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NEW GEOGRAPHIES

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THE BANALISATION OF THE EXOTIC

AN INTERVIEW WITH MARTIN STOKES BY THOMAS BURKHALTER

MARTIN STOKES HAS BEEN RESEARCHING MIDDLE EASTERN MUSIC FOR OVER THIRTY YEARS NOW. OVER THE COURSE OF SEVERAL EMAILS, NORIENT'S THOMAS BURKHALTER ENGAGED HIM IN A CONVERSATION ABOUT EXOTICA, ASKING FOR HIS EXPERIENCE AND KNOWLEDGE. HOW HAS THE SUBJECT OF EXOTICA BEEN DISCUSSED IN ETHNO-MUSICOLOGY? IS LISTENING TO »FOREIGN« MUSIC A PRIVATE MATTER OR A POLITICAL ACTIVITY? AND WHAT HAPPENS TO EXOTICA WHEN UNFAMILIAR SOUNDS ARE ONLY A FEW MOUSE CLICKS AWAY?

Thomas Burkhalter: Many musicians and sound artists in non-Western countries keep telling me in interviews that they want to be »modern« and »in the world«. They produce indie rock, rap or electronic music. They shy away from local music styles as they are for them linked to conservatism, tourism or political propaganda in their home countries, or to Euro-American centrism or Orientalism. Some musicians react with parodies on exotica. How would you theorize these different standpoints?

Martin Stokes: They want, in my experience, to feel connected, not marginalised. They also want to be in the market, on acceptable terms. They want to be able to travel. For most, all of this is very, very difficult indeed. »World Music« has provided a certain kind of institutional and commercial framework. Being visiting artists in universities and other cultural institutions provides another. State patronage – musicians as cultural ambassadors, musical diplomacy – is propaganda, as you put it. I often notice that the people who manage to make their way in the West become, for those left behind, objects of fascination and frustration. Trapped energies of this kind create rich environments for satire and parody.

TB: Where are the differences between exoticism, othering, primitivism, ethnocentrism, Orientalism and colonialism?

MS: They overlap and shade into one another, obviously. All human beings »other«. They find ways of categorizing themselves

on the basis of some property of »sameness« from which outsiders are excluded and seen as strange and mysterious (»exotic«). We shouldn't forget that we »same,« even as we »other,« and that these self-other boundaries are often highly flexible and porous. They are there, in a sense, to enable movement, not only to inhibit it. »Ethnicity« was once used to define outsiders. »They« have it, »we« don't. Only in the 19th Century did it become a positive quality associated with the new nation-states, who sought to construct ethnic identities for themselves where the great empires denied them. And only in the 20th Century did »ethnocentrism« – the inability to understand or sympathize with people who don't share this thing we came to call an »ethnic identity« – become a perceived problem. The history of the term »ethnicity« is quite instructive. Colonialism produced the modern lines across the map separating »us« from »them.« These lines are still with us in one shape or another. Orientalism was the intellectual movement, seeking in »the Orient« the origins of things and in Islam the cause of their stagnation: colonialism's task was one of protecting »the Orient« from itself, in music as in all other things. Primitivism looks the other way, to an Edenic vision of uncorrupted social and artistic life amongst those free of the burden of civilisation: Africans, Polynesians, Celts. These various terms are the keywords in the metropolitan fantasies that have shaped so much 20th Century musical life in the West, from Claude Debussy and Béla Bartók to David Byrne and Brian Eno.

TB: Philosopher Barbara Engh wrote: »The racist love for cultural difference is mostly linked to woman, and to music«. To what extent is exoticism simply a human phenomenon? To what extent is it a result of colonialism?

MS: Western musical ideologies, since the 19th Century, have posited music as a space of intellectual and emotional play beyond the reach of »politics«. What we do there, according to these ideologies, »doesn't count,« in one sense, but on the other is all-important as a site of self-making. It overlaps precisely with the idea of the private sphere in capitalism. Hence Engh's quote. We can't understand music (and, especially, »exotic music«) in the modern world unless we at least start off by accepting its connections with – and role in justifying and naturalizing – the more systemic patterns of violence in modern life. Modern thought and culture can't escape its fixation with cultural difference. We have to find citizenly ways of inhabiting it. We have to find ways of dealing with the problems that arise when you turn exoticism into a commodity. We have to develop a language of sameness, access and inclusion to set against the language of difference, otherness and exclusion.

TB: Can you expand on these connections between public violence and private pleasure? What role and function can exoticism in music play in our modern world?

MS: What is positive is that most of us, at least in the metropolitan West, live in more or less global worlds. Exoticism is unremarkable. The »Other« is an everyday fact of life. Public culture in the West is, almost by definition these days, »multiculture.« What is negative is exactly this unremarkableness, this banality. The challenge to self-reflection, the sense of aesthetic and political provocation has gone. It's become comfortable, routine. As a consequence, racial and gendered stereotypes dig deeper, are harder to change or challenge.

TB: On the YouTube platform one finds micro-genres like seapunk and vaporwave that play with images of masks, palms and islands, and they manipulate sounds of steel drums and unfamiliar instruments. Can one continue to discuss these clips under the rubric of »exoticism«?

MS: I think your examples show what a broad and mixed field contemporary exoticism is. They also underline my point, I believe, about the banalisation of the exotic. Seapunk and vaporwave involve a kind of playful nihilism, born of the idea that the sensory apparatus is in a permanent state of exhaustion and

confusion, that signs have become unstuck from meanings, and that ironic distance is the ethical sensibility appropriate to our times. Philosophically I don't find this terribly interesting, and certainly not new, I'm afraid. I think these micro-genres probably do function, though, as an interesting space of cross-cultural communication, technology sharing and creative sociability. As for where this will lead, as usual I think it is far too soon to say! We are learning to imagine only now the important relationships between the counterculture of the 1970s (including punk rock), Silicon Valley's dot com culture and the broader configurations of neoliberal governmentality. Popular cultural movements usually insist on erasing the past, on declaring it null and void. But one's got to take the longer view.

TB: What are some of the main challenges when sampling and remixing »cultural markers« in music?

MS: Much has been said and written about, for instance, David Byrne and Brian Eno (*My Life in the Bush of Ghosts*) in this regard. For me the exercise is more or less successful to the extent that the others involved have been partners in a real conversation, that the sampling process is, in some rather deep sense, understood. This takes time, and we don't all have time, and sometimes things just have to be done quickly to seize the moment. But when I'm listening to »multiculti« music, electronic and sampled, or put together in live, acoustic situations, I'm reassured to the extent that I feel some kind of mutually destabilizing dialogue is underway, and that we are not listening to something where everyone has been assigned a place and is acting a role in somebody else's drama.

TB: Can you expand on what you mean by »mutually destabilizing dialogue«?

MS: Conversation should move participants. By this I mean it should be emotionally engaging and engrossing. And I also mean that it should take you someplace else intellectually. This doesn't mean you change your mind about things every time you meet somebody new. It means you should find yourself reflecting on what you thought you knew from some other place. Maybe you'll come back to it, but you'll do so enriched. What is true of words is true of music, in my view.

TB: Today, foreign sounds are just a few mouse clicks away – nothing seems far anymore. Is the »exotic« therefore disappearing?

MS: A dictionary definition of »exotica« I've just looked up gives me, inter alia, »strange in effect or appearance«. I like this definition with its emphasis on the affects and the sensory apparatus. It gets at that buzz of unfamiliarity on hearing musical sounds in a musical language not your own, or one you've not yet learned. It gets at that frisson of difference, when you see people around you responding passionately to something you don't yet quite follow. It's something felt on the skin, somewhere in the muscles, a kind of movement within the body, so in an important sense already there – a kind of thought, yes, but of an environmentally engaged and sensory kind. It is important to dwell with this feeling, to return to it and inhabit it, perhaps for a long period of time, to allow it to provoke political sympathies, to provoke the desire to learn (languages, musical styles, poetic traditions) and ask questions, and to teach others, where one can, in turn. And one needs time to learn how to work it into and change one's own musical worlds, to generate the life-long dialogues and friendships which take one ever deeper. That frisson eventually becomes, I believe, not one of »difference« but of communication, sharing, reciprocity – one of living and evolving human relationships. It's a feeling – a »structure of feeling« perhaps, to use Raymond Williams' useful phrase – and it's one that might involve changes in intensity but that can nonetheless be maintained over considerable periods of time. I've been researching Middle Eastern music for thirty years now, for instance, and it's still there. As I mentioned earlier, the banality and ubiquity of the exotic, the mouse click availability of »the exotic,« hugely complicates this, tying us into massive corporate and surveillance systems. But one mustn't be deterred. The alternative is, for far too many people these days, at least in Western Europe, a hatred of cultural difference. A »love for cultural difference« is, in this context, by far the lesser evil.

TB: Are there institutions, producers or even musicians to blame for this »lesser evil« – meaning the production and distribution of banal versions of exotica? From my experience I would criticize funders and multipliers first: curators, arts councils, NGOs, movie directors, and music journalists who spend too little time in research and bring forward the first music from a foreign place they can find? Or are our hands tied? All is a consequence of neoliberalism, and so everyone works under economic pressure and no one has time?

MS: The expression »lesser evil« implies, at least to me, that all of us are complicit in the politics of, and commerce in, exoti-

cism in some way or another. There's no position of moral externality here. So I'm not one to judge. If moral judgment is required I think it should focus on institutions, for the most part, and not individuals. The university environment I inhabit grants us – supposedly – the luxury of time and reflection. It certainly doesn't always feel like that to me, but, relatively speaking, yes, we have that luxury. So, inevitably perhaps, I tend to have a large measure of respect for projects in which the people involved take their time over things, and people, and languages and social and cultural contexts, and the learning of instruments and vocal traditions, whether in university environments or not (something like Philip Yampolsky's amazing series of Indonesian recordings for the Smithsonian, for instance, which took shape over decades). People in the world of journalism, arts councils, media, curatorship of one kind or another and so forth often have less time to make their decisions, more direct pressures to meet, and meet quickly, the demands of funders, audiences, customers or license payers. This doesn't preclude great work, when the people organizing are inspired, energetic and persistent creatures – look at Songlines, for example. I do get somewhat frustrated at the kind of consultation going into supplying »ethnic« music for Western TV documentaries at the moment. Who is responsible for this? Ever since Peter Gabriel used Vatche Housepian and Antranik Askarian's duduk on his soundtrack for Scorsese's *Last Temptation of Christ* – a sound to my mind associated entirely with Christian Armenia – the duduk seems to be used indiscriminately to accompany any shot involving a mosque, a camel, a sand dune. It is today's snake-charmer music, I guess – a sonic cliché of Islam. And I do get frustrated with a lot that is going on at the moment in the global NGO environment, in which Western classical music, or Western classical music values of some kind or another are presented as the answer to global unemployment, histories of political injustice, systemic poverty. It makes a nice story for the liberal newspapers, but to me it simply seems colonial, a Western civilizing mission, hardly even thinly disguised. The problems of exoticism are significantly smaller, to my mind, than the problems of this kind of cultural colonialism.

TB: Since its beginnings in the early 1900s Ethnomusicology has often focused on non-Western music. Scholars from the US and Europe travelled to foreign places, often lived there for a while, studied music and culture, started to play local instruments, and then went home to publish academic books that we now find in libraries in the US and Europe. Some – as you mentioned – also recorded local music and released it on Europe-

an or US labels. When you look back into the history of ethnomusicology and how it has studied non-Western music – and bearing in mind the topic of exoticism – how have approaches of research changed?

MS: In the second half of the century, anthropologists and ethnomusicologists started to spend longer periods of time in situ studying »exotic« cultures as, well, »cultures« – people probably just like us, for all their apparent strangeness. When I started studying anthropology, we were taught to »seek the familiar in the strange, the strange in the familiar«, because anthropology could, after all, also be done »at home«. The »exotic« was, only half a century ago, »another place«, and a distant one at that. It was also a scarce resource. When I started getting interested in non-Western music towards the end of the 1970s, there was a tiny section of the shop in Oxford I used to visit in the Covered Market (no longer there, alas) marked »Folk and Exotic«. World music hadn't quite been invented then! The man in the shop would put aside the kinds of Asian classical musics he knew I was interested in. This was where I accumulated quite a collection of some of those old ethnographic discs, Nonesuch, Traditional Crossroads, the UNESCO series and so forth. I would buy two or so a week, and play them to death. That now seems a very long time ago. The lines between »us« and »them« have now not exactly disappeared but become a much more complex proposition, as have »our« positions in relation to them. Who and what exactly do these pronouns now signify? Recognizing this has been an achievement of sorts. A consequence is that ethnomusicology can now be about modern, everyday worlds, not just remote and exotic places.

TB: Where do you see the biggest challenges for ethnomusicology today? How and to what extent could ethnomusicology help to find a way out of what you call the »lesser evil«?

MS: We've all had to struggle with the transformation of the university system over the last twenty years or so, a world that is steadily becoming more commoditised, depoliticised and bureaucratized. Ethnomusicology can hardly shoulder the blame for that alone, but of course it's been part of the story. How can we exempt ourselves? A problem for me has been the way we have drawn institutional lines between critique, creativity and performativity, thinking of them, and teaching them, as separate zones of human experience and world-making. I hope we'll eventually figure out a more combative stance in the face of everything that's been going on in the name of higher educa-

tion, certainly in my own country. I also think music education is getting more and more conservative. There's been a reaction to the (quite politically conscious) »new musicology« of the 1990s. We face ever more politically disengaged students. This worries me, and ethnomusicology surely has a responsibility here.

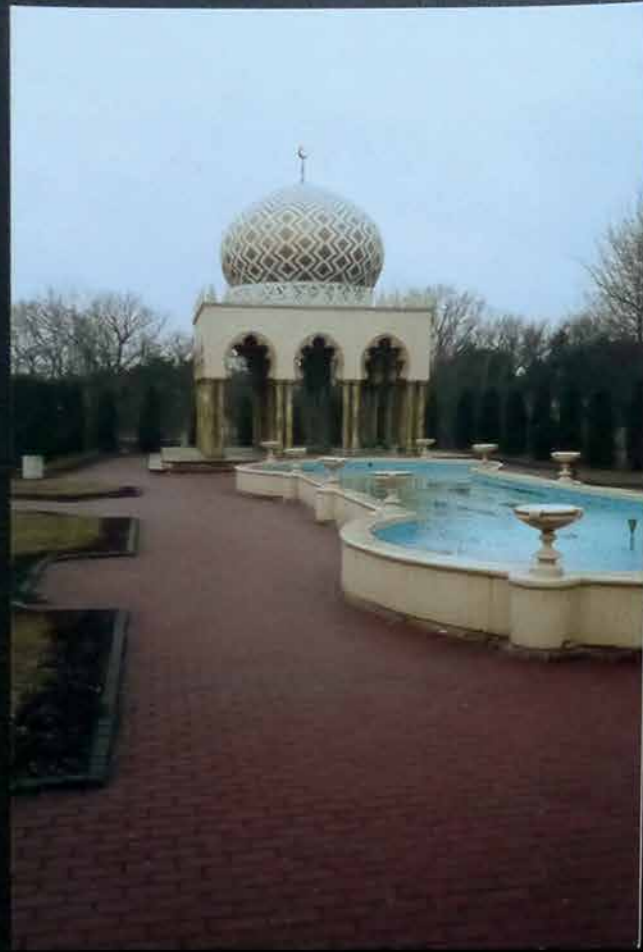
TB: To what extent is ethnomusicology for you a political project? And to what extent is it about research only?

MS: It's hard to say where one begins and the other ends. Research that is about demonstrating some political point or position is often weak research. Research must be open-ended. It must move you, as I said above about conversations. So I think it is an important distinction, even as I often find it hard to make in practice. But I think all good research is motivated by an ethical and political sensibility of some kind or another.

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– www.norient.com/stories/book

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LOCATING MUSIC

BY DAHLIA BORSCHÉ

»WHERE IS MUSIC?« THE TASK OF LOCATING SOMETHING AS IMMATERIAL AS SOUND HAS, THANKS TO THE DIGITAL REVOLUTION, BECOME MORE COMPLEX THAN EVER. SOUNDS TODAY ARE DE-TERRITORIALISED, REVEALING THEIR CAPACITY TO BREAK FREE AND TAKE ROOT AGAIN, CONTINUALLY GENERATING NEW ASSOCIATIONS AND MEANINGS. HOWEVER, LOCATION REMAINS AN IMPORTANT, IF NOT PREFERRED, CLASSIFIER WHEN IT COMES TO DESCRIBING MUSIC AND ITS CREATORS. IT IS THUS MORE IMPERATIVE THAN EVER TO CHALLENGE THE STRATEGIES AND INTERESTS THAT UNDERPIN THIS TENDENCY TOWARD IDENTIFICATION. DAHLIA BORSCHÉ EXAMINES THE IMPORTANCE OF QUESTIONING TODAY'S MUSIC MAPPING PRACTICES AND THE NECESSITY OF MAINTAINING FLUIDITY IN OUR CLASSIFICATIONS SO AS TO OVERCOME NATIONALIST AGENDAS AND FOSTER HYBRID PROCESSES AND NEW SOCIAL COMMUNITIES.

1. ——— Sound has no place. Sound is immaterial and dynamic, conceivable solely as motion, for sound is nothing other than air made to vibrate. True, such vibrations permeate a certain space, but they also fade away, remain intangible. This is why even the sound-based art form, music, can never be pinned down to a specific place. Indeed it is difficult to say exactly where music is manifest: in a score, perhaps, of which generally several versions exist? In cultural memory, which is equally elusive? In the knowledge of those who perpetuate or make music? In concerts and performances? In the brains of listeners, who process sound waves? Or in a recording, a CD or a file?

There are no simple and, as a rule, only unsatisfactory answers to the question: »Where is music?« It is nonetheless indisputable that location is the first classifier of choice when it comes to music. The idea that music or culture is generally site-specific is a seemingly self-evident and therefore rarely challenged topos. That it has taken root linguistically is obvious when we speak of music or culture »taking place«. The idea that music (or culture) and place are mutual determinants is so widespread and so deeply anchored in our conception of sound culture that it

cannot be overlooked. It is as clear as day in the names given to different musical genres, for one could quickly fill a page or more with terms such as Detroit techno, Britpop, Hamburger Schule, J-Pop, Neue Deutsche Welle or Balkan Beat, all of which reference a real geographic location. In addition – although not all of the following reference a real location – there are band names, such as Portishead, Phoenix, Boston, Calexico or Beirut, and, to cite this year's CTM Festival programme, Jerusalem in My Heart or Dwarfs of East Agouza. Frequently, too, thanks either to the evolution of a certain genre or the work of a trendsetting musician, a city or an entire region comes to stand for a specific sound: Seattle is associated with grunge and New Orleans with jazz while Iceland, courtesy of Björk, is now on the innovative pop map. Classifications of this sort are quickly snapped up in various fields, for example in the tourism sector. The website visitliverpool.com announces: »Liverpool is proud to be the birthplace of the best band in the world [...]«. The associations triggered by music thus become a trademark, an image, and hence an auditory cliché yet generally remain potent nonetheless – after all, does not the sound of a sitar, a raga, or Bollywood instantly transport us to India, the sound of samba

to Brazil, and of gongs and the pentatonic melodies of a guzheng to the Forbidden City of Beijing?

Interestingly, the supposed antithesis of these local anchoring strategies, the aspiringly utopian, we-are-all-one world music genre, draws on these very same clichés. All the hybrid forms of this allegedly crossover music share a firm belief in the authenticity of local musical styles and rely almost exclusively on sounds that may be unambiguously associated with specific (preferably exotic and at the least unfailingly »non-European«) cities or regions of the world. As Johannes Ismaiel-Wendt rightly points out, even »world music« is sorted in record shops according to its region and country of origin.

Explicit reference to an artist's nationality is still commonplace, moreover, in event programmes and advertisements. CTM Festival itself has always featured the bracketed abbreviation denoting an artist's country of origin behind her or his name, and one click on its website suffices to sort the year's list of artists either »by random«, »without image« or »alphabetically by country«. The only exceptions to such attribution are cases of dual nationality, such as Evelina Domnitch (BY/NL) or Deena Abdelwahed (TN/FR), or those in which »international« is the more preferable term, either because an artist consciously rejects identity attributions (as in Tara Transitory aka One Man Nation) or because the project line-up is de facto international (as in Sublime Frequencies).

Likewise in artists' biographies and music journalism, to define a person or genre by naming numerous attributes is practically standard practice. The artist pages of this year's CTM Festival thus reveal that Tianzhuo Chen's activities range »from LG-BTQ hip hop to the London rave scene, Japanese Butoh, New York vogue, manga and the fashion world [...]«, while Radwan Ghazi Moumneh of Jerusalem in My Heart was »[b]orn to Lebanese parents, spent his early years in Oman before relocating to Canada after the second Gulf War [and was influenced] by post-punk and the raw, psychedelic quality of folk recordings from Beirut and neighboring Syria [...]«. Wukir Suryadi, for his part, »[hails] from Malang, in Eastern Java, and [is] currently based in Yogyakarta, [as a] composer and instrument builder [who] fuses ancient Javanese tradition with contemporary music practice«. About Honey Dijon we read: »She has held residencies at the chicest of NYC venues, including Hiro Ballroom, Cielo and the Chelsea Hotel«: evidence that not only countries, regions or cities but also cultural venues sometimes play a decisive role in these identification strategies.

2. ——— Reasons for defining music can be found both in the respective production context and the reception/consumption context in the broadest possible sense of these terms. The contexts in which music is produced are constitutive of it to a significant degree: specific local factors – be it the role of and value attributed to music in a society, the resources there, the opportunities for education and performance, the legal framework and societal norms, the types of cultural venue and their attendant habitus – all have an enormous influence on the production and perception of music.

»SOUND HAS NO PLACE. SOUND IS IMMATERIAL AND DYNAMIC, CONCEIVABLE SOLELY AS MOTION, FOR SOUND IS NOTHING OTHER THAN AIR MADE TO VIBRATE.«

The site-specificity of music rests in part on actual geographic circumstance. The development of alpine horns, for example, can be explained solely in connection with the mountainous environment in which these instruments originated and the specific nature of sound transmission there, while Futurism, by contrast, must be understood as a direct reaction to, and processing of, industrialised, urban conditions in Europe in the early 20th Century. Regional geography as early as the 1920s began to address the fact that sounds and music shape not only visual and haptic conditions but also local characteristics and hence the »landscape tradition«.

Differences between regional musical styles and music concepts are often enormous, and different readings of them at times almost impossible to translate. The use and development of specific musical instruments gives rise to specific sound characteristics. Different tonal systems have evolved in keeping with the potential of these instruments, and instruments have in turn been adapted to meet the demands of these tonal systems, as is evident in the European musical tradition from the invention of the well-tempered piano. Tonal systems are under-

»NEW PATHS TO DESCRIBING, LOCALISING AND ANALYSING SOCIAL ISSUES HAVE BEEN TRODDEN IN RECENT YEARS IN MANY DISCIPLINES – TELLINGLY, ALSO IN THE FIELDS OF GEOGRAPHY AND MUSICOLOGY.«

pinned not only by an ordering principle but also by a concept of what music is. And such concepts have not only changed often and radically throughout history, but have also taken extremely varied forms in different regions of the world. For music is always embedded in local cultural practices, value systems, social structures or rituals and hence constitutes a cryptic system of signs that can only be read (decrypted) by those familiar with the aforementioned factors. Accordingly, music played or listened to outside of its original production context is subject to a transformation that automatically embeds it in a new system of signs.

Another not inessential reason to define the biographies of musicians, artists and producers in these terms is their respective credibility rating. Resident Advisor's documentary film series *Real Scenes*, which examines the local techno scenes of various major cities, shows the enormous effort that DJs and producers from Mexico City, for example, have to make to acquire a certain standing, whereas their peers from the techno capital Berlin are given the red-carpet treatment just by virtue of where they are based. That Honey Dijon was a resident in the chicest club in New York automatically says something about her status. And the fact that Wukir Suryadi was born in Java lends plausibility to his interest in Javanese traditional music. He has a nuanced understanding of the references in Javanese music as well as virtuosity with a range of local instruments – and such skills suggest authenticity.

Just as an artist's degree of credibility determines her or his ranking within a global hierarchy, so, too, does her location assure a measure of orientation. Ranking venues, cities or regions serves to put people »on the map« in terms of their geography or style, and hence, with nothing more than a few words or intimations, guarantees any reader capable of reading a map insight into some reassuring mines of information. Since the 1970s, cartographic tools have become an increasingly popular means to visualise complex cultural processes in various disciplines. Music mapping, i.e. cartographies of the origin, production and distribution of different musical styles or genre »family trees«, is used to portray broad-ranging research findings – yet there is always a risk that it may oversimplify, or, at worst, prove unable to convey the complex interweaving and mutual impact of music and economic, social and political processes.

In addition to this kind of cultural mapping, location data is processed first and foremost on the various virtual maps present in the mind's eye of the listener. Artists are identified namely against the backdrop of the listener's own personal experience and tastes, which, like the artist's music, inform the imagined community of fans to which s/he feels s/he belongs. The identification potential offered by music plays into the hands of these location mechanisms. One associates with a particular locale, stands willingly in a certain tradition, a certain sys-

tem of signs and meanings, and identifies oneself with these. The social alliances that music triggers and maintains, such as local, translocal or virtual music scenes, are a decisive factor in the construction of personal identity; and like any factor or practice constitutive of personal identity, they are viable only if the person in question clearly marks her or his separation from the Other. To compare anything with the personal map of one's experience, tastes and sense of community hence necessarily implies the designation of, and assignment to, one of two categories: »Own« and »Other«.

Such processes prove volatile above all when used for the purposes of identity politics. Music tends to be appropriated especially for the construction of national identities. In colonised, conquered or newly founded states, as in times of upheaval or post-war reconstruction, the myth of a locality's »own« musical culture is revived or simply invented in order to better cement the »We-sense« among the more or less arbitrarily thrown together members of a labile community. Whether it's a case of right-wing movements recalling nationalist hymns or minorities invoking their musical traditions as a means to counter cultural hegemony, the intent is always to foster or strengthen a sense of common identity. Music serves in such cases to stake out certain territory, either ideological or (as with national borders) geo-political. The practice of music mapping can therefore reveal a great deal about social orders, about power and empowerment, about political interests and resistance. In his pioneering book *The Location of Culture* (1994), Homi Bhabha turned the spotlight on this political dimension by describing processes of cultural hybridisation and the political implications of cultural identification strategies; and he thus made a far-reaching contribution to the then still relatively young discipline of postcolonial studies.

3. ——— The answer to the question of why places play such a major role in an expressive art form that does not lend itself to localisation, at least puts an end to the erroneous but persistent idea that music somehow exists in and of itself, as an object with no connection at all to its production and reception contexts – an idea fostered by the misleading expression »a piece of music«. Musicology and ethnomusicology have long since mistakenly assumed that music can be treated as an object, and that works of music and musical traditions can be studied and read as complete, unchanging entities. The reference to so-called traditional music implies a connection not only to ancient but also to unchanging times, as if music cultures in their »pure form« were complete constructs with clearly classifiable properties and might be preserved and protected. This essentialist approach and the notion implicit in it of the authenticity of traditional music cultures often ensues from a romanticising image of exotic-primitive cultures and always entails the dual risk of defining the otherness of cultures as a foil to one's own, and of thereby distorting perception of the heterogeneous and dynamic processes inherent to local music cultures.

But to regard music as cultural practice is no longer a groundbreaking new idea, not even among musicologists. The performative turn has long since ensured that performance and practice now rank among the predominant themes. Moreover, a group of scholars has been seeking for some time to accomplish a further turn by once and for all dispelling the last remnants of the classical notion that music is representation or an object. Prompted by the Actor Network Theory (ANT), new paths to describing, localising and analysing social issues have been trodden in recent years in many disciplines – tellingly, also in the fields of geography and musicology. In geography it was first and foremost Sarah Whatmore, who succeeded in turning the discipline topsy-turvy with her controversial book *Hybrid Geographies* (2002), in which she posited that: »geographies are not pure or discrete but hybrid and constituted through relations«. In musicology it is authors such as Antoine Hennion or Georgina Born who have drawn inspiration from the ANT. A central premise for Georgina Born is that music must be imagined not as representation but as a myriad of mediations. Neither music nor society exists »per se«, i.e. in and of itself, in a vacuum, since each is the outcome of instances of mediation. Music takes place on many different levels simultaneously. It is a diffuse and heterogeneous assemblage, »an aggregation of sonic, social, corporeal, discursive, visual, technical and temporal mediations«. It is not only a social practice but also generates social factors (for example, in the form of imagined communities). By this reading, to locate music is of relevance only when it serves to explain a certain practice, i.e. when it brings to light associations and agency; and it only ever takes place, moreover, on imaginary, transient maps.

This mediation theory is a helpful means to grasp the great diversity and contrariety of transcultural processes, to address the dynamics between global music streams and local variations, and to understand the permeability, fluidity and motion of sound and musical cultures. It is all the more helpful given that these dynamics have accelerated dramatically over the last few decades. Recording techniques make it possible to separate sounds from the local specificities of the place they were produced. Previously, all sounds could only ever be heard at their point of production and for as long as they lasted. Sound recordings and sound storage have put an end to this however. R. Murray Schafer has coined the term »schizophonia« for this phenomenon. Thanks to the digital revolution, sounds today are more placeless than ever, de-territorialised, and are

revealing their capacity to break free and take root again, time after time, and thereby continually generate new associations and meanings.

Location processes have not become any less important in light of this development. It is more imperative than ever to question the strategies and interests that underpin localisation. Mapping is not innocent. Andrew Herman, Thomas Swiss and John Sloop have written in this regard of the need for »a cartography of sound as a territory of power«. It is not that I am in favour of diluting or denying local differences, or of the homogenisation so long anticipated by critics of globalisation. On the contrary, music is the best medium through which to experience global diversity. But at the same time, it opens our eyes to the fact that cultural processes are fluid, permanently in flux, and that creativity and innovation are often particularly strong at points where cultural production is ambivalent, hybrid and transgressive. In his visionary book, *Noise. The Political Economy of Music*, Jacques Attali argues that: »[Music] heralds, for it is prophetic. It has always been in its essence a herald of times to come«. If one shares his view, one can understand music to be a harbinger of an ever more rapidly networking hybrid world in which borders shift and dissolve. Transcultural musical processes can then serve both to foster understanding of how to overcome national states, of migratory movements and of new forms of social community, and to foster appreciation of the enormous potential and opportunities inherent to accelerated hybridisation processes.

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ON NATIVE ALIENS

BY SANDEEP BHAGWATI

SANDEEP BHAGWATI WORKS IN VARIOUS MUSICAL TRADITIONS AND ROLES AND HAS SUNK ROOTS IN ASIA, EUROPE AND NORTH AMERICA. HE SELF-IDENTIFIES AS A NATIVE ALIEN, AND CLAIMS THAT THIS CONDITION SHAPES HOW HE LISTENS TO AND COMPOSES MUSIC. IT CAN BE SOMETIMES RATHER LONELY.

Do you like and trust people more easily just because they speak your dialect and share your customs? Does your heart warm to any particular place or language more than to any other? Then you are a native at heart, even if you are momentarily elsewhere. You may feel displaced, an emigré or refugee – and yet that only means that there indeed is a home where you feel you should rightfully be. But more and more of us have never known what a home feels like: some left their place of birth early in life, yet are regarded as aliens where they are now. Others, born where they still live, were simply never made to feel welcome. Still others, such as myself, have always lived in several homelands at once – and thus in none. You global vagrants, you born out of »placelock«, I will call you: Native Aliens.

Native Aliens are curious creatures: they are always alert, master the lingos of many locales, have learnt their implicit, unspoken codes, and thus can move and feel like the locals, live in their circle of warmth. We Native Aliens can fit into many places, and all these may sometimes feel just like home to us – and yet, at the same time, uncannily alienating. And we, therefore, are always aware how this native intimacy relates to a wider, alternative world. We are, in the truest sense of this ethnological term, participant observers. The more streets, dinners or customs we learn to navigate with native intuitive ease, the more each of them becomes an implicit critique of all the others – they mutually invalidate each other's nativist claims to exclusive devotion.

ON HOME-ADDICTS AND SOBER GUESTS

A native, of course, cannot yield to such equivocations: to feel unquestioned ties to one's own place, its customs and people is essential to being a native. Granted, attachment to a place, its people and its traditions is not bad in itself – as long as you do not become suspicious of your co-locals who do not feel it, as long as you do not go »nativist«. In any case, there is no need

to fear Native Aliens: our acute observations are not enemy intelligence, they are essential survival tools of the lonely. For to be a Native Alien does not mean to be free of the desire to belong, nor to shun the pleasures and amenities of a home – but it does mean: to not be a home-addict. For we have observed how »belonging« so often will slide into vicious addiction: how it must be enjoyed in moderation. The loneliness of Native Aliens is that of the sober guest reveling with drunken friends – ready to blend in and enjoy the fun, but always on edge for when the mood turns sour, prepared to leave the feast at any hour.

»YOU GLOBAL VAGRANTS,
YOU BORN OUT OF
»PLACELOCK«, I WILL CALL
YOU: NATIVE ALIENS.«

Musicking, too, can lift your soul with drunken abandon. Some will maintain that this is indeed its *raison d'être*. But there is another way to listen to musicking: as an intelligent discourse. For example, Adorno's ideal listener knows so much that each instance of musicking is like reading an open book, where every detail is treasured not just because it delights, but because it also affords a glance into the emotional lives and thoughts of others: this phrase intends to make the listeners sad, this rhythm wants them to dance, this melody is likely meant to be wistful, this sound aims to impress with its complex inner life, this loud passage is placed there to steamroll all that is left of our critical stance. This is the way, I believe, that Native Aliens listen to musicking. It certainly is how I, as a composer, hear all that I listen to. For me no musicking will ever stand alone, free and absolute. I only can hear it as something made-and-used for a purpose, a form that embodies its makers' intentions, and

sways to its listeners' prejudices. How musicking appears in my ears will unfailingly make it a sign of its times, part of a cultural gambit, a seismograph of its society, a metaphor for life itself.

ON MUSICAL NATIVISTS AND WORLD-WISE LISTENERS

When people want their music to be »pure«, »true«, »absolute« or »authentic«, they want to forget the world outside and enjoy feeling at home – in »their« music. A recent data crunch of Spotify users found that musical taste, apparently, solidifies by the age of 30. Most people do not actively seek out new kinds of musicking afterwards. At this point, many even become musical nativists, declaring their own taste to be the ultimate arbiter of quality. For them, the living process of musicking becomes an object, a kind of mirror in which they want to encounter their idealised selves. A musical nativist can thus be as intolerant towards other musics as a political nativist can be towards immigrants – whether what they prefer is commercial, classical or seemingly groundbreaking avant-garde sound.

Hence all the loneliness of the musical Native Aliens: to us, musicking will always be such a mess, such a muddled attempt not at style, progress or authenticity, but at sounding the murky terrain of today's global existence, crisscrossed and splintered by a million agendas, ideas, hopes – and sounds. Our *dharma* as musickers and world-wise listeners is to navigate these uneven terrains of the audible, to not sink to the bottom, to grasp neither at the facile promises of nativist agendas nor at those false-hope esperantists who claim that musical sound is the one ur-language we can all speak at birth. For musicking, being an act of making, can never be our home: rather, it is like a bundle of paths towards discovery, our multiple tool to make sense of the world around us. In the presence of all those mirror-listeners we sometimes feel deeply alone. But more and more of us

are born into the alienation I sketched above – and they are changing musicking already. Dear patient reader: might you, perchance, be a Native Alien, too?

»WE NATIVE ALIENS CAN
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Text taken from *Seismographic Sounds. Visions of a New World* (Noriant Books 2015, 504 pages), edited by Theresa Beyer, Thomas Burkhalter and Hannes Liechti of Noriant, the Swiss-based Network for Local and Global Sounds and Media Culture. More information on the book:
– www.norient.com/stories/book

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PLAYING WITH THE DUSTBIN OF HISTORY

BY THOMAS BURKHALTER

THE LEBANESE-SWISS DUO PRAED EXPERIMENTS WITH SOUNDS THAT CULTURAL ELITES CALL TRASH OR KITSCH. IN SO DOING, THEY ATTACK CULTURAL CANONS WITHIN THE ARAB WORLD AND PRESENT A FRESH MIX TOWARDS EUROPE. HERE IS A DIFFERENT TAKE ON EXOTICA.



Praed: Paed Conca (left) and Raed Yassin (right), photo by Tony Elieh.

Praed, the duo of Lebanese artist Raed Yassin and Swiss artist Paed Conca, perform popular media sounds from the Arab world with techniques from experimental music. On their first CD *The Muesli Man* (2009), we hear lots of samples: gunshots, someone screaming, music from Egyptian films, a speech by iconic president Gamal Abdel Nasser, Arabic pop music from the 1980s, electric bass, virtuoso clarinet playing, electronica sounds – all held together through a wide range of editing and manipulation techniques. On their second release *Made in Japan* (2011), Yassin sings over a sample of Egyptian pop star Mahmoud El Hussein while a bathroom pipe is bursting. Japanese voices, screaming, and dub grooves are interlaced. All of that is put into a grinder and mixed with prepared double- and E-bass, varying playing techniques on the clarinet and scratches from record players and tape recorders.

The approach is discussed openly by the duo's label Annihaya, which specializes in the »displacement, deconstruction and »recycling« of popular or folkloric musical cultures«, in the »about« section of the label's website. Annihaya »seeks to distort boundaries of popular music«, with the aim to present »new ways of listening to original works«.

MICRO-KORG SOUNDS AND MAQSUM RHYTHM

The Praed track »8 Giga« (on *Made in Japan*) serves well to illustrate this approach. Yassin plays a melody on his micro-Korg synthesizer. It keeps repeating itself (on C, B flat and E flat) throughout the track without variation, cuts or changes in dynamics. Ethnomusicologist Shayna Silverstein links the micro-Korg sound to the mijwiz reedpipe, a typical instrument of the rural Levantine dabké music and dance. In contemporary dabké the shrill mijwiz sound is replaced through synthesizers – played with the Korg PA-800 in the case of Rizan Said's Annihaya album *King of Keyboard* (2015). Together with Syrian wedding singer Omar Souleyman, Said brought this music international attention in recent years. The duo toured excessively, and they produced tracks with Icelandic pop star Björk.

The 1 + 2 + 3 + 4 + (accentuated on 1 and 3, unaccentuated on 1.5, 2.5 and 4) of the maqsum rhythm – throughout the Praed track – further links »8 Giga« to possibly the most popular rhythm in the Arab world. One finds it everywhere from rural dance music to the electronic mahragan music of Cairo. The latter, sometimes called electro sha'abi, is produced on the vir-

tual instruments of software sequencer FL Studio by upcoming musicians of lower-class backgrounds. Today, cheaply produced mahragan is as popular as the expensive productions of pan-Arabic pop.

1980s ARABIC POP AND 1950s BELLY DANCE

In addition, Yassin starts repeatedly shouting »Allah« after 8'48" of »8 Giga«. It's a reference to classical Sufi music. As Conca puts it: »The ecstasy of Sufi music without the religion.« The »Allah« shouts sound distorted and thus do not reference the high quality standards of ethnomusicological records of Sufi chants in pre-war Aleppo, the lighter and well-produced versions sold in the Euro-American world music market, or the over-produced renderings of the many TV preachers on Arabic satellite channels. The focus on imperfection and low production quality is important, as Charles Hirschkind, anthropologist and author of *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics* reminds us. He argues that when it comes to cassette sermons, the low-budget and home-recorded cassettes and mp3 files (full of background noise and blasting voices) are higher in demand than flashy productions on TV. »There is an aesthetic of modesty that is appreciated by many people«, Hirschkind explains on request. »People have more trust in low quality.« The same seems to be the case for pop music. Yassin and an increasing number of subcultural musicians fall for the sha'bi street pop of Hakim, the crazy renderings of Sha'ban 'Abd al-Rahim, or the virtuosic keyboard versions by Islam Chipsy. They tend to ignore the clean pan-Arabic pop sound that is perfectly produced, financed and promoted by Saudi-Arabian satellite TV empires. They prefer Arabic pop of the 1980s that was »produced quickly and comparatively inexpensively through studio overdubbing and extensive cutting-and-pasting«, as Michael Frishkopf writes in his edited volume *Music and Media in the Arab World* (2010). The pop sound of that period integrates both the instruments, rhythms and sounds of 1970s psychedelic rock and the Oriental sound of belly dance music from the 1950s and 1960s. »The nightclub sound was a musical hybrid generated by the creative invention and innovation of second-generation and post-World War immigrants who were inspired by modernisation and Orientalism,« writes scholar Anne Rasmussen in her article »An Evening in the Orient – The Middle Eastern Nightclub in America« (1992). According to her, this music of the nightclub violated »every boundary of authenticity«.

»THESE STYLES AND SOUNDS HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO ANGER CULTURAL ELITES WITHIN THE ARAB WORLD AND FANS OF WORLD MUSIC ABROAD«

VIOLATING AUTHENTICITY

It is this violation of »every boundary of authenticity,« the obviousness and easiness, and the amazing sounds that Yassin and an ever-bigger circle of local musicians enjoy – Yassin calls them copy-cats or hipsters. More importantly, these styles and sounds have the potential to anger cultural elites within the Arab World and fans of world music abroad. In a conference at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London, BBC world music pioneer Charlie Gillett – shortly before his untimely death in 2010 – expressed indignation at Omar Souleyman's London concert. He said that Souleyman was the worst wedding singer he had ever heard. One can plainly state that the old, pure and gentle world music has been attacked and replaced by new, less pleasant sounds.

The micro-Korg sound of Praed expresses this bias directly and indirectly. Music writer Simon Reynolds calls this focus the anarchic. These are sounds and styles that have been outside the canon of official music history in the region for a long time. It's the dustbin of history. These styles and sounds are seen by many as culturally inferior, as trash, cheap or kitsch. Praed often renders this material with irony and parody. As Conca explains: »We manipulate sound aesthetics of various Lebanese political parties and put them into new contexts. On stage, Yassin likes to wear the typical mirror sunglasses of the party leaders of the radical Christian right, while playing the music of Shiites and Sunnites on his synthesizer.«

POSITIONING IN THE ARAB WORLD AND IN THE WEST

Raed Yassin positions himself on various levels. With his choice of references he criticizes the elitist cultural canon in Lebanon and he breaks taboos – in his solo piece »CW Tapes« – working with sounds from the Lebanese Civil War. He also presents Europe and the US with a different, not too clichéd image of the Arab world. Praed, however, also positions itself within a European and American context. Paed Conca plays multiphonics on his clarinet at the beginning of »8 Giga«. Multiphonics – the art of playing several sounds together using specific blow and fingering techniques – are known from the history of jazz, new music, free improvised music and other music styles. Through

these references, Praed creates experimental music that is not just high culture but also plays and manipulates material from our increasingly mediatised popular culture. Experimental music working with pop sounds is still a minor development – it happened in Bastard Pop in the 1990s and in few other instances. One can find similar artistic ideas and strategies in Post-Digital Pop, in contemporary jazz where some musicians improvise over pop songs instead of the Great American Songbook, or even in the New Conceptualism in New Music. Conca left Switzerland and lives in Beirut: »It's more free here«, he says. »The way Yassin experiments with local pop culture is rare and fresh. It is difficult to find such unobstructed handling of popular culture amongst European musicians and listeners of experimental music.« For Conca, Praed is a »commentary about the randomness, oppositeness, and purposelessness of the acoustic materials that are surrounding us«. He explains that the music is »a plea for an infinite, crazy, fragmented and open world«.

Yassin says that he aims to work towards a local and an international audience: »My work functions differently in places where people understand the language and the music. Here I use nostalgia as a key to get into their feelings. In the West, in order to reach their emotions and manipulate them, I use exoticism – not in a cheesy way, but in a way that triggers questions of why I manipulate music.«

Text taken from *Seismographic Sounds. Visions of a New World* (Noriant Books 2015, 504 pages), edited by Theresa Beyer, Thomas Burkhalter and Hannes Liechti of Noriant, the Network for Local and Global Sounds and Media Culture. More information on the book:

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– www.norient.com



Praed: Raed Yassin (left) and Paed Conca (right), photo by Tony Elieh.

EPIPHANIES

BY RADWAN GHAZI MOUMNEH

A CONCERT BY LEGENDARY LEBANESE SINGER ABDEL KARIM SHAAR PROVES YOU DON'T HAVE TO MAKE RECORDS TO BE REMEMBERED, AS JERUSALEM IN MY HEART'S RADWAN GHAZI MOUMNEH FINDS IN THIS TEXT WRITTEN FOR FOR UK MUSIC MAGAZINE THE WIRE'S »EPIPHANIES« COLUMN.

I am afraid to die. I am afraid of being forgotten. And I am afraid of contributing nothing to the world... or at least nothing of any artistic relevance to anyone. I spend a lot of time thinking about my contribution to music and its history, and I spend a lot of time working on my contribution to music's history. It will be etched in stone, in history, forever there to be referenced for its successes and failures. I struggle with the idea that what I craft might have an expiry date. I don't know that it doesn't. Who does? No one making a record does. It is not I who decides that, and that is not OK. So I fight that. I make records. I make other peoples' records, but more importantly, I make my own records. The record, after all, is the ticket to that eternal existence, however meagre and inconsequential it may be. No one can take that away from me. It is what I believe, and it is what I do.

Meeting Abdel Karim Shaar in 2011 in my studio was a confusing moment. I was aware of who he was, and I thought I was aware of what he did. He had started his career on Lebanese television in the early 1970s as a young talent. He became known for his unique – though not hugely popular – singing style.

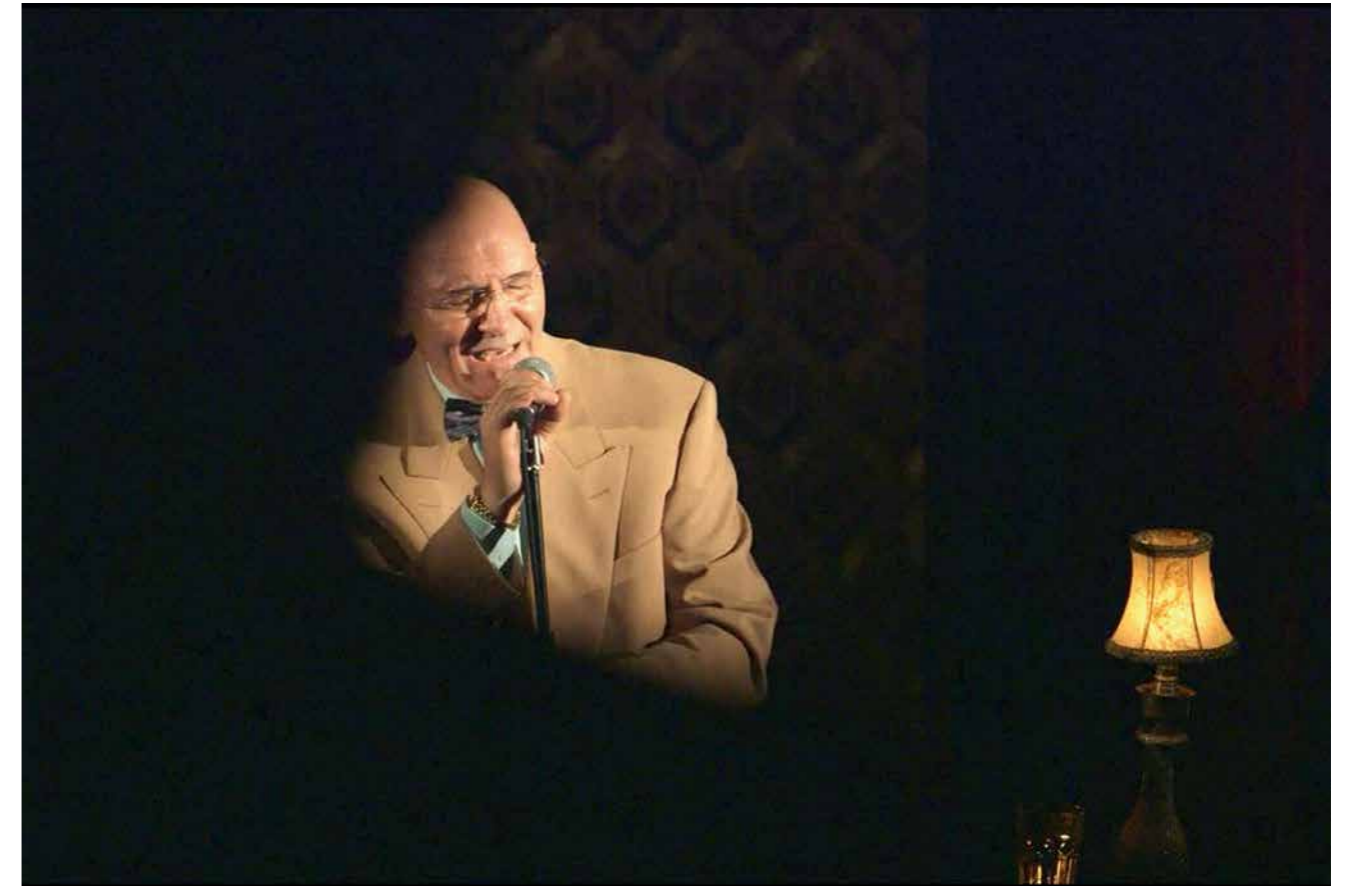
I felt uneasy being with him in my studio, talking about its existence, and about myself and my music. The whole affair seemed foreign or uninteresting to him. He didn't seem very moved by any of it. And why would he be? A man in his sixties who has had a 40-year career, and yet no records to show for it. By his

own admission, he had attempted a few sessions that never yielded any albums. We had a warm exchange about music, its disciplines relevant to the Levant, and live performance. He invited me to attend a show of his on my next trip to Beirut, and I of course accepted. We parted ways, but he didn't leave my thoughts.

I was rather confused by his artistic existence. Was he not afraid to die? It didn't seem so. Was he not afraid of being forgotten? It didn't seem so either. And why do I not know of any of his records? It's because he has none. So how am I to know what his music is? Where is this person, this artist's contribution? And how can someone at his age have not made a record? My entire thought process was being challenged and I needed to answer my own questions here. I had once had a similar viewpoint about my music, idealising a musical life that would be exclusively about the »live experience«. Of course, this attempt failed as I have since released recorded music.

I made a point of attending an Abdel Karim Shaar soirée on my next trip to Lebanon. The show was in a dimly lit downtown basement cabaret venue that seated roughly 100 people or so. The stage had its red velvet curtains drawn. I took my seat and anxiously waited for the show to commence.

The lights dimmed and the music started from behind the curtains, and slowly they were opened as the quartet of oud, qanoun, violin and riq musicians played an introduction to the



evening. The power of the acoustic takht was deafening. It was so quiet that it was so loud. Too loud. Moments later, the larger-than-life Abdel Karim appeared on stage to a loud roar from the audience. He took his seat, acknowledged the crowd, closed his eyes and there the night truly began. It was a journey. Two hours of emotional movement. His singing was so powerful, and so full of life. Nothing mattered other than that moment to him. And nothing mattered other than that moment to me. He was conducting me, telling me when I am to sit still in anticipation, and when I am to scream back at him, when to contemplate, and when to stand on my chair with my hands stretched out open. When to close my eyes and when to open them. It was discipline, and I cannot claim to have, nor to have ever experienced it before. Two hours on, and he has concluded his journey with me, where he stands up and exits the stage.

Tears were flowing. I was truly humbled. Humbled not only because of the experience I had just experienced, but humbled because I was challenged beyond my capacity. I had just witnessed this artist get up on a stage and nullify my musical ideology and, to a certain extent, nullify my artistic existence.

It was very difficult for me to come to terms with that. That he has chosen to not record an album became so obvious to me. That he chooses this format for his music was so logical all of a sudden. That he, at this point in his career, chooses to do this completely on his terms, as any other terms would be a compromise to his vision. He has proven all he needs to prove, and

in the process, has given me an experience that would be an eye and soul opener.

Text taken from The Wire issue 379, September 2015. Published here with kind permission. – www.thewire.co.uk

[Radwan Ghazi Moumneh's](http://www.jerusalemmyheart.com) is a Montréal-based producer and musician with Lebanese roots. With his music project Jerusalem in My Heart he found a home at Constellation records. He currently splits his time between Montreal and Beirut. – www.jerusalemmyheart.com

BEYOND: AĪSHA DEVI

AĪSHA DEVI IN CONVERSATION WITH LENDITA KASHTANJEVA AND
GUY SCHWEGLER OF ZWEIKOMMASIEBEN MAGAZINE



Aisha Devi, photo Emile Barret.

THE WORK OF SWISS PRODUCER AND SINGER AĪSHA DEVI RESEMBLES A TRIP THROUGH THE RUMMAGE ROOM OF GLOBAL HIGHBROW AND POPULAR CULTURE – WITH ONE'S THIRD EYE WIDE OPEN. DRIFTING ON THE AIR IS AN OCCASIONAL GABBER KICK-DRUM OR A SNATCH OF VERSE FROM PAKISTANI FEMINIST POET KISHWAR NAHEED, A TRANCE HARMONY COURTESY OF THE ROLAND JP 8080, PERHAPS A GUTTURAL MONASTIC CHANT, OR EVEN A LYRICAL NOD IN THE DIRECTION OF KIM KARDASHIAN.

IN A BROAD-RANGING CONVERSATION WITH ZWEIKOMMASIEBEN'S LENDITA KASHTANJEVA AND GUY SCHWEGLER, DEVI TALKED ABOUT PERSONAL HISTORIES, EASTERN MUSIC, A NEW KIND OF FEMINISM, HER COLLABORATION WITH CHINESE ARTIST TIANZHUO CHEN AND PLAYING AMBIGUOUSLY WITH SYMBOLS. THE FIRST PART OF THE CONVERSATION IS PUBLISHED BELOW; THE SECOND WILL FEATURE IN THE UPCOMING PRINT ISSUE OF ZWEIKOMMASIEBEN MAGAZIN (OUT IN SUMMER 2016).

zweikommasieben: You were talking about your identity and your quest as a musician in recent interviews. This meant researching your cultural roots in Buddhism and Hinduism, but also trying to find your father, who you never got to know. Which of those two parts came first?

Aisha Devi: I think at first there was an attraction to Asia in general. When I was a kid, I never quite felt that I belonged anywhere, I felt like something about me was weird, that I was an outcast in little polished Switzerland. It was always a struggle for me, because of my name, because nobody really understood where I was coming from, and in particular, because I was mainly raised by my grandmother. I never really talked about my father with my mother – his Nepali and Indian origins were never a topic. So I was intrigued by Asia, but very discreetly. Furthermore, I think my love for Asia came through music. I was looking for something different than Western music. Somehow I felt a huge connection to the Indian (musical) scale. When I began meditating, this scale helped me the most to connect to other worlds, to an invisible energy. Music opened the door, really, and from there I began to search more and more for my own roots. I only have a picture of my father. I'm trying to find him but I don't think he's still alive. My father is more abstract to me than music: music really exists, it is part of my life, but my father is still a concept. Looking for my father is also a kind of alibi for connecting to that part of the world. It's not an ego trip; it's more to understand a different culture, to understand why I feel so happy in India and to understand why Western

cultures need to look to the East or to ancestral knowledge to fully comprehend our society. Through that, I think I found a lot of knowledge and a lot of prudence.

ZKS: When researching Eastern music, did you have the Western electronic music continuum in the back of your mind?

AD: No, I think it was a general interest that came into existence through meditation and through spiritual knowledge. I dove into ancient texts, for example the *Upanishads* or the *Sūtra*. These are some of the most ancient texts ever written. They contain both metaphysics as well as »actual« knowledge: physics, medicine, mathematics and sacred geometry. They're a basis for both Hinduism and Buddhism. I gathered all that knowledge while meditating and learned guttural chanting too. So meditation began as a spiritual process, but the more I was meditating and the more I was using those techniques, the more I started to realise that meditation is music and that it was really close to my way of producing. Both are intimate and introspective processes. The two became the same ritual: meditation and music production merged into one way of breathing and one way of transforming energy into something material. I also rediscovered many things (through meditation) that I had already included in my music, like the use of frequencies. For instance, when you're chanting you're creating a tone that has a direct impact on your body. Therefore, the main role of music is a medicinal one: To gather and heal the collective energy. With that in mind, music is not only entertainment, it's a ritual.

»TO ME PLAYING LIVE IS EXACTLY ABOUT THIS IDEA:
GATHERING PEOPLE AND PUTTING THEM INTO A
COLLECTIVE TRANCE WHERE THE ENERGY IS HIGHER
THAN THE SUM OF ITS PARTS.«

Yet our Western music industry is total sterile. Nature doesn't react to its standards of frequencies and recording. There is another way of producing music that has an impact on nature, an impact on our bodies, an impact on our society. What I really love in Asian music is that they keep that ritual aspect even though it is industry-related too. They are aware of nature's response.

ZKS: You're based in Geneva. How does that affect your life and your work as a musician?

AD: I think Geneva is quite soulless at the moment. It's changing a bit, but I probably chose the city as my home because living there is a good way to remain a hermit – there's not much around. The cultural scene is quite small and there's not a lot of exchange happening between other countries or cities. In Berlin or London it be would different, I guess – there's so much stimulation everywhere. On the other hand, I don't really fit the Genevan stereotype of the healthy, wealthy banker. Geneva was really huge in the 1980s and early 1990s. There were lots of squats here. The punk scene, the electronic and industrial scene, both were really flourishing and the energy was intense. But eventually the authorities took back houses and evacuated all the squats. Now the culture is not that diverse anymore. There are a lot of people from other countries living here, but I get the feeling that nobody is really mingling. That's a pity. But

I'm staying here to be a hermit in my studio. Also I'm really close to nature and to an airport. Finally, I'm quite happy with the relationship we have to the Swiss-German scene.

ZKS: You consider the voice to be sacred. How does this relate to a transformation of the voice in a technical way? Besides your untreated singing and guttural chanting, you also apply some pitch shifts and vocoder effects in your productions.

AD: I think that the voice is sacred because it is a vibration you create with your body. You have two vocal cords and when you're singing, you make your own cords vibrate. For me this is the most frontal, physical and energetic way to express myself. Singing is the prime opportunity for me to exist in the world.

First, I learned classical singing techniques, like opera. Opera is very much ruled and constrained, though. I had the feeling that you can't be really free. At one point I decided that I'd rather scream than sing another opera. I love the idea of a primal scream: the voice not being formatted by the whole industry, by the West's vision, by radio or television. My singing has changed a lot since, also through the whole meditation process. When I'm singing now, I'm almost in an outer state of mind. I'm currently singing with half-tones, almost as in the Indian or Arabic scale. And I never felt so free. Singing without any constraints is like singing without an ego, I guess. Ravi Shankar said



Aisha Devi, photo Emile Barret.

about the Indian scale that there are no harmonies that could draw you or make you feel totally self-satisfied. Instead you're always switching from one note to another. This is what connects you to the spirits and to cosmic energy. However, I'm trying to use as few effects as possible. Also when I'm practicing guttural chanting, it wouldn't make sense to transform it. But there's one track, »Aurat«, on which I used a vocoder. I'm reading a poem and, as I hate my own voice so much, I had to make it sound more robotic. In a way, I tried to avoid my own voice. I played with pitch in some parts – I like a really high pitch, because that makes the voice totally narrowed and nasal – to me it sounds a bit like a voice from an ancient time, and I cannot do that myself. I can't sing like that. I wish I could.

ZKS: In your live shows, the Roland JP-8080 synthesizer plays an important role. This piece of equipment was key to European trance music, too (it's also the main object of interest in Lorenzo Senni's T-studies; see last issue of CTM Magazine). To what extent was that of interest to you?

AD: When I'm producing, I'm not using hardware. I only produce with my laptop. But I like to transpose the tracks onto machines for live settings – to give the music a second birth and a more open perspective. I think the Roland JP-8080 is one of the only instruments that I intentionally chose. The first time I heard it was on trance tracks, massive ones like from Tiësto.

Although I don't like this kind of music, I absolutely love the effect it's generating on people. I wanted to use the JP-8080 because it has that capacity. It has those strong subs, which address the emotional part of your body. Then there are those amazing high frequencies, and the supersaw wave that duplicates the higher tones and harmonizes them. This has a really strong effect on the top part of your brain – that's the effect that puts people into a trance. To me playing live is exactly about this idea: gathering people and putting them into a collective trance where the energy is higher than the sum of its parts. People making modern trance music are using this kind of synthesis for self-satisfaction and their own egos. But I like to use the machine's capacity, those frequencies, not as a self-satisfied person, but to really make people feel like part of a community.

ZKS: What's your reason for exclusively using the laptop when producing music?

AD: I could make music on a djembe or guitar – but for me, producing music is so connected to my everyday life. I don't want to just make ritual music, I want to make contemporary ritual music – a high-fi ritual merging pulse and frequency with our way of living. I'm not saying we're living life in a good way, or in a true way, but it is what it is. The kind of meditation I'm applying while producing aims at being with yourself, being inside yourself. And when I'm working with a computer – I'm not

»SINGING WITHOUT ANY CONSTRAINTS IS LIKE
SINGING WITHOUT AN EGO«

talking about being on the internet, but of making music – I'm not going inside my computer. I think my computer is coming inside my brain, inside my breathing, inside my body and that's a part of that meditative process. I can be alone on my computer and be in a total trance. My computer is not a wall to me, but a direct connection to what's inside my brain. The computer creates the physicality of my own abstractions. The computer materialises all of my energy. For me, it is simply the best way of achieving this.

Besides that, working on a computer gives people the perspective of realities other than one's own. And I like that idea – same goes for video games. There's this idea that not only physicality exists.

ZKS: The Conscious Cunt EP you released before your album was focused on issues of femininity. Was this the reason you released its three tracks on their own? On the follow-up album the EP's tracks – and therefore their underlying issues – are still there, but the themes are broader.

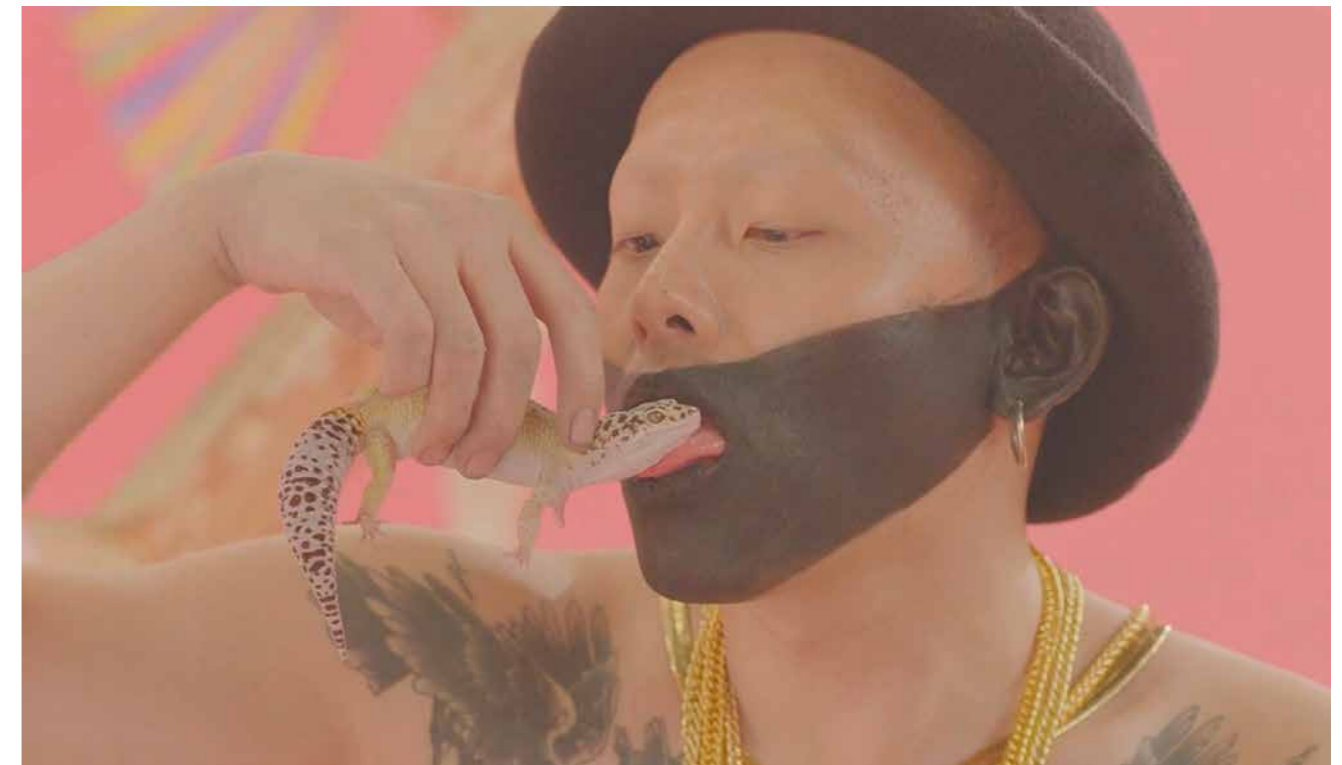
AD: The album is about meditation, my initiation trip, and the knowledge I was collecting during that process. The whole EP was kind of a genesis, a sense of awakening. I wanted to make a shout-out to the status quo of women. That status is in between the spiritual ascension that we witness in society and the still-ongoing power of the patriarchal media – the star-ification and idolisation of women, who are still functioning under and playing with misogynistic codes. They are still fulfilling patriarchal promises. For instance, the track »Kim and the Wheel of Life« is an examination of spirituality's eternity – we are all one, we are all connected, a society without hierarchy gathering in spirituality – put in front of the mirror with icons like Kim Kardashian. It's not about her, primarily, but about her symbolic position in the society. That position is still fulfilling misogynistic dreams, doesn't give any content, doesn't use a voice to spread ideas to build a better society. She's just fulfilling her own ego pleasure.

I'd like to see new icons, new female icons, who are shamans, scientists, who have answers, who have something to say. And that's the idea of *Conscious Cunt*: femininity can be sexual, but it shouldn't be sexualised. It's not an object, but a conscious choice of one's position in society.

ZKS: Do you intend to position yourself in pop culture with your visual language and your music?

AD: I don't think that it's about positioning myself. It's more about using the tools and language that are contemporary. What really interests me is the tension between two things, and pop music doesn't have any tension, it's just heavy and closed. I like to leave doors open, and tension can do this, allowing everybody to inject their own history into it. I also like to involve people in my own genesis, including the people I'm working with. That's why I'm using contemporary visual language. But I think I'm avoiding pop in the music, in a way. I like the tension between image and sound. It's like the video for the track »Mazdâ« that was done by Tianzhuo Chen. His visual language is very similar to what I'm doing in music, but the way he delivers it is totally different. It's his language. It has a vibration that I really like, but it's far away from my way of doing music. It really was love at first sight. He's such a visionary artist. And I really liked the fact that he's Chinese and Tibetan-Buddhist. I think his work is really bold for a Chinese artist, considering the repression in the country, and I'm really happy that we're able to do a performance together during CTM Festival.

zweikommasieben is a magazine based in Switzerland dedicated to documenting contemporary music and club culture. The collective also organises concerts, club nights, matinees, raves and other fun events throughout Europe.
– www.zweikommasieben.ch



Tianzhuo Chen, stills from »19:53«, single channel HD video, courtesy the artist and Long March Space.

THE GREAT INVENTION

DRAWINGS BY TIANZHUO CHEN

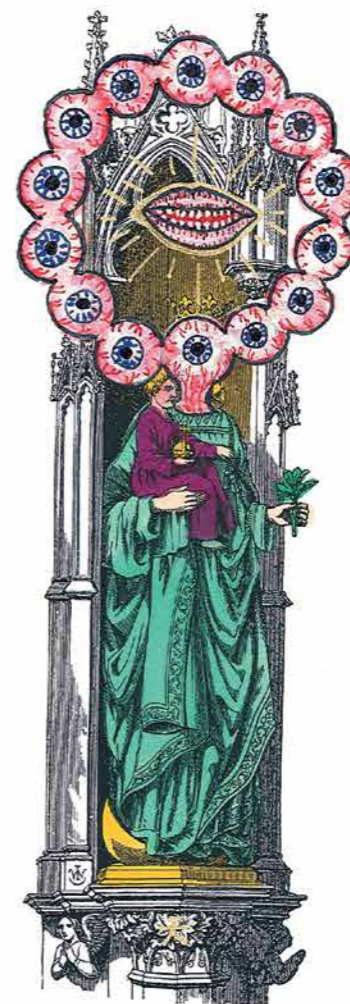
THE NEON GROTESQUERIE OF CHINESE ARTIST TIANZHUO CHEN TAKES ITS CUES FROM A SPRAWLING RANGE OF INFLUENCES, FROM LGBTQ HIP HOP TO RAVE, JAPANESE BUTOH, RELIGIOUS SYMBOLISM, MANGA AND THE FASHION WORLD. WORKING ACROSS THE MEDIUMS OF PAINTING, DRAWING, INSTALLATION, VIDEO AND PERFORMANCE, CHEN BORROWS AND CORRUPTS RELIGIOUS AND POP-CULTURE ICONOGRAPHY TO GENERATE NEW SYSTEMS OF MEANING AND SUBVERSIVE REPRESENTATIONS OF GLOBAL YOUTH CULTURE.

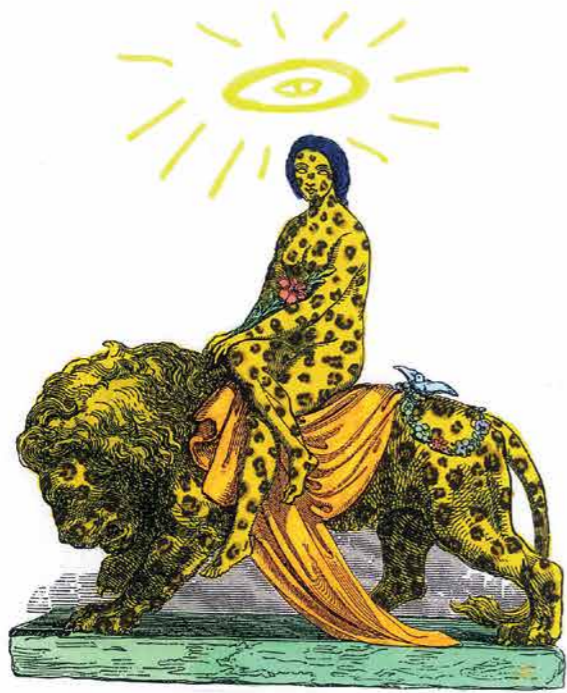
HIS FIRST SOLO EXHIBITION WAS PRESENTED AT PALAIS DE TOKYO IN PARIS IN 2015 AND FEATURED PERFORMANCES WITH ARTIST AND DANCER BEIO AND FRENCH COLLECTIVE HOUSE OF DRAMA. OTHER RECENT PROJECTS INCLUDE »PICNIC PARADISE BITCH« AT BANK GALLERY, SHANGHAI (2014) AND »TIANZHUO ACID CLUB« AT STAR GALLERY, BEIJING (2013), AND HE HAS ALSO WORKED ON COLLECTIONS SHOWN DURING LONDON AND SHANGHAI FASHION WEEKS. HE CURRENTLY LIVES AND WORKS IN BEIJING. AT CTM FESTIVAL 2016, CHEN PREMIERES A NEW PERFORMANCE WITH ELECTRONIC MUSICIAN AĪSHA DEVI AND DANCER BEIO.

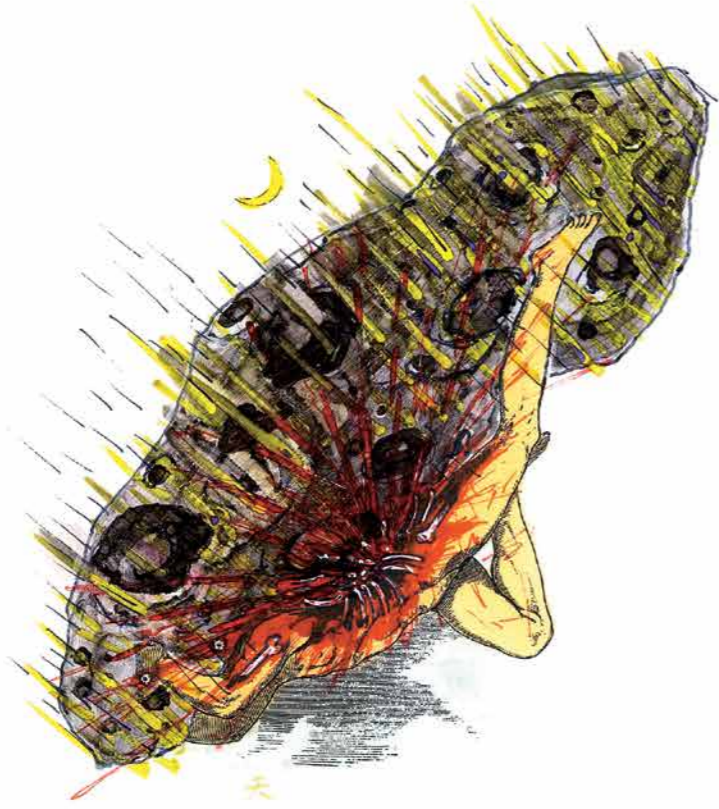
Opposite and following pages: Tianzhuo Chen 陈天灼, from the series »The Great Invention«. (Permanent marker on A3 photo copies A3 打印纸上油性水彩笔, dimensions 42 × 29.7 cm 不含画框.) Courtesy the artist and Long March Space 图片由艺术家和长征空间提供.

The Great Invention_ NO.12, 2011
 The Great Invention_ NO.44, 2011
 The Great Invention_ NO.20, 2011
 The Great Invention_ NO.40, 2011
 The Great Invention_ NO.15, 2011

– www.tianzhuochen.com







RITUAL, NOISE AND THE CUT-UP: THE ART OF TARA TRANSITORY

BY JUSTYNA STASIOWSKA

JUSTYNA STASIOWSKA EXAMINES THE IDENTITY AND GENDER HACKING WORK OF NOMADIC ARTIST TARA TRANSITORY. USING CUT-UPS, NOISE AND RITUAL, TRANSITORY EXPOSES THE FALSEHOODS OF GENDER NORMS AND REPOSITIONS THE BODY AS A LOCUS OF POSSIBILITY THAT ALLOWS FOR TRANSGRESSION AND »QUEER HETEROTOPIAS«.



Tara Transitory aka One Man Nation, photo by Miriam de Saxe.

»Ritual is another word that needs a new definition... Ritual, as I use the term, refers to an artistic process by which people gather and unify themselves in order to confront the challenges of their existence.« – Anna Halprin

The shivering on your skin gradually builds like a soft electric shock that presses you down to the floor. The whole experience feels like an earthquake, with vibrations pricking through bone into organs. The affective tonality of the performance puts the body in a state of alarm, where listening turns into self-observation. Your perception is immersed in sensing the materiality of a room filled with other bodies, all attuning to the low frequencies resonating with the architecture of space, trying to maintain equilibrium. You refocus away from the artist to yourself and the rest of the audience, realizing the depth of your feelings of total connection.

This transcendence comes through dissolving the boundaries of the body and the vibrational disturbance of one's kinesthetic sense of self in a room, or proprioception. As One Man Nation, Tara Transitory¹⁾ creates noise during her performances to offer out-of-body experiences for her listeners, a ritual where the unity of body and self dissolves. Using samples gathered through field recording and other sounds processed via her MIDI controller, 64button monome and contact microphones on the tables and floor, Tara Transitory catches her body moving and interacting with the instruments, amplifying the process of making sound in the here and now.

Tara Transitory's artistic praxis enables me to explore the ways in which the body creates and receives noise. I define noise here as the unwanted and always-present materiality of (mis) communication. Tara Transitory explores the body as a site of noise and disruption, working to disrupt the false narrative of unity pervasive in Western concepts of gender. Using cut-ups, noise, and ritual, Tara Transitory exposes the falsehoods of gender norms and repositions the body as a locus of possibility that allows for transgression and what Angela Jones and Baran Germen have called »queer heterotopias.«

QUEER HETEROTOPIAS AND THE RITUALS OF SELF

Morning rituals like taking pills and brushing teeth produce the tiny noises of becoming one's own person, or at least moulding one's self into a presentable form. Repetition is a key element, making the process seem effortless and automatic. As Judith Butler discussed in *Gender Trouble*, everyday movements, gestures, actions, and ways of using and presenting one's body

are framed by gender categories. Butler also demonstrated that gender is a performance made of repeating gestures and movement that are prescribed to male and female genders.

The everyday routine of Tara Transitory's life, therefore, in a specific socio-political context, can seem unnatural and marginalised. Taking drugs every day changes the meaning of an action, whether the drugs are hormonal, supplemental, medicinal, or recreational. Still, the »natural«, as most queer theorists show, exhibits power only through the framing of social categories as transparent, creating an illusion of normalcy. However, while this post-structuralist perspective seeks an antidote to the normalisation of cultural schemes, it does not make clear what to do after destroying society's illusion. Deconstructionist perspectives produce a constant grating sound coming from the friction between the conceptual framing of body and the materiality of fleshly gender performance.

In other words, what didn't make the cut?

CUT-UP SPACES

As proposed by Brion Gysin and William S. Burroughs in *The Third Mind*, the cut-up method, an early analogue method resembling sampling, involved artists cutting up pieces of text and reassembling the pieces in a new form. This technique, used across different media, enables artists to create a self outside the limits of the body. In Burroughs' *Invisible Generation*, he describes creating a »cut-up« using a tape recorder. Recording, cutting up the tape, then reassembling it for playback allows the listener and the artist to become aware of a specific socio-cultural programming that Burroughs presents as a method of policing the self. However, remixing and repetition also opens spaces to reprogram our selves. The tape recording cut-up becomes a multisensory stimulant used to create an *other* self through de- and re-construction. Furthermore, the body, working as a membrane, becomes transformed through the repetition of these new sounds; sound affects listeners simultaneously at the level of cognition as well as at the level of the body as a corporeal listening apparatus.

Genesis Breyer P-Orridge and Lady Jaye also explored the concept of the body itself as a cut up medium in their Pandrogyny project.²⁾ They underwent the process by cutting up each other's gestures and behaviours through mimesis and cutting up parts of their bodies by undergoing plastic surgery in order to create a third being. The cut up material that they used is DNA, which they refer to as the »first recording.« They used



Tara Transitory aka One Man Nation, photo by Miriam de Saxe.

the pronoun »We« even after Lady Jaye left her body (passing away in 2007), so the third being is not just a shared body, but a connection of minds and spirits across the divisions of gender and body. Making a cut-up of the body enabled them to create an *other*, a combined Genesis and Lady Jaye, the pandrogynous self, the We that is now Genesis and Lady Jaye. Pandrogyny is, in their project, a unified being presented as the double self in the negation of gender. It is a performance aimed to create a space for the connected consciousness, the third mind within a physical space of the body.

Tara Transitory uses a different method of »cut-up«, focusing on vibrational exchange among bodies to create *communitas* – or common public – specific to ritual in order to disenchant the geopolitical connection of body and gender. Tara Transitory's »cut-up« aims to create a body in transition, which connects with other bodies through the amplification of noises the body produces. Her work uses vibration to establish communication across genders, within a body or between bodies in a state of flux.

»The last day before the end of the world. Somehow I feel my life has been up till now very fulfilling and I really cannot think of what more I want, or what I need to do before the end. My only plan is to take my first pill of estrogen at 23:59 tonight Bangkok time, the beginning of the apocalypse of my testosterone.« – Tara Transitory, Ritual.

Originally from Singapore, Tara Transitory works as One Man Nation, documenting and developing communities in Europe and Asia. Her project *International //gender|o|noise| Under-ground* consists of mapping and documenting lives of trans women in Asia and Europe and creating performances using noise. With Miriam Saxe Drucki-Lubecki, she also took part in establishing a monthly trans/queer leftfield music party in Granada called *Translætica*. *Translætica* has grown to other countries, with editions in Paris, Bangkok and Saigon and

includes lectures, workshops and film screenings mixed with electronic music. As posted on *Translætica*'s Facebook page, the goal behind the event is to present »the idea of a new world as one borderless living space, with all the shifts and transformations and their irreversible impact on local/original cultures.« It connects local and international artists and activists to create an ever-evolving community without borders.

As Tara Transitory's name might suggest, she herself is not committed to a national identity. Throughout her migratory experience, Tara Transitory gathers field recordings then uses narrative to transform them. Her site-specific approach focuses on concrete, situated realities that are entangled in current political situations, where friction arises between the policing norms in Asian and European societies and her own functioning as a nomadic being in state of transition. Her performances are rituals that blur the restrictions that society conveys through noise (screams, samples from field recording, the sound of the moving body) as an affective force, creating a state of meditation and catharsis. For example, while documenting trans experiences, she worked with trans women street performers from Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam.

These women make fire performances to »Gangnam Style«, moving during the night from one public place to another to perform for unsuspecting audiences. Sampling the street noises and then playing them back during the performance creates a mirror for the audience; interjecting common noise into a common dance song established a specific heterotopia, shifting what might be a normal experience into something uncanny within the conventions of street entertainment.

In her performances, Transitory uses noise as an intentional activity, suspending communication, disabling the recipient from receiving information, leading to an »immersion in noise«. This immersion is similar to sensory deprivation in that it overloads the receiver with stimuli, suspending communication. Its affective

»TARA TRANSITORY EXPLORES THE BODY AS A SITE OF NOISE AND DISRUPTION, WORKING TO DISRUPT THE FALSE NARRATIVE OF UNITY PERVASIVE IN WESTERN CONCEPTS OF GENDER.«

tive force comes from invading the body with frequencies and vibrations, where one feels the body in constant movement – a state of perpetual flux. It becomes the tactic of distancing from the self, enabling the listener to create different experiences, a heterotopian space of otherness and developing new rituals for specific situations.

One Man Nation's performances end with traditional Isaan Molam-style music (»Mo« is an artist and »Lam« is a kind of performance art where the artist tells a story using tonal inflections) sung by Angkana Khunchai, a 1970s pop-music singer. The pop-ish songs are calming and soothing after the intense experience of Transitory's performance. The text is a repetition of the words »calm down«, a therapeutic ending creating a sense of light from this cathartic performance. Tara Transitory's use of Molam eases re-entry into one's everyday existence outside of the performance. The harmonies and softness of the song contrast with the harshness of noise performance as part of ritual – from transgressing the everyday and entering the liminal state that Transitory creates in her performances to better re-enter society.

Tara Transitory's work conjures new rituals of transcendence and distancing one's self from the body. I treat the *//gender|o|noise|* as a hacking of the everyday experience of body. By creating a temporary heterotopia, Tara's work reveals the tactics of hacking gender, generating a temporary space for alternative modes of existence. She creates flux in bodies and bodies in flux, thus affectively crafting heterotopic spaces, sites which are, as Brian Massumi states:

»[...] an open threshold – a threshold of potential. You are only ever in the present in passing. If you look at it that way you don't have to feel boxed in by it, no matter what its horrors and no matter what, rationally, you expect will come. You may not reach the end of the trail but at least there's a next step.«^{*3)}

The everyday processes of becoming oneself by repeating practices become rituals when performed in different contexts. This ritual is a process of creating an affect, a space of potentiality that enables the body to reshape and change, much like Tara Transitory refits old rituals into new skin. The ritual forms applied to actions of the everyday enable us to change their meaning and our perceptions, creating a sense of the transitory nature of one's body. Sonic rituals like Tara Transitory's are tactics to develop a self-conscious and creative approach to everyday activities and use them, as Anna Halprin says, to confront the challenges of existence.

This text was first published on Sounding Out!, a weekly online publication, networked academic archive, and dynamic group platform bringing together sound studies scholars, sound artists and professionals, and readers interested in the cultural politics of sound and listening. We would like to thank the editors Airek M. Beauchamp and Jennifer Stoeber-Ackermann for their kind permission to reprint this article.
– www.soundstudiesblog.com

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POWER THROUGH NETWORKING: RESHAPING THE UNDERGROUND ELECTRONIC AND EXPERIMENTAL MUSIC SCENES IN EAST AND SOUTHEAST ASIA

BY C-DRÍK FERMONT



Adeo at Kill The Silence Festival, Hong Kong 2014, photo by C-drík Fermont.

MUSICIAN AND ACTIVIST C-DRÍK FERMONT GIVES AN OVERVIEW OF EXPERIMENTAL MUSIC SCENES IN AN AREA WHERE, UNTIL RECENTLY, NETWORKS AND EXCHANGE BETWEEN SMALL THRIVING YET ISOLATED SCENES WERE NOT VERY PREVALENT. THROUGH A SHORT INTRODUCTION TO THE HISTORY OF EXPERIMENTAL MUSIC SCENES IN COUNTRIES LIKE CHINA, JAPAN, TAIWAN, INDONESIA AND SOUTH KOREA, THE AUTHOR DESCRIBES THE BEGINNINGS OF A RHIZOMATIC NETWORK THAT PULLS AWAY FROM A WESTERN-ORIENTED GAZE.

The internet is a vast, perpetually growing space. It is a place where users can find impressive amounts of information, and it should be a place where anyone interested in topics relevant to history and art could easily find answers that provoke further interest and engagement. Unfortunately, regarding music at least (whether popular or academic), knowledge sharing still often goes in one main direction: from the navel-gazing Western world and Japan to the non-Western world, with a few small exceptions concerning traditional music.

To put it simply, knowledge exchange commonly takes place between three groups: the knowledge producers (in this case musicians and composers), intermediaries (labels, magazines, organisers and other media) and those who receive and/or use that knowledge (listeners). Obviously and especially at the present time when musicians and artists tend to be their own managers, concert organisers and publishers, some take part in all three groups at once. The producer is also a listener and tends to receive a certain amount of information that can be seen as influence, conscious or not.

In January of 2005, I left Europe for six months to tour across various Southeast and East Asian countries. My goal was to perform, meet musicians and organisers, share CDs, buy as many records as I could and bring all that back to Europe to show all my European »detractors« that, yes, there are experimental and electronic music artists in Asia, too. Throughout the tour, I noticed that there was an enormous lack of networks between the local countries. This was one of the facts that pushed me to publish a first global compilation (*Beyond ignorance and borders*, Syrphe, March 2007) to include various musicians from Asia (and Africa). It also motivated me to go back several times to explore more of that part of the world, build networks, collaborate, create a database for artists, labels, magazines and venues, and to dedicate most of my label's work to Asian and African alternative electronic music and sound art.

Back then, I remember some Chinese artists wondering what I had done in Vietnam and telling me they were surprised to hear that there were noise musicians in Hanoi, or Singaporean musicians laughing at me when I asked them for info about the Indonesian experimental music scene – they had never heard about such thing. Many of those artists and organisers would refer to Japanese, North American, Western European and, to a lesser extent, Australian musicians, and had no or few connections with their neighbours. The situation was similar half a century earlier, even though a handful of composers and musi-

cians have had the will or the opportunity to travel from abroad to Asia and vice versa.

Ever since the 1950s and 1960s, most, if not all, East Asian electronic and experimental music composers have primarily been influenced by the European or American schools due to the fact that electric, synthetic, electronic, experimental and tape music was first developed and established in countries such as the Soviet Union (which unfortunately remained isolated for a long period), Germany, the USA, etc. The first formative electronic music and musique concrète studios that arose after the Second World War were in France, Italy, Germany and the USA. Post-war avant-garde composers began to present their works and new ways of composing around the world, and as a consequence, some Asian composers who showed interest in electronic, tape music and musique concrète got the opportunity to study in various Western schools or to gather information from Western sources; for example, the publication *Technische Hausmitteilungen des NWDR – Sonderheft über elektronische Musik* (Technical Proceedings of the NWDR – Special Issue on Electronic Music) from 1954 was translated into Japanese by a group of technical engineers from Japan's public broadcasting service NHK.

Studying in foreign countries was surely not a novelty. For hundreds of years, artists travelled abroad to improve their skills and study new techniques: Japanese artists have studied in foreign countries since at least the 8th Century, when painters, craftsmen and sculptors working for the imperial court travelled to China to study the advanced styles of the Tang civilisation. Colonisation affected not only the colonised citizens but also the colonisers' cultures (see Debussy's use of the ostinato and the pedal in compositions inspired by the Javanese gamelan, for example).

Post-war Japan recovered much more quickly than any other East Asian country, and some original musical concepts sprouted a few years after the Japanese Instrument of Surrender was signed: in 1948, Japanese composer Tōru Takemitsu conceived a music in which he could use technology to »bring noise into tempered musical tones«, and in 1949, another Japanese composer, Minao Shibata, wrote that »someday, in the near future, a musical instrument with very high performance will be developed, in which advanced science, technology and industrial power are highly utilised. We will be able to synthesise any kind of sound waves with the instrument.«



c2o Library, Surabaya, Indonesia 2014, photo by C-drik Fermont.

It should be noted that post-war Japan was an exception: while all countries occupied by Japanese forces and most of those occupied by European countries and the US were quickly freed after the war and often turned to nationalism and/or various forms of dictatorships, Japan continued to be occupied by the USA and influenced by its military, political, economic and social reforms from 1945 until 1952. In other words, the USA made a partly successful attempt to transplant its culture onto a very traditional and conservative country, and had a bigger influence on Japan than on any other neighbouring country.

Radical political and cultural movements emerged on the archipelago, among them the Nihon Avangyaru-do Bijutsuka Kurabu (Japan Avant-Garde Artists Club, 日本アヴァンギャルド美術家クラブ), founded in 1947 by Shūzō Takiguchi and Jirō Yoshihara. Yoshihara also co-founded Gutai Bijutsu Kyokai (Art Association of Gutai, 具体美術巨魁), a multimedia performance and theatrical art group, in 1954, and meanwhile, Jikken Kōbō (実験工房, Experimental Workshop), a group of mixed-media projects and performing arts artists coming from various backgrounds (audio, visual art, poetry, etc.) saw the light in 1951. Unsurprisingly, Tōru Takemitsu took part in it.

In 1955, composer Makoto Moroi visited the electronic music studio of the Nordwestdeutscher Rundfunk (NWDR) in Cologne, West Germany and met electronic music pioneers Her-

bert Eimert and Karlheinz Stockhausen. Following his visit, he and Toshiro Mayuzumi guided the NHK to build the first Japanese electronic music studio. Korean-born Nam June Paik also visited the NWDR studio, where he met the composers Stockhausen and John Cage as well as various conceptual artists like Joseph Beuys. This inspired him to compose experimental music, including the piece »Hommage À John Cage«, as early as 1958–59. In 1962, he also became a member of Fluxus.

Meanwhile, Filipino composer and musicologist José Maceda, who had studied in Manila and Paris before the war and in the USA afterwards, worked with the Group de recherches musicales (GRM) in Paris in 1958. In spite of his knowledge of Western classical music, Maceda took an original direction. While he was inspired by French musique concrète, he also remained influenced by folk music and developed a particular approach in contemporary music with compositions such as »Ugma-ugma – Structures« (1963), which mixed various traditional music instruments from Southeast and East Asia, »Cassettes 100« (1971) for 100 tape recorders and »Ugnayan – Atmospheres« (1974) for 20 radio stations broadcasting pre-recorded tapes.

Another artist worth mentioning is Indonesian composer Slamet Abdul Sjukur, who received a scholarship that allowed him to go to France, where he studied at the École Normale de Musique de Paris (1962–67) with Olivier Messiaen. In 1968,

he had the opportunity to study briefly with Pierre Schaeffer at the GRM. Sjukur had also already experimented with tapes in 1963 in Indonesia with the composition »Latigrak«.

In 1960, Taiwanese composer Lin Ehr began to study computer music at the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign with guidance from the father of computer music, Lejaren Hiller. In 1968, he composed »Computer Sonata«. He and Lee Tai Hsiang remained two of the very few Taiwanese composers to create such music in these early times, yet he himself remained more famous for his pop and classical music compositions.

Through the 1950s and 1960s, very few connections between East Asian countries had been made, but the late 1960s and early 1970s saw a watershed of change. In 1969 South Korean artist Seok Hee Kang, who had studied in Berlin, founded the Pan Music Festival, where he and Byeong Ki Hwang performed a piece for daekum and tape. Four years later, in 1973, the Asian Composers League (ACL) was founded in Hong Kong with the aim of fostering contemporary music that incorporated both Western and Asian Pacific instruments and influences through conferences and festivals. It also promoted mutual exchange between these countries.

Following its first meeting in Hong Kong, almost yearly meetings took place in various Asian capitals and expanded to other countries such as Singapore, Indonesia, Vietnam and even Israel.

»WHILE ITS EARLIER NETWORK WAS PYRAMIDAL AND WESTERN-CENTRIC, EAST ASIA IS SLOWLY ADOPTING A RHIZOMATIC NETWORK NOT ONLY FOCUSED ON THE WEST BUT CONSCIOUS OF ITS OWN REALITIES, IDENTITIES AND FUTURE POSSIBILITIES.«

But the league, as most conservatories and electronic music centres were and are still today, was an essentially closed circle. It was often related to the middle and upper classes, which above all tend to exclude so-called popular music and popular approaches to experimental music. The gap between the academic and non-academic world in Asia and anywhere else

on Earth remains, even though there are some attempts to improve the situation.

Taiwanese composer Dajun Yao stated in a 2003 interview that »serious music is no longer monopolised by the academy, as it certainly was several decades ago«. Indeed, a few initiatives tend to fill the gap, such as what the private school Dom-Do did in Hanoi in its past activities. The school taught methods of improvised and experimental music to students, whether they came from an academic background or not, and organised concerts and workshops to spread knowledge. The aforementioned Dajun Yao moved to the mainland and co-founded the Chinese Computer Music Association (CCMA), which sponsored the 1999 International Computer Music Conference in Beijing, in 1999. He is currently a professor in sound art and the director of Open Media Lab at the China Academy of Art in Hangzhou.

Due to various factors such as the expanding mail art and tape trading networks and the slow democratisation of the island from 1986 on, including the first direct presidential election in the history of the island in 1996, Taiwan saw the birth of a radical experimental music scene in the early 1990s. This wave was led by artists such as noise and industrial band Zero & Sound Liberation Organization (零與聲音解放組織) in 1992 and experimental punk band Loh Tsui Kweh Commune (濁水溪公社) in the same creative period, and was followed in 1993 by Taiwan's first industrial and noise music label, Noise, which published numerous cassettes and other media by Japanese and Western artists. The country's first noise and experimental performance festivals, Broken Life Festival and Post-Industrial Arts Festival, took place in 1994 and 1995, respectively, and included various Taiwanese artists (Z.S.L.O., L.T.K. Commune), Japanese noise artists (Killer Bug, C.C.C.C., etc) and European artists (Swiss noise performers Schimpfluch-Gruppe and British power electronics performer Con-Dom).

Small underground connections also arose: in 1994, the Canadian label Somnus released a compilation called *Eternal Blue Extreme: An Asian Tribute to Derek Jarman* that included artists from Japan (Merzbow, C.C.C.C., Otomo Yoshihide, Aube), Hong Kong (Juno, PNF, I.666) and Taiwan (Z.S.L.O.). In 1998, US label Auscultare Research published a compilation curated by Randy H.Y. Yau that featured noise artists from Hong Kong (PNF), Taiwan (Ching Shen Ching, Z.S.L.O.) and Japan (Government Alpha MSBR, Kazumoto Endo, etc.).

Unfortunately, the enthusiasm diminished relatively quickly. Few artists remained active after the mid-1990s, and the Taiwanese scene only re-emerged later, in the early 2000s, once the Chinese DIY scene had expanded and spread into neighbouring countries. Indeed, even though the first electro-acoustic music concert in China took place in 1984 at the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing following an initiative by Zhāng Xiǎofū, Zhū Shì-rui, Tán Dùn, Chén Yí, Zhōu Lóng and Chén Yuǎn Lín (who founded the first studio at the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing in 1986 after studying at the State University of New York), an independent experimental music scene didn't emerge until 1999. This emergence happened partly thanks to

sound artist and concert organiser Yan Jun, who published on his label Sub Jam, as well as to DIY pioneers Wang Fan, Pandwa Twin and Ronez, to mention a few.

In the mid- to late 2000s, musicians from major mainland cities had developed a real network for electronic musicians playing electro-acoustic, noise, breakcore or electronica. Concerts would take place in major centers such as Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou, but also in Guilin and Changsha, for example. Musicians from South Korea, Japan, Hong Kong, Australia, Belgium, Canada and other countries started to tour China. Japanese, Taiwanese, Hongkongese and other foreign artists were published on Chinese labels such as Sub Jam, Doufu Records, Shasha Records and Shànshu. Some print and online press dedicated to underground music began to regularly publish news and reports about electronic, noise and experimental music. Examples include »Rock in China«, a database and news platform focusing on underground music in China since 2004; *Gothic Age*, a magazine publishing articles and interviews about the dark ambient, industrial and gothic scenes; and more recently, *White Fungus*, a New Zealand magazine published in Taiwan.

Now, in 2015, a decade later, the whole landscape has drastically evolved. It has its ups and downs, of course, but nevertheless constitutes a very impressive change, thanks to the following factors: the increased interconnectedness between knowledge producers and intermediaries; the expansion of the internet; political changes such as the rapprochement between Taiwan and China; the semi-democratisation of Myanmar (Burma), which shares some similarities with the end of the Orde Baru (the Indonesian New Order) in 1998. From that point on, as censorship drastically decreased, artists could express themselves more freely and radical art forms openly appeared. The advent of personal computers and other increasingly affordable technologies such as tablets, smartphones, free software, and digital recorders as well as the vast possibilities to build DIY synthesisers and effects has led to creative music composition by talented young artists in most South and East Asian countries.

We must also take into account the fact that travelling is cheaper and more convenient for the middle class today than ever: besides the train and bus networks that have been modernised

in many countries, a few low-cost airlines are covering a major portion of East Asia.

Cultural and linguistic connections also play a role in this network development. Because some countries share common or similar languages, relationships between artists and organisers develop more quickly and easily: Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia share a lot of linguistic similarities. Malaysia, Singapore, China, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau also share similar languages (above all Mandarin, but also some others like Cantonese and Hokkien, in various proportions and regions).

It isn't only informal networks that exist today in Eastern Asia: some perennial international groups of artists are currently building important bridges, among them the improvised music group FEN (Far East Network), which was born thanks to Otomo Yoshihide (Japan), Ryu Hankil (South Korea), Yan Jun (China) and Yuen Chee Wai (Singapore). As they have described, »While FEN is a improvisational music group it is at the same time an idea or concept which hopes to maintain unique aesthetics and sustainable relationships in diverse Asian cultures. FEN's activities explore aesthetic possibilities in new forms of music which are different from the Western world.«

A second group, the Asian Meeting Network, was created by Otomo Yoshihide, Yuen Chee Wai and DJ Sniff (Japanese and living in Hong Kong), and is divided into three sections: the Asian Meeting Network itself and its Asian Meeting Festival; the Ensembles Asia Orchestra; and the Asian Sound Research (ASR). The first Asian Meeting Festival that took place in 2015 included the following artists: DJ Sniff (Hong Kong & Japan), Bin Idris (Bandung, Indonesia), To Die (Yogyakarta, Indonesia), Iman Jimbot (Bandung, Indonesia), Kok Siew Wai (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia), Leslie Low (Singapore), Yuen Chee Wai (Singapore), Yui-Saowakhon Muangkruan (Bangkok), Nguyễn Hong Giang (Ho Chi Minh, Vietnam), Lương Huệ Trinh (Hanoi, Vietnam), Sachiko M (Tokyo, Japan), Yonago Tadashi (Osaka, Japan), Yamamoto Tatsuhisa (Tokyo), Sato Kimiya (Tokyo), Kawai Shinobu (Tokyo), Fumitake Tamura (Tokyo), KΣITO (Tokyo), Watanabe Ai (Tokyo), Ono Ryoko (Nagoya, Japan) and Otomo Yoshihide (Tokyo).

Ensembles Asia Orchestra is a project launched in 2014 and directed by Otomo Yoshihide and Arima Keiko with the mis-



erDao & Zen Lu at 191 Space, Guangzhou, China 2014, photo by C-drik Fermont.

sion of creating a free-form orchestra that engages with non-professional musicians. The project is organised by the Japan Foundation Asia Center with musician Otomo Yoshihide as artistic director. Ensembles Asia Orchestra aims to uncover new and unprecedented ways of making music and connecting with people by sharing the joy of music and fostering communication with people from elsewhere in Asia.

Asian Sounds Research is led by Japanese sound artist Sachiko M and also organised by the Japan Foundation Asia Centre. It is a research project that focuses on the sound of the ASEAN region.

Other festivals, experimental music events and organisations connect Australasian countries and incorporate artists from the rest of the world: 2pi Festival in Hangzhou, China; Lack-ing Sound Festival, a monthly experimental music event in Taipei, Taiwan; Mini Midi Festival in Beijing, China; Hanoi Sound Stuff and Experimen.TET in Hanoi, Vietnam; the temporary art space 7000 Padauk in Yangon, Myanmar; Switch On Mini Festival in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia; WSK in Manila, the Philippines; CHOPPA Experimental Music Festival in Singapore; EESE (sound art Electronic South East) in Thailand; and many more in Indonesia: Jakarta Noise Fest; Melawan Kebisingan Kota in Surabaya; Jogja Noise Bombing Festival; Kill the Silence Festival in Hong Kong and Macau, etc.

While its earlier network was pyramidal and Western-centric, East Asia is slowly adopting a rhizomatic network not only focused on the West but conscious of its own realities, identities and future possibilities. Much is in store for the future of electronic music and sound art in Asia.

Born in Zaire (now Democratic Republic of Kongo) and currently based in Berlin, [C-drik Fermont](#) is a musician, activist, curator, DJ and author. He runs the label Syrphe with a special focus on publishing contemporary electronic and noise music from Asia and Africa. Together with sociologist Dimitri della Faille, he is currently working on the publication *Not Your World Music: Noise in South East Asia*, a book and CD about noise music in Southeast Asia in all its aspects, covering topics from art, politics and history to identity, gender and global capitalism. He is also co-curating Pekak! *Indonesian Noise 1995–2015: 20 Years Of Experimental Music From Indonesia*, an audio DVD soon to be released that comprises almost nine hours of noise, electronic and experimental music by 123 Indonesian artists. – www.syrphe.com

THE FIRST SOUND OF THE FUTURE

BY MARI MATSUTOYA

SINCE HER 2007 LAUNCH IN JAPAN, VIRTUAL POP IDOL HATSUNE MIKU HAS BECOME THE ULTIMATE POP STAR, DEVELOPED FROM A VOCAL SYNTHESIZER PRODUCT INTO A GLOBALLY ADORED AND COLLABORATIVELY CONSTRUCTED CYBER CELEBRITY WITH A GROWING USER COMMUNITY, COUNTLESS STADIUM PERFORMANCES AS A VIRTUAL 3D PROJECTION, ENDLESS USER-GENERATED ONLINE VIDEOS, MERCHANDISE AND MORE THAN 100 000 SONGS RELEASED WORLDWIDE. FASCINATED BY THE NEW REALITIES OF 21ST CENTURY STARDOM, CONCEPTUAL ARTIST MARI MATSUTOYA INITIATED THE PERFORMANCE PROJECT »STILL BE HERE«. THE COLLABORATION WITH LAUREL HALO, DARREN JOHNSTON, LATURBO AVEDON AND MARTIN SULZER EXPLORES MIKU'S TRAJECTORY WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF THE JAPANESE POP MUSIC INDUSTRY AND OPEN-SOURCE COMMUNITIES, AND INVESTIGATES QUESTIONS OF COMMODIFICATION AND NORMATIVE SOCIAL ETIQUETTE.

Hatsune Miku (whose name means »first sound of the future« in Japanese) is a virtual idol. She is the third and most successful in a series of animated pop stars developed using the Yamaha Vocaloid engine. She was launched in 2007 by Crypton Future Media under a creative commons license and subsequently adopted by a vast community of online users. Miku has since become a kind of mirror, revealing to each new user their own desires. »She is the product of what (Walter) Benjamin called ›phantasmagoria‹ and ›the desire of the masses‹«, writes media professor and Hatsune Miku expert Mitsuhiro Takemura. Simultaneously, she is an advertising gimmick, an entity without any original form.

This is not the first virtual idol to have ever been created, but none has enjoyed as much success or attention as Hatsune Miku. In 1996, a talent agency in Japan called HoriPro produced Date Kyoko (DK-96). Combining the best computer graphics technology available at the time with the voice of an unnamed artist, they created a character with cropped hair and a crop top and cast her in music videos. While the distinctly 1990s aesthetics of the creation would appeal to today's obsession with retro, only a handful of fan sites still contain traces of Kyoko. In 1999, French artists Philippe Parreno and Pierre

Hughe bought the copyright to a Japanese manga character and made her into an open-source character named Ann Lee. Yet if virtual entities aim to supersede the lifespan of a real-life idol, no attempt has come near to achieving this. Even Miku's popularity has waned in Japan in recent years, despite the fact that she has achieved a great deal of autonomy for a character that was created as a Vocaloid ad.

Vocaloids were initially developed to eliminate the need for backup singers in recording sessions, thus cutting time and costs for the artist or label. Due to increasing numbers of home-studio producers, the ratio of singer to producer was also becoming problematic. The Vocaloid was seen as a long-overdue development in electronic music synthesis, as almost every other known instrument had already been synthesised decades ago. Drum machines and synthesizers had become integral to the music production process, and while vocal effects such as the vocoder or its predecessor (the »Voder« from Bell Labs) did exist, there had never been much success in making an instrument out of the voice. The Vocaloid, which gave producers total control over melody, timbre and even emotion, was the closest anyone had come, but it was never conceived of as a center-stage product.



Hatsune Miku – »Still Be Here«, image by LaTurbo Avedon / Crypton Future Media, Inc. 2007.

Recorded human voices form the base material for the Vocaloid. These recordings are then dissected and strung back together in the synthesis engine according to an operator's commands. Early trials utilised the voice of a professional singer, and in the case of Hatsune Miku, a vocal actress named Saki Fujita was chosen specifically for the »Lolita-like« quality of her voice. The voices of well-known J-pop singers have also been recorded, packaged and sold: Gackt, a popular Japanese musician, became the Vocaloid »Gackupoid« and Meg's voice became »Megupoid«. With the advent of this new technology, unique voices once housed in the bodily architecture of stars suddenly grew legs and walked free into the market.

The Japanese pop industry is centred on delivering the utmost dream to fans, namely the illusion of an attainable fantasy. As such, the industry has always cashed in on the pop idol who is never quite perfect, and whose imperfections which make her/him all the more desirable. In order to avoid shattering the illusion of attainability, all precautions must be strictly followed. This comes at a price for real-life entertainers, whose discipline and endurance is tested throughout their careers. For instance, pop idols sign a contract promising never to engage in a real-life relationship so as to perpetuate the image that an encoun-

ter or even a date could one day be possible for the fan. It is interesting to note that since the advent of the »perfect« pop star, imperfections have been projected onto her rather than being inherent.

The Japanese government has been exporting »cool« to a global audience with initiatives like »Cool Japan« for over 15 years. Japan, and its entertainment industry especially, has become a loud, garish advertisement, a self-aware image-making machine ever-conscious of how it is seen by other countries. As Takemura states, »it is simply the Japanese nation's narcissism«. The country has been very successful at winning fascination from all over the world with its soft power, and the world continues to be entertained. However, Takemura is keen to separate the Japanese government's initiative and the phenomenon of Hatsune Miku. In the end, both Cool Japan and Miku are capitalist ventures and marketing tools, only the former is endorsed by a nation's self-importance, and the latter by the act of self-initiated sharing.

According to Hiroyuki Ito, the head of Crypton and the creator of Hatsune Miku, Miku's early popularity coincided with a spike in user-generated content and platforms like YouTube

»IF THE SURFACE OF MIKU'S BODY IS COMPARABLE TO
VISIBLE AND PUBLIC COLLECTIVE DESIRE, COULD IT BE
THAT WE FIND THE DARK WEB BEYOND THE LAYERS
OF HER SKIRT?«

and Niconicodouga in Japan. Filed under the Creative Commons License, certain aspects of Miku's physical characteristics – teal-coloured hair, 158 cm tall, 42 kg, 16 years old – cannot be changed, but her personality and voice have been deliberately left open for the public to interpret and use as they please, as long as they credit her original creator.

User-generated software such as MikuMikuDance owes itself to this principle, too. Users can choose from a vast pool of models (also user-generated) and make the models move, again using user-generated movement files. The character licensing specifically forbids any usage that might harm the character's image, but this has not stopped users from flooding the internet with sexual or violent scenes involving Miku anyway. For example, MikuMikuDance and MikuMikuMove gave rise to the persistent need to lift Miku's skirt, leading to thousands of attempts documented in YouTube clips. If the surface of Miku's body is a metaphor for collective public desire, could it be that we find the dark web under the layers of her skirt? Crypton does not target explicit content for removal – there is simply too much. But, more cynically perhaps, it's also just good publicity.

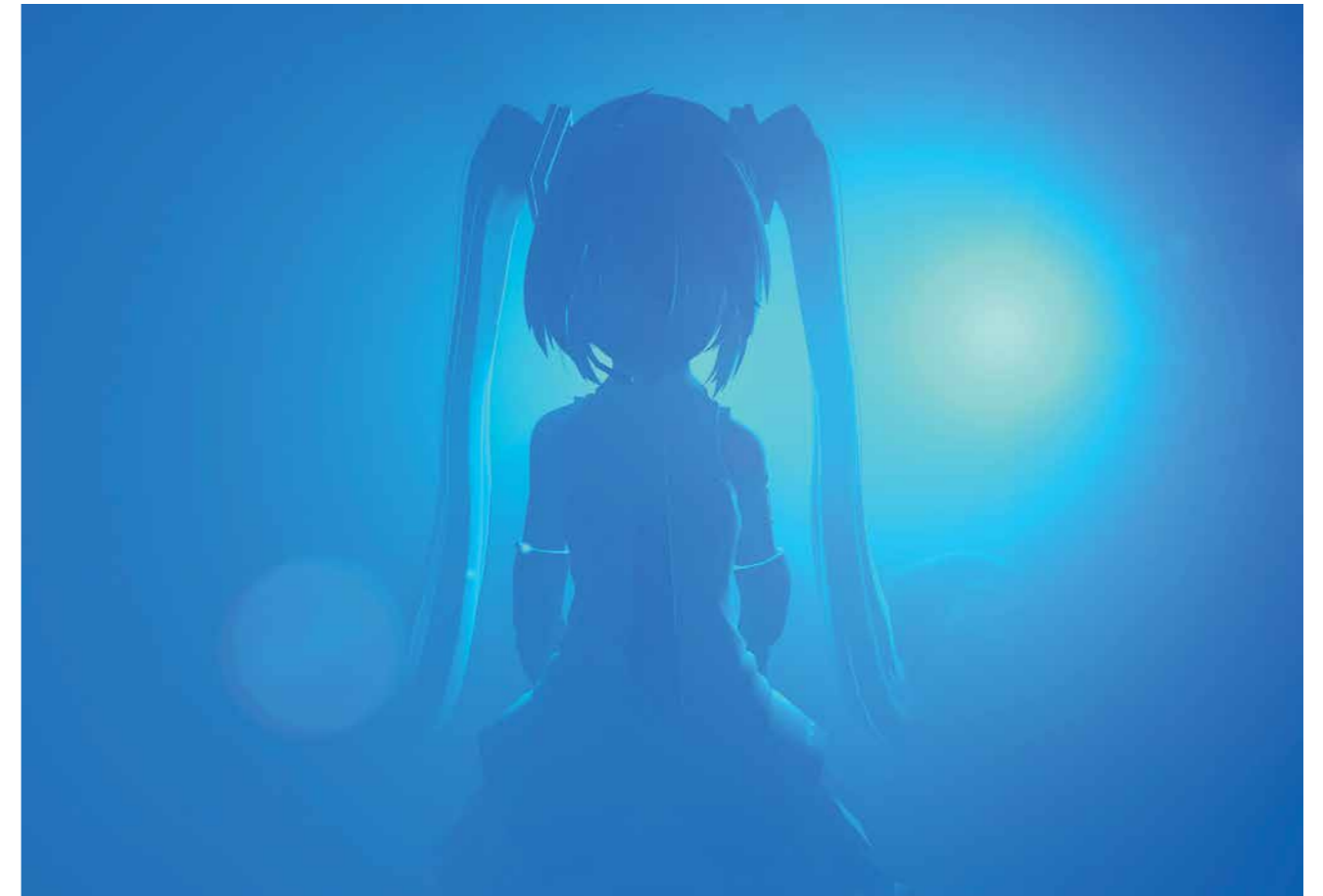
Miku's licensing was also implemented to accommodate an already existing structure, the Doujin circle, where »secondary derivatives« of original and more widely circulated animation characters (such as Doraemon or Sailor Moon) are exchanged and sold in the form of manga comics, illustrations or other

merchandise at fairs. Companies looking to use the character for commercial purposes are required to contact Crypton Future Media and ask permission first, taking into account that she is already associated with various businesses and that the concepts and ideologies of the new companies might clash.

How does the »Still Be Here« project, presented at CTM Festival in 2016, fit into all of this? Staged performances like this one take place in a gray zone between utopian, collective vision and capitalism. It's not as direct as selling T-shirts and mugs emblazoned with the character's image, nor is it as benign as superimposing Miku's image onto the family Christmas card. Audiences must come to terms with Miku as both a marketing tool and a medium for emotional information and experience.

In comparison to the Vocaloid idol's massive success in Japan, Miku's reception in the West has seemed slightly more skeptical and amused. Could the Japanese readiness to accept another's voice as a vehicle for one's own lie in a tendency to negate the self – and therefore the voice – in favour of the community? In turn is the West's lack of conviction a result of an emphasis on the »self« and the voice? Social concepts of the »self« vary drastically between the two cultures.

It could be said that if the production of a Western »self« is constructed through differentiation to the »other«, then the Japanese »self« construction is through identification. (It is maybe



Hatsune Miku – »Still Be Here«, image by LaTurbo Avedon / Crypton Future Media, Inc. 2007.

worth noting that the use of the personal pronoun, ie. »I«, »you«, »he/she« etc, is frequently omitted in everyday spoken Japanese language.) Social psychologist Geert Hofstede defines individualism as »a society in which the ties between individuals are loose: everyone is expected to look after himself or herself and his or her immediate family only« (Hofstede, 1994: 261) and collectivism as »a society in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong cohesive ingroups, which throughout people's lifetime continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty« (Hofstede, 1994: 260). If we replace the notion of self with the voice, the lyrics created by Miku's users show these tendencies literally and metaphorically. »As usual, you're hated, pushed away when you haven't done anything. Even though you tried, the reason is »vague« and you're both confused and sad. So, you should use my voice – some people say it's incomprehensible and dissonant, an unattractive voice, but I'm sure it will be of use to you so please let me sing with your own, your very own words.« (from Odds&Ends/ryo). One must not forget that Hatsune Miku derives from the Otaku community, a subculture often (but not always) associated with social inferiority. The term defines people with obsessive interests, commonly huge anime and manga fans, who often seek empowerment through channels such as Cosplay (costume play).

According to Tomonori Shiba, music writer and author of »How Hatsune Miku Changed the World«, the wave of creativity trig-

gered by the phenomenon of the virtual idol is comparable to a »third wave of the summer of love«. The first wave was Woodstock in the 1960s, the second was the rave scene of the 1980s, and his claim is that the utopian ideals and infectious euphoria surrounding Hatsune Miku in online communities constitutes the third wave. If this were true, the effects in Japan were relatively short-lived, and even the virtual idol was chewed up and spat out by the ruthless pop-production machine. However, I am inclined to agree that even if it is not the music itself that brings these users together, that unity is generated through a communal sense of being at the cusp of something revolutionary, be it free love, drugs or free creation; a concept of sharing which is inherent to musical experience. Perhaps Hatsune Miku could be seen as a metaphor for a long-lost voice in Japan finding a global stage; a vehicle for shared experience. The fever has caught on outside of Japan, but it is exciting to see how she will develop now, not just in terms of location but also between genres, cultures and disciplines.

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Mari Matsutoya is a Berlin-based artist originally from Tokyo. Her work focuses on language as a mirror to reality and as a medium that sits on the fence between the visual and the sonic. – www.marimatsutoya.com

AKIHIKO TANIGUCHI – THE EVERYDAY VORTEX

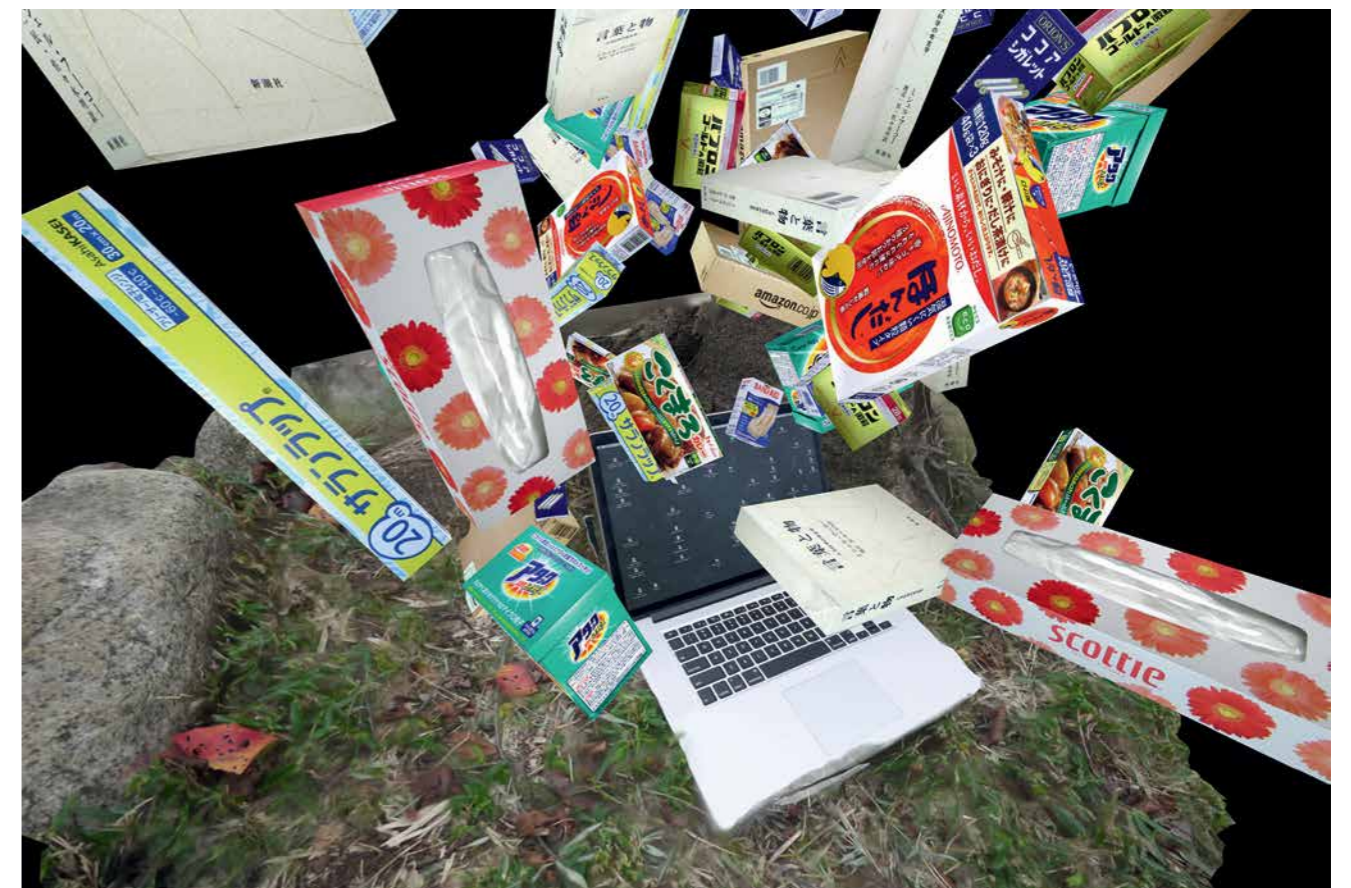
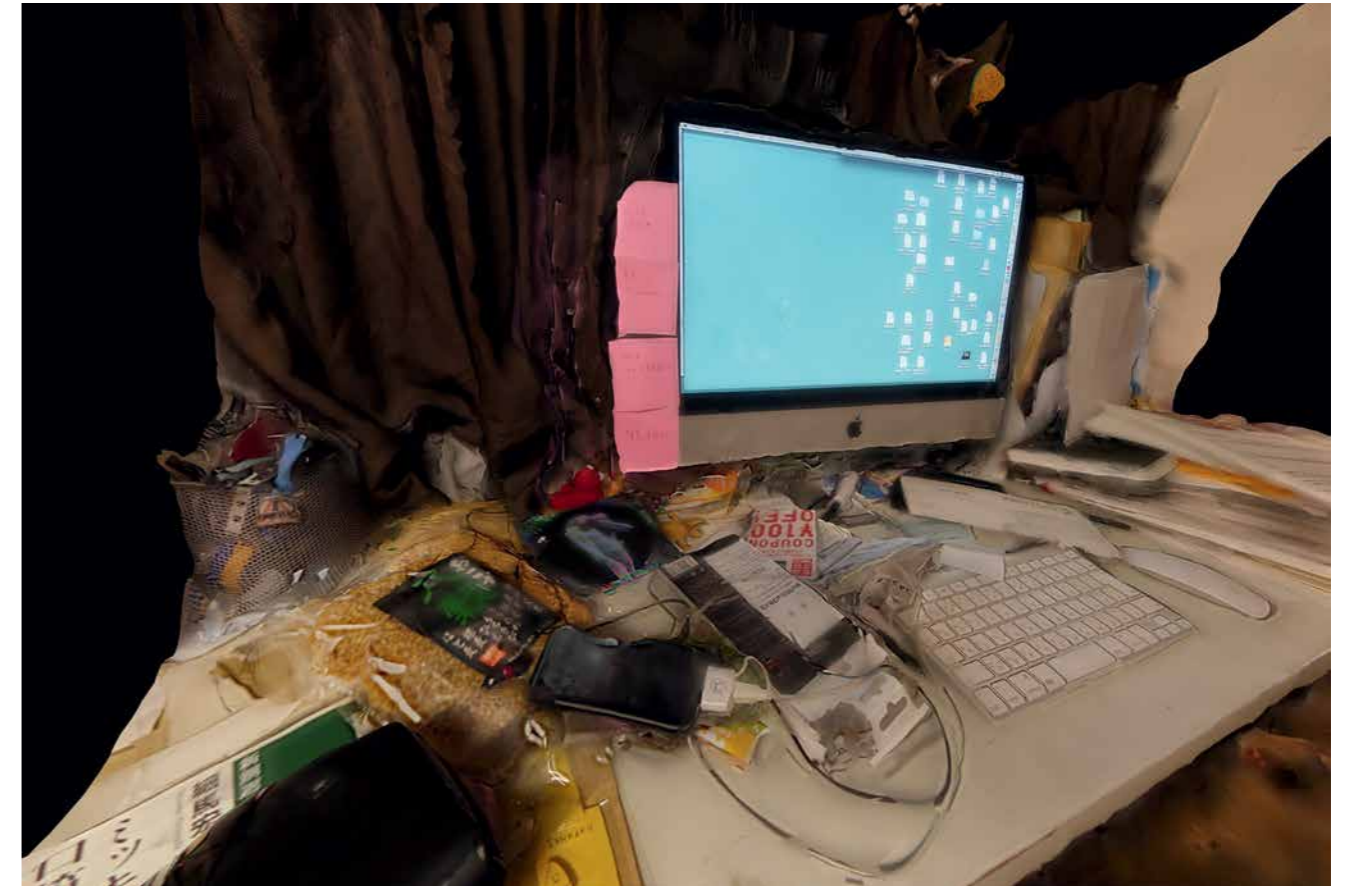
BY ANNIE GÅRLID

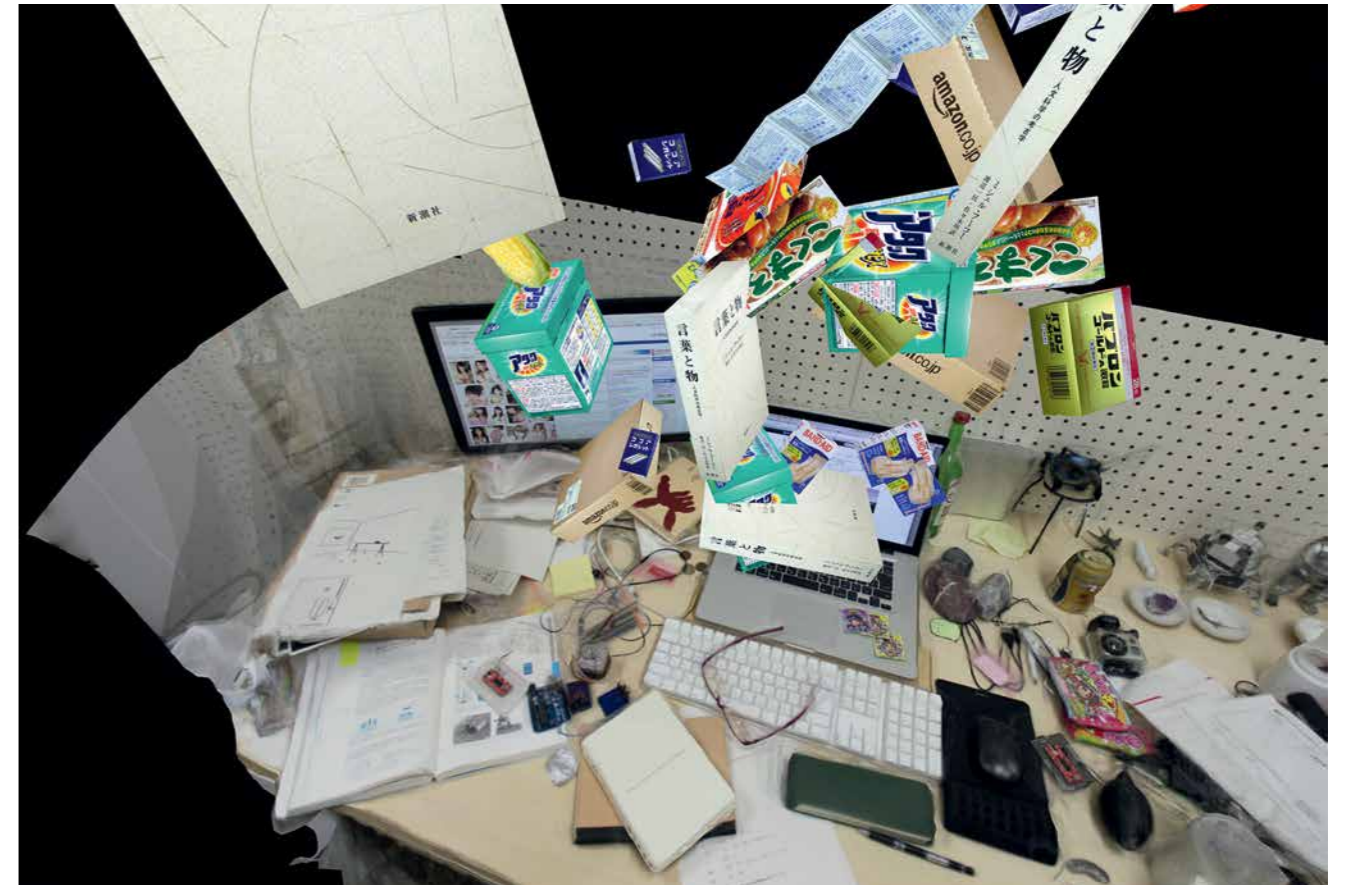
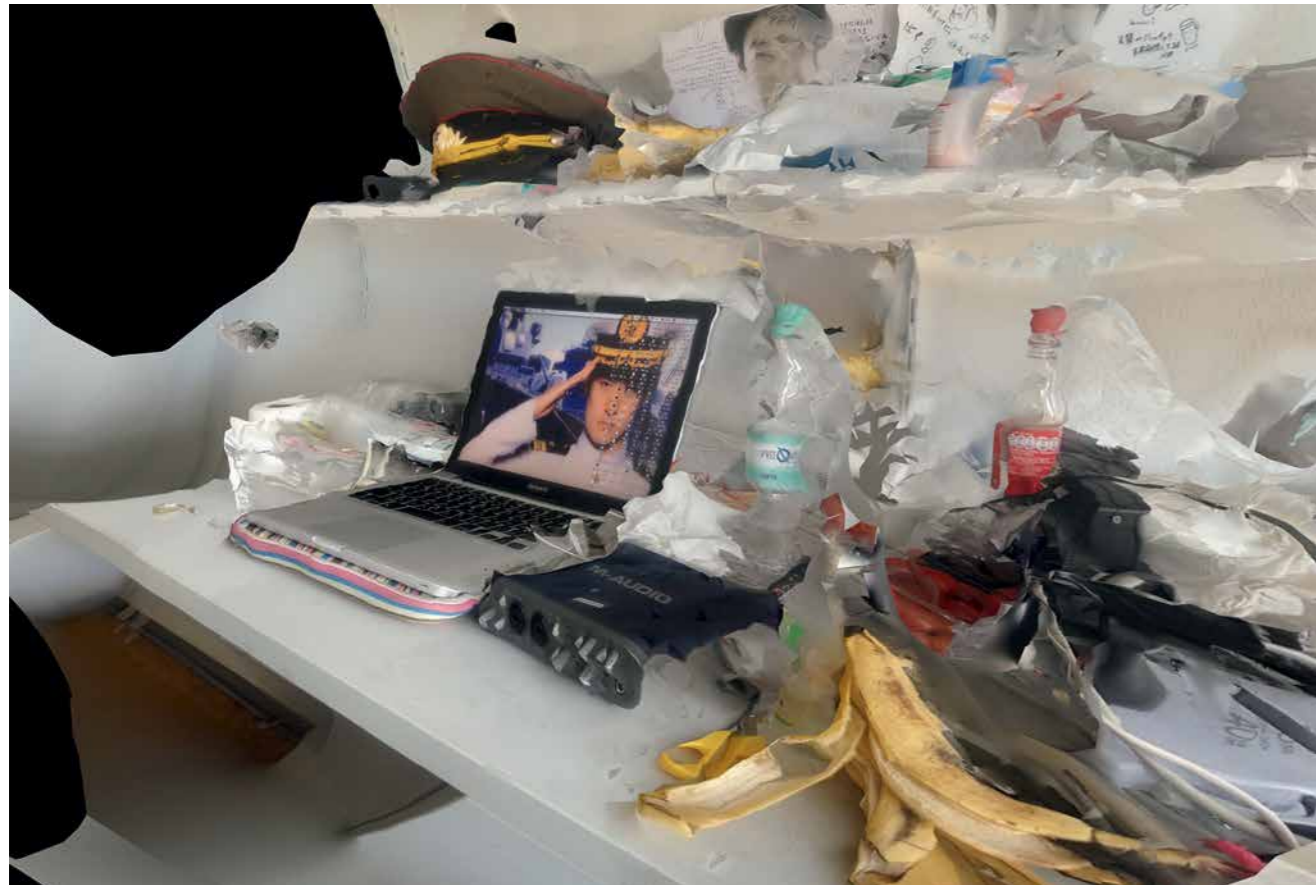
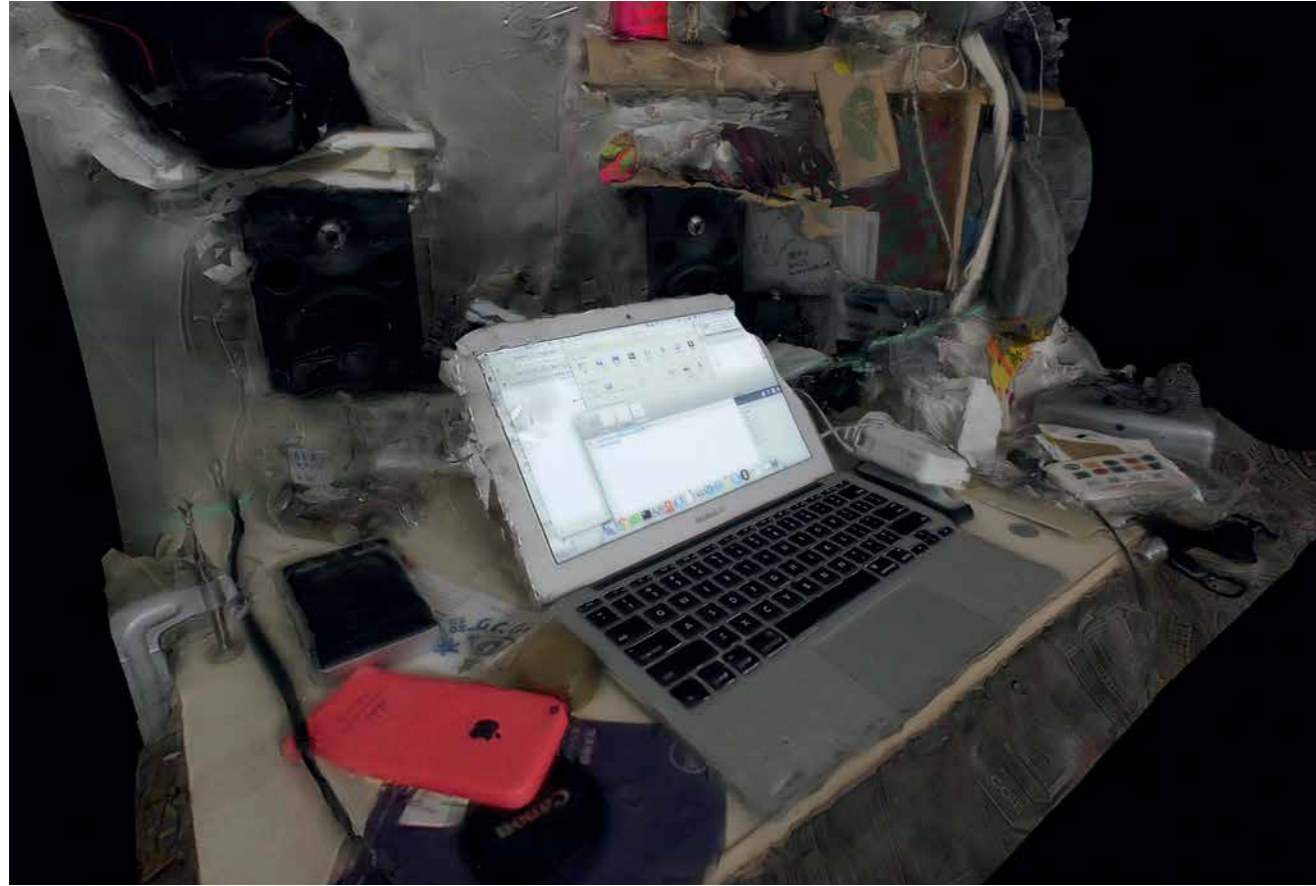
THE DATA REALM IS A SEDUCTIVE AND SELF-EXPANDING MEMBRANE. TECHNOLOGICAL DEVICES ARE BOTH SYMBOLIC AND LITERAL POINTS OF ENTRY INTO THE NEW GEOGRAPHIES THAT COMPRISE THE VIRTUAL ENVIRONMENT. THE USE OF COMPUTERS OR SMARTPHONES TRIGGERS A COGNITIVE TRANSITION INTO AN ENGROSSED, PHYSICALLY PASSIVE STATE IN WHICH DISPARATE CONTENT SYSTEMS OVERLAP AND COMPETE. THE DESKTOP PORTRAITS CREATED BY JAPANESE ARTIST AKIHIKO TANIGUCHI FOR THE VIDEO TO HOLLY HERNDON'S CLUB ANTHEM »CHORUS« BEAR THE STRETCH MARKS AND SCARS OF OUR EVERYDAY PASSAGES FROM ONE SPHERE INTO ANOTHER, FROM THE REAL INTO THE VORTEX.

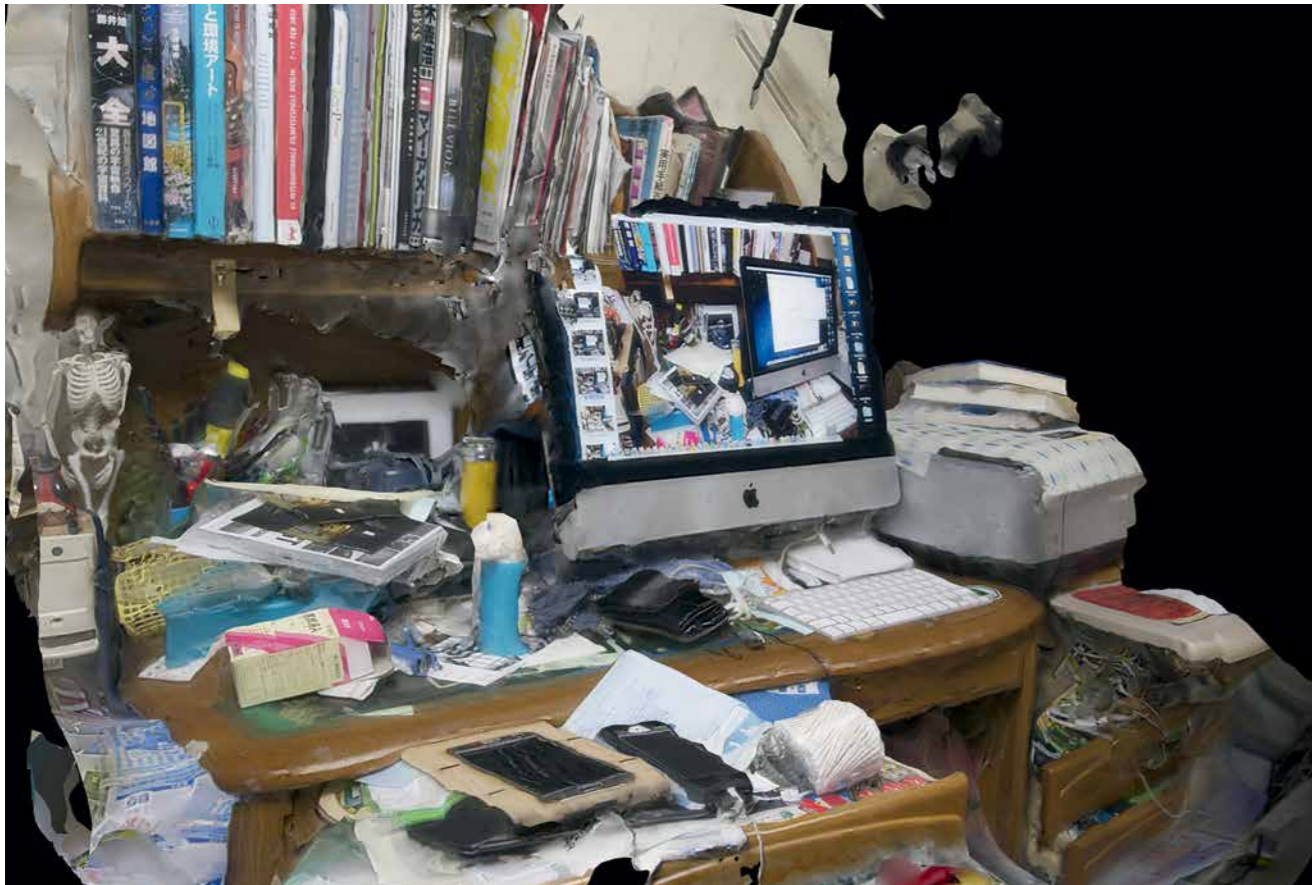
Akihiko Taniguchi produces installations, performances, and video work using self-built devices and software. His practice is concerned with investigating the increasingly quotidian and boundless roles of technology and the internet in our lives, a focus that both Holly Herndon and her frequent collaborator Mat Dryhurst also both share. In his original series manipulating »everyday images« of domestic interiors in »parents' homes«, 2D photographic images of laundry room shelves, bathroom sinks, and other nooks and crannies are processed by a 3D scanner and converted into haphazard, fouled-up renderings. Dryhurst and Herndon first reached out to Taniguchi in 2013 to learn about a system he'd developed for live 3D visuals (it's this system that creates Herndon's characteristic depictions of sashimi, band-aids, cough drops and sponges floating and rotating in space). Shortly thereafter, Taniguchi collaborated with Herndon and Dryhurst on the music video for »Chorus«, the centerpiece of Herndon's acclaimed 2015 album *Platform*. Both »Chorus« and the duo's recent live performances, including a concert organised by CTM in November at Berlin's Haus der Kulturen der Welt, combine the capabilities of Akihiko's 3DVJ program and a cooperative version of his »everyday images«, this time of computer-centred home desk spaces. Four

hundred people, mostly located in Tokyo, responded to an open call for photo submissions. The devices stand as dormant gateways amidst clutter and chaos, both incorporated and incorporating. These portraits infer that the mere sight of a device has the power to provoke disassociation and mental hustle, and the effort at translation speaks as loudly as the original photographic information itself. Most notable is the disparity between ideal and ability; the 2D version leaves informational black holes that the 3D software then fills in with its own cryptic imagination. In an attempt to augment or complete the originals, the program warps and mangles them until they look like flakes of ash left to hover in the cosmos.

As much as these images are familiar and likeable, they also instil a sense of discomfort: who is documenting or surveilling, and how? NSA revelations suggest that as devices are drawn more intimately into our lives, welcomed into our most private and exposed spaces, we make ourselves more vulnerable. Akihito, Herndon, and Dryhurst hold this shining, double-edged sword in the limelight. – www.okikata.org.







NAAFI – RITMOS PERIFÉRICOS

BY MAX PEARL

FORWARD-THINKING MEXICAN COLLECTIVE NAAFI IS USING CLUB MUSIC TO EXPLORE LATIN AMERICAN IDENTITY. MAX PEARL MEETS SOME OF ITS MEMBERS ON THEIR HOME TURF.

Two days before New Year's Eve last year, three friends and I packed up our car and drove ten hours from Mexico City to Puerto Escondido, Oaxaca, a small resort town full of gringo surfers on vacation and hostels run by retired hippies with deep tans. We pulled in around midnight, and the main strip of seafood restaurants, cafes and beach bars was buzzing with tourists celebrating peak vacation season. The sound of salesmen hawking coconuts from street carts mingled with shrill blasts of reggaeton and big-room house blaring out of nightclubs and rooftop patios.

This little paradise is the hometown of NAAFI head honcho Tomás Davo, and it's where he chose to host the label's first-ever mini-weekender, the Club De Playa. It took place a few miles down the coast, away from the touristy chaos, on a private plot of beach reached by meandering dirt roads that thread through a forest of palm trees. Kingdom, L-Vis 1990 and Massacooraan – friends from the labels Fade To Mind and Night Slugs – all flew in from the United States to play headlining sets. Davo had offered them payment in kind: they would purchase their own airfare, and in return he would treat them to a week-long tropical vacation at his parents' house, a short drive away from the beach.

»New Year's was ridiculous«, Davo says, leaning forward over the coffee table in his Mexico City apartment, his eyes electrified. He still can't believe the number of friends, fans and strangers who crossed an entire country for a party they knew nothing about. »That was like, »Why the fuck are we here? How did we get this lineup? These DJs tour the whole world and could charge shit tons of money for New Year's and they're coming here. I don't even know why the fuck they're coming here, because there's no money.«

Davo is high-strung with an eye for details, and his hustle is what got people to take a risk on this first-time festival. Alberto Bustamante – who DJs as Mexican Jihad and co-found-

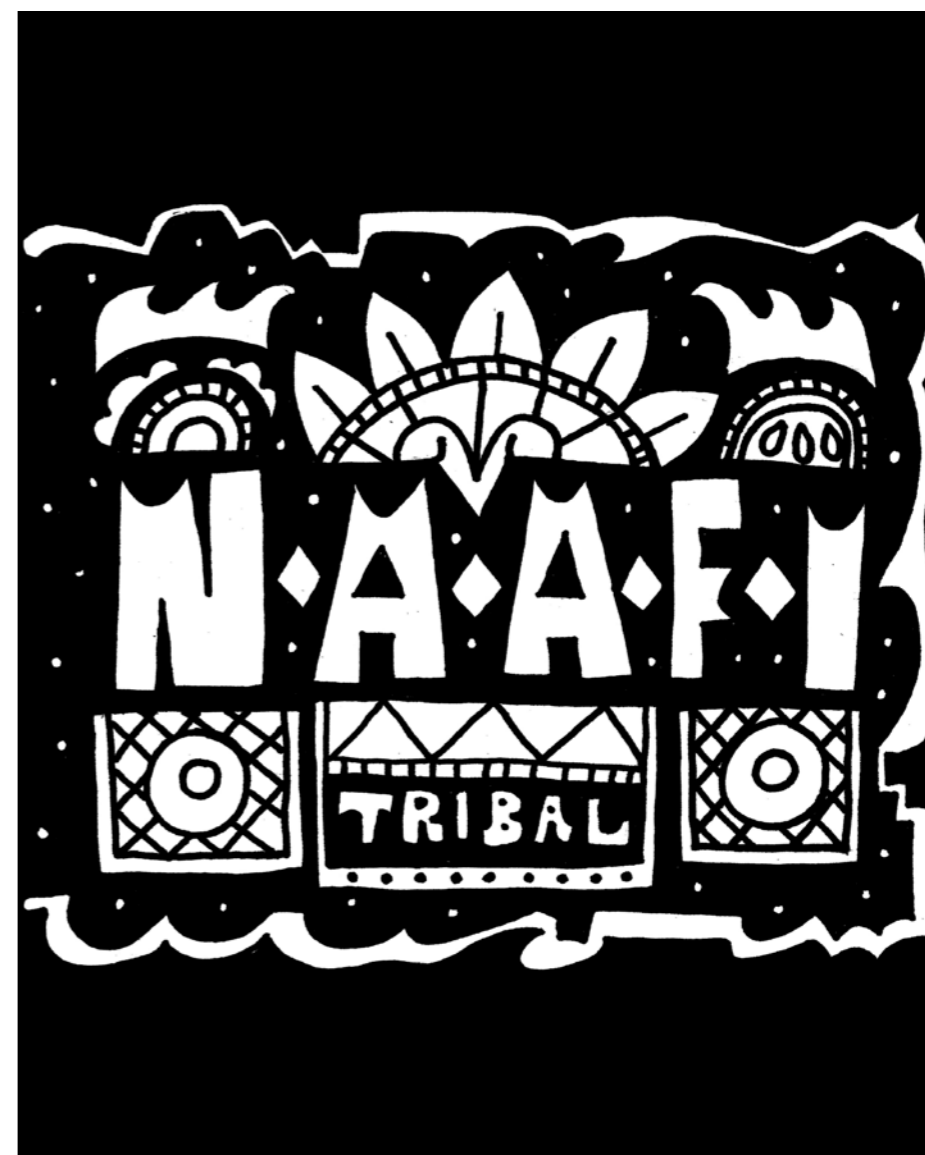
ed NAAFI with Davo, Lauro Robles and Paul Marmota back in 2010 – is the marketing genius behind the visual and conceptual sides of the project. In the months leading up to festival they screen-printed custom NAAFI beach umbrellas, monogrammed NAAFI towels and released a promotional video of the site filmed via a drone-mounted camera. They even paid to have huge, colourful murals painted around Puerto Escondido announcing details of the party.

As the Sunday morning sun crept over the dark expanse of the Pacific Ocean on the festival's third and final morning, I too wondered how it was possible that we had all ended up here at the edge of the earth, listening to Kingdom mix grime instrumentals.

»EVERYTHING THAT'S NEW
IS EXCITING«

Davo's drive to do it bigger and better every time is what pushes NAAFI towards increasingly inventive party concepts (this year they began a six-month DJ residency at Mexico City's most important contemporary art museum, the Museo Jumex). This almost anxious appetite for the new and foreign clearly comes across in the label's sound, which tends to shape-shift while maintaining an ineffable NAAFI energy. Grime, Jersey club, kuduro and ballroom house have all entered the mix at one time or another, taking root within a sonic framework built from deconstructed club rhythms and heavy, apocalyptic ambience.

»Everything that's new is exciting«, Davo says, interrupting himself to lift an orange cat out of his lap. He's wearing a snapback and a pair of tortoise shell glasses, surrounded by glass jugs of clear mezcal from the business his girlfriend runs out of





Alberto Bustamante, Paul Marmota and Tomás Davó.

their apartment. The sliding balcony doors are open, and since it's summer in Mexico City that means rain – usually torrential – from about 6 PM to 10 PM, like clockwork, every day until October. The street outside is leafy and quiet, but you can still hear echoes of the cars honking and screeching on the main avenue a few blocks away.

The crew is always darting between brief but fiery obsessions with regional party sounds from across the world. In July they dropped *Pirata 2*, a mixtape-style compilation of bootleg remixes that splices this season's reggaeton and rap hits with esoteric club experiments from producers like Lotic, Nigga Fox and Rabbit. »It doesn't mean we're gonna do reggaeton forever. In fact maybe that was the last part of it«, Davo explains excitedly. »Maybe we're obsessive for a year, but then next year we'll find something else that makes us say, ›What the fuck?‹ Like tribal: we were obsessed with it, and now it's become a part of us – but NAAFI's not going to throw a tribal party any time soon.«

When Davo says tribal (pronounced ›tree-ball‹), he doesn't mean the tribal house you might associate with vintage Steve Lawler or Danny Tenaglia. He's talking about the boisterous regional party genre – popular with Mexican teens – that is powered by low-budget software, sugar-sweet synths and lurching triplet rhythms. In the spring, NAAFI dropped *TRIBAL*, a three-disc genre retrospective that's divided into three regional sub-styles and curated by three different DJs. »Tribal came and went because nobody bothered to put it on a map, or bothered with any research«, Davo said in an interview with RBMA earlier

this year. The collection, which is the only semi-comprehensive document of the movement, was meant to rectify those years of neglect. »People talked about tribal but it became a novelty and swoosh, disappeared«, Davo said.

The unofficial NAAFI mantra – everything that's new is exciting – doesn't only apply to music. In August they brought a piece of New York's vogue and ballroom culture to Mexico City for the first time. In a seedy second-floor sports bar just outside of downtown, the House of Machos, the House of Shiva and the House of Apocalipstick met face-to-face for the first time to walk the runway in a vogue battle (›house‹ is the term for competing groups of dancers, such as the famous House of LaBeija that features in the film *Paris is Burning*). Mike Q, a world-renowned ballroom DJ whose fame transcends queer circles, spun alongside Venus X, the matriarch behind legendary NYC party Ghe20Goth1k, while dancers competed for prizes in specific categories. »Originally we didn't want to do a ball because it's something that I don't do«, Davo says. »Not only because we're not from New York but because we're not involved in that here. But then these two guys, Franka Polari and Pepe Romero, came to us and they were like, ›We want to do a ball. We've been doing little ones, but nothing that's actually well organised.‹ It was considered to be the first vogue ball in Mexican history.

NAAFI's mercurial taste is a source of criticism. Some see them as trend-hoppers, or at worst, consumers who devour and redistribute foreign ideas without contributing anything of their own. But part of what has made the collective so exciting is its



ability to mitigate this tension – to take new ideas and influences from underground pockets abroad and bring them into dialogue with the Mexican scene. »Apart from the food, everything else in Mexico that's modern is malinchista, because they're looking too much outside«, Davo says, using a term that refers to Mexicans who are too lost in their love for the first world to appreciate their own culture.

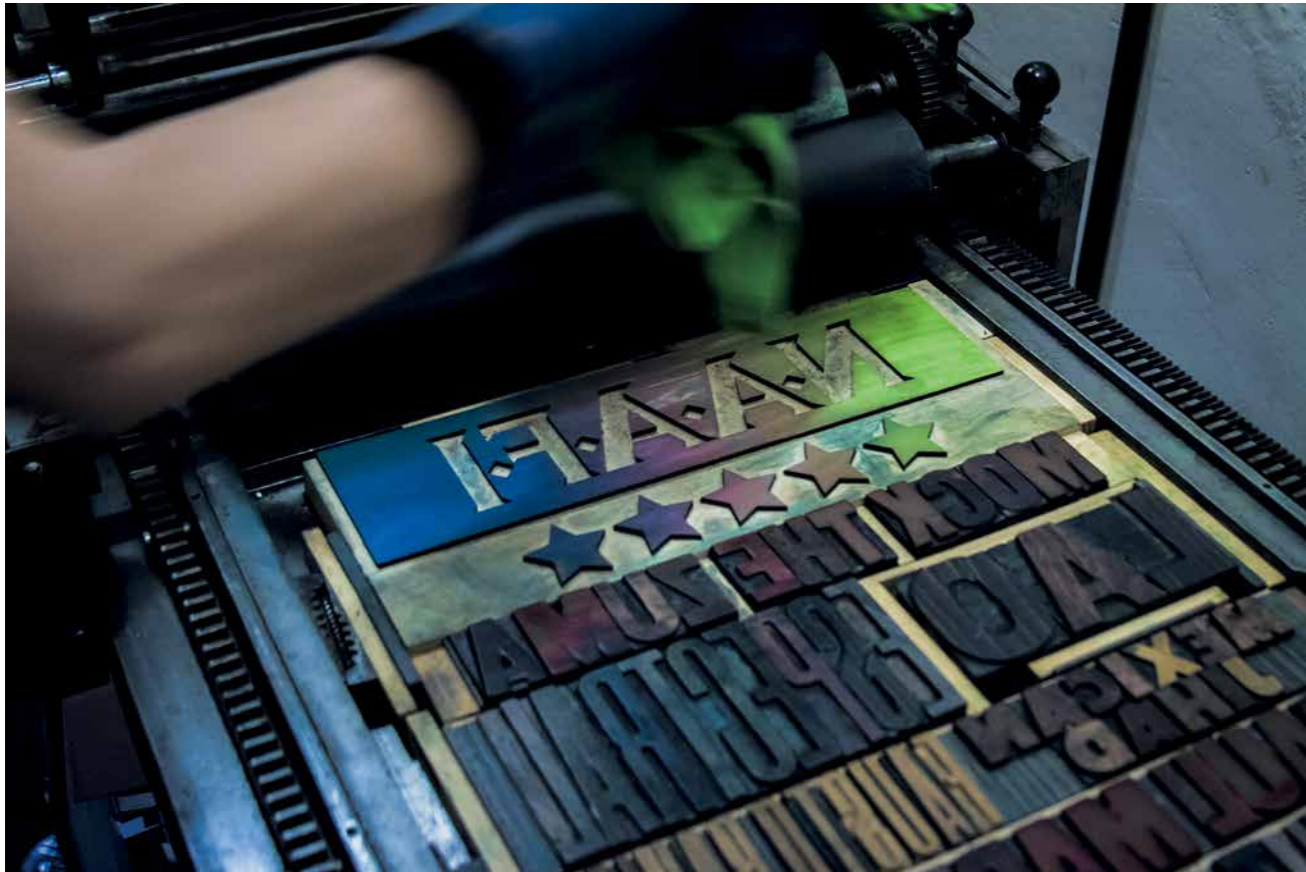
The word ›malinchismo‹ came up many times in RA's *Real Scenes: Mexico City* film. The term comes from the story of La Malinche, the Nahuatl indigenous who betrayed her own people by leading Hernán Cortés and his Spanish conquistadors to the Aztec capital in the early 16th century. It's wielded as one of the nastiest insults possible towards Mexicans who are ashamed of their own Mexican-ness – who have internalised colonial logic to the point that they reproduce its oppressive value systems. »Colonisation never stopped, and as a non-Western but westernised country, Mexico lacks confidence and self-esteem«, Davo explains.

»The official name of Mexico is the ›United States of Mexico‹«, Davo says. »The constitution of Mexico is influenced by the American constitution. La Roma« – the city's gentrified historic neighborhood – ›is built to look like France.‹ The self-confidence problem (a topic you will hear discussed at length in any art or music scene in Mexico) means that imported Western culture is placed on a pedestal, and Mexican artists often seek the approval of foreigners over the support of their own countrymen. »Everyone says, ›I don't feel conquered‹«, said DJ and producer Fig in *Real Scenes: Mexico City*. »But as soon as the

English guy arrives, he's the good one. Or the one from Germany – he gets the biggest artist fee.«

To say that Mexican artists should only work with what's directly at hand would not only be creatively stifling but unfair. Why are kids in Brooklyn allowed to worship 1990s Detroit techno without being seen as self-hating sell-outs, while Mexicans who move to Berlin for the music are accused of betraying their country? NAAFI's producers seem to have collectively found a way to deal with this dilemma, adopting an attitude that asserts their right to participate in global networks of cultural exchange while affirming the strength of their own contributions. »The idea that in order to have a club night in Mexico City you have to bring someone from outside of the country is so stupid«, Alberto Bustamante, AKA Mexican Jihad, told i-D. »We have to support what we have because it's what is responding to the context in which we live.«

»NAAFI have an incredibly strong sense of self and identity in everything they do«, says J'Kerian Morgan, AKA Lotic, over email. Morgan, who's involved with the experimental club music collective Janus, has been vocal in interviews and social media about his feelings of distrust for music that ›seems to have come from nowhere.‹ NAAFI's music, however, makes its own history and context audible. More than an arrangement of rhythmic experiments meant to make a dance floor move, it's guided by a clever and cohesive vision that makes its message feel all the more intentional.



»I think the club world – and music fans in general – are growing bored of music that doesn't have a face or an identity«, Lotic says, attributing the proliferation of place-less music to the »increased closures and policing of clubs – and club music consequently becoming increasingly abstract, less tangible«. NAAFI, with an aesthetic that he says is »undeniably Mexican [and] imbued with confidence«, offers a welcome antidote to that trend.

»COLLECTIVES LIKE NORTEC OR ZZK–THEY HAD TO EXPRESS THE MAXIMUM EXOTICISM OF THEIR IDENTITY. I THINK NOWADAYS, WE DON'T.«

Davo attributes the singularity of NAAFI's sound to co-founder Paul Marmota, a 28-year-old Chilean who moved to Mexico City in 2010 and helped organize NAAFI's modest early club nights. He's now in charge of label A&R. »I'm always drawn to music with honesty and originality – music that responds to its influences without falling into the obvious«, he says via email from Mexico City. »In general, everyone in NAAFI has been friends for years and we're all on the same page. When we integrate new people into the family it's because they share a common bond.«

The unreleased track »Danza de los Diablos« (»Dance of the Devils«) is a forthcoming collaboration between Marmota and fellow NAAFI producer Espectral. It's composed with field recordings from the ritual dance of the same name, which is performed within African-descended communities in the Mexican coastal states of Guerrero and Oaxaca. The traditional dance, which involves a parade of men in long, black, bearded masks being shepherded by an overseer wielding a whip, is performed on October 31st in a ceremony that leads up to the national Day of the Dead.

»Danza de los Diablos« grew from the idea of reinterpreting the music of the Afro-Mexican villages for the context of club music«, Marmota says, explaining that the country's national narrative tends to occlude any mention of its Afro-diasporic culture, which grew from a robust slave trade anchored on both Atlantic and Pacific coasts. »It's important for us to acknowledge the voice of what is called the »third roots«, [because] the country completely ignores and disavows that musical and cultural heritage. It's something that we feel really passionate about.«

In May, Marmota joined Lao – AKA Lauro Robles, the label's fourth co-founder – to represent NAAFI on their first European tour. It helped them understand where they fit within a loosely affiliated international community of experimental club music

producers. »It expanded my mental map«, Marmota says. »They treated us really well and we made a lot of new friends, met a lot of crazy collectives. We saw a really talented, active scene.« He points to a handful of regional crews that stand out as nodes in the global network: Rudeboyz, who are part of the gqom movement based in Durban, South Africa, as well as Poor Gang in Spain and Gang Fatale in London, which was founded by Night Slugs newcomer Neana. Then there's Lit City Trax and The Astral Plane in the US and Janus, the Berlin-based collective that includes acts like M.E.S.H., KABLAM and Lotic.

NAAFI's moment on the global stage has arrived, and they've done it on their own terms. »Historically in electronic music in Latin America a lot of the acts before us that were coming out, they had to be too latin to be real«, Davo says. »Collectives like Nortec or ZZK – they had to express the maximum exoticism of their identity. I think nowadays, we don't.« Rather than pandering to the exoticizing whims of the world music market, their aesthetic reflects the complexities of today's networked age. Many of their releases reference Mexican traditional music and local culture, while others, such as Smurphy's album *Geminiss*, move so far into the future they don't bother with terrestrial references.

»Hearing Spanish in the realm of club music was really exciting to me, because before that there was always a focus on English-speaking samples from R&B, grime and rap«, says Sara Skolnick, former editor of the New York latino culture blog *Remezcla*. She also DJs as Riobamba and runs the Pico Picante residency out of clubs in Boston and Brooklyn. Skolnick recalls her first encounter with NAAFI, an EP from star producer Siete Catorce. »It was around the same time that the tribal sound was having its crossover moment. He was playing with those same rhythms but with this totally apocalyptic, deconstructed take on it. While other artists were going the almost pop route, those early EPs were subverting by going in the opposite direction with an unapologetically dark sound.«

»It's so important to create space for complicating the narrative of the music coming from Latin America«, she continues, »to talk about party vibes just as much as the suffering, violence, the dark shit that happens, and for having club music as a context for this broader range of emotions.« NAAFI has been patient and persistent in sticking to its own narrative, in all of its manifold meanings, rather than reading from someone else's script. »I think we broke through that kind of stigma«, Davo reassures me. »It is latin. That's obvious. But we don't have to dress up.«

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MUSIC'S MORAL GEOGRAPHIES – AFRICAN DRUMMING, MINIMALISM AND DJ CULTURE

BY SEBASTIAN KLOTZ

DO WE EXPOSE *DIFFERENCE*, OR SHOULD ONE ACTIVELY TRY TO ENDORSE *SAMENESS* WHEN COMPARING CULTURES? USING AMERICAN MINIMALIST STEVE REICH'S TIMELESS PIECE, »DRUMMING« AS AN EXAMPLE, SEBASTIAN KLOTZ, CHAIR OF HUMBOLDT UNIVERSITY'S DEPARTMENT OF TRANS-CULTURAL MUSICOLOGY, EXAMINES THE »MUSICAL IMPERSONALISM« OF THE COMPOSER'S APPROACH AS AN ALTERNATIVE METHOD OF MUSICAL APPROPRIATION THAT CIRCUMVENTS MUSEOLOGICAL, ETHNOLOGICAL AND PEDAGOGIC ASPECTS.

Since its existence in human societies, music has served as a medium through which to appropriate, modify and transgress locality and the experience of space. One could even argue that the geographical imagination is deeply embedded in musical and sonic allusions that inform our understanding of geographic phenomena and experiences. In the global age, it becomes more and more difficult to understand music's geographic entanglements, as places of production and consumption can easily span across continents, and as the conditions of consumption have proliferated to a previously unknown extent. While this seems to suggest that locality has become irrelevant, recent research has underlined the relevance of locality and its re-configurations against an increasingly global background (Connell/Gibson 2003).

I would like to argue that these configurations carry a moral charge. Although any potential cross-fertilisation between musical cultures seems to be possible, anchoring vectors that are deeply ingrained in a pre-global geographic imagination organize the cultural field of global musical encounters. These moral geographies steer expectations, mobilize traditions of

ascriptions and affect the cultural meanings that listeners, concert-goers and clubbers make of the music they engage with. Faced with a vast array of musical manifestations, and their respective geographic entanglements, it seems impossible to even identify suitable points of departure for any kind of reflection. In light of this challenge, it is suggested to work towards rich contextualisations of phenomena that touch upon the issue voiced here.

Non-Western musics have exercised a strong appeal on the Western imagination. A case in point is Steve Reich's visit to Africa, which influenced his landmark composition, »Drumming«. Does the secessionist attitude of repetitive and minimal music towards the Western European avant-garde also reflect in its wider moral geography? »Drumming« in turn served as sampling material for DJs. How do we gauge these appropriations: do they confirm or modify these geographies? What are the underlying academic motivations in studying these relationships – do we expose *difference*, or should one actively try to endorse *sameness* when comparing cultures?

Africa is the continent that has perhaps triggered the most coherent set of projections in the field of music among non-African actors. Rhythm has become the most powerful descriptive category in singling out the special features of African musical cultures. As descriptive and normative dimensions tend to mix, the rhythmic capacity has been praised as »a natural gift« of Africans. This discourse on rhythm played a major role in essentializing African musical cultures as body-driven, sensual, spontaneous and rhythmically alert. It comes as no surprise that a recent cross-cultural study of musical emotions, undertaken by a prestigious research institution, would turn to a seemingly remote African population for psychological tests on the validity of emotional musical universals (Fritz 2013, and below).

»Drumming«, at least according to one critic, did conjure moral geographies when it premiered in 1971:

»It's not very often that a long complex piece of new music receives a standing ovation. What was it about Steve Reich's »Drumming« that brought the audience to its feet at the Museum of Modern Art on December 3? The simple fact that 13 musicians had performed intricate rhythms with amazing precision for an hour and half no doubt had a lot to do with it. Or perhaps it was because the simple white-note scales were refreshing to ears grown weary of dissonance. Or perhaps it was the joyous blend of marimbas, glockenspiels, drums and voices that turned everyone on. Or was it the pleasure of seeing African and European elements so thoroughly fused – almost as if we really did live in one world. Or perhaps it was because the music had spoken directly to the senses, with the sound itself never sacrificed for the more intellectual rhythmic side of the piece.«¹⁾

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EXPERIENCE OF SPACE.«

How can a composition suggest that we live »in one world«? Which compositional strategies support this argument? Can the »African and European elements« be identified? Why would a self-consciously U.S. American composer resort to European elements, especially as the reception of minimalism in European intellectual communities has been highly problematic?

In what follows, I aim to identify some of the geographical entanglements that are tied to Reich's study stay in Africa, to his

work »Drumming« and to a DJ adaption of the piece released in 1999.²⁾

IMPERSONALIZING EWE DRUMMING

»Drumming« is an ensemble percussion piece with voices, composed in 1970 and 1971, with the following instrumentation:

Four Pairs of Tuned Bongo Drums
Three Marimbas
Three Glockenspiels
Soprano and Alto Voices
Whistling and Piccolo

The instruments appear in specific groupings across the four parts of the composition:

Part I: Bongos
Part II: Three Marimbas played by nine players, together with two women's voices
Part III: Three Glockenspiels played by four players with whistling and piccolo
Part IV: For all these instruments and voices combined

The duration is approximately 55–75 minutes (Reich 2011). According to the composer, »Drumming« allowed him to introduce new techniques:

»(1) the process of gradually substituting notes for rests (or rests for notes) within a constantly repeating rhythmic cycle, (2) the use of the human voice in an instrumental ensemble to precisely imitate the sound of the instruments, (3) gradual but complete changes of timbre while pitch and rhythm remain constant.« (Reich 2011, »Note by the Composer«)

Quintessentially, Reich states that the whole piece is derived from one pattern: »There is, then, only one basic rhythmic pattern for all of »Drumming.« (ibd.). This pattern is unfolded by filling rests, or rather by substituting rests with beats. In the process, resulting patterns can be heard. Some sections maintain a pattern while a seamless change of instruments and timbres is undertaken. The rhythm and pace are upheld while instrumentation changes.

In his *Writings*, the composer introduces »Drumming« as a result of a biographical learning process in Africa (Reich 2002, 56). He recounts how he obtained stepwise familiarity with the intricate rhythmic patterns using a recorder that allowed him to slow down the tempo in order to grasp the interlocking patterns. It is striking that he avoids any reference to the potentially »different« or »exotic« setting of musical culture. The experience is paraphrased in the mode of very self-conscious and clear reflection of this experience within his own career and his compositional ambitions. It is not the encounter with Africa that primarily matters, but the fact that he found confirmation for specific compositional principles which affected his compositional thought in general. We learn that he took recourse to traditional African drumming, with transcriptions supplied by Arthur Jones' classical study *Studies in African Music* which was published in 1959 (Jones 1959).

»MUSIC AND AUDIO EMERGE AS PERHAPS THE MOST COMPELLING AFFECTIVE PRACTICES IN WHICH WE NEGOTIATE GLOBAL GEOGRAPHIES AND OUR RESPECTIVE MORAL CONCERNS.«

The 1970s allowed a global music market to take shape. Given the weight of these tendencies, it is quite astounding that Reich prefers to phrase his African encounter not within the frame of a wider cultural dialogue, but in terms of merely compositional issues. He was seeking ways of expressing a musical »impersonalism«, which worked against the exposed subjectivity of the bulk of Western experimentalism, and he was seeking confirmation of his ideas in the field of orchestration and timbre. In addition, familiarity with Ewe cross-rhythms led to a mature handling of musical patterns.

I would like to suggest that these were very conscious and well-reflected decisions, as they pointed towards alternative appropriations of African musics that circumvented museological, ethnological and pedagogic aspects. Reich bypasses the issues of composition/improvisation, of cultural contact and overlap, of fixing the essence of African music, of the ritual and cultural function of Ewe drumming in Ewe culture. Right from the start, he was focusing on something that would target his own creative development and Western audiences for whom he wrote his works. This is a statement in itself, given that the 1970s witnessed the first active cultural marketing of indigenous traditions by African state agencies and cultural boards. The U.S. Institute for International Education had issued a travel grant to Reich (Reich 2002, 55). The Institute still has a presence in Accra. The composer was not an independent tourist, but his contacts with Ghana's musical culture were overseen by the Arts Council of Ghana. The arrival of Reich in Accra coincided with the foundation of the Ghanaian National Dance Ensemble. Thus, quite a number of further African players got involved in the biographical and cross-cultural configuration under review. It also turns out that other Western composers, musicians and musicologists had been consulting only a selected number of well-connected actors in Ghana. The teacher with whom Reich studied in Accra, Gideon Alorworye, was among those frequently consulted by other visitors.

Reich approached the »African thinking« (Reich 2002, 71) by way of intense musical instruction, and via elaborate transcriptions of rhythmic textures. His academic reference, Arthur Jones, had anticipated this »trilateral collaboration« between researcher, drum recorder machine³⁾, and African musician in the 1950s (Jones 1959, vol. 1, 14). Jones was interested in how Africans understand their music (ibid., 15) and quite aware that the score produced by the drum recorder notation would make the music »Un-African« (ibid., 127). Jones's detailed transcrip-

tions of full works should allow non-African musicians to play African music, respecting the complex cross-rhythmic structures. To Jones, transcription was a prerequisite for understanding African music (ibid., 10). Reich's ambition is narrower in the sense that he is interested in technical details against the background of »African thinking«, which is not spelled out by Reich in his *Writings*. Throughout the illustrated *Writings*, there is not a single image of Gideon Alorworye, nor of himself during his African stay. The account focuses on technical and performance matters. The social and symbolic powers of drumming and of music in general in African societies is also covered, but the actors with whom he communicated in Ghana remain silent.

Although minimalism still resonates with the spiritualistic tendencies of the 1960s and 1970s, Reich, in his *Writings*, does not make any attempt to address the relevance of the psycho-technology and social psychology of Ewe dance-drumming (Ladzepko) in the moment of cultural translation to Western concert performances.

The gradual processes that play themselves out in »Drumming« surely absorb listeners' minds, but no further social meanings seem to be tied to them. Reich seems to have chosen cross-rhythms for their technical, didactic qualities in the first place. It is precisely through this denial of an expected functionality or simple »continuation« of Ewe music that his use of patterns gains expressive powers on the territory that »Drumming« spans. The avoidance of nostalgia, the elimination of any biographical allusions, and the insistence on »impersonality«⁴⁾ contribute to a *non-identity* of »Drumming« and the African experience.⁵⁾ We are at a loss in establishing any causality here. The composer is not *dramatizing* any explicit emotion or biographical trait, but the process of gradual changes of patterns, of timbre and of texture. The combination of repetition and non-referentiality, as compared to nostalgic, emotional, autobiographical referentiality, is crucial in this context. In connection with the neglect of the social role of dance-drumming in Ewe society, Reich creates a kind of abstraction from the specific circumstances, while the patterning obviously connects to his studies in Ghana. For lack of better terms, the recombinant variants⁶⁾ of drumming as encountered in Ghana that make up »Drumming« can be read as a *de-territorialisation*.⁷⁾ Yet the question remains: Does Reich drum, literally or metaphorically, »with« the African musicians, or without or »against« them? Which moral geographies have influenced his African encoun-

ter? Is his creative approach an option for neutralising the authenticity debate?

Apparently, no African drummer has been invited to join performances of »Drumming« back home in the West. It was never meant to radiate into African communities. While this clearly estranges »Drumming« from the circumstances that inspired it, the work also stands apart from Western experimentalism and from the European avant-garde. Through its de-personalised, generic title which highlights the activity of playing, it makes a strong non-intellectualist statement. Through its man-made repetitive patterning, it collapsed the structuralistic and individualistic foundations of musical thinking in the tradition of Darmstadt. The provocation of the title extends even further, as no other instrumental group would offer itself for an acceptable activist title: *keyboarding* or *stringing*, which would quintessentially capture Western musical discursive systems, would simply not function.

Performing »Drumming« turned out to be problematic and ambivalent. Reich himself pondered the shortcomings of his manuscript score on the preface to the re-edited score. Initially, the composer had shown »how to play the piece during rehearsal by playing the patterns, showing how to phase ahead, rehearsing it, and so on. Only after the entire piece was completed did I make an ink manuscript which in many ways was difficult to read, ambiguous as to interpretation and in some cases, mistaken as to note values in the choices and piccolo parts. For 40 years, this manuscript has circulated and an increasing number of unfortunate performances have been the result.« (Reich 2011, »About this edition«)

Great care has also been taken on the engineering side, with the sound engineer emerging as a »member of the performing ensemble« (ibid.). Pace, precision, transparency, and perfection, the hallmarks of minimalist aesthetics, were relying, among other factors, on exact microphone positioning.

This merely technical concern and effort is a feature that shields »Drumming« from wrong assumptions about »Otherness« or »Sameness« *vis-à-vis* »African drumming«. Reich never claims cultural symmetry. It allows him to override assumed intrinsic differences. It emphatically situates itself in the sphere of *music-making* that reaches from Africa to the Museum of Modern Arts where »Drumming« premiered⁸⁾ and thus levels differences. Looking back at his African months, Steve Reich states that

he simply »continue[d] composing, but with the knowledge of the non-Western music one has studied« (Reich 2002, 70). The statement is less trivial than it sounds and signals a moral geography that avoids normative claims and that implicitly strengthens global musicality. By not aiming to »understand« African music, Steve Reich upholds a range of options within a cross-cultural field that musically articulated *new geographies*. Ewe dance drumming is both present and absent in »Drumming«. The work opens a resonating space that cannot be measured by standards of symmetry and reciprocity which informs present-day ethno-musicological discourses that seek to enhance dialogical cultural practices (Kaufman Shelemay 2013).

ABSORBING »DRUMMING«

While there is no hint at any African appropriation of Reich's work »Drumming«, DJ culture and electronica have acknowledged the role of Steve Reich in their genres in various ways. »Drumming« became itself the object of creative manipulation: the CD anthology *Reich Remixed*⁹⁾ features a track by DJ Mantronik called »Maximum Drum Formula« which works with samples drawn from a studio recording of »Drumming«. Those who know »Drumming« will immediately recognise it. To those unfamiliar it may pass as a track with extensive rhythmic structures reminiscent of African traditions.

The highly controlled posture of Reich's »Drumming« is transformed into an immersive, dizzying sequence of dirty bass-lines, vocoded breaks, scratches and echoes, lending it depth and a physical, danceable contour. Reich's »recombinant strategy« (Fink 2005) is the subject of a new mode of recombination. The layered track structure of EDM (Butler 2007) has similarities with the resting and added part strategy that Reich tested in »Drumming«. Furthermore, EDM cultivates an impersonal, participatory attitude that it shares with Reich's search for an impersonal, non-subjectivist musical style. DJ Mantronik may have felt drawn to »Drumming« as he had started experimenting with log drumming similar to West African drumming styles before he produced the piece on *Reich Remixed*¹⁰⁾. This clearly lends the interface of African musics, minimalism and DJing a new spin that needs to be explored in future studies.¹¹⁾

As to the musical geographies, »Maximum Drum Formula« seems to simply absorb previous orientations without any further moral intent. While the creation of »Drumming« required a trip to Ghana for an on-site initiation to local dance-drum-

ming, as well as the sensitive ears, hands and the recorder of the composer, the DJ simply browsed his digital library to create samples from »Drumming«. Just as Reich imaginatively re-mixed Ewe drumming practices, his work »Drumming« is now cast according to the prerequisites of DJ culture. Reich's carefully orchestrated biographical experience is absorbed into a completely globalised musical style that neutralizes issues of authenticity, reference and origin. The delicacy of Reich's patterning, his careful moral geography of not reproducing African musics, is not further enhanced but technologically pacified and contained. The CD anthology *Reich Remixed*, from the 1990s, imports a historicizing impetus into the globalised electronic dance music market, allowing moments of homage and reflexivity into a fast-paced, future-bound industry that openly cultivated (and marketed) a retrospective view. In fact, DJs contributing to *Reich Remixed* were provided with separate tracks from the multi-track studio recordings by Nonesuch (Carter 2012), the label which released both »Drumming« and other original compositions by Reich and the anthology *Reich Remixed*.

A closer look at the programming strategy applied by the DJ yields little sensitivity for the principles that Reich had introduced in »Drumming«. DJ Mantronik has been more daring in other tracks. The transformation into regular beat structure with strong bass line levels Reich's intricate rhythmic structures. »Drumming« needs to assert itself against the metric and formal imperative of electronic dance music. No wonder only the fast-paced sections from parts 1 and 2 of »Drumming« have been selected. »Maximum Drum Formula«, therefore, is not dialogical in the sense of adopting and extending the compositional principles of »Drumming«.

Paradoxically, by smoothly incorporating »Drumming« and Reich's African experience as mediated in this composition within EDM, a move towards sameness is becoming visible in which the abstracting forces of digital technologies and present-day academic effort do coincide to work towards *sameness* rather than *difference* (Agawu 2003). At the same time, non-Western institutions and actors insist on setting themselves apart and on fostering local traditions.¹² It is against this background that current geographical and moral negotiations take place. They enable a variety of transculturally situated musical listening. If we concede to Steve Reich a kind of situative understanding of African musics that did not compromise these traditions, it still remains to be shown how specifically this understanding informs affective geographies and how it translates into social, aesthetic and commercial effects.

Which new geographies arise out of these situations? Are they in any way sustainable? Why does Africa continue to be thought of as an entity partially unaffected by the West? Biolo-

gist and music psychologist Tom Fritz who travelled to the Mafa population in Cameroon for field research on musical universals unknowingly re-enacted a phonographic research practice that was invented around 1900 in the formative years of comparative musicology. Contrary to music cognition studies, the present reflexive ethnomusicology regards musical universals as strong cultural constructs that form part of wider strategies of representations and cultures of measurement. In addition, ethnomusicologists with particular emphasis on Africa and the Western study of African musical practices have suggested recalibrating the relationship between specific local traditions and the contingent:

»The idea would be to unearth the impulses that motivate acts of performance, and to seek to interpret them in terms of broader, perhaps even generic, cultural impulses. Such a project would ultimately look beyond the immediate material level, not by denying that Africans blow on elephant horns, cover drums with animal skin, or make flutes out of bamboo, but by emphasizing the contingency of their material and conceptual investments. Objects function as means to an end, and it is the complex of actions elicited by such objects that betrays the untranslatable impulses behind performance. Focusing on such impulses promotes a cross-cultural vision without denying the accidental specifics of local (African) practices [...] Restoring a notional sameness to the work of ethnomusicology will go a long way toward achieving something that has hitherto remained only a theoretical possibility, namely, an ethical study of African music.« (Agawu 2003, 234–5)

The academy, too, promotes its moral geographies. Here, Dr. Tom Fritz introduces the research set-up:

»The investigation of musical universals with Western music stimuli would ideally require participants who are completely naive to Western music [...] The individuals investigated in the present study belong to the Mafa, one of approximately 250 ethnic groups that make up the population of Cameroon. They are located in the Extreme North in the Mandara mountain range, where the more remote Mafa settlements do not have electrical supply, and are still inhabited by many individuals who pursue a traditional lifestyle, some of whom have not been exposed to Western music. Interestingly, the Mafa do not have a word for music, because all musical activity is an integral part of actions or rituals. This indicated that for the Mafa, music is highly ritualistic, interpersonal and symbolic and Mafa music is rather unlikely to be appreciated for its iconic-sign-quality.« (Fritz 2013, 2)

While the Mafa actors function as *passive respondents* in a psychological test series that relies on Western stimuli, the Ewe musicians that taught Steve Reich about cross-rhythms were

strong *active actors*. Reich fulfilled a *mediating role*, while DJ Mantronik is an *adaptor* of Reich's work. Both Reich and Fritz visited Africa as collectors. Their experience and data were processed and displayed back home in the West.

Each of these social and cultural roles is linked to geographic sites (the Mafa village and the Max Planck Institute for Human Cognitive and Brain Sciences in Leipzig/Germany; Accra and New York City; the RCA recording studio A in New York City for the Nonesuch Recording of Reich's »Drumming«; The Robot Crib in New York Studio for Mantronik's studio work for *Reich Remixed*). Actors show various degrees of mobility and social agency. It is their musical, academic and commercial aspirations and the medium of music that links these sites. Music seems to function without even understanding the specificity of traditions. For this reason, no musical and receptive strategy in the complex cluster of musical practices presented in this essay can be termed right or wrong. Reich was legitimised to gear his focus in Africa toward his own creative interests and to resist a mere reproduction of ethnic dance-drumming. Ewe musicians were free to share as much of their own culture with their visitor as they wished. Musical universals carry a strong fascination among psychologists, and DJs will select samples that work best in their technological environment and on the dance floor.

I have been trying to elucidate some entanglements of music's moral geographies that reach from Ewe dance drumming via minimalism to DJ culture and psychological tests. These entanglements embrace de-territorialisations and appropriations that can disregard moral dimensions that were previously linked to specific musical productions under specific circumstances. Music conjures these connectivities within split seconds. It can articulate a sense of belonging and blend real and virtual geographies. Music and audio emerge as perhaps the most compelling affective practices in which we negotiate global geographies and our respective moral concerns.

Dr. Sebastian Klotz is professor of Trans-Cultural Musicology at Humboldt University Berlin. His research interests span from Quattrocento dance to theories of musical action and to musical knowledge cultures. His project »Berlin, Chicago, Kolkata – Music as Medium of Urban Transformations« (2008 to 2012) was supported by Alexander von Humboldt-Stiftung.

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- *1) Cf. www.newmusicbox.org/articles/Steve-Reichs-Drumming/
- *2) This essay draws on previous work of mine which is accessible online www.atodya.com/ewe-drumming/
- *3) The drum recorder is an electro-mechanical device that notates musical events on a moving strip of paper.
- *4) The notion of impersonalism which Reich attributes to Ewe music should be further explored among Ewe actors and in Ewe discourse. To Reich, it opens an important option in legitimizing minimal music in general.
- *5) Momemi captures this delicate relationship by paraphrasing the relation of the composition to Ewe musical culture as »separate but related worlds« (Momemi 2001).
- *6) Robert Fink placed minimal music against the background of repetitive cultural practices in US post-war consumer culture. I owe the idea of »capitalist abstraction« arising out of technologies and the term »recombinant cultures« to him, cf. Fink 2005.
- *7) Deleuze and Guattari address the »deterritorializing force« of music, cf. Deleuze/Guattari 1987, 302.
- *8) See the concert review as quoted above.
- *9) Various Artists, *Reich Remixed* © Nonesuch Records 1999.
- *10) Information culled from www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kurtis_Mantronik
- *11) Complex rhythmic layering that is fairly rare in mainstream electronica can be observed in Mantronik's track »Needle to the Groove«, released on Mantronix, *The Album*, © Sleeping Bag Records 1985. From 0:00 to 0:36, it features continuous fast pulsation, multi-layering and irregular break patterns that strongly evoke the textures of Drumming.
- *12) Cf. www.ug.edu.gh/music/about/brief_history

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JUMPING THE GAP: THE DISTANCE BETWEEN TAONGA PUORO AND EXPERIMENTAL MUSIC

BY ROB THORNE

REFLECTING HIS WORK WITHIN THE REVIVAL OF TRADITIONAL MAORI MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS, ROB THORNE EXPLORES THE FLUID BOUNDARIES BETWEEN TRADITION AND INNOVATION, AND EXPLAINS HOW ACTIVE DISCOVERY, VERSATILITY AND HYBRIDITY ARE IMPORTANT GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR MUSICS OLD AND NEW.

Experimental music is about innovation and the revival of taonga puoro (traditional Maori musical instruments) is about tradition. Yet a large part of reclaiming, re-learning, rediscovering and reviving the traditions of taonga puoro has come out of improvisation: improvising construction, improvising playing methods and styles, improvising how something should sound according to specific memories of people present and passed, improvising whole instruments from scant and rare or singular, historical descriptions, and sometimes even improvising on knowledge when large parts of accounts have been mislaid/covered over (lost).

One blank area of knowledge occurs in regard to the pūtōrino (bugle flute). It is known that it was used musically in a duet accompaniment with the kōauau (short open-ended tubular flute), as in the story of Tūtānekai (Hinemoa) and Tiki from Rotorua. But how? One might assume (improvise) that the pūtōrino plays a drone bed underneath the kōauau, as this is what this instrument seems to do well, but we cannot be certain. The pūtōrino can be played both as a flute and a horn. Maybe it was trumpeted, while the kōauau played a flute melody over the top. As a flute, because of its technically monotonous yet harmonic abilities, maybe it was played as a rhythmical harmoniser. The principles of action archaeology determine that we can gather good (acceptable) evidence as to how things were done, or achieved, by putting theory into practice and trying things out. By experimenting. Materially, we collect and observe physical evidence from artefacts, and then »jump the gap« between what we know (»what«), and what we theorise (»if«), with experimental action (»how«). Musically we do this by improvising: work-

ing with the »what« and »if« to develop the potential »how«. No matter what we discover through practice (action), we need to remain critical of what we »discover«. Large amounts of revivalist learning in this era in regard to playing style, technique and method has come about through calculated trial and error i.e. improvisation. New practices, and even new traditions have been developed. A good example of this is the playing of the pūtōrino (often horizontally) across the central aperture. There is no provenance (traditional or historical source) for this being done, yet it makes a fantastic and uniquely »Maori« sound and is more than possible – it is easy. As a result, the method has recently become popular. This is a good reminder in the science of cultural rediscovery that »just because something is possible (now), does not mean it was done (then)«. A culture governed and bound by ritual, belief, meaning and magic may restrict the way things are done for many reasons that have nothing to do with achievability or modern logic.

Innovation cannot exist without tradition, and tradition should never be considered as static or fixed. Within culture changes and flows, traditions can be strengthened or can dwindle. Tradition requires innovation to challenge and confirm its foundation. Many cultural traditions and their supporting legends and myths involve great innovators who break with tradition to change the way things are done and perceived. Maui was one such hero in Maori culture.

Experimental music is about discovery while taonga puoro is about rediscovery. Unlike other ancient musical traditions, taonga puoro lacks a consistent, fixed body of instrumental



Rob Thorne plays pūtōrino, a traditional Maori instrument that is both a flute and horn. Image by Jo Berry-Loughrey.

»INNOVATION CANNOT EXIST WITHOUT TRADITION,
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AS STATIC OR FIXED.«

musical learning into which a student can engage and study from the »inside«. Many musical traditions involve a master/apprentice mode of knowledge translation. In some, the master spends their entire career working with a set of musical pieces and skills that are unique to them. These are their cultural responsibility, and are passed to them by their own master, and so on through the ages. The musical culture of taonga puoro is what might be termed as a »broken tradition« – at some point the transmission of knowledge was discontinued. As a result, there is now virtually no traditional »inside«. The tradition from which a student learns might be musical (as in song or dance), or it might be historical or cultural, encompassing oral tradition, stories, whakapapa (genealogy) or mythology. Neither of these, however, are specifically »insider« modes of instruction in musical instrument practice. At some point the instrumental musician must »jump the gap« and improvise from their wider non-specific (non-instrumental) knowledge, to play what they think is most suitable within their current context. Such learning is knowledge-based rather than inherently skill and practice-based. Currently with taonga puoro, to learn from a master is to learn (often basic to intermediate) usage, protocol and technique rather than master skill sets and techniques or specific sets of musical pieces and the finer intricacies of how these should be played according to tradition. Process and outcomes are therefore currently indeterminate. The rest of the student's learning and mastery is then achieved through a personal quest for knowledge and skill. This method, though, may be a tradition of sorts. One story I have been told relates to the traditional learning of pūtōrino, and was implied as regionally specific. The student was given an instrument by the teacher and sent off into the bush, with instruction to not return until they were able to play. Such a tradition could potentially determine a very wide range of playing styles, techniques and skill levels, with a vast variety of self-styled methods and musical compositions.

Discovering (mining, finding, creating) sound and organising it using musical criteria is one element of experimental music. This process of discovering sound and exploring musical (and non-musical) criteria involves deconstructing and reconstructing our understanding of what music is – a key principle of experimentalism. We take what we know and reorganise and rework it into something that we (or the listener) no longer recognises as music. Of course, the more we do this, the more we become familiar with what we do, to the point of constructing whole new sets of understanding and criteria. Soon enough, we perceive it as music. I like to use a terrain metaphor, where actions, criteria and »rules« or boundaries

are roads and pathways within networks or maps, and differing outcomes are whole new places. Innovation is often about deconstructing traditional process and then reconstructing new outcomes. While the revival of taonga puoro as a tradition is similar to this process as it deconstructs to reconstruct, it may be more about constructing new processes with whole new outcomes that, with time, will be perceived and accepted as tradition. Revitalisation hinges the new door onto the old frame, requiring a balanced (managed contradictory) belief that tradition is fixed *and* fluid. It is not so much about the door frame or the door, but the open threshold and that we step through to the other side. This revival puts us all in a unique position »at a new beginning of time«.

Taonga puoro has been able to develop as a cultural and musical field because of its ability to work laterally and experimentally with other sources and fields of knowledge and practice. With a combination of actual and re-imagined tradition and innovation, it seeks a form of renovation that retains and rebuilds the old while utilising the new.

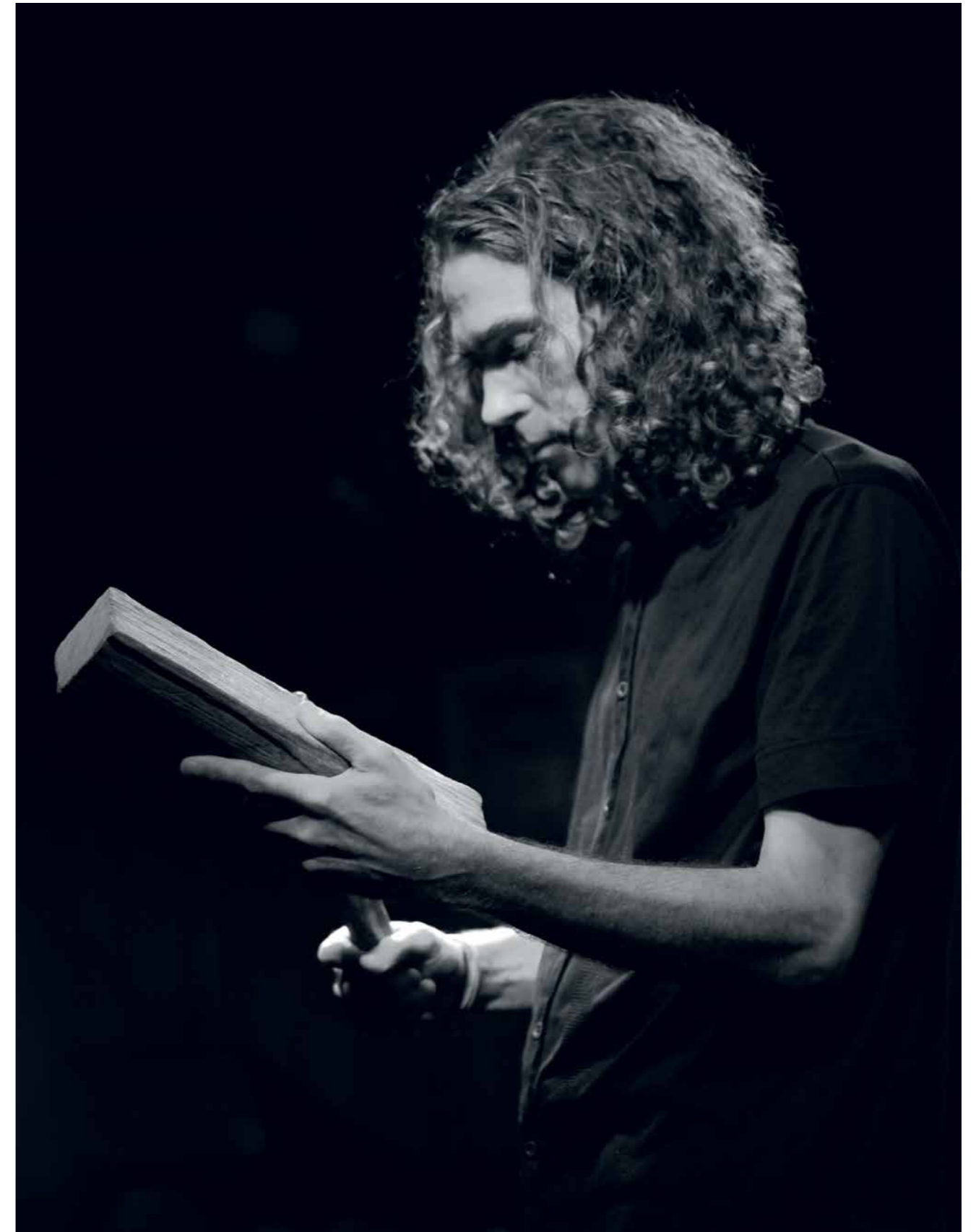
As an experimental sound artist and musician, the daily learning and practice of taonga puoro revival has enabled me to not only deconstruct sound and tradition; it has also empowered me to reconstruct my identity as a Maori. Through the discovery of sound and the development of skill, I have rediscovered who I am and come to better understand the cultures to which I belong, as well as the relationships that I operate within and that operate within me as an individual and as a member of New Zealand society. Meanwhile, I gain great personal satisfaction from creating »new« and modern music with »old« and ancient instruments.

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– www.soundbleedjournal.wordpress.com.

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– www.robthorne.co.nz



Rob Thorne plays the pahū rākau, a traditional Maori wooden gong. Image by Jo Berry-Loughrey.

RETRO-FUTURISTIC MACHINE MUSIC

BY GAMUT INC

THIS YEAR'S »NEW GEOGRAPHIES« THEME EXAMINES SOUND-BASED PRACTICES THAT TRAVERSE GEOGRAPHICAL, CULTURAL, PHILOSOPHICAL, OR OTHER FRONTIERS. IN THE CASE OF CTM 2016 PERFORMERS GAMUT INC, THE FRONTIER IS HISTORY, AND IS NAVIGATED USING SONIC ARCHAEOLOGY AND INSTRUMENTARIUM-FOCUSED MUSICOLOGY. MARION WORLE AND MACIEJ SLEDZIECKI START BY QUALIFYING THE WORD »NEW« AND DISCUSS THE PRE-20TH CENTURY ROOTS OF EXPERIMENTAL MUSIC. ACCORDING TO THEM, THE IMPROVISATION, DETAIL-ORIENTED INNOVATION AND CONCEPTUAL RIGOUR THAT CHARACTERISES TODAY'S AVANT-GARDE IS FAMILIAR, EVEN ARCHAIC, TERRITORY.

Before tapping into »new geographies« it is well worth ascertaining whether the allegedly »new« territories have not already been tapped into. Colonial-era European sea merchants claimed to have »discovered« both new continents and the people already living on them...

Discoveries and new inventions in the realms of science and technology are likewise not always as original as is often supposed. The invention of the steam engine triggered the industrial revolution in Europe, yet the technology behind it was already known in Ancient Greece, where temple doors opened automatically and kinetic sculptures with moving arms and heads played flutes and organs – all thanks to the power of steam, discreetly produced by heating water over a wood fire in an adjoining room. The Greeks didn't think the technology was of much use, however, and the »automata« described by Heron von Alexandria were anathema to the educated classes or, at best, merely an entertaining means of creating illusions, as in the case of the *Deus ex machina* in Greek tragedy: an actor playing a god who appears seemingly miraculously on stage, courtesy of a pulley construction.

A great variety of musical machines have been invented throughout history, sometimes several times over.

Outstandingly complex pneumatic devices were created by the Banū Mūsā brothers and Al-Jazari in the Arab world. Only monarchs, aristocrats and priests had access to knowledge of machines, which was concealed within sacred books on alchemy and occultism. Twentieth-century futurist Luigi Russolo's »Intonarumori« had predecessors in Baroque noise intoners: these instruments, enormous machines comprising a kind of noise orchestra, were invisible to the audience, even though they surrounded the stage. They could produce natural sounds, such as those of wind, thunder or rain. Leonardo da Vinci designed a hybrid instrument called »viola organista«, the strings of which were vibrated by rotating automated wheels instead of a bow, and selected by pressing keys on a keyboard. The development of music machines reached its climax in the 19th Century with the music box, the pianola (a beloved attraction at fairs), the barrel organ with its encoded (pinned and stapled) cylinder and, finally, the orchestrion, which could play whole symphonies by itself.

Before the Great Depression of the 1930s, 70 per cent of some 350 000 pianos produced annually in the USA were player pianos – perhaps better known as pianolas – but all mechanical instruments lost their significance with the invention of recording and loudspeaker systems and, eventually, analogue synthesizers and computer music. However, music has had



gamut inc, photo by Christoph Voy.

a strong connection with computation since its earliest days: from Pythagoras through Ramon Lull, Athanasius Kircher, Arnold Schönberg and beyond, it has always been a code consisting of figures and symbols, and capable of undergoing multiple recalculations.

In essence, there are two types of automation in computer music: the automation of sound production (the loudspeaker as instrument, sound synthesis, etc.) and the automation of composition (algorithmic composition procedures, aleatorics, etc.). Both types look back on a long history. Take the sequencer, for example, which by the 18th Century was already able to automatically reproduce rhythmic and tonal sequences thanks to the cardboard punch-card roll – not unlike the MIDI launched in the 1980s. Hermann von Helmholtz's endeavour to reproduce the vowel sounds of the human voice culminated in the first analogue synthesiser: tuning forks were set to vibrate by electromagnets, so as to obviate the sound of impact. This generated a tone approximate to that of a sine oscillation. By variously blending these tones he was able to synthesize almost all vowel sounds.

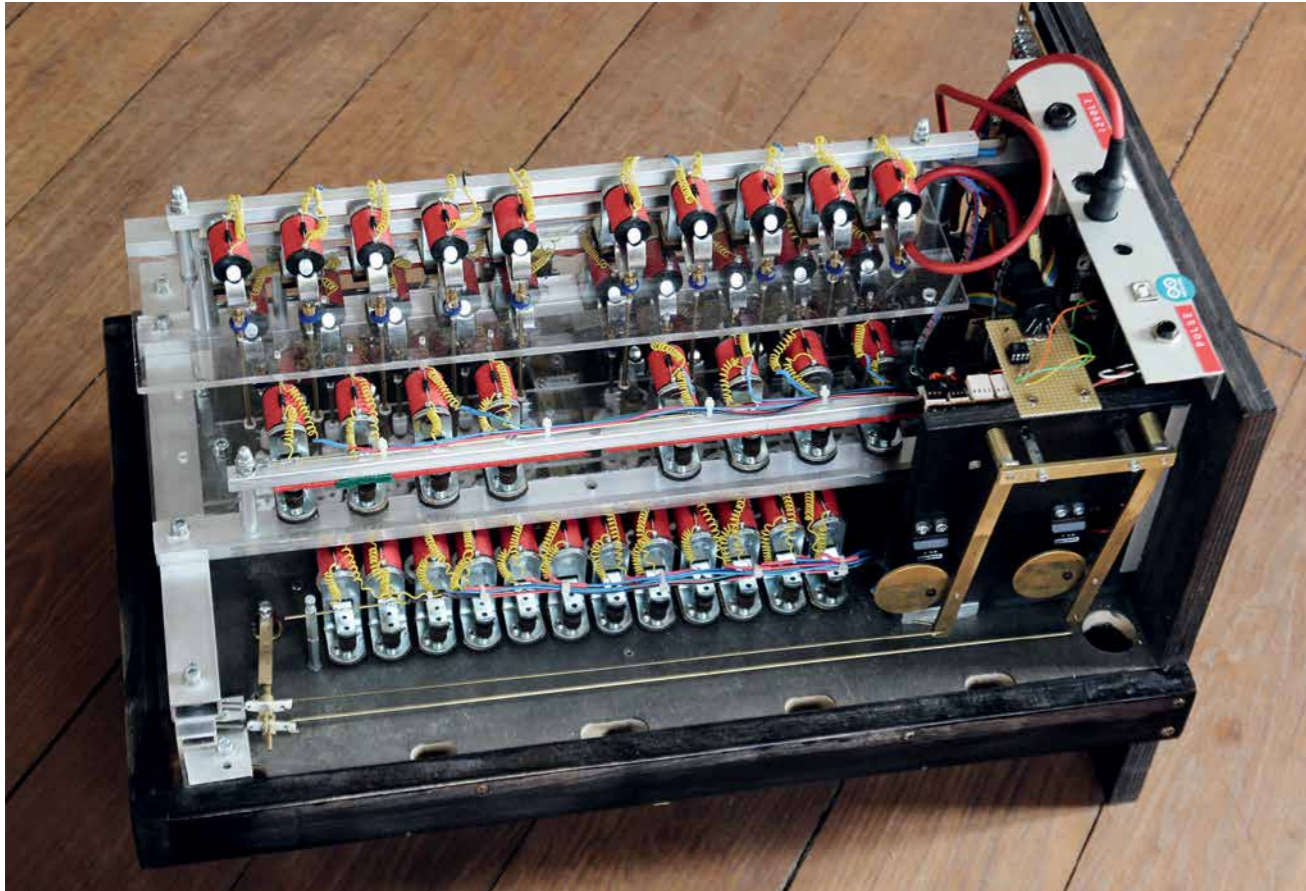
The automation of composition likewise owes much to its early pioneers. In the 17th Century the universal scholar Athanasius Kircher invented, among other things, an algorithmic method of

composition and realised it as an analogue machine, the »arcamusarithmica«: a complex filing system in which rhythm and harmony cards were combined according to certain rules, in a way such as to compose four-part canons.

Another 18th Century combinatory composing method was the so-called »Musikalisches Würfelspiel« (German for »musical dice game«). Here, a layperson could roll dice (or draw cards) to randomly trigger set rhythmic sequences and thus »compose« a variety of waltzes, polonaises or minuets. The most famous of these proto-aleatoric compositions is doubtless Mozart's »Würfelwalzer« (»Dice Waltz«).

In cooperation with the instrument builder Gerhard Kern we have created several acoustic music machines over the last four years. The *Avant Avantgarde* festival prompted our pioneering venture, which we embarked upon in the company of Polish curator Michal Libera and some 40 musicians. It was on this exciting research trip into the pre-20th Century roots of experimental music that we discovered the predecessors mentioned above.

Our apparatuses generate acoustic sounds, such as percussion, accordion notes and string oscillations, which are vectored in turn by software developed with the programme



A previous version of the Physharmonica, photo by Marion Wörle.

Max4Live. This not only allows tones to be played but also brings to the fore more complex sound qualities: wind valves are regulated, stop handles continually modified and the intensity of electromagnetic fields varied at will. Thanks to the micro-controller routing, the music machines are considerably more flexible than their pneumatic predecessors, which were based on punch-card systems.

Our music is shaped by the formulation strategies of contemporary electronic music: slowly developing rhythmic structures, timbre compositions, micro-harmonics and deconstructed harmonic passages alternate with dramaturgically elaborated compositional gestures.

The palette of tone modulation effects and extremely diverse vocal systems is very comprehensive in non-European musical traditions, where one frequently comes across split tones, resonance effects and a preference for overtone structures. While the European 20th Century had to struggle to emancipate itself from consonance, in the cultures of Vietnam, Indonesia or Central Africa the difference between tone and noise appears to be more of a continuum. In the case of string instruments such as the Vietnamese k'ni or the Central African and Congolese mbela, players use the mouth cavity to modulate the resonators and so achieve talk box-type effects. Analogies of this sort between electronic and traditional sounds are pretty common.

Gamut inc applies a hybrid structure of acoustic sound production, digitally controlled yet driven by analogue electric circuitry. Any black-and-white distinction between electronic and acoustic sound therefore becomes pretty blurred. For instance, one of the instruments, the BowJo, uses magnetic fields to move its strings. Speakers equally move its membrane by magnetic fields. But if the same electronic technique is used to move two different components (string or membrane), how can we say definitely that the former is acoustic, and the latter is electronic? That these two worlds are on a continuum is surely self-evident. Music robots close the gap between acoustic and electronic music and foster new forms of expression in instrumental music. While they can only rarely imitate certain human ways of playing, there are many qualities of music machines that they alone can reproduce.

In addition to building instruments, we electronically process the sounds they make. This enhances our live performances and boosts their power, especially at the low end, thereby emphasising the setup's hybrid structure even further. When designing our instruments we focus on sound phenomena that human beings can hardly produce, as well as the diverse ambiguities incorporated in acoustic computer-driven sound production. One factor is speed, because extremely quick note repetitions allow continuous modulation within long notes, for example, as well as modulations in sound and separate rhyth-

mic entities, much as in electronic music. Another important factor is the multiplicity of action, which obviates the need to compensate for human flaws, such as having only ten fingers and only two hands.

The process of composing begins with the design of the machine, much like the creation of customised software in electronic music. At the end of this process one might find oneself dreaming of a machine that can produce all electronic sounds in an acoustic way – a modular acoustic synthesizer. However, to build such a Frankensteinian machine would go way beyond our time resources. As it is, the machines already have us under their spell, and we live in hope that these reinventions of former technologies will lead us into more unexplored territories.

Our ensemble meanwhile includes the following machines:

PHYSHARMONICA

The physharmonica is an automated accordion. All its tones and all its registers can be computer-driven. They can be opened or closed in smooth transitions and thus facilitate various blends of register, in a similar manner to an electronic filter. Motorised valves control the air pressure of the instrument's wind machine.

BOWJO

A three-stringed banjo whose strings are either electromagnetically made to vibrate using e-bows (which generates standing tones), or strummed using motorised plectra. The construction has motorised necks too, which, like the bottleneck of a guitar, facilitate *glissandi*.

SPECHT (German for »Woodpecker«)

Our latest machine is a miniaturised version of the carillon. Claves of steel are struck or muted by electromagnetic hammers. Specht is our first modular music machine and currently comprises two identical 8-tone modules.

CABASA

The Cabasa comprises an array of rattles that are either played in the classical manner of percussion instruments or continually rotated like some kind of acoustic noise generator. Varying the rotation speed produces different pitches.

DRUMS

The motorised kettledrum can be beaten extremely fast at different points. It is also equipped with an electromagnet that allows the tension of the head to be continually altered and thus different pitch levels to be rendered audible.

Marion Wörle and Maciej Sledziecki live in Berlin and Cologne. As gamut inc they play retro-futuristic music machines. In addition to staging musical theatre pieces, such as »Ghost Tape XI« and »One More Pioneer«, they run the music publishing house satelita Musikverlag, organise international projects in cooperation with the non-profit ZAM – platform for adventurous music, and work as film musicians and graphic designers.

– www.gamut-ensemble.de
 – www.satelita.de
 – www.z-a-m.eu

THE IMPORTANCE OF DANCING ACROSS BORDERS

BY LUKE TURNER

THIS PAST SEPTEMBER 2015, LUKE TURNER TRAVELLED TO CTM SIBERIA, HELD SOME 2800 KM AWAY FROM MOSCOW IN NOVOSIBIRSK. AT THE INAUGURAL FESTIVAL, RUSSIAN MUSICIANS PLAYED ALONGSIDE INTERNATIONAL ARTISTS IN A SPIRIT OF UNITY THAT WENT AGAINST CURRENT AND HISTORICAL INTERNATIONAL TENSIONS. PHOTOS TAKEN IN NOVOSIBIRSK DURING CTM SIBERIA BY GRAW BÖCKLER.



»Why are you here?« asks the girl with piercing blue eyes, swaying slightly in the lights outside the lift that carries the audience five floors up to RAGU, a restaurant pressed into service as a nightclub for CTM Siberia. She presses us further, asking: »Is it exotic for you, to be here? I do not understand. This is a dark place.«

Novosibirsk, founded at the point where the Trans Siberian railway crosses the Ob River, is hosting CTM's first excursion outside of its Berlin base. This two-leg event, the first half of which took place in the city of Krasnoyarsk, 800 kilometres to the west, was the brainchild of the Goethe Institut, which since the early 1950s has sought to encourage cultural exchange between Germany and the rest of the world. Picking up on a local electronic music scene that seemed to be thriving without much infrastructure, the Goethe office in Novosibirsk worked with CTM to bring artists from Germany and elsewhere, such as Lorenzo Senni, Helena Hauff, Byetone, Muscovite Mujuice and Rabih Beaini, to play alongside – and this is very much alongside – young Siberians and Tuvan throat singers Huun-Huur-Tu. The majority of the festival production and booking has been done here, and there's a relaxed feeling to it all, with a hope from the German side that people might see things are done and can be done. The locals (if »local« is appropriate in such a vast country) hardly need much encouragement, with the likes of genial sound artist and composer Stanislav Sharifullin working themselves into the ground as they perform, organise and lead us in a merry dance around the streets of Novosibirsk. »It's the overall feeling, when you feel like surrounded by dozens of like-minded people, all this warmth and love and blah blah«, enthuses Sharifullin. »Like a damn Woodstock '69 in the middle of nowhere.«

There is a huge weight of history between Germany and the empty spaces of Siberia. As one of the staff from Goethe Institut here remarks, »There is a feeling in Germany that Siberia is a place where you go and never come back – most of our grandfathers were sent here as prisoners in the war.« The vast expanse of Russia's largest region could gobble people – or non-people – up with ease. As someone I speak to in Novosi-

birsk explains: »People were forced to walk hundreds of kilometres from their towns to the railway to take them to the Gulags. They were scattered like dust to the wind, and near the tracks in the forests you can find their bones, just under the leaves.«

As I leave England to head to Siberia, the petty argument about whether or not new left wing leader of the Labour opposition party Jeremy Corbyn ought to sing the national anthem is still dominating the news. The »victories« of three world wars, two very hot and one cold, has unfortunately given the British a myopic, nostalgic view of the 20th Century, distilled now into jingoism, the horrors wiped away by a »Keep Calm & Carry On« tea towel.

To us in the UK, Siberia is a place of clichés learned from spy novels, an abstract negative space of communism, a belief system that we're told by the media that »we« defeated 25 years ago. In Novosibirsk however, the 20th Century is ever present. Indeed, I think it could be argued that, along with the 1917 revolution, 1941 Nazi invasion and collapse of communism, Russia is experiencing a long 20th Century, with former KGB man Vladimir Putin part of a continuum. It's only a smug ignorance that leads us in the UK to believe that we are not a part of it. It's strange at the airport to see all sorts of tacky tourist gear – plates, mugs, t-shirts – covered in the president's enhanced lantern-jaw face. Yet how different is that to Britain's souvenir tat that frequently is based on red-coated soldier iconography or images of the queen, encouraging a deference that has its roots in war and empire.

One of the artistic projects I hear about in Novosibirsk is the idea of »talking about the weather«: politics are not a safe subject for discussion, so coded descriptions about the human universal's favourite subject for a quick chat are used instead. Discussing politics, or reading political meaning into the work of any of the artists playing, is therefore not only problematic – there are nuances to the way Russians approach political thought that are very difficult for a Western mind to latch onto – but also potentially dangerous.



In a forgotten corner of one of Novosibirsk's parks stands a grey monument to the victims of Stalin's purges. It was built during the 1990s after the fall of communism, but now looks neglected – some tiling on its four pillars is splitting, and there are a few tired flowers scattered about. People walk past without giving it a second glance. Just behind it, a huge new apartment block is rising on the site of the former NKVD prison, where unknown numbers of local people, including relatives of some I meet, were shot. In the early stages of construction, local journalists started demanding an excavation, but the police shut the site down and the flats went up on the bones of the dead. In Novosibirsk, 30 per cent of new apartments are unoccupied, bought as investment opportunities by Russians who made a fortune from oil and gas.

Memories – real, imagined and falsified – shape Novosibirsk. The giant opera house in the city centre was originally designed in the constructivist style during the late 1930s. Delayed by the Second World War, it ended up a hulking mass of neo-classical pomp, with gigantic wings extending the backstage into the streets either side to allow cavalry or armoured cars to pour across the back of the set in particularly dramatic scenes. Just behind the opera house is a park, quiet in the early evening and full of decaying children's rides – water rafts, swing boats, a couple of trains, a shooting gallery. A maintenance yard built of shipping containers (»Property of Tiphook Container Rental Bromley, Kent«) sits in a corner, a radio blaring inside, and the only words I hear in English from it come from the actress and frequent collaborator with the great Derek Jarman, Tilda Swin-

ton. This was once called Stalin's Garden, and was built on the site of a former cemetery. Workmen arrived overnight to remove the memorials and the next morning members of the local Jewish community wept as their neighbours danced the foxtrot where the graves of their ancestors had been.

When I learn this, I feel uncomfortable about the touristy photographs I've taken of the decaying rides, Soviet-era apartment blocks and iconography, feeling somehow complicit in shoring up these secrets and forgotten histories. A teacher I speak to tells me that none of his pupils have any idea about Stalin's purges. Under the contemporary regime, which thrives on a potent mixture of nationalism, capitalism, cult of strength and the resurgent Orthodox church, some histories seem best forgotten.

In a talk on CTM's opening night, Robert Henke remarked that »the beauty of globalisation is that our generation, and the ones to come, have access to the world of sound«. This might read like a rather naive statement, yet after four bewildering, stimulating nights, it reflects the optimism of this strange festival in the back of beyond. Perhaps the flaw of globalisation is that all too often, it can lend itself to a global blurring, a sameness that frequently feels impossible to fly away from. Many of the areas of British, German, Australasian, American, Scandinavian or Spanish cities where musical, artistic and creative communities dwell are increasingly indistinguishable, MacBook glows in the same sorts of bars, cafes and restaurants. That's even despite the global cooption of these former undergrounds as



easy marketing gimmick. In the West, we have access to a world of sound, but increasingly homogenous spaces in which to experience in. At CTM, it's impossible not to be jolted out of this complacency.

The venue for Huun-Huur-Tu, for instance, is liminal in itself, a giant lobby of the Philharmonic hall that overlooks the former apartment blocks that housed Soviet officials. The Tuvan group's ability to generate different notes and tones within one set of vocal chords undoes the auditory senses' concept of what music can be, more liquid than anything else, flooding into and filling this room with ancient sound. There are so many things in the globalised world that connect us across the continents, like those shipping containers in the nearby park, and some of Huun-Huur-Tu's music reaches beyond the borders of the Republic of Tuva to hint at sounds from further afield. I pick up on African desert blues, and even some of our own folk traditions – perhaps throat singers once wandered to ancient trackways of England. On the flipside, RAGU is a glass venue that bulges in the middle of its eight stories like a vertical slice of London's Gherkin, and a curious place to host a nightclub. Usually it's a dinner party place, and at one point I notice I'm dancing next to a stack of thick menus bearing the slogan »Racy & Glorious Union Since 2013«. The windows look down on the St Nicholas Chapel, which had a gold dome, and once conveniently marked the centre of the Russian Empire. Most of the crowd here are incredibly young. There's a kid with a Confederate flag wrapped round his head and a flat cap on losing his shit.

All of which is why CTM Siberia is an inspiring and hopeful experience, where a new generation of Russian artists, internationally connected, are creating their own futures and narratives in a way that's at once very familiar and unlike anything I've seen in the UK or wider »West«. Credit should be given to the Goethe Institut for such a hands-off approach (one that contrasts with the aggressive commercialism of most European music »export« bodies) that seems to have blown oxygen onto already glowing sparks of what might well become one of the most exciting electronic movements around.

Yet it's all very well, from my perspective sat in London under a constant email barrage of new music from around the world, both brilliant and utterly appalling, to use words to pigeon-hole Siberian artists into a scene that doesn't exist, or perhaps even patronise them in doing so. By focussing too intently on certain artists, performances, or a few crazy nights in Novosibirsk, does one risk removing the equal dialogue that these events ought to be about? Speaking after CTM Siberia, Ivan of Love Cult says that though an international event hosted »in the middle of nowhere« might superficially give an impression that a scene is »approved«, he and his fellow musicians have some qualms. »We really don't like to think that way«, he says. »Siberia had been considered an electronic music mecca in Russia before CTM – but it certainly is nice to experience collaboration, to dive deeper into the situation.« Indeed, are we in danger of getting the wrong end of the stick about what's happening in Siberia, and wider Russia? Ivan says that the current »scene« in Karelia is »a couple of like-minded people making tunes in the





LPSHBR, one of CTM Siberia's venues.

middle of a forest» and that it's arguably in decline: »There used to be significant gigs and events four to five years ago and a lot of free noise activity eight or nine years ago but that era is over. Petrozavodsk is a town with good musical heritage, but that's it.« This, he argues, provides Love Cult with a terrific autonomy. »It simply allows us to be whoever we want«, he says. »With no scene, no media and infrastructure you're left on your own as an artist. We like that. Our education was making all the possible mistakes and enjoying the process, then sending the results to faraway countries.«

Ivan admits that this geographical isolation can be frustrating, but adds that »On the other hand it makes perfect sense The Wire is covering a lot of UK stuff and Pitchfork is super US-centred, for example. Why wouldn't they be like that?« I can't help feeling, though, that this is where American and British... arrogance? complacency? privilege? ought to be undone. As Ivan astutely observes, »the problem is that the little pockets on the other side of the language barrier tend to be ignored. But it seems like it's the English-speaking listener who should feel sad really – they're missing out on some great music. Some Asian shoegaze and black-metal, some Russian twisted electronics.«

Perhaps there's a conflict here in a »Western« approach assuming that our experiences of how a music scene is organised and functions is applicable to the Russian situation. There's arguably a danger in internationalist thinking that assumes everything works the same way around on a global scale, that different

communities can meet, relationships form and collaborations happen as if different parts of a machine being bolted together.

Sharifullin agrees that it's a fairly complex and nuanced situation. »I mean – come on, all this »Siberian musical community« is just a small bunch of weirdos, totally unknown – and myself as well,« he says, remarking that certain rivalries have been given an added frisson thanks to inclusion (or otherwise) on the festival bill. He's also very aware of how Siberian experimental music is far more of an outlier here than it might be elsewhere. »Maybe in one's imaginative world he or she is a key figure in the regional (or even Russian – or worldwide!) cultural scene, but there's also the damn reality. There's one simple fact in this reality – we are nothing. I mean, we all need to work a lot to become something – and yes, it is just another great thing, an inspiring one. The scene is growing, so just please let it grow organically.« And what of preconceptions some might have over glacial drones over the icy frozen trees etc. etc.? »I love to keep things ironic«, Sharifullin says. »If one imagines Siberia as a huge empty space filled with snow and ice and nothing else – why not? Why get bothered with other people's delusions when you can play with it?«

On the Sunday night, there's a closing party in Novosibirsk's first nightclub, a square box of a room plonked as if from above in the middle of a courtyard, surrounded by offices. It's a remarkable party unlike anything I've seen before. It's unclear whether this is a noodle restaurant (people wander around with steaming cartons of foods as others hammer down shots), chi-



chi bar (the walls are covered with righteous quotes from musicians) or a simple box that, to be frank, rivals any venue in London, a city where live and club music venues are falling victim to property developers at an alarming rate. Rabih Beaini unleashes an absolute collision of music, liquid rumblings, as if the skein of wires that connect all Novosibirsk's buildings at various heights (I keep tripping over one cable that someone is using to leech a phone connection) had picked up short wave transmissions from across the globe – uncountable voices, all discussing the weather. He plays what I am imagining must be a field recording of a folk song, the language of which I can't catch over a hulking bastard of a track, a rhythm by a thousand drums. He keeps pulling that in and out of the mix, then flies into some mind melting jazz drowning in shards of drums, something else that sort of might be The Ex. This is true freak-out music, God's own record collection falling on your head, and the sounds we'll be broadcasting to aliens should the peoples of the earth ever decide that they can get along.

It's certainly working in the room. Sharifullin has organised a whip-round, with everyone asked to contribute 500 roubles towards a fund to purchase a synth for one of the Siberians, struggling to afford to buy the equipment he needs to move his music forward. Just before Helena Hauff plays, the venue empties and we all gather in the courtyard under the gathering dusk for a presentation, a speech, cheering that buoys everyone through until the very small hours of Monday morning. Yes, this might be a dark place with tensions and issues that are difficult for the Western European mind to unpick. But the spirit

here is not exotic at all – it's honest, very real. What's more, everyone emerges steeped in a conscious internationalism that feels more and more needed in these strange times.

Speaking afterwards, Sharifullin is cautiously optimistic about the impact of the festival and feels, rather excitingly, that it's just the beginning of what will hopefully be an ongoing process. »You can't change the whole game in one day, it requires years, even decades«, he tells me. »The ice has broken though and there's no way back.«

Luke Turner is an editor for British online music magazine The Quietus. – www.thequietus.com.

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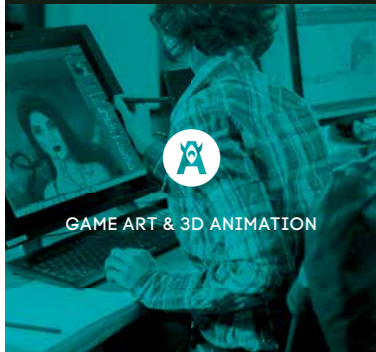
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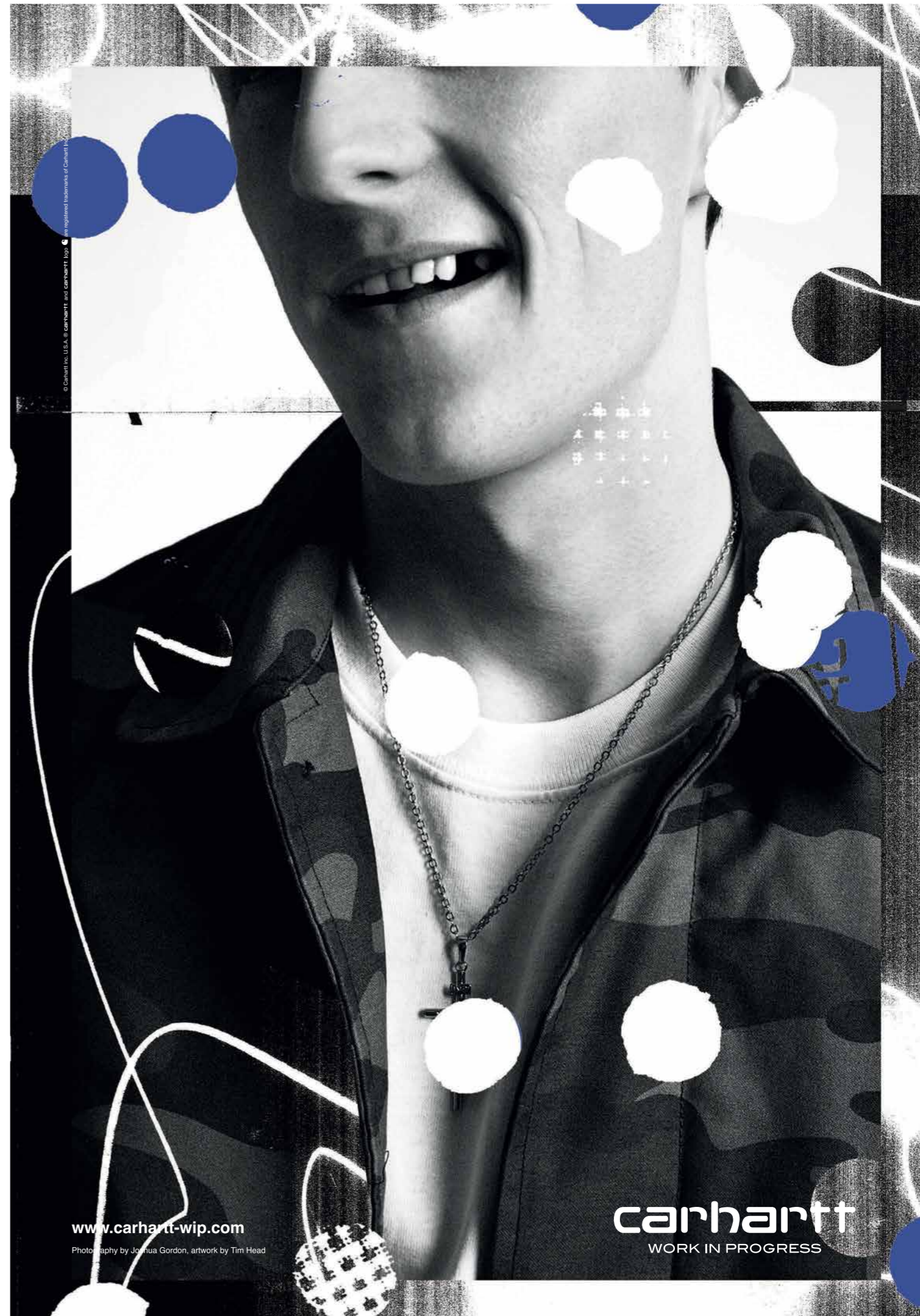
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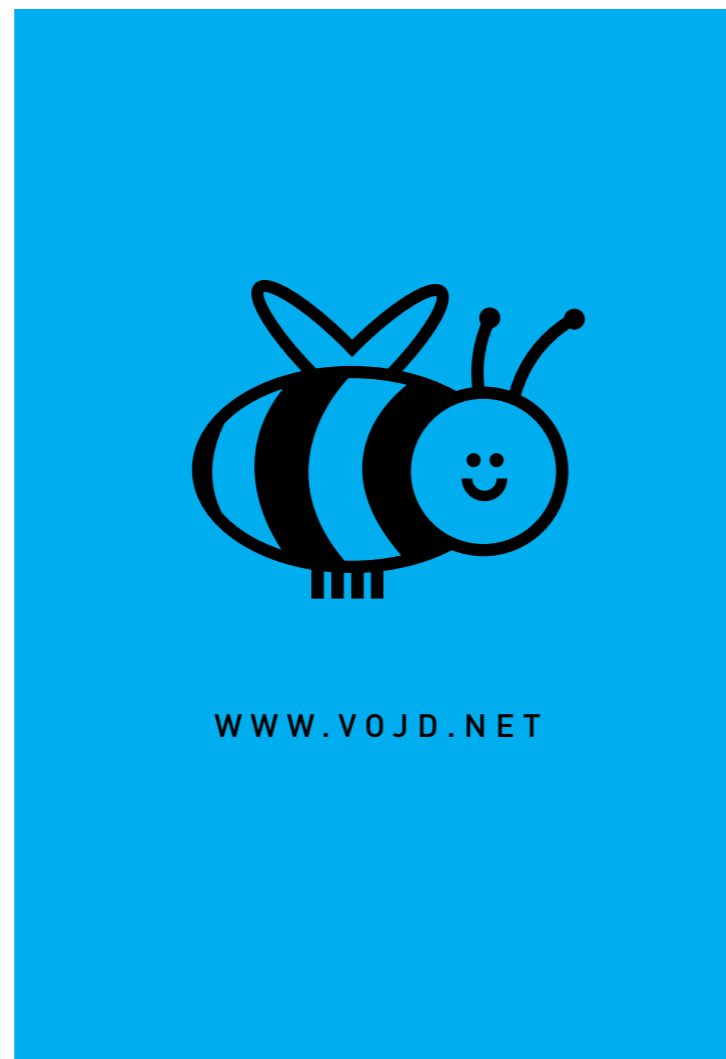
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