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# PERSISTENCE

CTM FESTIVAL 2019  
ADVENTUROUS MUSIC & ART  
20TH EDITION  
BERLIN

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# CTM 2019 PERSISTENCE

As polarising stances and simplistic rhetoric continue to proliferate at alarming rates, we are faced with the difficulties of resisting them and the rifts they create. The challenge lies in cultivating persistence without tumbling into rigidity or dogma – in cultivating a steadfastness through a recognition of diversity, difference, and hybridity while also embracing fluidity, uncertainty, and flux.

With *Persistence*, CTM 2019 examines the aesthetic and societal potentials and pains of perseverance, and of its opposite: the transient and the provisional, and considers the struggles that come with balancing continuity and changeability.

Music and art are characterised by continuous searching, open-ended experimentation, and the speculative nature of hypotheses, which allows for a positive adoption of uncertainty. A hypothesis is always open to being corrected or discarded. It requires constant questioning and exchange: Listening, critical discussion, and doubt are inherent components of this process, as are sensing and recognising inconsistencies and differences.

A decisive difference between artistic and scientific hypotheses is that art and music take subjective feelings, personal experiences, empathy, the imaginary, and desire as their starting points. Artistic propositions can therefore never be completely eliminated, and because they need to be experienced, they offer transitory moments of radical pluralisation. Thinking and acting on this basis is a form of resistance against essentialism and naturalistic misconceptions, against the absolute, and unshakable identities, and also against the corrosive powers of uncertainty. So, can music and art provide us with methods to move towards new societal horizons? Can we maintain a productive,

idealistic kind of perseverance – a persistence of the transitory?

The persistence of transience is not only a fitting allegory for CTM Festival's 20-year anniversary, it also describes an attempt to think of collectiveness, community, and subcultures as fleeting, experience-based associations. It's a framework for considering them as testing grounds for collective speculation rather than rigid or exclusive constructs. CTM has always strived to provide a forum that facilitates exchange and networking between different creative communities, while at the same time fostering open spaces of possibility that also allow those who are non-associated to navigate the interstices and try things out.

In order to keep such spaces open, however, we must also insist on stable economic conditions. To survive as an artist and to maintain communities and spaces of open discourse make for great challenges worldwide. We urgently need concepts, tools and structures that enable music and cultural creators to continuously experiment in a self-determined manner and to freely associate themselves. CTM's 20th anniversary edition, and also this magazine, brings together many actors and initiatives across music, culture, and technology to imagine, discuss, and celebrate open and pluralistic structures.

Developing our festival and keeping it afloat throughout the past 20 years has been a challenging exercise in determination and persistence, of constant and sometimes extremely rapid change and continuous learning, and with moments of intense existential pressure. It has been an incredibly enriching experience, one that we wouldn't want to do without and that has shaped our lives

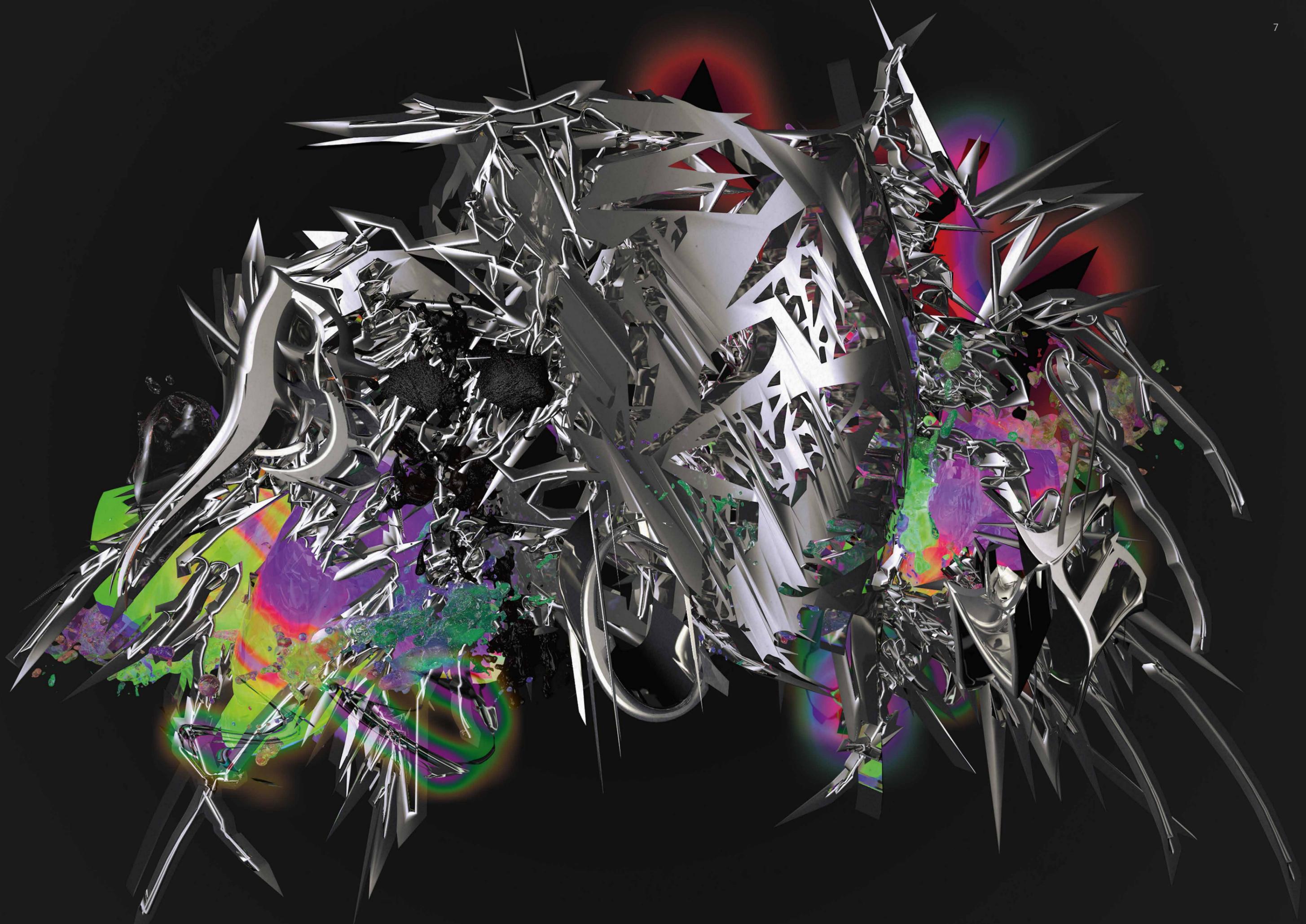
like little else. It is something we have had the rare privilege to bring about – a gift. One that was made possible by the great many people who sensed the value of such a festival and generously contributed to its survival and prosperity with their energy, creativity, affection, skill, and knowledge. It's a gift that we wish to share with as many as possible.

We'd like to thank all of you from the bottom of our hearts. Our endless gratitude goes out to everyone that has collaborated and contributed to the festival throughout the years; to everyone that came out once or many times over; to all participants and artists; all volunteers; all partners, first and foremost our sister festival transmediale, to all funders, sponsors, and supporters; to our hometown for all its unrefined realness that provides a continuous source of inspiration; and to our dear partners and families for their immense and lasting support. Without all of you the festival would not exist.

We also sincerely thank the authors of this publication for sharing inspiring reflections informed by their broad range of disciplines and experiences.



Oliver Baurhenn, Jan Rohlf, and Remco Schuurbiens



AS IF WE EXISTED  
AS IF WE WERE UNIQUE  
AS IF WE WERE SOLITARY SELVES  
AS IF WE KNEW  
AS IF WE REMEMBERED  
AS IF WE COULD FEEL  
AS IF WE WERE FREE  
AS IF WE WERE HEARD  
AS IF WE HAD A VOICE  
AS IF WE WERE HAPPY  
AS IF WE WERE BEAUTIFUL  
AS IF WE WERE EQUAL  
AS IF WE HAD RIGHTS  
AS IF WE HAD AGENCY  
AS IF WE WERE WHOLE  
AS IF WE HAD MEANING  
AS IF WE WERE SEEN  
AS IF WE WERE KIN  
AS IF WE COULD SPEAK  
AS IF WE COULD SHARE  
AS IF WE WERE GHOSTS  
AS IF WE WERE STRONG  
AS IF WE COULD CONNECT  
AS IF WE COULD AGREE  
AS IF WE COULD BE HOPEFUL  
AS IF WE HAD POWER  
AS IF WE WERE LOVED  
AS IF WE COULD IMAGINE  
AS IF WE COULD LEARN  
AS IF WE COULD CHANGE  
AS IF WE COULD LIVE ON

AS IF THERE WERE NO IFS

# INTERDEPENDENCE

JON DAVIES

As expectations around creative labour have transformed under Capitalist Realism, the role of the musician has changed drastically. Jon Davies considers the hazards of contemporary discourses around mental health and consider how music might posit potential salves.

What to make of Capitalist Realism and the state of music-making for many struggling artists today? Perhaps a day for the average electronic music producer involves trading several hours commuting and working to pay for rent, and not too unlikely anti-social hours working in bars and clubs. The hours set aside for creativity are often snatched, inconsistent, and appropriated from social and leisure times. Adding to further complication, socialising can become more of a dress-down networking event, where the »always on« nature of capital surges through the psyche of the urban club space. The economic malaise of the music industry has been well documented from the emergence of the mp3 up to the end of 2018's collective backlash against Spotify's end-of-year playlists, summing up the chasm between social and financial reward as an artist. And yet there is seemingly no end to new producers, thanks to the emergent structure facilitated by cheaper hardware and software and by music platforms providing a lower barrier of entry to share new tracks. Musicians, according to Rosalind Gill and Andy Pratt, »are hailed as model entrepreneurs...conjured in more critical discourse as exemplars of the move away from stable notions of 'career' to more informal, insecure and discontinuous employment.«<sup>(1)</sup> The precarity of work in the arts is similar to that of many more emerging employment sectors, most prominently in the so-called sharing economy. However, creative labour entails the exhaustion of one's passions, leading to fatigue both emotionally and creatively.<sup>(2)</sup>

In his conception of Capitalist Realism, Mark Fisher drew on strains of Marxist political theory from Italian Autonomism to Post-Fordism to recognise the blurring of boundaries between labour and leisure,

in particular the effects it has on mental health. Labour became flexible in more ways than one; not only does the contract between employer and employee become casualised, but also the nature of communication increasingly becomes transactional, and bonds become temporary. Most noticeable of all, labour is internalised. As a case study, the UK's employment figures are massaged and plugged by an increase in self-employment, the most casual and least protected working sector. »Work and life become inseparable. Capital follows you in your dream. Time ceases to be linear, becomes chaotic, broken down into punctiform divisions. As production and distribution are restructured, so are nervous systems...you must learn to live in conditions of total instability, or »precarity,« as the ugly neologism has it.«<sup>(3)</sup>

The noticeable rise in mental health awareness, in music but also more broadly in society, is not necessarily a thing to celebrate. Yes, it is positive progress to recognise such illnesses as stress, anxiety, and depression as legitimate diagnoses which can be as debilitating as more physical, visible maladies. However I sense a particular nefarious undertone in the narrative afforded to mental health issues in the public eye. The rise of »mindfulness« and self-care strategies, twinned with sensationalist media campaigns on musicians opening up about their woes (although the destigmatisation through celebrities provide key icebreakers in the conversation) obfuscate the debate over stagnating living conditions for a generation. For many, practicing mindfulness proves to be a necessary coping mechanism for high-pressure work and living conditions. But who can afford to take time off and meditate? To what extent is mindfulness

designed as self-improvement not only for one's own needs but also for the creation of more mental resilience in the face of ever more exploitative labour practices? Aisling McCrea posits that »the rhetoric around self-care is flattering but flattening, treating its audience as though the solution to their problems is believing in themselves and investing in themselves. This picture glosses over the question of what happens when society does not believe or invest in us.«<sup>(4)</sup> Not only does mindfulness demand a form of labour on the self, but it also turns its patients into consumers, supplementing their lives through short-term fixes, from short breaks to health apps.

McCrea asks: »Why are these feelings familiar to so many of us, yet we feel so alone?« Refocusing on the musician, what impact does production and performance have on our mental health? What impact does it have, particularly on the surge of solo artists, producers, and DJs who on one hand have benefitted from computer music-making yet on the other hand have ushered in the atomisation of creativity, after the wreckage of the music industry at the beginning of the 21st century? Without lamenting too heavily on the decline of the band, one might suggest that the replacement of group collaboration with an emphasis on individual personal expression may lead to an increase of isolation in art. The Quietus' 2016 research into mental health in music showed a 10–20% difference in anxiety and depression sufferers between solo artists and band members.<sup>(5)</sup> Working alone in electronic music is nothing new, with over three decades of solo producers and DJs making the canon, however with the democratisation of audio workstations making creativity more accessible than hiring studios, rehearsal spaces, and affording musical instruments, isolation is quickly becoming the norm for contemporary Western music practice. Furthermore, when creative isolation becomes more ubiquitous both in music and in other knowledge-based labour, one of the few options presented to us seems to be atomised self-care.

Loneliness is often allayed, in Western culture at least, within a framing that sociologist Eva Illouz defines as emotional capitalism. When registering the emotional intelligence of voice assistants, Siri is described as »a regime that considers feelings to be rationally manageable and subdued to the logic of marketed self-interest. Relationships are things into which we must 'invest'; partnerships involve a 'trade-off' of emotional 'needs'; and the primacy of individual happiness, a kind of affective profit, is key.«<sup>(6)</sup> Furthermore, wellness in emotional capitalism fuels the industry of self-optimisation, from becoming more effective in the workplace to expressing your best self in social situations. How art, and music in particular as a digital and physi-

cal practice, may intervene in our mindfulness malaise may prove to be a key to how we might escape emotional capitalism.

Reinvigorating forms of solidarity in music mark a strategy for wellness, not just for oneself but in order to support one another. The dynamics of improvised music within a group, for example, demonstrate ways of communication and care in which the sonic outcome is dependent on the constituency of the group. As David Bell notes, improvisation as a radical practice »collapses the binary opposition between the individual and the collective: the ability of one to act from their position of difference increases the ability of the collective to act.«<sup>(7)</sup> Rully Shabara's improvisational practice explores consciousness-raising through communicating musically with different performers from various traditions, as well as responding to his environment. With Senyawa (roughly translated as »chemical compound«), his semi-improvisational compositions with Wukir Suryadi are inspired by a dialectic between man and nature, while Ruang Jagat invites audience members to try their hand at exploring their voice through conducted orchestras.

Similarly, Pauline Oliveros' Deep Listening practice encourages a heightened sense of consciousness of sound to open up human dynamics of attention. However, her Sonic Meditations group embodied a more concrete political approach in that the initial group was a women-only formation. Throughout much of Oliveros' work, her aim was to »to create an atmosphere of opening for all to be heard, with the understanding that listening is healing.« Music demands resonance, empathy, and space to be heard, in the same way the politicised, marginal body seeks freedom of expression. Working with dancer Elaine Summers, Oliveros' Meditations focused on exploring the movement of bodies together in a space. After hosting private weekly improvisation groups, Oliveros began sharing her Sonic Meditations practice through print in order to share her work as a form of activism. According to Kerry O'Brien, Oliveros' Sonic Meditations shouldn't be mistaken for escapism or disengagement. The composer described listening as a necessary pause before thoughtful action: »Listening is directing attention to what is heard, gathering meaning, interpreting and deciding on action.«<sup>(8)</sup> For Oliveros, music's symbiotic action of listening and performing was key to healing oneself and each other.

These collective experiences, be they in the workshops conducted by Pauline Oliveros and Rully Shabara, or in groups of individual performers, such as London's Curl collective, serve a timely reminder that collaboration can help musicians out

»BY NOTICING EACH OTHER'S VULNERABILITIES,  
WE MAY FIND ROOM FOR EACH OTHER IN MUSIC-  
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FOUNDATIONS«

of isolation, whether through meeting up in physical and virtual space to communicate abstractly; to absorb, explore, and embody other ideas outside the hermetic reach; or to simply have fun in making sound. In the example of Curl co-founder Coby Sey, eclectic output is defined by a desire to make conversation through challenging his practice – he works alongside a broad array of artists from Mica Levi and Dean Blunt to Tirzah, Ben Vince, and artist Hannah Perry. From there broader solidarity can occur, posing questions as to why these experiences are sometimes not afforded to us, particularly in politically and economically complicated spaces. Along with Sey's work, which makes nods towards the long struggle against austerity in Britain, music has always been a battleground for political and cultural bodies in space. During 2018's Lisbon Pride, DJ and producer Violet invited queer collective mina to invade the stage in protest for the lack of visibility for transgender people during the event, while Moscow duo IC3PEAK publicly challenged the Russian government's authoritarian stance on sexuality through live performances and the dissemination of provocative music videos. These moments serve to spark discourse and struggle, however activism in music extends beyond events and towards building more solid foundations of solidarity and community.

Traces of Oliveros' feminist activism from the 1970s in the spirit of Sonic Meditations can be found in the current wave of production workshops, such as Mint and No Shade in Berlin and Femme Electronic (hosted by DJ Rachael) in Uganda, which use music practice to build female-oriented communities. These workshops emphasise the listening experience as central to mixing records, training DJs to carefully select tracks that flow from one another, to create unlikely kinships from track to track, and to respond to the dancefloor, controlling the momentum and giving a platform to as-yet unheard musics. Workshops give spaces for womxn to not only develop their skills but to foster communities. »I felt that women DJs were missing...they were invisible,« said DJ Rachael to Vice Magazine. »I also thought they would be stronger as part of a group than being solos, as it has always been.« Safer spaces have increasingly be-

come a tactic in the face of rising or already-existing xenophobic, homophobic, and patriarchal oppression, creating alternative welfare networks. With the recent reports of sexual assaults at music festivals conducted in the UK as well as the demand to diversify clubs and venues, the demand for safer spaces has never been more urgent. London nights such as Pussy Palace and Body Party have initiated safer-space policies through an intersectional approach, ensuring that queer black bodies are protected at their venues. These spaces are still precarious, and dependent on occupying commercial spaces which can only exist if the spaces are attended regularly.

However, precarity, if held solid long enough, can sow the seeds of more permanent accommodation. Bassiani, Tbilisi's best known night club, provides an apt example of musical space acting in defiance of wider structural forces, creating kinship not only within Georgia's countercultural scene but also through visiting performers, collectives, and scenes. Housed underneath a Soviet-built sports stadium, Bassiani was established as soon as founders Zviad Gelbakhiani and Tato Getia could find a venue big enough, acting as a space for alternative culture as well as housing LGBT club Horoom. However this past year has seen accusations and raids conducted by the Georgian government over their supposed responsibility in drug-related deaths, despite the fact that none of them occurred at Bassiani. After the club was violently raided and shut down by the police, over 10,000 people took to the streets to stage a rave and demand the resignation of prime minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili and minister of internal affairs Giorgi Gakharia. The organisation of the protest was in no small part assisted by social media, with participants broadcasting their activities to local and global networks, as well as distributing footage from the raids to online magazines in order to mount pressure on the Georgian government.

New forms of activism have not only built upon traditional forms of protest, but also serve to remind us of the possibility of intersectional support and dependence on one another. Such strategies include creating swarms as spontaneous collective

action from specialised hackers and organisers, or assembling weak networks on popular social media platforms, with which to share information and one-off campaigns between disparate individuals and groups. Weak networks, while perhaps allowing us to fall further into issues arising from popular social media, from the capture of personal data to discerning the broadcast of information between free and sponsored posts, have also allowed for activism to spread worldwide.<sup>\*9)</sup>

Taking vulnerability as a shared position, as demonstrated by maintaining safer spaces, sharing activities, and supporting campaigns directly or indirectly, is, according to Judith Butler, a resource for common wealth. Of course it would be preferable for such communities as LGBTQ, refugees, ethnic minorities, the disabled, and the unemployed to be afforded autonomy equal to cisgendered and patriarchal beneficiaries. However, in considering Butler's suggestion that »to say that any of us are vulnerable beings is to mark our radical dependency not only on others, but on a sustaining and sustainable world,«<sup>\*10)</sup> we invite ourselves to open up and resonate with others through shared needs. Precarity calls upon a broadening interdependence and the call for creating coalitions between people, a direct contrast to the neoliberal world of individualised and competitive bodies. By noticing each other's vulnerabilities, we may find room for each other in music-making and scene-building to ensure everyone is not only included, but given time and space to find one's own solid foundations.

Of course it would be naive to expect music to solve all the demands of the contemporary world and its emotional and mental strains. The production and enjoyment of music is especially compounded now that music is becoming more ubiquitous thanks to streaming platforms, simultaneously

sculpting our increasingly work-oriented environments into what Paul Rekrret calls »a contemporary chill ground zero,«<sup>\*11)</sup> while extracting data capital from our leisure time. While there is a discussion to be had about the wider net of Capitalist Realism, we can certainly ask what music can do to raise consciousness, a central tenet of Mark Fisher's unfinished Acid Communism project. In certain camps Acid Communism is seen as a rehabilitation of countercultural utopianism, from communal meditation to discussion groups, while others see a more radical and philosophical construction of the Other. Acid Communism could be broadly seen as a reassessment of the materials and histories at hand, an effort to remould all senses of community and intersectionality. This could range from pragmatic strategies of connecting digitally with ourselves and others to create networks of solidarity, to taking inspiration from improvisation and learning how to explore boundaries and relationships fluidly, or even forming groups of precarity that allow time and space for people to be heard. Music can be a part of all of that. Channelling Butler, Mark Fisher wrote about consciousness-raising: »The roots of any successful struggle will come from people sharing their feelings, especially their feelings of misery and desperation, and together attributing the sources of these feelings to impersonal structures.«<sup>\*12)</sup>



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\*1) Gill, R. and Pratt, A. (2008) »In the Social Factory?: Immaterial Labour, Precariousness and Cultural Work«, *Theory, Culture & Society*, 25(7-8), pp. 1-30. p. 14  
\*2) Ibid pp. 15-16 \*3) Mark, Fisher. 2009, *Capitalist realism : is there no alternative?* Zero books Winchester, UK. p. 34 \*4) McCrea, Aisling, 2018. *Self-Care Won't Save Us*, *Current Affairs* magazine (online) \*5) The Quietist, 2018. *Why Psychological Analysis Shows We're Right To Worry For Musicians' Mental Health*. *The Quietist* (online) \*6) Aronson, Paulina and Duportail, Judith, 2018. *Can emotion-regulating tech translate across cultures?* *Aeon* (online) \*7) Bell, D. 2012, *Playing The Future: Improvisation and Nomadic Utopianism*. Centre for Contemporary Arts, Glasgow UK. p. 7 \*8) O'Brien, Kerry. 2016. *Listening As Activism: The »Sonic Meditations« of Pauline Oliveros*. *The New Yorker* \*9) Stalder, Felix. 2013. *Digital Solidarity Mute/Post Media Lab, Lüneburg*, pp. 40-50 \*10) Butler, Judith, 2015. *Notes toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*. Harvard. p. 150 \*11) Rekrret, Paul 2018. *Why Does Today's Pop Music Sound Like It's Attended Mindfulness Seminars?* *Frieze* (online) \*12) Fisher, Mark 2015. *Abandon Hope (summer is coming) k-punk* (online)

# ON LOOP AND IN THE CROSSFADE: MUSIC IN THE AGE OF MASS PERSISTENCE

JOSH KUN

In the name of persistence, many demands are placed upon us. Bodies migrate and move in need, in search, and in hope of better, of alternatives, of security, of stability. How do loops and crossfades, ubiquitous in so many music cultures, reflect contemporary conditions such as precarity? How might they facilitate means of listening to and across borders? With *On Loop and in the Crossfade*, Josh Kun considers sonic staples as methods, as politics, as ways of music-making, and as ways of living.

1. \_\_\_\_\_

A loop is a *shape produced by a curve that bends around and crosses itself*.

A loop is any structure or process in which the end is connected back to the beginning.

A sequence that repeats by returning to the position it started from.

A closed circuit.

For the nearly 300 million people currently around the world who have left the land of their beginnings, their end is not back from where they started from. For so many forced to move, to leave, whether because of political terror or economic impossibility or climate catastrophe – 26 million refugees and asylum seekers among them, roughly the population of North Korea or Madagascar, more than the population of Hungary or New Zealand or Jamaica or 200 other countries around the world – the loop is a wish, a goal post, a dream.

The reality is an incomplete circuit, a shape produced by a curve that never bends around itself, that never crosses itself. A beat that never returns to its beginning. A feedback loop that is all feedback.

What is the opposite of a loop?

A line? A boundary? A border? A wall?

A return that is always deferred.

A forward motion, a propulsion, that never ends, either because the movement never stops, or because the movement is stopped – at borders, at checkpoints, in detention centres, in prisons, in the desert, in the sea.

This is no world of loops. Think of that long curving bending line of thousands of Central Americans walking north across Mexico who did not want to return home, now halted indefinitely in Tijuana by clouds of tear gas and barricades of riot gear and razor wire at the most-crossed land border in the world that – at the Tijuana-San Ysidro crossing alone – regulates a 2.1 million dollar a day cross-border economy.

Think of generations of Palestinians – the unending refugees of this century and the last – who want the right of return, and whose existence is defined by the denial of that right. One day, Fairuz still sings, *we will return, return, return, return. Regardless of the length of time and distance that separates us*.

The right to loop. The privilege to loop.

There are those who want to return and cannot. There are those made to return, processed, detained, sentenced to months and years in tents and camps, added to watch lists, sent back, deported, denied entry, who don't want to return.

The loop is the political dream. But the loop is also the punishment.

Much of the commercially produced and available music in the world today is made of loops: a breakbeat that is made to repeat as a pattern, a sample of a politician uttering a declaration, a trumpet squeal that keeps squealing. Loops become the foundation for composition, a bedrock of patterned knowledge and information that, through its sonic architecture of repetition, allows new possibilities to emerge, new choruses to erupt, new bridges to connect verses and phrases. Beyoncé likes loops. J Balvin likes loops. CTM is unimaginable without loops. In Lampedusa this past spring, I heard loops everywhere – reggaetón and Arabic trap bumping from car speakers. In London, I heard loops in Afro Bashment burners and Indian new school jazz and industrial oud experiments. In Tijuana, Haitian rappers use loops to make sense of how far they've come from a home they are no longer trying to return to: a music of loops for a population that cannot loop.

The loop is just one way to explore how global displacements and expulsions have changed the way the world sounds. As a result, I've been listening for the sonic aesthetics of displacement, the music of dispossession, the sound that forced movement makes, or, as Philip Bohlman put it, »the importance of music as a measure and medium of displacement.« Music as a form that migration takes.

There is no music without movement, of course, no conception of sound without the event of two opposing forces moving towards and into each other to create vibrations in the air. Music, to sample and

flip Q-Tip, is a *mig'rant thing*, a migratory thing, a movement thing. So we need a new kind of listening, one that listens for the politics and hierarchies of these movements, their uneven flows and policings. Let's call it, in the spirit of Walter Mignolo, Anibal Quijano, and Rolando Vazquez, a listening attuned to *the coloniality of power*, a border listening.

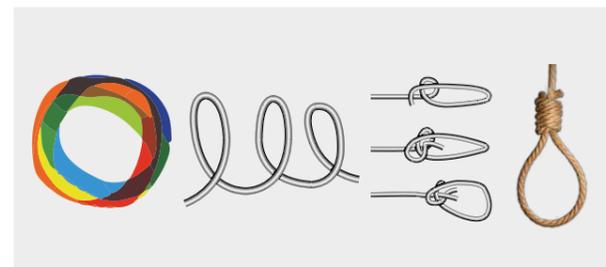
»Borders have changed place,« Etienne Balibar has written. »Whereas traditionally, and in conformity with both their juridical definition and 'cartographical' representation as incorporated in national memory, they should be at the edge of the territory, marking the point where it ends, it seems that borders and the institutional practices corresponding to them have been transported into the middle of political space.»

What does this new global borderscape sound like? What does colonial divestment sound like? What is the sound of rights? Hannah Arendt famously argued, from a 20th century position of displacement and exile that echoes similar positions from this century, that politics is the space of appearance and the legislation of a right to appear. The loops of contemporary sonic culture provide the foundation for an exploration of sonic rights, of a right to sound, to listen, and to be heard.

»If you had the freedom to get in a car and drive for an hour without being stopped (imagine that there is no Israeli military occupation; no Israeli soldiers, no Israeli checkpoints and roadblocks, no »by-pass« roads...)« the Palestinian artist Emily Jacir asked fifty Palestinians in 2008, before the Separation Wall made daily commute loops across Jerusalem unsustainable, »What song would you listen to?«

What sound would you listen to if you could be free?

Most definitions of a loop remind us of its shape: curves and bends that always create an opening.



And yet, one of the word's etymological roots comes from the 14th century, when a loop was also a word for noose.

A shape of life that is also a shape of death. Decomposed in the Mexican desert. Lost in the waters of the Mediterranean. Blown to bits in Gaza.

I recently heard an invocation by Father Gregory Boyle, the founder of Homeboy Industries (a job training program for the recently incarcerated and former gang members), ask the world to draw a circle of compassion so wide, so large, so ample, that there is nobody who stands outside of it.

A loop of compassion so wide, so large, so ample, that the circle can only be an opening, a start, an embrace, and never a noose.

Never a noose.

On loop.

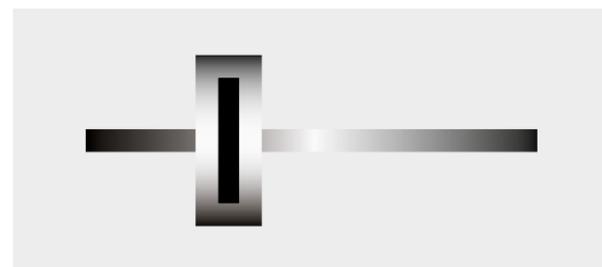
2. \_\_\_\_\_

To fade is to lessen in intensity, to diminish, to become less bright, to move into darkness, to become invisible. »We see what happens when we persecute people,« Mahershala Ali said. They fold into themselves. Fading and folding in; folding in as a kind of fading out.

The crossfade, though, the crossfade never lets the less bright take over. It folds out, it moves into the light.

Section 9.13 of the 1977 sound engineering manual *Audiocyclopedia*:

crossfade. verb. »The gradual attenuation of one signal as another is gradually brought up to normal level. This is accomplished by closing one mixer pot as another pot is being opened.«



Richard Wadman, the British engineer who created one of the first crossfaders on the SMP101 mixer, didn't see it as a strictly musical tool. It was a solution to an energy crisis: how to sustain energy in the face of its diminishment? How to sustain flow and current when moving from one source to an-

other, how to move from left to right to left to right to left without losing your step, your bounce, your beat. How can the uninterrupted flow of energy save us? How to mix without erasing? How to sustain life in the face of the loss that always threatens to take it over?

At roughly the same time, in the South Bronx, Grandmaster Flash was answering the same questions when he wired his own horizontal crossfader into his DJ mixer to perfect the beat science of connection within his theory of the Quick Mix. He used the crossfader to juggle breakbeats, cut them up with scratches, and create loops that kept bodies moving and bending and breaking.

At roughly the same time, at Harvard University, George Steiner got on the mic to remix T.S. Eliot's *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*. Born into an escape from Nazi Europe, Steiner called his exilic edit »Notes Toward a Re-Definition of Culture« and this was a sample he flipped:

*The new sound-sphere is global. It ripples at great speed across languages, ideologies, frontiers, and races. The triplet pounding at me through the wall on a winter night in the northeastern United States is most probably reverberating at the same moment in a dance hall in Bogotá, off a transistor in Narvik, via a jukebox in Kiev and an electric guitar in Benghazi. The tune is last month's or last week's top of the pops; already it has the whole of mass society for its echo chamber. The economics of this musical esperanto are staggering. Rock and pop breed concentric worlds of fashion, setting, and life style. Popular music has brought with it sociologies of private and public manner, of group solidarity. The politics of Eden come loud.*

By the end of the 1970s, the crossfader had become a method and a politics, a new way of music-making but also a new way of living. To crossfade is to mix without erasing.

To openly pursue the multiple, not the singular; the both/and, not one or the other. To listen for points of connection, moments of commonality, starting points of solidarity. To crossfade is to sustain difference. To listen carefully to sounds that already exist while imagining sounds that have yet to exist, to juggle past and future within the time signatures of the present. To crossfade is to listen for edges and borders, not centers, the places where the lines blur, where languages trade tongues, where geographies meet. To crossfade is to suture and cut, suture and cut. To crossfade is to live multiple realities at once, playing one while cueing up another, playing one and fading it to another, finding a new mix for life.

The crossfader knows:  
we are not single inputs  
we are samples  
we are constellations of place, broken locations, dislocated maps  
we are each a matrix of conditions, waiting to become part of another matrix of another set of conditions  
we are here to be connected

The crossfader is an anti-assimilation technology. The crossfader chooses the mix over the melt, the many over the one, the *pluribus* over the *unum*. The crossfader is German and Syrian, Algerian and French at once, at once, never needing to abandon one for the other. What a time to be crossfading, across fortress Europe, in the age of the AFD and Orbán and Trump and Netanyahu and Bolsonaro, across militarised deserts, across the former West and the former East, the former North and the former South.

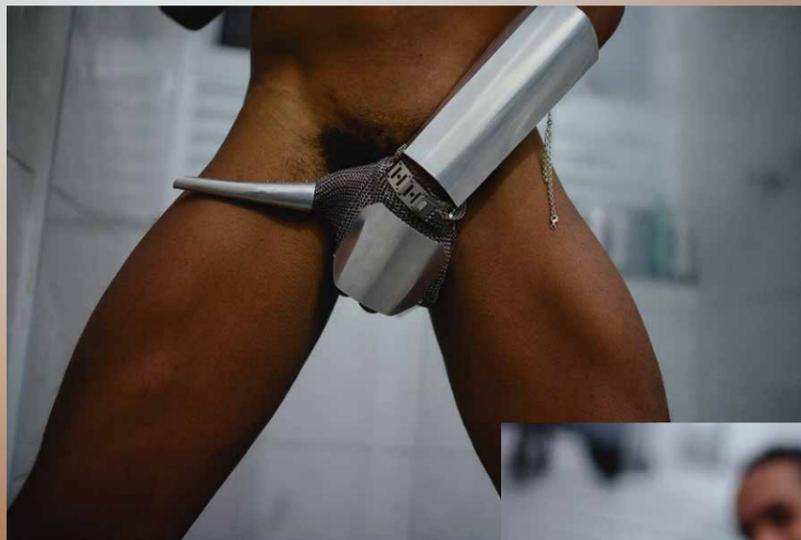
The crossfader looks linear but it actually operates on a curve. Bending and arcing like justice – open and closed, closed and open, keeping the beat going across our walled, walled world.



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# TRANS-MITTING BLACK RESISTANCE

TAI LINHARES IN CONVERSATION WITH LINN DA QUEBRADA



Linn da Quebrada. Stills from the documentary *Bixa Travesty* by Claudia Priscilla and Kiko Goifman, 2016.



Since the explosion of funk carioca, the emergence of MC Linn da Quebrada has challenged a number of norms and expectations revolving around the genre. With lyrics that passionately rebut transphobia and other political violences, the singular MC speaks to Brazilian journalist Tai Linhares about Black queer resistance, »deviant« sexualities, body politics, and the weaponised potential of music.

Music is dictating the movement of bodies as they sway against each other. The air is thin, pupils dilate in an attempt to understand the spectacle, and sweat pools together, making the audience forget that outside the temperature is still below zero. Tickets for Linn da Quebrada's Berlin show were sold out in just a few days. Everyone wanted to be present at that unique moment during her stay in the city. Linn had come for the 2018 Berlinale, where she received the Teddy Award for »Bixa Travesty,« a documentary portraying her trajectory.

Linn da Quebrada is a transsexual singer, composer, and multimedia artist who broke through the Brazilian pop scene in 2016 with the hit, »Enviescer« [Queering]. Her first album, *Pajubá*, was crowdfunded and released at the end of 2017. Emerging as an MC of the musical style known as funk carioca, Linn sought, in her debut album, to find a modern-day sound that is still connected to her roots, obtaining a mixture she defined as »afro-funk-vogue.« Few people are able to unite the catchiness of pop with avant-garde's aesthetic qualities, a fusion that is present in her lyrics and video clips, as well as Linn da Quebrada.

Linn's rise to fame in a country like Brazil, whose current president is an openly homophobic man, may seem contradictory. Since the 2016 coup, the country has been a territory of symbolic and social struggles where reactionary politicians try to hinder all of the progress that women, black people, and LGBTQ people have made over the last two decades. The conservative offensive is also felt on the streets. Studies by the NGO Transgender Europe (TGEU) claim that Brazil is the number one country for assassinations of transsexuals and travestis: from 2008 to 2014, 689 deaths were recorded. According to an investigation by Grupo Gay da Bahia (GGB), 179 deaths were recorded in 2017 alone. The Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) states that transsexuals have a life expectancy of just 35 years – half of the national average.

**TAI LINHARES** *When you won the Berlinale's Teddy Award in 2018 for the »Bixa Travesty« documentary, you spoke very emotionally about the importance of occupying spaces and promoting a »black queer resistance.« Which spaces did the Linn of 10 years ago wish to occupy? Which of these spaces have you already conquered?*

**LINN DA QUEBRADA** The Linn of 10 years ago was only 18 years old, and dreamed of occupying the main territory: her own body. I feel that I have made great progress concerning my desires, my affections, anxieties, and decisions. I think that I have been conquering my body. It's a process: alive, ongoing, and constant. I've conquered these territories based on what I wished for and conquered in my dreams; it's a lot of spaces, you know? Music, cinema, performance, writing... through these, I've been gaining a space beyond my body, and I've been gaining a voice that echoes between us, between our bodies, which has been very important – especially with regards to politics in these current times. I've been really happy with everything we've been building.

**TL** *What spaces had trans women and travestis occupied in society until then?*

**LQ** In Brazil, trans women and travestis occupy many different spaces. Plural spaces, actually. It's true that there are still many travestis that don't occupy spaces in the job market; travestis that don't get to study; travestis that are expelled from their homes, that don't get to be part of or have a space within a family; travestis that continue to occupy a space in prostitution... On the other hand, we are seeing travestis and trans people occupying spaces in music, in the fashion industry, in cinema, step-by-step, and I think this in itself is very important because we've conquered other possibilities in the social imaginary.

**TL** *How does Linn want to impact the way that Brazilian society views non-binary people?*

**LQ** The impact I want to have, first of all, is on myself. It's an impact that moves me, takes me out of my usual place and my comfort zone. It's the impact that makes me constantly look at the mirror and re-imagine myself. An impact that continues to lead me to transform myself. That leads me to transform myself into several others. That leads me to exactly this kind of movement, right? Not only to what concerns non-binary people, but especially to what concerns corporealities, the understanding that our corporealities are multiple and that there are several possibilities of corporealities. And to understand that these corporealities, in turn, lead us to other behaviours. They lead us to new relations, which lead us to other frames and social conditions related to sexuality and gender in an affectionate, material, and economic way. This is the impact I sought for myself and for the society I live in: a material, social, political, affectionate, and economic impact.

**TL** *You present yourself as a multimedia artist. When did you discover yourself as an artist?*

**LQ** I didn't discover myself as an artist. I've done and have been doing myself as an artist. For me, being an artist doesn't necessarily mean being in the spotlight, on stages, and in front of cameras. For me, being an artist is the possibility of creating over my own existence. My body is my raw material for creation. My body is my work. I've been an artist when I began to experiment, incorporate, and elaborate other forms of existence into myself. When I started to produce (my own) thought. When I started to produce collective thought. When I started to use my own body as my own artwork.

**TL** *How is it being an artist in the quebrada (hood)?*

**LQ** Life as an artist in the quebrada also passes through singularities – especially with regard to the stifled possibilities of artistic production inside the quebrada, the trashing of our ideas. The scraping of marginalised bodies prevent the free circulation of our thoughts, particularly bodies like mine, which carry the gift of uncertainty. I don't make art to produce answers, I don't have many certainties. But I carry so many questions and I've been elaborating many more... These are the questions that stir me and many people around me. Being an artist in the quebrada, for me, also means expanding territory, disputing language and power.

**TL** *With your music, performance, and recently your entry into cinema, you manage to move between different worlds, from pop to avant-garde art, to funk shows, or to being the main attraction in the opening of a festival*

*devoted to contemporary and experimental music. How does the experience of shifting between worlds contribute to your growth as an artist and as a person?*

**LQ** The possibility of moving between worlds contributes a lot for me as an artist and as a person because this changes me into several others. This changes the way I think; it places me in front of very different people and situations. This makes me change my own way of thinking, it disturbs and transforms me. I perceive myself as alive and I think there's no greater treasure. All of these things keep me alive, active, present, and acting over my own self.

**TL** *Black, non-binary, feminine bodies are often objectified and exoticised. How can we decolonise these bodies? Is this a question that is part of your creative process?*

**LQ** I don't have a »how-to decolonise bodies« manual. I think this is a matter of perception and study, a constant practice. I'm looking to myself, my theories, my thoughts, all the time, and perceiving how they translate into the real world. And I note the collateral effects and affects that come from my self-perceptions. I think that, even until today, I haven't managed to create and constitute a perception about myself that is free from the gaze and expectations of others. Our existence, our identity, exists through friction. I myself make my body into a work of friction. Not fiction, but friction. And this friction emerges exactly through the encounter between my feelings and the affects which circulate through my body when they meet the other's gaze. Because my body is also text and it's constantly read in several different ways. It's from this encounter and friction that our identities emerge. This is a question that often goes through my creative process and it's precisely because of it that we can speak of different topics and create diverse things without being restricted to talking only about our experiences and ourselves. I have an entire universe inside me. And I want and can talk about this entire complex universe which is sometimes very different from myself. Because it's exactly when I experiment with myself and put myself in check that I transform. And this is the moment when I want to talk about other things, to come up with other questions, and to explore other issues. I'm tired of feeling the same things through my own perception of my own self or encounters with the gaze of the other. I want to talk about new things in order to feel new things.

**TL** *Your lyrics talk about sex in an explicit manner, dismissing the false shame present in funk music which often chooses metaphors that objectify the act of sex (sit, bounce,*

*get down, up). What concerns accompany your compositional process? What effect do you wish to achieve when creating your lyrics?*

**LQ** When I compose, I also decompose myself. I start by decomposing the words that are circulating in my thoughts. I constantly ride my thoughts, seeing where they lead me, noticing which thoughts are already encrusted/embedded in my body, in my mind. Certain words, terms, phrases, and sentences accompany me for a while, and I try to decompose and transform them into others. I use this process of composing and decomposing so that I can incubate my own thoughts in myself, be my own doctor, and create my own monster. My music is both the virus and the antidote. And so, I use my process as magic. As spell and charm. So that I am able to cast spells that were previously unachievable. So that I can reach the tough and ancient parts inside me, parts that are often ancestral, and so that these parts can – *sigh* – decompose. Vanish. So that I can destroy things in myself. So that I can create other things inside me. I create my music as magic and spells, as charms. This is primarily aimed at myself. I make my music into a weapon, I make a tool of it. I make of my music an oar, and I paddle to other places, against the tide. Against the tide of my own feelings.

**TL** *The body is your media, through it you rebel. What is your strategy to deal with the vulnerability resulting from exposing your body? How do you deal, for example, with hate speech on the internet?*

**LQ** My strategy to deal with vulnerability is to deal with my own vulnerability. Not to pretend it doesn't exist, but to perceive where it comes from, and especially to transform my fragility into potency. That's when I transform. I'm working with my vulnerabilities, my shapes, my limits, all the time to gain new limits, shapes, and a new aesthetic. One that is not static. My work comes from my fragility, from what's pointed out to me as fragility. The feminine inhabiting my body. The melanin existing in my skin. My colour, my behaviour. The things that I'm told imply frailty and weakness are what I transform into power and potency. And into a strategy of resistance. I look at hate speeches on the internet and see how they're shallow, often cowardly, discourses because they rely on threats. They come from the political strategy of fearmongering, to set us back. To make us doubt our own strength. From the shallow and retrograde nature of these discourses, I sense how their creators/perpetuators feel threatened. Why they are attacking us? What's in me that bothers other people so much? Why do they attack me? What do they want to kill in me?

Or maybe I'm a reflection of something that also lives in them?

**TL** *We've seen the rise of far-right movements in Brazil, leading to the election of an openly racist, sexist, and homophobic president. Historically, right-wing movements target any form of »deviant« sexuality. How can sex, intimacy, and affection help us when thinking about politics at this time?*

**LQ** Sexuality is not necessarily the sex we have in private. This kind of sex doesn't bother these people in power and their conservative system. It is not necessarily about whether or not you are having sex. It's about how homosexuality, transsexuality, and blackness as movements disarticulate the system. If we look at identity issues radically, it will transform our relationships. Identity issues are material and concrete. This transforms the maintenance of this economic and power system, because our forms of sexual and affectionate relationships build families. They dislocate money and distribute assets. They distribute affection, collaborate, and stimulate our existence. Or our end/withdrawal. I think that, for these far-right movements, the danger lies precisely there. Because if we rethink our sexuality, affection, and intimacy in a political way, it can shift the gears of our material and economic system. Beyond a shift in power, it signifies a real economic and financial change. Our love benefits the bodies around us. Looking at this in a radical way makes us perceive which bodies benefit, and makes us start subverting the system's order and elaborating other networks between us. Not only the sexual and affectionate ones; let us also start elaborating other economic, territorial, and material networks. So that we manage to stay alive and with dignity. And this is frightening, because we're talking again about disputes: or power and language.



» [www.linndaquebrada.com](http://www.linndaquebrada.com)

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» [www.tailinhares.com](http://www.tailinhares.com)

Translated from the Portuguese by Hailey Kaas.

# »ALL THAT IS SOLID MELTS INTO PR«<sup>\*1)</sup> ON PERSISTENCE, RESILIENCE, AND AUTONOMY IN MUSIC

OLLIE ZHANG

Through tumultuous times, what does it mean to persist? Beyond persisting, what would it look like to thrive? To have agency and autonomy, or to cultivate joy? Ollie Zhang considers the ramifications of late capitalism on the independent music industry and makes the case for new infrastructures, platforms, practices, and politics – ones that make room for pleasure, empathy, and imagination.

There's plenty of evidence out there: frustrated Twitter threads, reluctant tidbits dropped in interviews, and a plethora of idealistic music-blockchain projects that aim to »fix« music. The more time I spend in Berlin and in the »music scene,« the more traces I uncover of dissatisfaction and resignation.

In the past year, artists have begged for likes and the support of fire emojis online; numerous threads criticised the perfunctory gestures of superficial music journalism; a number of pop stars lamented today's industry pressures to be visible; beef was had with Instagram/Facebook/Twitter dependence; despair at corporate reliance was expressed; and countless off-the-record admissions were made, stating that x phenomenon in the music industry isn't working, but is a necessary evil.

What resigns us? A fear of being left behind, or an incessant pressure to excel? A masochistic drive? Or, more likely, a widespread apathy resultant from rampant individualisation?

Swirling in a toilet bowl of our apparent collective apathy are our anxieties, smartphones, corporate reliances, and social media habits.

This brings up more questions: what is to be done? Will another piece critiquing social media convince anyone to leave a platform? Will another rant against the reliance on [insert corporation] in music help?

An economic system that persistently says »never enough« is, unsurprisingly, not the ideal climate for art, creativity, sharing, or joy. If neoliberalism »seeks to bring all human interaction into the domain of the market,«<sup>\*2)</sup> then music, along with the rest of us, is in a troublesome situation. A medium that cannot be quantified or have its value reduced to metrics ends up pushing against a bizarre industry that makes »an attempt to crudely quantify... affective contributions.«<sup>\*3)</sup> Placing »affective, as well

as productive« demands on artists, promoters, publishers, writers, listeners, and everyone else in between are the pressures and mechanisms of PR and promotion in the age of platform capitalism.

These attempts at measuring forms of labour »which, by their nature, are resistant to quantification«<sup>\*4)</sup> cultivates a cultural dynamic in which representation seems to weigh more than actuality – music dissolves into gesture.

It becomes common practice to book artists with certain follower counts. A good press release is reiterated time and time again, and comes to define an album or artist. Corporate platforms with beyond-dubious operations come to dictate the way we think about and discover art.

The conviction that we in music are motivated not primarily out of financial interest but also out of love has long been considered a common foundation of independent (music) cultures. As we navigate the shifting ways in which technology shapes our lives, what it means to have agency or to be independent becomes increasingly contested.

To preserve and insist on the value of what we do is a necessary and difficult task. We continually trust centralised, investor-owned platforms; »[w]ithout thinking, we have passed vast swathes of music culture to the whims of capital, and distributed it through channels with a single point of failure.«<sup>\*5)</sup> As we swim through a culture that places more value on representation than being, we are also in danger of pursuing a politics (or wokeness) that only »register[s] at the level of (PR) appearance.«<sup>\*6)</sup>

In 2007, Facebook announced Beacon, a system that lets users broadcast recent activities and purchases. It was also accompanied by the Facebook Page, which was touted as a new way for consumers to engage with businesses and heralded as »a new era for advertising.«<sup>\*7)</sup> The ubiquitous Facebook Page is now one of the presiding meth-

ods via which artists share their work and make a name for themselves. In 2015, these Pages were »empower[ed]«<sup>8)</sup> to connect with users/consumers via direct messaging. Meanwhile, the behemoth acquired Instagram in 2012 and WhatsApp in 2014, thereby playing a dangerously large role in our networked world, and reshaping many music industry norms.

2008 saw the launch of Spotify, another investor-owned platform that rewired the music industry, promising »Music for Everyone.« While espousing this seemingly egalitarian sentiment, Spotify has come under fire for failing to properly compensate musicians, for fostering a new strain of Muzak, exacerbating sexism in music, and threatening the art form itself through cultivating homogeneity. The list of dubious activities goes on, yet in 2018, it was reported that their user base had ballooned to 180 million monthly users globally. For all the reports of it »saving« the music industry, lesser known artists (and those who don't make it onto playlists) continue to receive paltry payments.

## »FOR ALL THE TALK OF POLITICS ON THE DANCEFLOOR, THERE SEEMS TO BE A SUBSTANTIAL OVERSIGHT HERE«

These corporate monoliths undoubtedly do not rule the music industry alone, but given their gargantuan roles, sketch out a picture of where we're at today. Facebook and Instagram have become dominant sites of communication and promotion; meanwhile the rise of Spotify and similar services normalises passive listening and inequitable streaming across the board.

Our shared reliance on corporate platforms is to the detriment of the entire ecosystem. Even in the arts, there doesn't seem to be space for a creative gesture outside the homogenising forces of persistent press cycles, relentless (re)posting, and PR.

All of this paints a fairly dire picture, which probably doesn't come as a surprise. But what does is the supposed »radical« underground's acquiescence to and acceptance of these phenomena.

For all the talk of politics on the dancefloor, there seems to be a substantial oversight here.

People will posit that it's a privilege to leave or abstain from any major platform, and rightfully so – but perhaps that makes it all the more important to. The few who refrain from social media promotion are likely already established, with careers that blossomed a few years earlier. Those who have the option to decline suspect programmes and services likely need financial security to do so. Yet even then, it seems the desire for individual »success,« relevance, or popularity often eclipses whatever hazy benefits abstinence or refusal might eventually give rise to. But surely any kind of progress is dependent on those who have the capacity and means to move to do so.

Despite its apparent visibility, the underground music world has suffered on many fronts over the last decade. It not only lacks viable economic models, but also faces neoliberalism's weighty demands in the forms of maximum efficiency, affective labour, and constant visibility. In a landscape where music is content, and content is free; when many can't afford to pay, and many don't want to, it becomes more difficult than ever to build a healthy arts scene that isn't run by and for those who are independently wealthy. After the era of the work of art in the age of digital piracy, what is left to do?

20 years ago, many of these professionalised industry practices weren't standard in the worlds of experimental/underground electronic music. It was enough to do the thing, without having to gesture about, sensationalise, create hype around, and insist that the thing was great; the thing was enough. This isn't posited in an effort to convey a boring, unhelpful nostalgia for »better days,« but instead to further sketch out the context in which we're operating today.

The worlds of underground, experimental, and club music have changed drastically in the last couple of decades. As we entered the age of surveillance capitalism, the role and world of music have seen multiple paradigm shifts.

Reliances on centralised platforms that operate in the interests of capital quash our collective ability to imagine otherwise. Resigned, we participate in the very same structures that are funneling revenue away from the arts, undercutting individual agency, and furthering our joint dependency on them. Our shared reliance siphons revenue away from those who need it, demanding grand amounts of

affective labour and undercutting individual user agency. Music consumption is not just an economy in its own right, but also an opportunity to produce data that can be exploited via other means. Streaming has continued the custom of sharing music for (nearly) free – often without direct affiliation or engagement with the artist or the culture that the music is a part of. While making music available for free can also be a conscious strategy of artists to flatten economic disparities and to connect to listeners, this only works if their engagement is reciprocated. Gargantuan platforms – and, of course, technologies like smart speakers that are designed to foster passive listening – often strip music of these contexts and intents. They thereby risk homogenising and diluting music into play-hungry background Muzak.<sup>9)</sup> Independent promoters, publishers, artists, and so on all suffer as a result.

A number of efforts have thankfully been undertaken to imagine better structures, platforms, and means of connecting to/sharing with one another, both in-and outside of music. From new economic models for creators of all stripes, such as those conceived by sustainable journalism initiative Civil<sup>10)</sup> and browser Brave,<sup>11)</sup> to Cryptorave's pursuance of autonomy on dancefloors in an age of digital capitalism and db's<sup>12)</sup> proposition as a small, user-owned platform, several noteworthy developments are taking place in these conversations and their peripheries. Off the back of the platform co-op movement, crypto boom, and social media dissatisfactions, it appears that in order to be effective, efforts need to span an array of conversations and ideas. While this conversation is sometimes framed as a question of whether we need new technical solutions or whether we need to change our attitudes and approaches, maybe we ought to sidestep this false dichotomy and acknowledge that platform design is an ideological problem, and that our practices are dependent on them.

So far, efforts don't seem like enough. There's still plenty of resignation, dismissal, flat-out critique, and anger. Perhaps an effective approach (and thus

a responsibility of all who desire alternatives) may be to keep searching and working towards these strategies, in ways however small. If we are going to draw so frequently on a term like intersectionality, let's consider how our varied practices can enact that. Acts of protesting dubious platforms and contributing to the development of better ones can be called what they are – practices that are at once anti-capitalist, anti-racist, feminist, collective, and so on.

How might we step outside of our collective tunnel vision and consider what a better, healthier, more joyful cultural ecosystem might look like? How might we find or create wiggle room in an industry that appears hopelessly bound to the whim of investor-owned platforms that do not have our shared interests at heart? How might we foster an empathetic politics, and challenge the ways in which we assign value to our work?

If we want to cultivate a music ecosystem that doesn't just persist but maybe even thrives, perhaps we need to reconsider our roles within and contributions to it. To combat the harmful effects of our existing habits, it seems we must begin to shift our approach. A helpful beginning may lie in allowing collectivity, generosity, and joy to weigh more than appearance, and in interrogating what it is to be »successful.« In the face of questions thrown up by »persistence,« maybe we can find hope in turning to collaborators both in- and outside of music to collectively imagine better platforms, infrastructures, and practices.



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<sup>1)</sup> Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2010), p. 39. <sup>2)</sup> David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 3. <sup>3)</sup> Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism*, p. 39. <sup>4)</sup> Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism*, p. 42. <sup>5)</sup> Josh Hall, »Towards a Distributed Culture«, *Rewire Festival Magazine* (2018). <sup>6)</sup> Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism*, p. 43. <sup>7)</sup> Rob Hol, »Facebook Declares New Era for Advertising,« 6. November 2007, *Bloomberg*, [www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2007-11-05/facebook-declares-new-era-for-advertising](http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2007-11-05/facebook-declares-new-era-for-advertising). <sup>8)</sup> Josh Constone, »Facebook Empowers Pages To Provide Customer Support Over Private Messages,« 5 August 2015, *TechCrunch*, [www.techcrunch.com/2015/08/05/facestomer-support/](http://www.techcrunch.com/2015/08/05/facestomer-support/). <sup>9)</sup> See: Liz Pelly's »The Problem with Muzak,« December 2017, *The Baffler*, [www.thebaffler.com/salvos/the-problem-with-muzak-pelly](http://www.thebaffler.com/salvos/the-problem-with-muzak-pelly). <sup>10)</sup> A community-owned journalism platform prioritising transparency and economic sustainability. Learn out more at [civil.co](http://civil.co) <sup>11)</sup> Which uses micro-payments to propose a new, seamless remuneration model for content creators online. <sup>12)</sup> db is a co-operatively owned platform and experiment in peer-to-peer broadcasting; find out more at [broad-cast.sh](http://broad-cast.sh)

# ALL UNITED

IC3PEAK IN CONVERSATION WITH  
MARIANA BEREZOVSKA



IC3PEAK. Photo: Courtesy of the artists.

Self-described »audio-visual terrorists« IC3PEAK garnered international attention in late 2018 after a series of unannounced inspections and other inconveniences, including bomb scares and arrests, interrupted their Russian tour. Mariana Berezovska of BORSHCH magazine speaks with IC3PEAK to find out whether their artistic and social resistance is as dramatic as the Western media makes it seem.

In 2018, the duo drew another level of attention. After their latest album, *Skazka* (or *Fairytale*), came out in September, IC3PEAK's reputation ballooned past their fanbase, reaching Russian authorities and government-owned news channels. The scandals escalated a month later, after the artists released a video for the now-infamous »Smerti Bolshe Net« (or »No More Death«), in which Nastya and Nick drench themselves in kerosene in front of the Russian White House. They devour raw bloody meat with the Kremlin in the backdrop and ride federal police officers in front of the headquarters of the FSB.

Despite palpable tension and heated media discussions fueled by hatred and trolling, IC3PEAK still decided to tour Russia. They were apprehended and detained, missing gigs in the process. Promoters were threatened, and the duo's manager was beaten up. Nonetheless, Nastya and Nick remained positive and kept sharing the incidents on social media, while the FSB's outdated methods were watched, judged, and ridiculed across the web.

IC3PEAK deliberately kept touring to make a statement against these pressures, hoping that their actions could serve as an encouraging example to their peers across the country. As is often the case with the citizens of Russia, in being truly patriotic, the young musicians do not wish to flee or emigrate; they want to persevere, drawing a staunch line between the country's conscious youth and its deeply rooted dictatorship fortified in the Red Square.

**MARIANA BEREZOVSKA** The lyrics of your latest album, *Skazka*, are very straightforward. They are critical of the government and focus on anti-establishment sentiments. In an interview, Nastya mentioned that writing lyrics about dystopian themes made even more sense to her after Putin won the presidential election for the fourth time, in 2018. What caused the shift in your songs from existential issues to open political satire?

**NIKOLAY KOSTYLEV (NICK)** I think that when Nastya started writing lyrics in Russian [in 2017], the country's problems naturally entered the songs. But I wouldn't call all of our work political. In all of our latest albums, there are a range of themes and topics that we address. Sometimes they happen to be political. I think that real art is always created in the process of struggle, whether with ourselves or with the government, and our music has always been about emancipation and about »being against,« not »with.«

**ANASTASIA KRESLINA (NASTYA)** We sing about everything from love to politics. Everything human has its place in our music and my lyrics. Initially, we used words and voice like an instrument; they carried phonetic rather than semantic meaning. The abstract noise and screaming were comprehensible for listeners worldwide – it was a language of emotions that needs no translation. Now the message is more clear and direct, and yet allegorical. The latest album is a scary social fairytale, and we are its bewitched protagonists.

**MB** *IC3PEAK has been known to audiences in underground music circles for several years, but after recent stories emerged detailing the harassment you experienced at the hands of authorities and the pressures put on you by the government and the FSB, your level of fame rapidly took off. The funny thing is that now many listeners are grateful for the attention and criticism from authorities because it first introduced them to IC3PEAK. There are also many more haters, even among public figures like the renowned Russian director Nikita Mikhalkov, who publicly analysed and criticised your songs. His remarks, according to Nastya, were just copied from popular YouTube comments. Does this have any negative influence on you, or is there no such thing as bad PR?*

**NK** Our music definitely got more exposure thanks to all of these problems with authorities and Siloviki [politicians from the security or military services, who are often officers of the former KGB, GRU, FSB, and SVR]. Of course, with more exposure comes more hate. There are people who are very far re-

moved from this music and don't have the context to understand what we are talking about. But the reactions are mostly positive, because our songs vocalise what a lot of people want but don't dare to say.

Mikhalkov's comments are funny but they can also lead to something negative, because Nikita Mikhalkov is one of the main Russian propagandists. If they put so much effort into putting us on this list of «bad artists,» it means that they are really angry. And since we all know how the Russian FSB works, we also feel that it can be dangerous. At the same time, this propaganda does not work at all, because people who end up watching our videos don't rely on those comments and make their own judgments instead. Some viewers also thank Mikhalkov for the tip.

**AK** I also don't see any real problem here. Some people are scared of new things, and that's fine. This is an educational moment – how else will people start perceiving other music if they don't listen to it in the first place? Now they need time to comprehend the idea that having an alternative is very important. Fake and angry comments on YouTube are funny – they come from impotence and the fear of a new, powerful culture that won't be stopped by prohibition. Many thanks to the FSB for the promotion!

**MB** *When it comes to censorship on social media in Russia, do you have to be careful with the ideas you express on different platforms?*

**NK** We don't try to be careful with our message. The only thing we want to avoid is having our videos age-restricted or blocked on YouTube. In the process of writing a script or directing or filming a video, we don't really think about any consequences. It's in the process of post-production that we start to think about the parts that may be perceived as extremism or drug propaganda. Unfortunately, we sometimes even have to blur cigarettes in our videos.

**AK** The most important thing for us is to be honest with ourselves and our listeners – to give people an opportunity to understand that they are not alone, and to show from our own experience that it's time to stop being afraid of the dictatorship and to finally speak up. The prohibition of our concerts showed that publicity and information are our main weapons and that the media can provide enormous support.

**MB** *The Russian underground scene is growing, with young rappers taking the lead, touring the country in crews, and also receiving a lot of pressure from authorities. You are also often put in the same category of artists,*

*but your language is very different from the majority of the scene: there are no swear words, no name-calling, no drugs. All of your songs are very symbolic. It must be difficult and frustrating to have your songs banned or censored – it doesn't happen to rappers like Husky, for example. The same goes for your videos, which make use of a DIY approach and low budgets, yet everything is well thought-through and, again, very symbolic. Do you think this language is as understandable to young people in Russia as rap?*

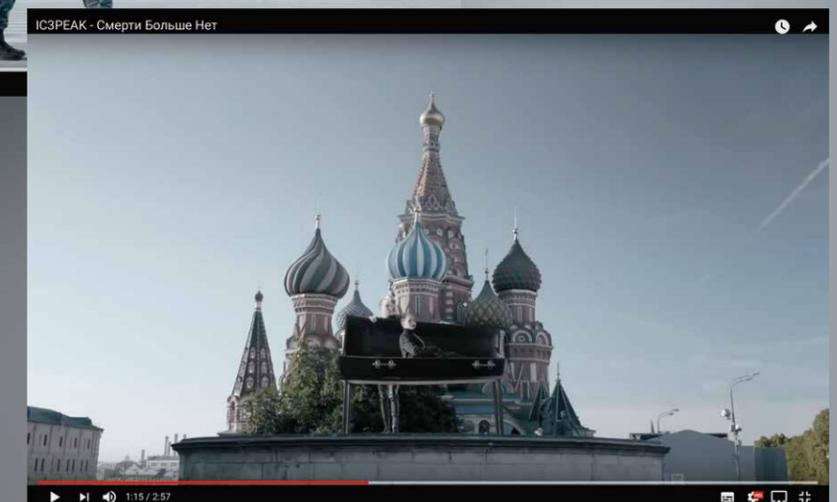
**NK** Nastya's language is poetic. That's just the way she writes lyrics; everything is symbolic and has a deeper meaning. The same happens when we make a music video. We think of it as of a movie and not as advertising for a song. Good movies usually have deep symbols and strong imagery, and that's what we want to see in our videos. Judging from the reactions our audience had to our latest album, we just express things that many people can relate to.

**AK** You can only change culture through language, because language is culture. We all exist in the same kind of context – the same time period, which we reflect on. The rest comes down to artistic tools. Everyone understands and reads these signs, so of course we are also talking to our generation.

**MB** *From rapid media updates, we see IC3PEAK is being followed by the FSB. Alternative music concerts are cancelled, artists are detained and threatened. Putin meets up with rappers in the Kremlin to discuss their music and the influence they have on young people, aiming to interfere and get young influencers to be on the side of the government. It sounds quite dramatic and a bit desperate, but at the same time it proves that youth culture and underground music have their value and power.*

**NK** That we've been followed and detained by the FSB, and that our concerts get cancelled by Siloviki, it really means that our music is being recognised. But the thing is, these tactics are so ugly, old-school, and clumsy. They end up making fun of themselves – they try to censor rappers and cancel concerts before backtracking afterwards and saying that rap is good, or even trying to rap on state television like Kiselev did.

**AK** It is youth culture that's shaping the generation that, in a few years' time, will be deciding the future of the country. The Russian government suddenly woke up and realised that they are losing control and that there are many people beyond their influence. Alternative music has a strong effect on those people; to them, the authorities are just a joke. The government resorted to their old methods in hope of changing the situation.



Stills from IC3PEAK's «No More Death» music video. Courtesy of the artists.

**MB** *But do you think these old methods are just threats, or do you feel real danger to the point where you might need to leave the country? What would need to happen for you to stop writing and performing music?*

**AK** At the moment, most of the pressure comes from fake YouTube comments attempting to create a bad reputation for us. But still, the reactions of real people outweigh them. For me, it's better not to do art at all than to be dishonest with myself. Perhaps what could stop me would be conditions in which speaking up honestly is already impossible.

**MB** *Have you ever thought that living outside of Russia might make things easier for you?*

**NK** We are international musicians and can live wherever we want. We don't want to leave Russia forever. There are no reasons for that. We have many fans in Russia and we love this country. It's where we grew up and we feel like we belong here, even more so after this whole story with the authorities.

**AK** I love Russia and I'd love to travel the world, but I wouldn't like to leave Russia forever. It's not important where you are but rather which language you speak.

**MB** *I must say that in the Western press, the concept of Russia and Russian culture is often generalised based on what is known about Moscow or St. Petersburg. This is in spite of the fact that it is a huge country, and it would be logical for young people in different regions to develop their own interests and cultural movements. Do you think it's important to understand the difference between various regions of Russia when speaking about musicians and their socio-political context?*

**AK** There is a common cultural code in Russia that glues everything together. Surely there is a difference between possibilities in Moscow and other regions, but young people who have access to multiple sources of information on the internet can think critically, and this is what unites all of us. And music, of course, is our common language.

**NK** Russia is huge, and cities outside of Moscow and St. Petersburg, and maybe also Ekaterinburg and Kazan, are quite different. This applies to education and the environment there. But I wouldn't say that people we met during our time in the regions differ much from the youth in Moscow. We are all so heavily connected to the same sources of information that it feels like we're all neighbours. Of course, the internet doesn't solve all problems, and the environment in which these talented, bright young people live is much more severe than that of their Moscow peers. It's sometimes depressing to see how talented people have to struggle just to do something simple like going to a gig.

**MB** *What do you think people outside of the Russian context should understand about the current music scene in Russia?*

**AK** The music scene has grown in recent years. We are not ashamed to say »we are Russians« anymore. But we also don't want to scare anyone. We stand for dialogue and communication.

**NK** Maybe outside of the country, Russian music scene and culture do not seem so big or interesting because most of it is in the Russian language. In actuality, we have a booming scene right now, and a lot of super-talented young singers, producers, and performers are emerging. People should definitely check out more music coming from Russia because the language barrier is not so difficult to overcome.



» [www.ic3peak.bandcamp.com](http://www.ic3peak.bandcamp.com)  
» [www.instagram.com/ic3peak](http://www.instagram.com/ic3peak)

**MARIANA BEREZOVSKA** is a Ukrainian writer, editor, and co-founder of BORSHCH, the Berlin-based print magazine on electronic music on and beyond the dance floor.  
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# THE RADICAL ELASTICITY OF SOUND

SALOMÉ VOEGELIN

## UNPERFORMING RESILIENCE

Take off your shoes and socks  
stand on your tiptoes  
in the middle of the room.  
Voice the word Resilience 100 times.

Words strut about and make a space for themselves. They rise out of the conversation with other words to temporarily colonise language and determine interpretations, enforcing new contexts and meanings, carrying through ideologies and desires that are the driving force of their upsurge.

However, words also stutter and fall over themselves, breaking the rhythm of their naturalised meaning and, suddenly sounding awkward, they expose the ideologies that carried their prominence. And so, standing unsteadily on bare tiptoes, *Resilience* falls over its own repetition to reveal what it knew all along: that it was a con, a charade, played out on the back of those who had no choice but had become persuaded by its ever more frequent repetition and the promise of its rhetoric to provide agency and security in a baffling and abusive world. Resilience connotes »the capacity of a system to return to a previous state, to recover from a shock, or to bounce back after a crisis or trauma.«<sup>(1)</sup> This resilience is ideational. Bouncing back should occur without the help of social infrastructure, but through training and anticipation instead. It is a signifier of individual strength and autonomy that interprets elasticity as compliance (i.e. to accept low wages, precarity, uncertainty, disaster, and even war), and demands you withstand it on your own two feet. Its emphasis is on an ethics of self-care and self-entrepreneurship that balances the financial deficit on the weakest in society, and distracts from other political possibilities by pronouncing an ongoing threat that demands preparedness rather than resistance.

Repeating *Resilience* over and over on shaky ground however, this emphasis slips. And once accidentally »mispronounced,« with a stress on the soft vowels and a skip of the consonants' edge, its politics becomes apparent. This sonic slip-up offers a glimpse behind the scenes, at the engine and author of its aim: the neoliberal ideal for the individual to become »a subject which must permanently struggle to accommodate itself to the world, and not a subject which can conceive of changing the world.«<sup>(2)</sup> A subject, in other words, that overcomes its own weakness rather than fighting the inequities that cause it; that cannot resist, but needs to adapt, thereby inadvertently enabling the status quo that is stacked against it.

By contrast, in our unperformance of vowels and consonants, in an extended and unnatural pose, on the tips of our toes, we expose the development of a word from the scientific sense of ecological adaptation into a dubious economic elasticity: instituting the neoliberal response to asymmetrical resourcing that prepares the mind and body for the tolerance of an intolerable world, offering solutions on the stretched-out form of the resilient individual without having to address causes or consequences, thereby abdicating collective responsibility in favour of personal blame.

However, in the breathy enunciation of E's and I's without language as a certain frame to lean on rests another meaning: that of failure and vulnerability, which become radical efforts of resistance in an unequal world. And in the fragile breath of

their open sounds, politics finds another imagination: that of a shared existence and responsibility, performed in the acknowledgement that there is no independent self but that everything, including every »I,« is made of non-»I«, non-thing elements:<sup>(3)</sup> My tiptoed voice repeating *Resilience* 100 times articulates between body and breath, and sounds the co-dependence of oxygen and the sun, of trees and water, life and things. Thus it brings home the need for collaboration and participation and sounds an elasticity that is not resilient, but expansive and contingent.

In its repeated performance, *Resilience* rethinks the neoliberal adaptability of the individual in the invisible volume of sound, its viscid dimensionality, where responsibility is not individuated but a matter of interbeing, as being of and with each other: not »this« or »that« but »this« with »that« and from »that,« indivisibly sounding a shared cosmos; and where weakness is not overcome but listened to, sounded and heard in the breath that connects us all.

The volume generated in the unperformance of *Resilience* is not a measure of decibels but the expanse of a sonic world, its voluminous capacity, generated by our collective sounding and listening, in all its asymmetries, terrors, and dangers, but without allowing them to singularise the political imagination. This is not a capacity to endure, but a capacity for interaction and the possibility of a shared cosmos.

According to Mark Thatcher and Vivian A. Schmidt, writing on *Resilient Liberalism in Europe's Political Economy*, resilience is »perceived as the only legitimate course of action.«<sup>(4)</sup> It pretends to allow for diversity and plurality, everybody can be resilient, while remaining the only possibility, everybody has to be resilient. We have accepted this demand since its solution appears simple: »she must learn resilience«<sup>(5)</sup> while not questioning its unyielding elasticity, whose flexibility is not a sign of its conceding and reciprocal intent but the rationality of its control.

By contrast, the sounds of our unperforming *Resilience* are irrational in relation to the word's neoliberal aim. Its enunciations do not move on a horizontal chain of meaning and association but dive into the depth of contingent articulation. They produce a verticality of sense, »embracing a world of forces and matter, which lacks any original stability,«<sup>(6)</sup> and linger in an elastic expanse that is that of sound rather than of compliance. Here we do not hear the rhetoric of one truth and the demand of its reality, but plural possibilities that initiate other ways to live: where she does not have to learn to

be more resilient, but comes to resist the cause of her pain.

To follow the vertical, to fall vertiginously into the word, is to discover its invisible textures, not to a certain ground but into a viscid expanse, in which we inter-are with things in our individual capacities together. Thus through its repeated performance, *Resilience* starts to open a different imagination that rethinks neoliberalism's adaptability of the individual through the possibility of an indivisible world and the necessity of radical nonresilience.

Thatcher and Schmidt wonder whether there is already a different political economic imagination afoot. They sense a tipping point but concede that they are not sure. They suggest that »on the one hand, the content of neoliberal ideas may be weakened from the inside by its increasing internal incoherence and gaps between rhetoric and reality,« and that »on the other hand, rival ideas may gain strength.« In the conclusion of their 2013 publication they mention the concurrent developments in Latin America and Barack Obama as sources for a potential rethinking of the neoliberal ideal – neither of which have succeeded, however. But Thatcher and Schmidt leave us with hope by suggesting that a new thinking »might arise from novel sources...«<sup>(7)</sup>

I understand the nonresilient elasticity of sound to be such a novel source for a radical critique and agitation of resilience that as neoliberal signifier enslaves and blames us individually, but that as repeated utterance creates a voluminous expanse and makes us responsible together. Sound, a sonic sensibility, does not provide the consciousness of a counter-resilience but enables its unperforming, its re-articulating, re-uttering, in bits and pieces of separate vowels and consonants that form a volume which we can inhabit together in a contingent process of co-constitution, trying at least to listen out for and participate in a more equitable world.

And here I meet Thatcher and Schmidt's hope for a Latin American source of another thinking as I hear in the avant-garde compositions of Jocy De Oliveira the soundscape of a sonic possible world that is viscous and indivisible, promoting a being-together according to listening and sounding without a horizon of danger but the possibility of a different future.

De Oliveira, a Brazilian composer, musician, artist, and writer, began her career as a concert pianist playing the works of avant-garde composers such as Berio, Xenakis, and Santoro. During the 1960s, however, she started to focus on her own compositions, which expand a traditional definition to

cover installation, film, video, and theatre as well as concert hall works. And as little as her sonic works comply with a traditional definition of music, so too do they not comply with the neoliberal disaster management of economic asymmetries, but sound on slow revolutions a vulnerability that connects rather than needs to be overcome.

Her work presents a »novel source« to rethink resilience through voices, electroacoustic sounds, and acoustic instrumentation. They sound the world as a voluminous cosmos and create the condition and impetus for a different engagement. And so as I listen to undulating voices, breathing words, and moving sounds, I accept an invitation into »a distinct cultural capsule, and a means through which to find accurate truths to amend history's sins.«<sup>78)</sup> Her work generates the material for a global conversation that rethinks reality and truth through sonic rather than ideological encounters.<sup>79)</sup>

sions a language that is nobody's and everybody's; that in its turning undulation explores and performs the sonorous depth of words rather than their horizontal connection in language, and that sounds without recourse to semantic certainties another possibility of sense.

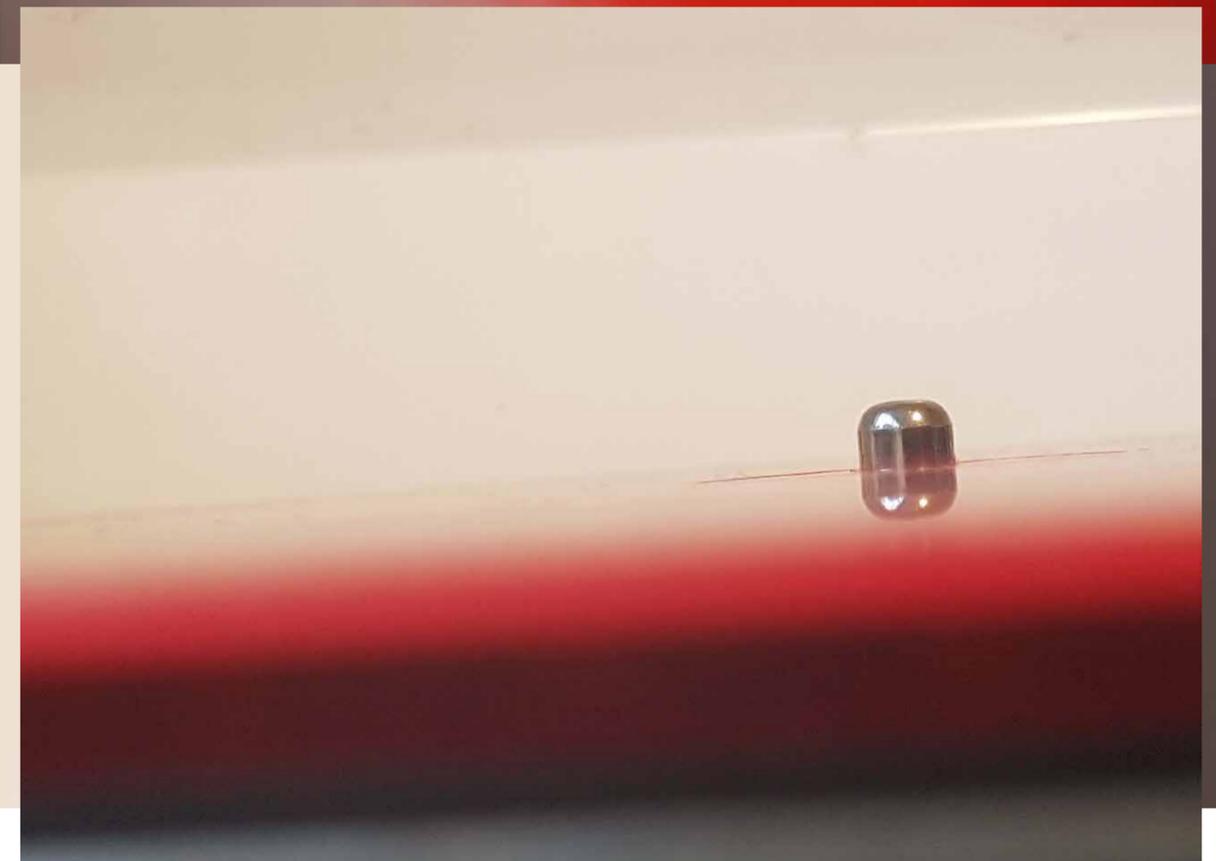
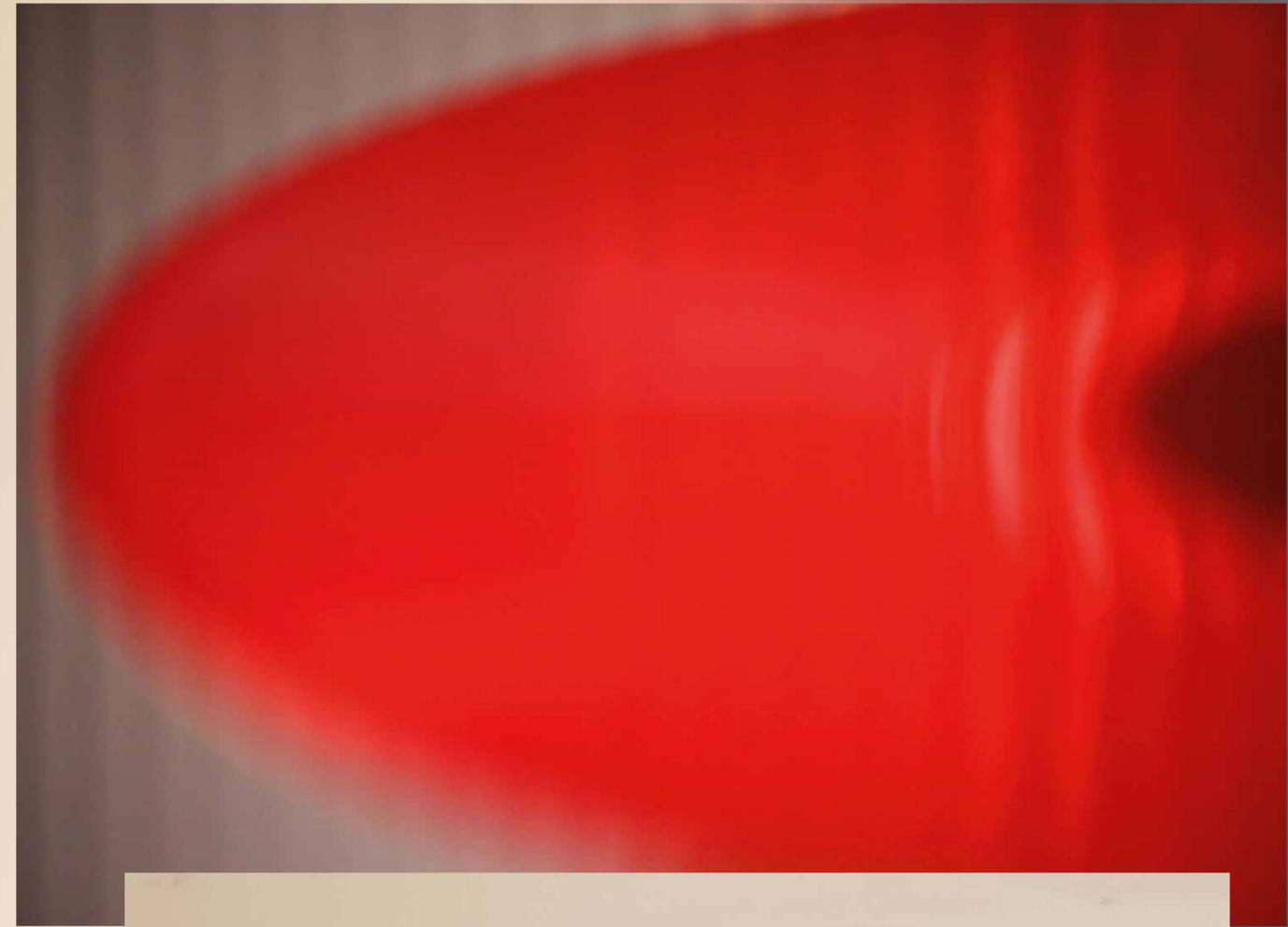
The sound created between the two voices, electronic violin, bass, guitar, and percussion is elastic without being compliant. It does not adapt but formlessly forms another imagination of music, of instrumentation as well as of the body, and in extension also of the political understood as the governance of interaction and living together. It creates communication as a viscous thread that repeats and returns again and again to the same juncture without saying the same, but pointing at the infinity of expression and the impossibility of a direct exchange. This impossibility is not the work's failure but its desire for a plural voice, and its infinity is

## »WEAKNESS IS NOT OVERCOME BUT LISTENED TO, SOUNDED AND HEARD IN THE BREATH THAT CONNECTS US ALL«

De Oliveira's work spans seven decades and in that time sounds different socio-political realities and possibilities. I am listening to »Estória IV,« a composition which she started in 1978 and first released in 1981, during the last years of the military dictatorship in Brazil. Its performance occupies the whole second side on the album *Estórias Para Voz, Instrumentos Acústicos e Eletrônicos* [Estórias for voice, acoustic and electronic instruments], an album which in its 2017 re-release is a bright and translucent red. No visible lettering or labels, just a bright-red turning surface that makes no line of tones but a volume of voices and sounds, open-mouthed and moving, one performer singing after the other, following the same text not to understand but to modulate and exist in the encounter: indivisibly, expansive, and potentially infinite. As De Oliveira, discussing the piece, explains: »the performer's role is not to make the text understandable but to use it as a key, for the phonemes selection, singing as slowly as possible, as a tape that has been played backwards, in a slower rotation.«<sup>10)</sup>

The piece turns these two voices around the deck, around the mouth in slow rotation, articulating between Portuguese, Sanskrit, and Japanese expres-

not a sign of the work's resilience, but the continuation and expanse of its viscid material and song. Bradford Bailey, writing in the liner notes of the album, reminds us of the paradox of the avant-garde, and particularly the Latin American avant-garde: of its optimism and global exchange post-war – »bouncing and ricocheting around the world, these sounds, structures, and ideas, have offered a forum through which radically diverse backgrounds and cultures can meet and speak« – and its concurrent inability to reach a broad audience and become part of a general socio-cultural consciousness – the failure of its »quest for open democracy and access through sounds, it is a world which, for most, remains opaque – perceived as offering challenges too great for the majority of listeners to take.«<sup>11)</sup> Thus while this work remains relatively hidden still, its audition in the context of a discussion on resilience allows us to reconsider its sonorous power. It invites us to think about what might have been if it had succeeded in its quest and had managed to inculcate a general listening and broad sonic consciousness of the world at this very moment, in the 1970s, when neoliberalism was finding a footing in politics and language, and a truth in the breathless preparation for disaster and catastrophe via ecological notions of adaptability.



»THIS FAITH IS NOT THAT OF RESILIENCE, BUT OF RESISTANCE TO THE STATUS QUO, THAT OF MUSIC, THAT OF LANGUAGE, AND THAT OF POLITICS. ITS TRUTH IS COMPLEX BECAUSE IT IS CONTINGENT.«

By contrast, the truth of this sound is that of its material and of its performance. There is no manipulation on the tape that provides the original for this record re-release. Instead, the tape faithfully provides the surface for the depth of an elastic sound. This faith is not that of resilience, but of resistance to the status quo, that of music, that of language, and that of politics. Its truth is complex because it is contingent. It does not promise an understanding and the clarity of easy solutions, but practices the demand of a sonic depth, where we need to generate our own understanding and participate. It provides not a line of words but a volume for us to be in, together, to breathe in its slow rotation and to share in the indivisible cosmos of its sonic expanse.

»Estória IV« produces an elastic sound that unperforms resilience. That counters the pliability not with a stubborn refusal but with the resistance of the material to be plied into a form, by not accepting to work with what can be listened to and instead making us hear something new.

And so to practice our tiptoed unperformance of resilience we can join with De Oliveira, following her first voice, modulating with it to find our place in a fragile and open sound, going round and round on the record deck not to show stamina and acceptance but vulnerability, and to produce with our voice a different sound that resists the pull of forward movement, simplicity, and self-care, and relishes the rotation and fleeting encounters with everything. Not to move towards a certain aim but to move in processes and relationships, to experience in their depth an unresolvable fragility rather than a weakness to be overcome.

And maybe if in the 1970s, the moment financial politics took resilience from the discourses of ecology to adapt to its own aims, we had learnt to listen to avant-garde music in general and the work of Jocy De Oliveira in particular, we could have avoided a descent into insecurity and resilience and practiced our own voices, our own breath, generating an autonomy that is not about self-care and responsibility, but about creating an environment for everybody and everything.



*SALOMÉ VOEGELIN is an artist and writer concerned with listening as a socio-political practice of sound. She engages words in invisible connections, transient behaviour and unseen rituals, and performs the aesthetic, social and political realities that are hidden by the persuasiveness of a visual point of view. Her most recent book The Political Possibility of Sound, was published by Bloomsbury in November 2018.*

\*1) Mark Neocleous, »Resisting Resilience«, in *Radical Philosophy*, issue 178, March/April 2013, [www.radicalphilosophy.com/commentary/resisting-resilience](http://www.radicalphilosophy.com/commentary/resisting-resilience) \*2) Brad Evans, and Julian Reid, »Dangerously Exposed: the life and death of the resilient subject«, in *Resilience: International Policies, Practices and Discourses*, Vol. 1 No. 2 (2013): p. 85. \*3) »Everything coexists with this sheet of paper. You cannot just be by yourself alone. You have to inter-be with every other thing. This sheet of paper is because everything else is«, Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Pocket Thich Nhat Hanh*, ed. Melvin McLeod (Boston and London: Shambhala Pocket Classics, 2012, p. 57). \*4) Vivien A. Schmidt and Mark Thatcher, eds., *Resilient Liberalism in Europe's Political Economy* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 419. \*5) Mark Neocleous, »Resisting Resilience«. \*6) Hito Steyerl, »In Free Fall: A Thought Experiment on Vertical Perspective«, in *The Wretched of the Screen* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012), p. 28. \*7) Vivien A. Schmidt and Mark Thatcher, eds., *Resilient Liberalism in Europe's Political Economy*, p. 424. \*8) Baily Bradford liner notes for *Estórias Para Voz, Instrumentos Acústicos e Eletrônicos* by Oliveira De Jocy, BLUME 007, Reissue, Red, Italy, 2017 (re-release from 1981). \*9) Brad Evans and Julian Reid, »Dangerously Exposed: the life and death of the resilient subject«, p. 90. \*10) Jocy De Oliveira liner notes for *Estórias Para Voz, Instrumentos Acústicos e Eletrônicos*, by Jocy De Oliveira, BLUME 007, Reissue, Red, Italy, 2017 (re-release from 1981). \*11) Baily Bradford liner notes for *Estórias Para Voz, Instrumentos Acústicos e Eletrônicos*, by Jocy De Oliveira, BLUME 007, Reissue, Red, Italy, 2017 (re-release from 1981).

# FAILING AT THE IMPOSSIBLE: ATTEMPTS AT EMBODYING MATRIARCHY

AN INTERVIEW WITH NGUYỄN + TRANSITORY BY KAMILA METWALY



Nguyễn + Transitory. Photo: Fatha.

Nguyễn + Transitory (Nguyễn Baly and Tara Transitory) traverse the boundaries between sound, synthesis, noise, rhythm, and performance to explore various Southeast Asian + diaspora queer existences and histories. After meeting during 2017's Untraining the Ear Listening Sessions,<sup>\*1)</sup> Nguyễn, Transitory, and Kamila Metwaly discussed a wide range of themes, some of which are elucidated here. Ahead of the performance of their work-in-progress »Bird Bird, Touch Touch, Sing Sing« at CTM 2019, the duo speak with Metwaly about reassessing the politics of the senses, collective intersectional feminism, and the challenges and failings of their practice.

**KAMILA METWALY** *Let's start with »Bird Bird, Touch Touch, Sing Sing.« the work you will perform at CTM.*

**NGUYỄN + TRANSITORY** This is still a work in progress – one which we have been developing since early 2018, when we were exploring the possibilities of touch, proximity, and feedback as primary elements in a sound composition/performance. Concurrently, we decided to start building and using a modular synthesizer system, as this would enable some sort of flexibility in adjusting what we would like to control, and in a way that was more direct and immediate than if we had used a computer. Besides that immediacy, the sound palette that is offered by analogue synthesizers is both limiting and freeing, which sounds a bit contradictory but somehow makes sense at this point in our practice. While developing this piece, we were also trying to understand this new system we were building. As collateral, we had composed quite a number of sound pieces along the way, which we plan to release at some point in the future and are in the process of finding a suitable label for.

**KM** *I experienced this work when you first presented it in Berlin in June 2018. As an audience member, I felt like I was part of a collective entity consisting of many bodies, machines, and wires. You touch each other to produce sound and touch us – the audience – through vibration. With a seemingly abstract medium such as sound, you reminded me of the very primal urge to (re)connect, attach, and touch, weaving together one another's vulnerabilities, interdependency, closeness, and disorientation. You have noted that societies are desensitized from what touch could or could not mean; why else did you focus on touch?*

**N+T** We were interested in creating music together with our bodies, working with touch, amal-

gamating our physical bodies with parts of the instrument, and working with each other in the most direct way – to go beyond merely reacting to what the other is producing sonically. We wanted to become part of the instrument and to dissolve the individual in the process, and often times we fail in this attempt at the impossible.

Some of the key themes that we have been dealing with on both a personal and professional level include vulnerability, interdependency, closeness, trust, and intimacy. We tried to instill these in our collaboration and creation process. We are developing a work that addresses, explores, and embodies these qualities that are very close to us. In its own way, we feel the piece is a response to the frustrations we have towards the failings of normalised structures that are today, more than ever, able to impose their destructive value systems onto almost all facets of our universally-shared co-existence. The act of touching has somewhat been denigrated as of late, becoming associated with the negative more than the positive, and the act of reclaiming it was one of the central elements in »Bird Bird, Touch Touch, Sing Sing.« Touch, together with the use of collaborative feedback creation, the distance between us, and the distance between us and the instrument, affects the sound, which then affects the composition, which then affects our movement. This unintentionally creates another feedback loop which transcends the realms of the physical, the ethereal, and the magical.

**KM** *During the performance you were interweaving the energies in the room through a transmission of knowledge, almost dissecting the singular in the plural. In the moment when you are on stage as two bodies, do you consciously ask us to be close to you and vulnerable? To open up our senses, and propose that another language is possible?*

**N+T** We often hope to share the specific collective experience together with the audience in the space. The collective experience in this case would take the physical form and setting of a performance that somehow tries to embody those themes through transmission and communication, both between us (the performers) and you (the audience). Maybe that is where the art happens – beyond the aesthetics of sound, presentation, stenography, and presence – in an intangible, sometimes intentional, sometimes serendipitous exchange. We communicate beyond language, in silence, and with silence, despite the soundscape that drones on. Although we only communicate with our bodies, we reveal quite a lot about ourselves personally. We not only collaborate artistically, but also in everyday life. How and what we perform on stage also represent our relationship to each other, how we feel, and what makes us vulnerable – all this inevitably gets transmitted. The setting for this performance, which in itself is somewhat neutral, loses its neutrality once the bodies that carry their experiences enter the fold, bringing along histories, sentiments, memories, and interpretations. They infuse the collective experience, touching each of us with the usual mixes of anxieties, elations, pains, ebullitions, and ambiguities. Perhaps it was some of this that you felt.

**KM** *Baly, as a solo artist, you work mainly in the performing arts, but also with sound art and music. How do they intersect in your practice?*

**BALY** I usually work as a musician and performer in different constellations with choreographers and artists in the performing arts. Depending on who I am working with, I can be more or less free in what I am doing, though sometimes I feel more like a service provider than an artist. This made me decide at some point to work only with artists who are really interested in eye-level collaborations, in which our vision and politics might resonate, or in which we are at least willing to understand each other. I also try to avoid producing easily categorisable work – work which falls nicely into industry-defined genres. The sort of sound pieces I create depends largely on the context of the performance or theatre piece. With each collaboration, if possible, I try out new ways of creating music.

I am particularly interested in how we can break away from specific knowledges of musics. To me, music feels like it has always contained within itself certain knowledges, lineages, memories, emotions, and thoughts. Yet despite globalisation, much of non-Western music, if we can call it that, is still strongly associated somehow with its supposed geographical-ethnic origins. I feel that understanding music in this essentialist way comes from a dominant Eurocentric, patriarchal lens. In my work, I try to explore the relationships between

these processes and the music/sound/art that I make from a slightly more postcolonialist angle. In little ways, I try to come up with methods that are less influenced by this dominant approach. Usually these methods are quite subtle and not very literal, because I often wonder if actively decolonising these processes has to be cerebral.

**KM** *Tara, in your previous work you have been extremely sensitive about working with samples. How did this come about and how has it developed?*

**TARA** My feelings towards sampling have definitely shifted over the years, from using it recklessly and in abundance to nowadays using very little of it, and only using samples that I generate myself. How this came about definitely has to do with that sensitivity you mentioned. I guess my politics back then led me to assume that everything could be sampled and re-used in materialising the vision of the artist. Then I started to believe that by sampling, even if only taking a field recording of a place, I am not just taking the sonic identity of a place, but also part of its soul. I feel that this appropriation of the soul is much more obvious and literal when sampling someone's voice, because we do not just take the voice, we take what the person is trying to transmit, their emotional state, their histories, their narrative, their lifeblood. And for what grander purpose was I doing it? To keep an archive for future generations to reference? To reappropriate that into my work and call it my art? I ran out of excuses and could no longer bear to take credit for that which was not mine.

I do believe that some things in this world were never meant to be seen, heard, experienced, or much less documented. It is perfectly fine for me that some things exist forever in secret or that they disappear forever. I don't have a need to discover everything there is to discover – even less if I consider the negative costs that could come with that selfish curiosity.

**KM** *Your recent collaboration challenges our perception and categorisation of what is commonly considered contemporary music and dance. Together, you fluidly takes us beyond such constructs of form and genre. You dance and move to create sound, and through sound you move and dance. How do you grapple between those two worlds and still pay the bills?*

**N+T** It has been and still is difficult getting support from institutions and festivals for our work. We feel that this is due partly to what you have described, that it falls into the interstices between clearly demarcated categories. Many institutions and cultural managers still come across as quite clueless when it comes to works that are inherently multidisciplinary and do not fit neatly into those well-established categories, or works which are



Tara Transitory (top) and Nguyễn Baly (bottom).  
Photos: Fatha.



not easily reproducible, presentable, and predictable. This is quite shocking. It is almost as if the last century of the Western avant-garde canon never existed, maybe partly due to some movement's resistance to institutional appropriation, or to market policies. But this collective erasure by the cultural institutions of today is quite revealing of the contemporary cultural climate. Despite what one might think, the cultural climate of 2019 in some ways feels as conservative as it did half a century ago, if not more. Nonetheless, being in this peripheral position professionally is definitely not easy to sustain, especially as we both come from working class backgrounds. We have managed to survive so far, maybe due to good fortune and the support of some, but we feel that those days are numbered and the inevitable reckoning of collapse and burn-out is around the corner.

*KM Both separately as individual artists and collectively as a duo, it almost seems that your work is anti-production and anti-novelty. Do you connect with such positions?*

*N+T* It does not make much sense for us to produce one project after another, as we feel it is more important to have depth and dedication in developing ideas. For us, these processes usually take time to materialise and they do not function by the logics of the market. We see our work more as an ongoing process – one in which we can only see how to move one step at a time. It's a process which isn't clearly defined and intentionally lacks a clear outcome. This unfortunately sits at odds with market logic, and not being understood has become synonymous with this process.

*KM As queer artists of Southeast Asian backgrounds, you have shared your fears with regards to your futures and described how your identities have been appropriated and consequently othered, often as a result of certain dominant curatorial practices and institutional booking policies. Can you elaborate on these worries?*

*N+T* When an industry thrives on superficialities such as discovering and presenting only »new« things and those that fit into what is marked as trending, then it would come as little surprise that its championing of progressive politics might be nothing more than posturing. What seems to be a trend amongst many cultural institutions recently is the need to show inclusivity in the diversity of its programming, and it is in this limited scope that we see the Women, the Queers, the Indigenous, the Africans, the Arabs, the Asians, etc. We ask: who do these inclusivity/diversity showcases benefit? One way to look at it is that on the one hand, yes,

it does give visibility and a platform for the under-represented, but on the other, only a handful are fortunate enough to be given that opportunity, and most are used for some time and then replaced when that topic is not trending anymore. To have such programming makes many traditionally conservative institutions seem progressive, garnering them support from a demographic that might not have traditionally supported them, so they publicly project themselves to be more progressive than they are. It's basically a win-win situation for them. We have nothing against programming more underrepresented identities, but we question what the intentions are for wanting to do so. Because until we have more underrepresented, under-privileged, subaltern, under-class folks in decision-making positions in the arts and elsewhere, and until the cultural institutions themselves unsubscribe from the logics of capitalism and patriarchy, the cultural landscape will not be fundamentally altered.

*KM Is persistence a part of your practice?*

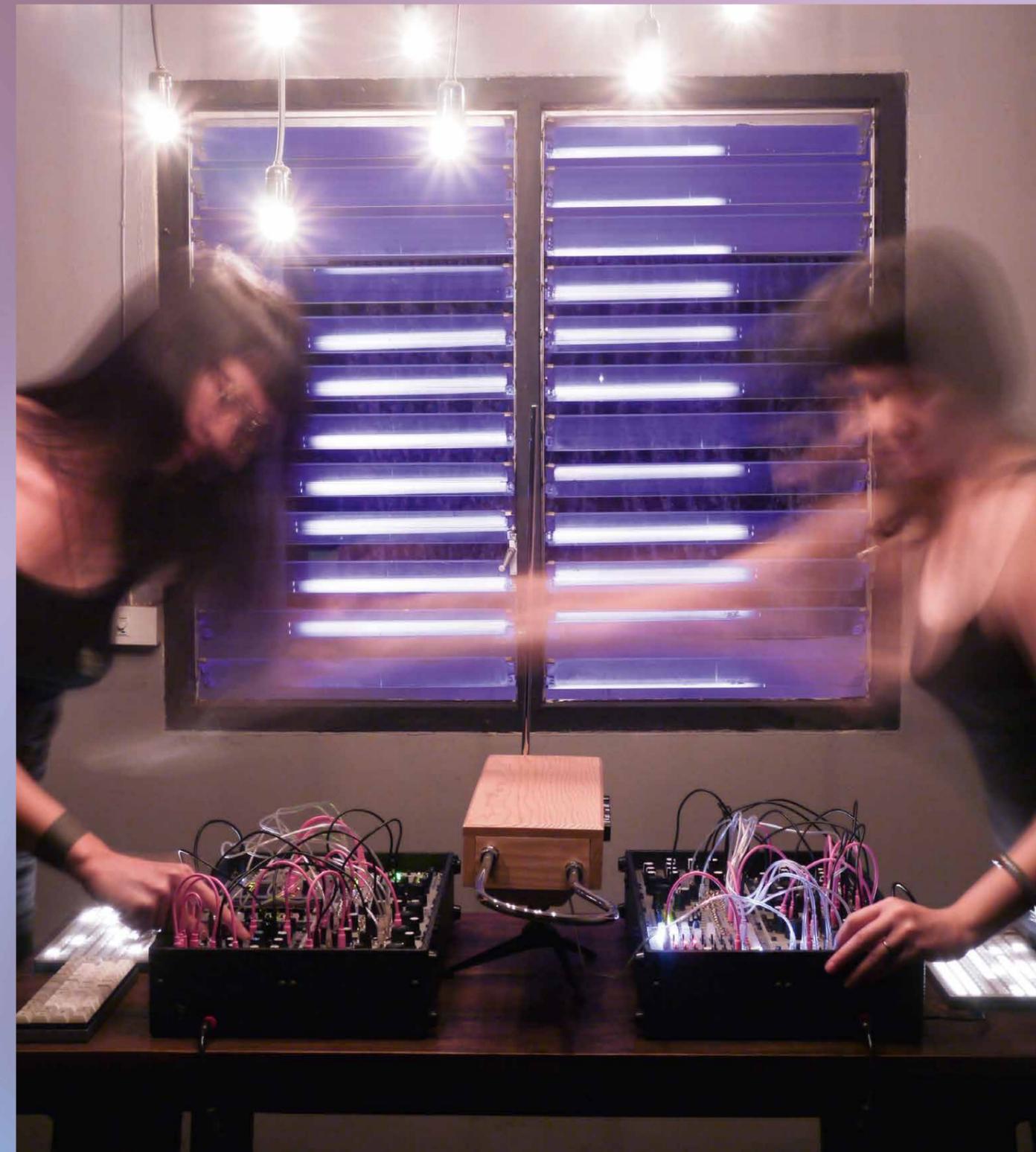
*N+T* When thinking of persistence, we are reminded more of the word »extant« and its relationship to us. We continue to exist despite conditions more suited to our extinction. Given these circumstances, our professional work, the sort of work it is, the medium, the politics embedded in it, and the values by which we try to live, perpetual precarity is destiny. But despite such dire and unfavourable conditions, we are still persisting in our attempts at embodying matriarchy and failing at the impossible.



- » [www.nguyentransitory.wordpress.com](http://www.nguyentransitory.wordpress.com)
- » [www.nguyen-transitory.bandcamp.com](http://www.nguyen-transitory.bandcamp.com)
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- » Facebook: @nguyen.transitory

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Nguyễn + Transitory. Photo: Fatha.



# POP, POLITICS, AND PERSISTENCE: POPULAR CULTURE BETWEEN DELIMITATION AND ACTIVISM

LUISE WOLF

Artists worldwide are persistently opposing social and political injustice and nationalist backsliding. But equally persistent are the anti-liberal and traditionalist forces who assert their power, which is apparent not only symbolically but long-since structurally. In this climate, artists are under pressure to express themselves, to take a stance, and even to act. Yet in the course of a general tide of re-politicisation, artists are also once again increasingly engaging and intervening in social and political discourses. Luise Wolf considers the complexities of blending art and politics.

Persistence. Once again this year, CTM Festival has adopted a theme that affects us politically, and even agitates us. It suggests that we listen to pop with politics in mind. After 2015's *Un Tune*, which brought to mind the physical and psychoacoustic power of sound, the festival turned to a series of politically-discursively charged topics starting with 2016's *New Geographies*. The 2016 theme aimed to extend the limits of European audiences' understanding and reception of music by including global and hybrid music scenes representing countries from Mexico to Iran. Under the slogan World Music 2.0, the audience explored a global music scene, a hybrid, technologically progressive, sampled, transnational, transcultural, and post-gender world community. *New Geographies* also drew attention – and not merely from a national viewpoint – to social and political conflicts and upheavals, and to the sounds of war and repression (Mazen Kerbaj).

The 2017 theme *Fear, Anger, Love* can be interpreted as a vociferous artistic and pop cultural response to a society in which fear and anger are cultivated in ways that, until recently, didn't seem possible. The conciliatory sound of love – apart from the sound of sex (18+) – was sought in vain. Yet the more drastic sonic examples of rage (Vomir), fear (Genesis P-Orridge), and protest (NON Worldwide) were easily found. Here, the coalition of music and war once again dominated the discourse programme (Lawrence English).

Emotions are followed by shifts and unrest. As such, *Turmoil* was last year's theme, and it explored the sound of emancipatory uproar. An aesthetic rebellion offers the opportunity to escape the global permanent disaster alarm, be it through the futuristic and speculative (Holly Herndon) or through contemplation (Christopher Bauder & Kangding Ray).

Seismographically, the festival themes reflect currently relevant topics and tendencies in our societies and cultures. Culture is changing all the time. This change is determined by internal dialectics of the conscious and the unconscious, identity and performance, tradition and progression, essentialism and hypermodernism. This year's festival theme of *Persistence* also addresses such dialectics. The term Persistence can be interpreted here as a mode of emancipatory art and pop culture, of liberal, anti-racist, and anti-sexist forces, yet also as the persistence of essentialist and nationalist setbacks. The political polarisation of Western societies and the growing harshness in the culture of public debate suggest that one reality cannot be refuted by another. Thus, the perception of reality, the interpretation of events and processes, in itself becomes a matter of dispute and a symbolic cultural loss or gain: In this climate, what are the per-

sistence, the success, and the symbolic and social losses with which artists fight for freedom social spaces, for acceptance of other life models?

In this essay, I would like to approach various artistic strategies with which to position oneself in political and social realities. It's about the proximity and distance between pop and politics, art and society. On the question of a policy of aesthetic practice, persistence can be understood on the one hand as open protest, as active resistance to hegemony, and on the other as a state of persistent distancing from the dictums of Realpolitik and consumer society. Artists can respond to the definitions imposed by dominant themes, norms, and general perceptual patterns with real alternatives to the very nature of currently lived reality, and experiment with new modes of expression and living. Through such approaches, they create new communities of meaning such as undergrounds and scenes, online communities, and safer spaces.

In recent years, artistic practices have experienced a re-politicisation, now also clearly visible in the mainstream. While the end of the protest song was declared in the 90s, political statements are again widespread today, even in songs on heavy rotation. Popular culture and politics have once again converged. On the one hand, political culture has adopted aesthetic strategies such as stardom, marketing, and performance.<sup>1)</sup> On the other hand, social and political hardships and rollbacks provoke artists worldwide to stand up for concrete social and political values and change. Under slogans such as *Die Vielen* (The Many) or *Wir sind Mehr* (We Are More), artists and cultural actors in Germany have initiated and joined such broad movements. Protest concerts are back, hinting at the return of pop culture's mobilising power. Yet artists are also increasingly pressured to position themselves politically. I would argue that while it is not the artist's task to dissolve the ambiguity in the world or to decorate political slogans, these days they are, in their function as role models, sometimes expected to do just that.

Persistence also exists on the part of the rise of essentialism and nationalism, which not only symbolically paints a »new normality,« but has long since become structural. This shows in the popularity of some right-wing conservative and nationalist artists such as Frei.Wild or Andreas Gabalier, as well as in the discussion about a radio quota for German-language pop music, which was rekindled in 2015. However, no soundtrack exists for the New Right, according to pop critic Jens Balzer in his article »The Kids Are Alt-Right – Tracing The Soundtrack Of Neo-Reactionary Turmoil« in the CTM 2017 magazine. Why is that? »One possible reason the New Right doesn't have a leg to stand

on, culturally speaking, is that its very ideology, its striving for 'purity' – despite the evident interdependence of every last atom in the cosmos! – precludes any true acceptance of pop culture. Pop culture is living proof that hybridity rocks. Without an endless circulation of signs, without the shifting permutation or fusion of every cultural tradition under the sun, pop culture just would not be. There is nothing in pop that doesn't refer somehow, somewhere, to something else.«<sup>2)</sup> Balzer explains that the lack of success for right-wing pop acts is due to the basic hallmarks of pop, which resist ideological determination and disambiguation.

From rock'n'roll to post-punk and from disco to trap, popular music is characterised by an interplay between adoption and variation, reference and manipulation. In the oscillation between the existing and the new, citation and reinterpretation, production and processing, pop celebrates an aesthetic of transformation. »Aesthetic is trans,« says the rapper and self-proclaimed »gender terrorist« Linn da Quebrada.<sup>3)</sup> Pop is in between – even ontologically. Pop is a fluid phenomenon that is all the more successful and interesting the more undefinably it positions itself.

»Pop stands for the simple behind which the complex hides,« wrote Peter Kemper.<sup>4)</sup> In contrast to populism – which propagates a »narrow ideology« and the disambiguation of the perception of reality – pop creates a positive commonplace, an open-ended web of connections. In contrast to the political sphere, performative forms of identification and hybrid world views neither pose any problems nor are considered exceptional circumstance in popular culture, at least not in principle. Rather, pop initiates such processes for the sake of inspiration, variation, development, and renewal, signified by terms such as fusion, featuring, or synthesis.

In contrast to political articulation, artistic practices and popular culture are not concerned with forming exclusionary content, absolute values, or ultimate judgments. Rather, they focus on illuminating things differently, on recontextualization, and on creating links or variations to generate meaning. Artists don't advocate for values and judgments through persuasion or by forcing opinions, but through attitude, performance, and aesthetic staging. Art and music are forms of articulation that are not primarily rational, strategic, and discursive, but physical, affective, emotional, imaginary, idiosyncratic. In taking up and re-contextualising motifs of prevailing norms and conven-

tions, in representing these samples as fabrication, as instruments, the changeability of all meaning is revealed. The arts sensitise us to inclusion and exclusion in society. Therefore, they are to the greatest possible extent and almost ontologically resistant to any form of hegemony. They act as correctives, as jokers, ridiculing solutions that are supposedly without alternative.

The rejection of political mechanisms provides the opportunity to create uncommon, extraordinary experiences. The dystopian sounds of noise, dark ambient, or doom strain our listening conventions. They let us hear the world from the dystopia of a failed existence, to experience ourselves from an otherworldly lostness. Such music, which is unsettlingly far from acoustic conventions, from common statements, symbols, codes, and stylistic templates, is especially conducive to experiencing the drastic nature with which categories determine us in everyday life. In pure sound we might hear life as it could be, according to musicologist and ethnologist Jochen Bonz.<sup>5)</sup> Indeed, from where else do we take the variation of our gestures and our habits? How can we perceive the defaults and biases of our senses? At the basis of our beliefs and values lies a physical sensibility, a sensed meaning that is touched and moved above all by the arts. Such music, which focuses on material-aesthetic transformations, conducts a kind of »fundamental research« on our emotions and our psyche. It can provoke sparks of reflection, and can affect the nano-politics of our bodies.

Art that is not concerned with the current, the necessary, or the real, but rather with the future, the improbable, or the possible, therefore cannot be considered a-political. It injects our supposedly »mere« existence or feelings with new ways of expression and articulation, expanding the horizon of our tolerance and knowledge.

In recent years, however, under the pressure of political and social changes which threaten the freedom of art itself, we have seen shifts in the politics of artistic practice. Art critic Boris Groys considers today's art activism to be a new phenomenon. Art has given up its »quasi-ontological uselessness« in order to make itself politically and socially useful.<sup>6)</sup> According to Groys, these art activists have tried not to only criticise political and social conditions, but to change them by means of art – especially outside of the art system: in politics and education, in the midst of society and at its edges. Actions by the Zentrum für politische Schönheit (Center for Political Beauty), the Generalversammlung (Gener-

al Assembly), or the Peng! Collective provide impressive examples in Germany.

From gospel to hip hop, popular music has never been disconnected from social and political reality and was never considered merely beautiful and »useless.« It has always been a direct response to reality, as opposition or mere compensation. The differentiation of »pop« – from Björk to Pop Idols – leads to the fact that innovations, differences, and protests today tend to be forged in niches rather than in the mainstream. But even the mainstream is often so successful only because it is dialectically influenced by convention and innovation, identification and ambivalence, commerce and protest. Movements such as queervisibility and feminism would not have found their way out of their niches and into the mainstream without artists like, for example, Antony or Coco Rosie. In a society that constitutes and reflects itself in segmented public spheres within which socialisation and integration happen, niches are plainly the places of action. And here musicians are increasingly positioning themselves in the most varied of roles with multiple responsibilities. They appear as musicians and activists, as musicians and researchers. They seize discourse and agency within and also far beyond niches and scenes, stages and clubs. They also use and produce formats and methods of articulation in the social, technological, or political spheres. They demonstrate, occupy, and hack. They write, proclaim, educate, and experiment.

Artistic productions that present themselves as art *and* life, art *and* politics, or art *and* social engagement, are often eventually pressured into justifying being ethically right or wrong, and act as morally good or bad – especially if they leave their niche and enter the wider public sphere. This is clearly visible in the boycott or non-boycott of Israel, where the dispute over the legitimacy of performing or not performing in Israel partially splits Western music scenes. Under names such as BDS (Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions) or DJs for Palestine, campaigns call for a boycott of Israel in order to put pressure on the Israeli government to stop oppressing Palestinians. Musicians

who joined the boycott, such as Roger Waters or Young Fathers, have to deal with accusations of antisemitism and populism. Musicians who did not join the boycott, such as Thom Yorke or Nick Cave, were criticised for not resolutely opposing the Israeli government's unjust policies. Label operators speak of »cultural terror.« Nick Cave talks of censorship. In one of the most complex political war zones of the 20th and 21st centuries, pop's positive commonplace has been blown up.

Such discursive shifts between pop and politics show that artistic activism not only strains the political discourses it addresses – often successfully, thanks to its media literacy – but that it also strains the field of art itself by questioning the limits of art, and its place in the field of tension between certainty and contingency, autonomy and social function. At times, theatrical forms of artistic activism manage to draw the entirety of politics into their performance, exposing politics itself as a performance of power. But whenever art puts these theatrical means completely aside, and radicalises itself primarily socio-politically, it can quickly get entangled in polarisation and populism, and thereby easily risks losing something crucial: social contingency and the power to maintain dialogue across different contexts, beliefs, and realities. Then again, one must ask whether such radicalism is not actually an appropriate response to an equally radical reality. Is it not the case that aesthetic freedom is first practiced when it overrides the hegemonic allocation of its competences? The answer to this dilemma should depend on whether or not artistic freedom is served.



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*Translated from the German by Alexander Paulick-Thiel, Berlin.*

<sup>\*1)</sup> Jörg-Uwe Nieland, *Pop und Politik. Politische Popkultur und Kulturpolitik in der Mediengesellschaft* (Köln: Herbert von Halem Verlag, 2009). <sup>\*2)</sup> Jens Balzer, »The Kids Are Ait-Right – Tracing the Soundtrack Of Neo-Reactionary Turmoil«, *CTM 2018 Turmoil Magazine* (2018), p. 24. <sup>\*3)</sup> Meiofilo, »Eu não quero me finalizar,« 10. October 2016, *Youtube*, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=k5\\*ck01W1Vc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k5*ck01W1Vc) (last accessed January 2019). <sup>\*4)</sup> Peter Kemper, »Love goes Pop. Die lärmende Macht großer Gefühle«, in *Liebe – Zwischen Sehnsucht und Simulation*, ed. Peter Kemper and Ulrich Sonnenschein (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2005), p. 302. <sup>\*5)</sup> Jochen Bonz, »Soziologie des Hörens. Akustische Konventionalität und akustische Materialität als Kategorien subjektorientierter Popkulturforschung«, *Pop, Populäres und Theorien. Forschungsansätze und Perspektiven zu einem prekären Verhältnis in der Medienkulturgesellschaft* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2011), p. 130. <sup>\*6)</sup> Boris Groys, »Kunstaktivismus – Die totale Ästhetisierung der Welt als Eröffnung der politischen Aktion«, *Lettre International* 106 (2014), p. 88.

# WE ARE THE HALLUCI NATION: AN INTERVIEW WITH BEAR WITNESS OF A TRIBE CALLED RED

LINDSAY NIXON



2oolman and Bear Witness.  
Photo: Matt Barnes.

»A Tribe Called Red promotes inclusivity, empathy, and acceptance amongst all races and genders in the name of social justice. They believe that Indigenous people need to define their identity on their own terms. If you share this vision, then you are already part of the Halluci Nation.«<sup>\*1)</sup>

Hailing from Ontario, Canada are A Tribe Called Red, a native producer and DJ crew blending elements of hip hop, dubstep, and house with traditional Pow Wow songs and drumming. Now comprised of Tim »2oolman« Hill (Mohawk, of the Six Nations of the Grand River), and Ehren "Bear Witness" Thomas (of the Cayuga First Nation), ATCR are a testament to the enduring strength and importance of Indigenous culture.

»If you're an Indigenous person living in a country that was forcefully colonised, it's all too common to find yourself underrepresented and misrepresented if not blatantly and systematically devalued and attacked. Positive role models and a positive self-identity are hard to come by, yet the Canadian DJ collective A Tribe Called Red is a modern gateway into urban and contemporary Indigenous culture and experience, celebrating all its layers and complexity,« reads the group's website. Against all odds, and against systematic erasure and oppression that continues well into the present day, Indigenous cultures have persisted and are reinventing themselves. In parallel to ongoing community efforts of documenting, preserving, and re-learning what little linguistic knowledge, histories, customs and beliefs of these civilisations can still be found, is a movement of artists, musicians, dancers, writers, and poets that imagine and experiment with modern and future identities of their (urban) Indigenous communities. Artists such as ATCR are a crucial part of this movement.

Since forming in 2008, A Tribe Called Red have established their voice in an essential renewed aboriginal rights movement known as Idle No More. It's no accident that the late native (Santee Dakota) activist, poet, and musician John Trudell is the first voice you hear on the collective's third and most recent album, *We Are The Halluci Nation* (2016), as the group considers him a forefather for this movement. The concept album features the stories of aboriginal voices, addressing the impact of colonisation on Indigenous people in the modern world. Trudell's lyrics open the record, defining the

Halluci Nation as »the tribe that they cannot see,« who »see the spiritual in the natural.« This stands in contrast to the oppressive ALie Nation, who »see the material religions through trauma [where] nothing is related, all the things of the earth and in the sky have energy to be exploited.« Featuring collaborations with artists such as rappers Yasiin Bey (formerly Mos Def) and Saul Williams, Polaris Prize-winning singers Tanya Tagaq and Lido Pimienta, in addition to Manawan Atikamekw Nation drum group Black Bear, Australian aboriginal band OKA, and Swedish-Sami singer Maxida Marak, the record's empowering anti-colonial message is poetic and clear.

Lindsay Nixon caught up with ATCR's Bear Witness ahead of their appearance at CTM 2019 to speak about how the group got started, how they see their role in shaping modern Indigenous identity, and to explore some of their wide-ranging artistic collaborations.

**LINDSAY NIXON** *For folks who don't know a lot about your work out in Berlin, your work is so multidisciplinary. I'm wary of describing it as »just« a DJ project. Can you give an overview of how you guys work together and how you produce together?*

**BEAR WITNESS** A Tribe Called Red has its roots in club DJing. But right from the start we were at a place where all of us played on different equipment. One guy on turntables. And myself on a MIDI controller. Another guy on CDJs. So we just always had all this gear set up. The idea of kind of playing together in a way that was more than just three DJs taking turns was something that came up right away at the Electric Pow Wow parties that we started here in Ottawa. That idea has evolved over the years into what we have now, with myself and 2oolman. It's still based in DJing but it's become more and more of a band, in a sense. I'm the only DJ on stage now, really. 2oolman is doing live remixing and playing the MPC. We started to bring the MOOG on the road and stuff. There's a lot more of a live aspect that has begun to be woven into

## »WHAT DOES [THE URBAN IN- DIGENOUS EXPERIENCE] LOOK LIKE AND WHAT COULD THAT BE?«

the DJ set. And then, we have the live visuals aspect, which just has always added another layer. We try to offer something more than just a couple DJs playing turntables. At the end of the day we're just a couple of guys standing at a table and it's hard to make that interesting outside of your usual kind of clapping and drumming around kind of stuff. Having visuals adds more to look at but also gives us an opportunity since our music is party music, it's club music. But there's always been more of a message to what we've been doing. Visuals have always given us an opportunity to add in a very fun way at times, but still adding to the conversation of Indigenous representation and Indigenous issues. The most recent thing we've added to our live set is dancers. We've had dancers now for about five years or even more. The group of dancers we're working with now were already doing that same kind of work we're doing with music in their dance practice. Lunacee and Creeasian both practice traditional Pow Wow dancing as well as street dance. You'll see Lunacee in her traditional regalia doing various different dances: fancy shawl and jingle dress. And Creeasian does grass dance. So you'll see them both in their traditional regalia. But then they'll change into their street clothes and do break- and house-dancing, those sort of things. And then you'll even see them in an in-between kind of mode, where they're sort of in half traditional regalia and half street clothes. These are all very visual representations of what we're doing with our music as well.

**LN** *This is a cool festival to house your work because it thinks about the interactions of music and visual art. I know these disciplinary definitions can be very complex for Indigenous peoples. I've heard you call both your art and musical work remixes. I was wondering how does A Tribe Called Red help you find your identity as a musician and artist?*

**BW** The work around identity as an urban Indigenous person has been all lifelong work for me. Even longer than my lifetime. It extends to my parents and my grandparents. All of whom are artists in different disciplines. All of their work has always

had a common thread: the urban Indigenous experience. And, really, their generation was asking those questions: what does [the urban Indigenous experience] look like and what could that be? Throughout my life I've seen it define itself and become a real community. We're a big part of that. We're a part of helping solidify that identity as urban Indigenous peoples. So, a bigger part than discovering my own identity through the work, has been the part of defining this generation of urban Indigenous people. I feel like we follow more than we lead with A Tribe Called Red. It might look from the outside that it's the other way around. But our following – the things we see our community needs, that our community wants – this community is able to represent ourselves the way we see ourselves. The way we are seeing ourselves is very important to our community. So that's what we go out in the world and do.

**LN** *You brought up Electric Pow Wow earlier. I went to the one right after you were nominated for the Juno and it was such a banger. I always think about A Tribe Called Red as being for the cool, fashionable neechies (the word in the Anishinabemowin language for cousins) who live in the city. Do you think about that? Kind of like the way Drake does with Toronto? Do you think about Ottawa and the city community there as really formulating and being a part of A Tribe Called Red?*

**BW** In our early years we started the Electric Pow Wow party without a lot of expectation and without a lot of foresight into what it could mean and be. But this was very quickly shown to us by the people here in Ottawa in the Indigenous community. They told us what it meant and that it was something that we needed to continue doing. So it's always had that feeling of being a community-led project. Things have definitely changed over the years. Unfortunately we don't have that Electric Pow Wow party anymore and we're in a very different position, but that's where things started.

**LN** *Listening to A Tribe Called Red is so cool because of all the collaborations that you include on your record. Do you have any cool or funny collaboration stories?*

**BW** Working with Yasiin Bey was one of the crazier collaborations we've gotten to do. And, like many of our collaborations, it stretched out over a year, from the time that we met to him coming out on the stage at Osheaga during our set and performing with us there, with Narcy as well.

**LN** *I was there! That was so cool.*

**BW** Ya, that was wild! He wasn't even supposed to be in town, he just happened to show up.

**LN** *I know! He just kept jumping on stages and it was like, are you here?*

**BW** And then they scored a set because somebody got cancelled. So he ended up doing a whole set too. So there was that meeting. There were several meetings that led up to us actually working together. And even just that was a really crazy experience. After we had recorded the song there was that time period when he was stuck in South Africa under house arrest, which meant that for the video we wanted to shoot, we had to go to him. We found a way to weave that into the Halluci Nation story we were trying to tell, and we were going to try to help him escape. After we made the video for »R.E.D.« we watched it. There's a middle part where they are actually escaping. A few months before that had happened, my grandfather had passed away. He was a holocaust survivor. He was born in Paris. He was sent away by his mother before anything happened to him. He was sent away. He had to escape in a cart, kind of thing, into the demilitarised zone. So, when I was watching the video after, I realised we kind of told his story in this video.

But back to the collaboration part of it. Working with Yasiin was nuts because he's a very on person. It was trying to herd cats in a sense, getting him into the actual studio. It was awesome! We were

talking. We were having a great time. Part of the collaboration process is telling stories and sharing your background with people. Even just getting to know people so you feel more comfortable in the studio. But for the recording process, you have an hour or two a day of the entire day. At one end, why are you complaining? You're in a studio with Yasiin Bey telling you crazy stories and being awesome. But me, being kind of pragmatic about the situation, I was like, »OK, we gotta get this guy in there.« We finally get him into the studio and he's like, »Where's Ruby?« And that's when we find out that he has this special mic named Ruby and it's the only mic he records on. He then disappeared for another three hours to go and get it. But when he finally got back with Ruby and everything, he finally dropped this amazing verse. What more could we have asked for in a Yasiin Bey verse, than what we ended up getting?

**LN** *Is there anything else you wanted to say to your audience in Berlin?*

**BW** We're excited to be coming back to Berlin.



» [www.atribecalledred.com](http://www.atribecalledred.com)

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» [www.aabitagizhig.com](http://www.aabitagizhig.com)

\*1) »A Tribe Called Red.« A Tribe Called Red. Accessed January 13, 2019. [www.atribecalledred.com](http://www.atribecalledred.com).



# MICROTONALITY AND THE STRUGGLE FOR FRETLESSNESS IN THE DIGITAL AGE

KHYAM ALLAMI

Despite the sleek, seductive promises of modernisation, recent music-making tools are culpable for a number of often-overlooked shortcomings. Khyam Allami delves into his research on microtonality to reflect on the non-neutrality of music software, the hegemony it encourages, and the cultural asymmetries it can cultivate, ultimately advocating for a celebration of difference across cultures, ideas, methods, and sounds.



Khyam Allami at One Hertz Studios, Beirut, working on *Kawalees: Part II* using his virtual/acoustic piano setup through Comma. Photo: Courtesy of the artist.

Persistence is a powerful word. It implies a sense of arduous effort – taken to go against the tide. To be insistent, to go on resolutely in spite of opposition. It is markedly different from the idea of perseverance, which implies a sense of focus and determination in one's continuation but doesn't really communicate the effort involved.

I used to consider myself perseverant, but only when I started writing this article did I realise that I was actually persistent. I don't consider myself to be someone who has achieved a lot, especially not when it comes to musical output. But what I have managed, both musical and extra-musical, has taken a lot of effort. Going against the tide, and for so long, has been draining – so much so that it became normalised and embodied to the point of a serious burnout that took around two years of recovery. Much of this is personal and due to my history, but much of it is also musical and therefore inseparable from life itself.

One of these avenues of persistence is closely related to the subject of microtonality and tuning systems. Over the last couple of years I've been experimenting a lot and developing Comma, a microtonal tuning Max4Live patch designed by me and programmed in Max in two stages – first by Charles Matthews in London and then by John Eichenseer in California. It is the epitome of my musical persistence to date.

I spent the majority of my adolescent years listening to rock music and learning how to play guitar, bass, and drums by ear. I would record songs from the radio onto cassette tapes and sit next to the rewind button with a guitar in hand. It was incredibly satisfying and so much fun to figure things out and be able to play what was coming out of the speakers – they could do it, and so could I. The seed of DIY and punk rock ethics was firmly planted.

That was until I discovered Soundgarden and Sonic Youth. They used alternative tunings for their guitars which were almost impossible to figure out, and so I had to rely on guitar magazines and tablature to understand what was going on. Here it stopped being fun, but it remained fascinating, and so I continued searching.

When I started discovering Arabic, Indian, and Azerbaijani music around the turn of the millennium, I hit a wall again. I was frustrated that I couldn't get my guitar to *sound right* when trying to play some of the melodies. I was sure I had the right notes, but they didn't *feel right*. I would spend hours checking the tuning and bending my strings whilst playing, thinking something wasn't as it should be.

In the following years my interests grew. As I did more research, I rediscovered the oud and its highly revered position throughout the Middle East and North Africa as the instrument of choice for theorists, philosophers, musicians, and composers. In April 2004, I decided to start studying it and began weekly private classes with Iraqi oud maestro Ehsan Emam in London.

In June 2004 – thanks to the influence of Trey Spruance's epic band the Secret Chiefs 3 and the Web of Mimicry's online forum community – I placed an order for *Harmonies of Heaven and Earth: Mysticism in Music from Antiquity to the Avant-Garde* by Joscelyn Godwin. The book soon arrived and I was captivated: tuning systems, mathematics, ratios, fractions, string lengths, monochords, the harmonic series, the zodiac, the planets, Pythagoras, the harmony of the spheres, the Greeks, the Arabs, the Enlightenment – it seemed endless. Wild and fantastical theories about sound, the universe, and music's place in it, not merely as entertainment, but as an alchemical mirror reflecting the depths of ourselves (our »self«) and the entire cosmos (the universe as an embodiment of order and harmony).

At that moment, something clicked between the unspoken spiritual philosophy of *taqāsim* (Arab-Ottoman improvisations), the tunings of the *maqāmat* (Arab-Ottoman modes), and the reverence of the oud as the king of all instruments.

This time, I had to really persist; the oud is a fretless instrument and takes at least 6 months to a year of practice before it becomes even remotely enjoyable to play. But once I got the hang of it, I could finally sit next to the computer and play music (by now it was mp3s) with my mouse and oud in hand and start to try figuring out those evasive melodies which had caused me so much trouble.

I ended up dedicating the next seven years to studying the oud intensively. Fretlessness is a beautiful thing.

TUNINGS, TEMPERAMENTS, MICROTONALITY, INTERVALS, SCALES, MODES...

The topic of tuning systems is complex and confusing, partly because it is mathematical and goes back at least 2500 years, but mostly because the internet is full of unreliable and unsubstantiated information. It is essentially the mathematics of music and therefore highly theoretical, with lots of words and numbers and very few attempts to practically elucidate any theories or discussions.

For those who aren't so microtonally inclined, here's a quick rundown of terminology:

- ◇ A *tuning system* is a mathematically derived series of pitches used in composition and performance, i.e. just intonation.
- ◇ A *temperament* is the modification of a tuning system, i.e. quarter-comma-meantone.
- ◇ An *interval* is the distance between two pitches of a tuning system, i.e. a perfect fifth
- ◇ An *octave* is a distance between two pitches at a ratio of 2:1, whereby the second pitch is exactly a double of the first pitch's frequency, i.e. the octave of 200hz is 400hz. The same applies, albeit mirrored, when thinking of an octave below, i.e. 200hz and 100hz.
- ◇ A *cent* is the logarithmic unit of measurement used for musical intervals. It was invented in 1875 by the English Mathematician Alexander J. Ellis and defines the octave as a distance of 1200 cents and an equal-tempered semitone as 100 cents.
- ◇ *Microtonality* refers to the use of intervals of less than an equal-tempered semitone, i.e. a quarter-tone (50 cents).
- ◇ A *scale* is a series of pitches selected from a given tuning system, i.e. C Major.
- ◇ A *mode* is a series of pitches selected from a tuning system that have a specific musical character, expressed through micro-melodies and central tones highlighting specific interval relationships, i.e. the ancient Greek Lydian mode.
- ◇ A *degree* is one of the selected pitches in the scale or mode, i.e. the sixth.

The majority of tuning systems throughout history have relied on the division of the octave into a defined number of parts. These are referred to as octave-repeating tuning systems. Some modern tuning systems disregard the octave altogether (i.e. Bohlen-Pierce scale).

The foundations of most tuning systems were discovered by Greek philosopher and mathematician Pythagoras in the 6th century BC. The Pythagorean tuning system uses mathematical ratios, more specifically, ratios that can be obtained from the musical tetractys: 1, 2, 3, 4.<sup>1)</sup> The ratios are relations of string lengths and intervals: 2:1 to the octave; 3:2 to the fifth, and 4:3 to the fourth.

Almost all tuning systems since Pythagoras use the mathematics of ratios. It is generally considered that the larger their numbers, the less pure the resulting sound, hence the reverence of the ratios 2:1 (octave), 3:2 (fifth) and 4:3 (fourth) as pure, universal, and in harmony with nature.

Today, 2600+ years later, the most pervasive tuning system used in the world is usually referred to as equal temperament (ET), also known as twelve-tone equal temperament (12-TET), or twelve equal divisions of the octave (12-EDO). It is named as such because it equally tempers, i.e. adjusts into equal parts, preceding historical tuning systems such as the Pythagorean or just intonation (another tuning system based on simple ratios). None of its intervals are simple ratios.

Although considered a »Western« tuning system, the earliest historical mention of it is found in China as far back as the 5th century.<sup>2)</sup> Outside China, the first mathematical description of a 12-tone chromatic scale is found in a treatise by the 9th century Iraqi philosopher, mathematician, and musician Ishaq Al-Kindi (d. Baghdad c. 874).<sup>3)</sup>

Before ET, all the notes on keyboard, wind, fretted, or hammered acoustic instruments had to be tuned to a specific tuning system in a chosen key. Wind instruments were another ballgame. Fretless instruments, such as the violin or the oud, did not have the same trouble because the musician can adjust their intonation accordingly.

ET was assimilated into Anglo-European music in the 18th century for the specific purposes of enabling compositional modulations into distant key signatures without sounding »out of tune,« and to allow the transposition of any composition into any key signature, without having to re-tune the instrument every time.

Contrary to popular misconception, ET was not favoured amongst all musicians and composers at the time. It was in fact a niche tuning system, necessary for specific types of compositions that used extensive and, for the time, experimental modulations.<sup>4)</sup> Essentially, it was a practical solution to a very specific musical problem, for a specific set of musical instruments, in a specific genre of music. But we have been stuck with it for over 200 years, and it has taken over (almost) everything.

Today, ET is the default system for all fixed-tuning Western instruments (piano, guitar, most wind instruments, etc.), including all analogue and digital music-making software or hardware that uses a piano keyboard as its principle input device or grid. But the fact that it is the »default« does not mean it is neutral.

#### MUSICOLOGY AND NON-WESTERN MUSICS

When I began studying for my BA in Ethnomusicology at London's School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), I quickly became interested in the musicological research and analysis of the musics

that were exciting me at the time, namely the music from the Arab world and North Africa, Turkey, Iran, Azerbaijan, and India.

After my BA, and with support from a SOAS scholarship and a study grant from the British Institute for the Study of Iraq, I went on to undertake a Masters in Performance as Research, focusing specifically on the Iraqi Oud School, its influences, and development. During these studies, the use of computer technologies for the analysis and composition of non-Western music became increasingly appealing, but it always felt like a struggle. The only way to get anything done was through workarounds, by combining various different software to do different things and, even then, clumsily. Things were unintuitive and felt limiting.

One of my major challenges was to try to use a well-known music notation software to notate music that was unmetred and that used non-standard key signatures, and to hear playback in tuning systems other than ET. In order to try and get answers for myself, my fellow students, and even staff, I contacted the software company's senior product manager and R&D at the time. He very kindly offered to come and give us a workshop at SOAS that was specifically tailored to our demands.

The product manager knew the software inside and out and was able to show us reasonably straightforward workarounds to the majority of our needs – although playback tuning was unmodifiable. But when I asked him why, if these musicological needs were easy to accommodate through workarounds, they weren't made explicitly possible in the programming of the software, his answer was straight to the point: there was no market, and therefore resources weren't assigned to develop this kind of functionality at a time when the market was demanding other kinds of developments.

And so I persisted with my research.

#### COMPOSITION, PLAYBACK, AND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES

It seems fair to say that very few composers throughout history have been able to compose music completely in their mind, with only paper on which to write it down. Composers have always relied on some form of »playback,« whether that be an instrument they play themselves, musicians to perform something written on paper, or a computer.

After I began studying oud and relying on my ears for intonation, it became really difficult to use computer playback for melodies that I would hear in my mind, or that I would develop on the instrument itself. The playback just didn't *sound right*.

When I tried to ignore the problem and just carry on, my composing would change. I would develop different kinds of melodies and directions in reaction to the tuning. Sure, it was interesting, but it wasn't what I wanted. It wasn't what I felt. I was no longer following my inspiration and intuition – instead, I was being influenced and manipulated by something external.

Rather than fight for the right feeling by trying to figure out workarounds, or spending fortunes on expensive hardware, I went back to my oud and focused my energies on my solo acoustic work instead.

Persistence is tiring, and sometimes you need a break. But only a short one.

#### MIDI / MTS AND THE DIGITAL IMPLEMENTATION OF MICROTONALITY

Contrary to popular misconception, microtonality and non-standard tunings have long been accommodated in modern music-making technology, the foundations of which began with electricity-based instruments – analogue synthesisers and the digital computer language developed to organise and keep the electricity in check: MIDI.

Musical Instrument Digital Interface was developed in the early 1980s, following concerns by instrument designers Dave Smith (Sequential Circuits) and Ikutaru Kakehashi (Roland) that »the lack of compatibility between manufacturers would restrict people's use of synthesisers, which would ultimately inhibit sales growth.«<sup>5)</sup> It was an economic concern. Throughout 1981 and 1982, there were many conferences and meetings between leading American and Japanese synth manufacturers. By January 1983, this new proposed system was born and presented at the Los Angeles NAMM show, where the Sequential Prophet 600 and Roland JP6 were »connected.«<sup>6)</sup>

Ten years later, in January 1992, the MIDI Tuning Standard (MTS) – an ultra-high-resolution specification for microtuning – was ratified by the MIDI Manufacturers Association (MMA)<sup>7)</sup> and included as an integral part of the MIDI spec itself.

Developed together with composers Robert Rich and Carter Scholz, MTS allows the use of both octave-repeating and non-octave-repeating tunings to a resolution of 0.0061 of a cent, which essentially divides the octave into 196,608 equal parts. It also allows the changing of the tuning of one or more notes in real-time, and even gives the user the choice of changing all currently sounding notes, or only the new notes that follow the tuning change message.<sup>8)</sup> This is a phenomenal level of detail that covers all the melodic needs

of all musics from across the world, past, present, and future.

But...

The support of MTS within the implementation of MIDI by software and hardware manufacturers is optional. There is in fact a long list of developers and manufacturers that provide tuning capabilities in their products: Dave Smith Instruments, Korg, Native Instruments, Steinberg, Yamaha, Roland, u-he, Ensoniq, and Xfer Records are just the tip of the iceberg. In these cases, however, the issue is not whether they support it or not – it's how.

Secondly, MTS messages are part of a MIDI data group called SysEx messages (System Exclusive). Most Digital Audio Workstations (DAWs) do not allow for SysEx data to be generated within them or pass through them, nor to go from them and out to hardware.<sup>9)</sup> The same applies for the majority of software instruments and samplers.

What this means for the practicing musician is that there is no unified tuning data system used by the master controller/sequencer, i.e. DAW, and accepted by all hardware or software instruments, that allows the user to set, modify, or change the tuning across some or all channels, even though this capability exists within MIDI, the unifying language used by all devices. Instead, tunings need to be set on an instrument-by-instrument basis in accordance with its manufacturers' implementation, and very often on a preset-by-preset basis. This is totally counterintuitive and creatively inhibitive.

A wonderful Dutch mind by the human name of Manuel Op de Coul invented a digital tuning file format called Scala, which can be used across the majority of devices available today. Unfortunately, though, it doesn't solve the issue of getting the data to the instrument at any given time.

Lastly, the biggest problem is that DAWs or software and hardware instruments lack support for adjusting tunings, and for changing tuning presets in real-time, even though this is well accommodated in MIDI as part of MTS. This may sound like nit-picking, but I will get to why this is important further on.

There are a couple of exceptions to the above: Steinberg's Cubase and Nuendo include a MIDI plugin called Micro Tuner, which allows for the tuning of individual virtual instruments on their own channels, but the tunings aren't easily switchable. Apple's Logic also allows the user to set a master tuning in the »project preferences.« But even in this scenario, the tuning information can only be applied to Logic's native instruments. Both allow non-ET tuning, then, but both limit the sonic op-

tions at the user's disposal. You can have your microtonal cake, but you can't eat it too!

#### MICROTONALITY MISUNDERSTOOD

The use of microtonality and non-equal temperaments in the West has often focused on tuning systems that are based on just intonation and its variations (see the work of Harry Partch) or systems that divide the octave into more than 12 equal parts (see the Microtonal Etudes of Easley Blackwood). But the way these systems are used is most often in line with how scales or keys are used in Western music composition, and the intervals of the scales are often treated as fixed, static relationships.

In the majority of cultures around the world, the use of microtonality is embedded within music itself, in that the tuning systems are ratio-based. In such contexts, the focus is on the relativity of notes to the tonic (root note) and, more importantly, to each other. Most often the music is modal, and the note relationships – and therefore the tunings – are malleable, changing from region to region or even from phrase to phrase within the same melodic sequence. Traditional Arabic and North Indian Classical musics are excellent examples.

In contemporary music making, microtonality has mostly been treated in a similar way to the divide between East Coast and West Coast synthesizer inventors Moog and Buchla. Bob Moog used a piano keyboard tuned to ET and Don Buchla used touch-sensitive plates, giving users the choice of either rigid ET or free-for-all pitching – a dualistic paradigm, essentially. Black or white. Auto-Tune or Aphex Twin. By this I mean that the way microtonality has been mostly understood, and therefore often implemented in hardware and software, is asymmetrical. It is most often viewed from the perspective of modern Western music-making. Its roots, and how the early systems have evolved into many rich ways of making music across the globe, are less often taken into account.

Another misconception is that microtonal music or non-equal temperament tunings sound »out of tune.« While it's true that a lot of experimental Western microtonal composition does sound dissonant, a lot of it does not.<sup>10)</sup> More importantly, the majority of music around the world is based on microtonal systems that sound perfectly consonant, if somewhat unusual. Indonesian gamelan is a perfect example.

Lastly and most importantly when it comes to music-making is the misconception that all the notes in any given tuning system need to be available for the musician to use at all times. It is precisely this that has held back the implementation of an intuitive and accessible microtonal solution today.

#### HOW MANY NOTES DO YOU USE?

In the last pages of his complex book on tuning systems around the world (written in 1943, revised 1994), French historian and musicologist Alain Daniélou concludes that »within one octave we cannot discern more than twenty-two groups of sounds having distinct expressive qualities,« and, more importantly, that »all twenty-two divisions cannot be used simultaneously in a mode, or in any melodic or harmonic combination. At the most twelve, and at the least three.«<sup>11)</sup> If we set aside adventurous and experimental music that seeks to break the rules and discover new possibilities, Daniélou makes a profound point.

What this helps us understand is that we don't need an input device (a MIDI controller, for example) that provides more than 12 different notes in an octave as the main solution for microtonal composition or performance. More important is which divisions within a chosen tuning system our input device is triggering.

Another important point to note is that the majority of music around the world uses octave-repeating pentatonic (five-note) or diatonic (seven-note) scales or modes, with some including the use of accidentals. For example: Indian music's tuning system theoretically uses 22 divisions in an octave (Śrutis), but in practice, the Rāgas are diatonic and only occasionally do specific ones use extra notes as accidentals, which gives us approximately 8 or 9 distinct pitches per octave. To get a chromatic scale, as is used in Western music today, a maximum of 12 distinct pitches is necessary.

Lastly, the majority of music around the world uses solmization, the attribution of distinct syllables to each pitch in a scale or a mode, whilst also recognising that the actual values of those pitches can change depending on which mode is being played. These solmization systems are almost always diatonic (Modern Western: C, D, E, F, G, A, B; European: Do, Re, Mi, Fa, Sol, La, Si; Indian: Sa, Re, Ga, Ma, Pa, Dha, Ni), and most of them are adapted today to include chromatic variations going up to 12 notes per octave (C#, Do diesis, etc.).

This all goes to prove the accuracy of Daniélou's observations and tells us that we are almost there.

Whilst there is obviously a need for the development of MIDI controllers that allow for the tactile input of more than 12 notes per octave (see H-Pi Instruments's MegaPlex), the majority of non-Western, and even experimental-Western, musics can be accommodated using the standard MIDI piano keyboard controller available worldwide, and for very cheap.

Therefore, as opposed to needing a MIDI controller that can give access to the full x number of divisions per octave, what is actually needed is a software solution where certain selections of the x number of divisions in a tuning system can be accessed by a twelve-tone controller and be changed at any given time, with or without affecting previously played notes.

Basically, we need MTS to be properly and intelligently implemented, 25+ years after it was ratified. The key question here, though, is why it hasn't been already.

The technology of today – and even of the last 30 years – provides ample provisions to accommodate all that I have mentioned above, but it hasn't done so. I can only imagine that the trope of »lack of a market« is one that has been consistently levelled at composers and researchers alike. But even when a market is identified, or when there is even just a simple realisation of the necessity to make this provision, it seems that an acute misunderstanding lies at the heart of its development – thanks to the Western-centric viewpoint taken on the subject.

#### MICROTONALITY MISIMPLEMENTED

As I mentioned earlier, many software and hardware manufacturers have made provisions to include microtonal capabilities in their products. The pre-loaded tuning files are often generous and include many historical, modern, and non-Western tunings. Unfortunately, though, when any such tuning is loaded up, it is impossible to know how it is supposed to be used. There is often no documentation on what these tunings are, what their values are, which note on the keyboard they start on... nothing. The maximum we can find is a little bit of a blurb about each tuning in the manuals, but even this is usually trivial.

Secondly, the tunings are loaded up and spread across the 12-tone piano keyboard/piano roll regardless of the number of divisions and regardless of the way these tunings are supposed to be used (which, as I described above, involves choosing only certain values for certain notes to create specific modes or scales).

The result is that almost any tuning loaded immediately feels unusable in any sense other than weird, exotic, or »other.« This applies just as much to historical and modern Western tunings as it does to those from across the globe.

That the inclusion of such capabilities is so tokenistic and counter-intuitive is really a shame. Rather than allowing users to discover such wonderful worlds and experiment with them, tunings are

treated like stocking-fillers, used to make the main gift seem bigger and more exciting, knowing they will be thrown aside within minutes of opening. More importantly, this »othering,« whether innocent or intentional, is detrimental on many levels.

#### THE PERVASIVENESS OF ET AND CULTURAL HEGEMONY THROUGH TECHNOLOGY

The persistence of ET has been astounding. It has homogenised and tainted music from across the world. Whilst all music makers are pushing to be as original and inventive as possible, they are all submitting to the rigid whitewashing of equal temperament without questioning it.

The truth is, for the majority of music being made today, (especially that which uses exclusively electronic melodic instruments), unless the music features key changes and modulations, ET is totally unnecessary. With the technology available today, the issues of harmony that faced 17th-century composers are long gone. We can easily and practically have any tuning, in any key, at any time, with the press of the button. We just need to affect the change.

ET is the grid of melody, the quantisation of inflection and expression, the squaring of melodic identity. Its seemingly innocent incremental values of 100, 200, 300 cents, etc. exude a faux-neutrality that has become normalised and accepted as »default.«

It has invaded our very core to the point where, in today's mainstream, every single note or sound is being tempered. The paradox is that major tuning software like Antares' Auto-Tune, Waves Tune, and Celemony's Melodyne all provide non-equal temperament tuning capabilities. Yes, that's right: it is possible to auto-tune your next trap hit using the Werckmeister III tuning, Indonesian Slendro, or Wendy Carlos's Alpha, which divides the octave into 15.385 parts! But due to the combination of misguided implementation, musicians' lack of knowledge and understanding of tuning systems, and the overly technical presentations and discussions of microtonality throughout the years, these possibilities are almost completely disregarded and often impossible to employ correctly.

When looking at non-Western music, the disaster of ET is even more painful. Not only have microtonal tuning systems been bastardised, but listeners' and musicians' ears have also been compromised. In the Arab world today, I don't know a single musician that doesn't use a tuner – set to the default ET – to tune their instrument. This means that the fundamental tuning of their open strings is set to ET and that their intonation is therefore manipulated. The Arab world is suffering even more because of

a misconception that the Arabic musical system is based on quarter tones, i.e. an octave divided into 24 equal parts. This is a grave misunderstanding and has led to the norm of musicians using electronic instruments to tune their »quarter tones« to -50 cents, which is not only incorrect but also sounds horrendous.

#### COMMA: AN ATTEMPT AT A WORKAROUND

After years of research and study, I took things into my own hands and started developing Comma, the Max4Live device at the heart of my current work – fully aware that it itself is a workaround.

*Kawalees: Part II*, the microtonal virtual/acoustic piano project that I will present at CTM this year, was created using and is performed live with Comma – as are many of the other experiments I am working on at the moment. It is the culmination of my musical persistence (read: hard-headedness), and the result of a belief that things can be different.

Comma is designed to allow real-time tuning and real-time changing of tuning presets of any virtual instrument, sampler, or external hardware instrument. But it isn't perfect.

Aside from the bugs, it currently only works for 12-tone octave repeating tunings, and the tuning data must initially be set manually. The other major issue is that it has to use MIDI Pitch Bend as a workaround for the actual microtuning (as do many other such solutions), which makes multi-voice or polyphonic applications a little cumbersome.

Regardless of these disadvantages, having Comma at my disposal has finally opened the door I have been banging on for many years. I am finally able to experiment and feel my way through ideas intuitively and creatively. The Arab maqam system I have been studying for the last 15 years is finally unlocked in unlimited timbres, colours and shades, allowing me to explore it in compositional and sonic ways I could only have dreamed of.

#### ANGLO-EUROPEAN-NORMATIVITY AND MULTICULTURAL TOKENISM

Even though MIDI has provided the perfect technological foundations for the accurate support and implementation of complex tuning systems from across the world since 1992, it is still to this day neglected and misunderstood. I would even go as far as to say that the continued tokenistic inclusion of microtonal capabilities in contemporary music software unconsciously maintains the pervasion of Western orientalism in the fields of both culture and technology. It is precisely this latent indifference towards what is seen as »ethnic« and

»exotic,« i.e. »other,« that continues to perpetuate a cultural asymmetry in the tools for cultural production, understanding, and engagement.

If MTS was fully accommodated and properly supported as its inventors Robert Rich and Carter Scholz had envisioned, I am certain that there would be a marked difference in the amount of non-hegemonic music available today. I am also certain that the progress and development of non-Western music would have been far less inhibited. And that cultural and individual identity in adventurous experimental music would not be limited to the First World.

#### CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS: MIDI 2.0

Surprisingly the MIDI specification officially remains at 1.0, despite having gained significant enhancements throughout the last 30+ years (its last significant update was in March 2017). But on November 6, 2018, the MMA announced that a major update was being planned, with many new companies joining, including Ableton and Native Instruments.

Apparently, this new update will include »in-demand options: auto-configuration, new DAW/Web integrations, extended resolution, increased expressiveness, and tighter timing – all while maintaining a high priority on backward compatibility.«<sup>\*12</sup> It is most likely that this development is what will lead to a thorough adoption of MPE (MIDI Polyphonic Expression), the future of MIDI based controllers, as already seen in the likes of Roli's Seaboard Rise. MPE essentially allows for every note to be treated independently, meaning every note can have its own CC values (mod, sustain, etc.), pitch bend, and so on. It is the ultimate method for allowing maximum musical expression in the programming or performance of digitally created music using MIDI controllers.

But what is the use of all these developments if the basics of certain musical concepts, such as tunings, and the needs of non-Western musics are so misunderstood, if not even systematically ignored?

#### CONCLUSION

As we have seen, the subject of tunings goes back millennia and includes very detailed and specific contributions from revered philosophers, theorists, physicists, mathematicians, scholars, engineers,

composers, and musicians from Greece, China, Iraq, Iran, Germany, France, The Netherlands, England, America, and many more. In the 20th and 21st centuries it has been developed and studied in great depth, but sadly still remains elusive and shrouded in unnecessary mystery.

It must also be stated that the treatment and rendering of the subject is also overtly, if not exclusively, male-dominated. Aside from composers Elaine Walker, Jacky Ligon, and Ellen Arkbro, in all of my research on this topic I have come across very few female contributors to related theoretical or creative output.

Tuning is a subject that should be about the celebration of difference – of cultures, ideas, methods, opinions, and tastes. It should also be about the celebration of choice, the choice of individuals to sound however they please.

Modern technology, as much as it seems neutral and empowering, is heavily laden with cultural and political asymmetries that often go unnoticed and unchallenged. In the field of music, its hegemonic reality is destructive, though wrapped in bows of promised modernisation and advancement. Just as we are learning to become warier of gender and racial inequalities, we need also to attune our antennas to cultural inequality. A default »zero« for one culture does not necessarily mean the same for another.

And so we continue to persist, and to persevere in our persistence, towards the reverence of difference, of individuality, of fretlessness, and the acceptance that »we« should mean all – not some, and definitely not most.



Scan this QR code to stream Khyam's curated playlist of microtonal music to accompany this article.

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\*1) A triangular figure consisting of ten points arranged in four rows: one, two, three, and four points in each row. \*2) James Murray Barbour, *Tuning and Temperament: A Historical Survey* (Mineola: Dover Publications, 1951), chapter 4. \*3) Cris Forster, *Musical Mathematics: On the Art and Science of Acoustic Instruments* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2010), section 11.46, p. 611. \*4) For a great summary, see Ross W. Duffin, *How Equal Temperament Ruined Harmony (and Why You Should Care)* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton, 2007). \*5) [www.midi.org/articles/midi-history-chapter-6-midi-is-born-1980-83](http://www.midi.org/articles/midi-history-chapter-6-midi-is-born-1980-83) \*6) Ibid. \*7) [www.midi.org/articles-old/microtuning-and-alternative-intonation-systems](http://www.midi.org/articles-old/microtuning-and-alternative-intonation-systems) \*8) [www.microtonal-synthesis.com/MIDI/tuning.html](http://www.microtonal-synthesis.com/MIDI/tuning.html) \*9) Reaper is the only exception, as far as I'm aware. \*10) For an excellent discussion about this, see Douglas Keislar, Easley Blackwood, John Eaton, Lou Harrison, Ben Johnston, Joel Mandelbaum, and William Schottstaedt, »Six American Composers on Nonstandard Tunings,« *Perspectives of New Music*, 29(1) (1991), p. 178. \*11) Alain Daniélou, *Music and the Power of Sound: The Influence of Tuning and Interval on Consciousness* (Rochester VT: Inner Traditions International, 1995), p. 247. \*12) [www.midi.org/articles-old/new-mma-members-and-new-mma-specs](http://www.midi.org/articles-old/new-mma-members-and-new-mma-specs)

# ARKESTRATED RHYTHMACHINE KOMPLEXITIES: MACHINIC GEISTERSTUNDE AND POST-SOUL PERSISTENCIAS

ARK



The panel of preset-buttons of the Maestro Rhythm King MRK-1. Photo: Hendrik Frank.

The ARK project began as a drum-machine choir, thrown together in 2018 on the occasion of an exhibition at the Museum of Applied Arts in Hamburg: *Mobile Welten oder das Museum unserer transkulturellen Gegenwart* [Mobile Worlds or The Museum of Our Transcultural Present], a motley assembly of quaint old-fashioned machines, speakers, and carrying cases coated in imitation leather or wood veneers, playing synthesised rhythms at the push of a button. It is the epitome of some kind of pseudo techno aesthetic, a sleek machinic imitation of seemingly human artisanship. But there is more to it than meets the eye. Something pervades these unimposing apparatuses like a tenacious swathe of mist, billowing through their corroded circuits, clinging stubbornly to their dusty surfaces. That's how it is, with ghosts and machines. Not that the ARK drum-machine choir seeks to exorcise or invoke any ghosts in the machine. It simply lets these restless machinic souls pop up and play their part. It aims to make of them its familiars. Let's celebrate the machinic *Geisterstunde* [witching hour]!

But hold on! »Drum machines have no soul!« This old reproach is as persistent as any belief in ghosts in the machine. And as, for example, Louis Chude-Sokei has recently shown, it imbues the notion of machine with a recurrent diehard trauma. Since time immemorial, »The soul« has served as a brutal battleground for negotiations over »humanity,« one on which a white-male-dominated so-called »humanism« has denied a soul to all that it deems technologically or racially »other.« Which is why, when Kodwo Eshun wrote his manifesto *More Brilliant Than The Sun* some twenty years ago, he celebrated Post-soul machinic musics as »anti-humanist« in the emancipatory sense of the term, that is, as a sonic refutation of the endlessly brutal production of difference that goes on in the name of a tremulously soulful »humanity.«

This is also why the ARK drum-machine choir chooses not to pursue a classic, glossy, technoid aesthetic. Once again, the Post-soul machine takes a very different path than the chest-beating, macho, and kitsch techno fetishism of long-outdated futurisms – kitted out in crumbling vinyl and fake wood veneers instead of highly polished chrome. The future here is no longer synonymous with a teleological march headed for apocalypse across the killing fields of history. The future now takes the form of rhythmic revolutions per minute in a variety of temporal dimensions. The future is the sheer potential for other and diverse temporalities. Any rhythmic

pattern is a form of anti-teleological temporal persistence. It holds (onto) something inasmuch as it keeps it in perpetual motion. And this something thereby also steps out of line. It drifts. Rhythmic time is not hauntologically awestruck by the sublimity of unredeemed futures past. For it knows that such futures always have been, are still, and will forever be nestled in the present.

So just what is it that so persistently clings to and pervades these machines, refusing to be dispelled? Which Post-soul ghosts haunt their sounds and patterns, or flit around their casings? Perhaps the truly spooky thing about these machines is how much they want us to believe in those little ghosts of their own, within them. Certainly this drum-machine choir invokes the ancient forebears. Long button bars of rhythms conjured on the dusty casing of machines from the 1960s and 70s go under the name »Afro« or »Latin American,« for example. Pre-set categories that, at the mere flick of a switch, neatly divide the world of rhythm into a discrete series of supposedly clearly rooted patterns, and that serve thus to preserve and perpetuate cultural concepts based on a long-obsolete notion of linear genealogy. These simple switches can be read all of a sudden as a postcolonial atlas. They render navigable a wieldy collection of allegedly »roots« rhythmic idioms, put a handle to them, quasi, to make a conveniently packaged takeaway. Lineage and ancestry are newly recon-

figured from a pile of transistors, diodes, and resistors. Yet it is precisely this belief in linear genealogy that drives the brutal phantom of distinctions made on grounds of ethnicity and »race« deep into the depths of these seemingly innocent and ingenuous machines. And such distinctions are not found there alone, but also in the latest updates of electronic and digital Musicking Things, the interfaces of which to this day drool with ethno kitsch.

Simultaneously, however, the pattern's unbroken revolutions per minute or the machines' incessant operation blurs the latent brutality of such definitudes, or better: even renders them ambiguous. When machines suddenly began *grooving* in the 1970s – in the hands of Sly Stone or Little Sister, Shuggie Otis or Eddie Harris, to name but a few – »getting into the groove« initially and primarily implied riding high on rhythmic ambiguities. Rhythm may on the one hand mean nothing but taking the exact measure of musical time, but it is this act precisely – that of definitively quantifying time – that allows time itself to be given shape. Groove is accordingly the creative play with and within the ambiguities that occur in the interstices of any strict beat. While the binary counter of classical music theory eradicates such interstices – or in-between spaces, one might say – machinic interplay lets their patterns groove.

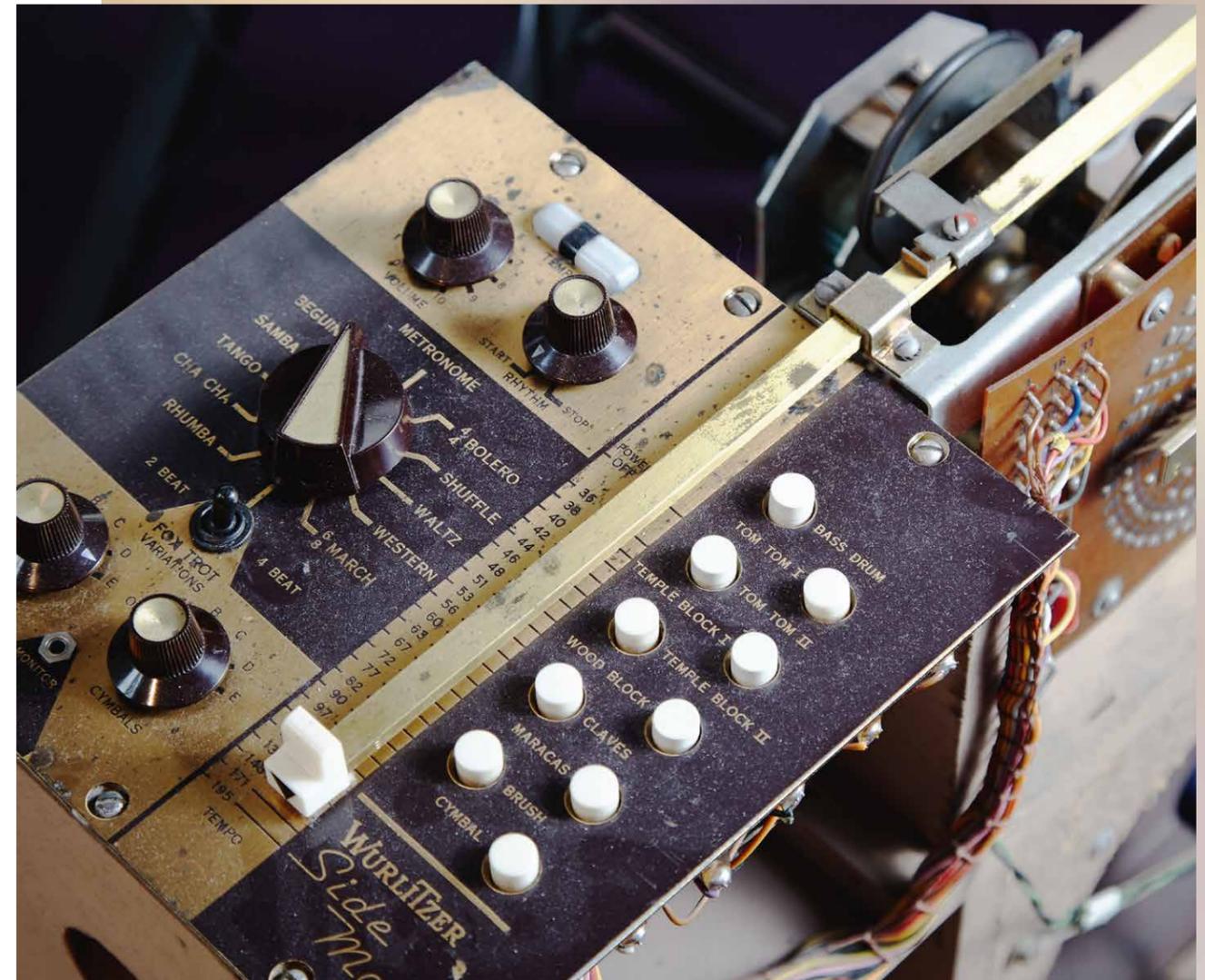
Funk has always already been a machine in this regard. And the reverse likewise holds true, as in: technology has always already been funky, inasmuch as it can never be reduced solely to the logic of its circuitry, i.e. to its technologic. So let's spin that one more time: funk has always already been a machine. Just take, for instance, Anne Danielsen's work on the pleasure politics of James Brown and Parliament/Funkadelic. Take Tony Bolden's work on the kinetic epistemologies of funk. Funk has always ranked among the most progressive rhythm technologies ever deployed to interweave several divergent temporal levels in the strictly binary-based logical beat of established music theory. »Everybody on The One!« On the fundamental count of »The One,« everything comes (back) together. Before and after that there is room for all kinds of cross- and counter-rhythmic complexities, but they all come (back) together on »The One.« Incidentally, the Rhythmicon – the first ever electronic rhythm machine that the avant-garde composer Henry Cowell commissioned Leon Theremin to build for him around 1930 – works in a similar yet totally different fashion, simultaneously letting loose sixteen different rhythmic pulses that, as in the overtone series, make an integral multiple of a basic beat. Cowell used the machine to develop a kind of rhythmic harmonics; and he also strove to compose rhythmic constructs of greater com-

plexity than the strict binary counter of the crotchet, quaver, semiquaver, and so on. So let's hear it now, one more time: funk has always already been a most complex time machine.

The devices assembled in the ARK drum-machine choir are somewhat younger than the still classically modern Rhythmicon, all dating from the 60s and 70s of the last century. And ironically, they do precisely that for which old-fashioned rhythm theory was just – for funk's sake – reproached above: namely, they measure musical time by a binary beat. An array of proto-digital circuitry is hidden within their veneer-coated wood cases: cascading rows of binary switches that are tasked with the technical translation of the unceasing passage of phenomenological time into a disjunctive sequence of singly addressable points in time. One of the most passionate debates in the philosophy of time is turned into hardware at the heart of these machines, without skipping a beat. Rhythmic time is technical time is switchable time. In the rhythm machines of the 1960s and 70s we find a phenomenon which, in computer technology of that same period, had long-since disappeared below the narrow frequency bands of human perception: time is technically discretised, and at such a speed, moreover, as to span a new (dis-)continuum of technical feasibility above and beyond the gap-ridden sequence of points in time.

Hence, technical circuitry too opens up an interstice, an in-between space that is vastly more complex and diverse than its strictly binary ambiguity ever suggests. Eleni Ikoniadou writes that »Rhythm may be one way humans have of accessing the subsistence of a more 'ghostly' or subterranean temporality lurking in the shadows of the actualised digital event« (Ikoniadou 2014, 7) in this era of universal digitisation, in her view, rhythm – and hence technical time, too – becomes the *Geisterstunde* [witching hour] of the undead fuzziness of binary code. In the latter's timing, a specific ghostliness of the still supposedly soulless realm of (not only digital) technology becomes apparent. For after all, even the strictest binary switching takes time, just as the smoothest ever technical processing takes time. But technical operating time, one of the primary features of any technology, is a key guideline for any »human« operational procedures, as anyone who has ever found themselves stuck in front of a frozen monitor knows. Rhythm is haunted by the Post-soul *Maschinenseele* [machinic soul]. What this might mean for sound culture can be gleaned for example from Sly & The Family Stone's uncanny album of 1971, *There's A Riot Going On*. Without his Family Stone, indeed more or less exclusively accompanied by his non-human Maestro Rhythm King – or funk box, as he lovingly called it –

Top: The preset switch of the Wurlitzer Sideman, the first mass-produced electro-mechanical rhythm machine. Photo: Hendrik Frank. Bottom: A stack of rhythm-machines: the Keio Rockmate, Wurlitzer Swinging Rhythm, BOSS Dr-55, Ace Tone Rhythm Ace FR-2L, Wilgavox 2000. Photo: Hendrik Frank.



Sly rasps his way through a fantastically spine-tin-gling multi-track duet with himself on »Just Like A Baby,« albeit swathed in the protective drapes of tape noise. The same rhythm machine runs in absolute slow motion also during Shuggie Otis's spectrally drawn-out instrumental track »Pling,« on his *Inspiration Information* LP of 1974. Otis stretches to the max that in-between time of the rhythm machine while throwing in some tough and tight Fender Rhodes chords for good measure. And it's probably nothing other than a Maestro Rhythm King clattering away below the mighty horns on Bob Marley & The Wailer's Rastafari proclamation »So Jah Seh,« likewise from 1974.

These early forms of machinic music never stood in awe of the shift-shaping ghosts in the machine. They simply played along with them, invited them to join the band, took them seriously as non-human players. Hence the recordings and gigs of that era attest to wholly new collectives built around the machines – collectives that functioned in other ways than the familial model of the band. In 1972, at the height of the Vietnam War, Timmy Thomas sat down alone at his electronic Lowrey Organ with its in-built drum patterns and asked: »Why can't we live together?« There may be a certain pathos to channelling major questions about the potential for (no longer only human) co-existence through a few trivial technical devices – and yet, on the other hand, Anna Loewenhaupt Tsing's parable, *The Mushroom At The End of The World* (2017) marks a most urgent endeavour, if not so much to answer these haunting questions then at least to articulate them afresh; for the anthropologist draws artfully on the matsutake mushroom to explore a radical post-anthropomorphic collective. In light of this unlikely candidate, a mushroom that thrives in landscapes disrupted or ruined by capitalism, Loewenhaupt Tsing inquires into what it might mean to live with all the uncertainties that accompany the inescapable co-existence of so-called humankind and all other creatures on a ravaged Planet Earth.

The ARK drum-machine choir makes a similar endeavour but by other means. The machines it assembles are all allowed to bring along the faces and ghosts that stubbornly haunt them. Yet their incantatory revolving patterns sing the praises neither of the motherland nor of ancient forebears but of the critical knowledge circling palpably on their surfaces, detectable in their sounds: a knowledge of the legitimacy of technological agency; a knowledge of the incessant flow of topophilia and the localisation patterns of sound technologies (Ismaiel-Wendt 2011); and, not least, a knowledge of the depredations and traumata spawned by »human« constructions of difference. The rhythm pattern is

a non-human memory: rhythmic random-access memory. Against the backdrop of such rhythmic memories, the currently pressing questions about the potential for new collectives in light of digital cultures may well take a different course. However, the witching hour that the choir announces marks a call neither for techno-utopian hopes nor machinic voodoo likely to appease the destructive forces of technological agency. The ARK choir aims instead to familiarise itself with those distressed and eerie patterns and problems disgorged in the most unexpected places by that »difference machine« known as humankind: those built from a heap of transistors and resistors, for example, and packed into slowly yellowing plastic coatings.



ARK (*Arkestrated Rhythmachine Complexities*) is a changing association of musicians, producers, writers, scientists, and electronic MusickingThings, who\*which perform heterochronicity and multi-track knowledge, looking for post-representative sound formats. It consists, among other, of Johannes Ismaiel-Wendt, Sebastian Kunas, Malte Pelleter, the Maestro Rhythm King, Sarah-Indriyati Hardjowirogo, Ole Schwabe, and the Wurlitzer Side Man.

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Translated from the German by Jill Denton, Berlin.

Top: The Korg/Keio Minipops 3 (left) and one of its many copycats, the Aria Diamond. Photo: Hendrik Frank. Bottom: The Korg Rhythm 33. Photo: Hendrik Frank.



# 200 BPM ORGASM CLUB MUSIC

GABBER MODUS OPERANDI IN  
CONVERSATION WITH JAN ROHLF



Customized scooter in Bali.  
Photo: alithieslarymnas blog.

Nusasonic is a multi-year project that plunges into a broad spectrum of experimental sound and music cultures in Southeast Asia. During the initiative's 2018 kick-off in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, CTM co-founder Jan Rohlf spoke to Bali-based duo Gabber Modus Operandi, who create potent fusions of club music and Indonesian tradition. The duo describe their love of footwork, jathilan, and gabber; the thrill of Indonesian soundsystem culture; and colonialism's persistent legacy.

**KASIMYN** We're Gabber Modus Operandi, currently based in Bali. We play...

**ICAN HAREM** 200bpm orgasm club music! That's our goal.

**KAS** Gabber Modus Operandi explores sound healing and sarcasm sounds. We want to examine the differences between the sacred, the stupid, and the fun.

**JAN ROHLF** *Where do these interests come from? Do you both come from punk backgrounds?*

**KAS** Yeah, we're punk musicians, but I'd somehow ended up as a house DJ in Bali. I didn't find that so challenging, and eventually Gabber Modus Operandi started from a discussion we had about what we wanted to do.

**IH** We started playing at random punk gigs in the library in Denpasar [the capital of Bali]; it was kind of an accident. The first time we played together was because of one of my projects – my partner back in the day cancelled three hours before a gig, so I asked Kas to help me. The answer was yes.

**KAS** We don't actually have very much gabber stuff, so we just push everything to 200 bpm. And it sounds better. This also emerged from late-night discussions we had about how we work and what we're interested in – we're both excited about all of these street improvisations happening across Indonesia. Both of us love jathilan [a traditional ritualistic Indonesian trance dance], but we don't really appreciate it with the whole cultural outfit. We're more interested in how it is practiced by people on the street.

We love it when kids wearing Sepultura or Rancid t-shirts and Adidas shoes are suddenly doing jathilan. It's the best crossover.

**IH** It's like mixing subcultures.

**JR** *Can you explain what jathilan is?*

**IH** It's like a trance dance in which a spirit possesses your body – an animal spirit, mostly. It challenges our humanness to become more animal and wild. There are no rules, and it's filled with really crazy movement. It emerged from a really common Javanese culture. Nowadays a lot of jathilan just happens in the corner of someone's house, performed by someone in a trance.

**JR** *So what you do is close to something like contemporary folk culture?*

**IH** I'm afraid to say »contemporary« and »folk,« actually.

**KAS** We don't really want to say that we celebrate these things, exactly. We just want to take part in them, somehow. One of our friends actually said, »you have higher education than these guys. Why do you want to be part of this?«

In the end, it's about jealousy. We have a real jealousy towards people who can genuinely enjoy their culture without all the filters that we have – complaints about the DJ, the outfit, the sound, or the venue. All of these questions bring you out of the experience.

**IH** It's kind of like a rave. These motherfuckers are raving harder than us!

**KAS** There's no flyer, no lineup, and no main star that you need to wait for. It's just constant beats and sounds that can suddenly flip and do batshit things without even needing to be categorised by any genre or style. This also applies to the fashion; people wear stuff that is completely unrelated to the jathilan tradition. Someone might wear...

**IH** A black metal t-shirt.

**KAS** And the next guy is wearing Yonex – it's like, »how?!« You wouldn't see that kind of crowd in the club, at least not in my kind of circle.

**JR** I guess that's what I mean by folk culture – you take what's available to you in your surroundings, and you make some kind of collage, crafting what's important to you. What is your process in playing with these elements?

**KAS** We try to set out rules. First, everything needs to be pentatonic, because Indonesian music is based on pentatonic scales. And most of the folk music in Indonesia uses fast bpm's. We tried 100bpm and it wasn't working. So we looked at traditional music and realised it is all very fast. Some part of us, our inner demons or something, just isn't sparked by 100 or 120 bpm stuff, by balearic house music, or chill-out.

So the rules are that we start at 200 bpm, use pentatonic scales only, and use certain sounds that replicate things from the past, like the trumpet. The beat is kind of constant, but we make it sound like it's on steroids through digital sound effects. And I can provide provocations as the MC.

**IH** It's more demonic. If you see our folk culture, there's always something like a handshake with a demon. That's the point. I love that part.

We've been influenced a lot by stuff like Senyawa, who opened up so many new pathways for Indonesian music.

**KAS** It's so weird that we got to release on Yes No Wave Music – the same label as Senyawa.

There's this post-Senyawa Indo stuff happening now, which has inspired a lot of people who have realised, »it's ok to be Indonesian!« It's ok to produce sounds that don't sound like Miami or Berlin. They proved that we can be accepting of it.

There's a big identity crisis for Indonesian kids, maybe even Southeast Asian kids. When people say »underground,« it's always referring to stuff from the outside world – in hiphop it's about »oh, are you playing in a Brooklyn style, or West Coast style?« Or some techno guy will claim to play Berlin style...

**JR** You want to find something – or maybe you've already found it – something that expresses what Indonesia is for you?

**KAS** Yeah, these elements of contemporary Indonesian culture are right there. They're all around us – we just usually don't think about them, and don't recognize them. For example, some kids street race. They use regular 100cc scooters, basically a mum's scooter, since that's all they can afford. They are boosting them, cranking them up to really

demonic speeds. The best part is that they decorate them; it's just mind-blowing. They might use patterns like those seen on fabrics on buffalos at Karapan Sapi [a traditional bull racing festival on the island of Madura], but they carve them into the bike, like on a Kris [a traditional dagger that might be a weapon or a spiritual object]. Maybe they started copying Japanese styles, but then realised, »oh, we're Indonesian, we love to carve things,« and they end up creating these weirdly decorated neon and chrome bikes. These street improvisations are one of our main inspirations.

**JR** What I admire about all of that stuff is that people are creating their own worlds – their own means of expression. They take from many sources, of course, but then transform it and make it their own.

**IH** It's like a cultural orgy.

**JR** You definitely seem most fascinated by anything that's strong, brazen, outrageous, and crazy.

**IH** I guess that's because Bali tends to present softer sounds, like bikini music or koplo house.

**KAS** It's touristy, we need to feed the tourist pocket. There's this thing called »ketimuran,« which is meant to describe an Eastern mentality. People who talk like that don't actually know what the fuck's happening in the East. There's a lot of violence, certainly sonically – if jathilan was played on a proper sound system, then I think it would be more intense than any other sound. But they just have this crap stuff, like what you have for weddings, and with that it's already very intense. If one of the jathilan groups played on a club system, it would destroy everything.

There's this new trend around DIY sound culture happening across central to east Java, where people make their own sound systems, load a stack of speakers onto a truck, and just blast them.

**IH** They meet and blast their big sound systems. The day before Idul Fitri [an Islamic holiday that marks the end of Ramadhan], all of these sound systems come to this one field and battle, blasting »Allahu Akbar« and »bang bang bang, drrrrrang...« It's like a blessing – Islamic culture, but with monstrous DIY sound systems and dangdut [the most widespread pop music in Indonesia, with roots in local musical traditions].

**KAS** There's definitely a hunger for loudness. I asked one of the people involved, »what is the main goal?« The answer was, »if we see a neighbor's window broken, that's enough.« I thought that was amazing, I love these small, genuine goals.

**JR** Could you speak a bit more about this contrast? There is this stereotype of politeness, on the one hand, that is



Gabber Modus Operandi with banner by Alwa Art Spanduk. Photo courtesy of the artists.

*projected as an »official« image, while on the other, there is all this anarchic street culture that often seems rather rough and disturbing – at least from the outside. Do you think that tension is not expressed enough?*

**KAS** I don't think there's much of a discussion about this, really. But I think Indonesia is a country that's dealt with a lot of catastrophe. Historically, there's Krakatoa, the volcano that erupted and killed half the population. Then there was the 2004 tsunami which killed an estimated 160,000. So death is really close; it's always with us. And yet, in this dangerous place, where you could die at any time, there is also an abundance of resources. A lot of food, energy, and minerals. I think that's what creates this contrast, but that's just my personal gut feeling.

**JR** *And do you find this contrast and tension expressed in the current versions of jathilan, and in other popular youth cultures like punk, metal, gabber, etc.? Is Gabber Modus Operandi somehow your way of navigating this?*

**IH** It sucks when people see us and think, »oh they're Indonesian guys, so they're polite.« I don't agree with stuff like that. I mean, I grew up in a really Islamic environment. When I found music, it became my way of reclaiming myself. The mother-fucker is dangerous now – I think that's the source of the power and that is my manifesto.

**KAS** I think this gets assigned both ways. What's projected onto us by outsiders? I think we still feel colonised – there are still so many whitening products. Just recently, a couple of clubs in Bali enacted policies that state if you're local you need to pay, and if you're foreign, you don't. And it's just acceptable – it's not seen as racist.

The way we see ourselves, it seems like there's a lot of inverted racism. It's chaotic. Colonisation isn't over, though that also depends on which colony you're in. Malaysia was colonised by the British and they have some kind of pride there, as opposed to if you're in a former Dutch colony, you're kind of fucked. If you're Vietnamese, at least you have this nice French cuisine...

**IH** It's funny 'cause gabber is so big in the Netherlands. [LAUGHS]

**KAS** Maybe the Netherlands got it from jathilan! Maybe some Dutch guy was like »I recorded some shit from some village in Java, let's crank it up loads.« [LAUGHS]

**JR** *How did you get into gabber, hardcore, and similar sounds?*

**IH** I guess it started from funkot. Funkot is really similar to happy hardcore in Europe, but based on different rhythm styles and bass lines that are closer to dangdut. I only recently started listening to gabber when a friend of mine from France told me that our funkot really sounds like these Thunderdome records. And when I listen to this stuff, I was like, yeah, this is actually really similar to funkot. I used to be really into psytrance, but Kas wasn't. He said, fuck, we need gabber. Its energy is much more evil.

**KAS** But also we're influenced a lot by footwork – we grew up hearing a lot of percussive sounds. It's familiar. Ultimately, we don't really know if we play gabber...

**IH** The name »Gabber« is kind of a joke. We're mocking this seminal Yogyakarta new media art collective from the 90s; they called themselves Geber Modus Operandi.

**KAS** They were really important for the development of underground new media arts in Indonesia.

**IS** When we were making fun of it, it became Gabber Modus.

**JR** *How are things for you in Bali? Do you feel like mavericks, or is there a group of like-minded people around you – a scene of artists making fast, energetic music?*

**KAS** It's tricky in Bali. Each region of Indonesia has its own style. In Bali, we have genjek, then you have koplo. There are different sounds and functions, but they all carry the same intensity. And then there is pop Bali. So there's Balinese pop music that started in the 80s and 90s, but there's also hardcore, the koplo version of Bali.

Is what we're doing new? For sure, but that's also a tricky answer. When people talk about music in Bali, it's usually about the clubs in the touristy area in the South. But there is also the North; places like Singaraja play a lot of funkot – it's on its way to gabber, but they don't know of that connection yet. It's kind of like breakbeat dangdut, though it's like gabber to me – it is 200 bpm.

**IH** Honestly, I never go to funkot clubs in the north of Bali. We're too »South.« For us it's too dangerous; we are too soft for them. That's partially why jealousy has been building in us – we always end up hanging out with and pleasing the tourists. Some of the gigs are changing right now, especially in Denpasar, where there's punk and underground and death metal. The noise scene is growing, Bali is quite late for sure in comparison to Java's scene.

**KAS** There's a lot of experimentation in Bali. There's a guy who makes this weird, synth pop stuff, but at the same time there are a few amazing composers, like Dewa Alit, Wayan Gde Yudane, or Made Subandi. I once saw Yudane put a massive angle grinder to a giant gong, it was next level stuff! Or Dewa Alit, who, for example, created a piece for 9 performers, playing with the after-sounds of gamelan with different tunings.

This doesn't really suit the tourists. It is not like this could officially represent »Indonesian culture,« so they don't really want to deal with Jakarta. You need the approval of [the Ministry of Culture in] Jakarta to represent Indonesia. So it's mostly DIY, but now they've gotten their own funding. Dewa Alit is now at MIT [in Boston, USA]. Yudane did a project in New Zealand. So personally, I think experimental music from Bali is more established outside of Bali. They could not really spread their ideas in Bali, because it falls in a sensitive area between the cultural norm and the traditional kind of stuff.

But one of the reasons why we love Bali so much is that it's one of the places that still lives with music. There's a social system called Banjar, [social groups that host community meetings, sports, dance, and music at places they run, which are known as Bale Banjar], each of which brings hundreds of people together to play gamelan.

**IH** Don't forget to mention the techno banjar! Before the silence day [Nyepi day is part of the New Year celebrations according to the Balinese calendar – a day of silence, fasting, and meditation, where all routine activities come to a complete halt] all the kids just hang out and get drunk in the banjar and they play really loud funkot all night long. They make their own rave, you know? It makes us jealous.

**KAS** It's impossible to say there's no experimentation in Bali. I'd say 80% of Bali is playing gamelan; pentatonic music is in their breath. There's this band we really love called Aardvark – they're kind of like math rock. But the way the drummer plays, it's like gamelan. They think they're playing metal, but they aren't; the composition is more like gamelan than metal. That's why I am saying it's tricky. The cultural environment is bending the music.

**JR** *Bali isn't majority Muslim. Is this one of the reasons why there is a more liberal club culture in Bali?*

**KAS** Yes. It's even become a gay refuge. If you are gay, you'd get persecuted in Java, so you need to run away to Bali.

**JR** *And this environment also brings about different music?*

**KAS** Yes, it's on its way. There is a fetish of being really stuck in one genre – it's always punk or metal. I think it's related to how society works there; a small caste system still exists. It's not »official,« but people still look at you differently depending on your name. Now it's slowly starting to dissipate, and there are some amazing musicians crossing castes.

**IH** People used to only visit Bali as a pleasure place – it was kind of the end of hippie trails from India. But now we found techno people, and broader cultural discussions. It's not just people finding spirituality or being surfers, and we've been influenced a lot by that. Now, there are other reasons to come to Bali.

**JR** *You said the funkot parties are too dangerous – what would happen if you played there?*

**IH** I guess they would accept what we do for sure, and they'd maybe even be kind of happy. But they're really sexist. We're too soft to hear that.

**KAS** There is a strong gang mentality, too. You bump into one and you have to mess with the whole gang.

**IH** If we agreed to play somewhere, I guess the club would be kind of happy about it. But for the average person going to funkot clubs, if you aren't a foreigner, it's another story.

**KAS** They also serve cheap booze, and I don't think we could handle those substances. We're not young enough anymore to handle that shit.

We kind of obsess over soundsystem culture. One of our goals is to play on top of one of those trucks we mentioned earlier. Blasting things like that appeals more to us than a funkot club.

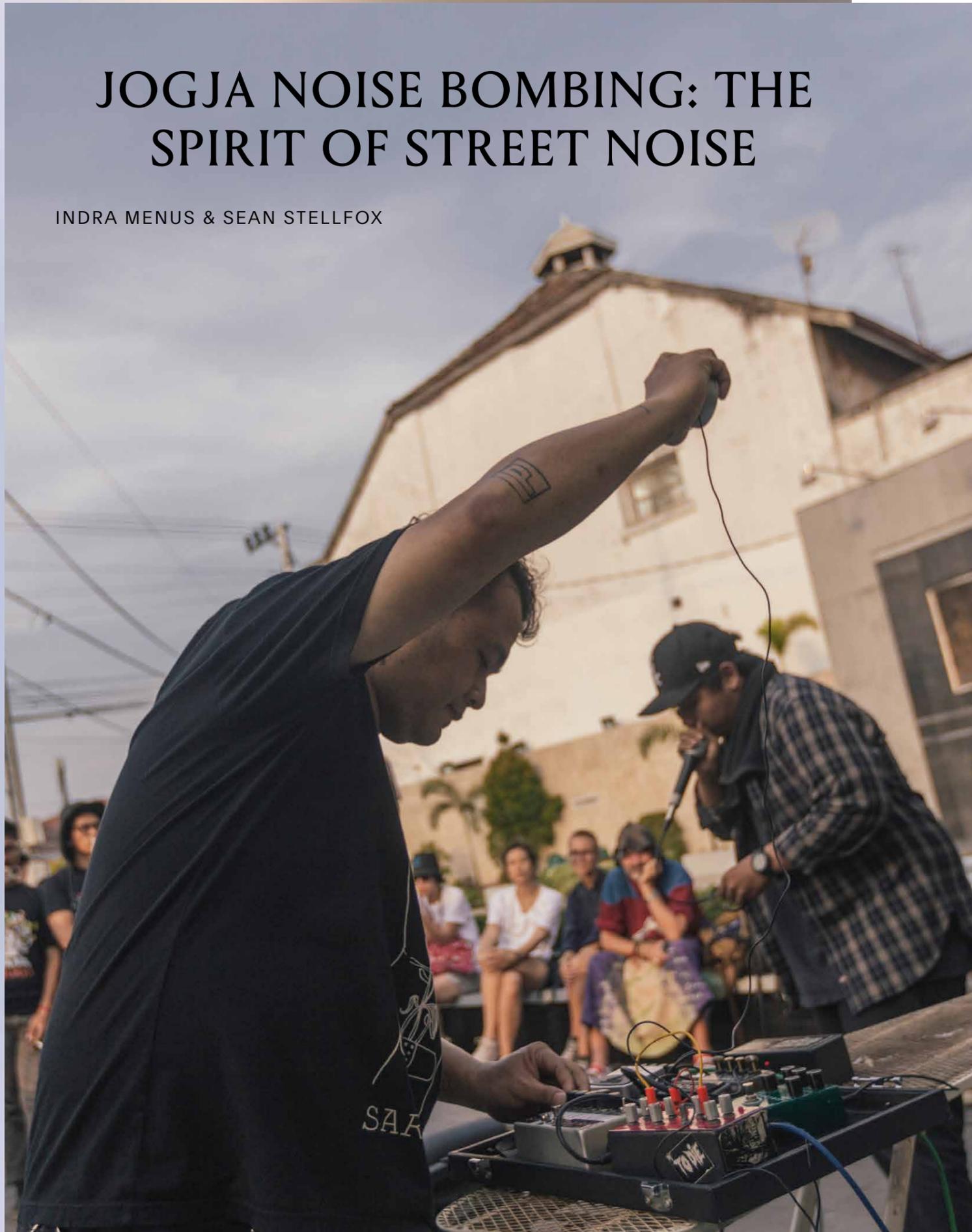


» [www.instagram.com/gabbermodusoperandi](https://www.instagram.com/gabbermodusoperandi)  
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**JAN ROHLF** *is one of the founders and artistic directors of CTM Festival.*

# JOGJA NOISE BOMBING: THE SPIRIT OF STREET NOISE

INDRA MENUS & SEAN STELLFOX



Indra Menus performing during Nusasonic Yogyakarta in October 2018. Photo: Doni Maulistya.

To complement the appearance of various musicians from Southeast Asia at CTM 2019, Indra Menus and Sean Stellfox take a look at the origins and development of the noise music scene in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. A much more detailed account of Jogja Noise Bombing and the local scene can be found in their forthcoming book, *Jogja Noise Bombing: From The Street To The Stage* (Warning Books).

## WHAT IS NOISE BOMBING?

The concept of noise bombing is something that can baffle the uninitiated, those whose daily routines are momentarily interrupted by dissonance. Screeching sounds emerge from a mess of electronics, which are connected to small guitar amplifiers in front of traditional markets, college classrooms, or local parks. Onlookers might pass a judgemental eye on us and just see a strange group, all decked out in black clothing, circling unusual electronics. We cheer each other on as we abuse our speakers.

Sometimes security guards and local gangsters, known as preman, get involved in the action and try to shut down the jarring noise. When this happens, we quickly pack our gear and head for the next available electricity outlet, away from the previous confrontation.

Other times, curiosity strikes and observers find themselves participating in the noise bombing. They enthusiastically twist knobs, or hit metal objects connected to piezo microphones. These are the interactions that help us initiate more participants into noise; we welcome these encounters.

Noise bombing can be undertaken by a larger group, who might stake out locations over a few days, map out routes, and strategise their use of gear until it's time to perform. It can also just be a few friends sitting around at a coffee shop using apps on their smartphones to create unusual compositions, to the dismay of other customers.

Anyone can join in noise bombing. There aren't any real rules about participating. Noise bombers may seem unapproachable, but that is far from the case. We're just a group of people who like to approach life from a different perspective.

Noise bombings can happen anywhere. Of course, it's helpful to find locations where power won't be an issue, so it's best to find an exposed public electrical outlet. It's also a good idea to test the outlets before we all gather and set up. Some reconnaissance and planning is smart, but not necessary.

## But what is »noise bombing«?

We like to define noise bombing as a performance concept in which we host illegal noise gigs in public areas with stolen electricity. Noise bombing is inspired by graffiti bombing, and basically involves playing an impromptu collaborative set in public until security or local thugs stop us, after which we move to another site. We usually bring a minimal amount of gear and small combo amplifiers on our motorbikes, find an outlet, and then plug in and play.

However, it is much more than that. Noise bombing is a community banding together around a passion. It's a way to infiltrate our local art and music scenes and bring exposure to the sounds of the underground. Noise bombing is a way to relieve the day-to-day problems and stresses we encounter. Noise bombing is also a reflection of the noisy city in which it was founded; like noise bombing, Yogyakarta is loud, unusual, and intriguing.

## THE EXPERIMENTAL NOISE SCENE IN YOGYAKARTA

Before discussing Jogja Noise Bombing (JNB), it would be helpful to outline a brief history of noise and experimental music in the city that gave JNB its name.

Musically, Yogyakarta can be divided into two territories: the south and the north. In the south, the music scene is predominantly comprised of artists and art students, as the art college, Institut Seni Indonesia (ISI Yogyakarta), is a central influence. This part of the Yogyakarta music scene is filled with experimentation, art, and political discourse. In the past, many experimental noise bands and musicians in the south often performed at art exhibition openings. Conversely, the music scene in the north has traditionally focused less on experimentation and art, instead emphasising music for parties and the music industry. Most of the musicians in the north are students of the many colleges throughout Yogyakarta. Despite these differences, both scenes have recently started working together in organising music events, and the borders between north and south are starting to blur.

Experimental music is nothing new to the city. One of the earliest examples of experimental music performance in Yogyakarta happened in 1995, at the Recycle Music event held in ISI Yogyakarta. Recycle Music was an event that tried to combine the conventional format of a stage show with fine art concepts. Music at the event was very different from the usual local stylings of *sampak*, *dangdut*, or traditional rock music. This marked the emergence of a new spirit among the students – an alternative spirit that was focused on being "different from the others." This alternative spirit was demonstrated in the way Recycle Music's stage was set up; musicians were locked up in a cage under a large tree, while spectators arrived in all manner of unusual costumes. In the past, a few art students from the south had become familiar with musicians from the north, for example the group SKM (Sejuta Kata Makian) fronted by Ari Wulu and Jompet, as well as Marjuki »Kill The DJ« (through the "Men-cari Harmoni" and "Parkinsound" series of events). Prior to that, there was also a phenomenal experimental rock band known as Steak Daging Kacang Ijo, who ransacked many different styles of music to create their own. Members Bob Sick, S. Teddy, Yustoni Volunteero, and Edo Pillu created interesting music not only because they didn't know how to »properly« play their musical instruments, but also because they were active during Soeharto's New Order. The members of Steak Daging Kacang Ijo were artists whose artistic approach was very different from conventional musicians. "It's a happening band," said Toni, drawing on the concept in the art world. In between 1990 and 2000, there were many bands that went »beyond the band,« in the sense that they also worked with visuals and stage performance, as evidenced in the work of political techno/digital hardcore band Techno Shit.

Yogyakarta art exhibitions are enlivened by creative music performances exploring experimental sonics, noise art, and sound art. One early example of this took place in 2003, when Yogyakarta visual artist Eko Nugroho hosted an exhibition at Gelaran Budaya called *Sound Garden*, which combined sound art with visual art.

In the heyday of the internet, the phenomenon has reemerged as a result of internet-savvy artists harnessing the magic of the network. Wok The Rock started his net label Yes No Wave, which provided a space for the production of music not absorbed by major labels. He focused on Yogyakarta groups, giving them a platform through which to share their music with larger audiences outside the city. One of the biggest and most influential bands to be released on Yes No Wave is Seek Six Sick, a noise rock band founded in 1999 and made up of art students.

This band would go on to be one of the core influences for the next generation of noise and ex-

perimental artists in the 2000s. Many of the band's younger fans developed an interest in noise and fell down the rabbit hole. This is true for many of the founding members of Jogja Noise Bombing, who used the chaotic sounds of Seek Six Sick as a launching point for their own noise projects. Jimmy Mahardikha and Sony Irawan, the core line up of the band, call their music »Asian noise rock.«

One of Seek Six Sick's vocalists, Bofag, also plays with Jimmy and Levoy (who drums in grindcore bands Extreme Hate and Proletar) in the noise-grindcore band Sound of Human Pollution. They appended noise samples to the starts and ends of their fast, short old school grindcore tunes – something that had never been done before in Indonesia. Sound of Human Pollution's discography is now considered to be very influential in this realm.

The influence of Seek Six Sick's brand of Asian noise rock was first evident in the younger generation at ISI Yogyakarta, specifically the group Black Ribbon. They started integrating noisy parts into their rock music, and added a noise component via Krisna Widhiatama, who rounded out the sound of Black Ribbon DJing cassettes and playing circuit-bent instruments.

Krisna Widhiatama himself then founded the harsh noise acts Feces Anatomy and Sodadosa. Together with Dyah »Woro« Isaka, Krisna later formed the drone noise duo Sulfur. He would eventually play a pivotal role in the emergence of Yogyakarta noise acts in the late 2010s, such as Asangata, Bangkai Angsa, Liwoth, Bleak, and many more.

Wednes Mandra, another key figure in the Yogyakarta experimental music scene, was involved in countless noise projects including noise-focused netlabel called Pati Rasa Records, and was also a founding member of Jogja Noise Bombing, participating in the very first street noise bombing. However, after forming the dark folk duo Rabu, he disbanded all of his noise projects.

In the late 2000s and early 2010s, several initiatives started to make connections between experimental noise music and new media art. Breakcore\_LABS, a platform for experimental audiovisual performance, formed. Lifepatch, an independent community-based organisation working in art, science, and technology, was founded by a team that includes Andreas Siagian (Ucok).

Bukan Musik Bukan Seni Rupa (BMBSR) was held in 2013 at ISI Yogyakarta campus and curated by Rain Rosidi, Krisna Widiathama, Ahmad Oka, and Koskow Widyatmoko. Initiated to showcase the latest developments in Yogyakarta's creative arts scene, the event was presented in two sessions: the first consisted of a noise performance, followed by sound art interventions, while the second was an

Top: Sarana performing at a Jogja Noise Bombing event within Nusasonic Yogyakarta in October 2018. Photo: Doni Maulistya. Bottom: Giga Destroyer at Nusasonic Yogyakarta in October 2018. Photo: Doni Maulistya.





Top: Dyah »Woro« Isaka aka Menstrual Synthdrone performing at Sonic Wilderness within Nusasonic Yogyakarta in October 2018. Photo: Doni Maulistya. Bottom: Noise bombing a public bus at Nusasonic Yogyakarta in October 2018. Photo: Doni Maulistya.

attempt to present the a meeting between sound and visuals. The event attempted to explore the unnamed, hazy area of »non-music non-art«, hence the title of the event, Bukan Musik Bukan Seni Rupa.

Electrocore, an act comprised of Venzha and Istasius, is one of the key bridges between noise and new media art. Both members helped found the House of Natural Fiber (HONF), an international new media art organisation based in Yogyakarta. As Electrocore, they toured Europe in the early 2000s, gaining notoriety because of their interest in UFOs. I remember watching Electrocore back in the early 2000s, when Venzha wore a big instrument reminiscent of a space suit that could capture sound waves using various sensors. The instrument generated sound using signals and frequencies from the human body, plants, water, and the surrounding environment.

SKM, the brainchild of Ari Wulu and Jompert, is another influential project from Yogyakarta. Formed back in the early 2000s, the act performed their compositions on a bicycle. Jompert is an artist and also a pioneer of electronic music in Yogyakarta who started Garden of the Blind together with Venzha. Ari Wulu is known as the godfather of electronic music in Yogyakarta in addition to founding the underground DJ collective Soundboutique. His father, Sapto Raharjo, was probably the first person to bring a synthesizer to Indonesia. Ari Wulu is also known for mixing electronic music with gamelan, and establishing acts Second Floor, Midi Junkie, and WVLV.

In the mid-2000s, the indie-pop scene in Yogyakarta flourished thanks to influential communities such as Common People. The band Melcyd found themselves more drawn to noise than indie-pop, and their sound grew noisier over the course of their career.

Bhakti, Melcyd's bass player, went on to play in experimental outfit Zoo with Rully Shabara, who would later form the influential Senyawa with Wukir Suryadi. Their singular sound combines Wukir's handmade bamboo instruments, guitar effects pedals, and Rully's diverse vocal stylings, embracing Indonesian ethnic music with hints of noise.

To Die was started as a three-piece hardcore punk band in 1998 by me (Indra Menus) and my high school friends. Our interest in Man Is the Bastard and Bastard Noise led us to shed our hardcore punk sound and embrace the spectrum of noise. Now we are cited as the band that bridged the gap between the Indonesian hardcore punk scene and the Indonesian experimental and noise scenes, and To Die was also one of the initiators of Jogja Noise Bombing alongside younger members of the local noise community.

Today, Yogyakarta's experimental noise scene is more developed, consisting of a wide array of participants. Musicians from other genres have started noise projects; enthusiasts from the grunge, metal, and hip-hop scenes have crossed over. A fan of J-pop idol groups now uses samples from AKB48 in noise compositions.

In the mid-2010s, Jimmy Mahardikha of Seek Six Sick and Satya »Panca« Prapanca launched a series of improvised music concerts known as Kombo. The concept was simple: feature a number of musicians from different communities, have them form duos, and then improvise together. Each performance would last about 10 to 15 minutes, and there would be several combinations of performers during an event. At the end, all performers would come together for a final improv session. Kombo successfully brought musicians from different disciplines together, providing musicians with the chance to experiment with their approach toward music writing for the first time.

Experimental music projects continue to exist in Yogyakarta, one example being Raung Jagat – an experimental choir led by Rully of Senyawa. Developing a unique code system with which to conduct the ensemble, Rully also established an offshoot instrumental project called Gaung Jagat.

Meanwhile, the Yogyakarta Synth Ensemble, which started as a synthesizer-building workshop conducted by Kenali Rangkai Pakai, is still active. The ensemble uses their own DIY synths as well as a particular notation system they created. At the same time, Klithih Bunyi began to fill a computer music vacuum with their laptop-driven improvised compositions. The Ruang Gulma collective organises regular experimental noise jam sessions under the Ngaji Swara banner. Ruang Gulma is also behind Terik Berisik, which organises gigs for out-of-town experimental noise projects that come to Yogyakarta.

The city enjoys an array of experimental music events, such as the legendary Yes No Klub. Established by Wok The Rock of Yes No Wave and Tim Puk of Performance Klub/Oxen Free, Yes No Klub, in their own words, is »a curated series of events concentrating on cultural and musical exchange between visiting and local artists.« They »range from experimental/sound orientated performances through to more conventional band and electronic performances,« and try to expose the people of Yogyakarta to new and unfamiliar sounds. They also »aim to link artists from Indonesia to an international network of experimental/other musicians and sound producers.«

As for record labels, my own Relamati Records, established in 2002, is still actively releasing

experimental noise music in a variety of physical formats. Tilis Records, a new record label, releases improvised experimental music from projects such as Potro Joyo, Wukir Suryadi, and Iqbal S Lubys of Sangkakala. 10 PM Project, run by Rio Nurkholis of Coffee Faith, focuses on CD-r, while Mindblasting Netlabel releases free digital downloads. New net labels such as Watch Pineapple Press are now active, trying to help experimental bands release their albums digitally.

Challenging, caustic sounds were around Yogyakarta well before JNB filled the streets with a cacophony of noises. Art was fundamental in exposing the sounds and concepts found in these styles of music to a wider audience. This, coupled with a continued desire to push boundaries, has also helped move these sounds from art to music communities. With members rooted in both scenes, Jogja Noise Bombing was also able to influence current trends, and has helped to bring more national and international recognition to Yogyakarta as a city filled to the brim with experimental and noise music.

#### HOW JOGJA NOISE BOMBING EXPLODED ONTO THE SCENE

Jogja Noise Bombing (JNB) is an open community and collective known for organising performances, exhibitions, and workshops. Also heavily involved in the international noise network, JNB organises festivals, tours internationally, and contributes to releases with international acts.

The seeds of JNB were planted in the years 2009 and 2010 by affiliates of net labels Ear Alert Records, run by Hilman Fathoni, and Pati Rasa Records, run by Wednes Mandra.

Both labels have shared music from Yogyakarta noise artists such as Martinus Indra »Menu« Hermawan (To Die, Relamati Records), Hendra Adythiawan (Anxiety/Anxiety Alone), Rangga Nasrullah (Anxiety), Krisna Widiathama (Sulfur, Soda-dosa), Hilman Fathoni (Palasick, Ear Alert Records), Wednes Mandra (Asangata, Liwoth, Bangkai Angsa, Pati Rasa Records, amongst many others), Pandu Hidayat (Control Z, KontrolJet), Taufik »Arie« Aribowo (Hartz Hertz, Suffer In Vietnam, Mindblasting Netlabel), Akbar Adi Wibowo (ULO, Evil Jazz Mortus, Radio Active Morbid, Giga Destroyer), Vitus Yogi Prasetya (Obluda, Jurumeya), and Dyah »Woro« Isaka (Sulfur, Menstrual Synthdrone).

In the early days of JNB, local noise musicians always faced difficulties in booking shows, because organisers and venue owners feared that noise would destroy their amplifiers and PA systems. This lack of venues drove us to create something new. Once we got kicked out of a spot, we would then move to another location and do it all over again.

This concept is part Occupy, part punk rock, and part DIY synth culture.

The gear and instruments JNB artists use tend to be mostly homemade. This is in part due to the cost of imported guitar pedals and electronic music equipment, but also because of the scene's DIY-focused creative culture. Some musicians use instruments built from scrap metal and springs, while others use DIY synthesizers and pedals built from various makers around Indonesia. Many of these synths are made by Yogyakarta native Lintang Radditya and his company Kenali Rangkaian Pakai (KRP). These instruments have played an important role in shaping the sound and tone of many JNB artists, and Lintang has also helped inspire plenty of instrument building.

JNB has conducted noise bombings almost anywhere power can be found, such as university campuses, parks, and street intersections. Other noteworthy venues include the Taman Kuliner (Culinary Park) where a video of local security kicking us out went viral; a Tong Setan (Wall of Death), where motorcycles ran in circles above us; and Tugu, a sacred and historical monument in Yogyakarta. For noise bombings, we don't care where we play.

Our early noise gigs received full support from local promoter Irvin Domi, who organised a gig for us called XYZ. He also helped us with our noise bombing efforts by providing a pickup truck to take the artists and equipment all around Yogyakarta. Irvin Domi also documented the early JNB performances and street performances through his production company, Snoop Doc. After a little while, Domi moved to Jakarta for work. His role of documenting JNB events was then taken over by Udin (Otakotor Records) and Fahrul (Disgusting Tapes).

In the early days, JNB mostly held illegal noise shows in public and on the streets. Now, we're no longer limited to stealing electricity from outlets. We have performed in art galleries, fried chicken restaurants, coffee shops, and abandoned buildings. Even when we do noise bombing in indoor venues, we still try to apply the concept of our street performances to the venues we play in. This means that we try to make sure performances are short (usually 20–30 minutes maximum), and involve impromptu collaborative sets between performers. The idea is to keep our shows similar to how we would play when we were on the street.

We also host the yearly Jogja Noise Bombing Festival, where we try to bring the atmosphere of street-level noise bombings to larger venues. We pair two different noise acts (that have never collaborated before) together, and have them play a 30-minute set. With this concept, we want to encourage performing artists to create new connections. Pairing artists also allows them to discuss their per-

formance with each other and create music that is unique for the festival. We believe that with this concept, both musicians will be able to establish a strong connection, with the hope that they can build on this after the festival. This concept has been especially great in recent years, as we have been able to connect local and international artists.

Many international noise acts have come to play in the annual Jogja Noise Bombing Festival. So far, we've had artists from USA, France, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Singapore, Malaysia, Belgium, Holland, Myanmar, and many other countries. Some of the artists who have played with us or at our shows include DJ Sniff, Bob Ostertag, Ora Iso, Gisle Froisland, Tzii, DJ Urine, Jerk Kerouac, sIn, and Circuitrip.

Some return time and time again. The camaraderie between them and the hosts, as well as the family vibe, are part of why these artists keep coming back, and why they champion JNB back home. After the festival, we usually go to local food stalls such as Angkringan Padang Amien Rais to enjoy a delicious wrapped rice with petai and jengkol in Padang style chilli, and the sound of noise is then replaced by conversation between friends.

In addition to the annual noise festival, JNB also organised the Jogja Noise Bombing Week – a week full of workshops, exhibitions, movie screenings, gigs, and discussions that revolved around the experimental noise scene. Another JNB-organised event was Persami Eksperimental (Experimental Weekend), which was a two-day camping excursion at Kampung Edukasi Watu Lumbung (Watu Lumbung Educational Camp), near Parangtritis Beach. This event saw the debut screening of Hilman Fathoni's documentary about the development of noise in Yogyakarta, *Noise Is a Serious Shit*.

In addition to being accepted by the art and music scenes, JNB has also attracted the attention of Yogyakarta's academics, becoming the subject of several student theses, and receiving media attention.

As of 2018, JNB has undergone many changes in membership. Some of the earlier noise bombers are no longer associated with noise music, while some continue to keep the spirit of street noise alive. Some still live in Yogyakarta, while others have now left for other cities or countries. The fluid nature of JNB makes it easy for acts to become part of community, but also it means that they might not be willing to prioritise it. It's better to think of JNB as a loose collective of outsiders who gather around a love for strange sounds, rather than a professional organisation with strict guidelines for membership.

Aside from the first generation of noise bombers who started in 2009, there are newer members of the scene that have become core members of JNB, such as Mahamboro (who also plays sax in To Die), Made Dharma (Mad Dharma, (((...))), Rio Nurkholis (Coffee Faith, 10 PM Project), Bodhi (Rupagangga), Gendes (Tsaatan, ASU(USA)), Lansanese (drums in in To Die), Dea Karina, and Sean Stellfox (Bossbattle, ASU(USA), Lansanese, Stellfox).

At this point, JNB has been around for almost a decade. We started bombing the streets of Yogyakarta with noise as a result of not being able to find a welcoming space to perform. As we performed our street noise, we gathered more and more interest. While we may have made a few security guards angry in the process, this just served as validation. The positive reception from casual observers was always much stronger than the negative. Eventually, we were able to transition from street noise bombing into becoming one of the staple experimental music communities in Yogyakarta. We've found acceptance from the same places that once shunned us. However, we're still on the fringe. Others might accept what we do, but that doesn't mean they fully understand it. To be honest, we wouldn't have it any other way. As long as we can find an open electrical outlet, we will continue to plug in our amps and just have fun making noise.



» [www.jogjanoisebombing.tumblr.com](http://www.jogjanoisebombing.tumblr.com)

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» [www.relamatirecords.bandcamp.com/music](http://www.relamatirecords.bandcamp.com/music)

*SEAN STELLFOX is an experimental musician originally from the United States who goes under the artist name Bossbattle. He moved to Indonesia in 2014 and, soon after arriving in Yogyakarta, found himself involved with the Jogja Noise Bombing community.*

» [www.bossbattle.bandcamp.com](http://www.bossbattle.bandcamp.com)

» [www.stellfox.bandcamp.com](http://www.stellfox.bandcamp.com)

» [www.asuusa.bandcamp.com](http://www.asuusa.bandcamp.com)

# PEEPING THROUGH A FROWN:<sup>\*1)</sup> A DÉRIVE THROUGH THE PUNK CONTINUUM

TIM TETZNER

From the activities of Penny Rimbaud in the 1970s to non-places searched for via Google Street View in 2019, Berlin-based artist Tim Tetzner takes readers on a time-warping ramble traversing the shimmering force fields of autonomous zones and the multilocality of digital ubiquity.

Recall the opening night of CTM 2018, exactly one year ago now. Upstairs in the recently opened Club OST, noise-punk idioms erupt in a shuddering, sizzling mass. Berlin trio Cuntroaches are heating things up. The band is loud, and between each number, feedback sears the air and snaps at buttocks. There's a hint of truculence, too, with newspapers torn up and stuff chucked into the audience (before being thrown back). After 20 minutes, it's all over – but there's something weird about this too. Something doesn't seem to fit in the venue. Is the audience too attentive? Has it failed to comprehend the *Fuck You* message? Or is it still waiting expectantly, unable to sense the music's inherent urge to destroy?

For five euros we grab a cab from Club OST that takes us back in time to Koma F, where Cuntroaches had played some months earlier along with Polish hardcore band Ohyda. Koma F is one of several cellar clubs in the Köpi complex, a place that wears its 28-year history on its crusted sleeve. It is a time capsule in which layer after layer of history settles democratically, a convulsive organism whose animal magnetism has pulled in generations of outlaws and exiles – and partied with them too, as Jabba the Hutt and his crowd do. It's a dark descent into Koma F. The familiar feedback of Cuntroaches

rips through the wall of indefinable odours. Apart from the shredded newspapers, Cuntroaches do nothing differently here. And yet the room is crackling with raw energy; bodies glow, and after each electrifying jolt, embers smoulder with relish like the reactor room on the USS Thresher.

There is a point to this juxtaposition, of course – to examine these two spaces side by side. CTM is a festival, built to neutrally showcase whatever content is pumped into it; Koma F is an emotional multiplier that raises mercury exponentially once action hits its peak. Socio-economically, of course, both spaces operate within complementary sets of rules. The crucial point is what melds them, namely their common aspiration to give audiences a unique experience a million miles removed from the everyday. Urban sociologists have long been researching Berlin's autonomous zones since the 1990s – and you need look no further than the history of CTM itself to understand how essential these zones and spaces are to festivals. Spaces like Koma F have emerged from a tradition-bound sociosphere that is neither likely nor (in principle) even remotely willing to receive any form of state support. How such spaces function and persist today, in 2019, can only be explained phenomenologically if at all.

FROM SOUTHWEST ESSEX TO NEW YORK

It's the early 1960s and Penny Rimbaud, a sheltered middle-class kid from Northwood, Middlesex, has just graduated from art school. He works briefly as an art teacher and then, following a successful exhibition in 1964, turns down a job opportunity in Andy Warhol's Factory, claiming he has better things to do. Inspired by Pop Art of the early 1960s, socialised by Bauhaus and Fluxus, and radicalised by the Situationist International, Rimbaud founds a commune with his pal Gee Vaucher in 1967. Residing at Dial House, a farm in southwest Essex, it is one of the first independent anarchic-pacifist-oriented centres in shared use and under collective management. Dial House helps propel a handful of seminal festivals that have the character of happenings – The ICES 72 (International Carnival of Experimental Sound) and the Stonehenge Free Festival of 1974 see themselves as *soziale Plastik* [social sculpture], and their influence on later subcultures, particularly in relation to public space, proves substantial.

It's 1977 now, and in reaction to the first eruption of punk in the UK, Penny Rimbaud and his 20-year-old Dial House-mate Steve Ignorant pull together a loose music collective with the aim of *doing something a bit like punk*. Tentative improvisation and a few recordings give rise to Crass, which quickly establishes itself as an authentic counterweight to a punk movement that is already selling out. Ignorant's juvenile energy combines with Rimbaud's theoretical foundations in a dynamic nexus that clearly puts its stamp on the further evolution of punk. Initially a cell of subversion, Crass soon becomes a prime example of anarchic self-management – and, incidentally, one of the most successful DIY businesses of the post-punk decade. Their records sell in tens of thousands and Crass concerts sell out faster than the Sex Pistols can break up. Rimbaud's agitprop-inspired vision of consolidating links between art and activism to craft a social tool for the influence of politics certainly comes true. Crass becomes a critical voice in everyday British politics, taking a stance on everything from the Falkland crisis and social welfare cuts to gender inequality and animal rights. In response to ascendant Thatcherism, Crass turns the spotlight towards the mechanisms driving an increasingly pervasive, multi-national corporate capitalism.

Owing to a bogus interview tape, Crass goes under observation by MI5 in 1983 and splits up, as anticipated, in the Orwellian year of 1984. Yet despite turbulent times, Crass continues to return to Dial House, where Penny Rimbaud still runs his operations to date. Steve Ignorant describes how Rimbaud came to be at Dial House: »Pen's idea of Dial House was that he'd seen a movie called *The Inn*

*of the Sixth Happiness* set in Japan [it was, in fact, China] and they had these houses where you could travel from one to the next. And if you were a poet you earned your bed for the night by reciting poetry or if you were a cook you cooked a meal. I think the original ideology was to have places like Dial House dotted all over England, Wales & Scotland.«<sup>1)</sup> Evidently, Rimbaud was quick to see the importance of self-run autonomous locations dotted across decentralised network structures – locations that later became key in the squat movements of the 70s and 80s. Even then, when the appropriation of (primarily urban) spaces really gathers momentum, Dial House stays in the wings: avant-garde in strategic terms yet geographically under the radar.

It is with a similarly panoptic perspective that French sociologist Michel de Certeau opens his 1980 essay *Walking in the City*, describing how the city, when seen from the 110th floor of the World Trade Center in New York, is transformed into an »immense texturology spread out before one's eyes.«<sup>2)</sup> Whether he thought about Crass at that moment is impossible to say, but it cannot be ruled out, as Crass played several gigs in New York that year. Gee Vaucher, who lived in New York at the time and was tasked to book shows for Crass, says, »I avoided booking the obvious. I said I'm not going to book CBGBs or Max's. So I booked the Puerto Rican Club and the Polish Club.«<sup>3)</sup> That de Certeau hung out at CBGB during his time in New York is a little improbable. But it's easy to imagine that one of his endless *dérives* in the city swept him into the Puerto Rican Club one night when Crass was on stage. Thanks to their common obsession with avoiding the limelight, de Certeau and Crass may well have run into one another, a case that would put flesh on the bones of de Certeau's sketch of the city as a chance encounter of »paroxysmal places...clashed by the streets [and] possessed by the rumble of so many differences.«<sup>4)</sup> He thereby invokes a term from neoplatonic dialectics, *coincidentio oppositorum*:<sup>5)</sup> the coincidence of opposites. Here, the coincidence of opposites resolves the arbitrariness of the city as construct.

But to return to the idea of the city as text: the premise that urban planning, hypertext, and virtual space are structurally similar (as »path,« »link,« »node,« »interface,« »point,« »marker,« »intersection,« and similar terms suggest) is nothing new in contemporary media studies. The transition from the analogue to the digital has been equally as decisive in urban planning as for network research.

Yet we are in the year 1982. Now, from Dial House's hippie grassroots approach sprouts the agile and efficient Crass Records, which shelters bands such as Rudimentary Peni, The Cravats, Flux of Pink In-



Left: »Crass font,« Crass' stencil aesthetic rendered as a typeface.  
Right: Crass Avenue in Handford, California



Left: The once-squatted Köpi in Berlin, blurred on Google Street View. Right: K19 on Kreuzigerstrasse in Berlin, obscured on Google Street View due to privacy laws.

**HÄUSER:** schau nicht in die häuser, denn sie lachen dich aus, sie sind so alt, sie haben viele narben, sie haben dich gesehn, und du warst noch ein kind.. jedes kennt einen witz, eine geschichte, und sie sind millionen, sie wissen mehr als dein computer.. so viele jahre zeichneten sie, doch sie beschweren sich nicht, eines tages werden sie ineinanderfallen, und niemand wird weinen.. mein haus ist schwarz, und es steht allein, es hat keine fenster, und es kommt niemand rein/

Image: Excerpt of lyrics from »Häuser« off EA80's first LP *Vorsicht Schreie* (1983). Listen to »Häuser« live at Hamburg's Hafenstraße  
» [www.youtube.com/watch?v=i77QUPGhoic](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i77QUPGhoic)

dians, Poison Girls, Zounds, and even Björk's first combo, Kukl. And while all these bands are fired by the raw urgency of punk, their aesthetic and musical manifestations are highly idiosyncratic. Slapping on labels like »anarchic punk« or »peace punk« is handy for marketing, but what really melds all the artists on Crass Records' roster is their shared faith in a liberal, utopian anarchy, and in the right of each and every individual to interpret and live as they please. This itself spawns the scene's primary, vital network: bands now can go on tour and, once on the road, they forge links between otherwise-disparate places. For networking, countless hours are spent in copy shops, letters are handwritten, telephone calls are made by prior arrangement from public phone boxes. Everyone involved in those ventures is at least absolutely sure that the *snail mail* dispatched from A to B and beyond will be of immeasurable value to whoever received it.

Moreover, there is a byproduct of all these activities, for they leave behind a paper trail: linear streams of text channeling ideas and injecting new blood into the network sustain it and foster its growth. This communication – an architecture of the intellect, so to speak – is the very lifeblood of a fast-growing virtual network. The texts underpinning it hence acquire geographical import, consolidating thoughts and intentions in ways that shrink the spaces between villages, towns, and cities, building communities of like-minded souls. De Certeau's primary premise, the city-as-text, is hence suddenly turned on its head. For now we have text-as-city – a city in which people have very consciously decided to live together, to trust one another, and to cooperate.

NEXT STOP: MÖNCHENGLADBACH (AND THEN ON TO VENICE BY BOAT)...

But let's now leave the British Isles, return to 2019, and enter an address into Google Street View: Beethovenstraße 6, 4050 Mönchengladbach. This must ring a bell for anyone who ever laid their hands on a record by EA80: there hasn't been a more mythical German address in punk since 1981. The Beethoven reference and the post-war gloom that stubbornly pervades the town of Mönchengladbach on the Lower Rhine undoubtedly play their part. The fact is that EA80 has been permanently based there since 1981, with barely a change in line-up. This is a punk continuum of which Germany has never seen the likes before – a clandestine force field in Xeroxed black and white, melancholic, angry, and aggressive. Any hint of reconciliation is at a distant theological remove. Benjamin Moldenhauer once wrote in the German newspaper *taz* that »EA80 play in a league most people don't even know exists;«<sup>6</sup> and this is a fair comment on the non-place where EA80 has its roots: off the zeitgeist map, safe from co-optation.

Ever since, EA80 has done its thing as persistently as any exemplary socialist workers' brigade could hope to. It has recorded 13 albums, released countless singles, and played in every squatted youth centre – never for more than a fiver, as is only right and proper for a punk band that feels morally bound to carry the cultural torch and pass it on to others in its network. This is almost conspiratorial; hence Moldenhauer's remark.

And the background to the conspiracy is this: while punk in the UK grows out of a tradition in which pop culture is always in sync with a cultural industry that churns out youth cultures and markets them as products, the cultural landscape of post-war Germany is dominated by the *Frankfurter Schule's* finer points of social analysis: a highly idealistic and cantankerously moralistic philosophy of right and wrong, authenticity and alienation, that lays a veil of cognitive dissonance across the land and soon culminates in both bitterness and a yawning generation gap. Even the radical movements that ensue – from the APO and RAF to the anti-nuclear movement – prove to be fertile soil for what is in essence an anti-hedonistic punk scene (and hence the very opposite of its UK counterpart). Acting in total refusal of social norms, the scene outrages the moral majority from the early 80s on, squatting the fountains of Germany's market squares, swigging beer from bottles, and taking part in orgies of nihilistic self-destruction.<sup>7</sup>

But good things come out of battles on the margins. Every young generation must define its own freedoms; the urge to appropriate and defend space is always also a means of expanding it. That's how houses get squatted and self-run youth centres get set up. These are places for fledgling communities committed to solidarity, equal rights, and sharing – for creating space beyond repression. And punk plays a role in this: it fuels many of those movements. Punk empowers the kids; it gives them energy, vision, and the chance to experiment with viable networks that are worlds apart from the mainstream dream. With »If the Kids Are United Then We'll Never be Divided,« Sham 69 delivers a prophetic take on what punks should aspire to: namely to put an end to individuals' isolation within the capitalist system, whether for a fleeting moment of personal freedom or for entire lifetimes.

But let's get back to the hyper-capitalised present and see what's going on over at Beethovenstraße 6, not that this address was ever an actual centre or public venue – just a postal address at which EA80 could be reached. The more you encountered it – whether through sending something to it or receiving post from it – the more real it seemed, even without ever visiting. Over time, the text of this address became an emblem that conjures a picture of the place. And now, tracking it down via hyper-

links (thanks to Google's virtual map), it's possible to see how far reality and imagination overlap. But Google disappoints: Mönchengladbach doesn't even feature on Street View, just like the many other towns in Germany too minor to guarantee a requisite number of clicks. Hopes of being beamed to a ghostly blurred house, a further facet in the EA80 myth, are suddenly dashed.

And there's another building in Mönchengladbach. No more than a few streets away, and also hidden on Street View, is Unterheydener Straße 12 in the Rheyd district. The artist Gregor Schneider has (re)converted it many times over since 1985. Schneider has practically taken it apart, in fact, while managing somehow to retain its aura. The *Haus u r* concept could easily have stemmed from EA80, but it is not known whether Schneider and EA80 ever met. In aesthetic terms, however, and despite their roots in contrasting cultural spheres, the two projects couldn't be more alike. For one, Schneider too uses his house to communicate with the wider world. At the invitation of the Venice Biennale 2001 (respectively its curator, Udo Kittelmann), he reconstructs the entire building in the German Pavilion. Some 150 tons of building material are shipped from Mönchengladbach to Venice, to be resurrected there as *Totes Haus u r* [»Dead House u r«]. Thereafter, the project takes on a life of its own. Schneider tours with *Totes Haus u r*, travelling the art world in much the same way as EA80 travels the world of punk.

The comparison is rhetorical, of course, for a house is not a punk band. The point of this excursion is to fathom the utopian potential of certain places and, on the basis of that »immense texturology,« also the very letters that compose it. We drift – as in *dérive* – through the endless scope of contemporary multilocality while remaining focused on the individuals that link each point within it; the crucial factor here being the energetic structure of each place or – to cite Rupert Sheldrake – the morphogenetic field which psychogeographically underpins it and configures its synapses.

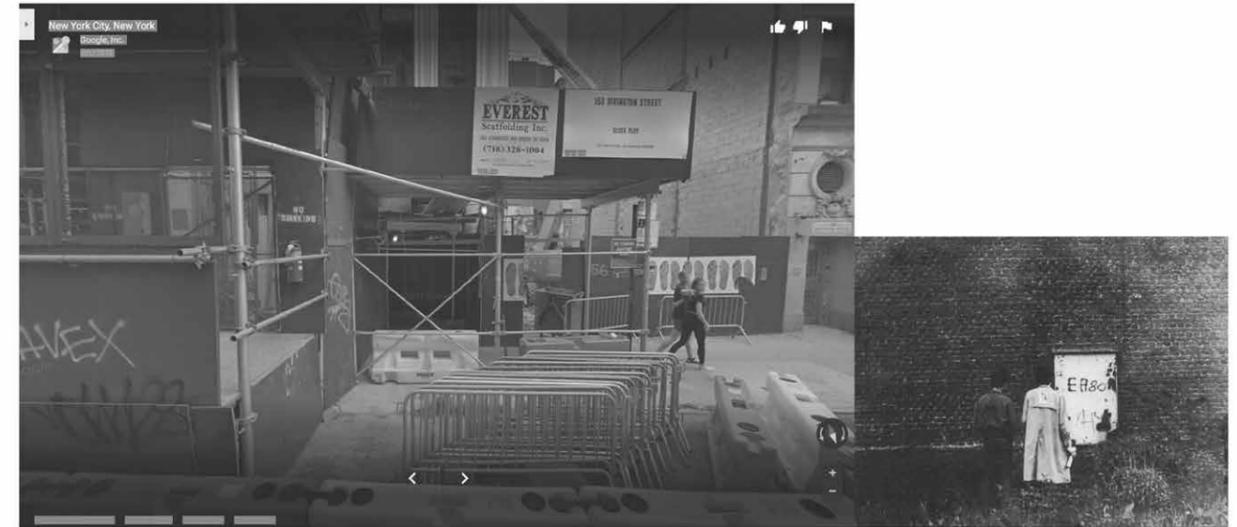
Even in 2019, however, punk is infinitely more than a spectral apparition. Whatever aura of anachronism it may conjure, and however often Google Street View depicts places like the Köpi as a blur, punk is still an ark on the rough seas of late capitalism. It is, perhaps, a phantom vessel adrift, but one nevertheless still willing to succour the motley non-conformists its network built over the past forty years – those united by the triumph of punk's idealism over the materialist world around it.

And the way this network operates is anything but anachronistic. The aforementioned communication skills of the still-analogue world have been transposed to the digital present without frictional loss – and are able now to turn over much more information at far quicker speeds. True, bands today still have to lug their backline from venue to venue to play live for audiences that trek home happily clutching some handmade merch. Yet on the whole, things suddenly became a lot more peer-to-peer and direct. So if, say, the Berlin punk scene's Facebook page, *Pech gehabt Keule!*,<sup>8)</sup> had announced yesterday that *Cuntroaches* would be playing at the Köpi tomorrow, word would have spread like wildfire and comments would be posted too. Likewise, if projects and squats like the *Potse*, *Drugstore*, or *Liebig 34* were about to be evicted, instant response, activity, and feedback would be guaranteed. Because nothing but feedback can ever cut through the compartmentalised dimensions of time and space to forge vital spaces of collective experience.



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Translated from the German by Jill Denton, Berlin.



Left: A couple on Google Street View in front of the just-torn-down ABC No Rio in New York's Lower East Side, not far from the former World Trade Center. Right: A couple on the cover of the first EA80 single, *Der Mord fällt aus*, from 1983.



Left: Crass and friends take over the Rainbow Venue in North London's Finsbury Park, December 1982. Right: Gregor Schneider's *Haus u r*, Unterheydener Strasse 12, Mönchengladbach-Rheydt.

\*1) George Berger, *The Story of Crass* (Oakland: PM Press, 2009), p. 78. \*2) Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984); translated by Steven Randall. \*3) George Berger, *The Story of Crass*, p. 93. \*4) Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p. 91–92. \*5) *Coincidatio Oppositorum* is a term from medieval theology which psychoanalysis has preserved for contemporary usage and which Michel de Certeau subsequently adopted and adapted for this essay. \*6) Benjamin Moldenhauer, »Was geblieben ist«, 12.1.2013, *taz – die tageszeitung*, Bremen Aktuell, p. 47. \*7) A thorough documentation of this state of affairs is available on the extremely entertaining archive platform run by Karl Nagel, [www.punkfoto.de](http://www.punkfoto.de). \*8) The full name of the Facebook group is: *PECH GEHABT KEULE! AKA PICK YOUR PARTY BERLIN punk*, etc. and is available here: [www.facebook.com/groups/827697427273137/](https://www.facebook.com/groups/827697427273137/) [last accessed January 2019].

# ENCOUNTERS WITH BEELZEBUB'S ORGANS QUELLGEISTER #3: BUSSD

STEFAN FRAUNBERGER

Austrian artist Stefan Fraunberger takes us into the fundamental acousmatic reverse cosmology that is his *Quellgeister* project. The long-term alchemical research series sees the artist collaborate with the non-human that he encounters in the persistence of decaying organs in derelict Transylvanian churches. In eliciting a language from states beyond, *Quellgeister* observes the disappearance of the borders between nature and culture, a dichotomy that has long been rudimentary for Western thought.

*Quellgeister*<sup>(1)</sup> is a long-term project devoted to investigating the states of mechanical pipe organs in deserted and derelict churches in Transylvania – organs belonging to a realm that neither nature nor culture can unambiguously define. Over the course of the project I visit them; I seek them out. Why? Well, in order to help them evade the drudgery of serving at the rite of mass, although it has been many years since this obligation weighed upon them. But first and foremost, my intent is to playfully pursue the rapture of their sound and the changes therein, so as to give voice to the *relations of non-human language* purportedly hiding behind the *veil of modernism*, in the crypt of this cultural context. Insofar my *Quellgeister* project is thematically, formally, and conceptually a collaboration – or interaction – between the uncanny and myself. This is evident not least from the series title, *Quellgeister*, which suggests spectral visitations animated by or within church pipe organs ravaged by the elements and the passage of time. Once bereft of their established sacral acoustic function, these organs become markers of liminality. No longer shackled by human demands, they stand, exposed and expectant, on squares and »wastelands« on the margins of the European present.

While the recording process is about perception of and play with the *altered signatures of a pipe organ*, my performative practice in *Quellgeister* con-

stitutes a *fundamental acousmatic reverse cosmology*. The *Quellgeister* project participates in the ascension of an abandoned world view. An excerpt from the phenomena implicit in this process is played back, *medially* – in what I call a *non-human mass*. And the fact that I've had a violent aversion to recording studios ever since I first became preoccupied with electronic music also prompted my quest for new event horizons in the forsaken fortified churches of Transylvania. Within their ramparts, I ask the Lord of the Flies (or Beelzebub, in Aramaic) about the language that has inscribed itself in tongues and the vortex, as well as in the dust dwelling in the organ. It is not for nothing that he remarked in Georges I. Gurdjieff's *Beelzebub's Tales to his Grandson* (1934): »Any writer can write on the scale of the Earth, but I am not any writer«.

*Indeed, this is perhaps the most important question to confront culture in the broadest sense. Let us make no mistake: the climate crisis is also a crisis of culture, and thus of the imagination...so the real mystery in relation to the agency of non-humans lies not in the renewed recognition of it, but rather in how this awareness came to be suppressed in the first place, at least within the modes of thought and expression that have come to dominate over the last couple of centuries.* — Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement*, 2016<sup>(2)</sup>

Inasmuch as I make a distinction in this context between non-humans and humans, the focus of my observations is the discontinuity fundamental to – and generally acknowledged within – this dichotomy, as well as the consequences thereof, and potential alternatives to it. The separation of nature and culture is established by and through the »autonomous ability of language.« (Descola) Separation – the garden fence, so to speak – is likewise the method by which particularity (or particularities) and their attendant nationalism(s) are created. This sort of exclusionary cosmology/ontology is taught to us in schools, perpetuated by the media, and further debated and elaborated in academic discourse. Humans form collectives and differentiate themselves from one another in terms of their respective language and customs – which is to say, in terms of their culture. To the greatest possible extent, they thereby exclude from the thus delimited realm anything and everything exterior to it – nature. This dichotomy of pure and impure sources in »natural cultures« and »cultural natures,« »animate« and »inanimate objects,« »monistic universalism and relative particularities« (Descola) – and, ultimately, of »non-human« and »human« – is fundamental to the founding *myth* of Western civilisation. Nature is accordingly everything we deem to be external to ourselves, an object that we examine and exploit on the assumption of our own position as subject, an object from which we distinguish ourselves »objectively« and that we supposedly should seek to control.

*But there is now more to gain from trying to situate our own exoticism as one particular case within a general grammar of cosmologies rather than continuing to attribute to our own vision of the world the value of a standard by which to judge the manner in which thousands of civilizations have managed to acquire some obscure inkling of that vision.* — Philippe Descola, *Beyond Nature and Culture*, 2005<sup>(3)</sup>

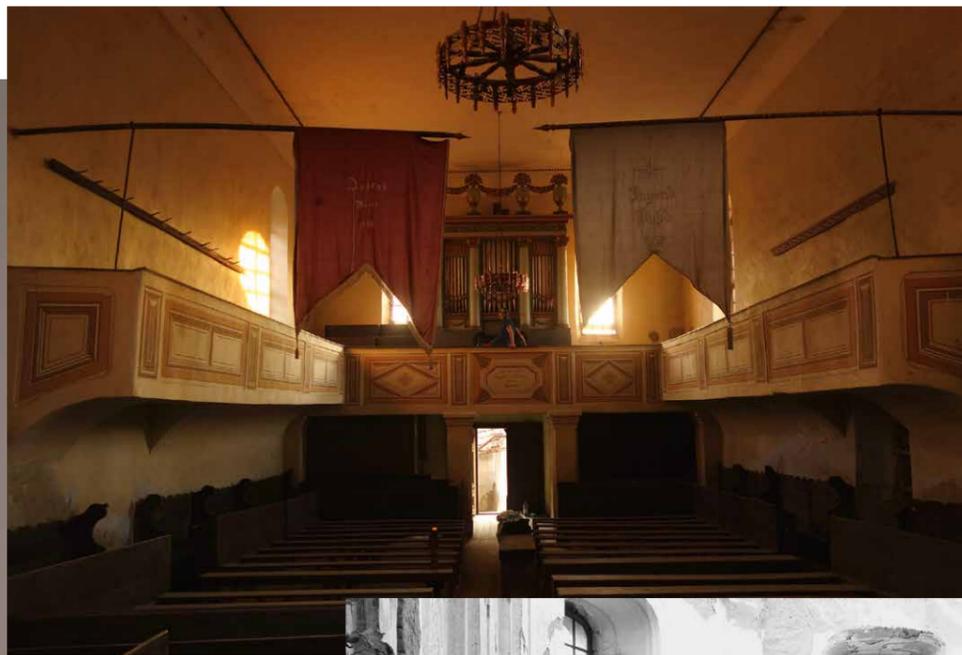
Folk music is classified today as a national and cultural phenomenon. However, if we take the separation of nature and culture to be just one variation in this »grammar of cosmologies,« then certain random facts might lead us to suppose that it is nothing but a caprice of the zeitgeist cemented in our minds. Our predecessors were wholly unfamiliar with this model – no ritual music in their day was considered a dogmatically established form of »cultural heritage.« This is why I explore the acoustic states of *non-human transformation*, thereby predicating music, the discontinuity of which is never-ending and emphatic, because it is composed together with non-humans and unfolds beyond the *score of the cultural boundaries* inscribed on maps. The church pipe organ is a fitting partner in this sonic investigation of an un-

ravelling of *imaginary imperialisms* given that this »queen of instruments« was once deemed the very epitome of Western civilisation's progressiveness in the musical field. Amid this »especial foam« of religious-aesthetic particularity and in light of the Christian-European »church laboratory,«, more specifically, of a former German-Protestant ethnic minority, I examine the disappearance of the borders between nature and culture(s). The *Heimat* [homeland] of a population, hitherto defined in social and geographic terms, here becomes a *Heimat anthem from the beyond*: human and non-human sound conjoined in the persistence of things. The »well-tempered piano« becomes the »inhuman organ,« but at the end of the day nothing but music happens »to play out abroad.«

*If everybody knows how the machine is functioning – where is the use of it, if we don't know what it is for?* — John G. Bennett, *The Dramatic Universe*, 1956<sup>(4)</sup>

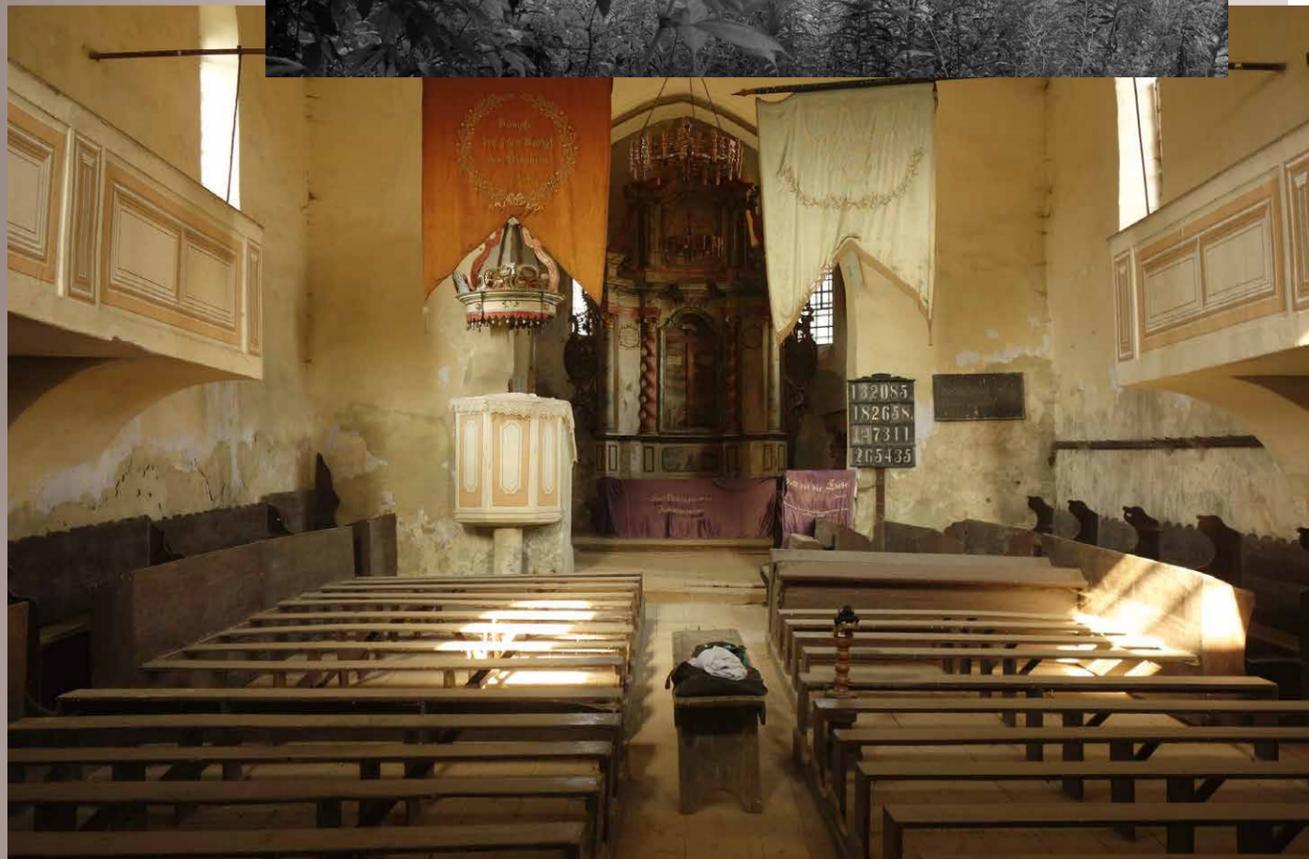
For *Quellgeister #2*, I investigated the church organ in a Transylvanian village with the German name of Wurmloch, which means *wormhole*. The organ had been modernised and equipped with an electric motor-driven bellows that would supposedly assure a constant airflow. No such electric bellows has ever been installed in Busssd – to use, here too, the German name for the place where the *event horizon of the present* ends.<sup>(5)</sup> The organ there – our protagonist in *Quellgeister #3* – has barely been altered or modernised since its redesign by the organ builder, K. Einschen, in the early 19th century. This is why the *Busssd bellows* is still pumped full of air by human hand while its »inner life« – the wooden mechanism that opens and closes the stops and pallet (valves) — is a filigree arrangement of wooden rods. In the *Evangelical Register of Organs in Siebenburgen* (to use the German name for Transylvania), the instrument is described as follows: »Action: *Registertraktur*: mechanical; *Spieltraktur*: mechanical; classicist in design with painted columns: red-gold-greenish; tin pipes, some *front pipes* are missing;« and it is said to be overall in an »unplayable/rundown« condition. From the classic viewpoint, this may well hold true, but in my view, this is precisely where the *Quellgeisters'* work of alchemy begins. The question being, once the event horizon is reached at last, how non-humans regard and influence our mechanical devices, as well as how they find shelter in them, and thereby wreak change.

*The sixth Quellgeist in the divine power is the sound, tone, tune or noise, wherein all soundeth and tuneth whence ensued speech, language, and the distinction of everything...Thou shall ask, What is the tone or sound? Or how taketh this spirit its source and original? All the seven Quellgeister are*



Busssd church interior by evening. Photo: Johanna Magdalena Guggenberger.

United church in Abrud, Romania  
Photo: Stefan Fraunberger.



Busssd church interior by day. Photo: Johanna Magdalena Guggenberger.

*generated one in another, the one continually generateth the other, not one of them is the first, nor is any one of them the last; for the last generateth as well the first as the second, third, fourth, and so on to the last...Hardness is the Quellgeist of the tone...And now when the spirits do move and would speak, the hard quality must open itself; for the bitter spirit with its flash breaketh it open, and then there the tone goeth forth, and is impregnated with all the seven Quellgeister. — Jakob Böhme, Aurora, 1612<sup>6)</sup>*

Owing to the punctured and decayed state of its air dampers, wooden pipes, and no longer upright tin pipes, the Busssd organ's *air vortex properties* in the *spatial phase*, *vortex turmoil* and *frequency rotations* are not quite what we might expect. Empiric deduction suggests a non-human influence on the properties of these acoustic phenomena. I call the changed air vortex and the spatial phase phenomena to which it gives rise a *language from states beyond*. The church in Busssd has not been used for celebrations of mass for several decades, and today constitutes an isolated object within the existing village order. In this respect it is practically a neutral temple for celebration of *non-human masses*.

*And the Horn will be blown; and at once from the graves to their Lord they will hasten. They will say, O woe to us! Who has raised us up from our sleeping place? — Quran 36:51, 620*

Eight hundred years ago, a German-Saxon minority followed the lure of tax relief, leaving what is now Luxembourg to make a new home in the village of Busssd, in Transylvania. Successive rulers – from local herding dynasties to Hungarian counts, from Ottoman governors to Austro-Hungarian monarchs – have put their stamp on the human cultural history of the place. Following the demise of the last of them – the multinational imperial and royal »k. u. k.« Empire – there arose around this »organ« the nation state of Romania, which was shortly thereafter steamrollered by National Socialism, before vanishing just as rapidly into the icebox of Cold War-era Communism until, finally, it could be ushered into the Social Darwinist *modern times* of dog-eat-dog capitalism – although this last instance never really made it as far as Busssd. Descendants of these settlers were able to move to

the Federal Republic of Germany long before the Iron Curtain opened – indeed, the West German government paid the Romanian government to allow such *Volksdeutsche* to leave. They »sought refuge,« as we would say nowadays, in that enticing paradise of »Modern Talking,« a European bastion of freedom and opportunity, and the last of them followed suit after the political turn of 1989. The deserted village was then taken over by Roma families, mainly from the south of Romania. Traditional family ties in their case extend from Wallachia to Turkey, Syria, and Russia as well as into Western Europe. Yet the church organ, now abandoned to its fate by its original benefactors, has found no role to play in these developments.

But physical similarities no longer determine the course of events in the case of Busssd's church organ, last redesigned and restored by K. Einschenk. As a shifting discontinuity, the *language from beyond* of the non-humans dwelling in the organ constitutes a sonic relation to the cultural object »human« which, in turn, given its wraithlike appearance, generates a similarity to interiority. Its behaviour thereby is similar to that in its relation to the »language of birds.« (Attar) The *Quellgeister* project draws on mental states and emotional processes to examine similarities in the interiority of non-humans and humans. In societies shaped by animism, there is nothing extraordinary about non-humans speaking in altered states or tongues through human beings. Any subject not distinguished from an object may be found to be in many things.

*Animist subjects are everywhere, in a bird that is disturbed and that, protesting, takes to flight, in the north wind and rumbling thunder, in a hunted caribou that suddenly turns to look at the hunter, in the silk-cotton tree, swaying slightly in a light breeze... Existing beings, endowed with an interiority analogous to that of humans are all subjects that are animated by a will of their own, and, depending on their position in the economy of exchanges of energy and on the physical abilities that they possess, hold a point of view on the world that determines how much they can accomplish, know, and anticipate. — Philippe Descola, Beyond Nature and Culture, 2013<sup>7)</sup>*

My work on these instruments is no museum piece, no attempt at sentimental restoration of things long since lost to us but, rather, an investigation by means of sound and composition into changes in tonal properties within the body of the organs. The term *sonic archaeology* springs to mind in this regard, but could prove misleading, just as the notion of science fiction might. For the *Quellgeister* afford creative potential for a feat of *cosmological reverse engineering*, a non-human mass, in the celebration of which rings forth the states of a *language of signatures*. The work accordingly describes »a landing strip for incoming states.« The incoming sonic signatures speak sentences from the »far side of the Horn«<sup>8)</sup> about the altered states within the acoustic body of the organ. They inscribe the presence of the arrivals in its dust.

Musical intonation began as a sonic representation of a human cosmology, as a conceptual system of *relational natural intervals* that spurs our emotional states in a coherent manner. In pre-modern times this system was taken to be »the language of angels« (the Brethren of Purity).<sup>9)</sup> Yet trace the scant available proof and it becomes apparent that relational intervals and the aural spirits flitting between them have increasingly become the »objectified mechanisms« of a naturalistic »interval crisis« (Pleşu) in our self-contained »culture machines.«

The audio material on which the work is based was recorded during two sojourns, in September 2016 and 2018 respectively. In the space of these two years the organ had deteriorated considerably and, undoubtedly, will soon fall silent forever. In 2016 Johanna Magdalena Guggenberger operated the organ bellows by hand-pump and so played her part in interpreting with me the varying timbres that the instrument offered us. In 2018, two children and their father, Antonio – of the Roma family now living in the guardian's quarters on the outer ring of the fortified church grounds – lent me a hand with this exhausting and challenging task.

Pigs roaming the inner courtyard and the entrance to the church were reassuring heralds of the fact that no villager need go hungry in wintertime. And while we worked inside the church on deciphering the *signature of non-humans*, village life went on outside, as it has always done.

We humans feel it is our prerogative to interrogate inanimate (natural) objects and keep them under close observation; and so we overlook that we ourselves have long been under surveillance by watchful eyes and attentive ears – almost as if our own familiar Earth had become that mind-altering planet painted by Stanislaw Lem in *Solaris*. And who among us can safely say that they have never experienced one of those moments when seemingly inanimate objects suddenly come to life? As when a pattern in the carpet reveals itself to be a dog's tail – a tail, moreover, inadvertently stepped on... In such moments the call of The Simurgh is suddenly closer than we think.

*All of this [reality] – praise be to God – is in actual fact imagination, since it never has any fixity in a single state. But people are asleep, and the sleeper may recognize everything he sees and the presence in which he sees it, and when they die, they awake from this dream within a dream. They will never cease being sleepers, so they will never cease being dreamers. Hence they will never cease undergoing constant changes within themselves. Nor will that which they see with their eyes ever cease its constant changing. The situation has always been such, and it will be such in this life and the hereafter. — Ibn Arabī, al-Futuhat al-Makkiyah (The Meccan Illuminations), 12th century.<sup>10)</sup>*



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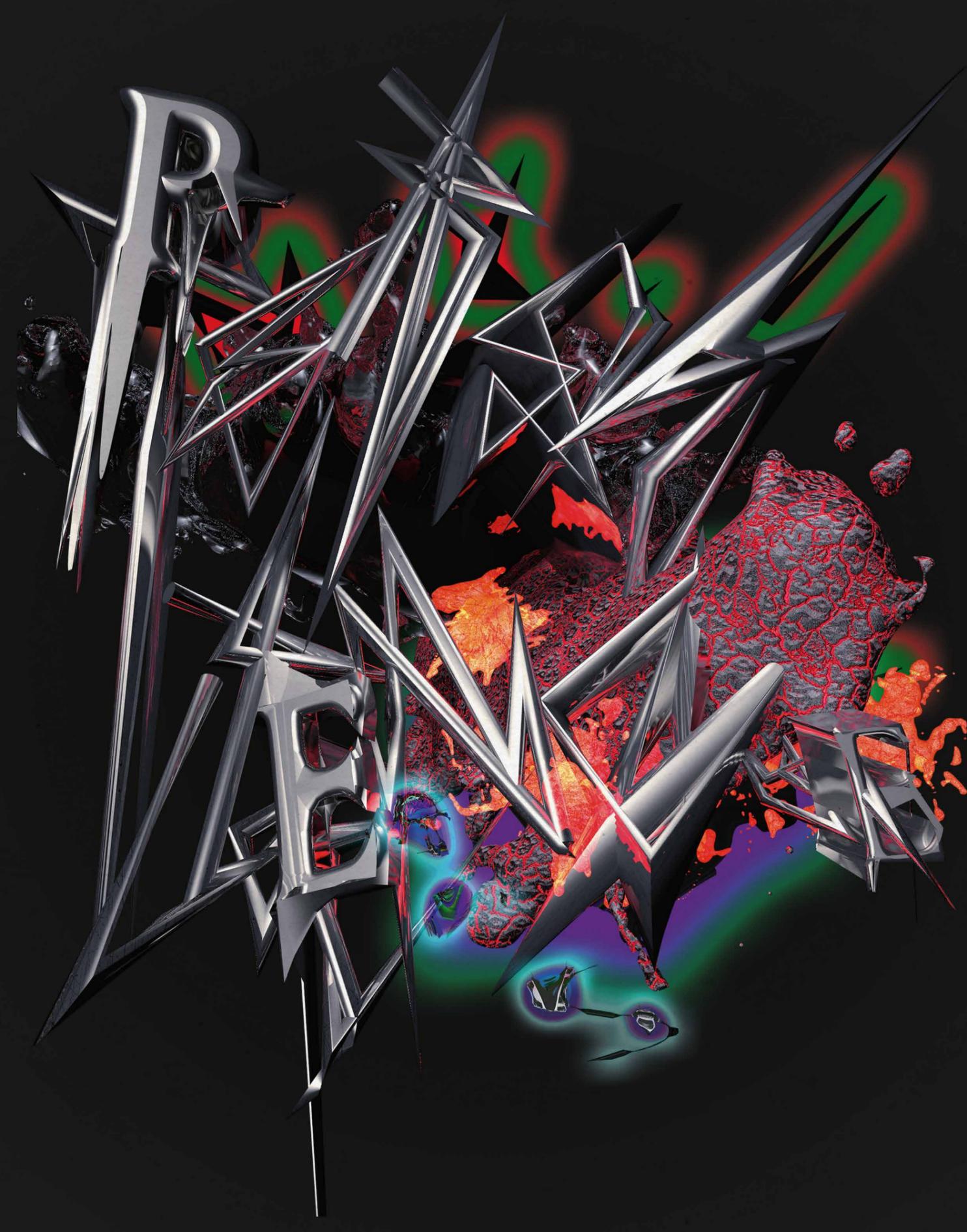
16th century wall painting in the wooden orthodox church in Rogoz, Romania. Photo: Stefan Fraunberger.

Bussd church organ manual by K. Einschenk. Photo: Stefan Fraunberger.



Bekhal waterfalls in Rawanduz, north Iraq in the year 2013. Photo: Stefan Fraunberger.

\*1) Here, as also in John Sparrow's first English translation of Jakob Böhme's *Aurora*, which was published in 1656, only forty years after the original, we retain the original German term for *source spirits*. \*2) Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement* (Harayana: Penguin Random House India, 2016), p. 87–88 \*3) Phillippe Descola, *Beyond Nature and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), translated by Janet Lloyd, p. 87–88 \*4) John G. Bennett, *The Dramatic Universe* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1956). \*5) ... and which happens to be pronounced like the English word »boost«. \*6) Jakob Böhme, *Aurora*, ed. Gerhard Wehr (Frankfurt am Main: Insel Verlag, 1992), p. 185 \*7) Phillippe Descola, *Beyond Nature and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), translated by Janet Lloyd, p. 282. \*8) This phrase is taken from Ibn Arabī's *Meccan Revelations*, Chapter 26: »Concerning the inner understanding of how people remain between this world and the Resurrection.« There, he writes of the *Horn of the Imagination*, the *wahdat al-wujud* (unity of being) of which represents the entire conceivable cosmos, creation itself. The manifest part that we are able to physically perceive he describes as »the broad side of the Horn.« »It is breathed into the Horn/forms« (6:73, etc.) and »it is blown upon the Trumpet« (74:8). And the two of them (the »Horn« and »Trumpet«) are exactly the same thing, differing only in the names because of the various states and attributes (of the underlying reality) ... Since the Imagination gives form to the Real, as well as everything in the world around it, including even nothingness, its highest section (horn of imagination) is the narrow one and its lowest section is the wide one.« Quoted from James W. Morris, »Spiritual Imagination and the »Liminal« World: Ibn 'Arabi on the Barzakh«, *POSTDATA*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (1995), pp. 42–49 and 104–109. \*9) Also known as the Brethren of Sincerity (Arabic: إخوان الصفا, translit. Ikhwān Al-Safā), this was a secret society of Muslim philosophers in Basra, Iraq, in the 8th or 10th century CE. \*10) English translation from William C. Chittick, *Sufi Path of Knowledge – Ibn Arabī's Metaphysics of Imagination*, (Albany: State University of New York, 1989) p. 231



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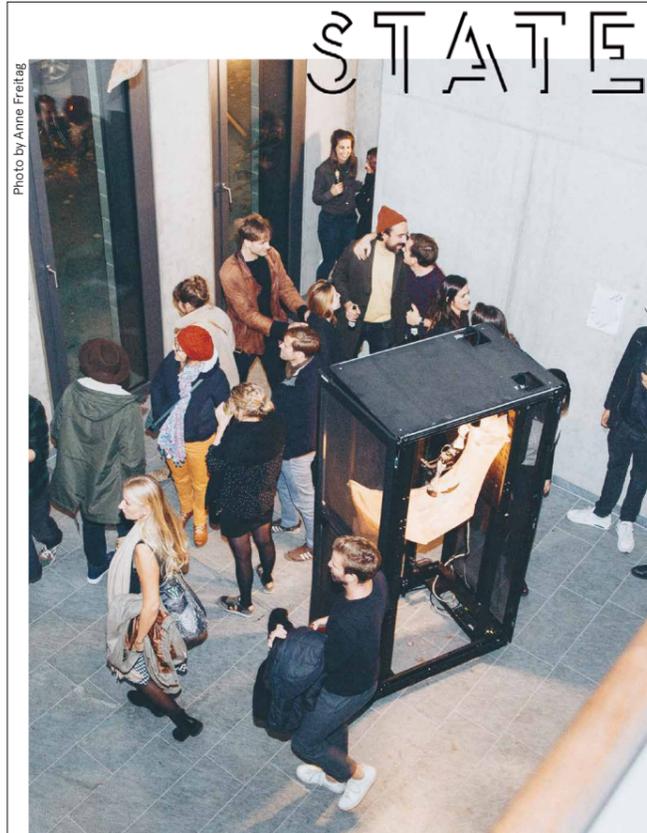
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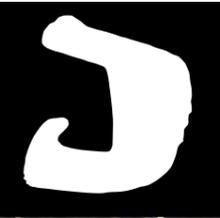
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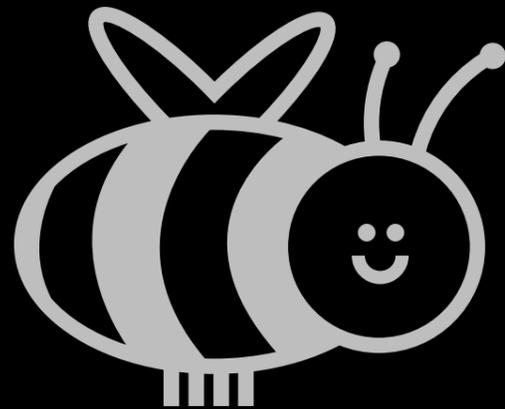


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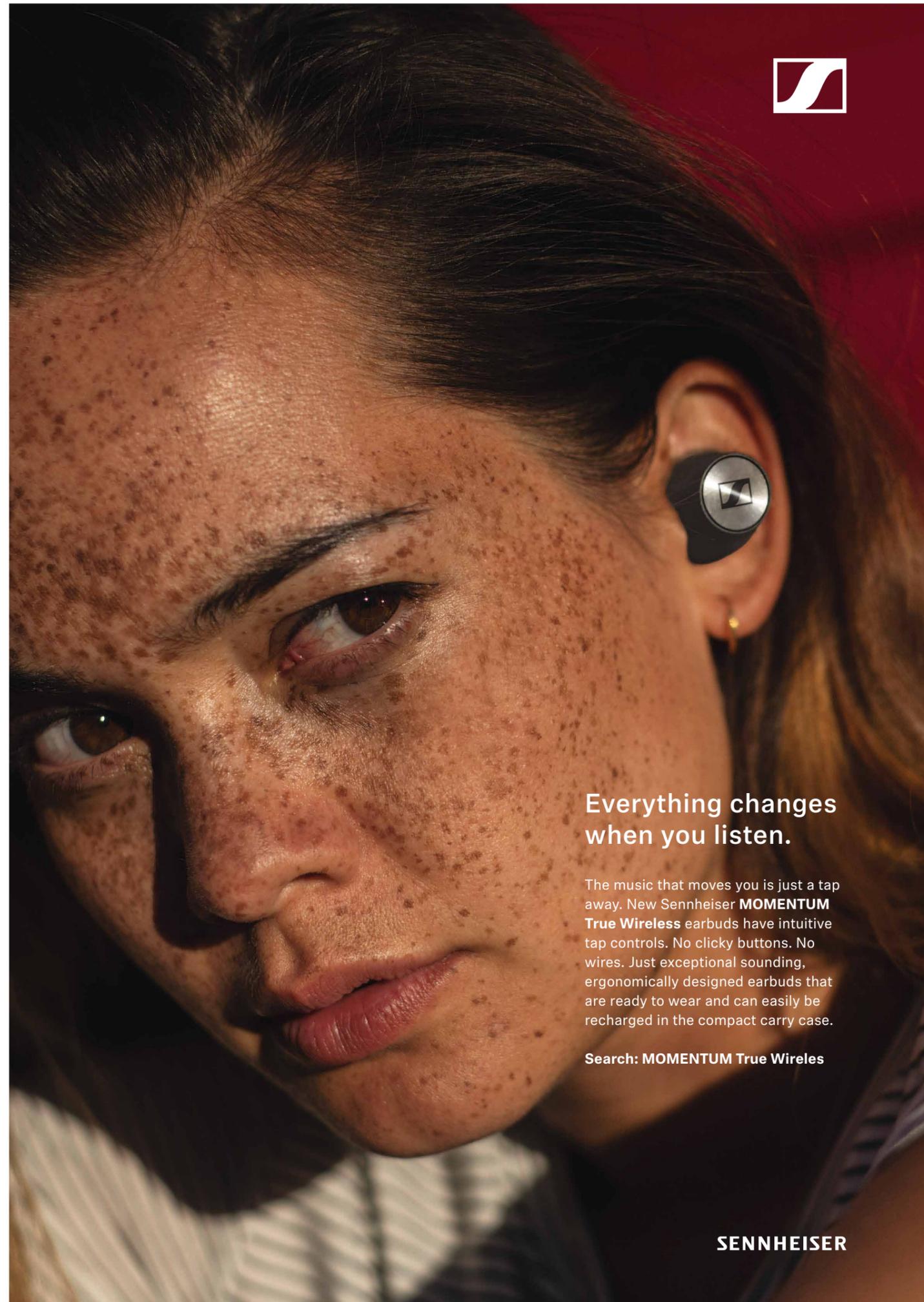
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