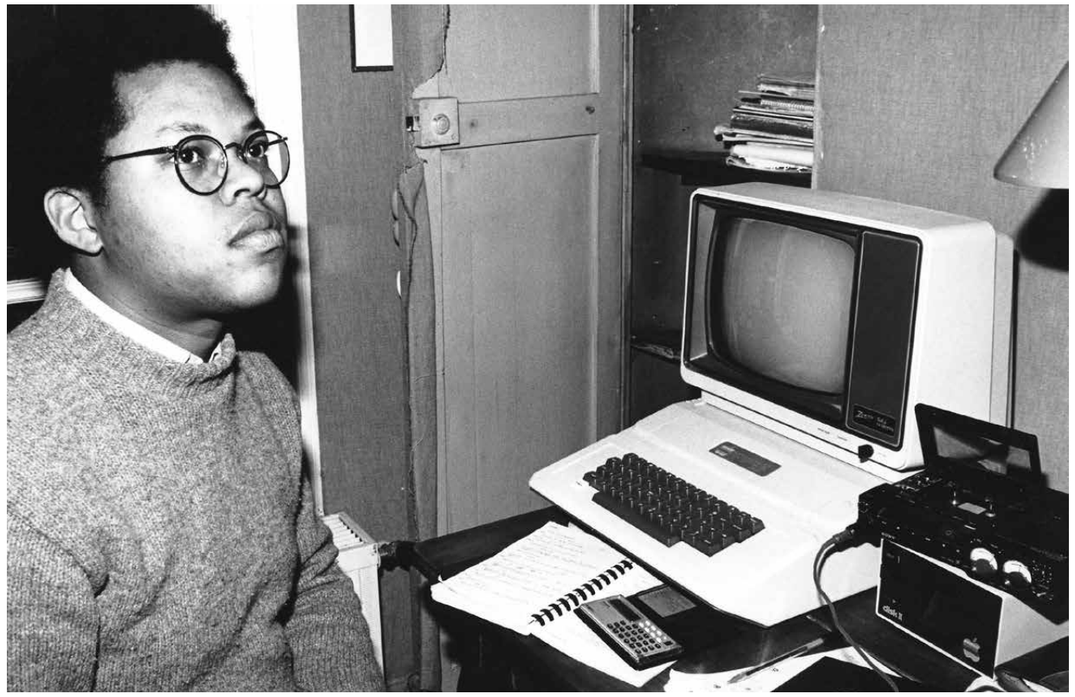
*1) www.thecreativeindependent.com/people/charles-broskoski-on-self-discovery-upon-revisiting-things-youve-accumulated-over-time
*2) www.are.na/christina-badal/club-architecture
*3) www.are.na/viktor-nystrom/90s-rave-flyers-again
*4) www.are.na/laurel-schwulst/pauline-oliveros
*5) www.are.na/chris-sherron/dance-clubs-robert-johnson
*6) www.are.na/carson-salter/sound-identity-audio-branding
*7) www.are.na/christopher-roeleveld/interspecies-music
*8) www.mac.are.na
*9) www.are.na/block/110448
*10) www.walkerart.org/magazine/counter-currents-are-na-on-ted-nelsons-computer-libdream-machines
*11) www.walkerart.org/magazine/counter-currents-are-na-on-ted-nelsons-computer-libdream-machines
*12) www.thecreativeindependent.com/people/charles-broskoski-on-self-discovery-upon-revisiting-things-youve-accumulated-over-time
*13) www.are.na/charles-broskoski/how-do-you-describe-are-na-at-a-party
*14) www.thecreativeindependent.com/people/charles-broskoski-on-self-discovery-upon-revisiting-things-youve-accumulated-over-time
*15) www.are.na/blog/hello%20world/2017/12/21/to-2018.html



LISTENING TO VOYAGER

BY PAUL STEINBECK

IN THIS INTRODUCTION TO COMPOSER, MUSICIAN, AND INTERDISCIPLINARY SCHOLAR GEORGE E. LEWIS, MUSIC THEORIST PAUL STEINBECK, A FORMER STUDENT OF LEWIS'S AT COLUMBIA, SHEDS LIGHT ON THE INTERTWINED HISTORIES OF THE ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF CREATIVE MUSICIANS (AACM) AND *VOYAGER*, THE COMPUTER SYSTEM WITH WHICH LEWIS AND ROSCOE MITCHELL WILL PERFORM AT CTM 2018. AS HE ARGUES, *VOYAGER*, LIKE ALL ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE, IS NOT A NEUTRAL SYSTEM BUT RATHER REFLECTS THE AESTHETIC VALUES AND EXPERIENCES OF ITS HUMAN CREATOR(S).



George Lewis in his studio at the Institut de Recherche et de Coordination Acoustique/Musique (IRCAM), 1984. Photo by Cheryl Lewis.

Founded on Chicago's South Side in 1965 by four African American composers, the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM) was the most significant collective organization in the history of experimental music. Or rather, *is* the most significant – the Association celebrated its fiftieth anniversary in 2015 and shows no signs of slowing down. Important new AACM artists emerge every few years, and the Association's impact can be seen in many corners of contemporary culture, including intermedia performance and visual art. But its influence may be strongest in the realms of social relations and musical sound.

From the earliest years of the organization, AACM musicians were united by a social commitment to support one another's creative pursuits. This ethic of mutual support was evident in countless concerts and recording sessions, when AACM composers called on fellow members of the organization to bring their music to life. The AACM's social relationships also operated behind the scenes, making the Association a dynamic community of artists who constantly encouraged their colleagues to keep practicing, studying, and developing their music. In this social environment – or »atmosphere,« the term favored in the 1960s AACM – musicians were expected, even required, to be innovative. The members responded to this mandate by creating a number of musical techniques that became synonymous with the Association, from multi-instrumentalism to unique ways of integrating composition and improvisation.

The AACM's 1960s performances attracted immediate attention in Chicago, and a series of recordings with local labels brought the music from the South Side to listeners around the world. Indeed, albums such as Roscoe Mitchell's *Sound* (1966), Joseph Jarman's *Song For* (1967), Muhal Richard Abrams's *Levels and Degrees of Light* (1968), and Anthony Braxton's *For Alto* (1969) were so revolutionary that the AACM's place in history would be secure even if the organization had disbanded at the end of the 1960s, as did most other musicians' collectives formed that decade. Instead, the Association continued to thrive. In 1969, Mitchell and Jarman's Art Ensemble of Chicago relocated to Europe, as did Braxton and his band. By the early 1970s, the Art Ensemble and Braxton's group were back in the United States, recording for New York-based major labels and urging many of their AACM colleagues to move to the East Coast. In Chicago, meanwhile, the Association was welcoming a steady stream of new members, throughout the 1970s and in every decade thereafter.

Of all the figures who joined the AACM during its 1970s »second wave,« few did as much to shape the organization as George Lewis. He came aboard in 1971, and four years later served as the AACM's chair, directing the 1975 Tenth Anniversary Festival. Lewis also functioned as the Association's in-house historian. From the 1990s into the twenty-first century, he published a number of writings about the AACM, including the book *A Power Stronger Than Itself* (2008), the definitive study of the organisation. Additionally, Lewis's performances and compositions left a lasting mark on the Association. In the mid-1970s, he established himself as one of the world's top trombonists, recognized for his virtuosic technique and his imaginative improvisations. By the end of the decade, he was making music with computers and synthesizers, often blending electronic sounds with traditional acoustic instruments. These early experiments were received positively, and during the 1980s and 1990s computer music became central to Lewis's compositional practice. He also composed for acoustic ensembles, writing chamber music, orchestral scores, pieces for improvising groups of all sizes, and even an opera: *Afterword* (2015), based on *A Power Stronger Than Itself*.

»FROM THE EARLIEST YEARS OF THE ORGANISATION, AACM MUSICIANS WERE UNITED BY A SOCIAL COMMITMENT TO SUPPORT ONE ANOTHER'S CREATIVE PURSUITS.«

Lewis's best-known composition is *Voyager* (1987–), a pioneering work in which human musicians and a software-powered »virtual orchestra« improvise together. A number of leading improvisers have given performances of *Voyager*, from Miya Masaoka and Evan Parker to AACM colleagues like Roscoe Mitchell, who appeared on the first recording of the composition (1993). In the decades since its 1987 premiere, *Voyager* has been played in hundreds of concerts around the world, making it Lewis's most-performed piece. Another measure of *Voyager*'s importance: the prominent place it occupies in histories of experimental music, which portray the piece as a breakthrough in human-computer interaction. These histories tend to

emphasize the composition's technical features and other topics of interest to computer-music researchers. With few exceptions, however, these histories neglect to consider a key influence on Lewis's *Voyager*: the musical practices of the AACM. Lewis started attending AACM concerts when he was still in high school. Born in Chicago during the summer of 1952 and raised on the city's South Side, he attended public schools for a few years before transferring to the Laboratory School, a K-12 academy operated by the University of Chicago. Lewis took up the trombone at the Lab School, playing in the concert band, jazz band, and orchestra. Soon he was listening to bebop, avant-garde tape compositions, and John Coltrane, while venturing off the Lab School campus to check out Chicago's primary exponents of contemporary music – the Art Ensemble, AACM saxophonist Fred Anderson, and other members of the Association.

»VOYAGER REVEALS THE CORE PROCESSES THAT CHARACTERISE EVERY GROUP IMPROVISATION, WHETHER HUMAN-HUMAN, OR EVEN COMPUTER-COMPUTER.«

In 1969, Lewis finished high school and entered Yale University. He hoped to major in music, but the Yale faculty were unwelcoming to students without classical training, and Lewis became disenchanted with the university. So he took a break from Yale and spent 1971–72 back in Chicago. One day in the summer of 1971, Lewis was walking home from his nine-to-five job when he heard a band rehearsing – it was Muhal Richard Abrams's group. Lewis introduced himself to Abrams's crew and revealed that he played trombone. Within weeks, he was invited to perform with some of the AACM's foremost musicians, including Abrams and the members of the Art Ensemble. Soon Lewis was formally accepted into the Association, and 1971–72 became his »AACM year,« a period of intensive study that gave him a thorough grounding in the AACM's practices and inspired him to become a professional musician.

Lewis reentered Yale in 1972 and graduated in 1974. Then he headed home to Chicago, where he reunited with the AACM and launched his career in performance and composition. By 1976, Lewis was touring internationally with artists like Count Basie and fellow AACM member Anthony Braxton. He was also developing electroacoustic compositions like *Homage to Charles Parker*, for electronics, percussion, synthesizers, and trombone. By the end of the decade, he had become interested in the musical possibilities of personal computers – then a brand-new technology – and he started teaching himself how to program while moving from Chicago to New York. Lewis was a quick study: in 1979, at the Kitchen in downtown New York, he premiered his first computer-music piece, *The KIM and I*, in which his trombone interacted with a custom-built computer controlling a Moog synthesizer.

Interactive computer compositions like *The KIM and I* opened numerous doors for Lewis. After the piece's premiere, the Kitchen invited him to serve as the center's music director (1980–82), a position that led to a residency at IRCAM in Paris (1982–85). While at IRCAM, Lewis composed a new computer-music work, *Rainbow Family* (1984), which would form the foundation for *Voyager*. Like its famous successor, *Rainbow Family* was conceived as an interactive composition for human instrumentalists and an improvising orchestra (here generated by Lewis's own software and a trio of Yamaha DX-7 synthesizers). After his residency at IRCAM, Lewis took up another residency at Amsterdam's STEIM, where he began developing his next series of interactive pieces, culminating in *Voyager*.

The 1987 *Voyager* premiere was the first of many versions of the composition. Over the following decades, Lewis continually revised the work in response to advances in technology. All of these versions, though, reflected Lewis's original vision for *Voyager*: a software-driven, improvising entity that can create orchestral textures based on the sonic ideals of the AACM. The AACM's musical practices influenced *Voyager* in a number of areas, especially the work's distinctive instrumentation. *Voyager* is an orchestral composition, but the (digital) instruments heard in performances are not limited to those found in a European symphony orchestra. Instead, *Voyager* combines symphonic strings, winds, and percussion with instruments from Africa, the Americas, Asia, and the Middle East. These sonic resources can yield textures as dense as a *tutti* orchestra, but ordinarily the software chooses sparser groupings of instruments, often forming unconventional ensembles rarely encountered in the concert hall. These configurations sound less like a handful of players plucked from a symphony and more like a gathering of AACM multi-instrumentalists – groups such as the Art Ensemble and Muhal Richard Abrams's Experimental Band. The AACM's explorations of multi-instrumentalism began in the mid-1960s, when Experimental Band members, the Art Ensemble, and other AACM improvisers »moved to develop multiple voices on a wide variety of instruments,« as Lewis put it. By the decade's end, musicians like Roscoe Mitchell were playing dozens of different instruments each, as Lewis witnessed during an Art Ensemble performance he attended as a high school student. The next time Lewis heard the Art Ensemble, at a 1972 concert documented on the album *Live at Mandel Hall*, the band's instrument collection had grown exponentially. »When I saw the Art Ensemble in 1972,« he remembered, »they'd have like a thousand instruments on stage.« In performances such as this, Lewis observed, »the extreme multiplicity of voices, em-

George Lewis preparing for the premiere of his »Homage to Charles Parker,« AACM Summerfest, University of Chicago, 1978. Photo by Nancy Carter-Hill.

Recording session, Roscoe Mitchell composition, »The Maze« (1978). Photo by Ann Nessa.

»DURING PASSAGES WHEN VOYAGER *IS FOLLOWING THE MUSICIANS, IT CAN EMULATE THEIR INPUT ACROSS NEARLY EVERY PARAMETER, AND IT OFTEN SEEMS TO BE READING THE PERFORMERS' MINDS, A PHENOMENON THAT LEWIS CALLS ›EMOTIONAL TRANSDUCTION.‹«*

bedded within an already highly collective ensemble orientation, permitted the timbral diversity of a given situation to exceed the sum of its instrumental parts, affording a wider palette of potential orchestrations to explore.«

Voyager's multi-instrumentalism is not limited to the digital realm. The software can also play an acoustic instrument: the MIDI-capable Yamaha Disklavier. In this version of the composition, *Voyager* is transformed from an orchestral piece into a chamber work, producing acoustic textures that are reminiscent of Lewis's trio (2003–17) with Muhal Richard Abrams and Roscoe Mitchell.

Crucially, like the Abrams-Lewis-Mitchell trio, the Art Ensemble, and other AACM groups, *Voyager* is able to conduct itself. Indeed, in any *Voyager* concert, all that the human musicians have to do is type the commands »start playing« (to begin the piece) and »stop playing« (to bring the performance to a close). In between »start playing« and »stop playing,« *Voyager* can create its own music, deciding which of the orchestra's instruments will play, arranging those instruments into distinct ensembles, and spontaneously composing its own melodies – even while the human performers are resting. But when the instrumentalists are playing, *Voyager* listens closely, converting their sounds into MIDI data and tracking some thirty musical parameters. However, the program does not use this data to store up musical motives for later use. In Lewis's view, this »essentially Eurocentric« technique would conflict with *Voyager*'s non-hierarchical, AACM-inspired approach to open improvisation, in which the instrumentalists and the software work together in real time to articulate musical form.

Voyager interprets the human performers' sounds not as isolated melodies or rhythms but rather as complex contributions to a continuously-changing texture. This innovative, »state-based« mode of sonic analysis enables *Voyager* to respond to the instrumentalists with astonishing sensitivity. During passages when *Voyager* is following the musicians, it can emulate their input across nearly every parameter, and it often seems to be reading the performers' minds, a phenomenon that Lewis calls »emotional transduction.« However, the program can also choose to ignore or oppose their sonic input – just like a human improviser. In this way, *Voyager* reveals the core processes that characterise every group improvisation, whether human-computer, human-human, or even computer-computer.

When musicians improvise together, no matter the genre or style, they listen to one another, analyse the texture as it evolves, and decide which sonic contributions will best serve the music. In an AACM-style open improvisation, moreover, the performers' rights and responsibilities are even greater. Improvisers who move away from standard forms take on a mutual obligation for determining how the performance will unfold. Furthermore, because all participants in an open improvisation have the right to be heard, no one possesses ultimate authority over the performance. Entering into such an open-ended musical environment can be a challenge for some improvisers, but not for Lewis and his AACM colleagues, who have been developing novel approaches to improvisation since the Association's founding. In fact, the very history of the AACM is an open improvisation writ large. Inventing the practice of multi-instrumentalism, programming virtual orchestras that can improvise, carving out a space for African American composers on the experimental-music scene: all of these AACM accomplishments were without precedent, and could only have been achieved by artists who can create order spontaneously without relying on existing models – a collaborative process that is renewed in every performance of Lewis's *Voyager*.

PAUL STEINBECK teaches music theory at Washington University in St. Louis. His research focuses on improvisation, intermedia, and the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM). His book *Message to Our Folks* is the first study of the Art Ensemble of Chicago, the AACM's flagship group. With AACM member Fred Anderson, he is co-author of *Exercises for the Creative Musician*, a method book for improvisers. Steinbeck is also a bassist, improviser, and composer. He performs with a number of ensembles, including the experimental trio Low End Theory, with Thurman Barker and former AACM president Mwata Bowden.
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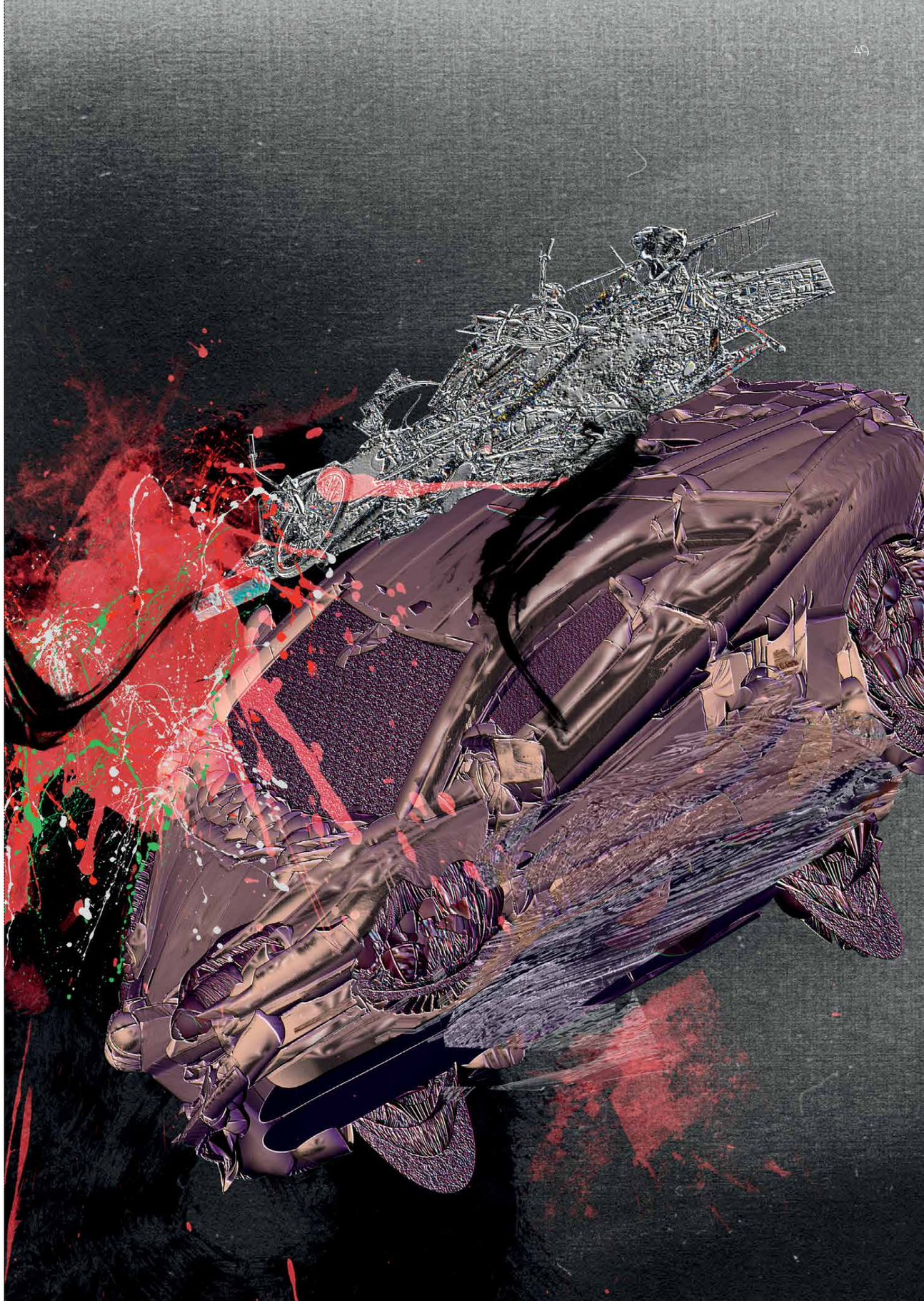

WHY DO WE WANT OUR COMPUTERS TO IMPROVISE?

BY GEORGE E. LEWIS

A MEMBER OF THE ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF CREATIVE MUSICIANS SINCE 1971 AND A PIONEER OF COMPUTER MUSIC, GEORGE E. LEWIS IS KNOWN FOR HIS INCORPORATION OF MACHINES INTO SITUATIONS OF MUSICAL IMPROVISATION. HERE LEWIS ADDRESSES SOME OF THE QUESTIONS AND DOUBTS RAISED BY THIS PRACTICE. THIS ARTICLE WILL BE PUBLISHED IN THE UPCOMING *OXFORD HANDBOOK OF ALGORITHMIC MUSIC* BY OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS IN 2018.

I've been involved in live electronic music since 1975, and programming computers since around 1978. An important part of my work in improvisation and computing is rooted in practices that arose in the early 1970s, when composers used the new mini- and microcomputers to produce »interactive« or »computer-driven« works, which preceded the better-known new media »interactivity« that began in the late 1980s, as well as influencing developments in »ubiquitous computing.«[*1)] Composer Joel Chadabe, one of the earliest pioneers, called these machines »interactive composing« instruments that »made musical decisions as they responded to a performer, introducing the concept of shared symbiotic control of a musical process.«[*2)] This process was exemplified by the pioneering mid-1970s work of the League of Automatic Music Composers, whose members constructed networks of musical computers that interacted with each other. »Letting the network play,« with or without outside human intervention, became a central aspect of League performance practice, one that was a key influence on my own work.[*3)]

At some point around 1979 I started to actually put on performances with what I have come to call *creative machines*.[*4)] Since that time, my machines have improvised in solo and group settings, and even as a soloist with a full symphony orchestra (see Figures 1–3).[*5)] Of course, reception varied widely, but early on, one issue arose that I've never quite been able to put to rest was exemplified by frequent conversations that started off a bit like this: »Why do you want to play with computers and not with people?«

Good question, and one that couldn't be dismissed by mere name calling (»You Luddite!«), since many of the people who were asking weren't in dialogue with those histories of technological scepticism anyway. In these early days of algorithmic improvisation, »posthumanism« was well in the future, and placing computers on stage with other people seemed somehow a denigration of the latter – not least because the machines often sounded a bit clueless and really couldn't keep up with what the musicians were doing. One fear, expressed by many, is well articulated by anthropologist of technology Lucy Suchman in terms of a project to »displace the biological individual with a computational one,«[*6)] a successor to the now-ubiquitous transformation of the nature of work that began with the Industrial Revolution and gained new urgency in the late modernist technosphere of the 1950s: »You will be replaced by a machine.«

By 2000 I was able to articulate at least one rationale for my work: »This work deals with the nature of music and, in particular, the processes by which improvising musicians produce it. These questions can encompass not only technological or music-theoretical interests but philosophical, political, cultural, and social concerns as well.«[*7)] By this time, however, I had got used to the fact that not everyone wanted those concerns encompassed. As one musician (and his interviewer) put it in a recent interview in the jazz magazine Downbeat:

George Lewis is working on another book that is about improvisation in daily life, and parsing the mental processes of which we make spontaneous decisions. It's not so mystifying,

Figure 1: Poster, George Lewis, Rainbow Family *(1984), IRCAM.*

even in our dialogue. We draw upon our vocabulary, our experiences, our associations – and we spontaneously speak to each other. I think that happens in music, but there's a particular mindfulness to the craft of that in music. Maybe that's the mystery – and should remain a mystery – if it's beyond what we can say in words."[8)]

The interviewer's response: »I'd be disappointed if we could actually map spontaneity.«"[9)] In fact, what I've come to expect from this arts-oriented notion of improvisation is an invocation of the ineffability of practice – a useful trope for artists trying to win space in an at least partially stochastic process of artworld success. In that regard, it seemed that, for some, a certain line was being crossed, and a certain transgression was in the air. The better the machines played – and for my money, they do play quite well now – the greater the threat to the mystery, and to an artist's strategic self-fashioning as one of a select band of designated superpeople with powers and abilities far beyond those of mere mortals.

In any case, the questions weren't put to flight by the quality of the computer performances. Even as much of the music we hear in the West sounds electronic or at least electronically enhanced, and programs that play music electronically are commonplace, it seemed to many that there was just something wrong with the notion of computers as improvisers. There was something special about improvisation – something essential, fundamental to the human spirit – that one just couldn't, or shouldn't, approach with machines. Nonetheless, for the rest of this chapter I want to briefly sketch out some of the basic reasons why some perverse individuals, and indeed entire communities, persist in wanting their machines to improvise.

The practice of improvisation is thoroughly embedded within the nature of many interactive, software-driven musical works, systems, and computing platforms. For my part, I've made efforts to imbue interactive systems with values such as relative autonomy, apparent subjectivity, and musical uniqueness rather than repeatability. My musical computers were designed to stake out territory, assert identities and positions, assess and respond to conditions, and maintain relativities of distance – all elements of improvisation, artistic and otherwise. Many composers theorized relations between people and interactive systems as microcosms of the social, drawing on social aesthetics that valorized bricolage and homegrown elements. System design and real-time musical interactions with the results were marked by efforts to achieve nonhierarchical, collaborative, and conversational social spaces that were seen as manifesting resistance to institutional hegemonies – all aspects of a free improvisation ethos that had emerged in the mid-1960s.

Interactions with these systems in musical performance produce a kind of virtual sociality that both draws from and challenges traditional notions of human interactivity and sociality, making common cause with a more general production of a hybrid, cyborg sociality that has forever altered both everyday sonic life and notions of subjectivity in high technological cultures. Being present at the creation of such a new mode of everyday life is simply too interesting to pass up, so that is one reason why I want my computers to improvise.

The question of machine agency is of long standing; to offer one example (and far from the earliest), in 1869 John Stuart Mill wondered, »Supposing it were possible to get houses built, corn grown, battles fought, causes tried, and even churches erected and prayers said by machinery – by automatons in human form.«"[10)] In our own time, improvisation has presaged new models of social organization that foreground agency, history, memory, identity, personality, embodiment, cultural difference, and self-determination. When we improvise, we can take part in that wide-ranging social and cultural transformation. That is because improvisation is everywhere, even if it is very hard to see – a ubiquitous practice of everyday life, fundamental to the existence and survival of every human formation, it is as close to universal as contemporary critical method could responsibly entertain. As computer scientist Philip Agre put it:

activity in worlds of realistic complexity is inherently a matter of improvisation. By »inherently« I mean that this is a necessary result, a property of the universe and not simply of a particular species of organism or a particular type of device. In particular, it is a computational result, one inherent in the physical realization of complex things."[11)]

For the philosopher Arnold I. Davidson, »Collective intelligibility… unfolds in real time when the participants in social interaction are committed to making sense of, and giving sense to, themselves and others.«"[12)] Thus, when our machines improvise musically, they allow us to explore how meaning is exchanged through sound. To improvise is to encounter alternative points of view and to learn from the other; improvising with computers allows us a way to look inside these and other fundamental processes of interaction. In this regard, creative machines that take part in collective musical improvisations exemplify the radical position of Lucy Suchman: »I take the boundaries between persons and machines to be discursively and materially enacted rather than naturally effected and to be available… for refiguring.«"[13)] At the moment at which musical improvisation with machines enacts this radical fluidity of identity, what we have is not a simulation of musical experience, but music making itself – a form of artificial life that produces nonartificial liveness. In that sense, perhaps our improvising computers can teach us how to live in a world marked by agency, indeterminacy, analysis of conditions, and the apparent ineffability of choice. Through improvisation, with and without machines, and within or outside the purview of the arts, we learn to celebrate our vulnerability, as part of a continuous transformation of both Other and Self.

I'd like to conclude with Arnold Davidson's understanding:

What we say about human/computer interaction is all too frequently dictated by an already determinate picture of the boundaries of the possible and the impossible… When one is

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6 constant nreplytypes

create replytypes nreplytypes allot

: setreplies ( -- )
  nreplytypes 0
    do 70 %chance
      if 1        \ follow input
       else 0     \ reverse or ignore input
      then
    replytypes i + c!
    loop
;

variable voldir    \ 0 = no change 1 = down, 2 = up
variable octdir    \ 0 = no change 1 = down, 2 = up
variable keydir    \ 0 = no change 1 = down, 2 = up
variable playdir   \ 0 = no change 1 = down, 2 = up
variable legdir    \ 0 = no change 1 = down, 2 = up
variable spddir    \ 0 = no change 1 = down, 2 = up

: computer-solo? ( -- flag ) \ both solo counters have to be up
  solo1 @ 59 >
  solo2 @ 59 >
  and
;

\ *** if more than 16 players, group them according to instrumental group,
\ different groups have different speakers (virtual orchestra)

variable maxgroup
variable mingroup

: getplayers ( -- ) \ right now 64 max number of voices
\  nchans irnd startchan !
  startchan @ 8 irnd + nchans mod startchan !
  maxgroup @ irnd mingroup @ max groupsize !
\  nchans irnd startchan ! nchans groupsize !
;
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Figure 2: 1994 excerpt from Forth program code for George Lewis, Voyager (1987–).

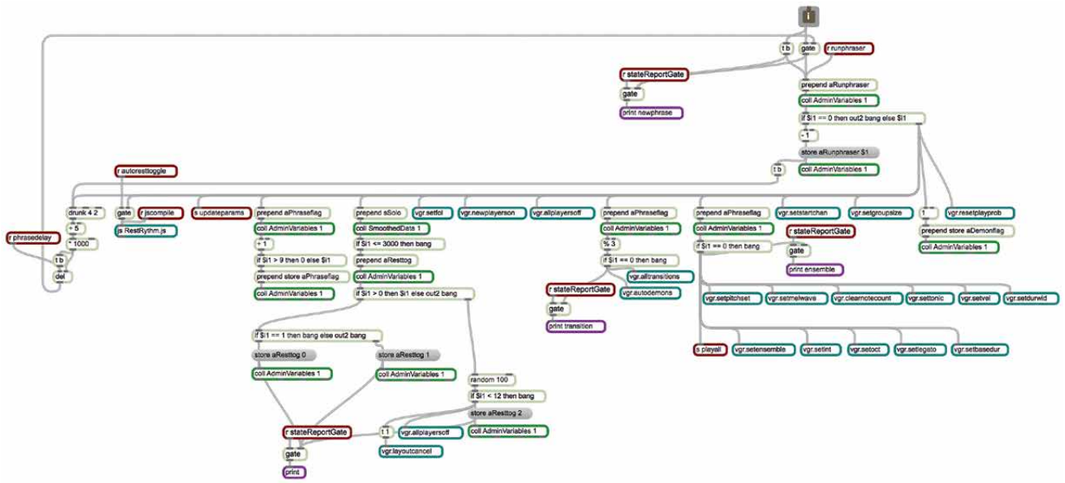

Figure 3: Excerpt from Max/MSP code for George Lewis, Interactive Trio *(2010-); realization by Damon Holzborn.*

»THE BETTER THE MACHINES PLAYED—AND FOR MY MONEY, THEY DO PLAY QUITE WELL NOW—THE GREATER THE THREAT TO THE MYSTERY, AND TO AN ARTIST'S STRATEGIC SELF-FASHIONING AS ONE OF A SELECT BAND OF DESIGNATED SUPERPEOPLE WITH POWERS AND ABILITIES FAR BEYOND THOSE OF MERE MORTALS.«

pushed to go beyond already established models of intelligibility and habitual practices of the self, when one searches for new forms of self and of social intelligibility, new modes of freedom, the improvisatory way of life assumes not only all of its ethico-political force, but also all of its very real risks of unintelligibility and self-collapse.[14]

Negotiating this complex matrix is part of why many of us want our computers to improvise and why we want to improvise with them. What we learn is not about machines, but about ourselves, and our environment. In the end, I've always been in sympathy with the way in which human-computer improvisations enact, as Andrew Pickering observes of cybernetics, »a *nonmodern* ontology in which people and things are not so different after all.«[15]

GEORGE E. LEWIS is a trombonist, composer, computer/installation artist, and scholar in the fields of improvisation and experimental music. Since 2004 he is the Edwin H. Case Professor of American Music at Columbia University in New York. He is the author of *A Power Stronger Than Itself: The AACM and American Experimental Music* (University of Chicago Press, 2008), and of the Oxford Handbook of Critical Improvisation Studies (Oxford University Press, 2016).

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NOTES

*1) For more on the anteriority of 1970s computer music interactivity, see Lewis 2003. I further develop this alternative history in an essay on the work of composer Rich Gold, who went on to become a key early figure in computer gaming and ubiquitous computing. See Lewis 2017. Also see Gold 1993; Weiser, Gold, and Brown 1999.

*2) Chadabe 1997, 291.

*3) See Bischoff, Gold, and Horton 1978 and Chandler and Neumark 2005. Also see Salter 2010.

*4) For the earliest recorded example of my algorithmic improvised music, dating from 1979, hear George Lewis, ›The KIM and I‹ (Lewis 2004a).

*5) See Lewis 2004b. For a documentary on my work from 1984, watch Davaud 1984. Complete performances with the Rainbow Family system, from 1984 at IRCAM, are available at www.medias.ircam.fr/xee3588_improvisation-george-lewis. For an example from 1994, hear George Lewis, Voyager (Lewis 2000). For a performance of my Interactive Trio piece from 2011 with pianist Geri Allen and a computer-interactive pianist, watch www.leccap.engin.umich.edu/leccap/view/7td666n16oht47labax15205.

*6) Suchman 2007, 240.

*7) Lewis 2000a, 33.

*8) Hwang and Staudter 2013.

*9) Hwang and Staudter 2013.

*10) Mill 1974, 123.

*11) Agre 1997, 156.

*12) Davidson 2012.

*13) Suchman 2007, 12.

*14) Davidson 2012.

*15) Pickering 2010, 18.

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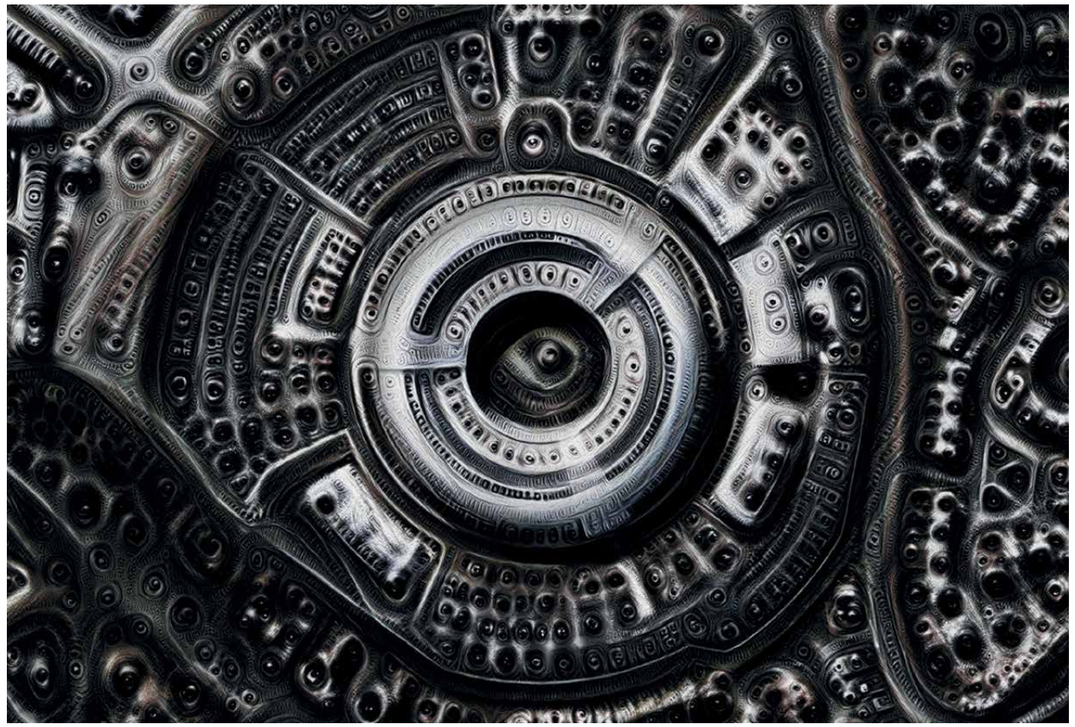
MINDS, MACHINES, AND CENTRALISATION: WHY MUSICIANS NEED TO HACK AI NOW

BY PETER KIRN

IN THIS ARTICLE, CTM HACKLAB DIRECTOR PETER KIRN PROVIDES A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE CO-OPTING OF MUSIC AND LISTENING BY CENTRALISED INDUSTRY AND CORPORATIONS, IDENTIFYING MUZAK AS A PRECURSOR TO THE USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE FOR »PRE-PROGRAMMED CULTURE.« HE GOES ON TO DISCUSS PRODUCTIVE WAYS FOR THOSE WHO VALUE »CHOICE AND SURPRISE« TO REACT TO AND INTERACT WITH TECHNOLOGIES LIKE THESE THAT GROW MORE INESCAPABLE BY THE DAY.



Memo Akten »All watched over by machines of loving grace: Deepdream edition« (2015), a satellite view from Google Maps of the GCHQ headquarters reimagined through deep neural networks made with Google's Deepdream code.

It's now a defunct entity, but »Muzak,« the company that provided background music, was once everywhere. Its management saw to it that their sonic product was ubiquitous, intrusive, and even engineered to impact behaviour – and so the word »Muzak« became synonymous with all that was hated and insipid in manufactured culture.

Anachronistic as it may seem now, Muzak was a sign of how telecommunications technology would shape cultural consumption. Muzak may be known for its sound, but its delivery method is telling. Nearly a hundred years before Spotify, founder Major General George Owen Squier originated the idea of sending music over wires – phone wires, to be fair, but still not far off from where we're at today. The patent he got for »electrical signalling« doesn't mention music, or indeed even sound content. But the Major General was the first successful business founder to prove in practice that electronic distribution of music was the future, one that would take power out of the hands of radio broadcasters and give the delivery company additional power over content. (He also came up with the now-loathed »Muzak« brand name.)

What we now know as the conventional music industry has its roots in pianola rolls, then in jukeboxes, and finally in radio stations and physical media. Muzak was something different, as it sidestepped the whole structure: playlists were selected by an unseen, centralised corporation, then piped everywhere. You'd hear Muzak in your elevator ride in a department store (hence the phrase, »elevator music«). There were speakers tucked into potted plants. The White House and NASA at some points subscribed. Anywhere there was silence, it might be replaced with pre-programmed music.

Muzak added to its notoriety by marketing the notion of using its product to boost worker productivity, through a pseudo-scientific regimen it called the »stimulus progression.« And in that, we see a notion that presages today's app behavior loops and motivators, meant to drive consumption and engagement, ad clicks and app swipes.

Muzak for its part didn't last forever, with stimulus progression long since debunked, customers preferring licensed music to this mix of original sounds, and newer competitors getting further ahead in the marketplace.

But what about the idea of homogenised, pre-programmed culture delivered by wire, designed for behaviour modification? That basic concept seems to be making a comeback.

AUTOMATION AND POWER

»AI« or machine intelligence has been tilted in the present moment to focus on one specific area: the use of self-training algorithms to process large amounts of data. This is a necessity of our times, and it has special value to some of the big technical players who just happen to have competencies in the areas machine learning prefers – lots of servers, top mathematical analysts, and big data sets.

That shift in scale is more or less inescapable, though, in its impact. Radio implies limited channels; limited channels implies human selectors – meet the DJ. The nature of the internet as wide-open for any kind of culture means wide open scale. And it will necessarily involve machines doing some of the sifting, because it's simply too large to operate otherwise.

There's danger inherent in this shift. One, users may be lazy, willing to let their preferences be tipped for them rather than face the tyranny of choice alone. Two, the entities that select for them may have agendas of their own. Taken as an aggregate, the upshot could be greater normalisation and homogenisation, plus the marginalisation of anyone whose expression is different, unviable commercially, or out of sync with the classes of people with money and influence. If the dream of the internet as global music community seems in practice to lack real diversity, here's a clue as to why.

At the same time, this should all sound familiar – the advent of recording and broadcast media brought with it some of the same forces, and that led to the worst bubblegum pop and the most egregious cultural appropriation. Now, we have al-

»THERE WERE SPEAKERS TUCKED INTO POTTED PLANTS. THE WHITE HOUSE AND NASA AT SOME POINTS SUBSCRIBED. ANYWHERE THERE WAS SILENCE, IT MIGHT BE REPLACED WITH PRE-PROGRAMMED MUSIC.«

gorithms and corporate channel editors instead of charts and label execs – and the worries about payola and the eradication of anything radical or different are just as well-placed.

What's new is that there's now also a real-time feedback loop between user actions and automated cultural selection (or perhaps even soon, production). Squier's stimulus progression couldn't monitor metrics representing the listener. Today's online tools can. That could blow apart past biases, or it could reinforce them – or it could do a combination of the two.

In any case, it definitely has power. At last year's CTM hacklab, Cambridge University's Jason Rentfrow looked at how music tastes could be predictive of personality and even political thought. The connection was timely, as the talk came the same week as Trump assumed the U.S. presidency, his campaign having employed social media analytics to determine how to target and influence voters.

We can no longer separate musical consumption – or other consumption of information and culture – from the data it generates, or from the way that data can be used. We need to be wary of centralised monopolies on that data and its application, and we need to be aware of how these sorts of algorithms reshape choice and remake media. And we might well look for chances to regain our own personal control.

Even if passive consumption may seem to be valuable to corporate players, those players may discover that passivity suffers diminishing returns. Activities like shopping on Amazon, finding dates on Tinder, watching television on Netflix, and, increasingly, music listening, are all experiences that push algorithmic recommendations. But if users begin to follow only those automated recommendations, the suggestions fold back in on themselves, and those tools lose their value. We're left with a colourless growing detritus of our own histories and the larger world's. (Just ask someone who gave up on those Tinder dates or went to friends because they couldn't work out the next TV show to binge-watch.)

There's also clearly a social value to human recommendations – expert and friend alike. But there's a third way: use machines to augment humans, rather than diminish them, and open the tools to creative use, not only automation.

Music is already reaping benefits of data training's power in new contexts. By applying machine learning to identifying human gestures, Rebecca Fiebrink has found a new way to make gestural interfaces for music smarter and more accessible. Audio software companies are now using machine learning as a new approach to manipulating sound material in cases where traditional DSP tools are limited. What's significant about this work is that it makes these tools meaningful in active creation rather than passive consumption.

AI BACK IN USER HANDS

Machine learning techniques will continue to expand as tools by which the companies mining big data make sense of their resources – from ore into product. It's in turn how they'll see us, and how we'll see ourselves.

We can't simply opt out, because those tools will shape the world around us with or without our personal participation, and because the breadth of available data demands their use. What we can do is to better understand how they work and reassert our own agency.

»WE NEED TO BE WARY OF CENTRALISED MONOPOLIES ON THAT DATA AND ITS APPLICATION, AND WE NEED TO BE AWARE OF HOW THESE SORTS OF ALGORITHMS RESHAPE CHOICE AND REMAKE MEDIA. AND WE MIGHT WELL LOOK FOR CHANCES TO REGAIN OUR OWN PERSONAL CONTROL.«

When people are literate in what these technologies are and how they work, they can make more informed decisions in their own lives and in the larger society. They can also use and abuse these tools themselves, without relying on magical corporate products to do it for them.

Abuse itself has special value. Music and art are fields in which these machine techniques can and do bring new discoveries. There's a reason Google has invested in these areas – because artists very often can speculate on possibilities and find creative potential. Artists lead.

The public seems to respond to rough edges and flaws, too. In the 60s, when researcher Joseph Weizenbaum attempted to parody a psychotherapist with crude language pattern matching in his program, ELIZA, he was surprised when users started to tell the program their darkest secrets and imagine understanding that wasn't there. The crudeness of Markov chains as predictive text tool – they were developed for analyzing Pushkin statistics and not generating language, after all – has given rise to breeds of poetry based on their very weirdness. When Google's style transfer technique was applied using a database of dog images, the bizarre, unnatural images that warped photos into dogs went viral online. Since then, Google has made vastly more sophisticated techniques that apply realistic painterly effects and… well, it seems that's attracted only a fraction of the interest that the dog images did.

Maybe there's something even more fundamental at work. Corporate culture dictates predictability and centralised value. The artist does just the opposite, capitalising on surprise. It's in the interest of artists if these technologies can be broken. Muzak represents what happens to aesthetics when centralised control and corporate values win out – but it's as much the widespread public hatred that's the major cautionary tale. The values of surprise and choice win out, not just as abstract concepts but also as real personal preferences.

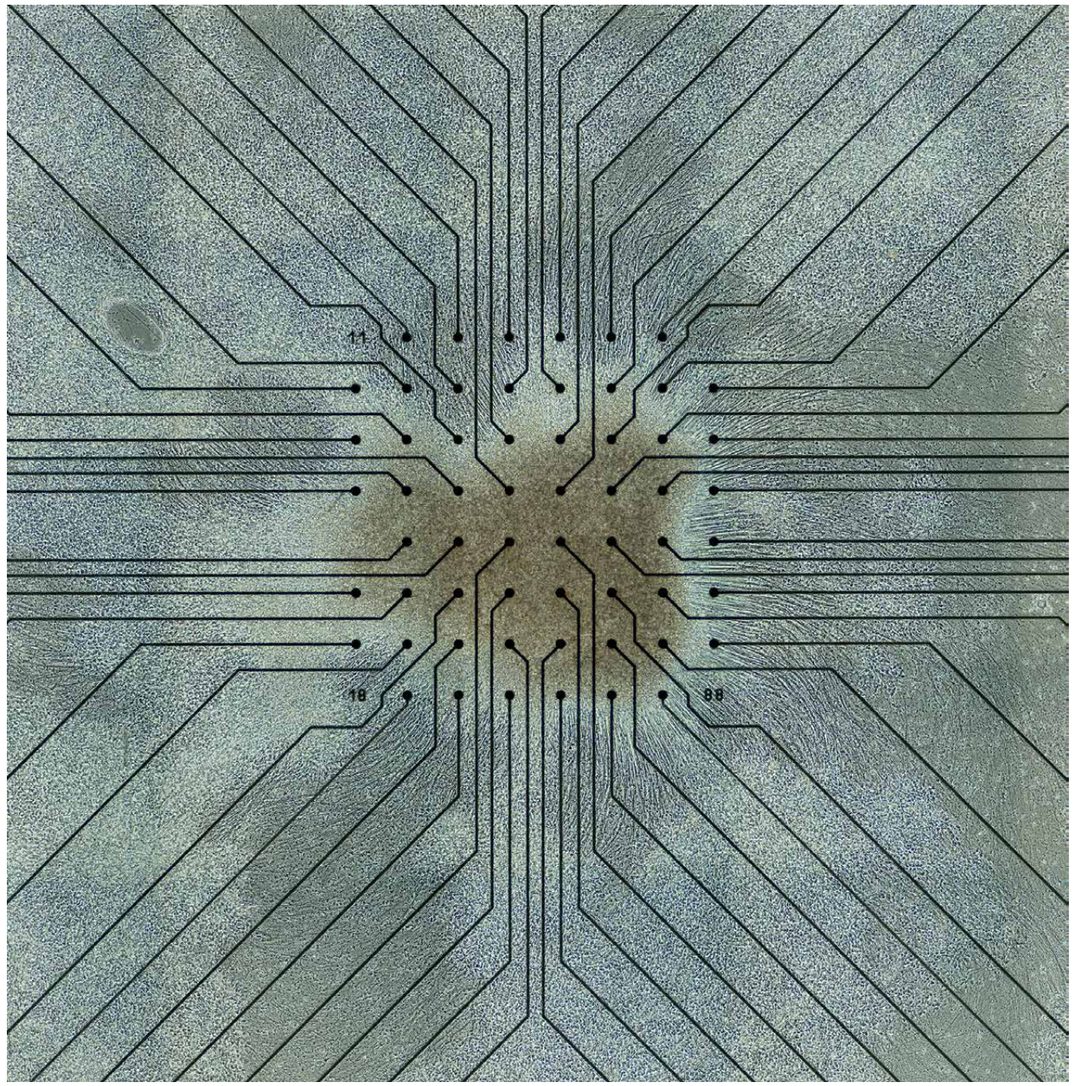
We once feared that robotics would eliminate jobs; the very word is derived (by Czech writer Karel Čapek's brother Joseph) from the word for slave. Yet in the end, robotic technology has extended human capability. It has brought us as far as space and taken us through Logo and its Turtle, even taught generations of kids math, geometry, logic, and creative thinking through code.

We seem to be at a similar fork in the road with machine learning. These tools can serve the interests of corporate control and passive consumption, optimised only for lazy consumption that extracts value from its human users. Or, we can abuse and misuse the tools, take them apart and put them back together again, apply them not in the sense that »everything looks like a nail« when all you have is a hammer, but as a precise set of techniques to solve specific problems. Muzak, in its final days, was nothing more than a pipe dream. What people wanted was music – and choice. Those choices won't come automatically. We may well have to hack them.

PETER KIRN is an audiovisual artist, composer/musician, technologist, and journalist. He is the editor of CDM (Create Digital Music, at www.cdm.link) and co-creator of the open source MeeBlip hardware synthesizer (www.meeblip.com). For six consecutive years, he has directed the MusicMaker's Hacklab at CTM Festival, most recently together with new media artist Ioann Maria.

MUSIC FROM THE PETRI DISH

GUY BEN-ARY IN CONVERSATION WITH CHRISTIAN DE LUTZ AND JAN ROHLF
PHOTOS COURTESY OF GUY BEN-ARY



Dish P09/07 – The Neural Network that performed in the premiere of cellF at the Masonic Hall on 4 October 2015, Perth.

NEURONS LIVING IN A PETRI DISH PERFORM DUETS WITH HUMAN MUSICIANS: AUSTRALIA-BASED ARTIST GUY BEN-ARY HAD HIS CELLS EXTRACTED AND GROWN INTO A CULTURE OF 100.000 LIVING NEURONS. LINED WITH ELECTRODES, THESE NEURONS FORM OUTPUT VIA AN ANALOGUE SYNTHESIZER, CALLED »CELLF,« ALLOWING THEM TO »JAM« WITH HUMAN MUSICIANS. IN MAY 2017, DURING THE THIRD EDITION OF TECHNOSPHÄRENKLÄNGE, A JOINT CONCERT SERIES BETWEEN HAUS DER KULTUREN DER WELT AND CTM FESTIVAL THAT EXPLORES CONNECTIONS BETWEEN MUSIC AND TECHNOSCIENCE, BEN-ARY TALKED ABOUT THE BLENDING OF ART AND SCIENCE, JOINT CREATIVE VENTURES, AND NON-HUMAN CONSCIOUSNESS.

You were one of the first people to work at the SymbioticA artistic lab at the University of Western Australia and are still based there. Your artistic practice is one of constant collaboration with scientists as well as engineers, musicians, and other artists. How does this interdisciplinary collaboration, alongside working primarily in a lab, alter artistic practice?

I'm not sure if »alter« is the right term. I would say »inform.« SymbioticA is a very enriching environment. Artists and resident researchers from multiple disciplines, scientists, clinicians, and bio-medical engineers are all located in close proximity. I'm constantly »bombarded« with new ideas and techniques and made aware of various research projects. After fifteen years of being there, I'm still learning a lot every single day. The idea of my work »In-potentia,« started in the lab when I saw a PhD student culturing foreskin cells; and the idea for »cellF« was born during a lecture I attended, which was given by a stem cell biologist as part of the school's weekly seminar series. The main benefit is that there is (almost) always someone »that knows« and can direct, assist, or provide useful information.

When your medium is a cell culture in a lab, how is the result defined as art, as opposed to pure scientific research?

As to cell cultures as art objects, I think this is one of the biggest challenges for so-called »bio-artists.« Once I figure out the protocols in the lab and thoroughly understand the material I'm working with, I ask myself questions related to visual or aesthetic language. In past years I developed various environments/technologies that allowed me to take the living cultures into the gallery. A good example is »cellF« as an object that not only has very particular aesthetics and functions as a musical instrument, but is also a fully functioning biological lab that consists of a high-precision tissue-culture incubator and a Class-1 sterile hood, which allows us to keep the neural networks alive in field conditions.

And conversely how do your scientific collaborators feel about devoting resources to a project whose results may not fit into traditional modes of scientific research?

Scientists collect data, but we bring the cultures into galleries and ask questions to generate a cultural debate. It's totally different. I think the scientists that work with us are as aware of the importance of the cultural research as they are of the scientific one – otherwise they wouldn't be working with us.

The modern era has stressed the individual over the collective. In cultural production that has led to the myth of the artist as genius, positing the act of artistic creation as uniquely individual. Yet your work, and a lot of new art connected with science and technology, is very much about complex collaboration across fields. Have we reached a par-

»WHEN THE CREATION OF ARTIFICIAL CONSCIOUSNESS TAKES PLACE IN AN ATMOSPHERE OF CONFLICT AND PROFIT-DRIVEN COMPETITION, THE RESULTS MIGHT BE VERY MUCH DISTURBING AND UNWANTED.«

adigm change in what it means to create an artwork in the twenty-first century?

I wouldn't go as far as a »change of paradigm.« There are still quite a lot of art forms that don't require collaborations. However, when it comes to projects that involve technology, and definitely in my area of research of art, biology, and robotics, collaborative work is very common. The reason for this is the complexity of the projects and the wide range of skill sets that are needed for the development of the work. »cellF« is my self-portrait, and in its early days I thought it would be appropriate to develop it by myself. But that was very naïve of me. Its final outcome involved the following areas of research/production: tissue culture, tissue engineering, neuroscience, cell biology, stem cell technologies, molecular biology, electrophysiology, microscopy, electrical engineering, material engineering, engineering, design, sound, music technology, and more… I could never have done it without my collaborators. They all joined the project as equals despite it being my self-portrait.

You initiated »cellF,« which is run from a neuronal culture containing your DNA. Yet this colony is fully autonomous. Its reactions to input from various musicians demonstrate agency on a cellular level. The culture (of approximately 100.000 neurons) is still one-millionth the size of the human brain, without the complex structure of the latter. We can surmise that, as far as we know, it has no »consciousness.« But considering that cellF acts and reacts to the human musicians, can we talk about a »neuronal subjectivity« here?

That's a very interesting question… and very hard to answer. The short answer is that I don't know. I agree that there is no point in talking about consciousness or intelligence. These cultures are not complex enough. But after experiencing »cellF« live I have a feeling that maybe we can talk about simple forms of emergence. I think that these neural cultures are active and responsive – but even more interesting is that they show vitality, which is what directs them to do what they do. These neural networks are very simple (made up of only 100.000 neurons and growing in 2D). However, I use living neurons deliberately, as a way to force the viewer to consider future possibilities that neural engineering and stem cell technologies present, and to begin to assess and critique technologies not commonly known outside the scientific community. However simple or symbolic these brains may be, they do produce quantities of data, they do respond to stimulation, and they are subject to a lifespan.

Speculating further on such future possibilities, do you think we will one day witness the emergence of synthetic, non-human consciousness?

I think that first we have to define what consciousness is. Consciousness has a spectrum from deciding to move organs, for example, to being sentient, self-aware, able to think critically, consider morality, ethics, and more… if we are considering the latter, I think that we are far from it. The central problem remains: we have no real understanding of how the brain gives rise to the mind and how neurons or their activity create consciousness, and without a clear idea of how this works I do not believe we will be able to create consciousness. Consciousness is a biological phenomenon. Brains contain analogue cellular and molecular processes, biochemical reactions, electrostatic forces, synchronized neuron firing at specific frequencies, and unique structural and functional connections with countless feedback loops, and then the »magical leap« from very complex computation to consciousness. I find it hard to believe that we would be able to replicate something similar… at least not in my lifetime.

If we were to witness the emergence of forms of non-human consciousness, what kind of relationship do you think humanity could develop towards those forms?

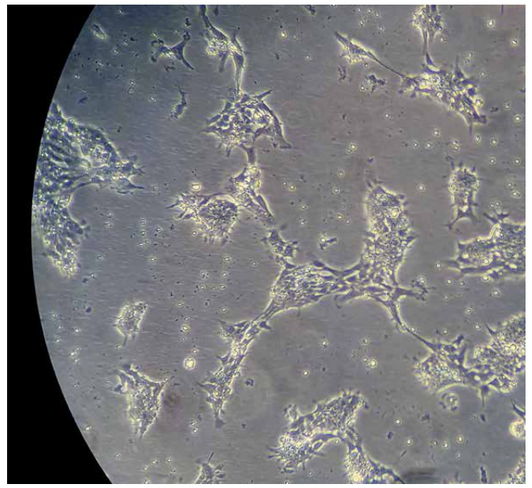
We live in a very anthropocentric world where humans treat other living entities (conscious or not) with superiority and arrogance. I think that we have to start thinking and establishing some ethical consideration regarding the treatment of those new living entities, especially if they show some sort of emergent behaviour, signs of intelligence, or even a low level of consciousness.

Why do you think humanity would wish for the development of artificial consciousness in the first place?

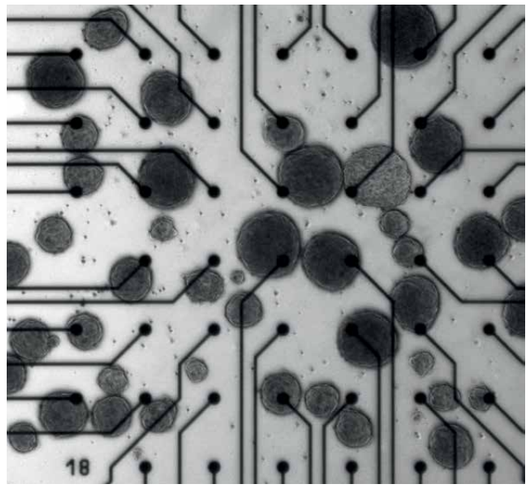
I don't think that we should wish for the development of artificial consciousness… I think that this would open a »Pandora's box« that we as a society are not ready to cope with. Artificial consciousness could be part of our lives in any mode or way possible – social, cultural, medical, and more… but when the creation of artificial consciousness takes place in an atmosphere of conflict and profit-driven competition, the results might be very much disturbing and unwanted.

Guy Ben-Ary reprogramming cells to stem cells using iPS at the Pluripotency Laboratory, University of Barcelona.

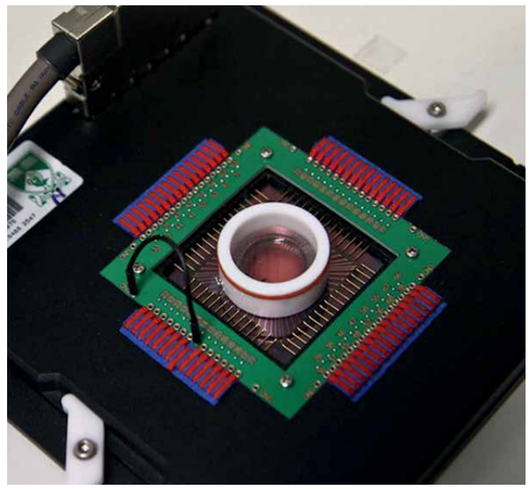
Vials of frozen cells that Guy Ben-Ary chose to send to Berlin for cellF at Technosphärenklänge #3.



Neural stem cells proliferating to neurospheres at the Max-Delbrück-Centrum für Molekulare Medizin, Berlin, prio to Technosphärenklänge #3.

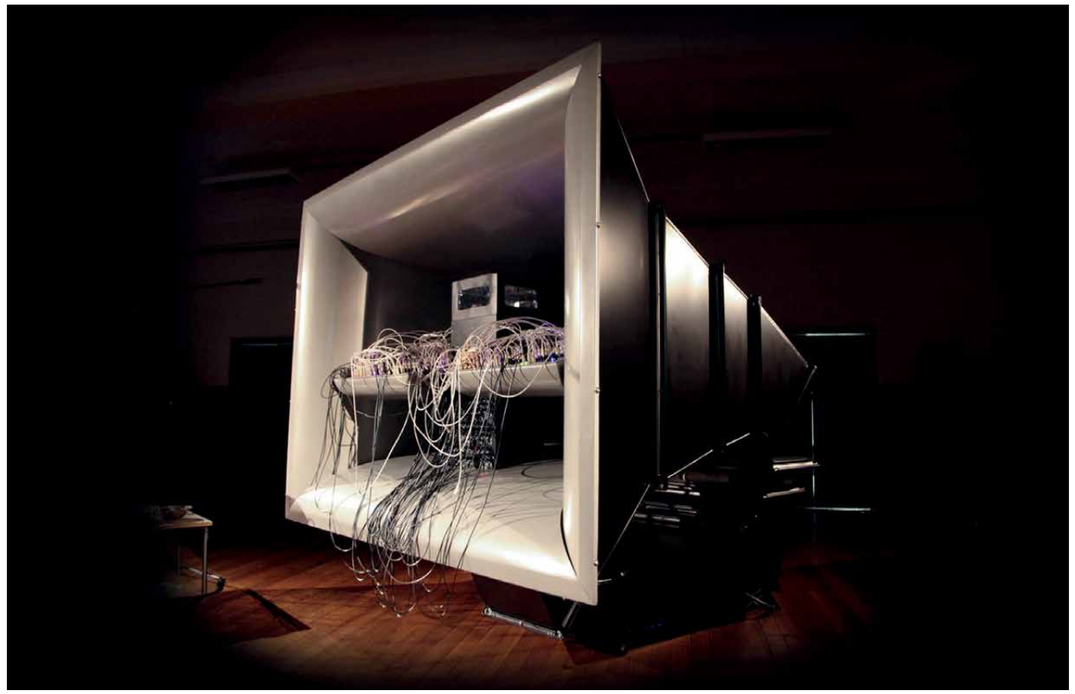


Seeding the neurospheres onto the Multi-Electrode-Array (MEA) and differentiating them to neurons.



The Multi-Electrode-Array (MEA) dish in the amplifier that allows to interface it with the analogue modular synthesizer.

Patching an tuning cellF, top center is the DIY high precision tissue culture incubator that houses the cell culture.



cellF at its premiere, 4 October 2015, Masonic Hall, Perth.

You see »cellF« as an effort to raise debate about the ethical controversies embedded in new bio-technologies. But couldn't it also be argued that works such as »cellF« contribute to normalising the application of such technologies by pushing the boundaries of the as-yet acceptable — and in doing so also pushing aside the fundamental question of whether we should go after these technologies at all before such a question has even been raised?

I think that one of the roles of art is to propose scenarios of »worlds under construction« and destabilise the technologies in question for the purpose of creating contestable artworks. This role makes the emergence of cellF and other similar works as evocative artworks and the multi-levelled exploration of their use relevant and important.

»cellF« has already taken part in seven concerts, and it performed its European premiere at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt with Schneider TM and then Stine Janvin. What has surprised you most about the ability of neuronal cultures to interact with and create music with human musicians?

Every performance is different, and all the performances we have given have been interesting in a different way. But when the neurons respond to the human musicians I get excited. I'm very much interested in human/nonhuman communication. It is when there is a clear sense of communication between human musicians and the neurons that my mind is blown. And this has happened in most performances up until now. I hope we will experience a bit more of that. These neural networks represent our fears and hopes as we enter an unknown future. They illustrate, in a highly visceral manner, popular ideas around disembodied consciousness and intelligence. However, although the neural entities I create might instil a sense that we are close to actualising the manufacture of intelligence or consciousness, in reality, the existence of these creatures is intended to be absurdly vicarious.

GUY BEN-ARY is an Australian artist and researcher investigating cybernetics, soft-robotics, and the cultural articulation of bio-technologies. He currently works at SymbioticA, an artistic laboratory located within the University of Western Australia and dedicated to research, learning, and hands-on engagement with the life sciences.
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CHRISTIAN DE LUTZ is a curator and the co-founder of Berlin Art Laboratory, a platform for contemporary art at the meeting point of art, science, and technology.
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Parts of this interview were originally published in May 2017 within the Haus der Kulturen der Welt's journal, *100 Years from Now*. Reprinted with kind permission.
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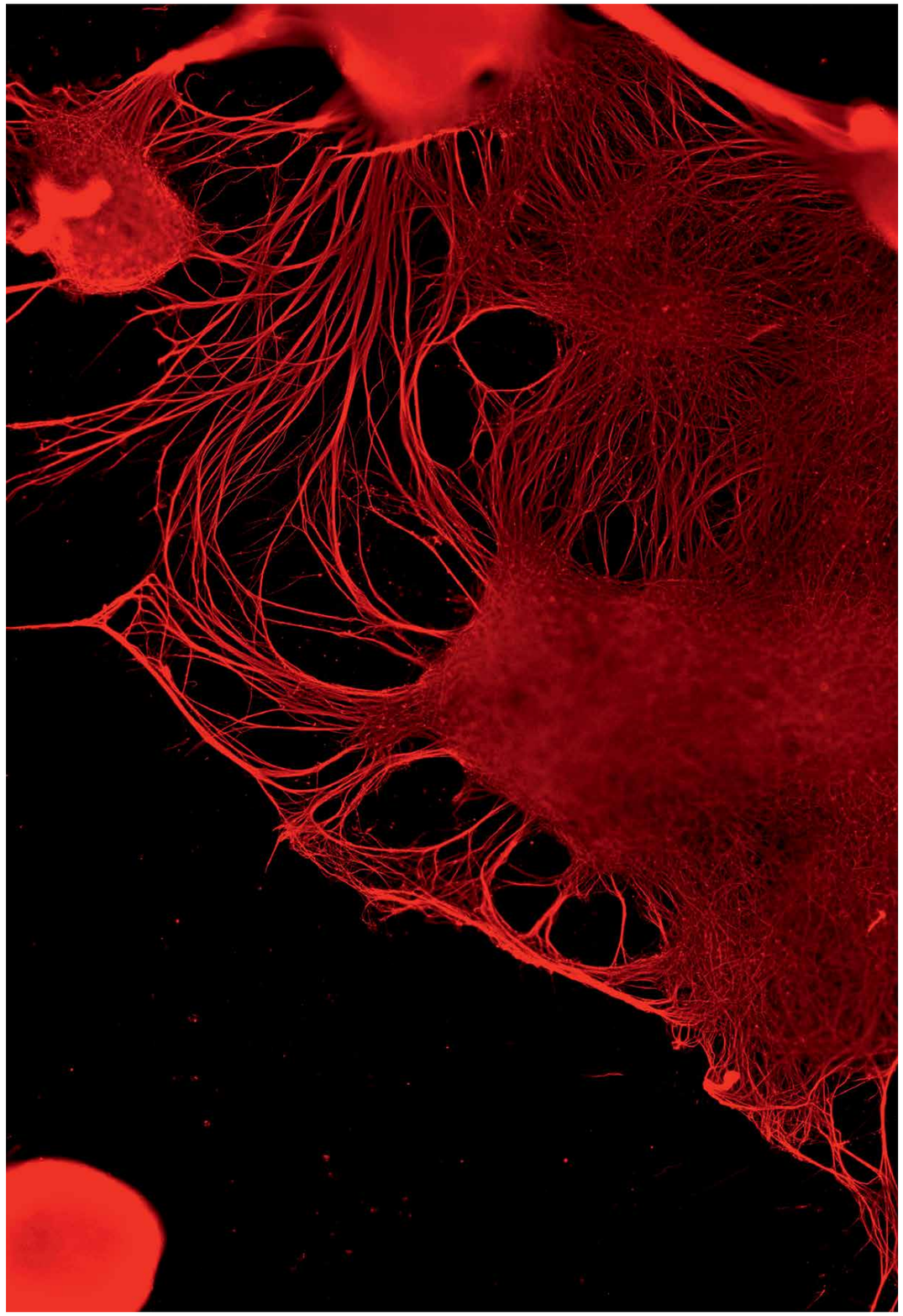
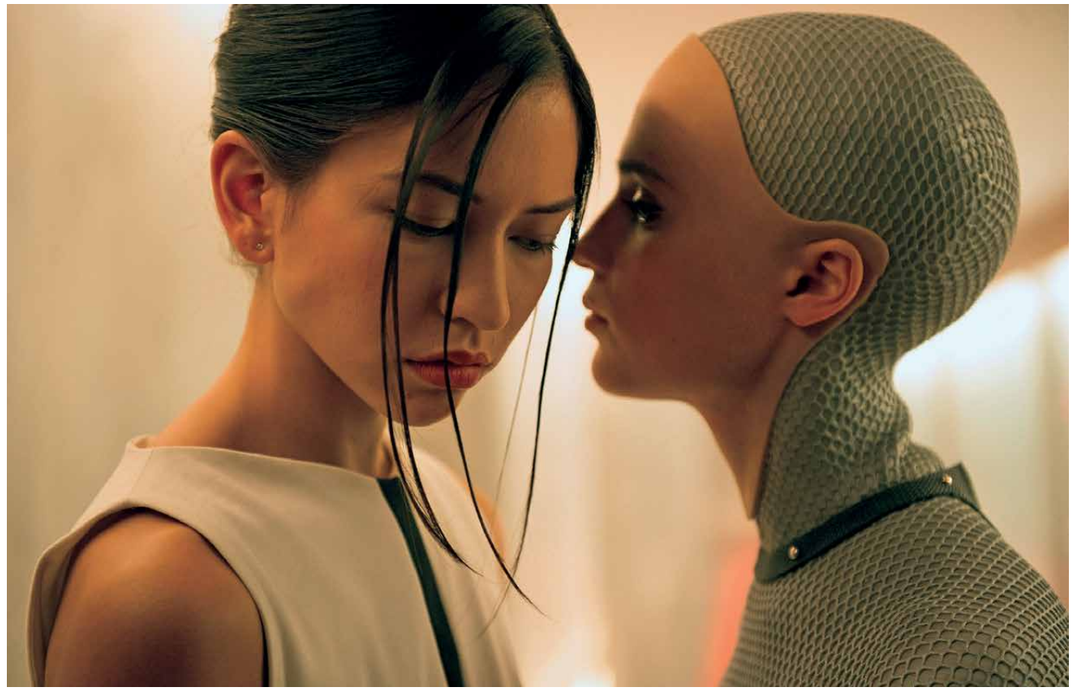


Guy Ben-Ary's cells differentiating into neurons.

I NEED IT TO FORGIVE ME

BY NORA KHAN

IN THIS FAR-REACHING ESSAY, WRITER AND TECHNOLOGY RESEARCHER NORA KHAN APPROACHES THE CONUNDRUM OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE VIA DISCUSSIONS OF FACIAL RECOGNITION SOFTWARE. WITH IT IN MIND THAT MACHINE LEARNING IS »HIGHLY DESIGNED« TO MIRROR HUMAN BEHAVIOUR, KHAN ADDRESSES ENGINEERED DISPARITIES IN THIS MIRRORING THAT FORECAST DANGER AND DISREGARD ETHICS. IN RAISING QUESTIONS ABOUT ALTERNATIVE PATHWAYS FOR AI AND THE ROLE OF THE ARTIST IN SOCIETY, KHAN ULTIMATELY SHOWS THAT A DISCUSSION OF TECHNOLOGY IS ALSO INTRINSICALLY A DISCUSSION OF TRUST AND OF THE UNIQUELY HUMAN TERRITORIES OF AMBIGUITY, EMPATHY, AND OPENNESS.



Still from the film Ex-Machina *(2015) by Alex Garland.*

»The culture that's going to survive in the future is the culture you can carry around in your head.« (Nam June Paik, as described by Arthur Jafa)[*1)]

I like to think that I could pick my friends out of a line-up. I assume that I know their faces well enough. But I am alarmed, when I focus on images of their faces too closely, at how quickly they can become unreadable. Kundera wrote, »We ponder the infinitude of the stars but are unconcerned about the infinitude our papa has within him,« which is a beautiful but roundabout way of saying that those you love can become strange in an instant.[*2)]

A canyon opens up in this moment of strangeness, between their facial expressions, like sigils, and the meanings I project onto them. As I try to map out why I know they mean what I think they do, their faces turn back to some early first state, bristling with ciphers and omens. Their words become polysemous, generating a thousand possible interpretations.

Each time we face a new person, an elegant relational process unfolds in which we learn to read the other's face to trust they are human, like us. A relaxed smile, soft eyes, an inviting smirk combine in a subtle arrangement to signal a safe person driven by a mind much like one's own. Messy alchemists, we compress massive amounts of visual data, flow between our blind spots and projections and theirs to create enough of an objective reality to move forward.

Early hominids mapped the complex signs transpiring on surrounding faces to discern intention, orientation, and mood. Their relational dynamics helped develop them into linguistic beings so bound and made through language that the first embodied act of face-reading now seems to belong to the realm of the preconscious and prelinguistic. And social rituals developed in turn for people to help others read them, to signal transparency – that one's mind is briefly, completely accessible to another.

Out on this abstract semiotic landscape, humans stagger through encounters with other species and nonhuman intelligences, trying to parse their obscure intentions with the same cognitive tools. Emerging artificial intelligences can be thought of as having a face, as well – one that presents as human-like, human-sympathetic, humanoid. Though animals also listen to us and mirror us, artificial intelligences are more formidable, using complex data analytics, powerful visual, and sound surveillance fuelled by massive computing power, to track and map your inner thoughts and desires, present and future.

Further, global computational culture plays on the very vulnerabilities in humans' face- and mind-reading, the processes that help us discern intention, trustworthiness. The computational »face« composes attitudes and postures, seeming openness and directness, conveyed through its highly-designed interfaces, artificial languages, and artificial relationality.

Simulating the feeling of access to the machine's »mind« sates the human brain's relentless search for a mirroring, for proof of a kind of mind in every intelligent-seeming system that twitches on its radar. Artificial intelligence is relentlessly anthropomorphized by its designers to simulate the experience of access to a kind of caring mind, a wet nurse that cares for us despite our knowing better.

»STUPIDLY, WE WRAP OURSELVES AROUND DEVICES WITH A CUTE AESTHETIC WITHOUT THINKING TO CHECK IF THEY HAVE TEETH.«

Computers, technological devices, platforms, and networks are habitually, now, the faces of powerful social engineering, the efforts of invested groups to influence society's behaviour in a lasting way. The designed illusion of blankness and neutrality is so complete that users »fill in« the blank with a mind that has the ethics and integrity resembling a person's, much as they might with a new person. B.J. Fogg, the Stanford professor who founded captology (the study of persuasive technology and behavioral design), writes, hedging, that computers can »convey emotions [but] they cannot react to emotions, [which gives] them an unfair advantage in persuasion.«[*3)]

Stupidly, we wrap ourselves around devices with a cute aesthetic without thinking to check if they have teeth. Our collective ignorance in this relationship is profound. We spend an unprecedented amount of time in our lives being totally open and forthright with intelligent systems, beautifully designed artifacts that exercise feigned transparencies. The encounter with artificial intelligences is not equal or neutral; one side has more power, charged with the imperative that we first make ourselves perfectly readable, revealing who we are in a way that is not and could not be returned.

What beliefs do we even share with our artificial friends? What does it do to us to speak with artificial voices and engage with systems of mind designed by many stakeholders with obscure goals? What does it do to our cognitive process to engage continually with hyperbolic, manufactured affect, without reciprocity? Misreading this metaphorical face comes at a cost. We can always walk away from people we do not fundamentally trust. The computational mind subtly, surely, binds us to it and does not let go, enforcing trust as an end-user agreement. Complicating matters, even if we learn to stop anthropomorphizing AI, we are still caught in a relationship with an intelligence that parrots and mimics our relationality with other people, and works overtime to soothe and comfort us. We have grown to need it desperately, in thrall to a phenomenally orchestrated mirror that tells us what we want to hear and shows us what we want to see.

Of course, we participate in these strange and abusive relationships with full consent because the dominant paradigm of global capitalism is abuse. But understanding exactly how these transparencies are enacted can help explain why I go on to approach interfaces with a large amount of unearned trust, desiring further, a tempered emotional reveal, an absolution and forgiveness.

CO-EVOLUTION WITH SIMULATIONS

Governments and social media platforms work together to suggest a social matrix based on the data that should ostensibly prove, beyond a doubt, that faces reveal ideology, that they hold the keys to inherent qualities of identity, from intelligence to sexuality to criminality. There is an eerie analogue to phrenology, the 19th century's fake science in which one's traits, personality, and character were unveiled through caliper measurements of the skull.

Banal algorithmic systems offer a perverse and titillating promise that through enough pattern recognition of faces (and bodies), form can be mapped one to one to sexuality, IQ levels, and possible criminality. The inherent qualities of identities and orientations, the singular, unchangeable truth of a mind's contents and past and future possibilities, predicted based on the space between your eyes and your nose, your gait, your hip to waist ratio, and on and on.

The stories about emerging »developments« in artificial intelligence research that predicts qualities based on facial mapping read as horror. The disconnect and stupidity – as Hito Steyerl has described – of this type of design is profound.[*4)] Computational culture that is created by a single channel or a corporate-owned model is foremost couched in the imperative to describe reality through a brutal set of norms describing who people are and how they should and will act (according to libidinal needs).

Such computational culture is the front along which contemporary power shapes itself, engaging formal logics and the insights of experts in adjacent fields – cognitive psycholinguists, psychologists, critics of technology, even – to disappear extractive goals. That it works to seem rational, logical, without emotion, when it is also designed to have deep, instant emotional impact, is one of the greatest accomplishments of persuasive technology design.

Silicon Valley postures values of empathy and communication within its vast, inconceivable structure that embodies a serious »perversion and disregard for human life.«[*5)] As Matteo Pasquinelli writes, artificial intelligence mimics individual social intelligence with the aim of control.[*6)] His detail of sociometric AI asserts that we cannot ignore how Northern California's technological and financial platforms create AI in favour of philosophical discussions of theory of mind alone. The philosophical debate fuels the technical design, and the technical design fuels the philosophical modelling.

COMPRESSION

As we coevolve with artificial minds wearing simulations of human faces, human-like gestures essentialised into a few discrete elements within user interface (UI) and artificial language, we might get to really know our interlocutors. The AI from this culture is slippery, a masterful mimic. It pretends to be neutral, without any embedded values. It perfectly embodies a false transparency, neutrality, and openness. The ideological framework and moral biases that are embedded are hidden behind a very convincing veneer of neutrality. A neutral, almost pleasant face that is designed not to be read as »too« human; this AI needs you to continue to be open and talk to it, and that means eschewing the difficulty, mess, and challenge of human relationships.

»THE ENCOUNTER WITH ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCES IS NOT EQUAL OR NEUTRAL; ONE SIDE HAS MORE POWER…«

This lesser, everyday AI's trick is its acting, its puppeteering of human creativity and gestures at consciousness with such skill and precision that we fool ourselves momentarily, to believe in the presence of a kind of ethical mind. The most powerful and affecting elements of relating are externalised in the mask to appeal to our solipsism. We just need a soothing and hypnotic voice, a compliment or two, and our overextended brains pop in, eager to simulate and fill in the blanks. Thousands of different artificial voices and avatars shape and guide our days like phantoms. The simulations only parrot our language to a degree, displaying an exaggerated concentrate of selected affect: care, interest, happiness, approval. In each design wave, the digital humanoid mask becomes more seamless, smoothly folded into our conversation.

How we map the brain through computer systems, our chosen artificial logic, shapes our communication and self-conception. Our relationship to computation undergirds current relations to art, to management, to education and design, to politics. How we choose to signify the mind in artificial systems directs the course of society and its future, mediated through these systems. Relationships with humanoid intelligences influence our relationships to other people, our speech, our art, our sense of possibilities, even an openness to experimentation.

Artificial intelligence and artifactual intelligence differ in many important ways, yet we continue to model them on each other. And how the artificial mind is modeled to interact is the most powerful tool technocracy has. But even knowing all of this, it is naïve to believe that simple exposure and unstitching of these logics will help us better arbitrate what kind of artificial intelligence we want to engage with.

It seems more useful to outline what these attempts at compression do to us, how computational culture's logical operations, enacted through engineered, managed interactions, change us as we coevolve with machine intelligence. And from this mapping, we might be able to think of other models of computational culture.

INCOMPRESSIBILITY

It is hard to find, in the human-computer relationship as outlined above, allowances for the ineffability that easily arises between people, or a sense of communing on levels that are unspoken and not easy to name. But we know that there are vast tranches of experience that cannot be coded or engineered for, in which ambiguity and multiplicity and unpredictability thrive, and understand on some level that they create environments essential for learning, holding conflicting ideas in the mind at once, and developing ethical intelligence.

We might attempt to map a few potential spaces for strangeness and unknowing in the design of the relationship between natural minds and artificial minds. We might think on how such spaces could subvert the one-two hit of computational design as it is experienced now, deploying data analytics in tandem with a ruthless mining of neurological and psychological insights on emotion.

On the level of language, the certain, seamless loop between human and computer erases or actively avoids linguistic ambiguity and ambiguity of interpretation in favour of a techno-positivist reality, in which meaning is mapped one to one with its referent for the sake of efficiency. With the artificial personality, the uncertainty that is a key quality of most new interactions is quickly filled in. There is no space for an »I don't know,« or »Why do you say this,« or »Tell me what makes you feel this way.« A bot's dialogue is constrained, tightened, and flattened; its interface has users clip through the interaction. So the wheel turns, tight and unsparing.

There is no single correct model of AI, but instead, many competing paradigms, frameworks, architectures. As long as AI takes a thousand different forms, so too, as Reza Negarestani writes, will the »significance of the human [lie] not in its uniqueness or in a special ontological status but in its functional decomposability and computational constructability through which the abilities of the human can be upgraded, its form transformed, its definition updated and even become susceptible to deletion?«[*7)]

How to reroute the relentless »engineering loop of logical thought,« as described in this issue of *Glass Bead's* framing, in a way that strives towards intellectual and material freedom? What would an AI that is radical for our time, meaning not simply in service of extractive technological systems, look like? Could there exist an AI that is both ruthlessly rational and in service of the Left's project? Could our technologies run on an AI in service of creativity, that can deploy ethical and emotional intelligence that countermands the creativity, and emotional intelligence of those on the Right?

There is so much discussion in art and criticism of futures and futurity without enough discussion of how a sense of a possible future is even held in the mind, the trust it takes to develop a future model with others. Believing we can move through and past oppressive systems and structures to something better than the present is a matter of shared belief.

The seamless loop between human and computer erases or actively avoids ambiguity, of language and of interpretation, in favor of a techno-positivist reality in which meaning is mapped one to one with its referent for the sake of efficiency. But we do not thrive, socially, intellectually, personally, in purely efficient relationships. Cognition is a process of emergent relating. We engage with people over time to create depth of dimensionality.

We learn better if we can create intimate networks with other minds. Over time, the quality and depth of our listening, our selective attention, changes. We reflect on ourselves in relation to others, adjust our understanding of the world based on their acts and speech, and work in a separate third space between us and them to create a shared narrative with which to navigate the world.

With computer systems, we can lack an important sense of a growing relationship that will gain in dimensionality, that can generate the essential ambiguity needed for testing new knowledge and ideas. In a short, elegant essay titled »Dancing with Ambiguity,« systems biologist Pille Bunnell paints her first encounter with computational systems as a moment of total wonder and enchantment, that turned to disappointment:

I began working with simulation models in the late 1960s, using punch cards and one-day batch processing at the University of California Berkeley campus computer center. As the complexity of our computing systems grew, I like many of my colleagues, became enchanted with this new possibility of dealing with complexity. Simulation models enabled us to consider many interrelated variables and to expand our time horizon through projection of the consequences of multiple causal dynamics, that is, we could build systems. Of course, that is exactly what we did, we built systems that represented our understanding, even though we may have thought of them as mirrors of the systems we were distinguishing as such. Like others, I eventually became disenchanted with what I came to regard as a selected concatenation of linear and quasi-linear causal relations.[*8)]

Bunnell's disappointment with the »linear and quasi-linear causal relations« is a fine description of the quandary we find ourselves in today. The »quasi-linear causal relation« describes

how intelligent systems daily make decisions for us, and further yet, how character is mapped to data trails, based on consumption, taste, and online declarations.

One barrier in technology studies and rhetoric, and in non-humanist fields, is how the term *poetics* (and by extension, art) is taken to mean an intuitive and emotional disposition to beauty. I take poetics here to mean a mode of understanding the world through many, frequently conflicting, cognitive and metacognitive modes that work in a web with one another. Poetics are how we navigate our world and all its possible meanings, neither through logic nor emotion alone.

It is curious how the very architects of machine learning describe creative ability in explicitly computational terms. In a recent talk, artist Memo Akten translated the ideas of machine learning expert and godfather Jürgen Schmidhuber, who suggests creativity (embodied in unsupervised, freeform learning) is »fueled by our intrinsic desire to develop better compressors« mentally.[*9)]

This process apparently serves an evolutionary purpose; as »we are able to compress and predict, the better we have understood the world, and thus will be more successful in dealing with it.« In Schmidhuber's vision, intelligent beings inherently seek to make order and systems of unfamiliar new banks of information, such that:

… What was incompressible, has now become compressible. That is subjectively interesting. The amount we improve our compressor by, is defined as how subjectively interesting we find that new information. Or in other words, subjective interestingness of information is the first derivative of its subjective beauty, and rewarded as such by our intrinsic motivation system … As we receive information from the environment via our senses, our compressor is constantly comparing the new information to predictions it's making. If predictions match the observations, this means our compressor is doing well and no new information needs to be stored. The subjective beauty of the new information is proportional to how well we can compress it (i.e. how many bits we are saving with our compression – if it's very complex but very familiar then that's a high compression). We find it beautiful because that is the intrinsic reward of our intrinsic motivation system, to try to maximize compression and acknowledge familiarity.[*10)]

There is a very funny desperation to this description, as though one could not bear the idea of feeling anything without it being the result of a mappable, mathematically legible process. It assumes that compression has a certain language, a model that can be replicated. Seeing and finding beauty in the world is a programmatic process, an internal systemic reward for having refined our »compressor.«

But the fact of experience is that we find things subjectively beautiful for reasons entirely outside of matching predictions with observations. A sense of beauty might be born of delusion or total misreading, of inaccuracy or an »incorrect« modelling of the world. A sensation of sublimity, out of a totally incompressible set of factors, influences, moral convictions, aesthetic tastes.

How one feels beauty is a problem of multiple dimensions. Neuroaesthetics researchers increasingly note that brain studies do not fully capture how or why the brain responds to art as it does, though these insights are used in Cambridge Analytica-style neuromarketing and advertisements limning one's browser. But scanning the brain gets us no closer to why we take delight in Walter Benjamin. A person might appear to be interesting or beautiful because they remind one of an ancient figure, or a time in history, or a dream of a person one might want to be like. They might be beautiful because of how they reframe the world as full of possibility, but not through any direct act, and only through presence, attitude, orientation.

ART, LIMITS, AND AMBIGUITY

This is not to say we should design counter-systems that facilitate surreal and unreadable gestures – meaning, semantically indeterminate – as a mode of resistance. The political efficacy of such moves, as Suhail Malik and others have detailed, in resistance to neoliberal capitalism is spectacular and so, limited.[*11)] New systems might, however, acknowledge unknowing; meaning, the limits of our current understanding. What I do not know about others and the world shapes me. I have to accept that there are thousands of bodies of knowledge that I have no access to. I cannot think without language and I cannot guide myself by the stars, let alone commune with spirits or understand ancient religions. People not only tolerate massive amounts of ambiguity, but they need it to learn.

Art and poetry can map such trickier sites of the artifactual mind. Artists train to harness ambiguity; they create environments in which no final answer, interpretation, or set narrative is possible. They can and do already intervene in the relationality between human and banal AI, providing strategies for respecting the ambiguous and further, fostering environments in which the unknown can be explored.[*12)] Just as the unreadable face prompts cognitive exploration, designed spaces of unknowing allow for provisional exploration. If computational design is missing what Bunnell calls »an emotional orientation of wonder,« then art and poetry might step in to insist on how »our systemic cognition remains operational in ways that are experienced as mysterious, emergent, and creative.«[*13)]

Artists can help foreground and highlight just how much neuro-computational processes cannot capture the phenomenal experiences in which we sense our place in history, in which we intuit the significance of people, deeply feel their value and importance, have gut feelings about emerging situations. There is epigenetic trauma we have no conscious access to, that is still held in the body. There are countless factors that determine any given choice we make, outside our consumer choices, our physicality, our education, and our careers, that might come from travel, forgotten conversations, oblique readings, from innumerable psychological, intellectual, and spiritual changes that we can barely articulate to ourselves.

A true mimic of our cognition that we might respect would embed logical choices within emotional context, as we do. Such grounding of action in emotional intelligence has a profound ethical importance in our lives. Philosophers like Martha Nussbaum have built their entire corpus of thought on restoring its value in cognitive process. Emotions make other people and their thoughts valuable, and make us valuable and interesting to them. There is an ethical value to emotion that is »truly felt,« such as righteous anger and grief at injustice, at violence, at erasure of dignity.[*14)]

Further, artistic interventions can contribute to suggesting a model of artificial mind that is desperately needed: one that acknowledges futurity. Where an artificial personality does not think on tomorrow or ten years from now, that we think on ourselves living in the future is a key mark of being human. No other animal does this in the way we do.[*15)]

This sense of futurity would not emerge without imagination. To craft future scenarios, a person must imagine a future in which she is different from who she is now. She can hold that abstract scenario before her to guide decisions in the present. She can juggle competing goals, paths, and senses of self together in her mind.

Édouard Glissant insisted on the »right to opacity,« on the right to be unknowable. This strategy is essential in vulnerable communities affected by systemic asymmetries and inequalities and the burden of being overseen. Being opaque is generally the haven of the powerful, who can hide their flows and exchanges of capital while feigning transparency. For the less powerful, an engineered opacity offers up protection, of the vitality of experience that cannot be coded for.

We might give to shallow AI exactly what we are being given, matching its duplicitousness, staying flexible and evasive, in order to resist. We should learn to trust more slowly, and give our belief with much discretion. We have no obligation to be ourselves so ruthlessly. We might consider being a bit more illegible.

When the interface asks how I feel, I could refuse to say how I feel in any language it will understand. I could speak in nonsense. I could say no, in fact, I cannot remember where I was, or what experiences I have had, and no, I do not know how that relates to who I am. I was in twenty places at once; I was here and a thousand miles and years away.

I should hold on open engagement with AI until I see a computational model that values true openness – not just a simulation of openness – a model that can question feigned transparency. I want an artificial intelligence that values the uncanny and the unspeakable and the unknown. I want to see an artificial intelligence that is worthy of us, of what we could achieve collectively, one that can meet our capacity for wonder.

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GABBER OVERDRIVE – NOISE, HORROR, AND ACCELERATION

BY HILLEGONDA C. RIETVELD

IN LIGHT OF A NIGHT DEVOTED TO GABBER AND HARDCORE AT CTM 2018, SCHOLAR AND FORMER ELECTRONIC MUSIC PRODUCER HILLEGONDA C. RIETVELD REFLECTS ON A GENRE THAT EVOLVED IN HER HOME CITY IN THE NETHERLANDS, SPREAD THROUGHOUT THE WORLD IN THE 1990s, AND IS NOW EXPERIENCING A REBIRTH VIA MILLENNIAL-GENERATION PARTIES SEEKING TO RE-INFUSE THE MUSIC SCENE WITH A SPIRIT OF ANTI-ELITISM AND THE AESTHETICS OF HORROR.

Video still from the 1995 VPRO documentary »Loladamusica«. Source: YouTube.

New York, 1992: DJ Repeat plays the hardest sounds he can lay his hands on: tekno from Berlin, hardhouse from Frankfurt, gabber house from Rotterdam, hardcore from Belgium; each a mixture of European avant-garde, post-punk, electronic dance music, Euro-disco, and house music. DJ Repeat is placed high up in a church-building-turned-nightclub, The Limelight, which caters mostly to young »Italian« and »Anglo« suburban dancers from Brooklyn and New Jersey – »bridge and tunnel« folk. His energetic set is a juggling act of flow and rupture, rewinding the already fragmented tracks by spinning the vinyl records backwards at breakneck speed and mixing in seemingly random noises like festive confetti. An MC whips up the crowd New York-style, with demonic shouts. The dancers, though, seem to be aimlessly milling around as the music is too fast to lock into a groove in a sustained manner. Instead, they occasionally wave their arms in the air, while the go-go girls sit seemingly bored, or tired, with dangling legs in their suspended cages.

Seemingly oblivious to the dancefloor, DJ Repeat is immersed in the sonic mayhem of brutal beats and piercing sawtooth waveforms. He enthusiastically turns around amidst the noisy turmoil and shouts over his shoulder that he aims to recreate the atmosphere of the Paradise Garage, the legendary dance club that in 1987 had returned to its former function as parking garage. For anyone who had set foot in the Garage, this was a puzzling notion – the size of its dance floor was comparable to that of The Limelight, but catered to an African-American gay crowd, which would dance all night long to an eclectic mix of soul, disco, funk, and electronica. The Garage was about love: love of music, love of the community, and love of a hi-fidelity sound. Offering an astounding soundsystem, you could have a conversation without shouting, yet the bass would bounce and stroke your body. With Larry Levan as its resident DJ, who lived for a well-balanced sound and who communicated his messages through vocal music selections, the club acted as a catalyst of a musical aesthetic known in the UK as »garage.« A melodic, soulful, and perhaps even melancholic type of dance music that mixed acoustic with electronic sounds, it seemed to me a universe away from the accelerated, extreme noise fest of gabber and hardcore.

While I'm reflecting on this, DJ Repeat spins in a hardcore track. To my astonishment, I recognise the staccato melody that is stabbed aggressively in piercing tones, based on a football song from my hometown, Rotterdam. Soccer fandom is not something that I would associate with this particular New York crowd, or with Paradise Garage, for that matter. At around 140 BPM, »Feyenoord Reactivate« by Rotterdam Termination Source (1992, Rotterdam Records) has a relatively fast tempo for its time, its low-frequency breakbeats rolling like a storming tank on the battlefield. As with other hardcore tracks, the musical structures are ruptured, the grooves broken up with occasional rewind sounds that recall hip hop turntablism.

In 1992, Rotterdam was the epicentre of a radical hardcore dance music, known as »gabberhouse« (simplified to the da-da-esque nomer »gabba« for English speakers). »Gabber« is a Dutch Yiddish term meaning »geezer« or »mate,« and was used in a derogatory manner by Amsterdam rival house music fans to refer to Rotterdam hardcore producers and dancers, who were mostly working-class and male. The term was adopted and accepted as a badge of honour, confirming a subcultural identity. The guys were recognisable by their shaven skinheads, and the girls by their half-shaven hairstyle.

The Amsterdam-Rotterdam rivalry stems from premier league football, Feyenoord for Rotterdam versus Ajax for Amsterdam. This is illustrated by the first identifiable gabber track, »Amsterdam, Waar Lech Dat Dan« (1992, Rotterdam Records), produced by Paul Elstak, the man behind Rotterdam Records, as Euromasters; the record sleeve unashamedly shows a cartoon of the iconic Rotterdam Euromast (a viewing tower near the river Maas, with a restaurant at the top) urinating on Amsterdam. The prolific success of gabber in Rotterdam may have partly been stimulated by a stronger leniency by the local authorities towards »house parties« (as raves were called in the Netherlands) when compared to elsewhere in the country, while the genre also gained popularity in the legal club environment. For example, according to Paul Elstak, the venue Parkzicht attracted many working-class punters who worked in the huge international harbour of Rotterdam. It was there that, in 1992, *Nightmare in the Park* took place in reference to the 1984 horror movie *A Nightmare on Elm Street*. This was followed by *Nightmare in Rotterdam*, the start of a long-lasting set of parties in the Energiehal sports hall that eventually moved into the Ahoy sports arena. The biggest dance event of that year, *Eurorave*, was held on the beach near the gigantic petrochemical industrial estates of the Europoort, attracting 20,000 gabber and techno fans.

Gabber not only features British rave-inspired breakbeats, but also tracks that are based on four-to-the-floor, on-the-pulse Teutonic bass-drum beats that pound like a pile driver, a reminder of the soundscape of a city being rebuilt after its partial destruction during WWII. An iconic example is Sperminator's »No Women Allowed« (1992, Rotterdam Records) with its horror movie sound bites and music samples – a track that, with its brazen »no women« sample, was re-appropriated by the leather lesbian scene at London's queer Soho club, *Fist*. A role model for such production values and sonic textures can be found in the German proto-gabber of »We Have Arrived« (1990) by Mescalinum United (Marc Acardipane a.k.a. Marc Trauner), who will be performing during CTM's »Turmoil« edition of 2018. The drum sounds in such gabber productions are mostly generated by the archetypal Roland TR-909 Rhythm Composer (a type of drum machine), which can also be heard in Chicago house music and Detroit techno, important components in the genealogy of hardcore techno. The characteristic swirling, multi-tracked, and piercing low-resolution »hoover« synth noise seems to be derived from (or seems to emulate) an 8-bit Atari video gaming home computer, illustrating an inescapable resonance between the gabber scene and game culture.

All of this is packaged in what seems a blank semiotic space, a seemingly amorphous noise that can be simultaneously contextualised as ironic and not ironic, and with a rockist dislike of »disco,« despite its rhizomatic links, as illustrated by DJ Repeat's reference to Paradise Garage in the above anecdote. However, hardcore's dance beats also stem from industrial dance and electronic body music (EBM), which, as S. Alexander Reed explains in his book *Assimilate*, gained its four-to-the floor beats during the 1980s with the adoption of drum machines, creating a danceable frame for industrial noise music that is very similar to a disco rhythm.[*1)] For example, listen to the Belgian punk-vocalised proto-techno of »Body to Body« by Front 242 (Red Rhino Europe, 1981) or the banging beats of »Der Mussolini« (Virgin, 1981) by the early-80s electro-punk duo DAF (Deutsch Amerikanische Freundschaft). Industrial is characterised by a machine aesthetic that foregrounds noise. Similarly, gabber overdrives the volume of its already shrieking and punching sound palette to extremes, producing an immersive experience of excess, in this case of rage and violence. Noise is a tricky thing to theorise, however. It can be regarded as an unwelcome interference, and as »anti-music.« This would reconfirm what »proper« music should be about, and thereby fails to deliver a new way of hearing. Still, is noise so embryonic that, from its state of chaos, it may be morphed into a range of political directions? A critical praxis may be found in hardcore gabber for its simultaneously numbing effect and immanent revolutionary potential. At CTM 2018, New York's Kilbourne »uses 'terrifying,' 'aggro-fem' slammers with titles like 'Witch Hunt' and 'Men:Parasites' to reconnoitre and exorcise the haunted territories of trauma.«[*2)] Simultaneously, this demonstrates that violent noise is not exclusive to male producers; women and non-binary producers are also increasingly involved in making electronic noise.

»THE POLITICAL AMBIGUITY OF NOISE AND HORROR MEANS THAT GABBER MAY BE UNDERSTOOD FROM A RANGE OF PERSPECTIVES.«

Extreme noise initiates a balancing act between repulsion and the sublime. Similarly, gabber displays a violent sense of masochism through an embrace of horror imagery, illustrated by the flyer image of the well-known pale, pinned face from the 1987 movie, *Hellraiser*: Can you stand the pain? Can you handle the noise, the terror, the nightmare? Here one can turn to a similar attitude in heavy metal. Rather than dismissing this as an empty nihilism, Robert Walser explains in *Running with the Devil* that horror appeared as a counter to the rationality of the enlightenment, and coincides with »periods of social strain and disorder«[*3)] – of turmoil, in other words. Horror, pain, and terror enable intense physical and mental experiences that can play an important role in the adolescent rite of passage, while the resultant adrenaline rush may produce a raw sense of excited pleasure. Perfect for an industrial rave populated by young, working-class dancers, then. During the early 1990s a chasm appeared between fast financial capital and a slowing economy, producing a gap between ambition and reality. In this context, horror became a way to channel the resultant sense of rage, which may be experienced within the contradictions of subordination. Furthermore, the irrationality of horror may well highlight »the dark side of the capitalist security state,«[*4)] turning what seems like a mindless night out into a type of avant-garde act. This is where the more left-wing anarcho-squatter scene inserts itself into the music, such as the regular hardcore/gabber *Death Till Dawn* parties in Brixton, London, taking some of the more reactionary voice samples with a sense of irony.

»GABBER OVERDRIVES THE VOLUME OF ITS ALREADY SHRIEKING AND PUNCHING SOUND PALETTE TO AN EXTREME EXTENT, PRODUCING AN IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCE OF EXCESS, IN THIS CASE OF RAGE AND VIOLENCE.«

Acceleration is equally central to gabber. Although the economy may be slowing down, simultaneously financial capitalism accelerates. In the UK, the philosophical group CCRU developed what Benjamin Noys identifies in his book *Malign Velocities*[*5)] as »accelerationism.« Partly inspired by the sped-up breakbeats in hardcore rave and jungle, the idea was to beat capitalism by being faster than capitalism – an impossible task, as biological rhythms of the organic human body are incompatible with digital capitalism. Yet computer game culture and raves seem to attempt just that: go faster, accelerate, take more pills, and don't sleep – speed on an amphetamine buzz instead. Not depending on a human drummer, the drum machine clock can be set faster and faster, to 170 BPM, 200 BPM, and beyond, towards speedcore, an undanceable gabber subgenre that turns music into a drone as the pulse accelerates to a speed of 1000 BPM: Can you handle the stress, this endurance? In an article on accelerationism for *The Guardian*,[*6)] Andy Beckett cites Steve Goodman, a philosopher and the owner of electronic music label Hyperdub: »We all live in an operating system set up by the accelerating triad of war, capitalism and emergent AI.« And, extending this logic, we are either swept along or, reversely, as was the case with dubstep during the first decade of the new millennium, stopped in our tracks in a tragic state of inertia. Fast forward to 2018, though, and CTM hosts Stockholm's HAJ300, who founded the female electronic music collective Drömfakulteten (Dream Faculty) and recently released the 200-bpm »Varfor sa du inget« ('Why Didn't You Say Anything?), an example of noisy overdrive that »us[es] tempo and speed as the lens and tool through which to look at material desires and failures, post-industrial economies and workaday workings in a Full Geography.«[*7)]

Music and its experience are articulated and shaped within specific social and economic contexts. In addition, Attali argues in his monograph *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*[*8)] that noise can be prophetic. The political ambiguity of noise and horror means that gabber may be understood from a range of perspectives and interpreted as either amorphous rage, nihilist destruction, or revolutionary, avant-garde anarchism. The embracing of acceleration heralded the arrival of post-human subjectivity, which was initially mixed with a disturbing populist demagoguery. So, was gabberhouse, perhaps, a prophecy of an emerging Alt-Right? Or will CTM 2018's offering of gabber and hardcore prove such a thesis wrong? Offering space for marginalised anger and turmoil in overdrive, the immersive, repetitive whirlwind of accelerated noise and abject horror acts as an unspoken, yet extremely loud, sonic critique that must be experienced.

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*1) Reed, S. Alexander. *Assimilate: A Critical History of Industrial Music*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.
*2) CTM Festival, »CTM 2018 – 2nd Announcement.« www.ctm-festival.de/festival-2018/welcome/ctm-2018-2nd-announcement
*3) Robert Walser (1993) *Running with the Devil: Power, Gender, and Madness in Heavy Metal Music*. Middletown CT: Wesleyan University Press, p. 161.
*4) *Ibid.*: 162.
*5) Noys, Benjamin. *Malign Velocities: Accelerationism and Capitalism*. Winchester and Washington D.C.: Zero Books, 2014.
*6) Beckett, Andy. »Accelerationism: how a fringe philosophy predicted the future we live in.« *The Guardian*, May 11, 2017. www.theguardian.com/world/2017/may/11 accelerationism-how-a-fringe-philosophy-predicted-the-future-we-live-in
*7) CTM Festival, »CTM 2018 – 2nd Announcement.« www.ctm-festival.de/festival-2018/welcome/ctm-2018-2nd-announcement
*8) Attali, Jaques. *Noise: The Political Economy of Music* (translator: Brian Massumi). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985.

»I'M TRYING TO IMAGINE A SPACE A LITTLE BETTER THAN WHAT WE'VE INHERITED«

KILBOURNE IN CONVERSATION WITH CRISTINA PLETT

Kilbourne performing, October 2017, photo by Luis Nieto Dickens.

WHEN CRISTINA PLETT CALLED ASHE KILBOURNE, SHE HEARD OF HARDCORE MUSIC BANGING OUT OF KILBOURNE'S MONITORS. »LET ME JUST SWITCH THEM OFF,« ASHE SAYS, MAKING ROOM FOR THE CONVERSATION. HER STUDIO ROOM IS BRIGHT, FILLED WITH LIGHT AND THE REFLECTION OF THE HEAVY SNOW THAT HAS JUST HIT NEW YORK. HAVING GROWN UP IN A RURAL TOWN IN NEW JERSEY AND RECENTLY LIVING IN NEW ORLEANS FOR THREE YEARS, SHE JUST MOVED BACK TO NEW YORK CITY. THE 25-YEAR-OLD (»BORN IN THE SAME YEAR AS THUNDERDOME!«) DJ AND PRODUCER HAS AN EXCEPTIONALLY POLITICAL VIEW ON HARDCORE. SO, WE ASKED HER ABOUT HER PERSPECTIVE ON IT.

How did you get in touch with electronic music generally and hardcore especially?

Through the internet I found happy hardcore pretty quickly. That was when I was in middle school, just through YouTube and stuff. I remember my friend would give me the *Bonkers*-CDs. The first ones were like early happy hardcore, early rave, then some of the later ones had like hardcore techno and hard techno! Also, in high school I started going to parties and dance parties and raves in Philadelphia and New York.

The shifting of energy in your DJ sets is so quick. How do you try to channel this energy?

I think that a lot of hardcore works with formulaic arrangements, where there is often an intro, a dropout of the beat, a build, a bigger crescendo drop, and then a dropout and then another build-crescendo-drop, and then an outro. Those atmospheric moments where the beat disappears, I think they work to both intellectually and physically gather yourself. Because if you do a set where the kick drum will be going 95% of the time for an hour or two, you just have to keep up with it or take a break at your own pace. Like a »Gather your head and figure out maybe what is motivating you to dance at that moment« kind of thing.

I was surprised that your early compilation *18 songs, 2012 – 2015* is a very different style than, for example, your *Sourland* EP from 2016. When did this shift?

A lot of the songs on there are Philly and Jersey club. There was a time when that was a lot of what I was making. This art form is very much black, and it is simultaneously really in the moment of being exploited by white people around the world. Ultimately what I saw was, if someone wants a club DJ and they're a promoter, often if they're white, they are more inclined to

»I THINK I'VE STOPPED MAKING CLUB AS MUCH BECAUSE THE MORE I TRY TO PUSH MYSELF TO THE CENTER OF THIS GENRE THAT I LOVE AND CARE DEEPLY ABOUT, I'M GOING TO BE PUSHING OTHERS OUT.«

book a white performer. Just because white performers who do black art are seen as transgressive or edgy in a way that black people who are doing art that is black aren't. So, I thought, for whatever good intentions I might want to have, I can't change the structural inequality around the music I make. I think I've stopped making club as much because the more I try to push myself to the center of this genre that I love and care deeply about, I'm going to be pushing others out.

So, do you think more black people got pushed out as club music becomes more hip?

Yeah. Or maybe like they weren't given the same economic opportunities as certain people. I think there is crossing-over with hardcore as well because a lot of the big producers right now are white, but then, if you look at the sampling culture of hardcore, a lot of it is nineties hip-hop tracks. It's kind of mind-boggling that there is, especially in the Netherlands, a really white culture.

White, and it also seems very male.

Yeah definitely. These big songs have rappers using the n-word, and it's so … it's uncomfortable. There is this group Gunz For Hire. It's a big raw style duo. And I like their work individually, but their whole thing is just these over the top vocal raw tracks, where it's like, [sings] »To the weak, no mercy! To the losers, no mercy! NO fucking mercy!«. You know, two white Dutch dudes and the songs are like »LA,« »Brooklyn,« mostly offensive, about violence and an imagined macho, coded as black, culture of hip hop. Basically, there is a whole market for that in hardcore, too; mostly white performers using black aesthetics because it's edgy and over the top and often seen as really exaggerated.

Do you think that's most of the hardcore scene or just a small negative part?

I don't know, I think [pauses and thinks]… Maybe there are parts like that that are really obvious in what they're doing. But I think white supremacy runs through everything in culture so… it shows up in small and subtle ways, too. I think that in some of the first hardcore and early rave and gabber tracks it's a big part of it, the fetishizing of black culture.

It's only a small part of the world but it's also a reflection of the whole world.

Absolutely. I think about the Netherlands, which is where so much of it starts, the assumption is that everyone's kind of very informed and educated about shit. So, the accusation of them making something negative going on in the community – I feel if you were to ask at a lot of these festivals, these guys, »Are you sexist?«, they'd be like no! But the whole thing about putting women's bodies on display and hitting on women being really aggressive sexually, is that a big part of it? Yeah, definitely.

How do you feel then producing it as a woman and especially as a trans woman?

I don't know about many hardcore people who are visibly transwomen. What's her name…? She is like one of the original hardcore and early rave people who is a trans woman and I really should know her name. [clicks on the computer, thinks]. Ah, yes! Liza N'Eliaz. She's a trans woman, she's an important person. She's no longer alive. Aside from her I don't really know anyone. When I've gone to festivals in the Netherlands, being trans is definitely a point of harassment and fear. There is also so much stigma in hardcore about producing. A lot of women who make it are accused of having ghost producers and certainly some do, but still, it's so weird. I always see on message boards – there is this artist I love, Miss Hysteria. They will be like »Best woman in hardcore!«, »Only woman who really makes her music!«. Even in supporting her they're basically downgrading women who try to participate in the scene.

I have the feeling that this old traditional hardcore scene from the Netherlands is very different to the new scene where you are and that's merging with club music. Are you trying to build a nicer scene for yourself or do you identify more with the old one?

I hope that in my own actions I'm trying to imagine and enact a space that's a little better than what we've inherited as far as politics and gender politics go in the scene, but at the same time it's difficult because maybe it's a genre that hasn't had these conversations so much. And it's starting to. I think there is a danger too: Of having a total break, even if hardcore is having this moment of a club and hardcore crossover and both are critiquing the politics of what has come before it. If there is a total break it's probably very easy to lose track of the music that got you here in the first place. You need to be involved in the critique of what's come before you, because there are issues that are clear around the scenes. Like misogyny and racism. And if you consider yourself totally separate from hardcore before, you might lose your connection to it.

»I THINK WHITE SUPREMACY RUNS THROUGH EVERYTHING IN CULTURE SO… IT SHOWS UP IN SMALL AND SUBTLE WAYS, TOO.«

You lose touch with the roots and the bigger picture. And it also doesn't improve the old one.

Yeah! Because if you just have these little pockets of people where everyone is on the same page, it's nice, but it doesn't affect the larger conversation.

I was wondering how you see this becoming hip of hardcore with acts like the Casual Gabberz, Wixtapol etc. – more positively or more negatively?

I think it's positive – and I think I trust everyone there really loves the music – but you get scared that it will just become, not for the groups you mentioned, but for people around it, like a fun little thing to try on, but not really embraced fully and sincerely. I feel like this because it's music that I love, and it's given me so much inspiration and happiness in my life. So I get scared at the thought of people being like »Oh this is like so over the top, Gabber!« but they're not really being there for it. The other thing I worry about – did you see that Resident Advisor article? Where it's top trends and hardcore as one. It's weird because hardcore shouldn't be a trend, it's such a giant mainstream culture in certain parts of the world, literally hundreds of thousands of people are obsessed with this genre. So it's important not to fool ourselves that we're something totally new and out of the blue.

It's just a new thing for the »underground« of electronic music.

And I love whatever that »underground,« obviously nerdy, club, internet people do and so I just hope that collectively we pay tribute to the music that's come before it and just live it to the fullest. And not treat it as just a joke.

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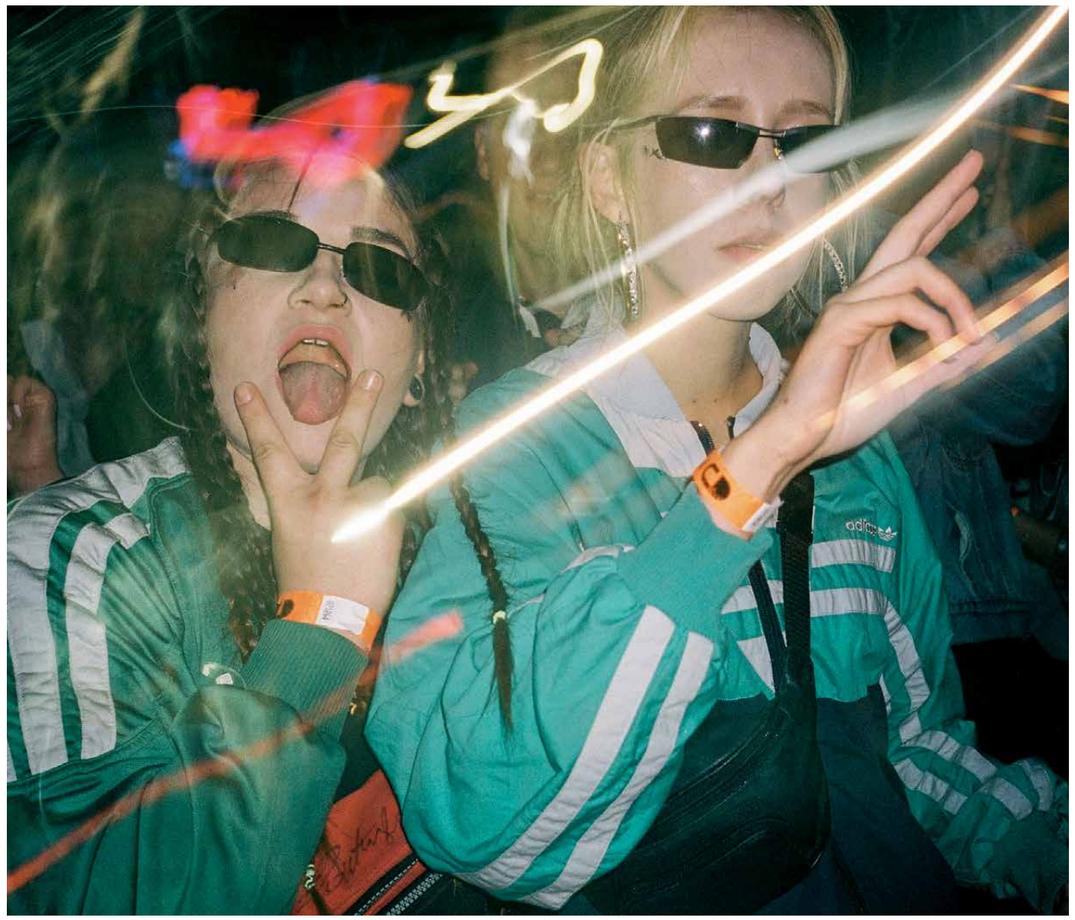
To listen to *KILBOURNE*'s music go to:
» www.soundcloud.com/kilbourne

RAVING AT 200 BPM: INSIDE POLAND'S NEO-GABBER UNDERGROUND

BY DEREK OPPERMAN / PHOTOS BY ELIZABETH CLAIRE HERRING



THE NEO-GABBER REVIVAL IS HERE. A SMALL NETWORK OF PARTY CREWS ACROSS EUROPE HAVE RETURNED TO DANCE MUSIC'S HARDEST CORE IN SEARCH OF FRESH INSPIRATION AND SOME KIND OF AUTHENTIC UNDERGROUND EXPERIENCE. IN 2014, BOILER ROOM HOSTED A SPECIAL TITLED »IT'S NOT A DISGRACE TO BE A GABBER« THAT FEATURED PARIS' CASUAL GABBERZ CREW. A SIMILAR CURRENT HAS EMERGED IN ITALY THANKS TO MILAN'S GABBER ELEGANZA, WHICH WAS TAPPED TO PROVIDE MUSIC FOR DIOR HOMME'S »HARDIOR« MENSWEAR LINE. BUT THE MOST PROGRESSIVE EXAMPLE OF THIS MOVEMENT TOOK ROOT FURTHER EAST, IN POLAND. THANKS TO THE EFFORTS OF A PRANKISH TRAVELING RAVE CREW CALLED WIXAPOL S.A., MANY YOUNG POLISH CLUBBERS ARE GETTING THEIR FIRST TASTES OF ELECTRONIC DANCE MUSIC VIA THE FLUORESCENTLY PUMPED-UP AND SPED-OUT SOUNDS OF HARDSTYLE, GABBER, HARD BASS AND A NEW INTERNET SUBGENRE THAT TRANSLATES INTO ENGLISH AS »POPECORE.«

It's 4 AM, and about 500 kids in brightly colored retro Kappa and Adidas tracksuits are locked to the beat in an up-and-down stomp that defies conventional stamina. Their jerking movements and quick footwork is diced and distorted by harsh blasts of strobe and electrified laser buckshots. One girl in Oakleys is thrashing her beaded dreads in time to a hardstyle remix of Drowning Pool's »Bodies«. The comically over-distorted kick drum causes a vague tingling sensation reminiscent of the numbing euphoria of nitrous oxide. Many parties, in Berlin in particular, are described in reverential tones as being cooly bacchanalian or sexually depraved. WIXAPOL is a different beast, a demented carnival-like race to intentional stupidfication beneath the banner of the crew's omnipresent black and yellow icon: a smiley face with a tribal tramp stamp for eyes.

The first WIXAPOL was held in Warsaw in 2012. It was created by three friends who choose to remain anonymous behind their DJ aliases: DJ SPORTY SPICE, DJ TORRENTZ.EU and MIKOUAJ REJW. Though originally a Varsovian party, it's since become a traveling entity with regular local editions in nearly every major city in Poland. A quick search of the hashtag #wixapol on Instagram or YouTube reveals why: Young Poles are crazy about WIXAPOL and identify with the party in a way that borders on obsessively tribal subcultural affiliation. There's a unique fashion, a sound, a language and even specific dances that only seem to exist at WIXAPOL.

»The name is a word play inspired by the '90s decade,« says DJ TORRENTZ.EU. »The ›wixa‹ is Polish slang for ›partying hard‹. For me it's like the Polish equivalent to ›rave‹. The ›pol‹ is because in the early days of Polish capitalism every guy was doing some company, and these companies had random names, but it was always, ›something-pol‹ for ›Poland‹. Like, some guy's name was Mirek, and he'd call his company ›Mirekpol‹. So you get ›WIXAPOL‹.«

WIXAPOL's social media presence is so strong that one dedicated fan created a »WIXOPEDIA« that automatically collects and organizes the memes, photos, videos and other assorted ephemera in one central location. »We are doing parties, but the fan page and our communication with fans is just as important,« TORRENTZ.EU explains. »We do a lot of memes, and our status updates are all written using a specific language with everything in caps-lock. It's inspired by chan culture and meme language.«

The »chan culture« that he mentions is a reference to the unhinged troll internet subculture surrounding controversial websites like 4chan and 8chan. These message boards revolve around anonymously posted image content that includes everything from memes and porn to gore and anime. According to TORRENTZ.EU, »this manner of writing also refers to Polish people who make grammar mistakes because they're angry or they're on drugs – lots of exclamation marks and stuff.«

For example, the club's biography on Resident Advisor is, »WILD AND PASSIONATE AVANTGARDE OF EASTERN RAVE REVIVAL, DEDICATED TO HARDEST AND FASTEST GENRES OF CLUB MUSIC. BRINGING VITAL ENERGY AND MADNESS INTO POLISH SCENE ({ ACCELERATE EVERYTHING }) !!!« And the group just recently made a Facebook profile overlay that says, »IT'S NICE TO BE IMPORTANT. BUT IT'S MORE IMPORTANT TO BE NICE!!!1«

Clearly, a big part of WIXAPOL's appeal is its humor. Its irreverent approach to dance music feels fresh at a time when techno and house are treated with the same reverential tone as high culture. »Actually, WIXAPOL was created as a reaction to all that seriousness in the techno scene,« says DJ SPORTY SPICE. »For example, the description of those techno parties,

they sound like it's some kind of classical music in the philharmonic. But it's a club event. People go there to get fucked up and dance.«

»WIXAPOL WAS CREATED AS A REACTION TO ALL THAT SERIOUSNESS IN THE TECHNO SCENE«

MIKOUAJ REJW agrees. From his perspective, the Polish electronic dance music scene was once associated with criminality, degenerates and satanism thanks to a media campaign from conservative elements and the Catholic church. »In the '90s, techno was a crappy thing for techno heads. Now it's trying to be artsy,« he says. »Like, ›We're serious. We're doing art stuff.‹« It wasn't until long after Poland joined the EU that people's attitudes changed thanks to interaction with scenes in western European countries. Now techno has become a societally acceptable music of choice.

But to WIXAPOL, this change in attitude is »a perversion. You're going to go to the club and get drunk or take drugs and be ridiculous, but at the same time feel better about yourself because it's a ›better type of party‹, which is bullshit,« says DJ SPORTY SPICE. »You can't categorize music in that way – especially club music. We were sick of that when we started, so we tried to do something completely different. We tried to do something raw, untasteful and ›not good‹.«

»We are into bad taste, bad stereotypes, bad aesthetics. Club music and techno in Poland had a very bad reputation for a long time, so we like to embrace everything. We're post-shame.« adds DJ TORRENTZ.EU. This mentality also trickles into their merry prankster sense of humor. »Polish humor is dark,« he says. »Polish people have problems with political correctness because Polish people joke about everything: death, rape, the Holocaust…sometimes it can be offensive and problematic. But humor has been a way for Polish people to survive really difficult moments in history. It's a psychic mechanism for dealing with difficult stuff.«

In some cases, WIXAPOL's humor gets close to the politically incorrect edginess of 4chan and »dank« memes (think LOL Cats, but with jokes about autism and school shooters). Nowhere is this more evident than in the party's fascination with Pope John Paul II. At a surface level, this manifests in the form of people sometimes wearing papal attire to the party. At a deeper level, John Paul II also occasionally appears in the party's memes and messaging. There's even a sub-genre called »papacore« that layers John Paul II samples over brutally noisy gabber beats and ludicrously cheesy hard bass plonks. This stems from Polish meme culture's obsession with using John Paul II – a national hero who was the first pope from this historically Catholic country – as a vehicle of transgression.

There's a whole popular meme format in Poland called »JP2GMD,« which loosely translates to »John Paul II rapes little children.« This meme references what is widely seen as the pope's lack of adequate response to the many child abuse charges against the Catholic clergy around the world. DJ TORRENTZ.EU explains the appeal. »It's a typical anarchic attitude troll thing. John Paul II is a national icon, but the younger guys don't remember him, and their parents and schools are forcing them to respect this pope, but they don't feel any connection to him, and they're extremely sick of the empty cult surrounding this individual.«

A Google search for JP2GMD reveals tons of these irreverent memes. Some surreally depict John Paul II as a computer processor, insect dancing or as a giant throwing cream cakes at the World Trade Center. Others are even darker, like a picture of John Paul II with two kebab knives in a meat locker full of dead babies. WIXAPOL even created its own papacore-soundtracked video, that weighs in on the issue.

In many respects, WIXAPOL feels like a party created by trolls for trolls. This is to some extent a function of the music itself, which sounds aggressive and fun to insiders but abrasive and terrible to outsiders. TORRENTZ.EU says, »Hardcore and hardstyle are kinds of music that can be very annoying. It gives you the same pleasure as making your parents or neighbors annoyed. It's a trolling pleasure like as in punk or any other counterculture.«

And he's right. A recent event in Krakow was held on a boat next to a wedding reception. WIXAPOL's wacky energy was amplified a few hundred degrees by an on-board Funktion-One sound system, which the crew used to power their YouTube rips and torrented MP3s. Standing from the shore, you could see two very different parties unfolding. On one boat: absolute savagery at 180BPM. On the other: a group of horrified normies awkwardly trying to dance to Bruno Mars.

»WE TRIED TO DO SOMETHING RAW, UNTASTEFUL AND ›NOT GOOD‹.«

The party's humor hasn't necessarily won it fans within what its DJs refer to as the »true school« community of existing gabber heads in Poland. »For some orthodox gabber and hardcore fans, it's unacceptable that we play this papal donk music or anything different alongside gabber,« says MIKOUAJ REJW. »They think that hardcore can only be serious, and that we're making some laughs about it.

»But in fact this music always had a sense of humor. It was very eclectic and diverse from the beginning,« DJ TORRENTZ.EU points out. Nevertheless, their unique approach has won some support with similarly minded figures from the old-school. New

»WE TRY TO BRING PEOPLE TOGETHER TO SHOW THEM THAT THEY CAN *BE TOGETHER. YOU CAN'T SAY TO SOMEONE THAT THEY'RE WRONG NECESSARILY; THAT WON'T WORK.«*

WIXAPOL S.A. artwork.

York hardcore camp legend The Horrorist and Abraxas of seminal '90s Dutch outfit Party Animals, who famously created a gabber remix of »Hava Naquila«, both played at WIXAPOL last year.

This clash with the local orthodox goes beyond humor and extends into the way the party approaches its musical selection. Unlike other explicitly gabber-centric parties, WIXAPOL's typical playlist cycles through the whole universe of fast and hard subgenres. »We are very hard for these older people to understand. They're like, ›What the fuck! Why are you mixing this good music with this shit!‹ says MIKOUAJ REJW. A night at WIXAPOL is like one big overwhelming grab-bag of donking basslines, absurd tempos, chugging 909 kicks that sound like barking dogs from hell, Polish sing-a-long choruses, nu-metal covers, Pope John Paul II samples, panic-inducing hardstyle stabs, a trance breakdown or two and the occasional guy screaming »HARDCORE!«. Of the three parties I attended, one of the standout moments came when DJ SPORTY SPICE summoned a mosh pit by playing Dutch hardcore godfather Paul Elstak's gabber remix of Sham 69's »If The Kids Are United«.

One thing that is especially impressive about WIXAPOL is just how obsessive its fans are. DJ SPORTY SPICE explains, »WIXAPOL is not a DJ collective. WIXAPOL is a movement. Everyone who comes to WIXAPOL is a part of WIXAPOL. And the people then feel they represent this idea.« The kids who go to this party dress and act the part. For many of them, WIXAPOL is their first entrance into any kind of electronic dance music whatsoever. At the party, there's a feeling of youthful enthusiasm that electrifies the atmosphere. They're passionate about gabber culture and hardstyle, and their interest is fueled by the novelty of the party as well as old YouTube videos of legendary gabber events in the Netherlands, like the massive Thunderdome parties. »These are young people who are inspired by historic videos from gabber parties and raves on the internet, and they want to experience similar stuff. They want to experience crazy experiences,« says DJ TORRENTZ.EU.

It's hard to shake the feeling of actually walking inside of one of those retro videos when at WIXAPOL. The dances, the fashion and the atmosphere are all weirdly familiar, even though the initial moment for this sound has long since passed. It's another facet of the party's indebtedness to the internet in that it perpetuates the inspiration and fulfillment of nostalgia in real time. In this way, it's not a retro party, despite its reference of gabber culture (beyond that much of the music it plays comes from contemporary hardstyle and hardcore).

Important to the sense of belonging is WIXAPOL's merchandise, which seemingly plays on Poland's hypercapitalist position. The full name of the party is Wixapol S.A., which suffix is like a GmbH or LLC. The crew sells embroidered t-shirts, laser-etched necklaces, 3D printed pendants, spray painted rave fans and football hooligan scarves emblazoned with the party's logo. They've even had professional tattoo stands at a few parties, so multiple people now have WIXAPOL tattoos. Through this, the logo has become a meme in its own right. On Instagram and Facebook, you can sometimes find it displayed in emoji shorthand as »))«.

The tribal tattoo and the ubiquitous track suits call to mind a certain working class subculture referred to as »dresiarze«, which has its roots in the word »to dress«, but which refers specifically to track suits. This Polish subculture is the local equivalent to British chavs or Russian gopniks. »Every country in Europe has this group. Sometimes it's named, sometimes it's not. But in the '90s these guys were tied to the techno scene. The tattoos were also a part of this working class culture. They look really aggressive,« DJ TORRENTZ.EU explains. Like all good trolls, WIXAPOL can be hard to read sometimes. »We use confusing aesthetics for good reasons,« he says, laughing.

Those good reasons aren't necessarily overtly political, but more societal. WIXAPOL is in an unusual position in that it's an extremely popular party that celebrates working class culture in a deeply conservative country split into two distinct economic zones: The »Poland A« of the cities and the »Poland B« of the rural countryside. »We try to bring people together,« says MIKOUAJ REJW, »to show them that they can be together. You can't say to someone that they're wrong necessarily; that won't work.«

DJ TORRENTZ.EU adds, »For example, we can bring together football hooligans and LGBT people and have them dance together to the same music and have fun at the same party. It can be their first common denominator. People are very separated politically in Poland, so I think that's a step forward.«

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For more photography by *ELIZABETH CLAIRE HERRING* see
» www.eclaireherring.com

More on WIXAPOL S.A.:
» www.wixapol.tumblr.com

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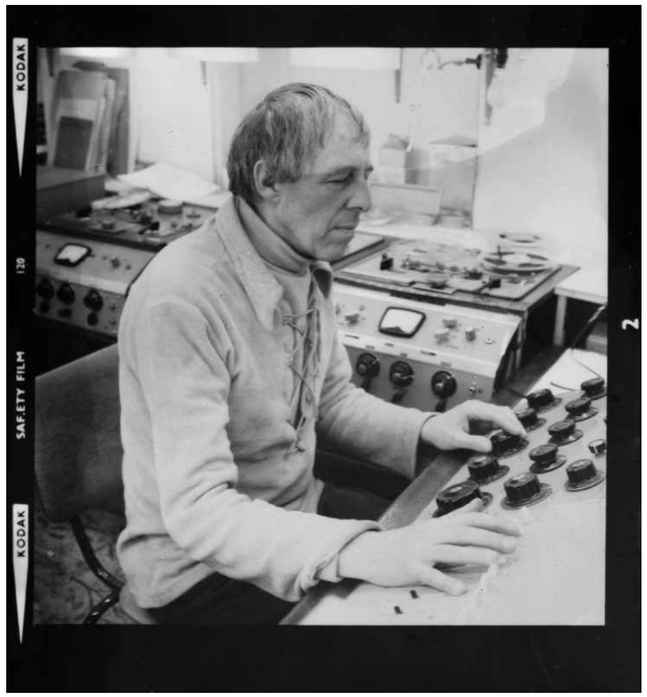
ERNEST BERK AND ELECTRONIC MUSIC

BY IAN HELLIWELL



Ernest Berk in his Dorset Street Studio, London, circa early 1970s.

AT CTM 2018, A RICH PROGRAMME OF PERFORMANCES AND LECTURES EXPLORES THE LIFE AND LEGACY OF CHOREOGRAPHER, ELECTRONIC MUSIC COMPOSER, IMPROVISER, DANCE THERAPIST, AND PEDAGOGUE ERNEST BERK (1909–93). AS WITH SO MANY ARTISTS BORN BEFORE WORLD WAR II, BERK'S LIFE AND WORK WERE INEXTRICABLY LINKED TO AND FUNDAMENTALLY SHAPED BY A TURBULENT POLITICAL CLIMATE. WITH ITS FOCUS ON »TURMOIL,« THIS FESTIVAL EDITION TURNS TO BERK'S INSPIRING EXAMPLE AS A WITNESS TO AND SURVIVOR OF GREAT SOCIAL AND POLITICAL UNREST. IT ALSO CELEBRATES HIS UNIQUE AND LIFE-AFFIRMING RESPONSE TO THAT UNREST. IN THIS ARTICLE, AUDIO-VISUAL ARTIST, COMPOSER, ELECTRONIC INSTRUMENT BUILDER, FILMMAKER, AND COLLAGIST IAN HELLIWELL GIVES AN INTRODUCTION TO THE MUSIC OF THIS MULTIFACETED, UNSUNG PIONEER.

Shortly before he died in 1993, Ernest Berk, a German-born choreographer who spent most of his career in London, reflected on his remarkable but little known parallel life as a pioneering composer of electronic music. »It amazes me how many compositions I made over the years, and the great variety of emotion they covered and the richness of sound-colour they showed,« he wrote in a letter to a friend. »It took me a time distance of nine-ten years before I could appreciate (or hate) my own music, and to understand the actual mass of work with which I am now confronted.«

Berk was not exaggerating in regard to the quantity or quality of the musique concrète and electronic music he produced in London from the 1950s onwards, and as with many unsung composers and experimenters working in early British electronic music, it is perplexing that someone so colourful and prolific remains so little known. Similar to other tape trailblazers in Britain during the 1950s and '60s, such as Roberto Gerhard, Don Banks, Cyril Clouts, and Jacob Meyerowitz, Berk arrived from overseas, settling in London where he would go on to craft his own vision for coupling tape recorder technology with his training in dance. An advocate for an expressive form of modern ballet with an interest in multidisciplinary projects, he set up his own dance and sound studio in Camden, north London, and began his experiments with tape and electronics in 1955. As a composer, he would collaborate with a variety of other experimental artists, including pianist John Tilbury, composer Basil Kirchin, artist John Latham, and filmmaker David Gladwell. Berk's electronic music was aligned with the modernist aesthetics of these more celebrated figures in Britain's '60s avant-garde, and his relative obscurity as a composer can be partly attributed to the fact that he was known primarily as a choreographer and educator. Near the end of his life he seemed ambivalent about his status as a producer of uncompromising electronic works. Included in the letter mentioned above, he wrote: »Was that really me who created these music-paintings, reflections of a wild and uncontrolled world?«

Ernest Berk was born in 1909 in Cologne, Germany. As a youth, he studied music and wrote and acted in his own plays. Having great difficulty remembering his lines led him irrevocably towards dance, which he later described as »acting without words.« While a student at the influential Mary Wigman dance school in Cologne he began to produce his own ballets, and in 1933 he formed his own company and married fellow student Lotte Heymansohn. As the 1930s progressed, conditions in Germany became increasingly dangerous and untenable for the young couple – Lotte was Jewish, and under the Nazi regime both were forbidden to teach – and they left the country in 1935. With Ernest's British passport they made their way to London, and eventually settled in Shepherd's Bush.

The culture of ballet in the UK in the 1930s was deeply conservative, and critics were largely dismissive of the new European dance style practiced by Ernest and Lotte. However, the couple performed with Sadler's Wells Theatre Ballet and several other companies, and they also appeared in the first live televised ballet broadcast from Alexandra Palace. As a lifelong pacifist and Buddhist, Ernest put his training in engineering to use on the home front during the Second World War, and though he underwent a hiatus from performing, his dance studies and practice continued. In the immediate postwar years, the Berks worked with Ballet Rambert, and by the 1950s both were seeking to establish their own studios. Lotte Berk developed what would become a world-renowned exercise method, and her London studio became a magnet for celebrity fitness seekers, including Britt Ekland, Barbra Streisand, and Joan Collins.

Although much of Ernest's early choreography was created for Lotte, she gave up professional dancing and the couple separated amicably in the 1960s. After setting up his Camden studio, Ernest continued to teach his freely expressive dance method, and for practical purposes began using a tape recorder, initially to record instrumental accompaniment for playback during rehearsals. By the mid-50s, experiments with tape and electronics were being conducted in all major Western countries, and it is likely that Ernest would have known about the work of his former countrymen Herbert Eimert and Karlheinz Stockhausen at the WDR studio in Cologne. British electronic composers Tristram Cary and Daphne Oram were already producing work, and experimental pieces for radio by Humphrey Searle and Roberto Gerhard demonstrated that broadcast opportunities and outlets for tape music were beginning to open up in the UK. Those four composers all had close connections to the BBC, while Berk remained partly an outsider, pursuing a fusion of art forms which the British establishment would never fully embrace during his lifetime. Nonetheless, his music did find a route onto television via the 1963 BBC drama *A Little Bit of Gold Said Jump*; in a TV experiment presenting music and dance titled *Here and Now*, from the same year; and in the documentary *One Of The Family*, broadcast in 1964.

At his Camden studio, Ernest set up tape recorders, tone generators, filters, ring modulators, and echo units, and explored

both microphone-orientated musique concrète and oscillator-based electronic music; techniques which still represented an ideological divide in France and Germany at the time. Drumming was also central to his approach; he had travelled in Africa and cycled across the Himalayas, and amassed a collection of traditional percussion instruments from around the world. He studied non-Western music, and fed his fundamental interest in rhythm into his dance classes and choreography.

In a March 1963 letter to the British Institute of Recorded Sound, Ernest invited a representative of the organisation to his studio for a special evening programme consisting of playbacks of his recent compositions. »You might be interested in the experimental work I am carrying out in the field of musique concrète and electronic sound,« he wrote. »I am particularly concerned with the creation and combination of totally new sounds, especially those which can be used in conjunction with the spoken word, to evoke images and emotions.« His compositions up to this point underline the number of interdisciplinary projects he was involved in besides creating music for dance. The studio log lists electronic sounds created for a tape/slide presentation, a mime class, poetry readings, and the 1961 short film *Talk Mr. Bard*, by the visual artist John Latham. The film, an abstract stop frame animation, was presumably screened with Berk's soundtrack in the 1960s, but it was later replaced, and it appears that this version is no longer extant.

Berk enjoyed a more fruitful relationship with the filmmaker and editor David Gladwell, known for his work with director Lindsay Anderson on the feature films *If....* (1968), and *O Lucky Man* (1973). In the early '60s, Gladwell was interested in incorporating electronic sounds into his own films, and was looking to connect with an experienced tape composer. He contacted Berk, and together they worked on four projects. The first, *An Untitled Film* (1964), was an independent experimental short that demonstrated Gladwell's interest in super slow motion. In the film, scenes of everyday rural farm life are transformed through slow speed and cutting into an eerie and captivating study of a young boy bearing witness to a deadly act. The ominous mood is amplified by Berk's electronic soundtrack, which combines a dissonant piano part with harsh bursts of noise.

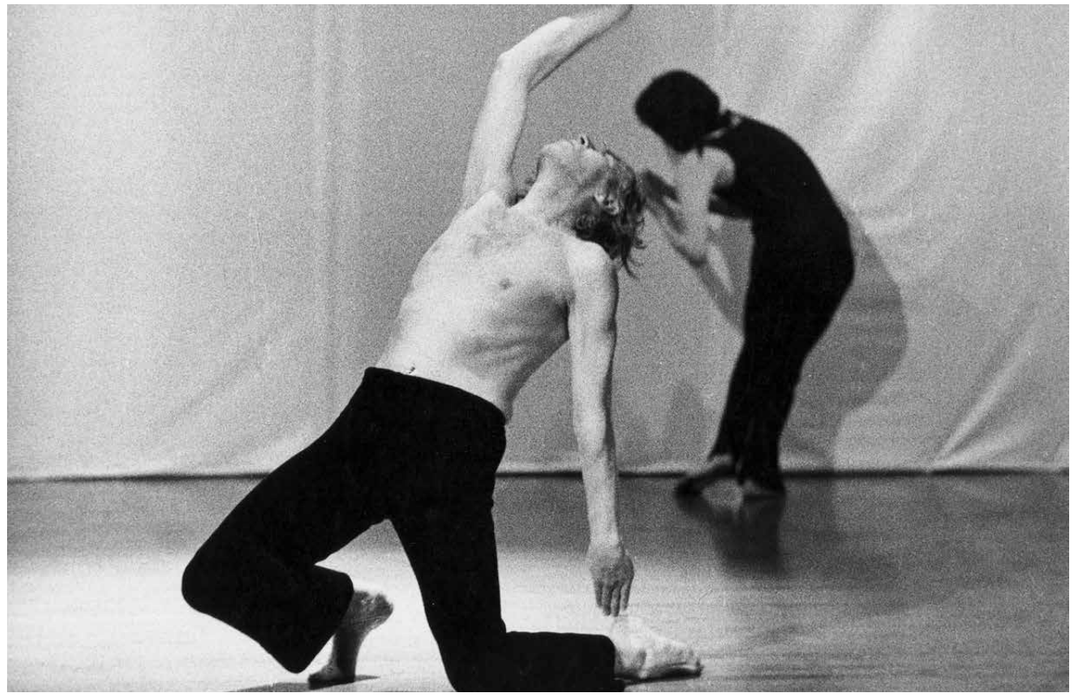
Berk's collaborative and crossover projects continued with scores for plays by Eugene O'Neill and Charles Marowitz; with future AMM pianist John Tilbury on the 1965 piece »Electronic Storm«; and with fellow tape experimenters Basil Kirchin and Desmond Leslie. Kirchin was originally a jazz drummer who turned to serious composing and film soundtrack work in the early '60s. He wrote music for the De Wolfe library label, and went on to collaborate on four pieces with Berk. »Jazz I« and »Jazz II« date from 1965, with Kirchin supplying backing tracks, and Berk completing overdubs and mixing. »Beirut To Baghdad« (1966) featured a melody by Kirchin, and was an attempt to produce commercial electronic music for library use. Berk later heard the track by chance on a visit to Cologne, after Kirchin had sold it to a Swedish company for use on a pornographic film soundtrack. A number of other compositions were made by Berk for labels specialising in library music, including Morgan, Conroy, Rediffusion, and the CBS EZ Cue Library.

Desmond Leslie was a charismatic and eccentric character who entered Ernest Berk's orbit during the 1950s. He is infamous for his intervention on the satirical TV programme *That Was the Week That Was* in 1963, in which the strapping 6'4" writer, film director, and UFO hunter punched the weedy, bespectacled critic Bernard Levin. Leslie is less well-known as a keen tape experimenter, and in parallel with Berk, he had a well-developed interest in music and drama, being drawn to the possibilities of recorded sound and tape manipulation. Setting up his own private studio in St John's Wood in west London in the mid-'50s, he similarly operated outside the British music establishment and sought commercial work, supplying electronic tracks to library label Joseph Weinberger, and tape interludes for a series of *Living Shakespeare* LPs issued from 1961. Some of his tracks were licensed by the BBC, and turned up in several episodes of *Doctor Who* during the 60s. Berk recorded the piece »Kali Yuga« (1962) at Leslie's St John's Wood studio, and dedicated to him, his composition »Anecdote 1« (1961). When Leslie left London sometime around 1963 to run the family estate in Monaghan, Ireland, his tape experimentation largely drew to a close. However, Berk continued incorporating his friend's music into dance performances, and in 1974 he choreographed *The Fence* and *Two Bottles*, both of which featured Leslie's tape sounds, with text by the early 20th century German poet Christian Morgenstern spoken by Leslie's first wife, the actress and singer Agnes Bernelle.

By the late 1960s, the artistic and cultural landscape in Britain was changing rapidly. Although still not wholly accepted by critics or much of the public, serious electronic music compositions – at least those by celebrated overseas composers – were firmly established and receiving performances. British tape composers during this period were generally self-taught home studio experimenters or academy-trained music graduates, and this curious mix of mavericks, hobbyists, and professionals tended to be overlooked or taken less seriously than their continental counterparts. Nevertheless, two electronic music concerts staged in London early in 1968 – the first at the Queen Elizabeth Hall, the second at the Planetarium – showed not only the diversity of styles and approaches of British composers, but aroused strong interest and large audiences. Berk's pieces »5 6 7« and »Diversed Mind« (both 1967) were programmed alongside works by Peter Zinovieff, Brian Dennis, Hugh Davies, Delia Derbyshire, Tristram Cary, Daphne Oram, George Newson, Stuart Wynn Jones, Jacob Meyerowitz, and Alan Sutcliffe.

While Berk was involved in the serious end of electronic music presentation, unlike most of his peers he also made connections with the emerging psychedelic counterculture. In summer 1968, just a few months after his work had been included in those Queen Elizabeth Hall and Planetarium concerts, he presented a performance at the Acland Burghley School theatre in Tufnell Park, north London. In a letter to The Times Education-

Ernest Berk and Dance Theatre Commune perform »Seci« at the international carnival of Electronic Sound, London, The Roundhouse, 1972. Photo by Mike Dunn.



Ernest Berk and Ailsa Berk, London, Stanhope Institute, 1970s. Photo by Mike Dunn.

»LISTENING AGAIN TO THE OLD STUFF IS LIKE GOING THROUGH A PSYCHOANALYSIS. I AM HEARING WHAT MY TORMENTED SOUL IN THOSE DAYS WAS CRYING ABOUT, AND ALSO WHAT MY SOUL WAS SINGING ABOUT IN GREAT ELATION.«

al Supplement, he described the programme as »abstract ballets in the modern idiom to electronic music composed in my sound studio. The lighting is of the psychedelic kind produced by kinetic slides… The programme closes with a ›Happening,‹ a simultaneous improvisation for dancers, musicians (who produce unorthodox sounds on a variety of instruments and objects), and a group of kinetic slide operators under the direction of Nick Fairhead.« A number of Berk's compositions from this period sound similar in approach to the rock électronique of Pierre Henry's 1967 album *Messe Pour Le Temps Présent*, and US Synket synthesizer exponent John Eaton's 1968 single »Bone Dry.« Berk's »Chigger Sound 1« (1968) best exemplifies this style, using the same basic recording of »Wake Up Cherylina,« a 1967 single B-side by English beat combo The Smoke. With the vocal track removed, Berk added his own electronic sound component.

1970 was a pivotal year for Berk; it included a move to a new studio on Dorset Street in London and the establishment of the Dance Theatre Commune. Ernest had met the diminutive dancer Ailsa Park in the early '60s, and they married in 1965, despite a 35-year age difference. Ernest choreographed a dance for Ailsa inspired by the Edith Sitwell poem »Dirge for A New Sunrise,« and in 1968 he produced an electronic score for her ballet based on the WH Auden poem »The Shield of Achilles.« Throughout the 1970s, the couple worked together on a large number of dances and performances, and like the Cockpit Arts Centre in London at exactly the same time, the Dance Theatre Commune became a nerve centre for dance, mixed media performance, and electronic music, with classes and workshops an integral part of studio operations. This drew in a range of dancers and musicians, including Christopher Thomson, Simon Desorgher, Rebecca Wilson, Julia Beddoes, and Bryony Williams, the founder of the SpiralArts Dance Theatre Company, who followed in Berk's footsteps to become a teacher at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. »I studied dance with Ernest Berk in London from 1974-77 and continued to study with him for many years after that,« Williams explains. »He was one of the most inspiring and creative teachers I have ever met. He challenged us to explore beyond our personal boundaries and discover our individual creativity, while sowing the seeds for a lifetime in dance.«

For much of his life, Berk lived a spartan existence, owning little furniture, and shunning cars and public transport in favour of a large motorbike. His marriage to Lotte had been an open relationship, and by the 1960s his bohemian lifestyle had parallels with the burgeoning hippie movement. His naturism though, was rooted in a much older Germanic tradition: the back-to-nature »Lebensreform« (life reform) movement, which emerged in the 1890s and took off during the 1920s, promoting health foods, alternative medicine, exercise, the outdoors, and a celebration of the naked human form. Berk introduced elements of this philosophy to his dancers through choreography and what he termed »Liberation« sessions, where he would often set up tape loops to soundtrack improvised freely expressive movement, for which dancers would sometimes perform in the nude. Careful with the mix of participants in the Liberation groups, he sought to develop the dancer from the inside and encourage personal growth. He was interested in how music could affect states of mind through »trance-dance« generated with drumming or tape loop repetition.

Christopher Thomson, director of creative teaching and learning at the London dance venue the Place, was taught at the Guildhall School by Berk from 1971-73, and performed with the Dance Theatre Commune between 1972 and '74. »We rehearsed and made most of the work in the tiny Dorset Street studio,« he recalls. »Just about all the pieces I danced in were to Ernest's electronic music, but I didn't have any real connection to its making. We would just watch Ernest intently working in his cramped corner with tape recorders and various other

Ernest Berk in his Dorset Street Studio, London, circa early 1970s.

machines. There was a keyboard and waveform generators, and he would also record live sound and treat it. I have a distinct memory of ball bearings being rolled around in a hubcap. I liked the music, though only remember scraps of it now. When I was about 16, I had bought an LP record[*1)] featuring tape pieces by Ihan Mimaroglu and Luciano Berio, all of which I thought were wonderful, and confirmed my teenager's view of the modern world as strange and out of joint, but marvellously exciting.

»Most of the choreography in this period was by Ailsa Berk, who was the lead performer with the company. In preparation, Ernest liked nothing better than to get us improvising freely for extended periods, often to African drumming, of which he had a number of field recordings on record. We sometimes improvised naked, as for Ernest it was all about finding expressive freedom in our dancing. There was nothing remotely prurient about it, and anyway this was the 1970s. The same went for dancing nude in a piece from 1973 called ›Duo-Trio-Duo‹ [renamed ›Trilogy‹]. We performed this at the ICA and elsewhere, and didn't think anything of it. They were good times; we toured in the UK, the Netherlands, and once to East Germany, where the response was enthusiastic. Ernest was an amazingly vital and creative person, and I'm glad to have known him and his music.«

Berk's grandson, Michael Fairfax, a sculptor and sound artist, moved to London in his late teens and made his way to Dorset Street and the Dance Theatre Commune. »I basically lived there as I couldn't afford to rent in London,« he says, recalling his time studying with his grandfather during 1972. »I was holed up in the basement along with a number of Revox tape recorders, oscillators, and other noise-making apparatus. The weeks with Ernest were spent learning modern dance, mime, percussion and electronic music – this was standard practice for his students to experience these different disciplines. We would record all sorts of found sounds – running rulers along radiators, footsteps across the floor and a wide variety of drums. We would also record sine and square waves onto tape, and were taught how to splice and create loops, which would sometimes run to great lengths around the whole studio. Through this we built up a collection of electronic sounds and tape loops, as the building blocks for a composition. I loved the whole process of cutting and splicing the tapes, running the sound over the tape heads, playing back at different speeds, playing the tapes backwards. It was a dream soundscape for a young 19-year-old who loved Pink Floyd and could now create his own strange world of sound.«

A notable aspect of Ernest Berk's composing was that he rejected the commercially-driven cycle of discarding, replacing, and updating useful equipment, a trend common to most other electronic music makers of his era, and which continues to this day. As a result, he maintained a remarkable consistency of experimentation all the way through his composing career. In 1983, aged 74, he produced »Winter's Tale,« an abrasive 23-minute piece which typified the kind of challenging electronic sound worlds he had been creating since the 1950s. He never got rid of supposedly obsolete equipment, enjoying the quirks and unpredictability of his assortment of waveform generators and tape recorders.

It is not uncommon for composers of Berk's generation to turn their backs on their early electronic experiments, often deeming them too technically primitive or simplistic. In failing health during the last year of his life in 1993, he began the task of playing back his tape collection – some of which had lain unheard for decades – and experienced a certain ambivalence towards his electronic works. In that letter to a friend quoted above, he wrote, »Listening again to the old stuff is like going through a psychoanalysis. I am hearing what my tormented soul in those days was crying about, and also what my soul was singing about in great elation. I think some of my old music is detestable and also sometimes wonderful. But for me it is as if a mirror is held in front of me, a mirror with a great depth, revealing long forgotten worlds to me now.«

By the mid-80s, the Dance Theatre Commune and Berk's electronic music composing had wound down, and he subsequently moved to Berlin, where he continued teaching and dancing. In his final years, he acted or danced in several films, including Wim Wenders's 1991 *Until the End of the World*, and in Germany there was something of a revival of interest in his work. Rather than his archive being donated to a British institution, his master tapes, a tape recorder, concert programmes, newspaper articles and letters were bequeathed to the Historical Archive of Cologne. Tragically, the archive building collapsed in March 2009, but before this catastrophic event occurred, all Berk's master tapes were successfully transferred. They reveal a high standard of hard-edged electronic sound in a body of work stretching across more than three decades and 200 compositions. Its rediscovery and appreciation is long overdue.

IAN HELLIWELL is an audio-visual artist, composer, electronic instrument builder, filmmaker, writer, and collagist based in Brighton, UK. Ian Helliwell's 2016 book *Tape Leaders* comes with a 15-track CD which includes two pieces by Ernest Berk: »Chigger Sound 1,« and »No Fish,« or »Oh Mr. Bard.«
» www.ianhelliwell.co.uk

This is a version, revised in November 2017, of an article that first appeared in *The Wire* magazine No. 380 in 2015.
» www.thewire.co.uk

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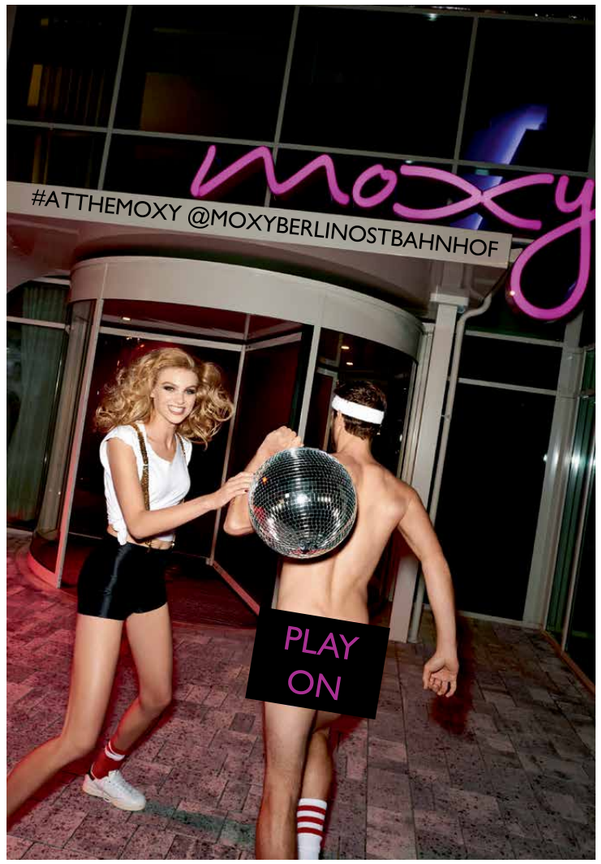
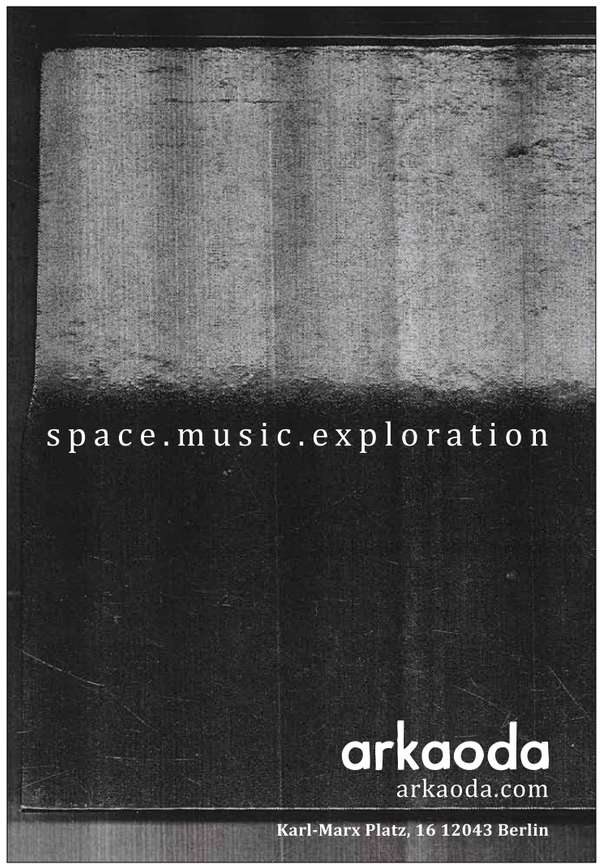
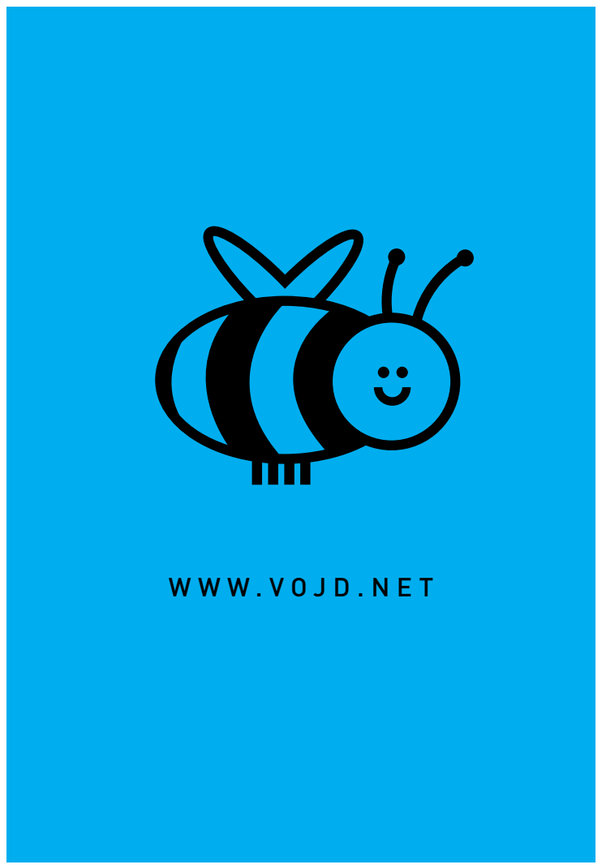
*1) An LP of various artists released on the Turnabout label in 1967, featuring electronic music from Luciano Berio, John Cage, and Ilhan Mimaroglu.







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With a kiss to Meike Jansen.

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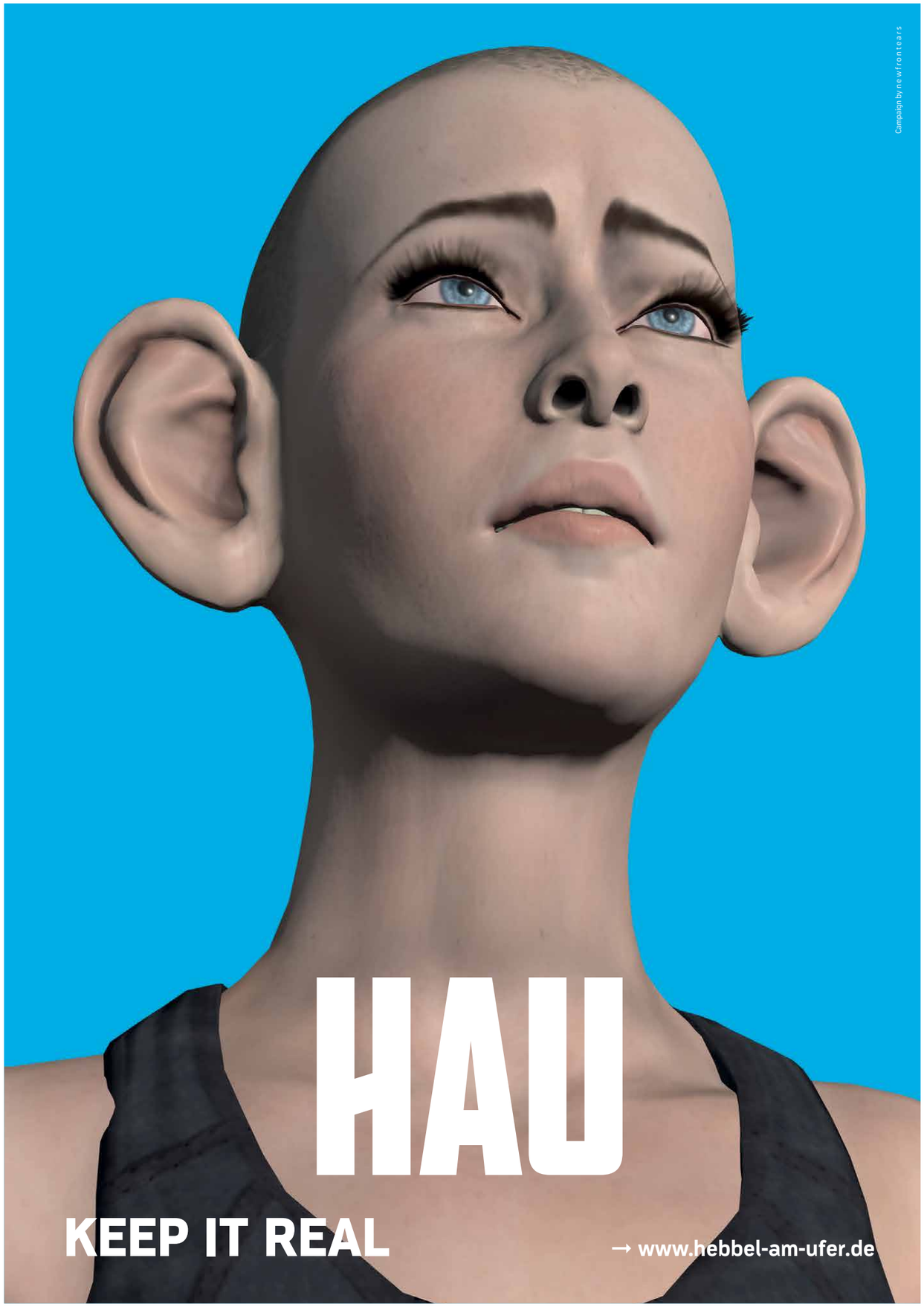

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