

THE AVANT
GUARDIAN
12

What about NOISE Poems?
Duncan Harrison

This idea of Panic
This idea of Shock
and this idea of rupture
as found in noise
is
The idea of noise
as the disruption of
the otherwise meaningful
things
The idea of that idea
is that the
panic
shock &
rupture
are supposed to show us
something
we didn't already know
about
(*meaningful noise*)

And in so doing
Get us in touch
with something
that is not human
But
the presence of an artist
in the advancement
of this idea
sine noise

The same thing can
be said of:
a new text or object
It's all for humans
and always has been
It is not for:
a *mountain*
a *gust of wind*
a *several hundred miles
long and wide expanse
of neutral land*
a *bat*
It is all for humans and
must contain things like:
noise sounds

but to discount the poten-
tial of repetition is, in my
view, a mistake
This idea of Panic
This idea of Shock
and this idea of rupture
as found in noise
is
The idea of noise
as the disruption of
otherwise meaningful
things
This idea of that idea
Is that the
panic
shock
rupture
is supposed to tell us
something
we didn't already know
about (add a meaningful
noise)
And in so doing
Get us in touch
with something
that is not human
But
the presence of an artist
in the advancement
of this idea dictates
that the idea cannot work

The same thing can
be said of:
*There can be no noise
here and thus no panic
Because the presence of
an artist is constant
and everyone here
already has an idea
Their own idea at that
And so we find ourselves
surrounded by signposts
But never in possession
of a map or concrete set
of directions
Thankfully*

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■ The Avant-Guardian is a free form magazine that materializes non-material events into a concrete form, i.e. a music magazine.



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What's Your Pleasure Sir? B.M. &

F.H., 2018)

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A MANUAL FOR RETHINKING COMPOSITIONAL PRACTICES NEUKÖLLN, BERLIN. SUMMER 2018

The poet sits down on the terrace of his favorite Italian coffee place. He is pondering the subtle differences between ‘bimonthly’ and ‘biweekly’. Irrelevant thoughts at the margins of contemporary society, he realizes. Barely worth a footnote, nor spending time and effort on. He checks his phone and while scrolling it becomes clear that the ‘bigger story’ dissolved ages ago. He swears: “Fucking avant-gardists”. The footnotes have become the story. The poet is a romantic soul, clinging to outdated concepts of immersion and to his inner rumblings and longing. He longs for the unwritten.

He lights a cigarette over a coffee and starts his job: finding strategies to avoid writing the ultimate poem. Main strategy: wondering if the ultimate poem has a right to exist; another successful one is procrastination. Actions by his fellow poet Kenneth Goldsmith comes to mind. The poet is jealous; Goldsmith produced what he considers to be the most important poem of this age. It could be the most important artwork as well, and the most important composition, novel and painting. Goldsmith published *One Online Square Kilometer of Black Pixel*.

“I don’t believe that he did it, I curse his gigantic balls and insanely wild imagination; I hate him” mumbles the Poet. He knows that his life as a Romantic is over, because Kenneth Goldsmith put into form what the Poet was looking for (or what he was avoiding). He suddenly feels the urge to throw his cup through the windows of the bar. He curses himself and considers suicide. The poet is angry, “outrageous” he says to himself. “incroyable, sale pute”.

He wants to buy a pound of opium to disappear in Goldsmith’s poem. It’s an endless scroll down and right. The conceptualization of the Absolute Waste of time. An all-encompassing action of procrastination. It says everything and nothing. It’s hopeful and utterly nihilistic. It exhumes lighthearted emptiness. “And the asshole is now printing it as well, to make a novel out of it! Devilish genius”

The poet has to do something, he cannot live without action. His life and honor are at stake. He wonders what humanity has become, and realizes that this idea is useless and obsolete. It’s from past times. The Poet is paralyzed, unable to act. An act is the only way out. He tries to picture how long it would take to scroll to the end. He gets up, bends over, pushes his thumb to the ground like it would be a screen. He scrolls the surface. In the blazing August sun he walks 1 kilometer backwards, his thumb scratching the ground. “Finally! An act! A poetic gestural performance!” he cries.

His heart bursts open and the longing gulps out and runs into the gutter. He stops the action to send a message to his composer friends. “STOP COMPOSING! IT’S USELESS! DON’T HUMILIATE YOURSELF!” He knows that music—like poetry, its nephew—is dead.

He is back on the terrace, sweating. He looks around. Nothing has changed; his hands shaking. Silently he thanks Goldsmith. The Poet’s mind is free, it opened for new forms, thoughts and emotions. He can be happy, he can leave poetry for what it is. Action will erase longing, thinking and feeling. “I should call Kenneth, and ask him what he thinks about recording the Poem” he thinks. “I will read the pages aloud. It’ll be a beautiful text-sound composition. I’ll send it to these Belgian/Dutch Braublff series; I will be satisfied if my proposal will be ignored, if it’s lost in the digital void. It will earn its merit by becoming a document of an obsolete act on various levels.” He realizes that the core of poetry lies in its incapability to act. Again he looks around, and everything is still as it was.

BEN NIGHT & TOM WHITE

Visual artist and composer Tom White is a specialist in brutal yet sensitive reel-to-reel tape manipulations. Ben Knight works as a performing artist and musician in the deep universe of the voice and as such researches its inner potential for individual transmutation. Both of them are part of the British new wave of avant-garde aesthetics and radical thinking. In 2016 the experimental radio platform Radiophrenia commissioned them for a piece which resulted in a fictional social-science narrative, presented in a series of minor narrative episodes, film and props, to reflect on the everyday listening events within and around a drop-in centre for refugees in Manchester.

Henry Andersen

Listening and Caring

HA I thought maybe a good starting point would be the idea of care and caring. You'll present some pieces at BRAUBLFF, one of which — *I've had it up to hear with fish and chips* — is based on a set of recordings made with care workers. The piece strikes as very well informed, based on extensive information gathering and listening, though the process of manipulating and reinterpreting the text gives the responses something very material, almost poppy. Who are the workers? How are listening and care related?

BK Both pieces are very much about a process of listening and gathering, interpreting and manipulating. *I've had it up to hear with fish & chips* began as a series of interviews with care workers of all kinds (care workers; social workers; and a mental health nurse) and the title is a quote from one of the interviews (and it was originally spelt 'here', but I misspelled it at some point and the resonance stuck). The script is a collage of these interviews, which was then sent to various friends to recite and record as they pleased. Tom then used this as the raw material for the piece.

I was really surprised by some of the readings, and I like your mention of *pop*; I hear a smidge of pop in some of the recordings too, which wouldn't have come about if we'd given the singers instructions: what Susan Fitzpatrick and Dulcie Mae Goldsbury Murray did with their readings just wouldn't have occurred to me. And I think that this, in turn, influenced the way that I sang-spoke my part, it gives the music an odd texture. The material quality of the voices is really important, and this is brought out more by Tom's manipulations. Emphasizing the material-ness of the voice is really central to *fish & chips*... that emphasizing of the non-verbal, affective qualities of the voice.

Listening is related to empathy and is a skill needed in care work and in communicative acts more generally. It can be an activity that opens you up to the world, putting you in touch with other bodies, other materialities in a way that requires you to negotiate, I think listening brings a certain vulnerability, and this is so important when confronting the asymmetrical relations of care.

tw Reading the script for the first time I was struck by the lyrical quality of the sewn together interview extracts and perhaps that's why some of the readers

decided to interpret it in this way, which of course makes it easier to create those more pop elements. For example in the second part the sung line 'te-le-phone' — I was interested in stretching this minute fragment into something almost choral, breaking out of the layers of multiple voices, material which is less discernible.

As I rarely use my own voice as a first person instrument, I have to find other ways to articulate a visceral or emotional resonance. Even with our best intentions listening can become a foggy, rarely tangible act, so the in-and-out-of-focus between Ben's live reading and the manipulated voices constantly fluctuates; something we were keen to represent conceptually.

Empathy

HA One of the most persistent themes that emerges from all these little text fragments is the difficulty for the care professionals to clearly differentiate between work and non-work situations; empathy is not just a human emotion but becomes a *tool of the trade* that needs to be called upon in very specific situations. You work as a carer yourself — have you noticed a change in the way you care, since you started working? Is empathy something that you can train?

BK In caring professions empathy *is* one of the tools of the trade; it's something you learn and I think this is one of the things the voices in *fish & chips* are getting at... the attempt to mark out caring as work and non-work is an attempt to grapple with how caring becomes a form of labour, and in this, how it fixes certain responses, certain legitimate ways of performing a caring role, which may be at odds with your own personal approach.

There's an economy of emotion and feeling at work in caring labour, which upholds certain power imbalances... it happens all the time; in the most routine contacts and everyday encounters. When it comes to caring work, I've worked as a Play Worker; Social Worker and now, I'm volunteering as an asylum support worker. In all these roles, the difficulties of empathy have struck me in different ways...

I'll take an example from my most recent work with asylum seekers in Manchester. I volunteer at two different organisations, one of them runs a project giving asylum seekers advice and practical assistance with applying for housing and financial support. In doing this, you have to apply to the Home Office — the government department that deals with asylum claims, which is largely incompetent and discriminatory (I guess that you've seen the news about them detaining and deporting EU citizens?) — but as an advice worker you find yourself operating within the parameters set by the Home Office.

There's a particular ritual of telling and listening; you start filling out the application form, and you realize quite quickly that the person on the form becomes this victim figure, which fits a *charity* narrative. The repetition of this can affect how you respond to people's stories — you're empathising with them, but fixing them in some ways as a passive victim of their circumstances. So there's this dissonance in the interaction as you're at odds with yourself in this role, and you try and create tactics for doing things otherwise...this is what *Difficult to Listen* is trying to get at I think.

Documentary Strategies

HA To what extent are these pieces correlated with documentary? Is that something you are interested in? Do you collect all the interview material before you start editing and reinterpreting, or is it a more or less simultaneous process?

BK I'm glad you asked this! I've only recently started thinking about *fish & chips* and *Difficult to Listen* as documentary. I would say that they're documentaries; maybe the relation is strongest in *DTL* because I really felt a responsibility to the organisations I work with, and the community of people who I've met there in putting together the *hörspiel*. This feeling was more intense with *DTL* because we were not just working with *professional* carers — who have a bit more autonomy in their roles and lives — but with asylum seekers who are granted very little autonomy in the asylum system (asylum seekers cannot decide where to live, neither can they work or study). Also, as a volunteer and a researcher I'm emotionally invested in both organisations, so there's this ethical implication... we're channelling, or trying to speak at the side of and present these transnational, multi-lingual narratives and I would say that *DTL* is a documentary of the listening cultures of both organisations, and a very personal reflection on my position within these organisations.

tw I like the idea that these pieces can be perceived as documentary, because beneath the abstraction and treatments of material there is a humanness to the places and experiences presented. *DTL* more so on my part as I volunteered in one of the organisations for a day so I was able meet the people working and visiting the drop-in centre which is a completely different experience to listening back to snapshots of recordings Ben has made. Having said that, I see the importance of both methods more attracted to cinematic/audio fiction where these are not so apparent.

Radio

HA Other than *fish & chips*, you recently made a piece *Difficult to Listen* for the Radiophrenia festival. It's a festival I'm quite curious about — a real radio tower, analogue radio waves, no audio archive of the event. How did that go? And more generally, what appeals to you in radio as a medium?

tw I guess more recently I've become aware and subsequently interested in radiophonic art as a medium to work in different contexts to live, recorded or installation presentations. In particular Radiophrenias broad programming and experimental approach has been an exciting discovery and was keen to explore the medium further upon commission for 2017s festival. For *Difficult to Listen* we were keen to put together a very visual performance, involving stage props — large office dividers that were a lot more difficult to source (a sorry and a thanks to Barry and Mark for finding those), spider plants replicating certain details within the environment of the organisation. This coupled with Ben walking throughout the audience reading the script and the foley materials triggered from a hydrophone in a boiling kettle, sweeping and mic-ing up the desk fan. The live audience can see and hear these things happening in the performance along with a live composition I was mixing/triggering — in contrast to those listening live on air. We were interested in the blurring of those perceptions — how much of this is happening live as foley, a composition, or field recording from RH. The medium of radio allows that. Especially given as you say the lack of archival catch-up, you're forced into an attentiveness and immediacy of listening in the moment. Broadcasting through an antenna locally within Glasgow also encourages unexpected, accidental listening — I can imagine someone tuning in in their car, flicking through the dial and hearing our piece by mistake.

BK One of the exciting things for me about Radiophrenia is the aspect of collective listening; especially with



Photo © fractalmag

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the *live-to-air* performances having no catch-up option means that you have to make an effort to listen on the night, so it makes it more of an event. My friend Claire told me that she tuned in to listen to *DTL* whilst on a coach between Edinburgh and Glasgow... being live threads into people's lives in a different way, and I like the idea of a community of strangers all tuning in at the same time. The other thing about the no catch-up option that I enjoyed as a listener was that it doesn't allow you to *curate* what you listen to as much—I tuned-in specifically for some stuff, but I also found myself tuning-in when I had a spare moment, finding things I'd not heard before...

Tom White vs. Ben Knight

HA How do you work together? Is there a set protocol, or does it change? Do you work together in the same room mostly, or is it an exchange that can happen in other ways?

BK For the most part it's a 21st Century postal collaboration! But everything coalesces when we rehearse together. Tom lives in London and I'm in Manchester, so we'll only get together a few times prior to each concert or recording. On both *fish & chips* and *DTL* I've cobbled together the scripts and Tom has worked on the sound, but I don't regard it as regimented as that...I mean, I share drafts of the writing with Tom and I'm interested in what he has to say...we don't work on our own contributions and then glue the final parts together at the end; we've always shared initial ideas, sketches and the like, and I think you have to have trust in the working relationship to do that.

TW Prior to *fish & chips* we'd not collaborated as a *duo* before. Ben had written an initial draft and asked if I'd be interested in interpreting that without suggesting any particular approach. We'd exchanged a few ideas but it wasn't until we were in the same room with the script and recordings of readings that the processes started to generate, stumbling across happy accidents in very much a live set-up. As Ben says it's a shared process and with *DTL* that took place over 6 months or so leading up to the Radiophrenia commission. I'd send back responses to his field recordings, mostly makeshift foley edits that would later form chapters once we were in the same room again.

Social Science Fiction

HA You call *Difficult to Listen* 'social science fiction'. Please elaborate... Among a lot of artists I know, science fiction is sort of enjoying renewed interest, in Brussels at least. What makes the piece science fiction for you? What permissions or tools are involved?

BK It's definitely not just a flippant play on words! When I emailed a description of *DTL* to the staff of one of the organisations they were a bit put out by the idea of Social Science-Fiction...clumsily, I had put the hyphen in the wrong place, so when I asked the manager what they thought they were pretty perplexed that I wanted to describe them all as aliens. It should be Social-Science Fiction, and the flippancy is serious. It's intended to fold the ethnographic into the fictional; the stitching together of the everyday, transnational narratives of the drop-in in a way that leaves room for that which can't quite be grasped in the present. For me, Social-Science Fiction is affirmative in the way that it is about the possibilities of the future.

Ursula Le Guin's essay *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction* has been on my mind for a long time, and has influenced my approach here, although she wasn't too keen on the SF label for her own writings. In the essay, she proposes the receptacle (a leaf;

a gourd; a sack) as the first tool of human society rather than the spear (or other weaponry/hunting tool), and on this she builds her idea of narrative and novel writing...

Even though the mammoth hunters occupy the cave walls, what people really did to stay alive was gather roots; seeds; berries and maybe a few tusk-less small-fry to up the protein. So the *Carrier Bag Theory* is about gathering and collecting, and the strange, awkward, surprising, even antagonistic encounters that occur when you do so are what Le Guin wants to write. As for permissions, I think reading this essay opened that portal for me, bringing together the supposedly different worlds of the work I do with asylum seekers, my PhD and more creative approaches, like our *hörspiel*. It's also legitimised my own use of narrative, and fiction in my PhD writing... oh, and I think Ursula Le Guin's Dad was an anthropologist as well, so there you go.

Listening as a political activity

HA The category of listening that is described in the piece is very virtuosic—at one point it feels like a catalogue of strategies for the listener to sidestep the purely empathetic position, but without 'being drawn into the way the state listens' There's something really fascinating about training to listen in very specific ways—especially when the outcome has nothing to do with art or music. What do you think about listening as a political practice? How do you think your practice as artists/musicians has affected the way you listen in other contexts?

BK You're right, the different modes of listening are virtuosic; in the drop-in people listen *legally*; *socially*; *deeply*; and *empathetically*. People listen in lots of different ways. And from the perspective of, say, people who have worked, or volunteered for a long time with a particular organisation they have developed their listening skills over years and years. Still, there's something intangible about listening, which makes it a tricky thing to pin down...this is why there's probably more emphasis on the voice and letting people speak for themselves.

As for a politics of listening; it includes notions such as advocacy, or giving people a voice, but it expands beyond this in different ways as well...I think this has been touched upon in some of the previous questions about the structures which educate our senses, and how you respond in certain situations. In *DTL* this is touched upon with how the Home Office can *fix* interactions, how you can end up, even unconsciously listening and speaking like the Home Office.

It's also in the affective nature of the work and the acoustic politics of space that cannot be reduced to the voice...I think the expanded listening practices you discover as a musician (or non-musician in my case) have been a big influence for me. I'm a great believer in bringing together the different parts of what you do, so they can contaminate each other, and you end up finding these surprising resonances. So a practice like Pauline Oliveros' Deep Listening can be an influence on how you listen to the ambient sounds and acoustic qualities of the drop-in. And for example, you learn to appreciate the human or non-human sounds that might not be paid attention to otherwise.

TW I recently presented my work to students and after a short performance we got on to the subject of noise pollution, in particular domestic situations in which we experience an aggravated leakage of sound due to close proximity living and poorly built housing. Living in London this is somewhat unavoidable and certainly the acts of concentrated listening as an artist

working with sound has affected this to detrimental levels. You become more attuned to the ambient sounds around you. Perhaps the inevitable frustration arises from the lack of control, or the willingness to avoid confrontation.

This week I read a report in which a certain percentage of Londoners have noticed a low frequency hum that cannot be attributed to anything concrete; an ambiguous, bewildering drone coming from nowhere in particular. Described by one sufferer as being like the lowest string of a bass guitar and through constantly tuning into it she

feels compelled to leave. On the plus side however, becoming more aware of your surroundings can be a rewarding, positive experience—noticing details in the everyday that others may not—the unheard and unseen. From experience it's even more rewarding when this becomes a shared collective endeavour. I'd say *DTL* is more of a poetic reflection of listening within those spaces, in terms of the sounds recorded as foley/concrete elements. The treatment of which has of course been exaggerated to an extreme that they begin to lose their original sources and meaning.

MARC MATTER Deep in the Black Forest lives Marc Matter—musician, theorist and regular contributor to *The Avant-Guardian*. He works on a trans-medial practice in which theoretical research, language abstraction and experimental turntablism is combined. His music is a playful field where vocal poetry intermingles with text-sound composition, and in which electro-acoustic abstraction displays a sensitive mind for the hidden qualities of the voice.

Jannis Van de Sande

jvs Voice and technology, and more specifically encounters between them seem to be a constant within your practice. Where did this interest come from?

MM I studied at the academy for media arts in Cologne, so the use of new technologies for artistic purposes has been a constant factor in my work and something that influenced me a lot. Later on, I got interested in sound poetry with its use of new media for poetry and writing, as in Henri Chopin's notion of *poésie sonore* as a genre that relies on technical media like tape-recorders as an instrument for artistic work and not only a means to record or document it.

And poets like Guillaume Apollinaire proposed the use of the turntable as an instrument for poetic *production* (and not only for recording recitations) about 100 years ago!

With my current work I am interested in a kind of dialogue between new media technologies and the human approach in producing art, and also to question the master-slave relationship between an assumed *human creativity* that uses media-technology only as a tool.

In my performances in Antwerp and Rotterdam I presented a new short piece—the first in which I also used my own voice by the way—that uses the dictation-function on my laptop in a very simple way, but I try to take the aesthetic potential of this media-technology seriously.

jvs Your work often refers to the history of sound poetry (for example your use of the lettrist-alphabet, and your research on Henri Chopin). How important is this tradition to you?

MM Sometimes I wish it would be less important, but then again, as an artist / researcher I cannot help but being influenced by it. I am personally interested in **THOSE** **historIES**, but I always try to not only do research in the specific field of the sound poetry canon, but also check out earlier stuff or things that were happening parallel at the time, like linguistics with a focus on spoken language (Anthony Burgess and his *Mouthful of Air*) or psychoacoustic research about the intelligibility of speech (Diana Deutsch and her *Phantom Words*).

For my artistic work I try to let be influenced by approaches outside the sound poetry tradition, the more the better...

But I am curious in general to what extent the sound poetry *tradition* is a canonic form and in what ways it influences contemporary work.

And I am also happy to **DISCOVER** contemporary approaches in the field by people who have never heard about that sound poetry tradition.

In my curatorial work I try to feature those contemporary approaches actively—for example the cosmomose festival and the edition that I founded together with Wantje Lichtenstein a few years ago.

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Photo © Marc Matter



jvs A lot of sound poetry operates in-between the natural and the technological, often illustrating the arbitrariness of this opposition: “the humanization of the machine”, as Bob Cobbing once wrote. Is this something that informs your practice too?

mm I think technology should be taken seriously as an active communication partner, also in artistic / creative processes; not like Henri Chopin once wrote in *Revue OU* that the human should still be in charge for the aesthetics and to use the technological apparatus as a mere tool (or slave)—he thought that technology itself can’t be creative. I find this an outdated view now that we have machine learning and AI kicking in.

It also has to do with my general interest in “non-intentional aesthetics”. This sounds a bit like trans humanism and in fact that’s something where “non-intentional aesthetics” play a role, as it doesn’t follow the paradigm that there has to be a human who wants to express something aesthetically and other humans then receive and decode those intentions or messages. I am more and more interested in the process of reception that is able to get an aesthetic value out of processes that have not been intended to be artistic in the first place—like when you overhear a conversation in the bus and think of it as a dialogue in a radioplay; so the aesthetic moment emerges in the listener without there being an aesthetic intention from the sender.

jvs It seems to me as if a lot of your work has an investigative character to it. What are the main questions you try to address in your work, or don’t you see it as practical research at all?

mm Yes, yet some works more than others. And it’s true, I am more interested in general questions about language, speech, and communication—or the mere “rustle of language”—how Roland Barthes once called it—than telling a story. Although I like the idea that people can project their own individual story into my work, which is mostly pretty abstract, somewhat conceptual and even brittle. I work a lot with found-speech, sampling from media sources (radio, TV, records, internet) and then re-contextualizing this material to see what happens with it during that process. For a duo performance that I am preparing with a German experimental poet (Andreas Bühlhoff), we are trying to implement the structure of a dialogue as a starting point, so in that case we *investigate* the possibilities of this specific form of communication—to find out to what extent we can tweak the idea of a dialogue.

jvs For your new project, you submit synthetic babbling to your computer’s dictation-function, the results of which you recite as poems. Do you see this merely as a new and innocent way of creating unexpected poetry, or rather as a critical (ab)use of technologies that become increasingly ubiquitous in our everyday lives?

mm My approach is rather playful, although in this specific case there is a kind of critical thought to it, as speech-synthesis and machine-processing of language has turned into an extremely important and powerful tool that even seems capable of shaping people’s opinions. Taking this into consideration, I respect those artists a lot who are successful in formulating a specific and precise critical agenda like Lawrence Abu Hamdan for example.

jvs What I find intriguing about the ‘synthetic babbling’ project is that it somehow reverses the method of the likes of Dufrière and Chopin. Instead of taking poetry beyond the page and exploring the sounding dimension of language,

you start from sonic chunks to arrive at a written *poem*. Is this an explicit ambition of the project?

mm Yes, it’s quite an explicit ambition to start with parasemantic material and then try to generate a more or less semantic text out of that. Crossing that border from the other side.

jvs Knowing you have been working with language for quite some time, it is certainly remarkable that you’ve never used your own voice before. Why is that? Do you experience the project as being more personal now that your own voice is present?

mm No, I just like to use found-sound, found-speech for my work in general. There is so much material out there, and I also like the additional layers of signification, references and associations that come with it. Media-art in the better sense...

jvs Could you dwell a bit on the generation of this synthetic nonsense? Is it randomly generated or do you compose this material to personal taste?

mm I am only starting to work with this material, trying to find ways to more or less *compose* the material with my sampler due to the specific implications of the material itself. In this case, the raw material that I used was actually produced by a speech-synthesis company who used this semantic babbling of computer voices as a gimmick to promote their research. My next step is then to deconstruct it by editing and playing with the snippets on my sampler-keyboard. Right now, I am working on ways to implement a rather compositional structure. It would be great to sharpen my skills for playing the sampler and enable myself to systematically create *phantom-words* or even *phantom-texts* out of that material.

Because I come from a musical / sound-artistic background where improvisation was the way to go, I have been especially interested in compositional and also conceptual approaches in the last few years.

jvs Related to this, how do you see your own agency within the project? Does the computer transcend its role as a mere tool in your work? Or is a medium always already more than just a tool?

mm As mentioned earlier, my goal is to create a dialogue-situation between myself and the media-technology I use, at least as an ideal aim or as a distant goal that directs my use of those machines, be it the laptop or the sampler or the turntable. I believe that a medium is always more than just a tool, but to what extent it can be an active agent in an aesthetic process, that’s something I am very interested in.

jvs The different stages of the project are shown to the audience. Do you consider the process, more so than a fixed outcome, to be the essence of our work?

mm I think the process is an important thing in this piece in general, that’s why it is important to tell the audience the general set-up of the piece beforehand. But the outcome of the piece, the text that I read as the third and last movement, could also stand for itself and I am thinking about using it as raw-material to compose new texts which will then be read by either a trained speaker or—even better—a custom-made synthetic voice, something that It have been dreaming about for a long time but which still seems pretty tricky to come up with. You would have to engage a whole team of software-developers for quite some time to come up with that. But who knows, maybe someday...

DUNCAN HARRISON Over the last 12 years, Brighton based Duncan Harrison has been one of the driving forces in the South English Weird Noise scene. In his music, he displays a broad array of cut-up sound poetry, improvisational strategies and audio collages with sonic left-overs abstracted from daily environments. Not surprisingly, he regularly collaborates with the likes of Dylan Nyoukis, Karen Constance, Pascal Nichols, Ali Robertson and many more. As he was included in the Braublff 6 program, we interviewed him about his work.

Niels Latomme

NL Duncan, you’ve been around in the improv scene for some years now. Tell me how you got into music and how that lead to the music you’re making now?

dh It’s not a very interesting story: for as long as I can remember I’ve just loved music and idolised the people who make it. I think the first thing I ever announced as a child that I’d be when I grew up was a drummer, though this still hasn’t happened. I had little dalliances with various instruments throughout childhood but began to take playing music seriously as a teenager when I saw that my efforts to teach myself guitar and bass were actually bearing fruit. There hasn’t been a time since those days where I’ve not been actively making music of some kind, be it in a band or alone.

It’s hard to pinpoint when I first discovered the kind of thing I’m making now because I still feel like I’m in the same process of finding connections between different kinds of music that I was as a teenager. Though those years were mostly filled with Metal and Punk—those of course lead you to more extreme sounds—I was still actively checking out electronic music as well as absorbing stuff from my parent’s record collections—Beefheart, Velvet Underground, Zappa, all kinds of progressive rock and even obscure classical things. All of the above serve as routes into *noise* or *weird* music in some way but I suppose it was and is the overall thrill of appreciating this giant, eclectic world of music that most accurately translates into what I’m up to today.

Practically speaking I was always experimenting with whatever pieces of equipment I had amassed from playing in bands: amplifiers, guitars, microphones, keyboards, effects and so on. Playing around like this on your own gets you used to absorbing abstract noises in the space of music; blasting feedback out in your bedroom while thinking you’re in Black Sabbath or wondering what will happen if you plug some shitty casio into a multi FX pedal. All that needs to happen next is you hear Merzbow or Hanatarash and realise it’s perfectly ok to record these sounds on a tape or CD-R as its own kind of music. My feeling upon discovering this kind of practice was not ‘Huh? Why?’ but ‘oh, of course.’

NL A lot of people who were into noise ten years ago started making synth music, while you released a consistent body of work of tape collage and sound poetry. What is your opinion on this evolution, do you even agree with this generalization?

dh It’s probably quite generous to say I’ve consistently released tape collage and sound poetry because there are fairly distinct patches of my back catalogue that aren’t quite as... refined as that...though I suppose to some extent components of these things have always been present in my work so I’ll accept that description if you like.

The basis of my approach stems from having backed myself into a corner creatively while making harsh noise. It was fun and I still love to listen to this kind of thing but I ran

out of new places to take it myself and began to lean toward a more variable style rather than all out, high volume energy at all times. So, by the time I killed that old project off and began to release things under my own name the only goal was to develop my music and evolve as was natural rather than find one new distinct style that I’d grow bored of in a couple of years. I wanted some kind of consistency between everything I put out and I suppose that would be what I was trying to communicate or embody from recording to recording rather than just the way it sounded. For me, at least, the process of recording, editing, arranging and re-presenting various kinds of audio remains the most fruitful and engaging way to pursue these preferences.

I suppose also that while many noise artists begin as *non musicians* and perhaps end up developing more traditionally musical abilities and interests, I started making abstract work as somebody who had been playing *real* music for a few years already and have continued to do so alongside my solo work. Because of this, I don’t think there is much chance of my music developing into some kind of techno or synth project. Too many years spent bored shitless by guitar guys, to begin making music that is just a showcase of your equipment collection or current record purchasing habits.

NL I like the way you blend performance with sound and music. Why is that? I sometimes have the feeling that music is looking to other arts (like visual/performance arts, inspired by the fluxus movement for example) to find doors to new forms and ideas. Is music in itself tired and worn out, did it run out of inspiration?

dh I’d agree with the statement that music is looking to other arts for new ideas and would say this has been the case for a very long time now. All these different media have been converging and borrowing from one another since long before you or I were born, for example, and I dare say they’ll continue to interact after we die. In fact, most influential thought of the last century as concerns music could, on quite a significant level, be described simply in terms of ideas more commonly associated with Fine Art and Philosophy being applied to the spaces and cultures of music, so perhaps *music* in its more traditional forms and contexts is a rarer thing to encounter today than whatever it is we’re working with now.

Even so, music as a phenomena still seems to come under more fire than other art forms when things reach the Avant Garde; getting more frequently accused of being dead and/or having failed to progress past the glory days (ironically, each decade seems to contain any number of these glory days depending on who you ask). Maybe there is some truth to a few of these accusations from a purely methodological stand point but I don’t understand why the value of music as an aesthetic pleasure alone is so often overlooked. Many people talk about experimental music being useless and illegitimate unless it does nothing but

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■ push buttons and test boundaries yet you and I wouldn't even be talking right now if thousands of people across the world didn't just enjoy the way all this weird stuff sounds.

In any case, I choose deliberately to work within the awkward boundaries of music precisely because of how delicate and easy to manipulate they can be. One can pour a bottle of wine down one's trousers in a gallery and have no problem insisting that it is art, but to do it in a rock club and insist that it is music produces altogether more extreme and noteworthy reactions.

NL Tell me about your last release. What does the title mean, and what is happening on the tape?

DH *Preamble to Nihil* is something of a precursory piece to an as yet unfinished full length album that I'm working on. Because it's still being conceptualised and recorded I'll not reveal much of what it's about besides to say that it—in part—continues ongoing themes and questions surrounding Nihilism and meaning that have found their way into performances, texts and recordings I've worked on over the last few years. The tape itself is made of several shorter sketch recordings that I was keeping around in order to potentially use them in the album but as the concept of that project began to define itself further I found they had done more to distract me from it than help it along. In the end I decided to collect and issue them as a separate release in order to build the full length out of totally new ideas and materials more relevant to the themes in question. While this doesn't necessarily

need to be of note for anyone else, I'm personally quite interested in how that release was formed from a detached, blasé act of tidying out vs. a separate, unfinished project of meticulous planning and crafting. It is a nice antithetical companion to the album that will come next.

NL What do you think of the central idea of the Braublff series, to research the zone where language/ words become music, or on a deeper level, where non-musical actions can become music?

DH Any kind of interrogation as to where, when, why and how non musical information can be received as music is worthwhile to me. Language and voice are very basic, stripped down tools in the wider context of music making and so I find them especially intriguing in terms of their potential to base complete works on. I am always interested to see what somebody can do with just their voice and body in a recording or performance; I certainly challenge myself to expand my own use of these devices as much as possible. Beyond overtly musical or performative uses of the voice I'm also interested in how common and ubiquitous information transmitted via language or gesture can be manipulated and re-presented as art. Since nearly everyone possesses a voice and language too, there is potentially limitless variation in what can be achieved by using them creatively.

NL In your live performances, there seems to be a fine line between the comical and the disruptive.

Photo © Duncan Harrison



Do people laugh, because they don't know how to respond, out of confusion? Or do they laugh because they think it's funny?

DH I wish more people would laugh for ANY reason. Perhaps it's mainly the audiences here in the UK but it can often be next to impossible to get a single sound, comment or reaction from the crowd until you announce that you've finished. Most of the time I struggle a bit with this but then again, one of the best things about playing live is seeing how long you can make an audience stand and watch something totally boring or ridiculous (or, in some cases, nothing whatsoever) with a kind of painful,

nervous patience. Manipulating audience expectation can be a very effective dynamic and even compositional tool in terms of delivering a performance. The delicate balance between something unnerving and entertaining is important in this regard, though difficult to achieve.

I can't tell how the audience feels as a whole though it must be said I've had nearly all positive comments about live shows so far which, ultimately, is what I want—for people to enjoy it. The thing is, even in the event that I'm somehow succeeding in appearing very funny, engaging and entertaining, performing is usually quite an intense and nerve racking experience for me too.

2021

DE PLAYER

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FRIDAY 22 JUNE
E-ARTHHA

DOUGLAS KAHN^(us) - BJNILSEN^(se)
AURÉLIE LIERMAN^(be) - MAX FRANKLIN^(int)

start: 20h30 finish: 01h00 entrance: €7,-
place: DE PLAYER, Hillelaan 49d, Rotterdam

SATURDAY 07 JULY
GARDENA FEST IV

CARL STONE^(us) - FELIX KUBIN^(de)
DELPHINE DORA^(fr) - VA AA LR^(pt/uk/uk)
ASH KILMARTIN^(nz) - MADHAV AGARWAL^(in/nl)
VANITA AND JOHANNA MONK^(nl) - DJ FATIGUÉ^(be)

start festivities: 17h00 finish: 02h00 entrance: €12,-
supper: 17.30hrs. place: DE PLAYER's garden, Hillelaan 49d, Rotterdam

SUNDAY 15 JULY
**HAD IK HET OOK ZO
GEDAAN ALS IK EEN
VROUW WAS GEWEEST?**

REINIER VAN HOUDT^(nl) - DIFFICULT^(uk)
PETER FENGLER^(nl) - ASH KILMARTIN^(nz)
MADHAV AGARWAL^(in/nl)

start: 14h00 finish: 18h00 entrance: free
place: TAC, Vonderweg 1, Eindhoven (*tac.nu*)

for more information about our program and releases - deplayer.nl

DE PLAYER is still supported by Mondriaan Fund, City of Rotterdam Department of Culture, Stimuleringsfonds.

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HALVERWEGE DE REIS VINDEN WE EEN OLIJFTAK



POLYGRAPH HEART-BEAT SONG BY SONG

Amed B

A Better Time

I bought the steel mandolin at an auction. It had no case and no strings, helpless like a chrome baby in my arms. Kind of hard to play, but easy to make it sing—steel fairy dust, shooting sparks of light like a luchizm painting. Who can really say which time is better than another? As long as you can sit in an easy chair, see the sun dapple the room and let an instrument do the talking, everything is fine.

Polygraph Heartbeat

“You can feel your heart beating, pam pam pam pam...” this is Arthur Lee singing. On his solo album he has his guitar on his back. Good title: *Vindicator*. Casual love for an instrument. Ted Nugent, Michael Schenker, those guitar dudes with their great album covers, spray paint or photo, American-style guitar heroes, cruising in neon glories. I wanted the cover to be an imitation of Schenker Group, with a polygraph instead of the weird laboratory vibe. Hard to get hold of one though. In the end using the title seemed enough. Strap anyone onto a polygraph and I bet they start telling lies, bragging or working their way out of it. You can’t keep calm when you’re suspected of lying even when you’re not. An audience can sometimes act like a polygraph. Twisting impossible shapes: spirograph. Imagine the *universe* expanding into *penroseverse*. Twisting impossible shapes—imagine your living room turning into a necker cube. Mr Necker had a wondrous profession, he was a crystallographer. I’m only honest in between beats on my polygraph.

Only Your Heartbeat can’t be Beat

The sound of a distant riot in the night, periodic flare-ups of angry voices in the hallway, the neighbours letting

go of the forks and spoons and going straight for the knives. Your heart may skip a beat; beat against your chest; stop beating altogether, spill out. Call and response, mr Fricke at work amidst the forests and greenery: Kosmische Phoenixology. Let astral appliances perform a little marvel in the mind’s eye.

Endless Reflection

By Blake Baxter, this tune at some point broke my heart, but maybe it was just sunday afternoon post-rave sentiments, a kind of high-definition digital after-glow, minus serotonin, aided by fatigue.

Can I say this is a cover simply by adopting the title? A blanket is a cover and it may keep you warm. This is a blanket version of the tune on Blake Baxter’s ‘blue album’. The coolest picture I found at a certain point, after the first Detroit vinyls, that world of tresors, was a tiny snapshot of Juan Atkins in a classy suit drinking a coffee somewhere in a bar, morning or early afternoon. Making night music gets you this relaxed? As soon as I arrived in Berlin (1999), I wanted to check the area where Tresor club was and on the corner was a shop selling safety vaults. Maybe just in my imagination. An endless reflection is a hall of mirrors is an endless reflection. UFOs built Babylon.

Night Borders

The undertow of the normal is that people may flip. The undertone of the day is the fact that night is coming, with borders or without.

Minus the Bloodshed Waltz

Change the battlefield equation minus the bloodshed. Preference for a slow? A ragtime also should be played a slow as possible, kind of a like a drag. Or at least that is what Scott Joplin said, and

he had a right to put his foot down. This is in another tuning than side A. Be a rag-picker, play a rag-man Waltz.

Break Away

Pygmy tribes, lord of the flies, break away, against the grain, against the tide. Abbé Guichard, Billy Blanco, Couperin, Ponce, Lutz Ulbrich, Zez Confrey, Jimmy de Knight, Tampa Red, Leigh Harline, George Botsford, Turlough O’Carolan (drinking man), Scarlatti, tintinnabuli, tubularly belly, playing pool while listening to *Jailbreak* by Thin Lizzy, a friend built me a brass knuckle it was spiky, have a need for alchemy, believing the omen is quite risky lucidity, deputy Andy spelling *une âme solitaire* not so literally, who’s that hanging upside down from the Gidouille

so giddily?, hotel room safety, not ready to embrace singularity, playing the chrome mandolin: always salutary. We’re going to buy ice cream in the rain.

Polygraph Tremors / The Banshee

In the novel *Petersburg* (1913), Apollo-novich— young version—wanders the city with a time bomb in his jacket, not really so sure what is real and what not, not really able to decipher surrounding codes, victim to fantasies of spirituality. Wandering comet. Mobutu built a space rocket. Make music for a city of endless sleep: bring on the banshees, let them wail and lull acerbically. Leeuwenbrug or Albertbrug. You can’t beat your own heartbeat.

MAHER SHALAL HASH BAZ

A Tori Kudo show is always something to look forward to, be it accompanying his wife Reiko Kudo on piano, or leading the Maher Shalal Hash Baz collective. The latter has been around since the mid-80’s, mixing poor playing skills with a catchy naivety that brings to mind bands like Beat Happening or Supreme Dicks, but with an important role for brass and woods. In March they hit the road with Le Ton Mite for a few dates in Europe.

Jelle Vanlerberghe

JV What’s the main philosophy behind Maher Shalal Hash Baz?

TK John Cage once stated that music is part of the play, and I agree with that. But when collaborating with playwrights, I feel that I still have to do music. I cannot suppress my personal musical inspiration sources. However, I believe that the process of transmitting it to band members is also music. Maher stands on the side of music, and produce it as a play. The latest album called *Garakei* was made in this way.

JV You like to introduce mistakes/ glitches in the music on purpose, by teasing the players, abrupt changes etc. Can you elaborate on this approach?

TK I do not remember what happens when I’m absorbed in playing my guitar. Anything can happen in music. I am not free but I let the music be free, as it likes. It’s a huge freedom that has been disrupting my daily life, though.

JV I saw you playing the piano at a Reiko Kudo show, in a complex and sophisticated way; playing the guitar in Maher is rather vigorous. Is it easy to switch/combine these ways of playing music?

TK Any instrument should be played in the history of rock music. Any deviation is possible, according to what extent one is trained. When playing the guitar, I am playing the piano in my head. But when playing the piano, I am playing the piano.

JV At the Ateliers Claus concert, McCloud announced that some of the songs were based on old, classic pieces, is this something you did for this tour only or is it a more usual approach for Maher?

TK Flanders is the birthplace of so-called chamber *music* or of so-called *art* as *le tableau*, in the late Renaissance. In that era, the Japanese met with western music for the first time. I chose that early music in honor of that history. Furthermore, I thought such selection of score might give the participants good reason to play there. All music needs a frame like a tableau, picture, or a window, and the frame consists of language.

JV What are the main inspirations in your work?

TK Sorry, I live poetry.

JV How does the line up evolve? Do you meet regularly to play?

TK Maher has no members other than me. The musicians you saw there had worked hard to make money for their travel expenses. Usually we don’t talk about music but just how we are alienated in our daily labor. I would like to display their portraits as workers in offices and factories next time we meet and play.

JV How is your collaboration with extern people/bands, such as Arrington De Dionyso and le Ton Mité? What is their input in the creative process?

TK They cannot read scores, but I do not mind how they play on my songs, because they are my close friends.

JV The Japanese underground we’re familiar with here is the more extreme part, while Maher Shalal Hash Baz works in a naivist spectrum. Are there other bands out there in the scene with a similar view?

TK Maher had a tree, its branches were planted in the 00s. But it seems to have become diluted, accompanied by the rising of singer songwriter-like things that have deviated from the history of Rock. Rather, I think that Japanese old school bands that branched from us in the mid 80s are more similar to Maher, even now.

On the other hand, self-named *underground* bands, who had not grazed or touched the history of Rock, that had been formed by a series of psychedelic vinyl of 60s, seems to be increasing.

JV What are your plans for the future, any new records coming up?

TK I have started making a new album called *JE EST UN AUTRE*. At first, when I found this phrase on the wall outside of the Ateliers Claus, I thought this graffiti was scribbled down by a refugee who had been learning a new language. I had my picture taken in front of the wall, intending to use it for my next album. But later I learned that it comes from *Les Illuminations*.



top: Aneel Brecht. Photo © Niels Latomme. bottom: Tori Kudo. Photo © Maki Abe

VARKENSHOND

After finding my way through the station neighbourhood of Antwerp, I am welcomed by the black cat, the mother and the son of a man named Pichap. This man is one of the leading figures of Varkenshond, a band that released an album recently and played the AB on 20/4 and the Belly (Antwerp) on 27/4.

Amber Meulenijs

AM Last time we met, we were sitting around a different kind of table—I remember that we were eating durum falafel—during the KRAAK festival. The last time we talked about your music is even longer ago, 4 years now. How have you been doing? Has Varkenshond changed?

P Yes, we did change a lot over the years. In the beginning of Varkenshond, we were mostly interested in artistic ideas, although we did meet in a spiritual context. Over the last years there was a shift towards the spiritual, which has become the core of and the source for our music.

AM Playing together still feels like therapy?

P Yes, that's the way it all started, as therapy. It's still a big part of it, it changes us, it influences us and we learn about life by playing music (*laughs*). But now we affect our surroundings by playing music. We've always been thinking about cosmic rays, we believe in Energy Lines that go through everything, and we believe that we influence those with our music. These lines are like gods to us, by playing music we communicate with them, and ask them favours, it makes life better for everyone.

AM How do you feel about chaos?

P Chaos is everywhere, nothing is organized in the end. I think a balance has to be found in everything, between chaos and order. This also corresponds with our spiritual ideas, because we believe that coincidence exists as well. No, chaos is everywhere.

AM Like a force?

P Yes, it has creative power.

AM As a birth place?

P Yes, absolutely.

AM The new record actually feels like a big birthing celebration.

P Funny you say so. We always start with original, traditional instrumentation and structures or melodies inspired by various cultures. This is the starting point for improvisation. The Maggergergorian faith comes from Russia for instance, it was founded by a man named Bronga, who was born a few centuries BC in Novotroitsk, close to the border of Kazakhstan. The first recording sessions of Varkenshond actually took place in Russia, with locals.

But improvisation is always about embracing chaos and providing it with an answer—because we don't always know where we are going, even if we start from a clear idea or a borrowed structure or instrumentation.

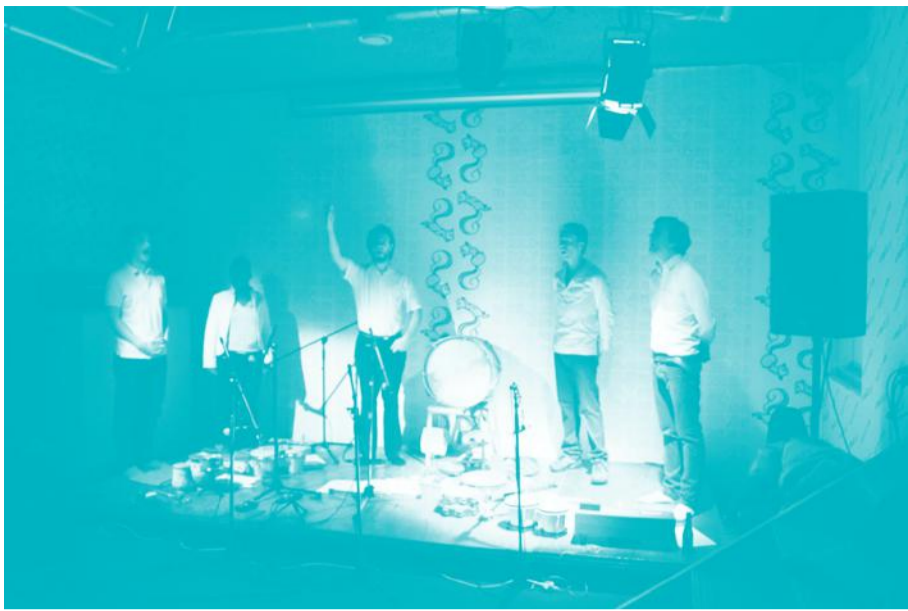
AM Is improvisation about trust?

P Yes, trust also has to do with it, because intuition is very important to us. From time to time, we don't really get what we are doing rationally, but intuitively it makes perfect sense. Intuition is a great tool to defy chaos.

AM Did you have a specific sound image in mind while composing the album?

P We meet up a lot as a group—not always to play music, for religious reasons as well—and we did

Photo © Varkenshond



a number of musical sessions with a flute player named Yori Yoki, who is featured on the album too. So that's why there are a lot of flute sounds on the record.

AM Does the music evoke images, or is it the other way around?

P It's not about images per se, the music evokes images, but often the tracks are about stories. The track *Krildin Kleg Jetsj* is about a spider creating Energy Lines, right after the Big Bang. And the track *Bapado Mahihkos* describes a baptist ceremony, you're really hearing a ritual going on. *Tamoldoetse Teraardebestelling* is mourning music for a funeral.

AM How important are rituals?

P It's a very important part of what we do. A ritual enforces human power. You can be more than just one thing by means of a ritual.

AM What is the definition of a ritual for you?

P A series of actions that bring you in a certain mood or openness, a certain state of being. For example a state of

being that helps you to get in touch with these Energy Lines.

AM Tell me about the cover, what do we see?

P *Pitchap* is holding the LP carefully. This is a picture taken from a shaman drum, we see important figures from the Maggergergorian religion—the figure Bronga, the temple, Bronga's grandson, and all kinds of characters, like this ritual scapegoat. It appears in all sorts of drawings, it symbolises a kind of apology for imperfections. The title is in Qamkanayan language, *Hargawaan por Shail*, which literally means “break the neck of the scapegoat”; to leave behind all kinds of unnecessary influences, and to be open to new things.

AM Open for the Energy Lines, to let them in.

P Yes. People can get confused by things, I believe in chaos but I'm also aware of the dangers of chaos. People can get lost. Sometimes it's great to burn bridges, try to be an empty page and start all over. A kind of (re)birth after all.

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JAMES RUSHFORD & JOE TALIA

James Rushford and Joe Talia are both in their own right and in numerous constellations (Food Court, Ora Clementi a.o.) renowned electroacoustic composers who create subtle and discomforting sound collages that delve deep into the unconsciousness. Rushford deals with the aesthetics of what he calls the Musical Shadow; Talia comes from a free jazz background as drummer, and for his own compositions he rethinks musique concrète, using analogue gear as reel-to-reel tapes and synthesizers to uncovering a new form of decayed virtuosity. Together they add up the sum of crafts into haunting pieces that unveil a search for the obsessed and the uncanny. Highly recommended are the Food Court and the Ora Clementi releases on Penultimate Press, as well their daunting Manhunter release on Graham Lambkin's Kye Records.

Inge Van den Kroonenberg

rvk Where are you from?

JR Originally, were from Australia, but neither of us doesn't live there anymore. Joe lives in Tokyo and I'm currently based in Germany, in Stuttgart.

rvk How did you meet?

JT Well, not very often obviously. Usually we both go back to Australia quite regularly, and when we are both there, we do some work together. But since we moved, it's pretty difficult to get into the studio. Doing gigs is not so hard, because we're both travelling. To make things is harder.

rvk Can you create through the internet, or not?

JR We can, but with this duo is not something we particularly like to do. There are of course projects where you can send stuff back and forth. But our work is really studio based.

JT A lot of is trial and error.

JR A lot is tightened up in the production, so not in the recording, but also in the mixing and everything that goes along with it. That is really informing the compositional process a lot.

rvk Do you have a musical background?

JT I come from improvisation, as a drummer with a jazz background.

JR I have a classical background, as a pianist and violinist. I studied

composition at university, similarly to Joe it branched out to other kinds of creative music making, collaborating and improvising. It all became one big soup.

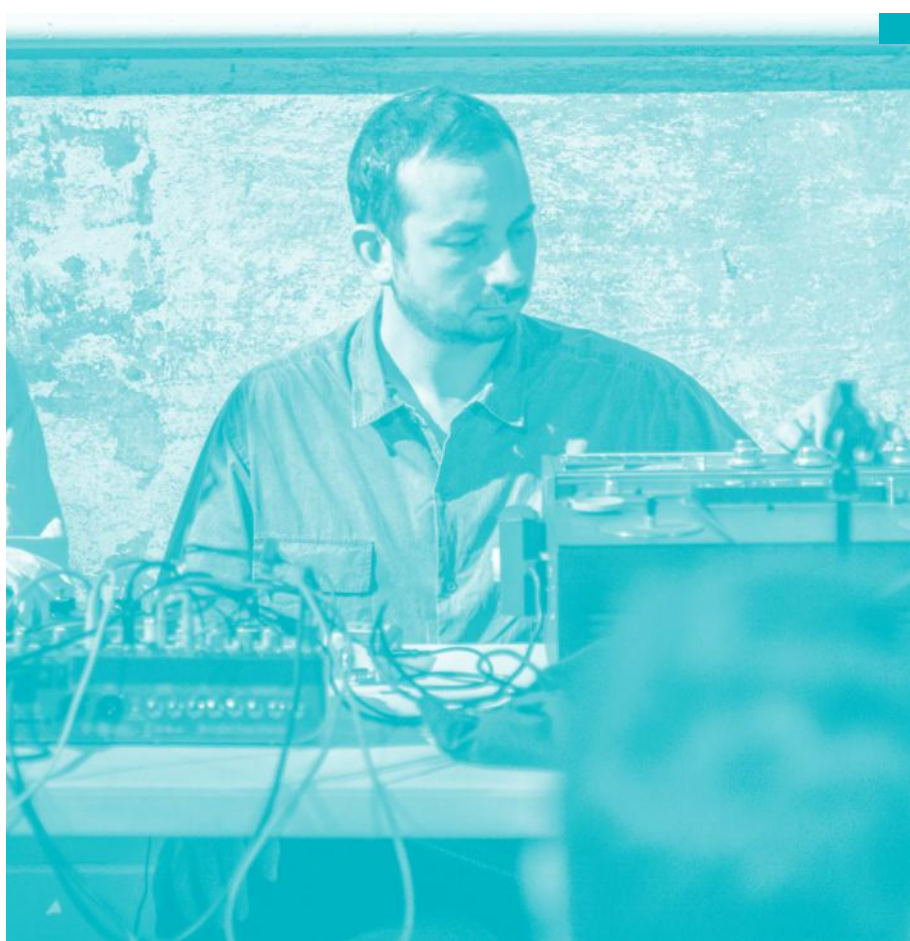
rvk Were those classical trainings (both jazz and classical) satisfying? Or did you then already felt the urge to experiment? Was it allowed in your studies?

JR I've been very fortunate, I actually recently finished my PhD in music. I really love to study. I was lucky even when I did my bachelor's degree, that I was in a school that was conservative in some ways, but I managed to convince them to let me study with people outside institute. I ended up having composition teachers that weren't employed by the school (*laughs*). I kinda knew what I wanted... in some way. I'm aware of the European institutions and the problem of curriculars. I teach nowadays composition and art history. Of course that helps, seeing the other side.

JT As drummer it was a bit different for me. When I left high school I wanted to be a jazz musician. Basically I did a jazz course — at the same school, but a different department of James. The course was at time really interesting for me. It brought me together with a lot of like-minded people, some of whom I still play



James Rushford. Photo © Keelan O'Hehir



Joe Talia. Photo © Keelan O'Hehir

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with now. So it was good to become a part of that community. As the study enrolled, I became less and less interested in that kind of music — in the typical jazz thing. There wasn't a lot of room to explore things outside that, but a lot of my fellow students were interested in these things as well. It wasn't really something I continued, I finished that course and followed my own path. I know Will (Guthrie) for a long time, he has a similar background, we both went to the same university, not at the same time. It's interesting to see that we come from the same background, and in a way followed the same path.

rvk Which composers inspired you?

JR My first teacher was Anthony Pateras who was a big formative influence. My supervisor for my PhD was Michael Pisaro, who is a US composer. He was also very influential, although his music is very different from what I do. His thinking about music was very inspiring. But actually there are millions of composers that I could list, but those two I'm very attached to.

rvk Do you improvise while playing, or do you follow a composition?

JT For the live shows, we are working within a sort of textural grain, we usually construct some sort of general composition that we use to improvise with. Each time we come together for a series of shows, we are trying to make very different. I think we've been moving more and more towards improvisation with our live sets. We definitely feel very comfortable improvising.

rvk Are there any reoccurring themes in your work?

JR There are things that connect across the work we've made over the past 10 years. Whether those were intentional or not, is a different question. I think that, with a lack of a better word, it's a kind of atmospheric music, because production is a really big part of the actual composing. It's not about creating material and making a record out of it. The record is made at the same time the compositions are made. From the beginning we were some sort of studio band. That really helps with the idea of an *atmosphere*.

rvk Was it hard to come out of the studio and play live?

JR When our last record *Manhunter* came out, we did a small amount of

shows where we really tried to somehow recreate that material — not exactly, but at least trying to present a live version of it. And it definitely was a challenge.

JT It's a completely different thing, because there is a lot of equipment that we cannot bring, and there are a lot of things that were very meticulously constructed in the studio. There's no way to reproduce that.

JR The set we play tonight will be way more depending on the synthesizers and electronic sounds, the sound is different then the records — it has this shiny sound. So that is a challenge. Sometimes you are surprised by what you play live... Playing live has a certain openness to it.

rvk How important is silence in your work?

JT & JR (*silenced*)

JR Silence is always in my mind somehow, but in this work we consciously implant silence. What is important to us, more than silence, is a sense of space and textural subtlety. That doesn't necessarily mean dynamics, but it also means that there are moments where we approach almost silence. I don't like to think about it as a formal piece of something. It's some kind of breathing inside the music. It's not thought out.

JT Yeah, I agree.

rvk I've never been to Australia, I only read the book *The Songlines* by Bruce Chatwin. It's a travelogue in which he traces the Aboriginal songlines. Apparently, in his Western vision, he thinks that they sing the land. Does Australian, with its open spaces play a role in your music.

JR I don't know the book. I would love the idea that it does, but we come from a metropolitan area, that's it. We're of course familiar with those landscapes. There is a slowness in our music though, that you could call a spaciousness I suppose. I don't know if that has something to do with the landscape, or something that just happens when we come together, it's a kind of precarious question... I like it.

JT It definitely informs us in a way, it's not a part of our daily live. But I don't have an answer.

rvk Thanks for the interview, it's time to watch the concert!

YEAH YOU

Yeah You is the unlikely father/daughter duo Elvin Brandhi and MYKL JAXN, transgressing borders of UK grime, improv strategies and pure pop. Last year they released an album on the Slip label, and recently a highly recommended tape on Luke Younger's Alter label. What seemed at first listen a freak act from the Newcastle underground, is now ready to conquer the world! As a preamble to their concert at the second edition of Vooruit's Uncanny Festival, Ben Knight—one of the vanguards in the Manchester experimentalist scene (see a.o. Katz Mulk)—interviewed them.

Ben Knight

BK First question, which is also an advertorial for 'WILD POP'... a term that seems to distil YY's approach to music-making, but at the same time it's more than that—coming into life as a Vimeo page; in blog posts and now a symposium in Newcastle. Can you tell the good listeners of The Avant-Guardian what it's all about?

EB We always insisted on pop. Maybe it's a traffic jam performance thing, we become an alternative to hits blasting from every radio. Admit it. Pop is inescapable, Pop wins. You will always end up with Justin Bieber stuck in your head. Rather than pretending we can shut it out we embrace and mutate its fundamental elements. We aim to be *Off for the masses*, we have Pop intent. Even if it fails let it be failed Pop, rejected Pop, rather than apologetically experimental. I avoid the 'this might not be your kind of music' attitude. It's Yeah You, you know? This is you, maybe not for you but through you, at you. There's something essential in the demand-bind affect-infect of pop. Pop enters the system. It gets under your skin, voluntarily or involuntarily influencing perception. We wanted to adopt this, attempt to conduct an intrusive infectious music. Repetitive, high intensity, to disorganise persona's and initiate collective squirm. Wild Pop is the waste product of chart hits through warped subjective digestion, mutation and regurgitation. Lady Gaga and Lil Wayne run through the psychic effect pedal of a inconsolably bemused invalid. When the consumer misuses content designed for consumption to produce something new you get in-consumable products. Not consumerism but regurgitationism.

MJ The insanely frustrating thing about how pop is taught in university music departments is that it is usually mapped onto the old classical pedagogy of 'you need to learn how to do this properly' while even the most mainstream pop is governed by technical anarchy—anything goes, by definition. I started using the idea of Wild Pop at Newcastle as a vehicle for carving a space to encompass the whole spectrum from chart pop to the most austere undergrounds of recording/gigging culture... Instead of a regular conference, for the symposium we invited people to make video essays with a Wild Pop brief, extending the aesthetic potential of saying something on a subject to a room full of people... Critical praxis?

BK Second question: I was sad to miss the Pat Thomas collaboration you did at Counterflows, a festival which always lands YY splat bang in the middle of some amazing performances (I saw the Sensational collab a few years ago...). How did these collabs come about? And who do you collaborate with more frequently? And how does playing in different configurations, and in unconventional settings, stretch or transform your music?

EB Both of us always play with lots of different people. I like the challenge of playing with someone for the first time live, because

you're already weaving out toward an audience of new faces then reacting to a whole new inventory of exertion. It's a big conversation, makes you very awake! Performing as a way of meeting someone is so refreshing. Cuts all the small talk. You're forced into finding footholds in each-others spectrum. The idea of strangers dissolves, you cannot know someone but when you play you feel them.

MJ We've always played with whoever whenever possible. We both have a few regular collabs going which grew out of that openness. It's almost a ritual, a way to convene without the connotation of words and subject matter, and it's always reflexively dialogic and critical, even when someone's not really listening... I love awkwardness in certain encounters the minute you ditch acceptables...

BK A third question: who are Elvin Brandhi & MYKL JAXN? Are you the same people you've always been since inhabiting them?

EB Elvin Brandhi is a psychic effect pedal, an instrumentalist subjective distortion bypassing the filters of identification. It triggers spasms, inverts synapses and attacks affective precepts of inbuilt public reserve. Cognitive beat repeat, thought glitch effect... let invade human. (Let surplus invade the construct.) And... Evil Gandhi? Eleven brandies? Eleven caskets branded? I think the thing is we never really thought about either name. Having another name is important though for me. My music is more me than I ever will be.

MJ Yeah, MYKL JAXN was never thought up. MYKL JAXN is an embarrassing joke, it's terrible... unworthy protest. But gladly blundered, neither picky nor wry-eyed.

BK Freya, I'm really interested in your vocal/lyrical approach, and I wanted to ask how your performances come about—they are stream-of-conscious, but as you've been doing it longer, do certain themes re-occur that you stick at, or do you try and push to different grounds? Also, how do the different ordinary environments (roadsides; car parks etc...) get channelled into your singing?

EB I dunno man, I just shout my mind out and watch it bounce off different objects. More stream of obnoxiousness. Sick the mind out on stage. Sick up the audience, the stage, the sound-engineer out through the mind. You're not just affected by your environment, you are product of it, I try to invert this process by turning this mediation back on itself. Autoimmune. But yeah, we tend to say *stream of consciousness*, 'improvisation' as if these were exceptional, but free-styling in the rap world is so much more common, expected even. If rappers say they freestyle no-one will be impressed, only the content of what they manage to deliver counts. One of the most liberating things to watch for me is free-stylers. Seeing someone who has really managed to get the self in sync with their particular context. Make personality a tool of communication. To jump their

shadow and let their mind fall out in new shapes. It is far from effortless for me, I couldn't even call it a skill, It happens very ungracefully, which defines the whole frantic stage presence, I'm trying to embody and dispossess simultaneously, which just doesn't work! I perform dysfunction.

BK What's next? Will Elvin and MYKL always be with you/us or will they transmute into something else?

MJ The wild productivity thing ad infinitum no doubt... But there's no transmuting, really, just parallels; I'm also several other artists.

EB Iconoclast. It's growing out of itself. Working out what it is trying to be. I would like to have a rocking chair.

BK Oh, and Niels had the cheek to ask me to ask you a question, that you don't have to answer if you don't want to: what has changed since you last played at KRAAK Fest?

MJ Every opportunity to play, in public or just to record, is taken and

dispatched with as little identification with the outcome as possible—but because everything we do is documented, each next moment becomes part of an irrepressible quest for absolute negation... I mean that there's no point at which anything settles, so as performers we're unrecognizable to the duo that played at KRAAK, but it's hard to say how exactly...

EB We are another whole other thing each time we meet, it's like, ah, yes us again. It's like all the things that have happened in our time apart get brought to the table and we dissect the content, hear how each one's inventory has shifted. KRAAK was particularly intense because it was one of the first times we met and played since I moved away from home. We're into that flow now though, that hectic in-between is our home. Playing music really is how we reconnect and hear where each is at. When I come back from travelling and we play a gig the same night, it's the best way of catching up. We never won't be always changing.



Photo © Yeah You

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KRAAK NEEDS !

Drop a line at pauwel@kraak.net

CRY'S COLE & OREN AMBARCHI

One of last year's highlights was crys cole and Oren Ambarchi's collaborative *Hotel Record*. It celebrates the hazy state of being involved in a trans-global musical romantic narrative, not unlike impressionist European art movies that emerged in a post-WW II era. The duo's sound is a symbiosis of soft sine waves, unreal voices and subtle field recording. Both live and on record, cole & Ambarchi frame touchingly intimate themes in a surreally unique, aleatoric sound world, just as you'd be warranted to expect from this pair of esteemed sonic alchemists. Their music is overtly poetic, and could be an encrypted document of phone sex or pillow talk—or something entirely else, all depending on your disposition. We had a talk with the couple about the record that they presented at Red Brut's LP Launch party on 26th of May at De Koer.

Niels Latomme

NL First of all, I wondered what the nature is of the sound that comes in around 3:30 in the *Pad Phet Gob* piece, the last side of the *Hotel Record*? It sounds like a cow.

OA (Laughs) A what, a cow?
cc It's actually frogs in Thailand. They sounded amazing. It's also why the piece is titled *Pad Phet Gob* (a very spicy thai frog dish).

NL I started with that question because the tension between private and public is key to your music. Because you present them as a couple, people will likely perceive the intimate sounds and words as *true*, honesty is pre-supposed; but I was wondering if it's a construct of *truth* rather than the truth itself—for example, the frog sounding like a cow?

cc The pieces on the album are compositions, so there are always details that are constructed and orchestrated, but the personal aspects of the record are captured through the day to day of our experience as a couple. We don't fabricate situations or material in order to create a new 'truth' but rather, we make music that weaves our reality and personal lives into it. On *Hotel Record*, there's a section where we are reading love letters to each other that we mailed years before. With elements like that, we want to bring in something that is intimate and personal, but we also want to obscure it, so that the listener has a kind of voyeuristic experience of our relationship, but he or she isn't really getting the full details.

OA I agree that it's completely natural. We're not really making records for anyone other than ourselves. We do what feels right to us. For example, in the track that crys just mentioned, when we use words or dialogue there is a necessity for us to make it personal. It just feels natural for us to do that.

cc Yeah, it *has* to relate to our relationship, the records are like diaries of our life together. I like the idea of documenting our lives through various contexts and places, and then moulding the material into something complete that we're really happy with artistically. Throughout this process we are constantly pushing ourselves creatively.

OA I think we both like challenging one another to do things that are a little uncomfortable. That's exciting, because we're in it together.

NL There is an interesting quote on the personal narrative and its role in the field recording genre: *If it's true that successful field recording albums require a narrative, and that narratives arise ineluctably from interactions between people, then the*

narrative that Cole and Ambarchi are creating by addressing their listening to us illustrates this principle in action.

OA I'm always inclined to use whatever is necessary to make a piece work. If there is an instrument, or something around that is going to make the pieces in the puzzle fit, I'll grab it and use it. A field recording can be a tool like that, but for us, with this collaboration—as crys said, it's very diaristic—all of the recordings completely relate to our relationship. The Thai recording on the fourth side of the record was made on a romantic holiday. We were walking through a field and heard the frogs...
cc ... and every night we would go and record them.

OA It's intrinsically related to our lives, the field recordings we use on our records come from our experiences and travels together as a couple. it's not just an effect that we are using.
cc Field recordings usually have a very personal reference to me. It's never arbitrary, but of course it's also about the sound. It's about creating a certain atmosphere, a certain space, and whether or not the recordings pick up on the personal narrative can be irrelevant in a way. We may know the relevance of a field recordings but it is not essential for the listener to pick up on the context.

OA It can be experienced on different levels—as a sound environment or composition that is engaging to listen to, or on another level where there is a personal narrative.
cc For example, side B of *Hotel Record* contains a multitude of recordings that we made in our personal space, but it is a constructed composition. Nothing is random; but all of it is personal and recorded in our apartment—In the bathroom, in our kitchen while we're making breakfast, things like that; except for the last element, which was done in a studio. It is really all coming from our lives and reality, and it has this domestic quality.

NL Do you use music to shape your life—as a tool to understand it—or, the other way round, does life shape your music?

OA It's kind of both.
cc It's so integrated into our lives. We both work on many other projects where our minds are more occupied directly with working on a particular project, composition, or collaborating with someone in a fixed period of time, whereas our duo develops more organically. And because it's like a diary or a photo album, we can look back and reflect on things that happened in our lives the past few years. I love that aspect of it.

OA It's almost like a banal everyday thing that we do that gets transformed into something else. The next record

will be recordings of us eating Dorito's and watching *Law & Order*.
cc (Laughs)

NL How does it translate to a live context, which is completely different from your home, or the studio?

cc Some of the pieces developed out of live performances. It started with a few experiments that we would do live, and we expanded upon them when we worked on the record. The first piece on the record grew out of a live organ, guitar and voice performance, and we had the opportunity to expand on it by running it through the Buchla synthesizer at EMS in Stockholm. It's really kind of organic thing, because we have been doing these pieces for a couple of years. Some of the pieces morphed from live pieces into the pieces of the record and from there we continue to expand upon them in a live setting. Live we pull from the recent record, but also from the first record (Sonja Henies vei 31), and we're always exploring new ideas and new territory.

OA Our live performance is totally related to the records. But it always changes; it's never the same thing.
cc We have certain variables to make sure it's impossible to be the same.

NL Can you give an example?

OA There are a lot of elements that can go wrong or fail. We're using technology or elements that are unpredictable and that never react the same way in different spaces.
cc Even beyond that, we have an element in the performance where we are actually playing a game. That game dictates how a part of the performance will shift, the timing, the dynamics and when different elements come in and out. It's all based on who wins the game. (Laughs) That has led to many different variations in the performance. It's a fun aspect of what we do.

NL Who can't cope with losing?

OA & CC (Both laugh)
cc Well... it's quite insightful to our relation because we're both extremely stubborn, and we're both convinced that we're right. So to me it feels, adding this competitive component to our performances is also quite reflective of our relationship.
OA (Laughs)
cc We've gotten pretty good at handling who loses during the performance.

NL How does it work, making a record, while you both travel so much?

OA The recent record is a reflection of our life style, because we were not really in one place for really long. The first record is different because we weren't able to be together for very long. It's almost a brief snap shot of when we had the opportunity to be together—in those days sometimes we were separated for up to 6 months. The new record is a second phase where we were always in a different place, trying to be together. As in, 'Hi, I've got a gig in this city, can you come and after the gig we'll stay for a while?'.
cc Nowadays we are travelling together 90 per cent of time. So in a sense we *are* living together—'where' we live is the question mark. We are always migrating from place to place, to different homes. This impacts our work a lot, because so many different scenarios and circumstances stimulate us. 'Home' is wherever we are in the world when we are together.

NL Would you call the records you've made your home?

cc That's a nice way of looking at it.
OA I like to think that records can be your home.
cc They do ground you in a weird sort of a way.
OA We could probably build a house from all of the records we own...

NL Thanks for the interview!

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Photo © Alicia Brown



KRAUS

Among *Lede Hills 9050*'s performers Pat Kraus surely shares DIY-aesthetics and philosophy with the other artists and organizers involved. His music takes influences from a broad spectrum of artists—from the psychedelic punk outfit Chrome to early electronic innovators such as the BBC Radiophonic Workshop. Its unpolished, cosmic nature and its primitive repetitiveness must have resonated within the Belgian underground because Kraus records were put out on labels as *Ultra Eczema* or *Kerm* and there was an appearance on 2015's *Kraakfest*. But how did it all begin?

Jelle Vanlerberghe

PK My relationship with Belgium started when Stefan Neville (Pumice) toured Europe in 2005. He took copies of my self-released CDR *I Could Destroy You with a Single Thought* and gave them to people like Dennis Tyfus, who later reissued it on vinyl, and Lieven Martens, who released my tape *The Facts* on his label Dreamtime Taped Sounds in 2007. KRAAK helped me come over in 2015 and I toured with Floris Vanhoof and Red Brut and had the best time!

JV How does playing live pleases you and why did you choose not to play live in the beginning?

PK I was too crazy then and now I am just crazy in a different way. I love playing live even though it is weird to have a lot of people stare at you. I don't do anything interesting like dance or wear outfits or make hilarious jokes, I just operate the guitar. You may as well stare at the floor.

JV How did your music progress over the years?

PK It's gotten looser as I have become more confident and better at playing. If you listen to *I Could Destroy You* there is no improvisation on it at all, it's all riffs

all the time. Which is fine, I am proud of how concentrated that album is, but now I can do that concentration plus rip a solo or just spray out notes for 20 minutes and make that work too.

JV Do you come up easily with new music and/or is it more a focused, well-thought kinda thing?

PK I have always been a good editor of my work and I think that's very important for any artist. I reject a lot of what I record and (I think) that policy has kept my releases at a high standard. When I am really in the zone I can write and record a whole song in one afternoon but that is rare. It's pieced together over months usually. It takes me about 12-18 months to do one album, although that album *Workers in Kontrol* I cranked out in 2 weeks.

JV How's the NZ scene going and what's your relation to it? Was 90's Flying Nun or Xpressway important for your musical/DIY aspirations or can those influences rather be found elsewhere?

PK It's hard to do art here now because it's just hard to live. Neo-liberal reforms which began in the 80s have really fucked things up, and now it's

expensive to live here, and you can't get away with being an artist on the dole any more. A lot of people are moving to Australia. However we are very lucky to have good venues and institutions that support underground and experimental music. In every city there is are enthusiastic, dedicated people doing amazing things with zero money, and I'm really proud to be a little part of that.

I couldn't give a flying fuck about Flying Nun but Xpressway was important for me in the 90s yes. I have drawn on a real wide range of music, like you can probably hear the East-Asian influences and medieval shit in there as well as 1960s electronic music. I am 40 now so I've heard a lot of stuff and steal from all over.

JV Do you read or watch stuff a lot (hence the references in your moniker and titles)? What inspires you?

PK Sci-fi and horror soundtracks are a big influence for my work and I would love to do a soundtrack for a film. I don't really read anything at the moment because of being depressed but this is what I have watched in the last few weeks: *Let's Scare Jessica to Death*, *Morgiana*, *Heathers*, *The Beguiled*, *The Killer Nun*, *Macbeth* (1971), *Pecker*, *The Blue Dahlia*, *River's Edge*, *Don't Torture a Duckling*, *Gun Crazy*, *Airheads*, *Tootsie*.

JV Any specific soundtracks to mention?

PK *Blood Orgy of the She-Devils* is the best one. Some other soundtracks I like are *Ben Hur*, *New Gladiators*, *The Holy Mountain*, *Quatermass 2*, and *Macbeth* (1971).

JV Are you currently involved in other music projects?

PK I am doing a thing called Mahoney/Kraus which is a tape-loop duo with Claire Mahoney, who plays solo as Thistle Group. She has a record coming out on Another Dark Age (London) next

year that I am helping to record and it's going to be great.

JV And are there Kraus records coming up?

PK I'm doing a residency soon at EMS in Stockholm There is a huge Serge system there that I'm going to work with, in between visits to the ABBA museum. With those recordings I will do a split tape with Auckland teenage electronic musical wizard Lortcon. Also I am gonna do something with Kraak next year.

JV Why the interest of making your own pedals and where do you find inspiration to make them? You're also running the MEL (a library of homemade electronical musical devices, a good part of them are built into old VHS cases). How is it going?

PK I got into electronics because I wanted a modular synth and had no money to buy one. All the electronic sounds on my albums since 2010 have been made with the Serge synth that I built. I am self-taught but I am quite methodical so mostly I have been successful with the things I've made. I am kind of burned out on electronics now but running the MEL is cool because I get to see people turned on to electronics and make noise with stuff that I built.

This interview was meant to be published in ed. N° 10.1, but in the true vain of the Free Form approach it fell in the cracks of the world wide web. A re-publication!

Photo © Kraus



