SHAPE PLATFORM presents
a selection of interviews touching
on topics like the relationship of
music and sonic arts to technology,
the environment, society and politics.
Featuring talks with:

Violet, Audrey Chen, Lyra Pramuk,
Julek Płoski, Balázs Pándi, Hüma Utku,
Resina, Jonathan Uliel Saldanha,
CHAINES, Afrodeutsche, Dorota, c / a,
Elvin Brandhi, Céline Gillain, FOQL,
Jessica Ekomane, Ábris Gryllus,
Avtomat, Robert Curgenven, Clara de
Asís, Johanna Hedva, ELVI, December,
NAKED, Sinosc, Tomoko Sauvage,
Sourdure, Uriel Barthélémi, Bérangère
Maximin, Jung An Tagen, Lawrence Lek,
Jay Glass Dubs, Jessika Khazrik,
Simina Oprescu.

SHAPE
Sound, Heterogeneous
Art and Performance
in Europe 2018–2022

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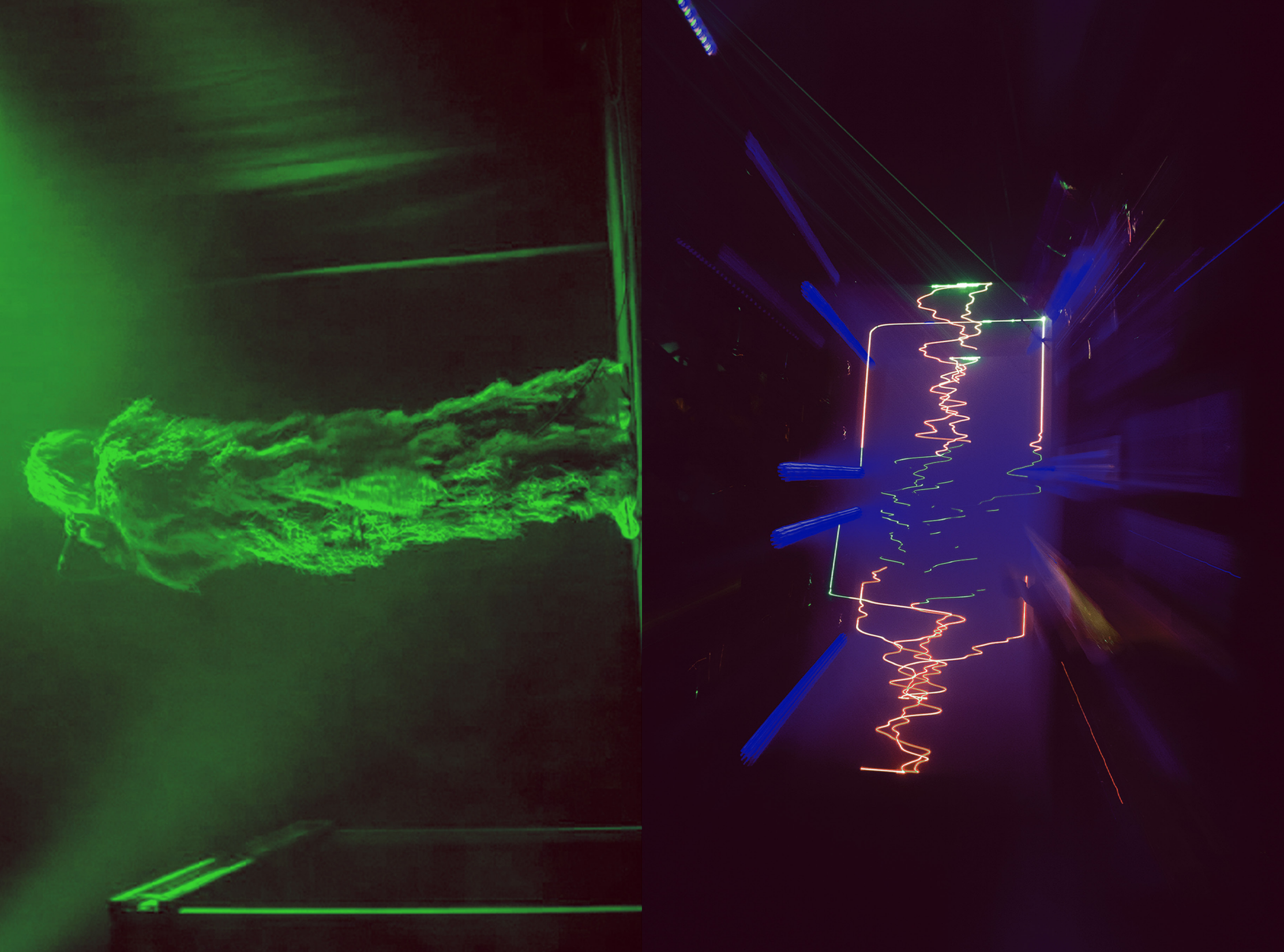
SHAPE SOUND, HETEROGENEOUS ART AND PERFORMANCE IN EUROPE

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16 FESTIVALS
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Artists for 2018
Sound, Heterogeneous Art and Performance in Europe
48 Innovative European Artists Per Year
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LABYRINTH GATES TO SONIA
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SONICA
Aisha Devi
Shackleton
James Ginzburg
Octex
Swan Meat
Spekid
Talamas A. Latinen
Jessika Khazrik
Marija Bozinovska Jovan
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"Aspiring musician's toolkit"
"MysTech Entanglements"
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Talks and panels in collaboration with SIGIC
SRE/WED 29.9.
MAO
BALADA O GENESIS IN LADY JAYE
THE BALLAD OF GENESIS AND LADY JAYE
RAZSTAVA
EXHIBITION
Marija Bozinovska Jones
Dorota Gawęda in Eglė Kulbokaitė
Sophie Hoyle
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BOUNDLESS BODYMINDS
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1.9.–2.10.
PON/MON 27.9.
TOR/TUE 28.9.
SRE/WED 29.9.
ČET/THU 30.9.
PET/FRI 1.10.
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Stara elektrarna
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JESSIKA KHAZRIK now live set
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ARTIFACT c/o Spazio Maiocchi
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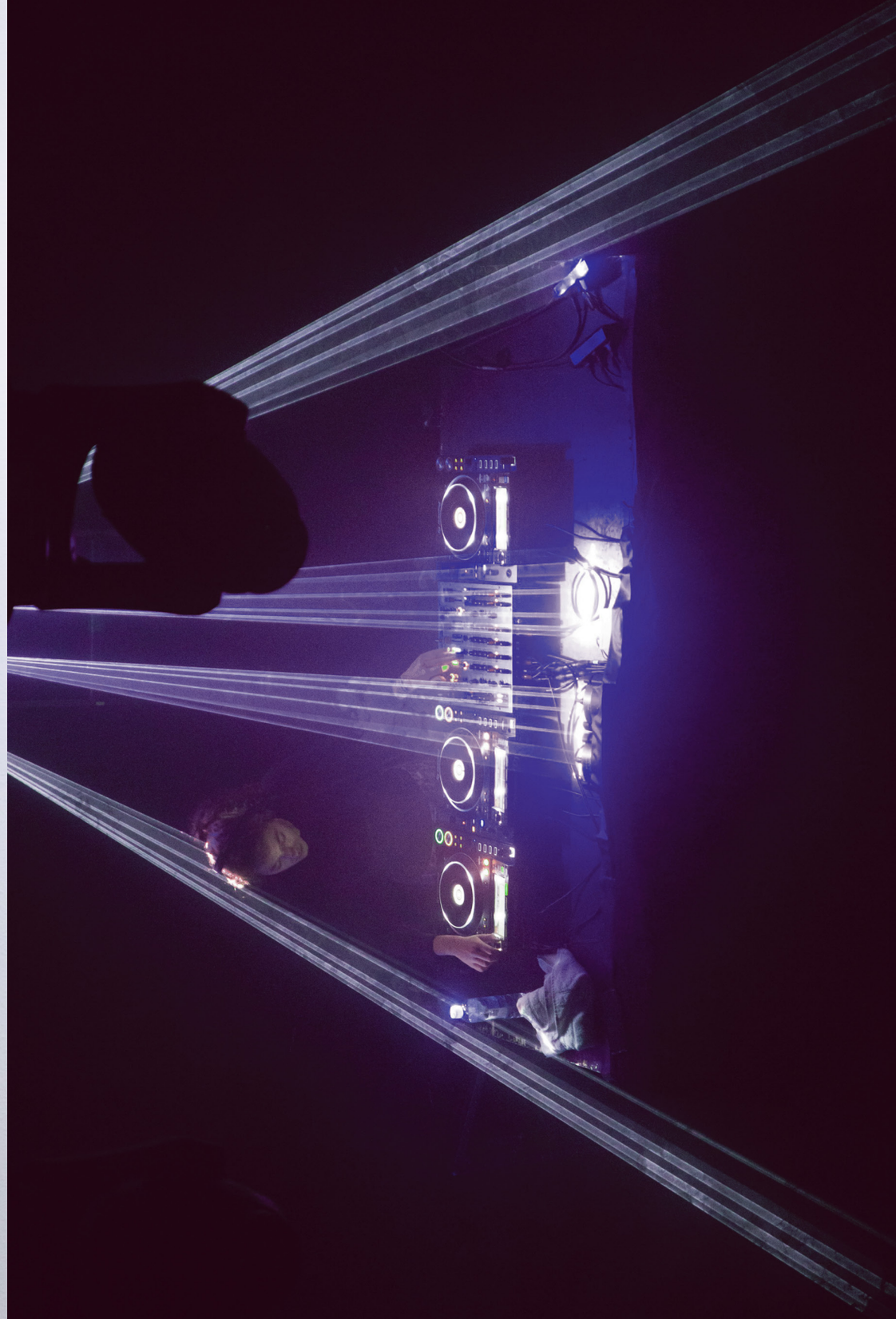


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SPATIAL
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JESSIKA KHAZRIK
MARIJA BOZINOVSKA JONES
DOROTA GAWEDA
AND EGLĖ KULBOKAITĖ
SOPHIE HOYLE
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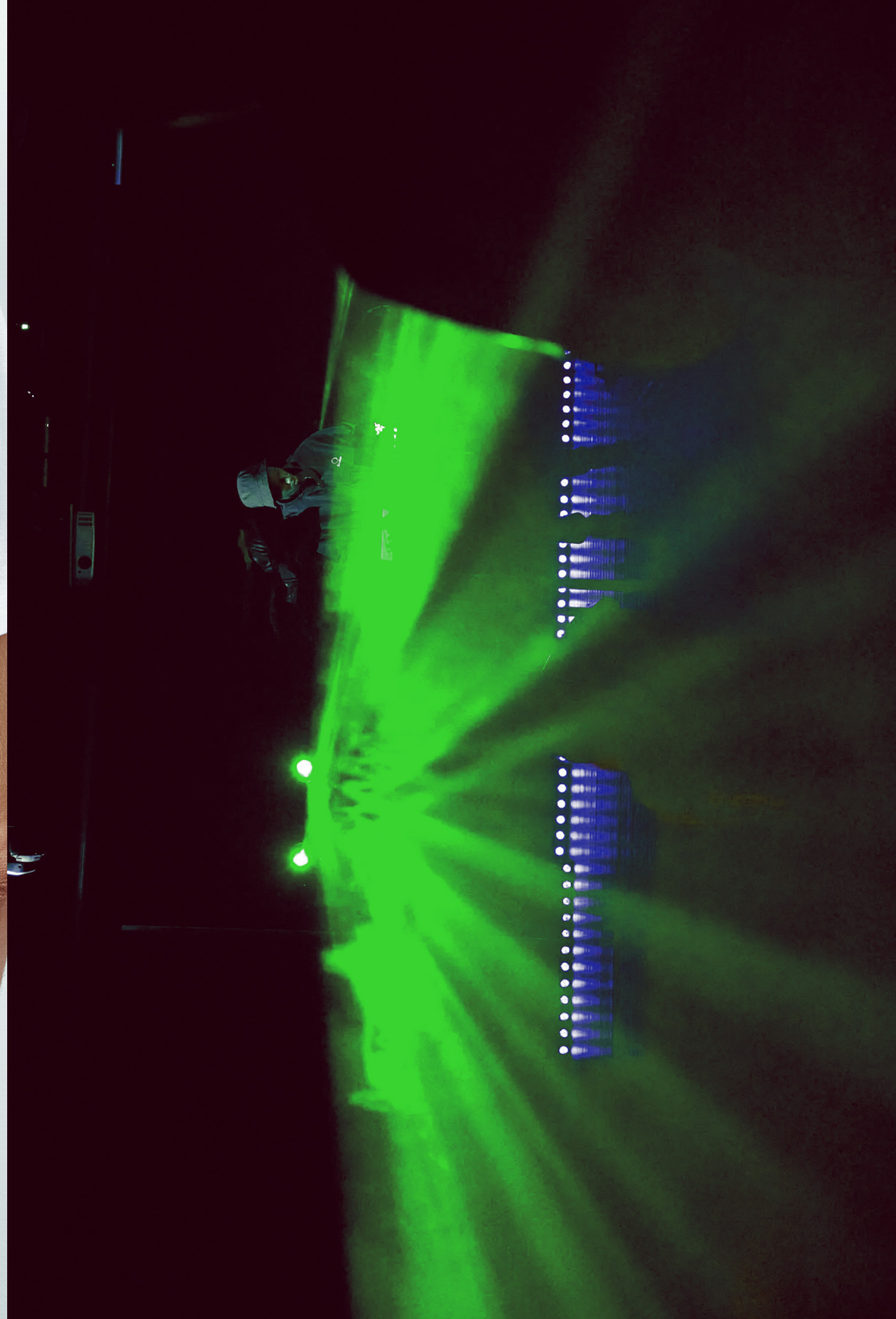

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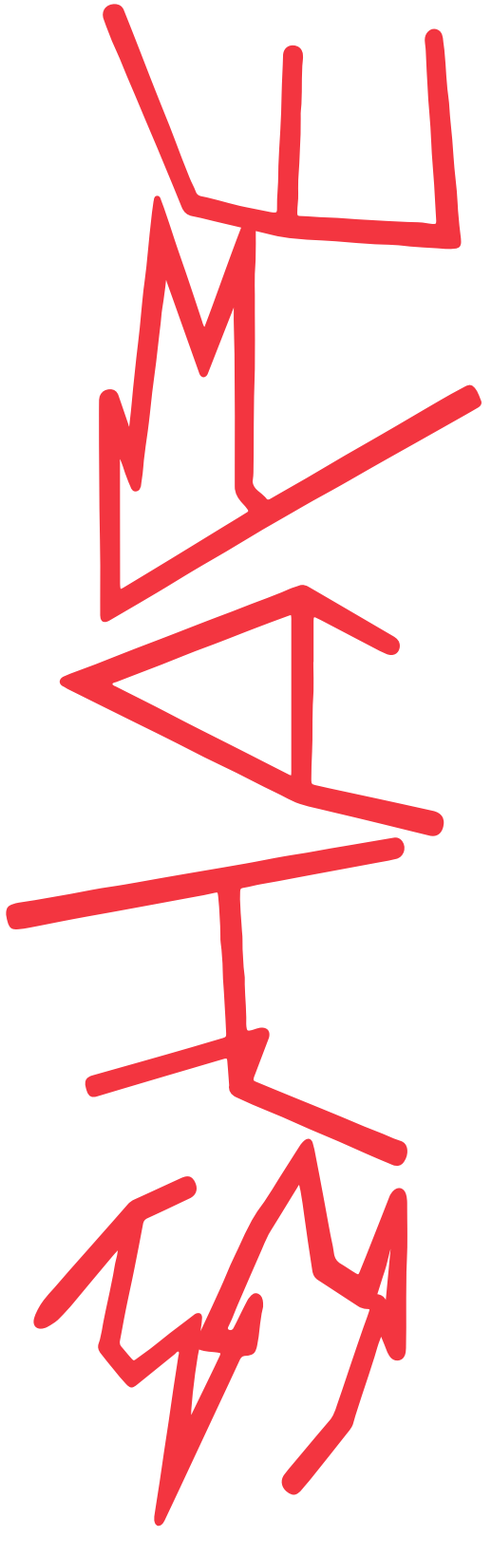

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FOREWORD

This book celebrates the second phase of SHAPE (Sound, Heterogeneous Art and Performance in Europe), between 2018 and 2022. The platform supports mainly emerging and at times less explored innovative music and audiovisual art from various parts of Europe. SHAPE is run by 16 festivals and organisations that worked with 192 artistic projects during this period. First and foremost, this publication is a collection of selected interviews with some of these artists.

The founders of SHAPE hope that these conversations will give to the reader an insight into the diverse world of adventurous European sound and interdisciplinary artists who, with some exceptions, have escaped broader international attention. When speaking to the artists, we got to hear what motivates and inspires them, what backgrounds they are from, what pleases or worries them about their current situation (both creatively and socially), and where they hope to arrive. Their answers were just as diverse as their work, and there are many colourful opinions – sometimes even contradictory ones – which allow the reader to conjure a hypothetical future of the fields of music and art.

Beyond that, this book is a catalogue of names in music and audiovisual art that the reader might want to follow in the future. By nominating them for the SHAPE project, curators from 16 festivals wanted to draw attention to the idiosyncratic and innovative work they have done so far, and to suggest that these artists represent ideas, methods, and trends that will shape the nearest future of both aforementioned fields.

HAPPY READING!

SHAPE

is a platform for innovative music and audiovisual art from Europe, co-funded by the Creative Europe programme of the European Union.

It consists of 16 festivals and art centres and aims to support, promote, and exchange innovative and aspiring musicians and interdisciplinary artists with an interest in sound. With the project, we attempt to present a variety of idiosyncratic music and sonic art from all over Europe, and provide audiences and professionals with insightful lectures, talks, and workshops by experts in various fields related to sound and performance.

Each year, the curatorial teams of all 16 SHAPE festivals and initiatives come together and choose 48 artists. This annual artist roster is created disregarding divisions of genre, gender, cultural background, age, or popularity. Rather, creative novelty and successful experimentation serve as core values, with additional emphasis on the inclusion of upcoming and underexposed artists plus the local scenes of the involved festivals and art centres. SHAPE strives to contribute to geographical diversity in the fields of innovative music and audiovisual art by nominating artists from all parts of Europe. Attention is also paid to improving gender balance among the selected artists.

Due to the broad aesthetic variety of the supported artists and musicians, the SHAPE project might have quite an amorphous image. Each SHAPE showcase can leave quite a different impression and may have a decidedly different vibe than the previous one.

On a practical level, the project revolves around these things: 1) each member festival/organisation presenting at least nine SHAPE artists at their events each year; 2) cultivating a better-informed audience and more adventurous sonic realm, while organising educational activities both for the artists and audiences in each one of the 16 cities that SHAPE represents, as well as beyond; 3) offering publicity assistance to the selected artists via a network of international media partners.

To broaden the reach of SHAPE activities and develop relationships with festivals outside its member list, there were collaborative SHAPE showcases from time to time, where many SHAPE festivals joined forces and compiled programmes for other festivals, mostly outside of Europe – with a memorable collaboration with Nyege Nyege Festival in Uganda in 2018, followed by a SHAPE showcase at Gamma Festival in St Petersburg, Russia, in 2019. Due to the coronavirus pandemic, the subsequent showcases have taken place online.

The platform was formed by members of ICAS (International Cities of Advanced Sound) – a global network of independent non-profit organisations dedicated to advancing sound cultures, music, and related arts. This meant that all organisations knew each other, but the project took their collaboration to a whole new level, boosted by collective curatorial decisions and deepened knowledge of the geographical and cultural scenes that each festival strives to nurture and represent.

AGATHE BLUME: SO WHAT NOW?

It was exactly a year ago, when Berlin was getting darker and colder again and a much-feared second lockdown was around the corner. Unemployed, I walked into a German language course to prepare for the C1 exam, in the hope of improving my chance at landing a job. My eyes locked with a familiar set of eyes across the room, albeit the rest of the face was masked. It was a fellow freelance music journalist who used to contribute to the same platform as I did, and who had also DJ'd at one of my parties. After the class, we walked home together and talked about our career prospects – how we were no longer able to write for the platform due to the pandemic, and how we could shift our career onto an alternative path.

I told this story to a friend, who had graduated with a degree in music production just before the pandemic. He had also enrolled in a German A1 course around that time, in his fourth year in Berlin. "Really? I've also met so many music producers on my A1 course, who've been living in Berlin for a while," he said.

Musicians who live in Berlin for years without learning German have achieved a meme status, and we chuckled at ourselves a bit too. But in retrospect, it was perhaps one of the darkest moments in our lives – when we did not even know what we could dare dream of, when we did not know when we would dance together again, if ever.

Fast forward to now, October 2021, things are looking a bit different. Berghain reopened its doors two weekends ago, attracting a ten-hour queue. DJs are jet-setting to different continents again, and festivals are filled with crowds that are more eager than ever. "Everybody's busy again – the artists, the bookers, the organisers – all very quickly getting back into the old habit," remarked Ruggero Pietromarchi, the organiser of Terraforma Festival, based outside of Milan.

But when there was the first lockdown, when we were rather excitedly fermenting everything, there was also a discourse about how we should take this disruptive event as a pivotal moment allowing us to diverge from 'business as usual'. Leading up to the pandemic, there were discussions on the environmental impact of touring in the music industry, and how the relentless touring schedules affect the artists' mental health. During the pandemic, there was also a heated discourse on the racial (in)justice in the industry, calling out toxic behaviour and demanding better representation of BIPOC members of the community. While it is understandable to want to get over this pandemic and hop 'back' onto the dance floor, I would like to first reflect on what we shall not go 'back' to.

"'Business as usual' leads to burning out and doesn't bring renewal, and this probably means we also have to revalue our functioning model," commented Krisztián Puskár, the organiser of UH Fest in Budapest, which just successfully held its 2021 event. "We worked less with agencies this year than ever, not on purpose for sure, but simply because the artists that were engaged to make the festival happen together with us chose their own way and moved around more independently. More trains were used as well, not enough I would say, but definitely more than before, and I really believe this should be the right direction in the heart of Europe."

"There's a lot of business as usual, but there are also a lot of pockets of resistance that've been there since way before the pandemic," observed Violet, a DJ and producer, who is also a co-founder of mina, a Lisbon-based collective, and the owner of the naïve label. "These people are still pushing for more sustainable practices that protect marginalised and vulnerable people. I think this work has become stronger during the pandemic, but it's been there for a long time. In communities that are more politically active, there's a renewed attention paid to the way we run our parties, who we involve in the decision making, who we book, who we work with, where we distribute the public funding, and so on. It's easy to fall into 'business as usual' even as a DIY scene, with a tendency to gravitate towards working with the people you trust and have worked with before, so it' s important to stay aware."

Other than the local communities, individual artists also gained some time to reflect on how unsustainable the industry practices before the pandemic were. "2020 was the complete opposite of what I thought it was going to be. I had tours planned all over the world in 2020, and I was mentally preparing for that. But none of that happened," recalled Schacke, a Copenhagen-based producer, whose track "Kisloty People" was named Track of the Year by Resident Advisor in 2019. During the earlier days of the pandemic, Schacke shared on his Instagram how he was struggling with the realities of the pandemic – and his vulnerability was appreciated and shared across the community.

"While I was touring, having to meet new people all the time was taking up so much energy. There's certainly a business element to it when you're only hanging out with people in the industry while touring. I think I was losing touch with my friends a bit, because I was often out of town, and when I was in town, I was either producing or too tired. I think that was one of the things that was making me subconsciously depressed – I was alienated from my true friends. I just had to hang out with temporary friends all over the place instead." said Schacke. "I guess it's a common thing in techno Instagram where you only post about the highest points of your life, so people just think you're feeling great all the time. When the pandemic began, I felt weird that people who followed me on social media didn't know that I was actually struggling. Speaking out about going through a hard time was in itself therapeutic, and gave me a good starting point for processing these feelings."

Indeed, when artists stopped touring, the so-called 'techno Insta' feed that was previously so robustly populated with tour flyers, festival crowds, and cute

posed pictures in front of Berghain, also became quiet. Now everyone was a bedroom DJ, deprived of the voyeurism into someone else's shinier career. The highlight of the pandemic DJ career on social media was a screenshot of one's HÖR set, in a green light that was not flattering to anyone.

This was also the moment that made us rudely aware of how disproportionately salient Instagram became in representing the lives of people in music, pulling us away from the authentic values that made us fall in love with music in the first place: the goosebumps we had when we first listened to that IDM track; the smiles of the sweaty strangers, dancing to the same frequency at 4am.

"I am able to be a lot more vulnerable and more myself in what I release now, instead of hiding behind a techno face. I used to feel like I needed to constantly produce this so-called 'Copenhagen techno' I was becoming known for – 140 BPM, superfast, a bit trancey, big leads. But having a time when there was no techno being played on the dance floors, gave me some space to explore what I actually wanted to make, which are not necessarily dance tracks, like abstract ambient stuff," said Schacke. "Isolation, and having to sit down and listen to myself, allowed me to become more vulnerable. I no longer had feedback from the dance floor every weekend, so I had to trust what I truly liked. I also came to realise that the tracks that get me the most track counts are not necessarily the work that people connected with the most. When I talked to people who were really into my music, what many of them really liked were some of my more obscure works."

Even before the pandemic, Violet was known for valuing authenticity in her approach to selection and running her label. I asked how this recent experience has affected her views. "Already a few months before the pandemic, I was struggling with depression, feelings of emptiness and extreme sadness. So going through the pandemic added a bit of a colour to my love for authenticity. I've always been aware of the darknesses of life. But being reminded of that once again changed my practice in relation to solidarity with people who are struggling, and the poetry that is in some of the sadness. If there is no struggle at all, you won't be able to recognise and appreciate the good parts as well. I also realised that one of the most important missions for me is to validate the dancing in clubs and rave as a valid and important cultural legacy that isn't currently acknowledged so much by funding institutions. Community work, compassion, self-medication, the things we feel at the raves – reflecting on how important these are reminded me that we need to not only appreciate, but also elevate and fight for rave culture."

The pandemic took many things away from us: the warmth of hugging a friend, euphoria on the dance floors, the jobs that paid our rents, and for some of us, the very existence of our loved ones. And when we discuss things we have learned from the pandemic, we do not mean that the loss was worth it because of the things we gained – nothing can be worth the lives that were lost. However, when something tragic happens, we try to hold onto the legacies that are left behind, and reflect on how we shall live differently in honour of these legacies. "I realised that ideas matter more than anything else, in the end," said Pietromarchi from Terraforma. "It's not just about the events themselves,

but more about the ideas: how strongly you are attached to these ideas, and how much you're willing to experiment with them. You needed to have had some fluidity to have survived this historical period. Even if there are external conditions that prevent you from throwing a party, if your ideas are strong, you're going to find a way to express them."

Maintaining a connection with loved ones was also an important legacy for many of us. "I've learned the importance of staying connected to my friends, and I think I'll make more conscious efforts to make time for them, going forward," said Schacke. "Taking care of other beings really grounds you; it's not just about you staying alive, you need to keep someone else alive too, you know," reflected Violet on what kept her resilient throughout the period. "It was kind of a lesson in a way, a reminder that things weren't going the right way. I knew the red flags were there before the pandemic, but I finally had the space to take action. So, now I'm touring maybe twice a month instead of every weekend, and I'm picking the gigs that I either really love or that pay well. That way, you can still be helped by the institutions that are bigger than you, and you can fill in your elements in parties that are exactly your vibe, where you can also collaborate and invite younger artists and give them a leg up. So, having this balance allows me to create this chain."

It was sometime around the spring or summer of 2021, and I was picking up a Chinese takeaway with a close friend, who is also one of the co-founders of my party collective. Surrounded by the aroma of the Szechuan pepper, we were heading to another co-founder's flat to eat and play music together, which was still illegal as I vaguely recall. Frowning because of the harsh sun, I confessed to her: "I don't know what I can envision about my path in music anymore." What she said in response stayed with me permanently. "For me, it was never about 'making it'. I just wanted to play music that I love with friends that I love. And we have that."

Agathe Blume is a writer, DJ, and co-founder of Un:seen. She has previously written for outlets such as Resident Advisor and Un:zine.

Terraforma and UH Fest are SHAPE members, Violet and Schacke are SHAPE alumni.

MAT SCHULZ: KEEPING IT REAL: IMAGE, SPECULATION AND MUSIC

In 2021, as cities across Europe came out of lockdown, the first place I noticed the return of live music was not in a club, but on social media. This peripheral awareness of events began with euphoric posts from various places in the world, particularly on Instagram, from the POV of the musician, the DJ, the promoter, the club, the festival. Scrolling, it's rare that any one post catches your attention – you feel the sheer volume.

Before the pandemic, I don't ever remember using the acronym IRL. Now, it rolls off the tongue, or rather the fingertips, and most know what it means: In Real Life. The three words imply a binary, but those Instagram posts suggest confusion. We all exist in a constant blurring of lines between online and offline, shifting every time someone raises their phone to film and post.

Yet the desire to collectively experience music physically together in a room remains wonderfully fierce. At concerts at Unsound in Krakow this year, the focus felt acute; at club events, the crowd felt almost unhinged. Screw aerosol transmission: people *wanted* to be packed in together. It's hard not to be reminded of the Roaring Twenties, the period of excess, change, jazz and dance that followed WWI and the Spanish Flu. Crushed between the rise and fall of the pandemic's curve, and the catastrophic effects of climate change – the Doomsday Clock is currently at 100 seconds to midnight – impatience is in the air, fuelled by the awareness that any return to an approximation of so-called 'normalcy' is, in the end, temporary.

"I want it all," says VTSS – a Polish techno producer and DJ with a savvy grasp of how social media works – in an interview. It's a sentiment that could be shared by countless young producers and musicians positioned between club, experimental and fashion worlds. One must embrace acceleration in order to thrive.

In March 2020, Unsound Krakow was the first of the SHAPE festivals to cancel its annual event, with the announcement that we would pivot online, and also create a book of essays and an album.

In amongst panel discussions, presentations and virtual worlds, the anchor of the online festival was, without doubt, *Weavings*. The project began life with a series of phone calls with its initiator, Nicolás Jaar, who suggested

that despite the deluge of lockdown concerts online, few had approached the format in a truly innovative way.

Musicians performing live-streamed concerts were usually placed in front of a camera, either in their room, a venue or studio, where they would play to an invisible audience. For many, it was a strange, even dispiriting experience. We wondered how to create an online, collaborative show using Zoom, a technology already omnipresent in the abrupt shift to remote working.

Jaar and I dropped in and out of contact, as was often the way in 2020. Miraculously, though, the project came together in a flurry of activity. We engaged 16 performers from across the globe, who played together across 90 minutes according to a set of guidelines created by Jaar, where each artist interacted with those on either side of them. We had to combine technologies to pull the show off, filming in Zoom, but employing the plugin Audiomover to record higher resolution sound with less latency.

Playing the video now, looking at the faces in the Zoom squares, this already feels like a document of a different era. Usually, the artists are not playing. They are waiting to play. The performance is therefore an exercise in patience. Sitting in lockdowns around the world, they peer into their screens, often uncertain what is happening, but then come together – *weave* together – in magical, unexpected ways. Since there is a delay between what each performer plays and another hears, the music is rarely rhythmic. It hypnotises.

Planning an Unsound event in Krakow this year, the first thing we wanted to do was create an IRL version of *Weavings*, again as an anchor of the festival, a clear way to explore the shift of concerts back into the physical world, via a contrast with its previous iteration. Artists were packed on the stage with barely any space to move, alongside gear that had sat in their rooms or studios during the online event.

With so many participants, it could have gone badly, but the tight rules that Jaar had mapped out in a visual score ensured the show made sense. Again, *Weavings* involved patience, and waiting, and listening, for both the artists and the audience, their individual experiences entwining, becoming a collective ritual.

The standing ovation at the end was likely not only for the music itself, but the fact we were all there together.

Andy Warhol once said, "Don't pay any attention to what they write about you. Just measure it in inches." These days, you'd need to measure it in megabytes and likes, something Warhol no doubt would have appreciated. In 2022, after a festival, you get photo galleries instead of written reviews. If you're lucky, they appear with a paragraph of text, otherwise as a post or story on the outlet's Instagram.

The devolution of discourse and criticism around music into image has been exacerbated not only by fashion and the concept of the 'influencer', but the sudden growth of NFTs, crypto tokens usually based around images and videos, even when they include music.

Amnesia Scanner launched their first crypto token at Unsound in 2018 with our Presence edition: a drop taking place across a LAN network during their live set at Hotel Forum. Just three years later, in 2021, NFTs became their

biggest show, a set of 555 meme-like tokens with short audio snippets selling for the equivalent of hundreds of thousands of dollars in total within an hour.

Considering the precarious nature of the music world, one understands artists engaging in – and encouraging – speculation. For some in the experimental music world, buying and selling crypto has become a source of income during the pandemic, something that would have been unimaginable just a short time ago. The life of an artist, though, has always been a form of gambling – some make it, most don't – and as far as the experimental music world goes, their work often involves engaging with new technologies, so is this shift surprising?

Putting on festivals is a form of highly stressful speculation, with many factors that can go wrong, always entangled with the financial. Right now, though, it feels like a real gamble. Events are at the mercy of Covid-19 numbers and variants, lockdowns, travel disruptions – we're in new territory, where the knowns are inverted.

I wrote the first draft of this piece during the weekend of Le Guess Who?, a music festival in Utrecht, Netherlands. Although not physically there, I noticed the festival play out in those fragments on social media feeds.

Their programme this pandemic year appeared massive – an act of enormous optimism, bravery, wilful blindness or all three. On the second day of Le Guess Who?, amongst soaring Covid-19 cases, the Netherlands announced a partial lockdown. Le Guess Who? scrambled to keep the festival going in some form, fitting to regulations by shifting night concerts to daytime, and making standing shows seated. One can imagine the incredible stress and self-questioning. Is it worth it? Are we doing the right thing? The prize for the gamble is in that room, the gathering of artists and audience.

On the last night of Unsound 2021, after *Weavings*, we gathered on Błonia, a public common in the middle of Krakow dating back to medieval times, to experience Annea Lockwood's *Piano Burning*, a piece in which a piano beyond repair is set on fire. A pianist plays until they no longer feel comfortable, and then the piano is engulfed in flames. It was strangely moving, but also somehow cathartic – a cheer and applause came up from the audience when the piano collapsed.

"This is our Wickerman," said musician and composer Robert Aiki Aubrey Lowe, who had presented the score to *Candyman* at Unsound. "The burning of the bad crop, calling in the new, a ceremony." It was an optimistic take: things will be better next year.

We've made a video of *Piano Burning*. It's the kind of footage that could go viral, a concept that Annea Lockwood could not have dreamt of in 1968, when she conceived of the piece – and yet her work makes for highly clickable content. The audience felt this as well, as they held aloft their mobile phones, each bright like a little fire.

Thinking of *Piano Burning's* future life on social media, I'm reminded of another burning that took place this year. After purchasing an original Banksy print for $95,000, the blockchain firm Injective Protocol set it on fire during a livestream. The video was then converted into an NFT and sold. Mirza Uddin, a spokesman for the firm, said, "We view this burning event as an expression of art itself", supposedly intended to inspire artists and tech enthusiasts. The nihilism, cynicism, craving for attention, and – again – speculation are the opposite of Lockwood's work, yet in 2021 the two are connected via fire, spectacle and their conversion into digital form.

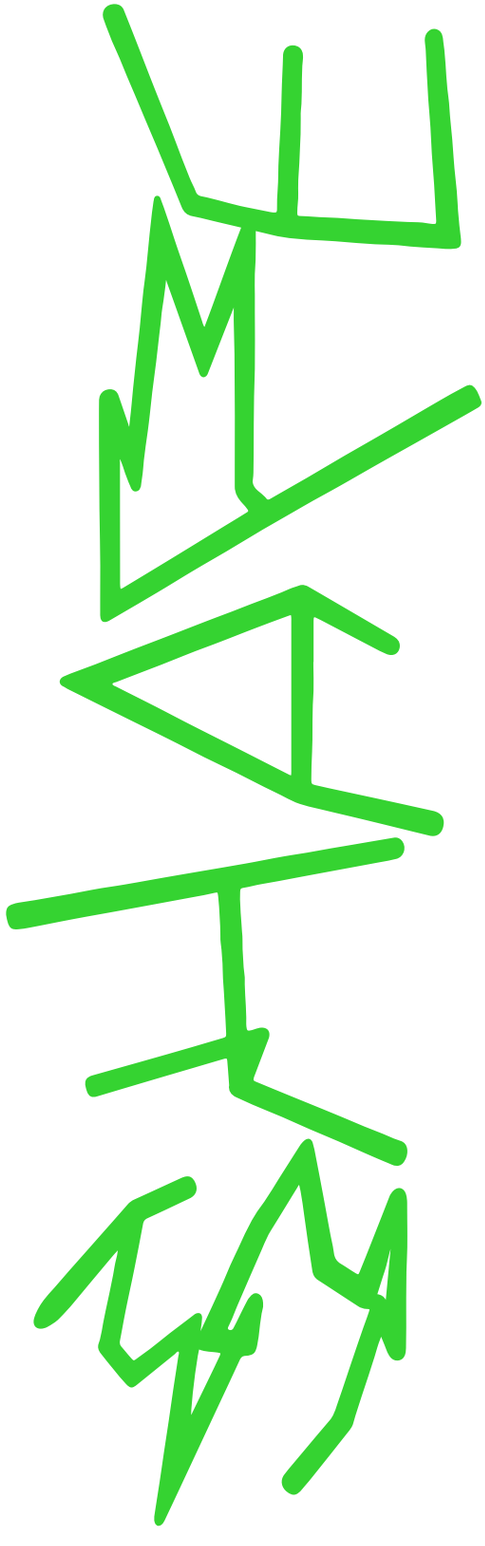
The burnt Banksy evokes another moment, the K Foundation shovelling a million quid – money made from the KLF's hit singles – into a fire in 1994. This burning was recorded on a Hi-8 video camera, with the film afterward touring around the UK, accompanied by Bill Drummond and Jimmy Cauty debating with an audience. Later, in 1997, a work entitled *The Brick* was presented by the K Foundation at the Barbican: a three-minute shot of a brick made of the ashes from the money. Drummond and Cauty never gave a clear answer as to their motivations. One assumes it wasn't even clear to them, but instinctual, a form of rebellion against their own success and wealth.

It's hard to imagine Drummond and Cauty's maverick energy in a world where the notion of 'selling out' barely exists, but there are those who feel it'll be located in Web 3. That we have reached such a moment in culture is confounding to some, thrilling to others, but taking a combative, luddite position in relation to rapid technological change is not the answer. Post-pandemic, things have changed forever, and for anyone in art and music it feels necessary to explore the crevices between the online and IRL worlds – or at the least understand them.

At the same time, I can't help but hope there are teenagers creating music and art who shun Instagram, TikTok, the metaverse, and all the rest of it, for surely one of the most punk things a kid could do right now is log off entirely? Make a space for their voices to grow, unhampered by the constant background noise.

Mat Schulz is the Artistic Director and co-founder of Unsound. He is also a writer.

VTSS and Amnesia Scanner are SHAPE alumni.



SHAPE MEMBERS

Biennale Némo (until 2019)
Paris, France
ARCADI.FR/EVENEMENTS/NEMO-1/

CTM
Berlin, Germany
CTM-FESTIVAL.DE

CYNETART/ depart.one
Dresden, Germany
CYNETART.ORG, DEPART.ONE

Maintenant
Rennes, France
MAINTENANT-FESTIVAL.FR

Insomnia
Tromsø, Norway
INSOMNIAFESTIVAL.NO

Intonal (since 2021)
Malmö, Sweden
INTONALFESTIVAL.COM

Les Siestes Électroniques
Toulouse
LES-SIESTES-ELECTRONIQUES.COM

MeetFactory
Prague, Czech Republic
MEETFACTORY.CZ/EN

SONICA
(MoTA – Museum for Transitory Art)
Ljubljana, Slovenia
MOTAMUSEUM.COM

ORF – musikprotokoll im steirischen herbst
Graz, Austria
MUSIKPROTOKOLL.ORF.AT/EN

RIAM (until 2021)
Marseilles, France
RIAM.INFO

Rokolectiv
Bucharest, Romania
ROKOLECTIV.RO

Schiev
Brussels, Belgium
SCHIEV.COM

Skaņu mežs
Riga, Latvia
SKANUMEZS.LV

Terraforma (since 2020)
Milan, Italy
TERRAFORMAFESTIVAL.COM

TodaysArt
The Hague, Netherlands
TODAYSART.ORG

UH Fest
Budapest, Hungary
UH.HU

Unsound
Kraków, Poland
UNSOUND.PL

SHAPE ARTISTS 2018–2022

2018

ALLEY CATSS HU
ARIELLE ESTHER FR/DE
BÉRANGÈRE MAXIMIN FR
BONAVENTURE PT
CATERINA BARBIERI IT
CATNAPP AR/DE
CHINASKI DE
DECEMBER FR
DEENA ABDELWAHED TN/FR
DJ / MORGIANA HZ AKA KAROLINA KARNACEWICZ PL
ÈLG BE
EOD NO
EWA JUSTKA PL/UK
GIANT SWAN UK
GOLIN BE
GOSHEVEN HU
GRYFY (PIERNIKOWSKI/ GOŁĘBIEWSKI) PL
ISAMA ZING SK
JASSS ES/DE
JOASIHNO DE
JUNG AN TAGEN AT
KATHY HINDE UK
KIMYAN LAW AT
KINGA TÓTH HU

LIFECUTTER SI
MALIBU FR
MIKA OKI BE
NAKED UK/PL
NENE H TR/DE
NINA HUDEJ / WARREGO VALLES SI
NKISI BE/UK/DE
OKLOU FR
OKO DJ FR
PAN DAIJING CN/DE
RED TRIO PT
SARAH FARINA DE
SCHWEFELGELB DE
SINOSC DE
SISSEL WINCENT SE
SOURDURE FR
SWAN MEAT US/DE
TESA LV
TOMOKO SAUVAGE JP/FR
TUTU ES
UMBRA RS
URIEL BARTHÉLÉMI FR
VLADIMIR IVKOVIC RS/DE
YAMANEKO UK

2019

ARASH AZADI IR/AM
ASTRID SONNE DK
AVSLUTA CZ/UK

AZF FR
BALÁZS PÁNDI HU
BAMAO YENDÉ FR
BEAR BONES, LAY LOW BE
BETTY FR
CHAINES UK
CLARA! BE
COMMITTEE HU/NL
CRYSTALLMESS FR
ERWAN KERAVEC FR
HATIS NOIT JP/UK
JESSE FI
JESSICA EKOMANE FR/DE
JONATHAN ULIEL
SALDANHA PT
KATHARINA ERNST AT
KIKIMORE SI
LUCY RAILTON UK/DE
LUTTO LENTO PL
LYRA PRAMUK US/DE
MARIA W HORN SE
MARTA SMILGA / ASTERISK
UNTITLED LV
MICHELA PELUSIO IT
MYAKO FR
NINA GARCIA / MARIACHI FR
OBSEQUIES BE
OCEANIC NL
OD BONGO FR/BE
PATTEN UK

PEACH UK
PERRINE EN MORCEAUX FR
PLUG FR
RESINA PL
RKSS UK
ROBERT CURGENVEN AU/IE
SAD DE
SALLY GOLDING UK/AU
SCHANELL DE
SCHTUM AT
SENTIMENTAL RAVE FR
SOHO REZANEJAD DK
TEYAS (WIDT & CHRISTOPH DE BABALON) DE/PL
TIM SHAW UK
TOUCHIETOUCHIE CZ
VIOLET PT
VOLITION IMMANENT INT

2020

AFRODEUTSCHE UK/DE/GH
ALOÏS YANG FR/DE/CZ
ANIMISTIC BELIEFS NL
AQUARIAN CA/DE
BEN BERTRAND BE
BOROKOV BOROKOV BE
C/A UK
CAM DEAS UK
CÉLINE GILLAIN BE
CLARA DE ASÍS ES/FR

DOROTA HU
ELINA WAAGE MIKALSEN NO
ELVIN BRANDHI UK
FARIDA AMADOU
WITH STEVE NOBLE BE/UK
FAUSTO MERCIER HU
FOQL PL
FRÉDÉRIC GIES SE
HUGO ESQUINCA MX/DE
JAY GLASS DUBS GR
KЙR RS
LAWRENCE LEK UK
LYRA VALENZA DK
LYZZA NL
MA'IWA (AIWA + MA'AM) HU
MARTA DE PASCALIS IT/DE
MOESHA 13 FR
OBJECT BLUE UK
OKTOBER LIEBER FR
OLI XL SE
OLIVER TORR CZ
PETER KUTIN AT
PIEZO IT
POLY CHAIN UA
RIAN TREANOR UK
RICHARD EIGNER AT
ROJIN SHARAFI AT/IR
RRILL BELL AKA
THE PRETERITE US/DE
SACRIFICE SEUL FR

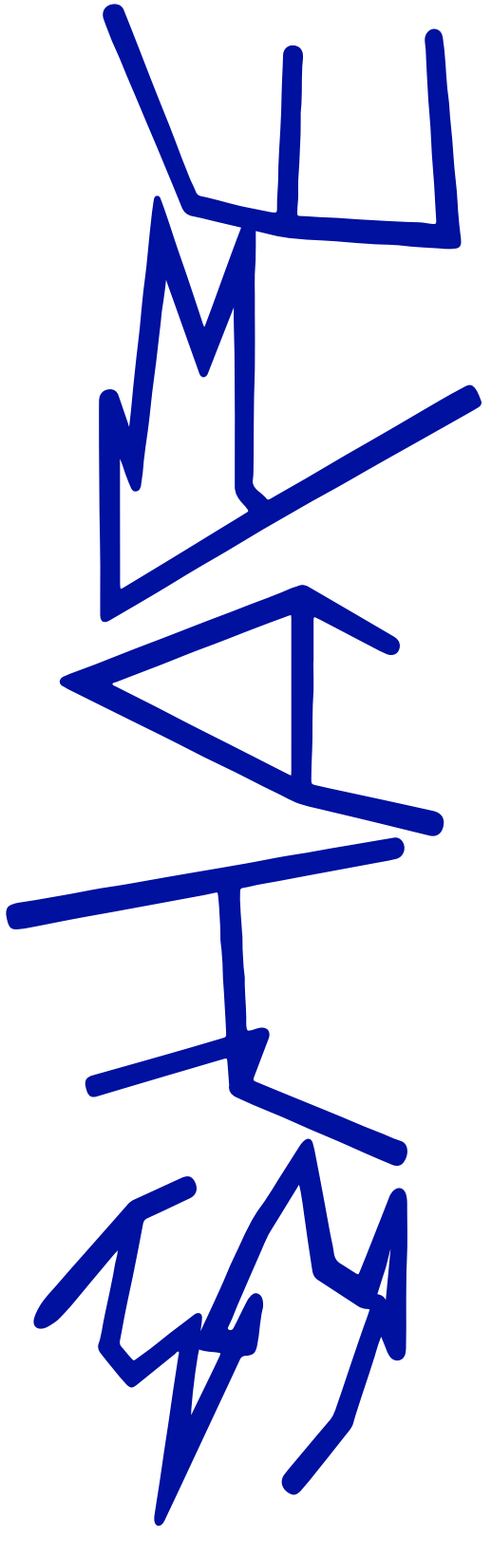
SCHACKE DK
SIMINA OPRESCU RO
ŠIROM SI
STELLAR OM SOURCE FR/BE
SVETLANA MARAŠ RS
TADLEEH IT
UPSAMMY NL
VIRGEN MARÍA ES
VTSS PL/UK
XIN DE
YANN GOURDON FR

2021

ÁBRIS GRYLLUS HU
AMOSPHÈRE CN/FR
APOLLO NOIR & THOMAS
PONS "(UN)RELATED TO GOD" FR
AUDREY CHEN US/DE
AVTOMAT PL
BLACK PULSE AT
BUDOKAN BOYS US/DE
CANILLA NO/DE
EIGER DRUMS
PROPAGANDA FR
ELVI LV
EVIL MEDVĚD UK/CZ
FÉLIX BLUME FR
FOLDABLE
SOUNDS COLLECTIVE INT
GASPAR CLAUS FR

GISCHT AT
GRAND RIVER NL/IT/DE
HEITH IT
HÜMA UTKU TR/DE
JESSIKA KHAZRIK LB/DE
JISKA HUIZING & RUDI VALDERSNES NL/NO
JOHANNA HEDVA KR/US/DE
JULEK PŁOSKI PL
JULIA REIDY AU/DE
KALI MALONE US/SE
KMRU KE/DE
KŒNIG AT
LINDA LEIMANE LV
LISA STENBERG SE
LOUP UBERTO FR
MARK IJZERMAN & SÉBASTIEN ROBERT NL/FR
MATHILDE FERNANDEZ BE
NAZAR AO/BE/UK
NONA INESCU RO
ODETE PT
PAK YAN LAU BE/HK
RICCARDO LA FORESTA IT
SARVENAZ MOSTOFEY IR/DE
SHAPEDNOISE IT/DE
SIKSA PL
SOFIE BIRCH DK
STILL HOUSE PLANTS UK
TERRINE FR

THOOM US/DE
TTRISTANA FR
U.R.TRAX FR
VALENTINA MAGALETTI IT/UK
YANTAN MINISTRY CH/DE
ZOË MC PHERSON UK/FR/DE



SHAPE ARTISTS SELECTED INTERVIEWS 2018–2022

VIOLET ON GROWING UP IN LISBON'S RAVE CULTURE, HER NAIVE LABEL AND WHAT SHE'D CHANGE ABOUT THE MUSIC SCENE

In her home city, Lisbon, Violet contributes to her local scene from different angles. She's the co-founder of the online radio station Rádio Quântica and also resident at mina – a queer rave in unexpected venues. This work permeates Violet's practice as an artist, as she thoughtfully expresses the political history of dance music through her voice and her music. As a producer, she has released music on One Eyed Jacks, Love On The Rocks and Dark Entries, self-released collaborations with artists likes Elles, DEBO – NAIR and Nightwave for International Women's Day, remixed on Cómeme and established her own label – naive.

Can you talk about the environment that formed you: 90s Lisbon? You also later lived in London, where parties are easily accessible and rave/party culture (whether legal or illegal) is part of the country's history.

In nineties Lisbon I was a kid and then a teenager in the second half of the decade, but I was exposed to the rise of rave culture in the country as the first acid house records arrived from London record shops and some key clubs like Alcântara-Mar and Kremlin became very popular – they had resident DJs that would push this sound via compilations that got really big and that I would listen to, just like a lot of young people at the time. So while I was unfortunately too young to attend the first illegal raves and general club nights, I was in touch with the music and the stories that would circulate via our older siblings, etc. While living in London I was already at a nightlife-friendly age of course, and it was hugely inspiring to attend warehouse raves, house parties and also very well curated nights in places like Corsica Studios or Dalston Superstore as well as the now-defunct Plastic People and Dance Tunnel. I brought back to Lisbon a clearer sense of grassroots projects, community dancing and queer nightlife.

You are outspoken about the need for politics and activism in music, which is resonating with the underground dance culture at the moment, but I guess coming from Portugal, which has an authoritarian as well as colonial past, has also had an influence on your outlook and work?

Portugal's past resonates a lot with the collective unconscious whether we like it or not: in my personal case, my grandfather was a political prisoner for criticising the regime by writing on walls in the city of Ponta Delgada. Both my parents were young when the revolution happened – my dad was enforced to serve in Mozambique while being part of the resistance against the regime, he was lucky he had kind of an office clerk position, and my mother, as a history graduate, is very aware of all of the bullshit our country was up to, and made

her children aware of it as well. Both my parents are leftist, and I know that was something that informed my political consciousness from early on. That, mixed with my Aquarian belief that each new generation has a purpose to change society into a more inclusive, emancipated one, made me someone who, like so many of my peers, does what they can when it comes to incorporating political action and ideas in their work.

Can you talk about your activities in Lisbon: Radio Quantica, the naive label as well as the mina parties?

Radio Quântica is the oldest project of them all – it started brewing in 2014 and came to fruition in 2015 – it was a joint effort with Photonz to found it, and nowadays it belongs to the community that was created around it – around 150 broadcasters, most based in Portugal but also abroad, who share a love of spreading the word about great music, old and new; and ideas of inclusion, intersectional feminism and a society that looks after the classically oppressed and works for parity – instead of profiting from them. We broadcast 24/7, and run a little studio within Rua das Gaivotas 6, a beautiful state-funded space put together by Teatro Praga, one of the city's most interesting and multifaceted theatre companies. We also run a series of parties at Lux Frágil, where we showcase fresh talent alongside some of the scene's pioneers in balanced line-ups.

Naive is the label I founded in 2016, where I put out the music I believe in by people I love and trust. It started as an outlet for some of my own music that other labels weren't interested in releasing, and it quickly became a sisterhood of artists around the globe. It's sub-label, naivety, is a bit more freeform, hosting music that isn't necessarily DJ-friendly, serving as a lab for artists to explore all genres, sonics and weirdness as they please – it's Bandcamp-only and a varying % of sales goes to an organisation picked by the artist. Both labels are very artist-focused, each release is worked on at a time, with the respective artist participating in all the decisions, from tracklist to artwork to words.
mina is a party, started in 2017, by marum, Photonz, Viegas and me, and it became a collective of over ten people – and a huge community of hundreds of ravers who are very faithful to the events, given that this is one of the few parties that is politically vocal: mina has a safer space policy, a careful door selection, is sex positive and provides non-judgemental harm reduction of party substance consumption, has gender-neutral bathrooms and a ravers' care team to look after everyone. We have a team of six residents: marum, BLEID, ketia, Viegas, Photonz and myself and our bookings try to create meaningful line-ups with artists from other queer crews around the world who are making and playing vital music in our view. It's, like the projects above, a community-building project and a true labour of love that is playing an important part in changing Lisbon's dance underground into a more conscious arena, and less of a boys club.

How is the scene in Lisbon now?

Buraka Som Sistema and Principe Discos have been key catalysts of a fresh danceable sound coming out of Lisbon in the present decade – Principe has the best artist roster in recent memory, in my opinion – there's also an interesting improv scene in places like ZDB, a historical venue with impeccable programming and ethics. There are parts of the dance/electronic scene that are a bit more male-dominated and gate-keepery that I'm less interested in, but there are also definitely pockets of realness in beautiful efforts like Brave, Kit Ket, Çirca, Maternidade, the Rama em Flor festival, Paraíso, Suspension (check out the new compilations on these last two labels/party collectives, as they provide a great insight into our local underground that matters: the one that includes and actively searches for womxn, non-binary, queer people).

What three things would you change about the (underground) electronic music scene at the moment, if you could?

I would limit the involvement of brands and therefore capitalistic motivations in underground efforts, namely events; I would normalise the idea of safer spaces, door policies and non-gendered bathrooms for parties if they want to be considered valid for dance music's age-old ethos; and I would definitely consider the unwritten rules of credibility obsolete, once and for all: for example, what genres and labels are 'good taste' and what aren't; what kind of software or hardware music producers should use to compose and perform, what format and technology DJs should play in, etc. – these are all outdated notions that serve the purpose of privilege-maintenance for voices that have taken up too much space in the past decades.

EARTHQUAKES, COLLIDING GALAXIES AND SLUGS SLIDING DOWN A WET WINDOW: AN INTERVIEW WITH AUDREY CHEN

Audrey Chen is a second-generation Chinese/Taiwanese-American musician who was born into a family of materials scientists, doctors and engineers. Parting ways with the family convention, she turned to the cello at age eight and voice at eleven. After years of classical and conservatory training in both instruments, with a resulting specialisation in early and new music, she parted ways again in 2003 to begin new negotiations with sound in order to discover a more individually honest aesthetic. Since then, using the cello, voice and occasional analogue electronics, Chen's work delves deeply into her own version of narrative and non-linear storytelling.

A large component of her music is improvised, is completely unprocessed, and her approach to this is extremely personal and visceral. Her playing explores the combination and layering of an analogue synthesiser, preparations, and traditional and extended techniques in both the voice and cello. She works to join these elements into a singular ecstatic personal language. Over the past decade plus, her predominant focus has been her solo work with the cello, voice and electronics, but she has more recently begun to shift back towards the exploration of the voice as a primary instrument. Aside from her solo concerts, Chen performs currently in a duo with Phil Minton; as HISS & VISCERA, with modular synth player Richard Scott; as BEAM SPLITTER with trombonist Henrik Munkeby Nørstebø; as MOPCUT with Lukas König and Julien Desprez; as a trio in SEN RYO NO with modular synth players Tara Transitory and Nguyen Baly; in a duo with electronic music artist Kaffe Matthews; and as the duo VOICE/PROCESS for voice/live digital process with Mexican sound artist Hugo Esquinca.

How did growing up in a family that was from a scientific background of engineers and doctors lead you to embrace art and music?

This story is intertwined with being a child of immigrants, because it's another level of pressure in terms of career choice and philosophical ideas about how one should make a living and live one's life when you have parents that are from a completely different cultural background than your own. My mother was born in mainland China. As a child, she and her family were exiled when Mao Zedong took over and they escaped to Taiwan. My father was born in Taiwan during the Japanese occupation. They met while at college in Taiwan and subsequently moved to the US in the late sixties to get their master's and PhD degrees at the University of Minnesota. Shortly afterwards, my sister was born, then my brother and me. How did their story influence my future? – I guess it's because they gave birth to an American kid and I was the youngest of three. Perhaps I was given more latitude than my two older siblings, although I felt a lot of pressure to in some way follow in the footsteps of my brother and my sister, both

being very scientifically and mathematically inclined. Of course, my parents wanted me to become a doctor, lawyer or engineer – something useful. I had a very different way of thinking, which was more Western, more individualistic. I was given the opportunity, or rather I took the opportunity – by being born in and growing up in the States – to choose my own path.

In retrospect, I think the whole music thing came about because I chose something that could be my own and created a space that I could take refuge in. A child of immigrants and a member of a minority in the US, I grew up in a very small town, which was basically all white. And the way that I dealt with this sort of exclusion in school was to find something that was all my own. Through that I discovered music, especially through listening to the radio and then being able to start playing a string instrument at school. I chose the cello at the age of eight. I took part in youth orchestras and found singing when I was 11 while attending weekend rehearsals at NEC, Boston. Eventually, I went on to study voice in college in both New York and Baltimore. I found my place in classical music, which created a space where I could concentrate, hide away, and also develop skills and a rigorous technical foundation for both my instruments.

And then you had another transgressive moment in 2003, when you embraced a more experimental type of music production.

In 2000, when I was 23, I gave birth to my son and consequently, my life turned upside down. I hadn't even graduated from conservatory at that point, was living in Baltimore, and I happened to meet some people who introduced me to a different process of playing and listening to music, a way to rethink what was beautiful and what was ugly, how to think beyond the binary and try to understand social conditioning in music and aesthetics. I was young, had a young child and didn't know what was possible in terms of how to build a career given this new format. And I didn't understand how to combine this with being a young mother. It was exactly around this time that I discovered that another (and similar) sort of improvisatory process – young parenthood – could coexist inside of the music I wished to create and the career I began to envision, and I basically improvised my own sort of path.

It's also interesting that these changes in terms of new paths in music could be seen as an expression of a strong personal will or reaction to external circumstances that you were trying to deal with.

I was introduced to this process of being able to make music while not knowing how to navigate any of it in a practical way. This new foundation of my practice is and was being able to switch quickly into a state of doing, becoming fully present. It's a lot about presence and deeply occupying the moment and the now, which is a perfect way to work when you have a kid. My practice developed in tandem with being a young single mom. I had to bring my son on tour with me a lot. And it wasn't easy. Being a single mom, especially in the States, was a struggle. There wasn't very much external support. I had a lot of part-time jobs alongside touring, while trying to hold onto some semblance of financial stability. It gave me strength and made me resilient and creative in every single way. I continued to pursue my practice and be as present as I could for my

child while he was growing up. He's 21 this year and has not only survived, but has flourished. He is my biggest accomplishment to this date, and remarkably I managed, even with his completely unstandardised childhood, to raise an extraordinarily smart, empathetic, kind and well-balanced human being.

I guess experimental music, especially in the early 2000s, 2010s, was quite male-dominated. Men were able to continue their artistic practice even while having families, unlike many of the women in the field.

There were almost no women who had kids at that time. I felt very isolated, although I met some mother musicians here and there, a few in New York, but not in Baltimore, and especially not my age. What I see here in Berlin, around Europe and in the States these days is that younger women in their late twenties and thirties are having kids and they're able to continue their careers. There's more support for that, it's more accepted and it's really awesome to see. Festivals are thinking about it and being more supportive of these women, and so are their partners.

When you perform/improvise, do you feel fear? Especially not knowing sometimes what you're going to perform? What sort of feelings do you have?

It's my work and my life. And it's not that I don't exactly know what's going to happen, I just don't plan that moment out. There is a little bit of fear, but I think that's healthy. The adrenaline and endorphins kick in, and then I arrive on stage and amongst the audience, I feel quiet. From that point, I am carrying the responsibility of the moment and I feel grateful. I find it actually much more daunting to speak in public than to make sound because in sound, I am creating an alternative language, which helps me to more deeply express all the underlying intentions, emotions and thought processes.

I think a lot about how to open up my own story to others in order for them to feel more free.

So, you have in mind an interaction with the listeners.

When I perform, the audience is part of the action and life of that moment. And while they listen and witness, I am right there with them, letting the moment unfold. And in terms of the wider audience, I think about how my decisions can have an effect on their lives. It's not that I've always thought this way, but it sort of developed. I think it's partially because I've been a mother for basically all of my adult life. I think about how my actions have affected my son, how he's turned out... I am constantly sussing out my usefulness and why doing what I do has meaning. I believe that my lived life has meaning, my parents, my grandparents and what they've given me. This all is inextricably intertwined with my artistic process and the sonic language I create. The act of sharing this, that's important to me.

In an older interview, you mentioned that communities and scenes can be damaging. Do you still think this way, do you feel part of a certain, let's say experimental scene?

I guess that was ten years ago and I've changed my viewpoint a bit since then. I think scenes and communities are very useful for people, depending on who you are and what you need. A lot of people really need community in order to flourish. And it depends on what kind of community. I suppose that I'm part of a global community. And actually, I feel very interconnected with a lot of people in a lot of different places, although personally I don't feel I belong to any community in particular. I kind of dip into different scenes in different communities and I like having that freedom.

I just feel I have my own trajectory and I don't like my path to be dictated by others. For the majority of my life, it was really busy enough for me to just try to make a living and raise my kid without being caught up in lots of other things. Now I find myself in this weird spot where I've kind of gone through this transition of empty nesting, and I have to find a new role for myself. I'm still trying to figure out how to be an adult without a child, so to speak.

Also, it's a weird time for this process because we're in this pandemic period. I've been separated from my son, a student at UCLA, a lot longer than we have ever been apart, which has been very difficult, but miraculously we've become a lot closer through this very particular trauma, keeping even more closely in touch than before.

Do you feel that all of this is influencing your art?

Totally, it's always been interconnected.

Is there anything concrete that you are producing now, or that you are channelling at the moment in terms of your sound work?

Recently, I made a video that premiered for ISSUE Project Room in New York. They commissioned me to do a piece for the *With Womens Work* series, which was inspired by a specific composition in a collection of works called *With Womens Work*, compiled by Annea Lockwood and Alison Knowles in 1975.

I have a lot of different projects, actually. The sound language I use exists in a similar sort of way in all the projects, although each context is quite different. I'm working with Hugo Esquinca, who was part of the SHAPE platform last year. We have a recording that we produced last year as part of a live recorded performance inside Savvy Contemporary's platform *Bodi No Be Fayawood*, a programme within Jazzfest Berlin 2020, and we're looking for a label to release it. And then with MOPCUT, which is with Lukas Koenig, who's also part of the platform this year (Ed. note: 2021–2022), and with Julian Desprez, who is a SHAPE alumnus. We're working on finishing a new album. I'm working with Tara Transitory and Baly Nguyen on a new album as well. And I'm quite proud of the one recording released during this last year that represents my first collaboration with Kaffe Matthews, *Breathing air as dark swallows*, released on Cafe Oto's Takuroku label. It sort of represents this entire period of recording material very closely miked with headphones, a kind of process I hadn't inhabited so much before, being a primarily live performing artist. The entire album is breathing, entangling voice and oscillating electronics.

One thing I've been doing throughout the entire Covid period thus far, almost weekly or bi-weekly, has been a Zoom improvisation correspondence

with Phil Minton, who's based in the UK. He hasn't been able to go anywhere for over a year now because he's 80. He's fully vaccinated, but we're just waiting for gigs to restart. This has been a kind of diary of improvisations we've been putting together. I'm not sure what to do with them yet, but it's been really inspiring work and a meaningful regular outlet for us both.

There's this really nice quote by Phil Minton on your website: "Singing with Audrey is like working with all the possible noises of the universe and beyond, earthquakes, colliding galaxies and slugs sliding down a wet window, very quiet." The voice is also a very important part of your work. You form sounds that are sometimes very surreal and pliable. You also said that the voice can be alienating and attracting at the same time.

Many of the sounds I make began with very pedestrian and simple sounds. When my son was a baby, I started to notice how he explored his new reality with all his senses, and he had an immense freedom in how he tested his voice in the world. In a sense, from the very beginning, we were improvising together all the time, a mother-son duo. He inspired me to explore all these simple sounds and use my technique to push them further and further. I found it curious that his perspective developed in line with my explorations and my changing attitudes towards sound and language. Being so symbiotically linked, we grew together, and even as the more normative social influences crept in, he was able to maintain his openness.

He's in college right now, studying to become a mechanical engineer, which is a totally different career path, but his ear is very open because he's grown up around so much weird music. I think it's a lot about education. What you perceive to be beautiful and ugly, what you perceive to be the sound of something organic or not, what sound is centred and what is othered. These perspectives are so flexible depending on where you're from and what your experiences have been.

These various techniques of voice alteration are widely used in pop music nowadays; people have become accustomed to digital modifications of the human voice. It seems that people more readily accept these digital modifications than my physical alterations/hyperextensions of the voice. I don't use any effects on my voice at all.

I create these techniques with my body in a weird muscular way. When people hear something auto-tuned, for instance, that's recognisable and they kind of accept it. But if I make an inhaling, clicking sound, utilising a constriction of my vocal chords, people sometimes get a little bit freaked out. It's an issue of perspective and expectation.

In terms of the techniques that you work with, are you planning to change them or work with technology in the future?

I have worked with people who have used technology in order to enhance my sound. Hugo, for instance, processes my voice. I don't do it myself and leave it to the experts. I use some analogue technology, but not to alter organic sounds that I make. My process is to try to create and manipulate sound 'manually',

without the help of technology. I want to use my body to physically invigorate or trigger a sound that resides within me and my capabilities, which is ever growing. There's much more territory for me to explore. My voice has already transformed over the years and it will continue as my body and mind grow older. When I had my son at 23, my entire voice changed due to the hormonal shift. So, even while working in a 'classical way' with my voice, I had to relearn a lot of things because the whole placement of my voice lowered. I started as a soprano and then I went down to being more of a mezzo and alto. And all of this was directly affected by the process of childbirth.

And how do you see the next few months (Ed. note: interview conducted in May 2021)? Do you think that concerts will restart? Do you have any expectations, or do you think about what will be the aftermath of it all?

I have some things planned and some that are pending. I'm just waiting to see if they're postponed or cancelled. Today I have to go to Cologne and give a workshop for a vocal ensemble and then next week I'm in Marseille for a live performance, but not for the public. It's a lot of waiting. But that's okay. I'm a bit impatient, but at the same time, I'm 'in my mid-forties' impatient, not 'in my twenties' impatient; time passes differently.

As frustrating as it is, because culture has been so muted in the last year, I feel quite fortunate to be in Berlin as an American because there's a lot of financial support that you can apply for. Last year, I actually applied for grant funding, which I have almost never done in my life. So yes, I'm patient because I can afford to be patient, but also, I think if I was in the States, I would feel much more desperate. So, I feel quite grateful to be located here right now. My son is okay and although he's had to do all of his studies online, things are opening up now and he should have a more or less normal senior year. And my parents are fine, they're safe in Taiwan where they have very few Covid cases, although I won't be able to see them until they're fully vaccinated.

BREAKING DOWN TRADITIONAL BOUNDARIES, IMAGINING NEW IDENTITIES: AN INTERVIEW WITH LYRA PRAMUK

Lyra Pramuk fuses classical vocalism, pop sensibilities, performance practices and contemporary club culture in what can best be described as futurist folk music. Citing musical collaborators such as Holly Herndon and Colin Self, collaborations with the visual artist Donna Huanca, freelance writing projects, and an ongoing international performance schedule, there are a variety of creative nodes that feed back into Lyra's practice.

In Prague at the SHAPE workshop in 2019, you had an interesting lecture about your vocal influences. Can you maybe describe them here and their importance for your own work?

I think it's interesting to be quite honest about which artists or tracks have inspired me. I often take the "feeling" I get from music I most love and try to reproduce that embodied feeling in my own demos, whether that's through a certain emotion conveyed in the singer's phrase, or through a rhythmic or textural idea, or something else entirely. It could be a feeling-feeling, or a musical feeling. Listening to music is an enjoyable and important part of my practice! Elizabeth Fraser of the Cocteau Twins has been a big inspiration for me in terms of rethinking ways of using language, text, and the physical voice within the framework of accessible melodic lines. The mid-twentieth century experimental soprano Cathy Berberian opened many windows for me in terms of how musical and aesthetic references can be evoked sonically through singing and extended vocal technique. I've learned a lot about devotional song through the study of singers like Abida Parveen and Shobha Gurtu, and while I'm not Muslim nor Hindu and did not grow up in either of these musical traditions, the sheer beauty and power of these songs have inspired me for years to think about my own forms of spiritual devotion within my own practice and personal spirituality.

In one interview you mentioned that when you were 16, you wanted to pursue music profes- sionally and that you practised for several hours, learning to sing in several languages. The teenage years are some of the most formative for our later life. Can you talk about this period?

So the practice and many languages didn't come until a couple years later, when I went to a music conservatory. I was actually pretty lazy before that, haha. And I am trying not to be lazy now, but not always successfully. In my teenage years, I was living in my small town where I grew up, and knew I needed to move somewhere else to continue my education and career and explore new ideas. So I think I was very focused in those years on channeling some sort of energy and seriously thinking about how I wanted to be involved in arts and music culture. But of course, the entire frame of what was possible grew for me once I started traveling and studying more. The formal music education where I grew up was based on classical, jazz, and marching band. So this is where I started from, while also being into electronic music production, which I'd worked on with my brother since we were 13 or 14. In a way, I've been fusing that formal education with my love of pop and electronic music since adolescence.

You've been open on social media and also in your performances about your personal realm, about your transition, some of the difficulties you've been through. How important is this transparency and openness to the public, as an artist, in your opinion?

That's a personal choice for each individual. But I do believe that transparency, when one has the energy for it, helps us to understand each other and helps us to break down traditional boundaries, imagine new identities, and enact new ways of relating to each other. And not just impressive or good things, but also difficult things. I was interested in virtual identity, simulation, and science fiction before I even knew any queer people or knew what queerness was. I think that the more I am able to realise and act upon the fact that I am a post-human cyborg, enmeshed with software, hardware, hormones, and a meta-identity built upon the ideas and concepts I believe in and am hyperlinked to, the better I am able to express myself, relate to other post-human agents, and engage in some form of community that feels real.

Another thing you mentioned at your Prague workshop was to be nice/kind, which is something that tends to be forgotten in this scene, which is focused mainly on the self and its promotion.

It's hard, since the nature of this industry forces us to focus on ourselves in a lot of ways in order to make ends meet. But of course, we are all in this together, especially in the experimental music scene. Whether you get my music or my life or not, or whether I get yours immediately or not. That's what's cool about this scene, we're all different. There are layers of understanding we can slowly unwrap for each other.

It makes me feel sad to think that we live in a world where it's easier to chase social media clout and isolate ourselves like solitary 'bad bitches'. But we forget that's not always how we've been; that's how the platforms are designed. The first step is to be aware that the social media platforms and algorithms are not designed to connect us, they're designed to addict us and capitalise upon us. Our souls are being harvested through the screens of our phones by a few powerful tech bros who probably couldn't care less about us. We need each other more than we need them.

You've collaborated with Holly Herndon and Colin Self, artists pushing the boundaries of contemporary music & performance, who also somehow reflect the sociopolitical context around them and utilise the latest technologies. Can you talk about why you chose to work with them and how the whole experience was for you?

I think it was natural to work with Colin and Holly and I'm extremely glad they found their ways into my life and wanted to work with me too! I had known of Colin and Holly's work independently and admired them both before we even met. I'm lucky to have both of them to discuss so many topics with, it makes me feel that I'm not alone in contemplating so many aspects of the world. We actually first met when I was visiting Unsound for the first time in 2015!

JULEK PŁOSKI: ‘THE MORE ENGAGING THE MUSIC, THE SAFER I FELT’

When you’re a DJ Hero expert you have to go on and do something more. you live too close to Tesco so you make an album devoted to it, you move to Warsaw, you play some gigs, you play some more gigs (one of them at Unsound), you release your second album, *śpie*, on Gin&Platonic and there’s a lot of other stuff coming up that you will release someday. you work on your third LP for Orange Milk Records, you do kickboxing bum bum and finally fall asleep and finally wake up and finally fall asleep and do kickboxing bum bum.
We had a chat – literally, over Messenger – one evening ahead of his performance at Unsound Festival 2021.

How are you? Preparing for Unsound?
I’m probably more overworked than ever in my life. I’m preparing for Unsound, finishing my third LP, doing some graphic design gigs, a day job, studying. It’s really hard and I’m not getting enough sleep, but there’s just a few more days of this and then I’ll be free. So I’m also very, very excited about the things to come. Maybe more excited than ever. Even during this interview, I’m trying to finish this new track haha.

Do you think this constantly being busy is some typical part of these times?
Totally.

Why do you think it’s like that and what are the ways to counter it?
Almost all of my friends (especially art friends) are always doing something and always in the middle of some serious project. We’re always too poor and always not paid enough and very often treated shittily as contract workers. I don’t have any idea how to counter it. I would love to have one, because maybe then I wouldn’t have to work so much.

You have a day job in addition to your music I guess?
Yes, but not for long! I’m doing graphic design, editing and animations for motivational coaches BUT I’m finally quitting in a few days from now.

And then you’ll focus on music full time?
I’ll try to make a living from making music, which has been my biggest dream ever. The risk is really high, but I’m finally willing to take it. I can’t wait to be poor because of being paid shittily for my music. It’s way better than being paid shittily for work for motivational coaches!

I’m also asking because your first album was called *Tesco*.
Oh yes, I remember that album!

Was this in some way related to this topic, capitalism etc?
Naah. I named the album this way because I was living next to the biggest Tesco in the city. It was more of a personal than a social issue thing.

But your albums are conceptual, no? Related to a certain topic or issue, like śpie or *Human Sapiens*. *śpie* was about sleep, while *Human Sapiens* addressed homophobia in Poland.
Yes! śpie was about the time when I had non-stop, almost daily sleep paralysis and *Human Sapiens* is about trying to feel like a real human in a country which is erasing LGBT+ people.

So in a way, for you music is a channel for expressing personal issues, as well as comments on society at large?
It's really hard for me to directly address some social issues through my art. I think words are a better tool for that, at least in my case. My music is always about me and it's always personal. For example, *Human Sapiens Ep* was for sure about homophobia in Poland, but it was only a side effect.

In the liner notes to *Human Sapiens*, the term "self-therapy" is mentioned.
The album was created for me to cope with the feeling of rejection and to find a safe space.

What sort of rejection?
Social rejection, I guess. It was not easy for me to grow up in a smaller Polish town, and the constant fear of being harmed on the street because of the way you walk, dress, smile etc. unfortunately stayed with me. That's why I wanted to make some really escapist, fast, colourful, sharp beats. The more engaging the music, the safer I felt.

Do you feel being part of a more global (music) movement can help alleviate these local threats? Is there a correlation?
I'm not sure if I feel like a part of a movement and I'm not sure if it can really help. For me, the biggest help was always my wonderful friends. Talking with them and hugging them are the most precious things I have. The second best thing is therapy, haha.

What is your relationship to fastness in music?
I love dancing to very fast music, but lately it's getting harder and harder for me to do this at home.

Dancing at home?
I mean, it's harder for me to enjoy this kind of music at home

I can imagine. What music have you been listening to at home lately?
Well, it's really hard for me to listen to hyperpop and I've almost completely stopped following that scene. I'm listening mostly to movie soundtracks, especially Johnny Greenwood and Jon Brion. I'm listening to *The White Lotus* soundtrack on repeat, but haven't watched the show yet. That's why on my third LP I'm trying to connect slow, epic, orchestral melodies with pretty fast, Eurodance synths.

You also run glamour.label. Can you talk about the label?
We're trying to keep glamour as fluid as we can. We've released beautiful wobbly harpsichord tunes, post-jazz, bubblegum stock music, hyperpop, abstract, dystopian electronics, gabber and colourful, singeli-inspired tracks.

Do you feel in general that these days music genres are obsolete, unimportant? That it's a hybrid of styles and approaches?
Sure, nowadays every field of art works that way. Everything, or almost everything, is based on references. For example, we're now working simultaneously on a reggaeton release, a doom metal release and a post-internet sound collage release.

What do you think is the thing that brings all these together on your label?
There's just too much good music in this world to focus on one field/genre. Our releases are of course tied together somehow by our aesthetic, but we're trying to limit ourselves as rarely as we can.

And what about your references?
Lately, it's mostly movie soundtracks. I love big instruments, big drums, big choirs and big emotions. Okay, movie soundtracks are not all about big things, but this is the aspect that is most inspiring for me. Lately, it's mostly been movie soundtracks, especially horror soundtracks! I love music from *The Omen* and *The Beyond* soundtrack might be my favourite soundtrack of all time. I'm trying to connect these influences with some Euro tunes. I love Scooter, Basshunter, Gigi d'Agostino and also some Polish classics like Kalwi & Remi or Stachursky.

Cool! And what are your dreams?
Making a living from music would be the best thing in the whole world. I just want to make music all day and not die of hunger.

BALÁZS PÁNDI: ON TOURING SQUATS, BOOKING SHOWS PRE-GPS AND WORKING WITH MERZBOW

"When the time predicated finally comes & human clones are reproduced en masse': my vote for the first musician to be dubbed is the almighty Balazs Pandi. Home base as Budapest, Hungary: this looming drummer has all the corner chops covered from Repulsion-blast beasts to the futuristic urban free scree of the New York Art Ensemble. Starting out a metal thrash & hardcore skin pounder of local energy units: Balazs soon got hit headfirst into the avant jazz world and has since jammed with Wadada Leo Smith, Arthur Doyle, Trevor Dunn, Jamie Saft, Joe Morris & Roswell Rudd. If that wasn't threatening enough: Pandi has also branched into the PA-Mangling World of free electronics scattered with continued live and studio recordings with the master of noise Masami Akita aka Merzbow, free-sludge rockers Porn, world consumer Bill Laswell and Mr. Godflesh himself Justin Broadrick- and jazz crossed-stream polluters Mats Gustafsson & Sonic Youths' almighty Thurston Moore..." *John Olson, Life Is a Rip Off*

You started organising gigs in Budapest pretty early on. Can you talk about this period, and how it formed you?

I started to book punk/hardcore shows when I was 17, and I keep booking sporadically to this day. For me, it has always been an important part of touring: to offer something in return, and to make things happen locally. The pre-GPS, pre-EU, pre-'cellphone on every broke person' routine was like this: cooking all day, going with the pot to a specific gas station outside Budapest to make sure we didn't miss each other.

Go to the venue. The next day, getting up, sightseeing Budapest as much as possible so the bands leave with something to remember. Coming from the DIY punk scene, touring squats with my grindcore bands at a young age, sleeping on the floor, cooking for bands, had made me prepared for the road by the time I started to tour more frequently, and helped me appreciate the smallest things. I still consider myself part of this scene.

You've been gravitating towards the more "extreme" sides of music: metal, breakcore, noise. What attracts you to them in particular?

There is nothing conscious about this. This level of energy seems to be my comfort zone when I play. When I listen, it's quite different. Outside of the stack of Merzbow records that I have, I might only have a handful of noise records. I prefer to listen to jazz, blues, dub and folk music from the Caucasus these days.

Can you describe how your drumming developed over the years, and, if you have some special techniques, could you mention them?

Not sure if I use any special technique. In my approach, I was conscious about expanding my vocabulary, instead of building a completely new one, as people who

used to be in punk bands do, and want to be strictly jazz drummers. I don't want to erase my past. The shit I play might not sound perfect, but perfection is not in my nature, polished things have never resonated with me. What was important was when I started to travel more frequently to the US, and play with masters like Jamie Saft, Joe Morris, Wadada Leo Smith, Trevor Dunn, Roswell Rudd, Marshall Allen, Danny Ray Thompson, Mats Gustafsson, etc. etc. They were all supportive and interested in my approach, and I can't give them enough credit. I think those sessions in Jamie's upstate studio and their acceptance were pivotal in shaping my approach to drums and my role as a drummer in any situation.

You've been touring and working with several legendary musicians, such as Merzbow, Keiji Haino, Thurston Moore, etc. Do you have any memorable moments from these collaborations?

Once I had breakfast with Masami (Merzbow) and Haino-san (Keiji Haino) in Vienna. It was great that they both helped each other with translation, so they could explain to me the social climate of their teenage years. We had a deep conversation, and I really appreciated their efforts to tell me everything about these things. Another Keiji Haino story is from a year ago, when we were recording our upcoming album on which he plays bass guitar on the majority of the record. We were supposed to do five to seven-minute takes. Then we found this bass guitar in the studio and the first take ended up lasting over an hour. When we finished the take, he looked up and said with a great smile: "I, enjoy!" I could probably go on and on, like the story about getting thrown out of a record store in Berlin with Masami during our first tour. But it's been almost 10 years of touring and recording and there are many things to remember.

Working as a journalist, organising gigs and generally living in times that are quite politically turbulent – especially in the Central European region – what potential do musicians and music have in terms of politics and activism?

Locally, I think our main problem is apathy, which comes from the fact that we don't have a coherent, organised option on the left either. The fact that the former far-right party and the left are marching next to each other at protests says it all: how desperate the few people who still care are. I feel that after they (the governing Fidesz party) won another term with a two-thirds majority, a lot of people just gave up. The night they won, I posted a quote from a Townes van Zandt interview, where he says his songs are not sad, but hopeless. I'm not sure what we can do as artists. I'm vocal about my opinion. Recently with Masami, we kicked out a band from the bill because it actually plays with Nazi bands. This is the type of shit I can't tolerate on any level. I think this whole populist stuff got so far because we thought we'd learned the lesson and buried these currently re-emerging ideas a long time ago, so we weren't vocal about it.

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THE MINDSET OF AN EXPLORER – A CONVERSATION WITH HÜMA UTKU

Born and raised in Istanbul, Berlin-based electronic music composer and sound artist Hüma Utku explores the possibilities of how sound textures and rhythm can be used to evoke a sense of the ancient within electronic music. With an overall disregard for musical genre divisions, she fuses field recordings, acoustic instruments, and atmospheric ambience into harmonious noise and harsh ritualistic rhythms as a means to utilising sound and music as tools for storytelling. Combining her practice of music with her studies in psychology, Utku's works draw inspiration from the human condition, Jungian psychology, mysticism and folklore. Her debut album *GNOSIS* (DL/LP) was released in July 2019 via Karlrecords.

How have you been in the last year? How do you feel about the return of nightlife and cultural events in general?

Honestly, I'm an introvert who has taught herself to be sociable when needed. So I'm OK with spending extended periods of time with social restrictions. Also, Berlin as a city teaches one about individual time and social time, like, we're all alone, but together. That aside, I was extremely lucky to be able to complete my residency at Elektronmusikstudion (which was delayed from May 2020 to October 2020) in a short window of time when the studio was open last year. I recorded a lot there, so when I came back to Berlin just in time for a long lockdown, I had a lot of material to work with and build on. So, I spent the following eight months composing and recording, completely undisturbed.

Obviously, this whole period has been a rough time for the collective so I tried to keep myself centred and support my people & community throughout this. Still trying to do so. Now it feels motivating to see cultural events slowly coming back. It was extremely distressing to watch culture workers and nightlife being shut down. I fully believe that arts and culture are the arteries of society, this is what makes us human.

In your work, you explore a certain sense of the ancient, the primordial. Can you talk about the concept of the ancient in your music? Do you have a specific image of an era or history in mind?

I don't necessarily refer to a linear sense of time. It's more about what is primitive, instinctive in us. Culturally ancient, but not necessarily traditional. It transcends words and trends. It is cyclical; a place we visit every time, but in a different state each time.

Is the concept of the uncanny something you feel close to in terms of creative work?

I don't necessarily intend to sound that way, but I always find myself investigating dualities in sound and concept – so I guess that might feel a bit uncanny.

You studied psychology. What concepts and ideas from this field can be applied in music? (Is psychoacoustics something you're into?)

Music and sound actually have a special place in the science of psychology. Aside from having its own centre in the brain, the auditory cortex, listening to music will fire up a whole neural network, while playing a musical instrument would be a strong exercise of the brain, given the simultaneous physical effort and auditory processing of it. If you add scale progressions and the emotional response they trigger in the person, this takes a whole other form. I am interested in all these things; however, I am nowhere near being a professional who has spent their lives researching this. Yet I am a conceptual artist and my concept is the core of my art. I draw a lot of inspiration and I give direct references to topics of studied psychology, especially through the lens of analytical psychology. Recently, Gestalt psychology and neuropsychology have also inspired my works.

What do you think about projects like Endel, which claim to create functional/utilitarian (for sleep, for relaxing) soundscapes based on neuroscience?

I actually recently found myself on a website where I could very easily set up ambient sound and music, even mix it to my taste. I thought it was genius, I listened to a Gregorian chant in a church on that website (I wish I remembered the name). I think these are merely the followers of how ancient spiritual systems have used sound, without necessarily knowing the complete science behind it. It also makes you think how weak the human will is when triggered by sound. We physically react to it, beyond our control.

Your debut album *Gnosis* was recorded across Greece, Egypt and Turkey, and explores various forms of human experience across time and space. What does this album mean to you and how did you source and implement its various elements?

Recording *Gnosis* was a complete adventure on many levels. I did field recordings during 2017 and 2018 in Cairo, Luxor, Crete and Istanbul. These years were also personally intense for me, so when I started processing them and composing around them in the summer of 2018, the stories pretty much started unravelling themselves. Higher knowledge of the universe and the truth are the main inspirations behind that album. I'm already a very spiritual person, with the mindset of an explorer, and some revelations I experienced during that time resulted in *Gnosis*. The story wanted to tell itself and I just put it into chapters.

How does it differ from your previous release, *Şeb-i Yelda*?

Şeb-i Yelda is a work that was based on political unrest. It has a darker tone to it, although I chose to narrate it into hope. Also, feeling-wise, *Şeb-i Yelda* is rather raw and unfiltered. *Gnosis*, I think, is a bit lighter in colour and has a different sonic tone to it. I also had a bit more confidence when I was producing *Gnosis*, as *Şeb-i Yelda's* release had done so well, so I dared to push myself further.

Soon, it will be the third anniversary of your EP *Şeb-i Yelda*, which was inspired by the verses of the Ottoman era Bosnian poet Sabit Efendi, and which fuses traditional instruments with electronic sounds to express feelings of anger and grief, but also empowerment and anger. Can you talk about this record?

I drew my first inspiration for *Şeb-i Yelda* in December of 2016, I think. I saw the verses of Sabit Efendi, where he was referring to *Şeb-i Yelda* (meaning the longest night in Farsi), not as an astronomical event but as it being the dark night of the soul, saying that *Şeb-i Yelda* cannot be understood by scholars of time and space, but by a soul that is troubled. This struck a chord with me. From that point on, I drew a parallel between my personal experiences and the experience of a whole geography, that is the Middle East. How this was our long, long night of dealing with political turmoil. This is why I ended the EP with the concept of the coming day ('Sabah') and being a servant of light ('Kul'). Call it wishful thinking.

RESINA: 'I WAS ALWAYS INTERESTED IN MUSIC WHICH DOESN'T GIVE YOU RESPITE'

Resina is Karolina Rec's solo project. The Polish cellist and composer is known by her fellow Poles through her collaborations with an eclectic list of artists, from Maciej Cieślak through Hubert Zemler to Zamilska, but since 2016, she's been carving a solo path with her own project. Her second album, *Traces*, sees her expanding the sound palette, employing not only otherworldly soundscapes created from heavily looped and processed cello, but also wordless vocals and rhythms. These take inspiration from an obsession with damaged sacral objects, memory, survivors of violence and the ravages of time.

"I've tried to build my own musical identity on a premonition how music from this piece of the world could sound – but not by using folk music literally," is something you stated once in an interview. Can you talk about your musical identity and its development?

It's constantly evolving – in parallel with what I generally learn about, and I try to constantly learn things which are not necessarily connected to music. But I won't deny that my musical identity comes from the place where I live and the culture which shaped me (the destroyed tradition of folk music or pieces written by modern Polish composers). My skills are obviously things that I received from this specific environment, teachers, nature and history (subjects present in my albums) and I recognise them as the elements which built my musical character – especially at the beginning. Now – using this background – it's interesting for me to work on themes/obsessions which come from non-musical sources.

You recorded music both in 'rural' (Gdynia, the Baltic coast), and urban locations (Warsaw, with its complex history). Can you perhaps talk about how environments have influenced your music and some projects in particular?

Yes, that was the idea – to allow myself to be inspired by both these environments. At that time, I didn't want to produce something detached from my everyday reality. It also makes sense when you think about the obsessive motifs of these albums: the first, written in Gdynia – concerns ambivalent perception and emotions, unpredictable nature, and the second, written in Warsaw – more concerns the repetitiveness of history and human illusions about it. I can't say how it worked in detail – it was rather a long and intuitive process.

There's a dichotomy between darkness and light in your music, anticipation and release, fragility and buoyancy – similar to many folktales, mythology and life in general – can you maybe talk about it with regard to your work?

One thing is that I believe in intuition – nowadays we know now that it is built mostly from experience and data collected, not necessarily in a conscious way. So that could mean two things: that I was highly influenced by all the things you list (mythology, folktales etc.) and secondly: I like this type of music, so I'm interested in making this type of music. I was always interested in music which doesn't give you respite or consolation, but plays with dramaturgy and tension to reveal some other layers.

You mentioned the importance of the live element of your music, using loopers, for instance – how can music be born of the unexpected and somehow primordial, the uncontrolled.

I like to push myself into some unexpected territories on stage – it's something that I believe many artists do. I simply want to make things work better for the audience, checking what makes my pieces more and more complex and essential. I want to keep the feeling of the creative process each time I play the piece (my debut album and most of the following ones were recorded live). I believe that it's an element which helps to build an almost physical relation with the audience. It's a huge reward and (I hope) a great experience on both sides.I treat my instrument in a very physical way – I'm just this 'manual' type of person who tries to mix skills with some abstract ideas about sound.

Your new release recontextualises your *Traces* album with a diverse array of musicians, including Abul Mogard, Ben Frost, Ian William Craig and Lotic. Why did you decide on these artists in particular and were there any surprising elements in their reworkings that perhaps inspired you further?

Obviously, I asked these artists because I love their work – I actually could write a long essay explaining 'why'. I'm a huge fan of Ian's way of devastating sound, which reveals hidden emotions and makes me unexpectedly fragile. I love the uniqueness of the sound of Abul, which is something I want to work on more. I'm an absolute fan of what Lotic does with some overused electronic music patterns and how it makes them more powerful and deep. And of course, I'm an admirer of how Ben mixes his very own electronic instruments with acoustic sounds to create such a strong sound world.

What really amazed me is that all these artists prepared pieces which I believe could appear on their own LPs as stand alone tracks – but at the same time, it's very exciting to hear some of my parts/motifs/thoughts used in them in ways I could never have imagined and put into a sound environment I absolutely admire. I'm generally interested in the idea of mixing very primal, acoustic sounds with electronics so from this point of view, every one of these remixes could be a clear inspiration.

You are apparently going to work on a special show at a detention centre for women. Can you talk about it?

It was an invitation from the promoters of the JazzArt Festival in Katowice. Every year they choose an artist to play a show there. Actually, I felt extremely honoured that they offered it to me – otherwise it would never happen. I must admit that I'm used to and love playing shows where people don't know what to expect, or they expect 'cello-lounge' music and they are a bit surprised about what happens on stage. Another thing is that I'm not a fan of treating music (other than pop) in an elite/exclusive way – it's a good opportunity to implement this idea again.

MULTILAYERING REALITY WITH JONATHAN ULIEL SALDANHA

Based in Porto, Portugal, Jonathan Saldanha has been a pivotal figure in the Portuguese scene, for both exploratory music and performance. He founded SOOPA, a music and art collective active in Porto since 1998, and has directed the ensemble HHY & The Macumbas since its debut in 2009. He works as a sonic and scenic constructor, within the interception of sound, gesture, voice, stage and film, operating elements of pre-language, resonant choirs, cyclic percussion, cybernetic systems, unfathomable presence, pressure, haptic memory, allopoiesis, echo and intra-cranial-dub.

You just got back from Haiti (Ed. note: interview conducted in 2019). What were you doing there?

I was there for the Soukri ceremony; I've been interested in Vodou for more than 15 years, so it was a very intense moment. I'm working on the mix of the new album of Haitian Roots music group Chouk Bwa Libete; it's a collaboration with friends and long time partners in music The Angstromers, Frederic Alstadt and Nyko Esterle. It was a very special invitation, and we filmed and recorded during the 17 days of the ritual, all moments, every day. We're thinking, with some of the key figures of this community, of working on a series of documentaries about contemporary Vodou in Haiti. It's a very welcoming system that brings together all who are interested, and where all outcasts and any sexual orientation or life vision is respected.

One Voudo initiate said to me that they have no concept of hell, so this for sure changes how punishment, expectation and liberation is comprehended. It's a very special time for Vodou at the moment, because there's a lot of pressure all around the country from neo-evangelical corporations, trying to label it an evil thing, when actually it existed at the foundation of Haitian independence and is still now a powerful world symbol of freedom. It's a point of resistance and liberty in a very hard political moment in the island and it signifies a cosmovision that sustains elements that are vanishing from all around the world.

These rituals are embedded in the culture there. How is it possible to connect to that as an outsider and observe it from a point of view that's not voyeuristic?

Well, culture, and specifically Haitian Voudo, is syncretic, so it's already a hybrid that is the result of dialogues and tensions between African-born rites, Catholic imagery and indigenous sacred sites, in a complexity that is a prototype of most of the cultural construction of the XXI century. We were very welcome; part of the power of Vodou is that it's open to all kinds of connections. The drummers from Chouk Bwa are the main percussionists for the Congo Division, that is the main rite operating on Soukri, so we had a special entrance point to the community.

The place itself is away from the city, in a beautiful palm tree landscape, and it's uncommon to see people from abroad there, but the Manbo

immediately received us with warmth. I'm interested in Vodou, in the life that breathes now on the amazing people that inhabit its cosmology, it's a living thing not a historical curiosity and we weren't anthropologists analysing a distant social mechanism or a team of documentarists doing a job assignment, but participants of a cosmovision that is present now and with a lot to say.

What attracts you to voodoo in particular?

It presents intriguing keys for reading things and ultimately people and the landscape. It's a complex agglomerate of languages that communicate through objects, smells, colours, diagrams, touch and rhythm. So it's not just a visual, cosmological or sonic system, with rituals, choirs and percussion, but it is also something that is really connected to how you read time and the dimensions encapsulated in what we call reality. The first single we released with HHY & The Macumbas ten years ago was a tribute to a specific Vodou Loa called Papa Legba, the mediator of dimensions.

The operational aspects of this Loa influenced a lot of the music I've been doing since then, it connects space with other dimensions, which is very interesting for music, in the way you can combine and collide acoustic spaces and sonic characters, building complex bodies and cross-referential languages of vibration in a multidimensional listening space. The concept of multilayering reality influences my music, but also my stage pieces and installations. It is a mutation of time through different axes.

There's also the aspect of the choreography, how the body operates in space.

In the particular space where we were there was a temple. This space has existed for more than 200 years, since before independence in Haiti. It's a space with a lot of sacred elements, gods and portals that are camouflaged in trees, rocks, holes and a river. You have special points in the landscape that you can trigger with vibration or attention. This kind of connection with space has influenced me a lot, especially in my choir works I always encrypt the score in movement, architecture or objects. The singers memorise their voice parts through space, with each voice attached to a different physical point. I find this very resonant with the landscape that unfolds in Vodou. You attach a point of density in the landscape and you can distribute time through space.

HHY has a Kampala Unit. You have been working with the label and collective Nyege Nyege for some time.

I was invited by Nyege Nyege to go to Uganda some years ago, but this was possible only last year (Ed. note: 2018) and I was there for almost two months. I started by helping to design Boutiq Studio in Kampala, which was being built at that time, and that was cool because I could build a studio and immediately occupy it and start recording. Then I started working with Omutaba, developing a particular rhythm system, a bit like what I do with the percussionists from the Macumbas; building a way for the rhythm to have agency. So we arrived at a very special mutant drumming style, played on traditional acoustic drums, but also using electronic pads and triggers and parts of drums. Within this, I took some rhythms that I like to work with which are part of HHY & The Macumbas language and with Omutaba we found similar rhythms in the traditional repertoire from the mythical kingdom of Buganda.

These traditional rhythms are impregnated in Omutaba's muscular memory and could be a core cipher that is then driven and totally reconfigured in a mutant drumming machine. We then started recording and adding the horns from Florence, which come from the background of local brass bands, playing a very abrasive and exploding sound. I also recorded the horns of the Uganda Prison Brass Band, in a very intense cluster of brass. We're going to release an album for Nyege Nyege in the beginning of next year; the first video will come out this year (Ed. note: 2019). In parallel to that, I've also worked with MCs from there and I'm going to continue this collaboration next year. One track with Biga Yut is coming out this year on a SHAPE compilation and, later on, Hakuna Kulala.

Nyege Nyege's sublabel Hakuna Kulala is a good example of these new, hybrid sounds. This hybridisation is something that's spreading across the globe.

There are so many possibilities to listen to music from everywhere. Even when I think about my background in music, I see this: my first instrument was Tabla, and I was playing in a Indian classical music ensemble when I was 15, and that's music that wasn't traditional or identifiable with Portugal or Europe, in terms of its construction, rhythmic notions and even tuning. There's so much amalgamation in the learning curve of any human, that's part of the way each of us opens to alterity.

Especially now, there are many lines being actively broken, lines that were dividing humans, things and dimensions are now crossed at great velocity by constant exchange and the deterritorialisation of knowledge from its centre of power. It's crucial to dislocate, move out of a stable comfort zone; the internet doesn't substitute the complexity of a place or community. The process of exchange and knowledge demands presence. We're living in a very complex, but very interesting moment for creating music or art of any configuration, the way we see form and language is changing fast. Resonance and vibration between humans and objects and sounds is accelerating into deep hybridisation.

How would you describe your musical vocabulary?

It's a shape shifting alien. Continuing to go in the direction of mutation between formats where I can work with improvisation one day and work with a score and ensemble the next. All of this has different densities but equal value in the sense that I'm equally interested in listening to a club session or to a piece made for an orchestra. The expansion of all of it into synaesthesia, how images inform sonic narratives, how gestures and bodies can inhabit a world that is sonic, is very interesting to me.

I work more and more with hybrid formats between stage and dance, video and installations, like the one I did in Palais de Tokyo two years ago called *OXIDATION MACHINE*. It was a vibrational landscape, colour and sound were

operated by a machine that regulates density, with a massive sound system playing the sounds of choirs that were moving in impossible Doppler-driven acoustic spaces. Clusters of voices singing inside an accelerating space in a massive industrial space full of oxidative colours and water vapours. This reconstruction of synthetic meanings is very exciting to me. An image informs a sound, and vice versa. My perception of form is driven by synaesthesia.

When you work, do you have a grid, a scheme, a plan. Do you prepare it ahead?

For many years, that was a big part of my creative process. Investigation and putting things together, making schemes and diagrams. I'm very much interested in early cybernetics and systems theory, autopoietic systems, systems that self-regulate and fail. Much of my work with choirs is based on that, like systems of voices that rely on touch, and not actually memorising the melody. I prepare the diagram, the system, and then I try to see how the system survives with people and space. With percussion I also usually go with this process. There's always this translation process. I think about Beckett a lot in that sense, he was writing in French and translating it into English, making a word survive on a stage, a stage develop in a video, or vice versa, always trying to go back and forth until something particular emerges.

Some of the videos that you've made are very cinematic. There's a sort of remnant of something having happened there, a postscript.

Post-script is a very interesting concept. Especially in video, to have access to only an extension of the story. You have an indirect glimpse of something that has happened or something that has an energy or vibration but exists and moves in a different dimension than yours. You only have access to one of its manifestations, to the outline, the post-script. I really love it when there's space between the imagery and the aural, then the environment, the landscape builds its own mythology.

I guess you leave it up to the audience to inhabit this space that you create.

To inhabit is actually the right term. Inhabiting a space, dealing with its presence. All these protocols of inhabiting spaces that are sometimes acoustic, but often cosmological, mental or metaphysical.

What about technologically enhanced realities, virtual and augmented?

I've never explored it much. Some years ago, I collaborated for my stage piece *O POÇO* with a sound engineer and researcher Eduardo Magalhães, who works a lot with sound-design and spatial technology for games, so we used a couple of technical elements from gaming to shift the aural landscape – like when a character in a game goes from one place to another, so we designed a vertical sound system that translates sounds falling and moving in a vertical axis and then we used some of this spatial technology to actually navigate inside that synthetic reality. I'm interested in technology in the sense that it can be bent into a live moment where you can experience shifts of perception, spaces or movements around you in real time. Collective listening is something appealing to me.

As an artist, do you feel this is a good time to be in?

On many levels, this is a special moment. The more disorder you have in the way the expectations of the world come to unravel, the more artists have something to do while negotiating with the forces of chaos. They can operate on a very important level of communication, contact and presence, reconnecting broken links, or proposing new ones. Even while we see the burning of the Amazonian forest and a new rise of nationalism and populism in politics. Even in Haiti, a place that has had many natural calamities and is being destroyed on so many levels, people are making music and through that making magic and changing their landscape. Even if everything is destroyed, the more destroyed it is, the more important it is to do what we do. What you do can be meaningful.

CHAINES ON WINNING THE ORAM AWARD, LIFE OUTSIDE MUSIC AND DRACULA

CHAINES (Cee Haines) is a composer and multi-instrumentalist based in Manchester in the UK, who writes surreal and fantastical electronica and electro-acoustic music. Their album, *The King*, was received with enthusiastic critical praise. Their live set uses tracks from the record as a springboard for solo, semi-improvised electro-acoustic performance, which the Guardian has called "a mesmeric collage of ecclesiastical beauty and creeping dread". In addition to their solo electronic work, CHAINES has also worked extensively with the London Contemporary Orchestra. They are the recipient of the 2019 Oram Award.

Can you talk about your background and what led you to music?

CHAINES: My mum got me some electronic keyboard lessons when I was about six. It was the type where you have a backing track and automatic one-key-press chord accompaniments in the left hand. That was kind of the start of it all. As I got a bit older, I started to play the keyboard all the time, every day, writing little bits and pieces, playing tunes from chord books and 'comping along. I got a Yamaha keyboard with a light up display. If you pressed a bunch of keys simultaneously, it would give you an approximation of the chord, and that's basically how I taught myself music theory.

It's funny, I've had a pretty classical music education; I learned the flute, and much later on as a teen I learned the piano. When it comes to my actual understanding of how everything works, though, that's actually self taught. When I had to pass classical theory exams, I already knew how things worked, I just needed to call them by the correct fancy name. My folks were always very generous to me on the music front – I bought a cheap guitar off a friend, they bought me a student violin one year, they hired me a saxophone when I was about 17, so I've had lots of opportunity to teach myself how to play various instruments, I've been very fortunate indeed.

Your critically acclaimed album *The King* is a complex, melodic record, with baroque atmospheres, at times reminiscent of the great British tradition of uncanny music-makers like Scott Walker, Mica Levi or Vindicatrix (Mordant Music). Can you talk about the genesis and development of this cinematic record?

CH: It's oddly difficult to look back and try to piece together how the record came into existence. It's from a time in my life that now seems distant and hazy, and was not, altogether, a particularly happy time. "DOWN" and "Carpathia" were both commissions from the London Contemporary Orchestra and Union Chapel London before they were tracks on the album, so the development of those tracks has roots in instrumental music (although they both had electronic components from the start). "Population 5120" was born out of the development

of “DOWN”, it's from the same headspace, thinking about the strongly affective atmospheres of *Silent Hill 2* and *Twin Peaks*.

I worked on and developed “Eraserhead” for ages – about six months on and off. “Airship” was the child of a track I attempted to write with a friend (which I ended up writing entirely, being an awful collaborator), which came from trying to conjure a dream-like, escapist kind of state. I can’t remember what prompted “For Your Own Good”, although I think I wanted to do something with speech, and I think I easily ended up with the words. It took a while to record – speaking quickly is difficult!

“Mary” came because I knew I wanted to do something with a monstrous voice, and this guitar hook came up under my fingers and it needed to have something done with it. “Knockturning” was the last track I wrote, and the ten days or two weeks in which it was written were absolute hell. I was so anxious and just wanted to be able to finish, so I could find some peace. As it is, I think it's one of the tracks I'm most proud of. It’s funny how music survives time but the process behind it doesn’t always do the same. I have these surviving totems of that time of my life, and I know the connections between them and the past intellectually, but the reality of how it was is a bit lost to me.

There's a track called “Carpathia” on the album. Since I'm writing this from Central Europe, I was curious about the title and the track itself (and the inspiration for it). That track is very much a love letter to my notions about Dracula and Dracula's castle, a lot of which is inspired by Francis Ford Coppola's film *Bram Stoker's Dracula*.

Dracula talks with great fondness of the Transylvanian landscape and Carpathian mountains, and in my mind they took on a kind of life and power of their own. I wanted the track to be going from inside the castle to outside, to inside to outside, where you’re finally chased by wolves, and then... do you find sanctuary in a cathedral? I guess it’s easy to romanticise a place if you live so far away and have never been there! That being said, forests make me feel something deeply... spiritual, I guess...wherever they are in the world. Forests are dope. We should have more forests.

You've also collaborated with the London Contemporary Orchestra. Can you talk about this collaboration?

CH: I’ve written a bunch of stuff for the London Contemporary Orchestra since “DOWN”, but that was the first major ensemble piece. It was a massive learning curve for me! That might have been the first thing I ever did that was a larger instrumental ensemble with electronics. Yes, I learned a lot from that experience – and have been very grateful that the LCO are a supportive bunch, cos yeah, there was a lot of practical stuff that I’ve now learned is best done differently.

Without going too far into it, I’ve come to the opinion that the more you can get the instrumentalists to do live (as opposed to pre-done playback), the better. It’s always a tricky balance, because unless I play the instrument myself, I can't test it out with effects to see how it’ll behave, so it’s tempting to give as much to the computer playback as possible, but it’s not nearly as rewarding (or easy!) as doing it live.

In one interview you were very reflective and even critical of your own work. How do you as an artist come to terms with and reflect on your own work?

CH: For me, it’s kind of hard to imagine a world in which I’m not very critical of my own work, and I guess I’m like that as a person. The deeper you can dive into the heart of what you're trying to do, the more you can understand what you want. Then you learn how to make the strongest version of what you want, and the work becomes more potent and concentrated. When things click, it’s invigorating. It's a difficult balance, however, because for me it’s easy for things to tip over into a place where you're so critical that nothing's ever good enough and it's super depressing. The prospect of writing music is something I can actually find quite daunting these days. As time goes on, I’m trying to go easier on myself. I think having a life outside of music is very important – something – anything – that can help give you a break and some perspective. More recently I’ve enjoyed drawing, and I enjoy playing Dungeons and Dragons with my partner and friends.

You are based in Manchester. Can you talk about the city’s creative/music scene vis-a-vis the looming Brexit and arts funding?

CH: I’ve found the electronic music scene in Manchester to be super friendly and supportive. They're a wonderful bunch of humans. Everyone's very forthcoming and enthused, even if I myself can be a bit of a hermit. I would not be in the position I'm in now if it weren't for support from Brighter Sound and the people I've met through their residencies and courses. They’re a treasure and I would highly recommend them.

As for Brexit, it’s just a bit of a nightmare. I don’t even know how to talk about it really, its scope for disaster goes way beyond music. I don’t want England to become a shoddy outpost of Trump’s America, which is what I think this is all pointing in the direction of. Yeah, I’m trying to order my thoughts about the whole thing, but really, my inner monologue is going, “AAARRRGGGHHH!”

What are you currently working on?

CH: Currently, I’m working on developing a game that’s largely sound-based. A game that someone with a severe visual impairment could get the same level of satisfaction out of playing as a sighted person. I worked for some time with a composer who doesn’t have sight, and you’d think in this day and age there would be more available in music technology for people who can’t see, but there isn’t. I guess it’s because it’s not a big enough demographic to influence the market. I’m not an engineer, so I’m not able to address larger questions of accessibility, but the idea of making something that relies on sound was a cool notion.

You have received the prestigious Oram Award, inspired by Daphne Oram and recognising emerging female and non-binary artists working with music and sound.

CH: Yeah, it’s been really nice to win an Oram. I was initially worried that the awards would misgender me and/or make it easy to incorrectly assume I’m cisgender (I’m transgender, non-binary and leaning towards trans-masc), but

their language has become more inclusive since I raised my concerns with the Award's producer. There's a lot of transphobia in the UK media, so it's difficult not to be paranoid about these things. As a non-binary person (my pronouns are they/them), who's still awaiting/raising money for gender-confirming treatment, I've got psychological and financial pressures on me that make putting energy and resources into music pretty difficult. I am also someone who is perceived, and has throughout my life been perceived to be, a woman, and been treated accordingly. So the award is a nice boost to my morale, because yeah, my situation has often felt quite hopeless. I often feel like I have to choose between my health and my musical career, so this feels good – it's like being told, "We know you're still here, we see you!"

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AFRODEUTSCHE: ‘I’M ALWAYS TELLING A STORY’

Afrodeutsche (Henrietta Smith-Rolla), is a British-born Ghanaian/Russian/German artist, composer, producer, and DJ based in Manchester. Her polyrhythmic compositions integrate a wide array of musical genres, including Afrofuturistic electro and techno, classical solo piano, and Detroit legacy house; all memorable journeys into deep, abstracted sound. Afrodeutsche’s DJ style is a synthesis of Drexciyan and Underground Resistance-inspired selections intercut with a variety of forward-thinking UK techno such as Bola and Lego Feet. Her debut album *Break Before Make* appeared on the legendary Skam label in 2018, followed by an EP on Eclair Fifi’s new label, River Rapid, in 2019.

Is music your main thing nowadays?

I started Afrodeutsche in 2016, and since 2017 I’ve been gigging and working full time. Last year was the major year for shows.

People work so hard to get there, and suddenly there’s a breakthrough and it happens. How does it feel to accept that this is your life now?

It’s very confusing. You don’t ever imagine that you’re going to arrive at any sort of place. You realise you have these ambitions but don’t know whether you accept when you actually achieve them. It’s all been very much a learning experience. It’s very exciting. It’s exhausting. But it’s also really fulfilling in lots of ways. Every other opportunity is a challenge and you have to get through that situation without falling or failing. It’s challenging, but it’s also really motivating.

You grew up in a rural area of the UK. Did you feel like you were searching for something else?

As I’ve gotten older, I’ve realised that it was very much about searching for my identity. Having never met my biological father, there was a huge part of my identity that I didn’t have any understanding of. While I was looking for my father, the word ‘Afrodeutsche’ kept on coming up and I had an innate sense of connection to it. Through Afrodeutsche I’ve been able to get a hold of my own identity and I’ve realised it is a lot of other people’s identity as well. Having gone on this journey myself, I’ve kind of almost facilitated other African Germans to find a way to their own identity even if they weren’t looking for it. I do believe it’s been an avenue for a lot of African Germans who listen to the type of music that I make and come to shows I play. I’ve met these three women of Ghanaian descent, born in Germany, who’ve been to three of my shows. It was almost like a reunion. We know we exist but we haven’t felt connected with each other. It’s not just me, it’s not just my music, it’s the reality of it. We exist.

These histories are often forgotten.

I had to be quite brave when I took on the name Afrodeutsche because I knew that it wasn’t mine.

I couldn’t own this. It was meant to be for African Germans. I had to think about it and be brave about it because it’s an untold history. I wanted to talk about it with my music.

I guess there is also the connection with Detroit. The Afrofuturism of Drexciya, the Germanism of Dopplereffekt and the whole spirit of Underground Resistance that have influenced your work.

All of the nineties Detroit sonics very much spoke a language which I feel I understood. It’s very cosmic and I feel very connected to the music. It’s overwhelming how connected we are.

I remember back in the nineties, growing up in the middle of nowhere in Eastern Europe, I was given a mixtape with Underground Resistance stuff on it and how special it was.

You were given a tape by a person who found some music and felt like they should share it. This is how people shared music before the internet. Someone in Detroit had a record and knew someone in the UK who might be a distributor. The connections that were made that resulted in you having that music are incredible. It’s not an email or a message, someone actually physically had to be there and share that music.

It’s easier to share all of this nowadays.

We used to do lots of mixtapes and share them with friends. There’d be parties and someone would record the gig and that would be circulated. That’s how I often found music. That culture is being revived through podcasts and digital mixes nowadays.

Were you inspired by or connected to the UK free party scene that happened all around the country when you were growing up?

I was able to access it through my best friend, who was slightly older than me. She used to go to free parties and bring me cassettes and flyers. I would listen to these parties that were going on in the West Country on my Walkman and imagined being there. But I was just too young.

Do you have a hypothesis why this whole electronic music culture fascinated you even at that young age?

It was quite a mysterious thing to me. I’d go to my friend’s house and we’d pretend that we were having a sleepover. She’d leave the house and I’d stay up in the bedroom as if we were both there and then she’d come back the following day and have all these flyers and experiences and tell me how amazing the party was. It was this unobtainable world that audibly was just brilliant. Imagine listening to all these parties and MCs. There was something about the music that just got me. It wasn’t necessarily that I wanted to be there, I just had a connection to it. Not being classically trained, I used to emulate the stuff that I would listen to. Something that I realised was that a lot of the melodies and basslines were like one-fingered basslines. I would be emulating it on the piano and thinking how brilliant it was that I could actually follow and be part of it.

You were also part of a vintage organ group called Sisters Of Transistors.

I loved that band so much. It was four of us on organs and synths, and Graham Massey on drums. We wrote original music, but we also used to do covers of Rachmaninoff.

I used to make our costumes. We used to wear capes. I remember the first time we tried on the capes that I made from a material similar to thin fake leather. I made hoods that came over our eyes, so you couldn't see them. You could just see our mouths. They were incredibly hot. At one point I turned round and Graham was drumming and he'd managed to take off most of his costume and leave the cape on. So he was trouserless while drumming because he was so hot. The music was geared towards a baroque kind of style in an electronic way.

You also work in film and theatre.

A friend of mine who's a documentary filmmaker was working for Al Jazeera and heard some of my piano pieces. He asked me to score this documentary that he was doing in 2009 or 2010. I wasn't really sure that I could do it but I knew that I really wanted to, so I said yes. I've always had a real love of film and scoring – making sense of visual images with sound. I did a play in 2018 which went to the Edinburgh Film Festival. The last documentary that I scored has been nominated for a BAFTA in the Best British Short Film category. It's called *Kamali* and it's a story about a seven-year-old girl skater from India. It's a really beautiful film and it was an absolute pleasure to work on it.

Film scoring is often an evocation of certain moods and atmospheres. Your music has also been described as dark or melancholic.

I actually struggle to get out of that melancholic vibe.

I'm always telling a story and they tend to be my honest kind of stories which tend to be quite melancholic. My new AV live show is very much about understanding my mental health and my existence, what has been before and what's to come. I find I can make sense of stuff when things are a little bit darker. There's an element of being able to understand light with darkness. Often when I'm not feeling great, I listen to stuff people might think of as quite dark but that helps me to see the light in situations. If I listened to things that are jolly and bright in those states it would be almost like I'm not accepting the fact that I'm not feeling great.

The world is not a happy place these days, anyway.

There's a lot going on for everyone. It has always been this way, but it's also about whether or not people feel they can share how they feel or what they're going through. People are starting to understand that it's OK to share the dark side of their lives rather than it being a wonderful Instagram 'great day', 'what I've seen, where I've been' kind of vibe. People appreciate and respond to honesty and vulnerability because it's relatable.

Music can also be a way to decompress.

Music is so important. It's the language that we all speak, especially instrumental music.

You're presenting an AV show called *Amt der Seele* at CTM Festival 2020. It's meant to be a requiem. Can you talk about it?

I have been in therapy for quite a number of years now. I had an awful experience with a therapist in 2016. It meant that I couldn't trust anyone, but I really appreciated what therapy had done for me in the past. I ended up going back into therapy and I had a really heavy experience with this new therapist who has helped me through these past two years. I was sat with her and she said to me "You need to write down certain events in your life to help you process these things". I'm not very good with text and I realised that I could do it through music. And then I thought of requiems.

I listen to a lot of classical music and requiems for me are just amazing pieces of work. I saw them as ways in which composers could make sense of their existence. Life and death and everything in-between. I thought maybe I should write my own requiem: me processing my life and my existence. The work is 14 pieces long of which I'm going to do the first seven at CTM. It's extremely personal and I don't think it's going to be like anyone's expecting. I'm going back to my classical way of thinking, with arrangement and instrumentation. I'm absolutely terrified of how it's going to be received because it's so personal. It's a requiem. Over the years when I've spoken to people after my live shows I feel that when I've gone through something and I'm able to translate it into music other people have felt the same way. It's almost a kind of therapy.

Do you feel that you've found what you set out to search for when you were growing up or would you still like to continue the search?

I don't know what it was that I was looking for, other than my father who I've not found yet. That search for him has kind of come to a halt at the moment. My brain and my emotions can't handle it right now. I thought that was going to be the body of work that I was going to do for the live show. I thought it was going to be much more about the search for my father, but actually it's turned into something else. I think I'm always going to be searching for that thing. I don't think I'll ever arrive at any certain point with music because it's always changing. I guess my motives will remain the same in that I can't do anything else. I've tried every single job there is, from landscape gardening to working in bars to making clothes. I've really tried everything but the only thing I'm really fulfilled by is making music. I think it's going to be an ongoing search. This piece of work will help me with that.

DOROTA
EASTERN EUROPEAN PANEL BLOCK ROMANTICISM, SCAM LETTERS, MONKS

Dorota was founded in 2009 by three Hungarian musicians, Áron Porteleki, Dániel Makkai and David Somló. Dorota's creative method always builds around a mystical fictional space. If we were to imagine the band's recordings as landscapes, the first album was a North American road trip, their second album, *Frik*, moved between a Nigerian internet cafe and a foggy mountain, and the home of their third album, *Solar the Monk*, is somewhere out of existence on the Georgian-Iranian-Mongolian border. *Solar the Monk* is a retreat, a reflection, the exploration of new ways and forms of existence in a world rushing to its end. *We caught up with Áron and David on a peaceful March evening in the centre of Budapest, days before the city was brought to a standstill by the coronavirus pandemic.*

Dorota was created in 2009. It's a girl's name, but the band has only males in it. Is there a story behind that?

David Somló: When we created Dorota, we had a favourite book we were reading at that time. It was *Snow White and Russian Red* by Dorota Masłowska; look it up. We couldn't decide on our name, and Áron's girlfriend at the time – who originally gave us the book – came up with the idea, "Why don't you call the band Dorota?" Funnily enough, three years later we went on our only European tour and we had like six gigs in three weeks, or something like that, and in Warsaw, someone contacted Masłowska and she came to our concert. Her partner insisted that we should go to their place and not sleep in a squat. I don't think Dorota was very keen to have drunken Hungarian musicians in her place, but anyway, we wound up there. We ended up drinking raspberry vodka until 4am in their kitchen, and we totally ruined her IKEA couch while trying to make it into a double bed. We woke up the next day when Dorota Masłowska was getting her daughter ready for school. She was like "I can't believe this".

Áron Porteleki: It was also funny that once, when we got in touch with her, she sent us a text message saying "Oh, it's really amazing you're called Dorota, because I'm just writing a book with three main characters called David, Dániel and Áron." We were flabbergasted, but she was joking, of course.

The band has a tendency to build a whole world around each album. How did that evolve?

DS: We had a lot of creative ideas around the music from the beginning, but we hadn't had much experience in putting them into an understandable form for the audience. This issue really came out regarding our second creation, the overly ambitious *Frik*, which involved three albums, two movies and an interactive website. It was a fully fledged fiction, about ten hours of content – imagine the weirdness of the third season of Twin Peaks. One needs complete devotion to

absorb it and to understand the contextual elements. For example, there's one part which is a text composed around the recurring rhythms of the songs, explained with medieval numerical theories, Dogon (Malian tribe) mythology, and details from Nigerian scam letters. Now, with the new album, we have kept everything rather simple in terms of form. We made four music videos for the vocal songs on the album.

AP: To further challenge ourselves, we stopped playing songs. At concerts we improvised with themes, using a large palette of experimental approaches, from free improvisation to quadraphonic soundscapes. It was a very deep process, which is perhaps not audience friendly, but it still had a strength and intensity.

DS: This whole creation period was so painful that when we finished it, I tattooed the symbol of the album – a mountain – on myself to remember that I should never do that kind of thing ever again. (laughs) The band went into hibernation for two years as a result of this impossible creation.

How did you decide to go on and record your new album, *Solar the Monk*, in 2019?

AP: Dávid Pap, an important figure in the Budapest improvised scene, was launching his label and we decided to do a fundraiser gig for him and also play our first concert there after two years of silence. It was a very strong and warm feeling to be together and to be with an audience again, so we decided to give it another go. We applied to the National Cultural Fund to make a new album and we said: if we get it we'll make it, if not, then not. We ended up getting the money and making the album.

DS: An interesting thing is that we had the title of the album before we wrote any music. I was travelling one time with my other band and someone read aloud an article from a petrol station magazine we had picked up. At the end, she said the name of the author: Szollár Domokos – who is the communications manager of the petrol company – which I misunderstood as Solar the Monkos (in Hungarian that means something like 'Solar the Monk'). I thought, OK, that is a great title for an album.

Did you send the album to Szollár Domokos once it was done?

DS: I sent it to him on Facebook, but he didn't respond. Maybe I should try again and tell him that people like this album and the title comes from his name.

But apparently, you had some thoughts about the topic that the misheard title suggests.

DS: Yes. Monkhood is something that I'm connected with in my daily life, because I practise Zen Buddhism and I meet monks every week.

AP: The word 'solar' reminded me of the concept of the Anthropocene, which I was into at that time. I was the mythology guy on *Frik* as well, making up my own myth about the marriages of solar systems, and so on...

DS: Generally, we use a lot of associations in our creations. When we recorded the album, we were intentionally watching films that inspired the process. An important film was the experimental documentation of the performance artist Tehching Hsieh's *One Year Performance (Outdoor Piece)*, when he stayed outdoors in New York for a whole year. He basically lived as a homeless person. The text of the song "Solar the Monk" was heavily influenced by this work.

The next big influence arrived after we finished the first recording session: my friend from England sent me a scene from an Iranian movie in which an old dervish is dancing in the desert in a trance state. I was like: "Wait a second, what if I match it with the song 'Solar the Monk'?" Of course it fitted perfectly, it was quite magical. Later, we wrote to the director to ask if we could use the footage but he was very unhappy with the idea, so in the end, we recorded our own version, an homage to the original scene. By the way, the movie is called *The Stone Garden* and it is by Parviz Kimiavi. We also played with this title, and used the story of the film in the lyrics of "Solar the Monk II."

You work a lot with mythical, fictional spaces.

DS: We have always been very much inspired by other parts of the world. When we recorded the first album, it was a mix of Eastern European panel block romanticism and American moods. The second album was based on all sorts of African influences, from their music to odd DIY aesthetics.

AP: It was not so much about us wanting to travel to Africa and play tribal music. It was reflecting on the controversial cultural exchange.

DS: We heard about this anthropological phenomenon called 'cargo cult', when tribes imitated the things they saw from the colonisers. Similarly, we tried to imitate what we saw from the Africans. So it's a reverse cargo cult in a way and that's why we called the album *Frik* – which is Afrika without the two a's. *Solar the Monk* has Middle Eastern influences. For example, the Sufi dance called Zikr was a strong starting point. In this dance,a compact group of men run around in circles to the accompaniment of very simple singing and clapping.

AP: During the rehearsals of *Solar the Monk* it was really good to play simple riffs and rhythms after years of experimental music making. It's still experimental in terms of how we were creating, but what you hear is closer to the form of songs.
In our perspective, it was more about dancing together through the instruments and not really creating rock songs.

Do you also reflect your local cultures?

AP: It's not that direct. On *Frik*, we spoke about romanticism in every way, also reflecting on our 'national' culture. I was brought up in a family that was involved in folk music, I have also played it on the viola since I was a child. As a band, we never really played any Hungarian folk songs or wanted to reflect them.

I had a problem with romanticising cultures or cultural tones by using parts of them without any context.

It was not Dorota's focus. Though David wrote a really interesting pseudo folk song "Szavadivi" (the last track of *Frik*), where he created his own authenticity.

DS: I think that song is really hauntological. Many people are wondering which folk song it is.

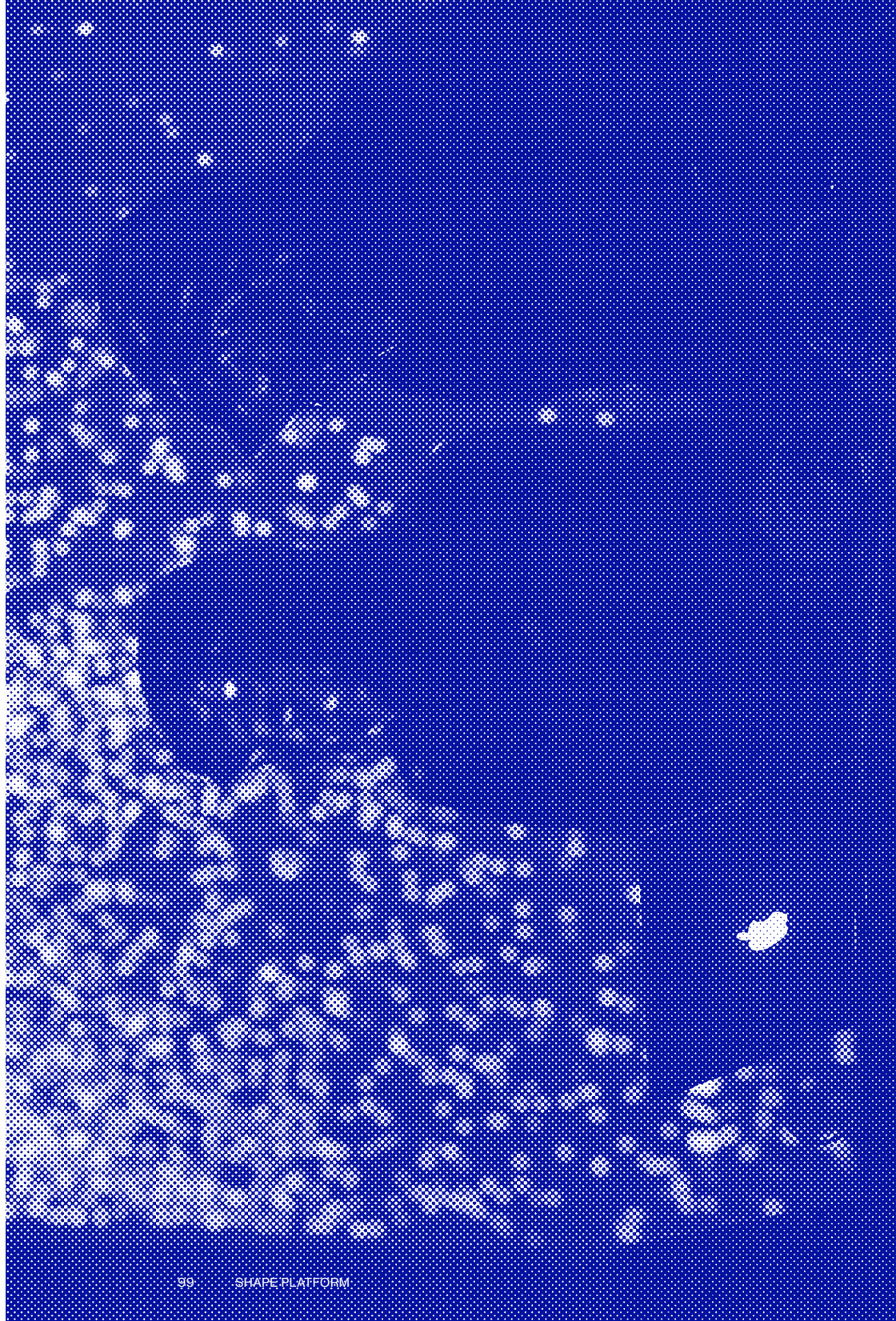
There is this romanticism in the band. There are also these faraway places.

DS: It's about longing and imagination. In this way we are romantics of other cultures. Dániel and Áron studied anthropology and I studied sociology, then we started the band. So it was a built-in feature of the vehicle.

What are your current plans?

DS: After eight years of playing music for seated, deep-listening audiences, now we are discovering how to create a concert where we want to get people into a full body trance. So, in a lot of ways, we are a beginner band now.

Our plans mostly depend on the coronavirus, but we are going to Russia at the end of March, Yerevan at the beginning of May, then we go to France, maybe northern Italy at the end of June. (Ed. note: interview recorded in early March 2020). For us it will be very exciting to see what it will do to people in other places.



C / A: 'WE WOKE UP TO A DYSTOPIAN DRAMA'

c / a is a South London-based progressive electronic music duo with a keen interest in software programming, film, video games and the internet. The project was initialised in 2018 with their first live A/V performance, *HYPER_HOLOGRAM*, and two performances at Sonar Festival and TodaysArt.

You are based in London. Most of Europe and other parts of the world are experiencing unprecedented times due to the coronavirus pandemic, trying to defeat Covid-19, the 'invisible enemy'. How are you getting by?

Well, for the past year or so we've been more of an indoor cat than usual, so our daily lifestyle hasn't changed that much, except we are slowly changing from feeling 'not that dreadful' to a slightly morose point of view. We hope that for everyone this period of time we have to live through will serve as a time for reconciliation, a time to consider how we utilise technology and the amount we intertwine it with our actual physical interactions by informing ourselves about past mistakes that were made and what battles still have to be fought to empower citizens rather than totalitarian surveillance regimes. Just look at mass media commercials on social media; almost glamourising staying at home and 'still being connected', they are repulsive and feel almost demonic. Probably just like anyone, we are waiting for this nightmare to end by doing what we love, mostly cycling and reading books all day.

Your work *BLEEDING EDGE 2020* somehow ominously predicts the future we are living now – with virtualised social spaces, raves in Second Life, etc. Can you describe this work and perhaps also its contextualisation in the present situation?

The show was to start with this long text about this nightmarish vision of empty central London streets and hints of a storyline where you would get scenes of an individual who, for some reason, could not go outside (today we have a word for it; lockdown) and is immersed in this new layer of the web, browsing a web page created by this entity with notes about the importance + role of non-verbal communication (e.g. proxemics, haptics and chronemics) methods in our lives.

In the middle, there was this metaphorical self-sacrifice of this internet entity, which would end up with the creation of this network of infinitely complex websites/environments/monoliths dedicated to these 'lessons' spread around the world wide web. This would conclude an era for humankind.

Now, such symbolic imagery, sitting somewhere between arcane and modern technology, feels somewhat off-putting because with the pandemic, it seemed as if we had almost shifted to an alternate reality, and we mean in a literal sense – we woke up to a dystopian drama. Even to us, it felt like some decision we had made had altered our destiny. We two are very powerful conjurers and, even if rarely, we know that sometimes our strong emotions or long-lasting, meditated thoughts do have a direct effect on people's perceived

lives and realities, but even we are not conjurers powerful enough to create such a distinct diversion. Strangely, when we talk about this issue with people, almost all of them can identify a single point in their recent past which might have caused such a shift, almost like a falling point from an edge or a very strong choice. People should question the origin of this more.

Your other work, the art experiment/game called *M Ξ T A P L Ξ X*, is a virtual environment, a mall and a network of these virtual spaces, utilising the Ethereum cryptocurrency. Can you describe it in detail?

It feels rather challenging to pigeonhole what it actually is but from our perspective it is a project born out of a few interests such as game design, web development and the need for a self-indulgent + self-educational platform. However these endeavours might manifest themselves today or in the future, *M Ξ T A P L Ξ X* is a domain that can bend and grow or continue serving as a selfindulgent playground.

Basically, at the time of writing this, *M Ξ T A P L Ξ X* has this virtual mall which serves as the headquarters by hosting a hall for temporary exhibits and various portals and stores that sell keys/tokens by opening up new tabs in your browser, which are mostly dedicated to other constructs. For example, in Construct A.I.F.X, the ETH tokens serve as a gateway file. In this way you can create different sorts of membership tokens and single-entry tokens to a website where a web script simply checks if you have it or not to allow access. Later on, those can be traded or sold as well, almost like being stakeholders in the virtual environment or having an indefinite digital membership card. Honestly, if it hadn't already become the norm in 2020, we probably would still be working on it in our spare time.

Do you think virtual environments can gradually replace real ones in the future – especially in the face of future cataclysms, be it environmental disasters and global warming, pandemics etc. How can underground/independent music scenes adapt/evolve?

If not replaced, perhaps they could develop to the degree that they will be advanced enough to be simpler and fun alternatives. There is no need to compare or think of them as replacements. People do all sorts of things online together, why not gather and enjoy music too. It's just that going outside brings so much stuff together, high volume music, fresh air, lights, face-to-face meetings and social interactions and everything is a part of the experience. Not sure how to put this or if it might sound awkward, but there is this small part of us wondering if there should even be people trying to manipulate this in order to serve their purpose in the greater scheme of crafting how society functions. Again, it is great that these things are happening and perfectly understandable that people are cherishing technology that keeps us connected and informed, but it feels as if there should be more warnings out there.

Thinking about it, if beforehand we had not been into such ideas, we possibly would not have contributed to any such virtual events, we just wanted to see how it feels. If you feel an unbridgeable distance from the rest anyhow

and have no desire to be entertained, why bother? We were just watching a talk by Slavoj Žižek and he said something like "even this stream [the one he is doing the interview on] is hosted and handled by a company called Zoom and it can be turned off at any given time by someone". Even we did a few shows hosted on Zoom and it actually felt intrinsically bad somehow. Especially given the nature of a 'rave', this feels more relevant, doesn't it?

Imagine 9/11 being legitimised by the NSA to create an unimaginable force of mass surveillance. Now we are on the brink of surveillance reaching an under- the-skin level and that is an abysmal thought. So, a part of us is just happy about the glimpse of connection we feel through the internet but part of us is also worried, at the same time. It is just too beautiful when you host an abstract image of the sea or oceans or waves on the deep web via a self-hosted Raspberry Pi attached to a modem that no one will see... Or simply see someone from Italy via a webcam dancing to the same music, but it is just awful that the internet has solely become social media today. We like things that resemble the rawness and communal force of the early days of the internet.

SCREAMS, BRASS, SEAGULLS: AN INTERVIEW WITH ELVIN BRANDHI

An improvising lyricist, producer and sound artist from Bridgend, Wales, who builds aberrant beats from field recordings, tape, vinyl, instrument and voice. Using sound and voice as an expansive language transgressing intrinsic systemics and inherited syntactical etiquettes, her live shows are unyielding bursts of erupting animation where her caustic stream of consciousness cavorts with restless, glitched-out heaviness.

How has your modus operandi developed in terms of music production over the years – voice, using of field recordings and samples, beats?

I build drum racks in Ableton that contain certain ingredients that shift depending on where I've been and who I come into contact with. Khanja screams, Blumbergian brass, Omutaba hits, seagulls, doors slamming, tapes, metal, tools, jackals, violin, YouTube – the personal associations of all these fragments combined determine the track's character. The drum rack is like the cast list of a psycho-acoustic drama. Collaborations have been of most importance in my work in the last years. Collaborating is socio-didactic, gives you the chance to step out of your head-dogma and mutate. The collaborations INSIN, Avril Spleen, BAHK, OCDC, Bad@Maths, 0n Est Malade, Gaivln Keiln, Yeah You, and all the ongoing Villa Hybrids are crucial spines, inverted vertebrae.

Yeah You is a project that you started with your dad. It is somehow beautifully pure in its spontaneity – in how you can make music anywhere, on inexpensive gear. Can you talk about this project and its impact on your creative work?

I need the contrast to my work on Ableton, to embody music spontaneously, substituting the capacity to endlessly revise sounds and tweak structure with an experience of direct mediation. This is why we can use whatever, even just voice. Our main technique is psycho-energetic. The idea of a family band transgresses the immunological distinctions between public, private, realist, absurdist, art, and logic, structure and experiment. Yeah You's work method and use of space challenges the distinction between practical and experi- mental, the absurd convenience of making music while driving for example. The idolisation of objects and artists put creativity on a pedestal to prevent it from contaminating the orthodox standards of public activity. Yeah You might be what counter-culture looks like when it infects the domestic.

In many of your Yeah You videos, you make music in cars, parking lots, in various environments – whether nondescript non-places or on the road, etc. How important is geography and psychogeography to you?

Intuition is an important part of improvisation, tuning into the other, but the over-tuned mental dynamic of a nuclear-family-duo demands a counter-intuitive lurch. It can come from domestic suffocation rather than fluidity. A situation so familiar with itself, it has to get it out of itself! It has to other itself to see itself. Aiming to jar, we sought places outside our comfort zone, fleeing familiarity, boycotting formulae. Abandoned buildings, motorways, rural, industrial, barren and public spaces, resonated with this self-realising estrangement.

Can you talk about your perhaps less well-known project, Ecce Silicon?

Ecce Silicon, a collective of artists from Bridgend, is my earliest and longest musical project despite it being the least publicly diffused. We perform organic electronic sermons, making use of second-hand electronics and audio archives.

You've done a residency at Nyege Nyege Boutiq Studios in Kampala, and the result was released on the Hakuna Kulala sublabel. How do you look back at the residency and your work with Nyege Nyege?

The Villa, the temple. The variation of what can emerge under one roof is immense. It is always so inspiring to live there and work there. Amazing music coming out of every bedroom door. The studio is a metamorphic sonic laboratory. There is a really unique atmosphere of total commitment without competitiveness, I get critical feedback but never feel judged. Bangers is the common cause. My time there is a huge part of my hope in music infrastructures not becoming crushed by an accelerated copy paste hype chuck cultural industry. I keep needing to return, it's one of my homes.

Perhaps this is an obvious question: how has the pandemic affected your work as an artist? How are you feeling? Are you able to create?

My work always becomes more existentially essential under intense conditions... panic producing! But the pandemic is a constant mental presence. I try to put it into perspective, but it's hard when you're limited to your immediate surroundings, and your connective streams bombard you with a range of often contradictory information, perspectives and statistics. Virtual solidarity supplements the intensity of segregation but I've never been very good at handling the internet, it's a polymorphic demagogic abyss! Using it without losing myself takes discipline...

I'm privileged to be in a good working environment, with a huge amount of unfinished material which the sudden break from touring is allowing me to hack into. I also have the time and space for visually assembling, half drawing-half melting, hacking? The way I compose images is kind of how I sample, using whatever is around, inverting use values; the bread heads I make for the Villaelvin artwork are a good example! Yeah You are accidentally on purpose documenting the mental processing of such an abstract disaster; daily vociferating gives me a way to regurgitate obsession, express the excessive information intake.

Do you think it might change the way artists operate – especially in terms of touring?

The complete alienation from routine gives us a chance to critically reflect. This return to basics, and the unprecedented rupture from the adrenaline-paced, jet-set work of constant self-representation in creative industries will open a lot of questions. Despite it being an involuntarily unifying experience, it's hard to account for others... everything depends on where you were and who you were with when the world froze. People are mortified, relieved, invariably confronted. But people are breathing and thinking, which maybe those of us on tour, even if we experienced a rich collage of collision and insight, didn't have room for. In the reassembling of momentum, artists might be more aware of how the pace of their movement affects their work.

I think we will appreciate the ability to travel and connect through music even more after this globally enforced stillness...Europeans are experiencing a fragment of what it is like to be on the other side of mobility privilege. It's important to know where and why you move, and national hospitality reciprocation should be essential. I'd like to make tours more durational so individual events and contexts can really be absorbed, but maybe that's because I'm a nomad.

106 SHAPE PLATFORM

CÉLINE GILLAIN: 'I CAN'T BE CREATIVE IF I DON'T HAVE TIME TO GET LOST A LITTLE'

Céline Gillain is a musician, video and performance artist living in Brussels. Her work is a hybrid of corrupted pop songs, feminist sci-fi, storytelling and dark humour.

Where are you and how are you doing these days?

I'm at home in Brussels, my apartment is small, but I live near a public park and have been feeling very lucky about that these days. I've found myself paying a lot of attention to the weather changes, to birds (are there more tits and robins than usual or am I just more aware of them?), I've been staring at trees, listening to the wind, smelling leaves, that sort of thing. Other than that, I exercise, watch cartoons, teach online, listen to music and podcasts, and I walk a lot. In a way, all the wandering around has helped me find my way back to my desire, a path I had lost these past few months. To be completely honest, this forced interruption is kind of a blessing to me. I've enjoyed not having deadlines, not having to make plans six months ahead. But then again, I've been counting my steps and obsessing over it like I'm some kind of robot, so I guess my mental health isn't that great after all.

Are you affected by the current situation in terms of your work & art (Ed. note: interview conducted in May 2020, around the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic)?

This crisis is reconfiguring many aspects of my life, the way I interact with people, of course, and how I feel responsible for them, how I organise, how I tend to put pressure on myself, and most importantly, it has given me space to think. This crisis has reminded me that I can't be creative if I don't have time to get lost a little, to kind of drift; imagination is linked to randomness, to something that is beyond my control. It's like I'm reeducating myself how to think. And I know I'm not the only one experiencing this right now. Everyone I know is. Which is why I think we have to radically reject the idea of going back to normal. There's no way we can go back to business as usual. It's not just a sanitary crisis, it's an imagination crisis. Our sense of purpose is resetting. And, as a consequence, I sense that self-expression has become irrelevant. Don't get me wrong: art, in its broadest form, is more relevant than ever but it has nothing to do with self-fulfillment. It has to be larger than that. The social value of music is huge, and that's what I'm willing to explore even more from now on. But of course, I've only been able to question my existence because I haven't got sick or haven't lost any close ones. Every morning at around 7am I can hear my next-door neighbour leaving for work (she's a social worker) and while I go back to sleep, I realise that my self-isolating, even if it's complicated, is a luxury.

"It's not easy to be free, but then it's harder not to be" is a quote from your album *Bad Woman*, which is perhaps something we are thinking about a lot these days. What does freedom mean to you?

The concept of freedom is kind of elastic. My desire for emancipation is evolving, adapting. I have quite recently become acquainted with the music industry and its rules. Once you accept playing according to those rules you become an entertainer, which is weird when you think about it. And it's not necessarily a bad thing either, but the risk is that you might experience a profound loss of meaning. In order to be profitable as an artist, the industry expects you to behave in certain ways, like, for example, you should be productive (it's how you'll grow), you should be grateful and should never complain (you're actually paid to do what you love) and you should be fully committed (you don't want to be seen as an amateur). When you make electronic music, you're called a producer. If you make experimental music, you're called a composer. If your music makes people want to dance, then it'll be considered a product more than a piece of art. Body vs mind, art vs industry: those dichotomies are very powerful in the electronic music field when they just don't make sense at all anymore. A lot of people agree with that today, but the infrastructures are still very separated (if you play in a club or in an art centre, it will be a very different experience). I want to test the limits of those rules and explore their porosity. What this crisis reminds us is that being creative takes time, that there's actually a difference between being productive and being creative. No one knows where this is heading but I think it's simply a great opportunity to rethink the way we've been doing things.

Can you talk about the title of your album *Bad Woman* – is it the Shakespearean shrew, the mysterious Lilith, the societal depiction of a woman who defies its standards?

Yes. I want to invent my own way to be free and my own way of being a woman. For me, those two things are intertwined. One of the things that has kept me from feeling free is a sort of self-programming I've inherited from my mother (and her mother before her) that you should behave the way you're expected to because if you don't you'll be marginalised and that's the worst thing that could happen to you. Women are still mainly expected to be nurturing and sexy, and that's limiting the way we see ourselves.

I want to allow myself to be aggressive, ugly, seductive, crazy, hilarious, inconsistent, wrong, smart. Once you've managed to clear the way a little, at first you're perplexed, confused. The situation's changed drastically these past few years but growing up there were very few role models out there, and it felt like you could either conform or jump into the deep void. So, the 'Bad Woman' is simply a person who doesn't do what is expected of her. She's never where you expect her to be. That's the role model I've invented for myself.

In an interview with the Word Magazine, you mentioned that having full control of your image is important to you. How can we control our images once they are out in the public domain – either as public personas or private ones (via our social media bubbles)?

When someone takes a picture of you while you're performing, that picture when shared carries a piece of you that you can no longer control. The tricky thing about that is that it becomes a self-sufficient thing, a thing people

can own. But nowadays it's the case for everybody. Everyone is exposed, everyone's image is a commodity whether we like it or not. Our image, like any content we share online or generate, is data. In a sense, we all became performers when we became producers of data. So, the moment we become active on the internet or own a smartphone is the moment we accept being used and exploited, the moment we lose control.

But in the meantime, it also makes every single one of us a potential pirate. We can choose what ideas we are planting, how to articulate them, how we infiltrate the system and contaminate it. When you publish this interview, these words I'm writing now will no longer be under my supervision, hopefully they will start a new life and go their own way. Ideas are very contagious; you can't stop them from spreading. But I'm also puzzled by the fact that as a performing artist your face becomes a brand and even more so if you're a woman, your body will be scrutinised, objectified like you're some kind of mascot or fetish, like your body doesn't belong to you once you take it outside the private sphere.

In the same interview you also said: "I consume pop culture in a wide and bulimic way. I'm fascinated by advertisements and capitalist propaganda, and obsessed with the American entertainment industry, in particular with the way it creates heroes and success stories." To what extent are you influenced by pop in your creative work?

Growing up in the eighties in a small village in Belgium, I discovered pop music through TV, radio, and local fairs. It was mainly chanson française and New Wave but also New Beat, which of course was my favourite (my dad said it was trash). I think I was around 16 when a friend in high school lent me an ambient cassette and I realised it was something that required a different kind of attention. Also, I played the recorder from a very early age and was familiar with baroque music. But I never considered these types of music to be unequal, or in fact considered categories to be relevant.

During my teenage years in the nineties, pop was adventurous and hybrid. Björk's "Venus as a Boy", Massive Attack's "Karmacoma", and Tricky's "Overcome" will forever be models and represent a certain idea of perfection to me.

I think I'll never get over those three particular songs because they are so very experimental and yet so very pop. Florian Schneider from Kraftwerk died today – I think Kraftwerk is one perfect example of experimental going pop without losing its intelligence, or pop going experimental without losing its directness, its efficiency. I love pop when it's testy, edgy, precarious, when it uses the contradictions of the system to its advantage and exploits its flaws. I can't really explain my fascination with pop and sometimes I hate it too, when it's simplistic and treats people like imbeciles.

Do you think art has the potential to change society these days?

I agree with Gilles Deleuze when he says the creative act is an act of resistance within societies of control. We need decompression zones where we can explore and play with our own defectiveness and we need to nurture those in a permaculture kind of way. Fascism and aggressive conservatism are creeping all over the planet and as artists we have a responsibility to resist those forces in any way that we can. Fun culture has ripped electronic music away from its political charge and it is maintaining us in a state of relative passivity (and self-destruction).

Today art fairs, art institutions and music festivals are often sponsored by big brands, banks, alcohol, multinationals, tech companies (they use the word partner instead of sponsor) and what we should ask ourselves is: can art be transgressive inside the logic of profit? And can we still infiltrate it? Can we stab crushing monsters with our little art blade? Are we completely powerless? When you're on a stage in front of an audience, you can feel the power of the people, the electricity of their bodies, it's so powerful it's scary sometimes. Being together, listening to music, dancing, thinking with our body, is in itself a form of political resistance because it creates a common language that is beyond anyone or anything's control. At least that's what I believe in.

FOQL: 'IN POLAND, ART IS ALWAYS AT THE VERY BOTTOM OF THE PECKING ORDER'

Justyna Banaszczyk, aka FOQL, is an experimental electronic and dance music artist, author of radio dramas, film scores and video game soundtracks. Her tracks bring to mind IDM and industrial, but their most distinctive features are complex rhythms and often harsh sounds, which constantly explore and contradict the artist's musical identity – a trait that is reflected in her largely improvised live performances. FOQL is also the co-founder of Mother Earth's Doom Vibes, a noise duo with performer and sound artist Edka Jarząb. She has co-curated the Oramics collective, community Radio Kapitał, and she also co-runs the Pointless Geometry imprint. In 2020, her collaborative album recorded with Fischerle was released by Paralaxe Editions.

As a professional artist (music being your main source of income), were you able to get by throughout the pandemic? The support for the arts has varied geographically across Europe. Whereas artists in Berlin might be able to get state support, this hasn't been the case everywhere.

I won't lie – it is hard. But not only for artists, for all people in a precarious situation and in general – for poorer people. All concerts and performances have been cancelled and, to be honest, I feel very unlucky to have my SHAPE year during a pandemic. But I really don't want to complain. I'm the kind of person who always finds a way to somehow survive, even though I also always choose the harder paths for myself because of my unapologetic character. I mean, it was always pretty obvious to me that my situation would be complicated when times of crisis came. I knew it very well, but it was my very own choice to give up all the 'normal' jobs I hated and dedicate my life to art. This is my way of life, not my hobby, so I'll just try to find ways to get through the hard times and stay true to my values.

I guess you cannot even compare what the state offers to artists in Germany and in Poland. In Poland, art is always at the very bottom of the pecking order. Especially independent art. It's not considered to be anything important or anything that builds and keeps bonds between people alive. Art is only useful when it's state propaganda or a tool for historical politics and it's always been like that. Every government acts for its own good. I managed to receive social benefits from the Ministry of Culture, I'm also on a three-month scholarship funded by the state – so again, I'm not gonna complain. I think that it happened only because I was super patient. I was waiting for this social benefit for almost three months and I had to make 15 phone calls and write 10 emails to get it. Many people are not so cheeky as I am and I'm sure they just give up even before they try.

For me, this situation is very interesting to observe because it perfectly unmasks how essential it is to be financially privileged in the so-called 'art

world' in order to be successful. People don't realise how extremely hard it is to not give up your dreams when you come from a poor, working-class background as I did.

You have recently relocated from the capital Warsaw to Łódź, a city in central Poland with an industrial legacy. You grew up and had your formative musical experiences there: from attending music school from a young age, to first encounters with musical subcultures (punk, etc), to organising events and creating music. How do you view your musical evolution in retrospect and what led you to return to Łódź and what are your plans there?

I think I can say that the pandemic relocated me back to my hometown, because I really did not plan this.

I moved to Łódź in March (Ed. note: 2020), at first only to help my mother and then, after three months, my partner and I decided that it made more sense to move here for good. Now I feel it's a very good decision. I left Łódź almost ten years ago when it was in huge economic crisis. I had no job and no prospects, so I just packed my stuff and landed at a squat in the centre of Warsaw. I didn't plan it. I was very angry, and I hated my hometown because it made me struggle a lot. I spent almost a decade in Warsaw, and it was an extremely good time for me, it helped me realise that I wanted to, could and would be an artist. I met hundreds of amazing people from all parts of the country and I learned from them that we could really build this world together. I don't want to sound like some kind of childish dreamer, but I really believe that what you can change is your local environment, your local scene etc. That's what I've learned.

Now that I'm back in Łódź, I'm amazed at how much it has changed. Its beautiful industrial architecture is being renovated and I think it's only a matter of a few years until it becomes one of the most interesting cities in Europe. Believe it or not – its architecture and vibe are unique. I'm also coming back with a slightly different energy. I know what my worth is and what my skills are – things I didn't know when I was leaving the city.

I want to work here and get involved with local artists. My plan is to open a second Radio Kapitał studio here in Łódź. Łódź is also perfect for artists, I guess. Flats are cheap, life is cheaper, there's not so much gentrification around and I guess you can be a little bit more down-to-earth when living here. It's also very close to Warsaw so if I really want to, I can get there in an hour.

This city has a very bad reputation of being a 'shithole' but that's not true; people saying that have usually never been here and they are using some stupid stereotypes. Yeah – it's a working-class city and the atmosphere is harsh sometimes, but I guess that's what made me strong when I grew up here.

I think my working-class background is more important for me than I ever realised and only now have I started to slowly understand it and not be ashamed of it. It's of value. I have started to more deeply understand how it formed my character, my aesthetics and my approach towards inequality and hard work itself. Everything. Including my music.

I'm happy that I'm back.

Aside from making music, you're also active on the music scene, having co-founded the Oramics platform to support women, non-binary and queer people in the electronic music scene, which has evolved into a booking agency and a podcast series. You're also involved in the Polish community radio, Kapitał, and the tape label, Pointless Geometry.

Yeah, I was a very active member of the Oramics collective for two years and I think we accomplished a lot of amazing things. Personally, I believe that the curating of *Total Solidarity* VA is a really big achievement and it also somehow created a microtrend for charity compilations in Poland. But at some point, the feminist profile of the collective became too narrow for me – I wanted something more and got involved in building the local scene on many more levels than just a feminist one. That's why I decided to leave Oramics last year and dedicate all my time to the development of Radio Kapitał – the first community radio in Poland.

I guess it worked. I consider Radio Kapitał to be a huge success and soon we will have our first birthday, which is something amazing for me. Not many people believed we would survive that long, but we did, and we have over 300 people involved in building the project. This is really mind-blowing. It's like one of my biggest dreams coming true. My second important project is co-curating the Pointless Geometry label. Today we are having three amazing premieres and I'm very proud of them. The label is also celebrating its fifth birthday so I'm not ashamed to say – check out our 39 amazing releases. If you don't know much about the Polish experimental scene it's a good place to start.

Do you feel your music is more influenced by inner feelings or thoughts, or external input?

I cannot say what inspires me in general. It's different each time – sometimes it's a book, sometimes it's my newsfeed, sometimes it's just one single feeling I have, sometimes it's other people. What I can say for sure is that I don't really find it interesting to focus my work on the formal or technical side of the whole process.

One of your recent tracks is called "No Need to be Mean". Was it a statement about something specific?

Only because in general there is no need to be mean and we really can help one another even if we don't like each other personally. I try to be mean only to fascists and Nazis.

JESSICA EKOMANE: ‘I’M MY OWN GUINEA PIG’

Jessica Ekomane is a French-born and Berlin-based sound artist and electronic musician. Her practice unfolds around live performances and installations. She creates situations in which sound acts as a transformative element for the space and for the audience. Her quadraphonic performances, characterised by their physical aspect, seek a cathartic effect through the interplay of psychoacoustics, the perception of rhythmic structures and the interchange of noise and melody. Her ever-changing and immersive sonic landscapes are grounded in questions such as the relationship between individual perception and collective dynamics, or the investigation of listening expectations and their societal roots.

You are currently at a residency in Yogyakarta, Indonesia *(July 2019 – note)*. Can you talk about the environment you are staying in and the purpose of the residency as such (especially from your personal perspective)?

The residency is part of a project called Nusasonic – Crossing Aural Geographies. It was collaboratively created by Yes No Klub (Yogyakarta), the WSK Festival for the Recently Possible (Manila), Playfreely/ BlackKaji (Singapore), and CTM Festival (Berlin) and was initiated by the Goethe Institute. For the residency itself, I’m staying in Yogyakarta with Nadah El Shazly who’s working on her own projects as part of the residency, and I’m getting to know the local scene and culture. It’s more of a research residency at the moment, I’m being curious and gathering thoughts that will hopefully lead to new projects in the future. I have a music studio at a place called Komunitas Gayam 16, a studio and gamelan practice space that is run by the daughter and son of Sapto Raharjo – who was a composer and the director of the Yogyakarta Gamelan Festival.

Another current project is an installation presented at the Venice Biennale *(2019 – note ed)* for which you created sound. Can you talk about your installation work in general – how do you approach it in contrast to more abstract sound-making, and what standpoints are the most important to you when you are deciding whether to accept an installation commission.

The installation at the German pavilion is by Natascha Süder Happelmann. She invited six composers – Maurice Louca, DJ Marfox, Jako Maron, Tisha Mukarji, Elnaz Seyedi and me – to create sound compositions in one of the rooms using the sound of a whistle, so that’s my contribution there. For this context I would try less to do a ‘track’ or let the musical elements take over, and rather emphasise the underlying concept and sometimes the process as well. In general, I accept commissions when I like the project, but also when I feel there’s room for me to add something to it and when I trust the people that are part of it. That was the case with Natascha; I felt connected to the other people she brought in and I believe in her way of working. This is something happening behind the scenes

and that the public thus doesn't see, but she really takes care of her collaborators, she trusted us although she didn't know us personally before, and she has a really critical approach when it comes to systemic problems in the art world.

Your work is closely connected to community radio. You were part of Berlin Community Radio's Incubator series and have your own show on Berlin's Cashmere Radio. Can you say something about this show, as well as the broader context of radio (and community radio as such) as a tool for presenting your sound and music choices?

The projects I did with radio came more from external invitations. My show on Cashmere Radio right now is called *Open Sources*; it started with an interest I had in the Lomax archives, and I wanted to share it by recontextualising it and shedding light on some related contemporary experiments I liked. I am now trying to expand it by having guests, other voices that speak for themselves. Recently I had Rully Shabara and Wok the Rock presenting the Yes No Wave Music label that's based in Indonesia, for instance, or Drew McDowall talking about the influence of Scottish Pibroch music in his work.

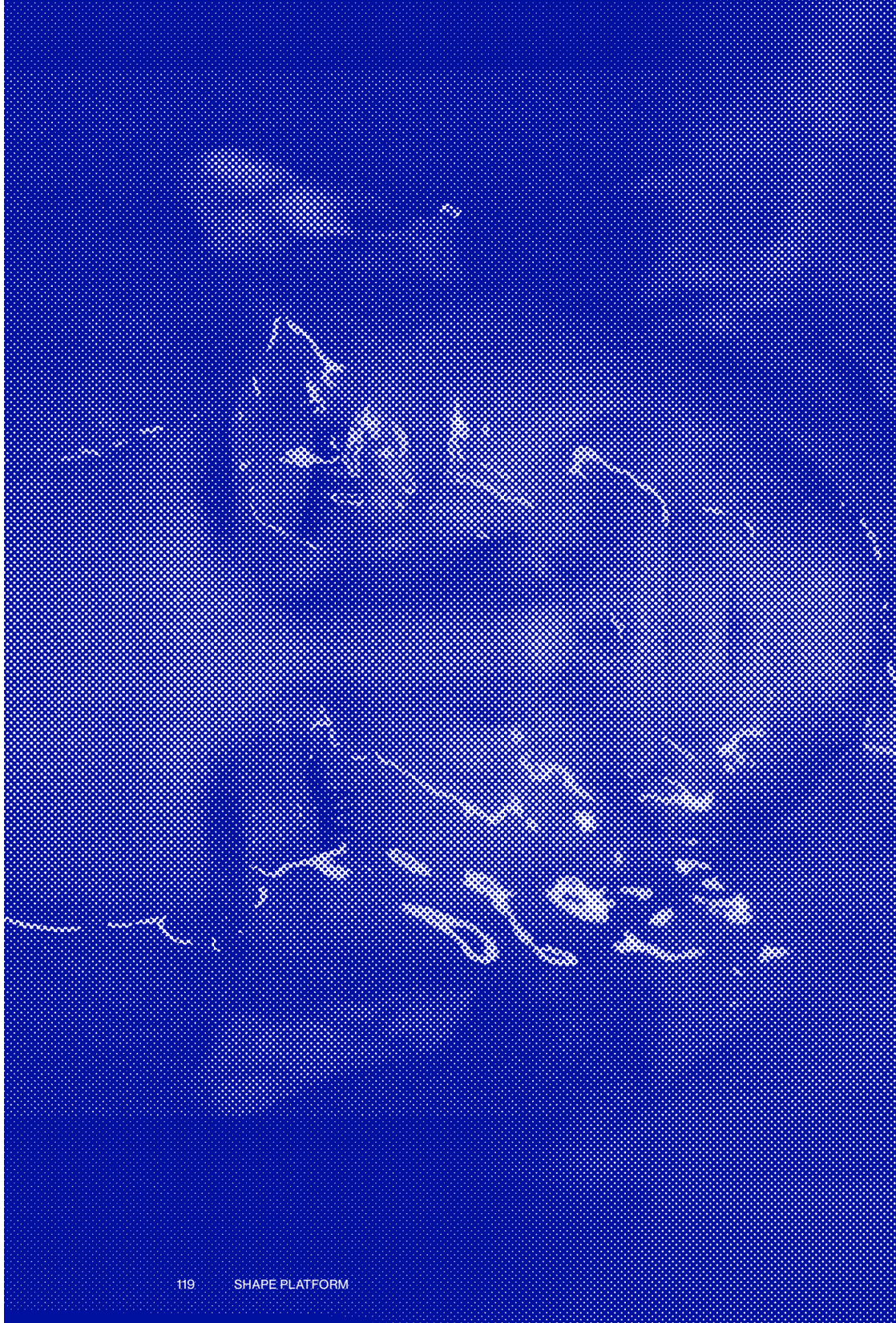
I like working with Cashmere Radio as it is more motivated by a common ideal than driven by all the pressures monetary profit involves. So you're quite free regarding content. I see this show as an archive of discourses available to everybody, and am trying to get closer to the way I'd like things to be, within the limits of my means. i.e. people talking deeply about their own cultural context instead of having an external gaze on it, or integrating related topics such as critical discourses, popular culture, the cross-pollination of influences, colonisation etc.

How do you structure/compose your sound pieces – for instance, the relationship between melody and noise, the production and perception of your work?

Sometimes I start with something specific but there's always a good bit of experimenting, making mistakes and seeing what emerges in the process. What interests me in this 'dichotomy' between melody and noise is mainly the contrast, that one wouldn't be so strong without the other. And so it is with silence and saturation, etc. I don't really have a rule working with perception, and I'm not dogmatic when working with concepts either. I'm my own guinea pig, so in the end the result is based on what I like to hear.

There is a quote on your homepage: "They were myths I once believed, and now they were beliefs I felt were myths". Can you elaborate on this?

This quote comes from a book by John Fante called *Ask The Dust*. I read this book when I was a teenager and I loved it. I come from a working-class environment and Arturo Bandini's funny experiences, coming from a working class migrant family and struggling in this world with his young intellectual tendencies, was a really refreshing read. I put it there just because I like to hide little things in code sometimes. That quote makes me think of getting lost in complexity, grey areas, and the fall of long-standing belief systems.



ADAPTIVE DESIRES: AN INTERVIEW WITH ÁBRIS GRYLLUS

Ábris Gryllus is a Budapest-based, cross-disciplinary media artist and musician. In his music and installations, he moves on the border of known and uncharted soundscapes, opening space for associations and different time sensations. Although he has put out a number of albums and tracks in the past ten years on several labels, Ábris Gryllus released his first album under his real name only in 2017 (*Post_*, Farbwechsel Records), marking a new direction in which his highly conceptual compositions focus in on experimental electronics. His latest solo album, *Canon,* was released by The Death Of Rave in 2021.

You come from a musical family. Could you talk about your background?

My mom is an architect. From her I've gotten lots of visual input since I was very little. My dad is a classically trained musician who turned towards folk and world music. Music was there for me from the beginning and I also trained to be a pianist from the age of six. But then, as a teenager, I got fed up with practising and discovered electronic music.

How did that encounter with electronic sounds happen?

My first encounter with electronic music was in a summer camp. Some of the kids there had Discmans, which was very rare at that time. One of the kids had a mix CD, I borrowed it and "Regulate" by Warren G was on it. This was the first type of different music I had listened to and I was mesmerised. Afterwards, I tried to make hip hop beats because of that encounter. Pretty soon, I realised that I'm not interested so much in the craft of making beats but in textures. And I started to create really weird projects in Reason.

Your solo work is rather abstract and conceptual, which one could say is perhaps approaching music creation from another side – focusing on the sound, rather than the music.

At some point, I tried to deconstruct all this basic musical knowledge in my head and in my sound and I tried to focus on different aspects, like presence and the physical effects of sound on the body, and on the nerves. I love working with contemporary dancers. They planted this awareness of my physical self in my head and therefore my perception became a bit different. The conceptual approach to my music is often more apparent after I finish recording something.

Could you talk about your collaborations with dancers? You've collaborated with a number of dance groups, like the acclaimed Hodworks collective in Budapest.

There's this amazing contemporary dance community here in Budapest. A few years ago, several companies and dancers found me through my music and asked me to work with them and I've been working with contemporary dancers

ever since, as a musician. Sometimes I get involved in the creative process as well, other times I invite dancers to work on certain video installations of mine. Recently, what I have really liked to do is to improvise together with them during the process of creation, within the frame of certain tasks or themes. I really like this conversation that can happen between movement and sound, which in the case of contemporary dance is not a one-way conversation. It's not that someone is dancing 'to' music, it's more like – I don't want to sound too obscure – an exchange of energies and frequencies. I enjoy it a lot.

Would you say that you influence each other when you work with dancers?

Definitely. If you are in the same room, it's something that you can't avoid. I also think that the way dance is created has many similarities to the creation of sound. I think it's because neither has to be necessarily put into words to be understood. It was very liberating for me to start to work with dancers and realise this. Even though I don't dance at all.

"They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more." The liner notes to your last solo album, *A.D.*, start with this quote by Samuel Beckett. The album is slow and solemn, utilising a tempo of 17 BPM, which apparently is known as grave in musical terms.

I started to develop this type of approach – let's call it a language or a way of composing – in 2017. That's when I made my first solo album, *Post_*, which dealt with the 'post state' of being after something or observing something afterwards. I was fed up with making music on my computer, and designing sounds and sitting for weeks in front of compositions. I started to work on a very small modular rig where I could not save settings. I gave myself the restrictions that I had to create one composition per session and make one recording of it. And that would be the outcome. Simply, I got much more interested in the actual moment when the music is created. I patch up something, I live with it, I breathe with it. The patch could be going on for a day or two in my studio. And then, when I feel that I'm familiar with it, I record a certain phase in one take.

This post state comes after the recording. It can be really meditative. I started this album before the lockdown and Covid-19. In that period, I lost family members and saw the reflection of those losses on my very close relatives and myself as well. In that period, somehow I felt that I had lost my childhood because I grew up in a sense, I'm 35 now. This triggered a general feeling of grieving, which is also a post state, when someone or something passes you are forced to reflect on that. The title, *A.D.*, Anno Domini, is often miss-deciphered as 'after death'. In the liner notes, there are several interpretations, including another dualism, afterlife dependence, artificial discipline, and adaptive desires, which all deal with the same theme, somehow, but open up a freer space for associations.

Can you elaborate on the 17 BPM element?

I often focus on my breathing and this gives me a tempo to work with. It is quite a creepy pulse of breathing; it's like four breaths per minute. This BPM happens

to be called grave in classical music, which is gravely slow. On the album, I work with artificial orchestra sounds which I created on a modular synth, with plenty of loops going on simultaneously, creating different constellations all the time. Behind and sometimes above those loops there's a noise hi-hat – the 17 BPM tempo – throughout the whole album. It was a gesture to try to play around with this disappearance of breathing and through that enable myself and the listener to kind of get lost in the textures of the album.

You also have a collaboration with another Hungarian musician, Miklós Farkas (fizikal), called FOR.. It's perhaps more direct, dynamic and less abstract than your solo production. FOR. provides you with a platform to voice your shared interests in techno-dystopian sonic worlds and brutalist sci-fi visions, and could be seen as a reflection of the darker recesses of capitalism.

We released our last EP on the amazing Budapest-based label Exiles. Miklós and I have been friends for 15 years and always listened to similar music. We've been working with certain topics in recent years, like biotechnology, nanotechnology and human labour in our time. I think this new EP is the most distinctive output from us so far.

How do you work with these themes, how do you approach them?

We read and talk a lot. We are also really into lots of images. Then they just sneak into our music. Aesthetically, we really try to keep things in a certain direction, for example, work with micro sounds, and relate to nanotechnology through that. But it's more like a play with fantasy. And when we arrive at a certain soundscape that we feel relates to that and we vibe with it, we do a take. We improvise, but we try to stick more to classical techno build-ups and storytelling.

Your latest release, *Vacuum*, is inspired by politically engaged movements and militant aesthetics, virtual frontiers and future geographies etc. Can you elaborate?

There's a video by video artist Veronika Romhány / Nimova Projeckt accompanying the album, with a text by Margarida Mendes about molecular colonialism. It's basically about how these new industries shape our connection to nature, how we excavate different materials for the pharmaceutical industry nowadays. Since music is abstract and there's no text on the record itself, these issues were more of an inspiration. Mendes also writes about vaccination as well as human labour, which in our current capitalist system is at the centre of our lives. That's why we called the track that the video was made for "Május 1" /May Day/, which is a Hungarian holiday, inherited from socialism, the celebration of labour.

In my house, for example, those who are not working from home leave at 9am and come back at 8pm because of the curfew. They work and come back; every day is the same. Those who work in a home office (Ed. note: interview conducted in April 2021) do the same without even leaving. I also teach from home. This type of living was always the corporate idea, which now, at this very unfortunate time, is executed a hundred per cent.

What are you working on right now?

I'm working on the third album in this series. I also made video installations connected to the first two albums with amazing dancers, Tamara Zsófia Vadas and Csaba Molnár, and I will also make a third video for this third album with Adrienn Hód and finish this triptych with it. I'm working with vocal layers, and I've been writing weird choruses. It's still in an early phase.

I've finished another album recently which is part of this vocal and text exploration, but more rigid and rhythmic. It started out from a collaboration with the Unusual Symptoms and Hodworks dance companies two years ago. The project aims to grasp some attributes, in an abstract way, of the hyperobject that is today's information network. I'm trying to create spatial and sonic illusions, like Binaural Beats and the Tritone Paradox and Phasing, through text bits in a stereo space. The spoken material consists of imperative sentences from our everyday actual or virtual interactions. Each call for a certain attitude to or connection with the unknown speaker. The digital infrastructure hyperobject that surrounds us is extremely complex, but this complexity is hidden by the same interface with which we connect to it. To serve a better user experience, the complicated architecture of the whole network, including many ambivalent features, is concealed. To be served and to be vulnerable, to be informed and misled; opposites are present at the same time. The content of the text plays around with this contrast, by putting together such sentences as "excuse me!" and "intimidate me!", or "hold me down!" and "calm down!". It will be out via The Death Of Rave.

Talking about labour, how does your working day look?

I moved my studio back home because of the lockdown. I work every day. I love to be in this state of constant creation because it helps me to be able to articulate more precisely. Usually, I patch things up on my modular. Sometimes, I leave the loop on all day long and in the evening I record something out of it. Often, when I listen back to these recordings, they suck. I make a lot, but I also select a lot. I'm very lucky to be able to spend at least two or three hours with sounds every day.

Do you consider making music to be labour as such – is it work? Often making art is idealised as a passion project, as something done out of love, which is not work. But this is not necessarily true.

It can sometimes be work, but 80% it's liberating, coming from a pure urge. Obviously, I don't do it every single day if I don't feel like it. I'm at a point in my life where I realise that a lot of work is required when you're making art. For me, the labour comes in when you want to put your music out, because that feels much more like work (recording properly, documenting what I'm doing, not just touching up something and spending a day with it, but trying to share it with others properly). I also work with visuals. That's a different kind of work for me, but images do inspire me a lot in music as well.

Do you have any specific images that inspire you?

I'm really inspired by water – water surfaces, liquid dynamics. I don't know why – it just makes my brain go.

AVTOMAT: ‘OUR COMMUNITY WAS TIRED AND ANGRY’

Avtomat is a man who wears many hats – an openly queer composer, producer, DJ and vocalist, graphic designer, typographer and 3D illustrator, proud member of the Oramics and Ciężki Brokat crews, co-creator of Radio Kapitał, and Polish ambassador for Keychange. His own music has morphed several times throughout the last ten years – from purely synthetic timbres and polyphonic singing with Pleśni to a perplexing fusion of rhythmically and sonically jagged compositions, to the bass-heavy club tracks on his latest EP, *Gusła (Human Rites)*. His thirteen-year experience of supporting the queer, anti-fascist and underground club scene has connected him to a disconcertingly disparate selection of the most forward-thinking sounds on offer today. In his series of DJ-sets and club nights he blends unusual rhythmic patterns, kicked up a notch by his improvised vocals.

How have you been in the last year, year and a half – especially as a musician and DJ, someone active in the club scene, with clubs shut for most of the time?

If I said I didn’t struggle I would be lying. It was a huge challenge to redirect my creative powers inwards, but I feel it was beneficial for me. Nightlife is a huge inspiration and it gives me the drive to go the extra mile, but it can also be a terrible distraction and a way to propel procrastination – at least for me it was. The first couple of months of lockdown were a creative vacation for me – I took care of my closest environment, started eating and sleeping well. I played a couple of livestreams, but it was a formula that quickly lost its appeal for me. It was a time to regroup, plan for the time ahead and finally take the plunge to work on a full EP, rather than single tracks for compilations. During the two previous years, I just didn’t have time to concentrate on my studio output, I was busy trying to earn a living being only a musician.

Still, last year was very lucky for me – I didn’t have to backtrack and give up music as a full-time career, as many others did. I’d managed to work up a household name for myself before the pandemic and survived only thanks to my creative endeavours and activism (writing, producing, licensing my music, giving talks, etc.) and teaching DJing in the Instytut Dźwięku. I scaled back my lifestyle quite a bit to achieve this, but I was adamant I didn’t want to let the pandemic make me go backwards in my journey as an artist. I was also very lucky to start a working relationship with Granko Agency – quite a unique phenomenon in Poland, dedicated to creating a sustainable framework for the Polish electronic music scene. I’m so grateful to have some of the more tedious workload connected with promotion and bookings taken over for me by an entity with a work ethic and an overview on many matters that are close to mine.

Your EP *Gusła (Human Rites)* on Tańce was your first in seven years. It was partially shaped by your residency at the Centre for Contemporary Arts in Warsaw where Oramics, a collective you are

a member of, performed a healing ritual. In August 2020, on the eve of the performance, you got arrested at the protests against the arrest of Margot Szutowicz of the Stop Bzdurom collective and the intensifying oppression of the LGBTQ+ community in Poland. The EP has numerous allusions to the increasingly difficult situation for the community in Poland in the last few years (one of the most direct ones being a quote by Przemysław Czarnek about dehumanising the LGBTQ+ community). Can you recollect what led to the events in August 2020, and what happened after? How has this influenced you almost a year later? What is the current situation?

The events of 7th of August 2020, were pretty much inevitable. The ludicrous sentence that was given to Margot was the straw that broke the camel's back – our community was tired and angry with all the obvious political manipulation we were (and still are) falling prey to. For me, it was also a personal breaking point – I see myself as a rather cowardly person, I was never brave enough to stand in the front line during protests. But that day, even though my legs were shaking at the knees and right-wing bandits were circling the monument I climbed – anger won. I wasn't going to passively consent to our laws being broken and our very nature being used for cynical political games.

Our residency in the CCA had already been based mostly on the oppression of the LGBTQ+ community even before I got arrested, so the fact that I arrived at the final event straight from jail gave it that much more meaning. In retrospect, I feel I was extremely lucky to have had this opportunity, because playing a gig (partly consisting of the, at that point unnamed, *Gusła (Human Rites)* material) acted as almost instant therapy. It was the first time I had let myself channel my repressed emotions through music so completely and it felt so incredibly good that it later informed the whole process of working on the EP. I let the music flow freely, so to say, without analysing how it was going to be perceived, if it was modern enough, niche enough, approachable enough.

Right now, the situation is even worse – the almost complete ban on abortion (that I wrote "Szeptucha (Hex Therapy)" about), police brutality, the awful legislation being proposed in the parliament week after week and the open, unabashed hatred that the ruling party is perpetuating towards our community have never been worse. These are basically the subjects that my next EP is going to tackle, so I guess now I can say that my creative floodgates have been opened for good.

On the EP, aside from the more abstract and concrete references to the status quo, you are also using polyrhythms and syncopation present in Polish folk dances such as the oberek and chodzony. Can you elaborate? What is your relationship to traditional music as such, especially that of your country?

My musical upbringing was very diverse – my mother was a co-creator of the biggest, then independent, radio station in Toruń, my hometown, and both she and my dad accustomed me and my sister to all kinds of music. We listened to King Crimson, Kraftwerk, Pink Floyd, Tangerine Dream and Black Sabbath, but also to Clannad, Dead Can Dance and Cocteau Twins as well as a lot of film music. They also never interfered with my own burgeoning tastes – I went from an early fascination with Roxette and Ace of Base through metal and industrial all the way to electro and early bass and rave music.

Traditional music only came into my life when I came back to Poland after my studies and settled in Warsaw. I met a bunch of people devoted to upholding the traditional dances and songs through the Wszystkie Mazurki Świata festival and I started singing traditional polyphonic *biały głos* songs from Poland and Eastern Europe thanks to the open workshops that it provided. I'd been producing music for almost ten years by then and it was just a matter of time before I put two and two together and in 2012 created Pleśni – a band which fused bassy, broken-beat electronica and these wildly emotional traditional songs. We toured a lot and had lots of material, but we only released a maxi-single. Shortly afterwards, I ran into the worst creative block of my life and never finished the album. When in 2020, the publisher-to-be of *Gusła (Human Rites)*, Łukasz Warna-Wiesławski of Tańce, approached me with an offer to create an EP of club music based on traditional Polish rhythms it seemed almost too serendipitous to be true.

You are also a member of the Oramics collective, created in 2017 as a platform for women, non-binary and queer people on the electronic scene. Your reach goes beyond Poland, and also focuses on other countries in the East/Central European region. Can you talk about your involvement in the collective?

In autumn 2018, I was already starting to get some recognition as a DJ in Poland and I was already throwing quite successful queer nights with my other collective, Ciężki Brokat, as a counterbalance to the frequently toxic gay-only scene. Joining Oramics seemed like the next logical step for me – they had a clear agenda of representing the underrepresented that resonated with me a lot, but they also underlined their search for quality. Together, we achieved some of the biggest feats I've ever been a part of. In the wake of the violence at Białystok Pride we released *Total Solidarity*, a huge, 122-track charity compilation aimed at raising funds for grassroots LGBTQ+ organisations in Poland (the hate campaign was already advanced back then) and *Sonic Resistance*, a similar compilation helping Rojava in Syria. We managed to mix well-established names and total newcomers in our podcast series, which shines a spotlight on femme and LGBTQ+ artists from all over the world. We have successfully raised the matter of representation of Eastern and Central European artists in global electronic music media. Oramics have also been instrumental in helping me overcome the artistic block I spoke about earlier – they motivated me, reassured me, grounded me and taught me how to work collectively and how to be assertive.

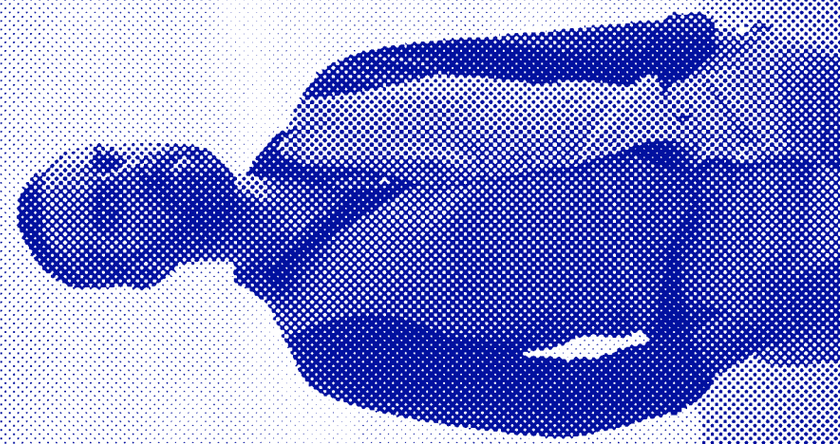
What led you to get involved in activism? Was it a personal motivation, the particular situation in your home country, or an overall feeling of discontent with how things are in the world? Did you consider relocating to a place like Berlin, where there are no such societal pressures?

I don't really like calling myself an activist per se. I'm not the kind of person who appears at every protest and devotes their whole life to bettering the world. I just do as much as I can to use the platform that I have as a musician to raise awareness of certain subjects and frequently use my music as a vehicle for that. It stems both from the feeling that I'm very privileged and need to pay this privilege forward, and personal motivation. Me being vocal about LGBTQ+ issues and women's rights in Poland is just a way of ensuring that kids don't have to experience all the hardships I experienced growing up as a queer or that my sister experienced as a woman.

I completely understand that many people from Poland didn't want to spend their whole lives fighting and moved abroad, but it's not an option I have. I've studied abroad and found that I am really attached to my country, my language, to Polish culture in general. Despite all the hatred and bigotry that cynical political campaigns and the Catholic Church have inspired in this nation, I still see a wealth of redeeming qualities – we are hard workers, we're not easily brainwashed by the absurdities of late capitalism, we have an innate sense of honour and justice. We're also a nation that suffered immensely throughout the last couple of centuries, so I feel like we deserve a bit of a break. Lastly – in my mind leaving Poland would be leaving it to be led straight into a Russia-like situation, and I couldn't live with myself if I chose the jump-start for my career that Berlin offers over my most cherished ideals, as pompous as it may sound.

As the lockdown is slowly easing, and cultural events are slowly restarting (outdoor at least), what do the next couple of months have in store for you?

I've just finished working on a new club-oriented release for a foreign label, which I'm very proud of, but I can't divulge many more details right now. I've just released a new track on a tape compilation aimed at raising funds for the operation of Radio Kapitał, a Polish community radio I co-created two years ago. I'm also finishing an original score for a project for Warsaw-based Teatr Studio in cooperation with the Archive of Public Protests, and I'm starting work on a quadraphonic sound piece for a French modern art festival. I want to use the summer to work out the architecture and additional musicians for live acts I'd like to play in the autumn, based on new material and *Gusła (Human Rites)*. In terms of nightlife – I'm being sceptical as of now. There are already plans for a couple of outdoor events, but I want to make sure all the necessary steps will be taken to avoid them being incubators for Covid; we all really deserve a longer break from the pandemic.



ROBERT CURGENVEN ON AIR, RECORDING IN THE DESERT AND THE IRISH EXPERIMENTAL SCENE

Robert Curgenven is an Australian-born artist based in Ireland who produces albums, performances and installations. His work emphasises physicality, our embodied response to sound and its correspondence with its architectural context, the weather and its physical production via air. His recorded output includes *SIRÈNE*, pipe organ works, for his Recorded Fields Editions; *Oltre* and *Built Through* for LINE imprint; and *Climata*, recorded in 15 of James Turrell's Skyspaces across nine countries.

I'm curious about your musical evolution.

I started off learning on an Electone organ at quite a young age, so I've been around music for over 35 years now. I was about nine or ten when I was home alone and, while using just the pedals on the organ, I made a plate fall off the top shelf in the next room from only the bass. So at a fairly early age it was impressed upon me that sound, especially bass, is quite physical. I'm still quite impressed by how manipulations of bass pressure can affect very localised changes, almost like a microclimate, how it affects changes around us and our own physicality. We later had a Hammond organ at home, which is basically about shaping overtones. In my late teens I stopped playing keyboard instruments but always had something lying around with a keyboard on it. I became more interested in not so much just intonation but the specificity of frequencies – the notes between the notes and harmonics. It felt like there are very obvious combinations and permutations that are possible with Western tuning and I was increasingly interested in possibilities outside that.

How did you get to play the organ at such a young age?

It happened partly because it can be put on headphones so not everybody has to listen to it. My father used to play a lot of jazz when I was young and he had these amazing quadraphonic test records. They presented a different way of hearing things and, generally, given Australia's relative cultural hegemony, I mostly was interested in anything that was unusual in terms of music and engaged with that.

You mentioned the organ and the fact that you were playing through headphones as a child. Has that had an impact on how you perceive sound?

Not so much, I try to avoid the headphones nowadays. I'd say the shift towards more spatial, contextual and delicate concepts came from using some recording equipment on a few projects at university. Through them, I noticed that what was going on outside was as important as what I was recording. I ended up getting a Tascam DAT recorder and the microphones that I've been using for the last 20+ years and noticed that because of their sensitivity

you really perceive what's going on everywhere around you. As opposed to a camera, where you are focused on what's going on in the frame, the microphones tend to pick up this framelessness, a field around you. A year after I finished university I ended up living in a relatively remote area on the other side of Australia so the surroundings became more important.

What were you doing there?

Getting away from the impending Sydney Olympics, which had a huge impact on the gentrification of the city, as well as being more interested in the areas outside the metropolitan zones of the east coast. In Australia, 80% of people live on the coast and I was interested in what happened further across the country and inland.

So this notion of space is also something that comes from those days?

Absolutely. You can see 16km to the horizon. If you make a recording or if you're standing in a completely empty, flat area – for instance in the desert outside Coober Pedy – across that distance you're effectively listening to a very wide geographical and topological context: how weather moves, how landforms shift, the small changes in sound as they heat and cool. And that's going to influence how sound moves. It's inherently contextual.

Technically, how do you create your work?

I did a lot of field recordings for a long period of time. Back then I was just doing radio. I've done radio since I was about 19, I learned to mix from that. There were two turntables, two CD players, two tape players, three Revox, a DAT player, a VHS player and whatever else was in the studio. Sometimes, there would be a group of us and we would be mixing live on air. There were no EQs on the studio console, so you'd just be getting a feel for the tactility of using faders. The field recordings happened when I was living in more distant areas and I made them for myself. Some years later, I ended up in Germany and discovered that people were interested in these kinds of things. My time in remote areas was very instructive because I learned how sound behaves and that there's a whole bunch of variant behaviours in any given situation. If you're largely focused on areas where there are very few people – even though the land was shaped by 60,000 years of indigenous land management – you're going to notice a certain way that things settle and move around. When you also consider that a 2Hz wave is about 75m long, if you've got a couple of kilometres between the nearest land forms, you have the potential for unimpeded, very large, very low frequencies to move around which you'll subtly apprehend with your body. It puts a different spin on how you can hear out there.

We discussed the physicality of sound and its technical properties, but what about its emotional side?

I don't use the recordings as much as I used to because, even though I have hours of them, at a certain point you've just exhausted the possibilities of combinations. Why would you combine a sound from a shopping mall in Japan

with the middle of nowhere or a desert, what kind of point are you making without it being pastiche? People ascribe emotional qualities to water: it's happy water, it's playful, it's sad-sounding...

I did a piece for Cedric Peyronnet's *La Rivière* project for his label Kaon where he made recordings along the 100km length of the Taurion River in France, which passes through the Limousin. I thought it was interesting to cut out all the other parts of the recordings that weren't just white noise, essentially only when the water is really quite turbulent. I was trying to make a piece with variants of white noise. I was trying to get around the idea of ascribing emotional qualities to something in an anthropomorphic/anthropocentric way. That was interesting because it ends up having a particular quality that maybe is a little bit full on all the time, but I think there's a certain sense of an emergent dramaturgy. When events happen quickly, you might ascribe a certain emotional context to them. It's often the tonal aspects that might give away a lot of that, so sometimes applying a heavy low frequency onto something creates a sinister quality, although the recording itself might not be sinister.

Nature also plays an important role in your work.

I have spent a lot of time outside, though now that I'm living in the Northern Hemisphere, architecture and the great indoors have become fairly driving forces. I noticed that I had some really nice recordings of wind in thunderstorms, wind moving through trees, to which you'd also ascribe a certain emotional arc because it feels like something's building up. It's really similar to how a lot of DJs or producers might use hissy frequencies in techno. I've noticed that if I was using a recording of wind out in the desert within a performance and I was also using turntables which have a great deal of hiss through them, that if I ramped-up the hiss it not only created a phase anomaly that felt as if the room was full of sound, but it also had a certain degree of emotional release, like a build-up in techno. I would become interested in something like a phase anomaly or how hiss works within an audio field and then spend more time focused on that.
I also realised in recent years that I'm quite interested in air. In the tropics, when it's super humid, it's like the air is coated onto you, the clouds are also quite fascinating to watch. They are all about subtle movements of air and shifts in pressure. Watching, listening, and understanding how these changes in nature happen and that, after all, we are animals and we live in a very rarefied version of nature largely of our own construction, but we are not outside of it. Trying to reinvent the wheel acoustically or sonically isn't necessarily possible but learning from the ways in which complex phenomena interact or impact on how we exist in the world seems to be a worthwhile activity.

Do you think sound artists working with environmental recordings can improve or contribute to the environment?

Both yes and no. I think there's a tendency to fetishise sounds. There are a lot of studies about sound in cities and, equally, there's a lot of fascination of urbanists with this ineffability of nature. This is almost harking back to some sort of colonialist and imperialist idea of nature itself representing some sort of purist state, or to a nativist approach which has very problematic overtones to

it. Engaging with the subtleties of what constitutes the specificities of a location and its context, and equally talking about a phase shift where one geographical or ecosystem shifts into another: where a savannah shifts into woodland and then gradually shifts into a rainforest or an Alpine area – being aware of how these things move around, you're are becoming aware of how you exist in the world and where you are, your own ontological state. I think the subtleties of field recording can present these possibilities. The subtleties of focusing on any aspect of sound that isn't primarily trying to manipulate people's feelings into selling records or participating within the contemporary capitalist context can yield results. But I think that equally, with the technological means of delivery, be they just through computer speakers and MP3s or concert systems, there are going to be limits to the intelligibility of that message.
I never really regarded myself as a field recordist, it was just one of the approaches I used at some points. In the last 10 or 15 years, it's become a lot more of a 'thing'.

You are based in Cork, Ireland. Could you perhaps talk about the Irish electronic/sound arts scene?

I've lived in a bunch of major cities, though I often don't play where I'm living. The first time I came to Ireland I was impressed that people were really 'up for it'. There was this raw willingness to engage. That said, there've been a number of venues shut down in the last few years here. There've been in-excess of 300 artist studios lost in Cork alone in the last couple of years, one building with 200 artist studios was levelled by a large development corporation so it could be turned into a hotel.

As with the Celtic Tiger and the lead up to the crash in 2008, there's a lot of speculative engagement that benefits maybe a few, over a general cultural engagement that could benefit the many. There's a real diversity of things going on, and there isn't this compartmentalisation like in the UK. In terms of a scene, I'm probably less in the know, but there is a great festival called Open Ear which is held on an island in the south west. They only have Irish acts and it covers a whole spectrum, from techno, dance music, to more improvised approaches. There's a strong emphasis on electronic music as well as site-specific projects across the island. This willingness to experiment characterises a lot of the Irish engagement. The political, religious/sociocultural environment does have an impact on how people engage with things outside of a didactic hegemonic mainstream.

CLARA DE ASÍS: ‘I LIKE TO CONSIDER MUSIC AS A MANIFESTATION OF LIFE’

Clara de Asís is a Spanish composer and performer based in France. She has an approach to sound that highlights simplicity, non-intervention and active listening as a means of music-making. Her works display an extreme precision and intuitive openness that involves a dedicated attention to sound in its details and in its most pure forms.

During the first lockdown in spring 2020, you travelled to Basel and recorded an album with Mara Winter called *Repetition of the same dream*. This record obviously was created in extraordinary circumstances. Can you talk about how it was created in terms of ideas and execution?

Repetition of the same dream was commissioned by Another Timbre as part of the label’s ‘quarantine series’. Simon Reynell’s invitation to create an album during that particular period came at a time when Mara Winter and I were already developing some of the pieces that, later, would be part of the album. As you mentioned, I travelled to Basel to join Mara as soon as the possibility of a lockdown became likely in France, considering the circumstances as an opportunity to continue cultivating our work together without interruptions. Music-making quickly became our main activity during March and April, in a way that wouldn’t have been possible in a different context: because of the lockdown, we were able to record in very specific locations of the city, in almost total quietness, and explore the sonorities of those spaces. We first developed most of the pieces in a tunnel in the city centre where we’d go in the middle of the night. Later, we had the possibility of using an empty church to record all of the pieces in a more controlled environment. In these pieces, there is a very strong link to the space where they were produced, which has its own identity. There was also the idea of exploring a combination of instruments coming from very different historical backgrounds: Mara’s medieval bass flute and the different objects and electronics I was using.

In an interview about the record, you said: “Somehow it showed that everything can change – and so everything is possible.” Which is an interesting premise, not only regarding the particular situation in which you found yourself, but also in terms of music and music-making as such.

Yes. I think that everything we observe or experience in life has its resonance in music, and vice versa. I like to consider music as a manifestation of life, and I treat it as such. This involves a certain attitude of acceptance, of trust, of respect towards the autonomy of sound, if I can say it like that. As if sounds had their own course, their own existence, and we as musicians are there to facilitate it. If we look at this premise from that perspective, “everything can change – and so

everything is possible", it can be understood as the acknowledgment of a certain essential indeterminacy, which we can see as something that has the potential to bring us somewhere we wouldn't have anticipated, rather than considering it an annoyance that we should struggle against.

You are also establishing a label with Mara, which should bring together historical and experimental music. Can you talk about it?

We recently established a label called Discreet Editions, which explores interactions between historically-informed aesthetics in music and experimental composition. There are great affinities between so-called early music performance and contemporary experimental practices in terms of a certain approach to indeterminacy, notation systems that integrate very open areas, tuning systems, stylistic improvisation techniques, and so on. We both find that this convergence is a territory that hasn't been explored very much yet. We'd like to provide space for existing projects that share this interest with us, but also, and more particularly, find and develop ways to bring together these two aesthetics which, socially and historically, have been placed apart from each other.

Your music highlights "simplicity, non-intervention and active listening as a means of music-making." Can you describe each of these things as a tool that can be employed in music-making? How can composers work with chance and randomness, and how can they work with active listening, which is required from the listener?

Rather than tools, I'd describe these elements as parts of a global attitude. They are quite interrelated: listening leads to non-intervention, non-intervention leads to simplicity. Of course, non-intervention is not something to necessarily apply literally, but it's to be understood as a philosophy that generates a specific aesthetic – that of not imposing yourself on the sound, but letting the sound be. I'm interested in working with sound in its most pure forms, rather than applying too many transformations or audio treatments. Rather than this idea of 'sculpting the sound', I'm keen on the idea of the sound itself sculpting my listening practice. I don't make a distinction between composer practice and listener practice. In a way, listening is composing.

Chance and randomness are related to the position that the composer takes in their creative work. Those who don't place themselves as the central, demiurgic instance of the musical experience, are probably more open to chance and randomness (something that's out of one's control). Considering indeterminacy and chance as a structural element of a composition is also refusing to perpetrate certain power dynamics and creating space for freedom.

What is the role of volume in your work? We live in times when music is getting increasingly louder; your works tend not to follow this trend.

I'm interested in exploring a form of music that doesn't intend to have the exclusivity of the sonic space, that doesn't try to erase or invalidate whatever 'extra-musical' elements happen at the same time, but, instead, proposes a particular way to experience sound. A form of music that integrates other sounds in it, just the sounds of life itself, if I can put it like that. And then it's up to the listener to focus their attention on whatever sound element they feel is a rich territory.

This indeed involves an approach to volume which, rather than getting its perceptive intensity from high signal levels, gets it from the listener's degree of attention. The louder the volume you apply, the more impositional you are. Though loud volumes can be necessary, and even generate ecstatic experiences in certain forms of music, in my case, it's rather the medium and low volumes that provide space to generate what I'm looking for. Which is: the listener going towards the sound, and not the sound coming to them. I also feel that there's sometimes a direct relation between loudness and power dynamics, which I try to leave out of my work as much as possible.

SCREAMING INTO THE ABYSS: AN INTERVIEW WITH JOHANNA HEDVA

Johanna Hedva is a Korean-American writer, artist, musician, and astrologer, who was raised in Los Angeles by a family of witches, and now lives between LA and Berlin. Hedva's practice cooks magic, necromancy, and divination together with mystical states of fury and ecstasy. They are devoted to doom as a liberatory condition, deviant forms of knowledge, and the ways in which a voice can unmake the world. Hedva's work, no matter the genre, is different kinds of writing, whether it's words on a page, screaming in a room, or dragging a hand through water. Their latest album, *Black Moon Lilith in Pisces in the 4th House*, was released on crystalline morphologies and Sming Sming on January 1, 2021. Hedva is also the author of two books, the novel *On Hell* (2018) and a collection of poems, performances, and essays, *Minerva the Miscarriage of the Brain* (2020).

You were raised in Los Angeles by a family of witches, and now live between LA and Berlin. Can you talk about your background?

It was the climate of the world I grew up in – magic, witchcraft, the dead are alive. My mother and my aunt weren't part of a particular tradition or coven or anything – I don't think it's that rare for people in LA to be into witchcraft, like, every LA bitch I know has some astrologer or tarot reader or reiki shaman or other. With my mom and aunt, who are working-class white women, I think it gave them a sense of purpose and power that they couldn't get from society. In our house, there were rituals around the cycles of the moon and planets, and there was a pervasive sense that everything had a will of its own, that there were no inert objects. Both of them kept specific objects in specific configurations around the house – altars, in a word – and these were not to be touched. These objects had a kind of unspeakable power, they were working their magic, even if it was something like a shell or a bottle cap, things that weren't otherwise considered to have value.

On my father's side, there's a tradition of Korean fortune-telling in the family, and as an adult I've studied and worked with Korean shamanism in an intentional way. That has felt really important, to feed that ancestral link. But, more than there being some kind of family grimoire I learned from, all of this was a perspective on how to make sense of the world, particularly when it comes to things that are immeasurable, mysterious, outside of the dominant structures that try to contain and define reality.

Besides music and art, you're also an astrologer. What interests you in this field? Are there any elements from astrology you are able to apply in your art?

Astrology has the most robust language I've ever found for talking about what's difficult and painful about life, such as pain, suffering, misfortune, misery,

bane, toil, sudden death, slow illness – astrology has a million lovely ways to account for all the specificities of that shit, and I find that hella useful.

When you practise astrology, you're practising a language that subverts and complicates ideas of causality, of cause and effect. It gets right into the guts of the tension between fate and free will and shows that these things are actually not antipodes but deeply enmeshed with each other.

What I like most about astrology is that it gives time a quality, not just a quantity; it wonders how night is different from day, how September is different from October, this year different from the last. And it's cyclical time, not linear time – it's everything in terms of cycles that are interwoven and repeating in different arrangements and iterations.

The thing is that time used to be perceived this way for millennia. It's only been the last few hundred years that have stripped down our understanding of time to only a quantitative measurement – and obviously this was done for and because of capitalism. When time has no quality, no differences, it becomes a means to measure labour that can go on and on without consequence. It's no coincidence that as capitalism began to take root, a regime of colonial exploitation started to run amok, de-enchanting the world. If the world is seen as a lifeless resource, it can be mined without compunction. If the only thing capable of consciousness is the human, then a relationship with our environment will always be hierarchical and extractive, with us on top. I guess what I like about the kind of astrology I practise (which is mostly informed by Hellenistic astrology, the kind practised by the Ancient Greeks) is that it really de-emphasises the human as the totality of purpose and reason. Instead, it's an approach that looks at all the many ways in which natural, social, political, economic, psychological, spiritual, and metaphysical forces can converge and diverge, and how any one person is simply part of that greater network.

You are also the author of two books: the novel *On Hell* (2018) and a collection of poems, performances, and essays, *Minerva the Miscarriage of the Brain* (2020). Can you talk about your literary work?

On Hell is a novel that reads as a kind of tirade manifesto by a former child genius hacker who, after being released from prison, is trying to literally escape gravity. He's maniacally hacking into his body, into his flesh, to install wings. The voice of that book is supposed to sound like the internet, this punctuation-less screed of rage and righteousness. Sometimes I think it's the best thing I'll ever write lol. *Minerva the Miscarriage of the Brain* is a collection, presenting in printed form the work I did across different media over the last ten years – there are poetry, essays, performances, plays, drawings, and photographs. Right now, I'm working on a collection of essays about music, mysticism, gender, and politics. Some of them have been published already: they're about Sunn O))), Lightning Bolt, and Nine Inch Nails. What's fun about this project is that, for the first time in my life, I'm writing nonfiction from a place of enthusiasm rather than critique or fury. I just love these bands and want to tell people why.

Your last album, *Black Moon Lilith in Pisces in the 4th House*, dealt with grief, and the stages of dealing with the trauma of losing your mother.

The album was informed by Korean shamanist ritual and the Korean tradition of P'ansori singing (which demands rehearsal next to waterfalls, in order to ravage the vocal cords), as well as by Keiji Haino, Diamanda Galás, and Jeff Buckley. What does this album mean to you nine months on?

The album came out in the middle of lockdown, so there was no tour, no live performances, no communal catharsis with an audience – and in a way, that seemed fitting, since so much of that record is about the stunning and annihilating solitude of encountering death. Just, you know, good ol' lonesome screaming into the abyss.

Are transgression or transgressive experiences in general something you are interested in translating into your work?

What else is there to care about?

What are some of the recent themes and topics that you are interested in exploring?

I have a new project that just launched called *GLUT (a superabundance of nothing)*. It's a sound work created using divination and AI and only my voice, and this sound piece is the core of both an immersive physical installation and a video game. The game can be downloaded for free at glut.website, and the installation was at the HKW Berlin, in the group show *Illiberal Arts*. *GLUT* was a way for me to think about how AI has existed long before computers in the form of divination techniques. If we understand an intelligence to be something capable of recognising patterns, predicting what will come next in a pattern, and articulating meaning from a set of data, then divination could be said to be a form of intelligence in its own right.

I was also curious about how magical and smart Amazon has become – like, is it a new form of divination and prophecy? Is it our contemporary mysticism? It's scary in a sublime way – a kind of transcendent terror. One of the experiences that began *GLUT* was when Amazon recommended my own book to me, which, because my book is pretty strange and niche and published by a super tiny press, felt actually fucking impressive, like, out of the millions of possible items to try to sell me, it managed to locate a pretty likely one. The other side of this experience is of course how claustrophobic the internet has become, how the algorithm figures you out pretty quickly and then just narrows the range of what you can find more and more.

The surveillance embedded in all places on the internet is fucking terrifying, so *GLUT* tries both to reach into how that feels as well as push against it in a critical way. My collaborator, Jessika Khazrik (who produced the sound, and is also a SHAPE Artist), and I trained two AI vocal clones based on my voice, but tricked them with vocoding processes, so we wouldn't give them any of my actual voice data to sell. Training machines with machines and seeing if they'll notice – that sort of thing.

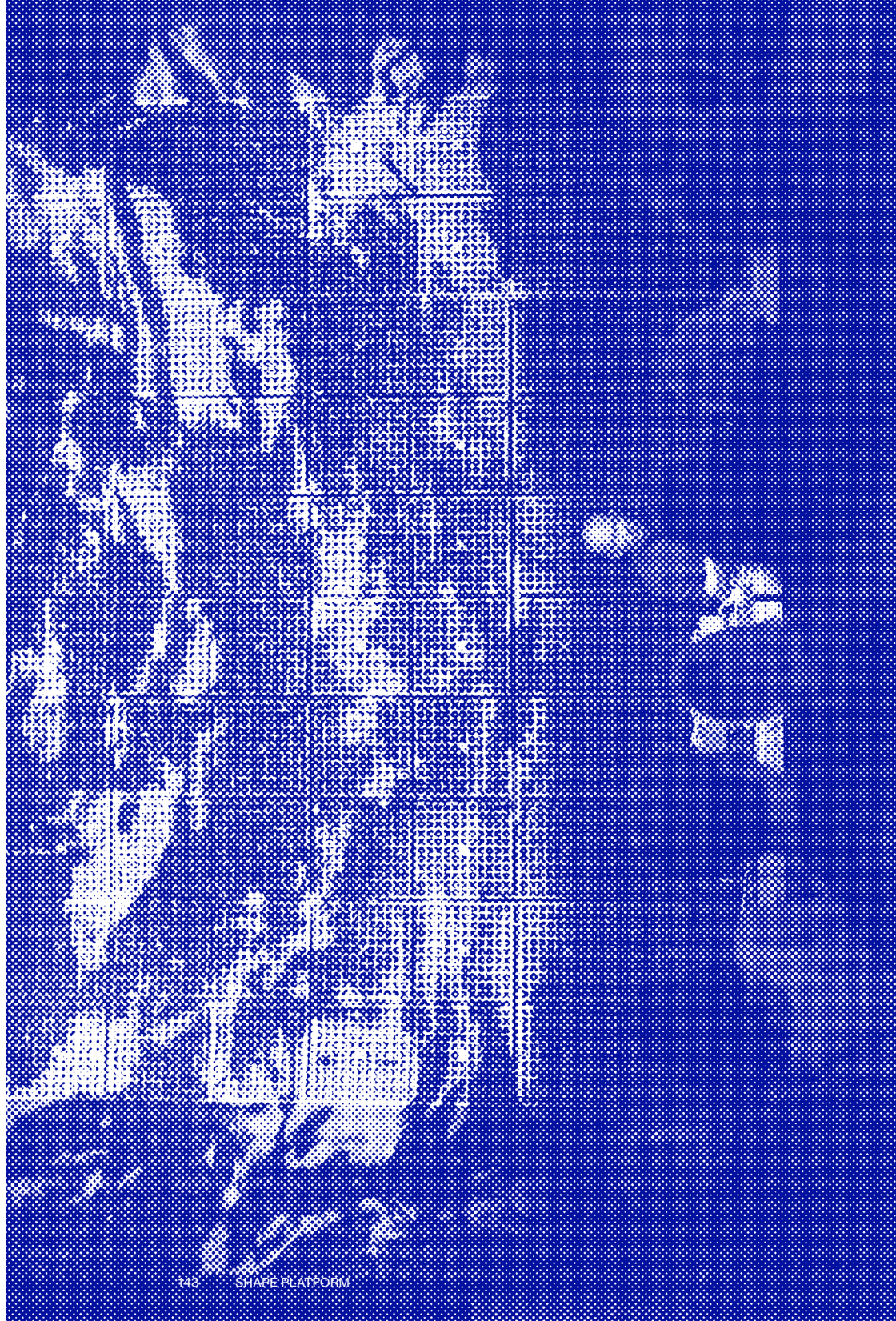
Accessibility is always a primary concern for me, so it was important to make sure the work was accessible beyond the museum installation, especially during a pandemic. It was interesting to try to translate the immersive sound

piece into a digital-only format without losing the guts, the somatic element, since the physical installation was built especially to rattle your bones. It's a small, narrow, dark room with a bench, and the speakers are spatialised, with a subwoofer in the bench so you really feel it in your ass. I hope it helps that the avatar in the game is based on a teratoma tumour and the monster from *The Thing*, and that it drags itself through an environment of nesting black holes, diseased intestinal tunnels, and there's even a non-Euclidean spike tunnel. Fun!

What are you currently working on & planning?

My next novel, *Your Love Is Not Good*, is being published in 2023, by And Other Stories, which means I'm in the throes of final revisions now. And I've been writing new stuff for the next album, which I think will be some kind of guitar drone chanting thing that quotes Clarice Lispector about how being born ruined her health.

But mostly, I feel pretty exhausted from all this apocalypse, and so have just been rewatching *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, which I do every couple years, and it's not like I'm coping with the end of the world by custom-ordering Spike mouse pads or anything ignominious like that.



ELVI: ‘MY PATH IS A PATH OF MUCH INNER CONFLICT’

ELVI is the performing and producing persona of the Rigan disc jockey and curator Elvi Soulsystems (Elviss Zants). His current method is to use low fidelity field recordings as the only sound source – these are recorded sounds of urban and rural habitats, industrial sounds, the sound of the human voice (mainly his own). These recordings are manipulated using primitive modulation – space, repetition, speed, phasing via improvised performance. No instruments – electronic or acoustic – seem to feature in his music. His approach is to always create a tension between opposites – the raw and the pristine, the calm and the aggressive, the minimal and the oversaturated, light and dark. He has extensive experience of a variety of collaborative work.

How have you been in the last year (Ed. note: interview conducted in August 2021) – a year that for many musicians has become quite strange and insular. Were you able to create?

This whole period has been weird indeed. We’ve been missing accidental, human, unexpected contact, but then again – there’s a lot of far more reflective stuff out there than there was before. And that is a good thing, I think. No matter how trivial the reflection sometimes is, I think it’s a good thing that we reflect on the passage of time. From time to time. For me it all came rushing – I became a father, I launched my little digital label, I did a lot of music. And found out I’m way more introverted than I thought I was. Hence, now that I’ve had the chance to DJ here and there, it’s almost harder than it was before. Harder to be amongst living people, harder to make small talk. And also harder for me as a DJ to understand how to approach the dance floor. So, my solution is to always perform in sunglasses. That helps for now.

You are based in Riga, and aside from being a sound creator, you are also a DJ and a curator. Can you talk about your creative work in general, as well as about its genesis. What is your background? How did you get to do what you do?

Yes, I was born in this city and raised by this city. So, it’s sort of a loving and a painful relationship at the same time. I’d say music making, which at the time meant beat making for my friends to write rhymes to, came first and then the DJ aspect and curatorial aspect came after. But soon enough, those lines sort of blurred and it’s been a process for me to shift between those things – when I identify as a person who utterly loves music and is happy just playing records and messing with other people’s creations, and when ‘the artist within’ comes forth and I’m actually able to call myself a performer and a composer. And then, on top of that, I feel this urge or even a responsibility to keep the scene somehow alive and sometimes rekindle it here. My path is a path of much inner conflict amongst those three personas, but it’s one that has been laid before me. And every time I say to myself I’ll stop one or other of those aspects, it doesn’t last long. When I say I’ll not DJ anymore and deliberately turn to playing plain noise at ‘parties’, it turns out that’s a thing. When I say I’m not a musician, I go out and somehow do a 40-minute piece in a matter of days. Currently, I’m in this phase when I say won’t be creating any more events. Let’s see how that turns out.

How is Riga’s music scene? How is it evolving – what are the projects to watch out for?

Too many DJs. But that’s everywhere, I guess, because it’s just what everybody seems to know how to do. Only there are very few actual, dedicated, in-for-the-long-haul DJs. But that’s not to say that what we have had historically are not the most amazing performers and educators, and I would point out specifically DJ Raitis, who is one of my greatest inspirations and is still the most enigmatic and stylish one out there. I’m sort of in love with the industrial scene here, which is led by the STURM crew. I love my friend SKD, who puts out beautiful records and is a true music lover and DJ too. There is a guy called Damaging Stimulus; he’s one to sit on his stuff for years and years, but I know he’s got it in him both as a DJ and as a musician. There’s a rock band called Nikto. Great name and great sound.

There’s a festival called Sansusī that takes place annually in rural Latvia, but they also have a space they curate here in Riga called Tujauzinikur, which is a beautiful space and they have this light and smart approach to keeping it always on the cutting edge. Yet of course, it has suffered a lot lately. And I guess one could not imagine Riga without the Skaņu mežs festival. There are lots of things. But Riga is not booming, that would be a lie. Riga needs a renaissance. It needs to reconnect itself to the era that gave birth to our current identity – to the artists of the end of eighties and the beginning of the nineties. NSRD, in particular. That’s our DNA, but we’ve somehow failed to make a connection to it. And the lack is felt.

In terms of your own sound-creation, you work with low fidelity field recordings as your only sound source. Recording urban and rural habitats, industrial sounds, as well as the sound of the human voice (mainly your own). Field recording has been a popular sound-making method for artists with wildly different approaches. Can you talk about yours?

I found this limitation to be the answer to what I struggled with when no matter what synth I would use or what drum machine or even acoustic instruments that I tried to incorporate into my music – either through sampling or through playing them myself – I would always feel that it all lacked authenticity in a fundamental sense. I would always hear that that’s a bassline generated by that particular synth or that percussive sound is again from another very particular set of samples. When I hear it in other people’s music and even when working with other people – that’s not a problem. But when it comes to myself, only now – in the last couple of years – have I found a method where I just hear pure music in my music, if that makes any sense. I use only simple, mostly very cheap device recordings of random things – a coin falling on a table, wind crashing against the little microphone which makes just a crackle... And I limit myself mostly to using that one sound to create a whole piece. For instance – in the EP for my own label

called *PLUS ÇA TOMBE, PLUS C'EST LA MÊME CHOSE* – the three pieces each use mostly just one little bit of recording as the material for the whole piece. This gives me great freedom and great confidence in performance. Yet this approach is, of course, also challenging and still surprises me from time to time.

Your approach is to create tension between opposites. Can you talk about these dichotomies in your sound work?

I guess this aspect is connected to that same element in me that keeps me between the worlds of performance, playing other people's music and curating events. Although I would like to, I cannot seem to be a 'drone' or 'ambient' or 'techno' performer. And for some time, it seemed to me that it was a flaw within me. But for some time now, I've grown to respect that in myself and just let it loose – I can be soothing and the performance can seem monotonous, but you just feel that it's going to crack after a bit and you will need to put those ear plugs back in. And, although it's not for everyone, in a sense that tension is therapeutic, which I'm not just saying – I've actually listened to testimonies of people experiencing deep relief at an ELVI concert. And I've been compared to another of my favourite Latvian bands – Tesa. Which is too much of a compliment, but it indicates the area that those who've experienced the concerts put me in. I used to try to decide which 'side' I wanted to be on, now I just try to keep that 'balancing act' alive, to hold the tension for just a little bit longer.

Collaborative practice is also part of your modus operandi. Can you talk about it? Do you have any dream collaborators?

It is getting harder and harder to collaborate without those accidental meetings, right? To choose to do something together merely 'strategically' seems somehow deadening. I do miss team effort. In curation and in music. I have had the pleasure of working with beautiful people. My visual collaborator DEE, we're friends, but I honestly think she's one of the greatest video artists the world has ever seen, and I'm really not exaggerating. There are still plans to rekindle the project ELVI/DUNIAN with my musical brother Artūrs, who's had tremendous success now with his Domenique Dumont. And I love every _too contemporary release. So far. If it were possible, I'd like to collaborate more with voices, with people who sing or talk or do both. People whose instruments are just their body, and who would also be open-minded enough to try to sing words that I've written or that we've written together. So, if you're out there and reading this, and you think that at least half of what you hear that's mine sounds nice, let's hook up!

TRAGEDY, MELANCHOLY, MYSTERY: AN INTERVIEW WITH DECEMBER

Adopting the December alias for his debut 12" on Blackest Ever Black, Tomas More found a perfect fit for his slow and moody techno cuts. Fast forward a few years and More has released recordings across a variety of labels, each record seeming to naturally follow upon the last. Much of December's music manages to make the most out of minimal drum patterns – partly a nod to primitive early 80s industrial and a testament to his ability to craft dance music that is interesting, yet often intrinsically simplistic. December has recently been focusing on utilising his own voice and adding another layer to his sound in the process.

Can you talk about the genesis of your project December – what preceded it and how it amalgamated?

I had a kind of a creative block for a while five or six years ago. It actually lasted for quite a long time and I decided to stop trying to make tracks for a year or so. I was just making music without editing anything, looking for a sound that would excite me again, something that would be a coherent and personal evolution of what I was doing before. I wanted to dive deeper into my obsessions and to try things I hadn't dared to before. And the first day of December arrived, and I felt ready, something made sense again.

You said in one interview: "I'm often trying to re-create personal moments to feed my music with." Can you elaborate? Also, are there any concrete re-creations that you could mention on specific tracks?

Emotions don't always wait for you to be in the studio to guide your inspiration. I'm sometimes trying to fight against the famous 'blank page' feeling by thinking about an event, a word, an image that struck me recently, a strong feeling that moved me, a scene that pulled an intimate string inside of me, focusing on what I could do with it musically. It doesn't mean I'll use music as an illustration, but more as a note, a raw imprint of something I wasn't able to express with words. Like a drawing.

Compared to your Blackest Ever Black record, the latest one (Ed. note: interview conducted in 2018) on Helena Hauff's Return To Disorder label steers towards the dance floor. While on BEB you were introspective and mellow, *64 Ways To Rob A Friend* is brazen and direct. Is this a natural evolution of your sound?

No, it's not. And I'm actually currently recording 'weirder' things, even though I don't like to categorise music like this – music not meant to be played by DJs, if that was the point of the question. But in the beginning, I had to dive into unknown territories and more introspective sounds first, to look for what could be the core of my sound, the general atmosphere, before making more 'functional' tracks.

It also took time to use my voice in a more direct way and sing. And paradoxically, being more comfortable with my voice helped me to move towards more club-oriented tracks. To finally accomplish that old dream of making primal techno songs, a bit like on my last EP (*64 Ways To Rob A Friend*). Now I'm trying to make slower, calmer, more melodic tracks, and to build them like 'songs' (even if they're still pretty far from being actual songs...)

Can you talk about some of the inspirations behind the project?

My main inspirations have always pretty much stayed the same. A minimalistic, melancholic, repetitive, naïve and dark approach to club music. Films have also always been very decisive. I studied cinema and I work on a film festival for a part of the year. Images have been as present as sounds in my aesthetic approach to music. Visceral and radical ways of making films have always fascinated me. Bresson, Costa, Akerman or Weerasethakul have always influenced me, in different ways. Their stripped-down approach and obsession for what we cannot see had a huge impact on me.

Emo/cold/dark imagery is a key element of what I do, too. I like these simple and naïve feelings they celebrate: tragedy, melancholy, mystery. I don't know why I've always reacted way stronger to dark and cold atmospheres than shiny and positive ones.

How do you make your music? Can you talk a little bit about your production methods?

I produce mainly on software. I've learned to make music this way and I like it. I don't really like technical theories and topics, I like sounds, wherever they come from.

Industrial, EBM-tinged music has been experiencing a revival. Do you think it also reflects something in society at large (originally, this music was made during the last decade of the Cold War with all its dualistic polarisations and tensions)?

Music and genres have always been cyclical I think, and once we have had so much of a movement that we eat it to the bone, we look for new influences. The eighties/nineties industrial and dark electronics revival that is happening now must be the answer to the previous one and I feel that it has always been a kind of a back-and-forth game in musical movements and scenes. Fashion is also a key factor in these episodes and we can witness it especially these days. But it is also a reaction to society, obviously. We live in an extremely violent system that tries to keep a smiley and liberal face. Dark and brutal Art is the most logical reaction to it.

NAKED: 'IF THE WORLD NO LONGER STANDS FOR US, WE HAVE TO STAND FOR OURSELVES'

NAKED are Agnes Gryczkowska and Alexander Johnston, a London-based duo engaging with noise, industrial, experimental and extreme forms of electronic music, best witnessed during their live performances. Their EP – *Total Power Exchange* – released on Halcyon Veil, uses the sounds of sex, vomit and noise to create a heavy, spine-crushing noise hybrid with Salò-birthed vocals.

How did NAKED start and what does the name denote?

Alexander Johnston: The word 'NAKED' is like a Rorschach test. People read into it what they want. For us, we like its instant, knee-jerk reaction. Sex, disgust and the body are equally as likely to come to mind as beauty, openness and fragility. Human nature, society and all of its extremities are what we are interested in, the word's ambiguity signposts this.

Agnes Gryczkowska: The name also relates to the raw and primordial element of our work, which links to the music as well as its performative side. We have from the beginning been interested in the importance of the corporeal and sensuous experience of sound and live performance.

Performances are an important part of NAKED. Can you talk about them?

AG: We've been trying to focus on the idea of caressing and obliterating the senses from the very beginning of NAKED. It often is uncontrolled and unplanned as it's about trying to create some form of an extreme connection with the audience, the space, the sound, as well as my own body. The deconstruction of boundaries between the audience and the performer is something that we find very important and my physical performance itself can vary from extreme and brutal, to highly emotional, fragile and submissive. We also try to differentiate between the shows: using different light effects, olfactory elements and props. Our shows are kind of animalistic and have to be experienced in a physical way – and in a sense have been seen by us as a commentary on the current state of art – looking at what constitutes the potency and intensity of live experience from the neuroscientific point of view and what differentiates it from work experienced within the digital realm.

AJ: We approach live performance in a Dionysian sense, focusing on the sensual, spontaneous and emotional.

What are your inspirations – you mention Pasolini's *Salò*, there also might be a reference to COUM Transmissions' performances as well.

AG: Cosey Fanni Tutti's performances as well as the film *Salò* have definitely had an impact on our EP *(Total Power Exchange)* because of the primordial and sexual nature of our work, but they also tap into a socio-political dialogue.

That's definitely something that we're intentionally adding to our work as well. In Cosey Fanni Tutti's early *Prostitution performances* and in *Salò* there is a dialogue on power which was the main focus of our *Total Power Exchange* EP. Our use of sex and BDSM is much more layered in this sense. In Fanni Tutti's case it is the power of the female body and utilising it in a subversive way, which can also be related to Baudrillard's *Agony of Power*, and with *Salò* there is the idea of demolishing hierarchies – with its commentary on the bourgeoisie, political corruption and relentless sadism. This definitely enters our work as part of our critique of the current socio-political situation.

In your case, is there something concrete that you critique?

AJ: When we make music, we want people to feel alive. It comes from a sense of feeling disenfranchised, disempowered and out of control, feeling like anything we do or say having little to no impact or change in our lives.
AG: It's definitely about critiquing the power structures that are in place at the moment. But we don't want to address one single thing such as gender inequality, nationalism/racism, economic and political instability directly. We just want our music to be empowering for those who feel like they're leashed in one way or another – it is about having the energy to do something, move forward and realise the potential.

These days things have become politicised a lot more than three, four years ago, even in the club scene.

AG: Yes, it has become more political and more conceptual, but ironically it seems more difficult than ever to create any movement – any type of a revolution, as people are becoming very individualistic. With our EP being called *Total Power Exchange* we wanted to refer to a sexual relationship where there is the submissive and the master. The control is obviously accepted and agreed upon, but this control is still in place – in a way it's also reflective of the current state of society as well. To some extent we are accepting it. With our music, we of course are aware of the political message we are putting out, but we also give people the opportunity to just not think about it and listen and go into the mosh pit. The idea of having this power embedded in our work can work in several ways – as a release, an energy or a critique.

What about the audience. How do people react to your performances?

AJ: People react in a lot of different ways. Nowadays we find most live electronic shows unengaging and boring. A flashing light while some music plays. When I go to a live show, I don't just want to hear the music, I want to see it. Is this not the difference between listening at home and live performance? When we perform live we offer the whites of our eyes, our bodies, a complete experience.
AG: I often try to remember some kind of choreography, but it never works. You become one with your work and literally almost fall into some trance – I'm really into rituals at the moment. If you believe in and become a part of what you're doing to the point of performing out every single thing that you've created and meaning it, it becomes very magnetic to people.

There's also the aspect of investing your energy in the people.

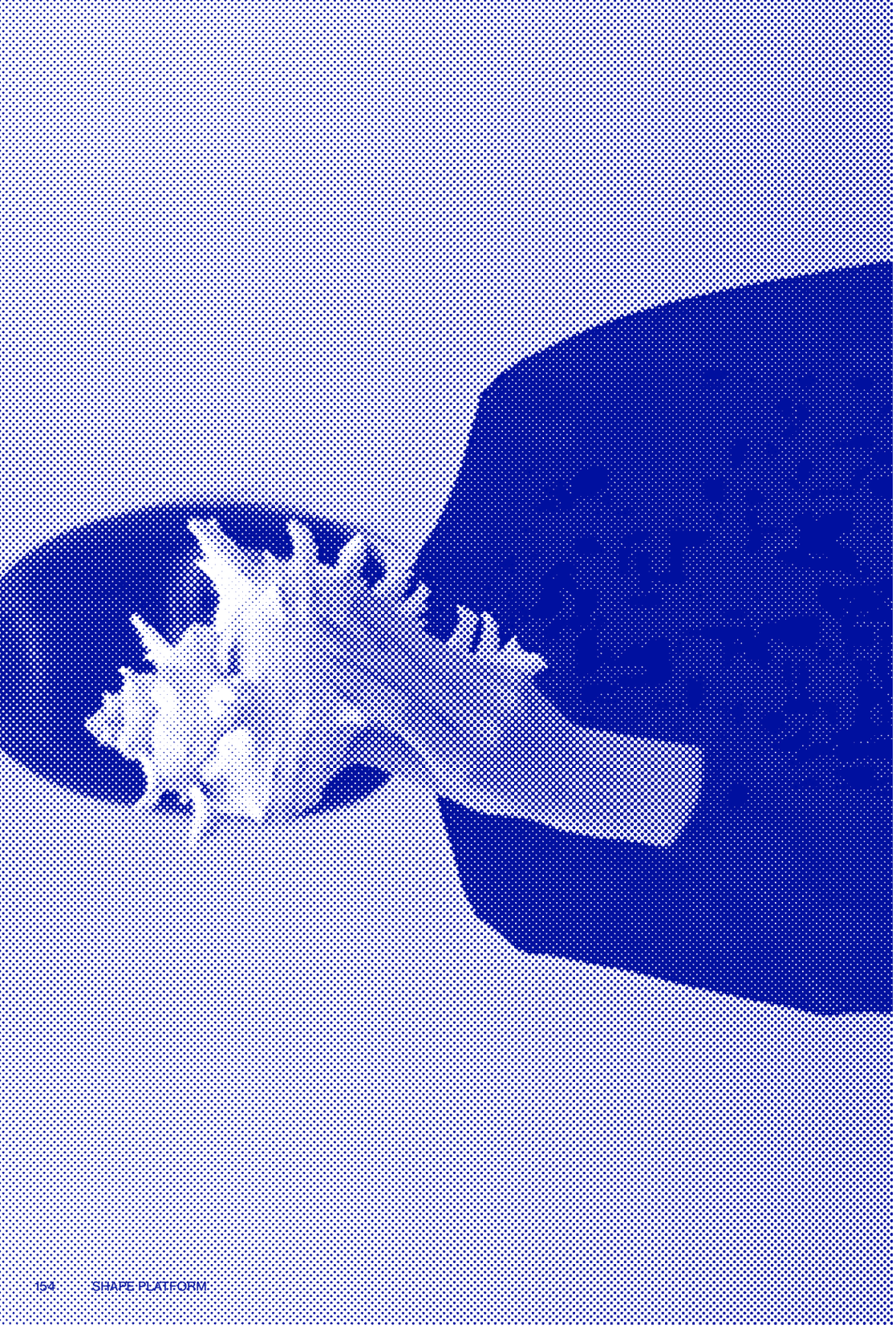
AG: Definitely. Towards the end, it always feels like your entire soul and body have been given out. It's amazing, but sometimes it can also be really frightening, when in 30 minutes you've given everything you had.

Can you talk about your music production?

AJ: From the conceptual side, we analyse our position in society and from there try to create sounds which we feel reflect that. For a while now, we've been using distorted sounds. Distortion feels like the right language for these times. On one hand they reflect the distorted values of our society, on the other hand, distortion and noise mixed with the right rhythm can give you an incredible amount of energy and feeling of power.
AG: We've stripped down the melodic parts and kept the rhythm and the raw elements of the music to reflect that even further.

Can you talk about the alternative national anthem project that you were commissioned for by Dazed & Confused?

AJ : The basis of the commission was to create our own version of a national anthem. We took the Polish, Scottish and British National Anthems.
AG: We just felt that the idea of nationalism has become a sickness and a cruel driving force for many irrational and inhuman actions. We simply felt that our national anthems no longer stand for what we want to stand for.
AJ: It was a crude symbol of the way we feel about nationalism. We then distorted the sounds of Aggie's vomiting and turned those sounds into our own personal anthem of empowerment. Rejecting old values and building something of our own. We chose to use a rhythm akin to a march to symbolise forward movement into our own future.
AG: Our own march of disgust, anger and relentless forward movement. If the world no longer stands for us, we have to stand for ourselves. United.



SINOSC: 'I USED TO ROMANTICISE THE IDEA OF BEING AN 'ARTIST"

Sinosc is an artist, designer, and DJ currently based in Dresden. By blending cinematic ambient soundscapes, spoken language, and deconstructed industrial passages, she aims to create DJ sets that require a conscious way of listening. She is currently studying under Carsten Nicolai at the Dresden Academy of Fine Arts (Ed. note: interview conducted in July 2018).

Can you tell us about your background – what led you to art & music?

Having grown up in a rather isolated village in Eastern Germany, I was glad to be introduced to hardcore punk in my early teens. I frequented plenty of concerts back then and eventually developed an almost manic obsession with collecting music – I spent my youth on Blogspot, hoarding almost every record I could digitally get my hands on. After hardcore punk I moved on to stoner/doom metal and drone, and later on discovered industrial, EBM, post-punk, and dark wave. At this time I also put together my first mixtapes on 8-tracks. I started DJing for this goth club in Dresden around the same time as enrolling at the Dresden Academy of Fine Arts in order to study Fine Arts. I was 18 at this time and have to admit that I primarily took this step because I didn't feel certain at all about what sort of 'career' path I wanted to pursue. Art was the thing that interested me the most back then, apart from music.

How does your artistic work influence your music, and vice versa?

Language definitely links both fields. In order to put more emphasis on the narrative, I often work with typography/text on the one hand and spoken word samples on the other. Apart from that, there has always been a rather obvious link between art and music for me, and the work I made often reflected the music I had a particular penchant for at the time; for example, getting very much into garage or jungle after reading Simon Reynolds's *Energy Flash* and making work about 'rave culture', or simultaneously dealing with minimal music and minimal art. At some point I realised that I was actually more interested in constructing the theoretical framework of an artwork rather than actually materialising the said concepts and thus it makes a lot of sense to actually get more into reading and writing theory again.

Both my perspective and focus have majorly shifted, though. I used to romanticise the idea of being an 'artist', but after having spent a couple of years at art school, I have no strong desire to exhibit or even 'sell' artwork anymore, nor do I believe that this is something that I could realistically make a living from. Instead, creating platforms for people, connecting them, and offering them a chance to show their work is something that brings me much more satisfaction. And writing and curating are things that particularly interest me at the moment. For example, together with two friends I am currently working on the second issue of our magazine for text-based art and conceptual writing titled *Documnt*. It is a hybrid art book and magazine as well as an online

blog, a mixtape series, and a growing platform for artists, theoreticians, and musicians from Berlin, Dresden, and New York. Our focus is mainly centred around topics such as concrete poetry, conceptual writing, and text-based methods of artistic expression.

Conceptual and immersive DJ sets are your primary mode of sonic expression. Some of the set titles have been: *A Cartography of Adventures and Forbidden Pleasures*, *Optical Camouflage*. Can you talk about how you structure your DJ sets, how you search for sounds, what samples you include, and what the titles denote?

I come across most of my material by browsing through Soundcloud, Bandcamp, or YouTube, and I reckon that it works like that for most people who are compiling playlists/mixtapes these days. The structure is something that evolves rather organically, in a way that is mostly about trial and error, but I am trying to put a lot of emphasis on the framework and dramaturgy of the mix. I often try to create something that consists of many ups and downs, and of unexpected moments that break with the expectations of the listener. I have to admit that I also like messing with people's attention spans a lot.

The titles are mainly references to research I have been doing: texts read, films seen, music listened to, images seen, and so on. For example, *Optical Camouflage* refers to the camouflage technology in the anime *Ghost In The Shell* which allowed the members of Section 9 to blend in with the environment and become nearly invisible. When I heard someone mention this camouflage while watching the film, it made me wonder what an acoustic analogy could possibly sound like, and how I could possibly capture those cyborg aesthetics in sound.

The DJ sets are also very cinematic – they capture the listener's attention and let them enter a temporary sonic/synaesthetic zone. What would be the ideal setting for your DJ sets – where and how should people listen to them?

I definitely think my DJ-sets should take place somewhere outside the context of a regular club night. As much as I would love to guide people through experiencing a state of pure ecstasy while dancing, this simply is something that does not carry my thumbprint anymore. Ideally, I would like to play for an audience that really just came to the venue to listen to the music consciously.

Carsten Nicolai, also renowned under his Raster-Noton associated moniker Alva Noto, is your professor at the Academy in Dresden. Do you think he's had an influence on your sonic work as well?

As far as music goes, I wouldn't call him an immediate influence, because my mixtapes are not something I discuss in the context of academia. However, I definitely think that Raster-Noton – as well as Mille Plateaux and ~scape – did indeed have an impact by introducing me to clicks&cuts and this very clean, synthetic sound that I was not familiar with before.

TOMOKO SAUVAGE: 'THERE'S A REVOLUTION GOING ON'

Born in Yokohama, Japan, Tomoko Sauvage moved to Paris in 2003 after studying jazz piano in New York. Through listening to Alice Coltrane and Terry Riley, she became interested in Indian music and studied improvisation of Hindustani music. In 2006, she attended a concert of Aanayampatti Ganesan, a virtuoso of Jalatharangam – a traditional Carnatic musical instrument with water-filled porcelain bowls - and was fascinated by the instrument's simplicity and sonority. Soon her desire to immerse herself in water engendered the idea of using an underwater microphone and led to the birth of an electro-aquatic instrument. She has also been deeply connected to the DIY art/music scene and is interested in educational projects.

You once mentioned that you grew up with American-influenced Japanese pop music and piano training. Can you talk about growing up in nineties Tokyo and how it formed you artistically?

My childhood took place in the eighties. They were playing YMO records from the speakers in my schoolyard every day. I remember well that we danced to "Rydeen" in military-style choreography at a sports festival. I found out later that some of the children's songs we were listening to on TV (like the famous NHK's (national TV) *Minna no Uta*) were arranged by YMO and lots of commercial music was composed by Akiko Yano, Ryuichi Sakamoto, Haruomi Hosono and so on. Tokyo in the nineties had lots of small independent theaters, cinemas, clubs, book shops, and the selection was quite multicultural and underground. I was listening to radio shows like the Ska Paradise Orchestra playing sixties & seventies soul and funk or reading books of the great ethnomusicologist Fumio Koizumi (who taught many Japanese composers, including Sakamoto). As Tokyo is a huge city, there was so much going on. Also it was still a good period, economically. Unlike today, there were optimistic, free, open-minded feelings in the air of nineties Tokyo... Anyway, Akiko Yano influenced me so much that I started to cultivate my passion for jazz. Playing the piano was my thing from early childhood but there was something uncomfortable about playing only old European music and also about how this instrument didn't fit a Japanese house – it didn't sound right with lots of humidity, in a small Tatami room with paper Fusuma doors...

Indian/Hindustani music seems an important part of your work. When and how did you first encounter it and which elements have you incorporated into your work?

I was into the music of Alice Coltrane and Terry Riley. I was copying their piano phrasings. In Paris, I took Hindustani music improvisation lessons with a French flautist, Henri Tournier. It was on the piano so it wasn't strictly respecting Indian music's notions of harmony. Also Indian music is something you learn for ten, twenty years, so what I did was just an introduction. But it was still interesting to see how Indian music considers notes or sound as something almost 'living'.

Trills or vibrato, for example, are not mere ornaments, they are a core part of their musical philosophy.

Then in 2006, I attended a concert of Aanayampatti Ganesan, the master of Jalatarangam, a rare instrument of Carnatic music with porcelain bowls filled with water which are hit with sticks. The instrument fascinated me and the next morning I was hitting bowls with chopsticks in my kitchen. That's how I started to play with bowls and water.

Listening to your work is meditative, almost hypnotising. Can you talk about the atmospheres you are trying to create and the musical effect on the listener you're trying to achieve?

I have never tried to create a certain atmosphere in music. The instrument came first and I tried to get the most out of it. The elements I use in my instrument – water, porcelain bowls, and underwater amplification – need special care. For example, to obtain a certain note, I might take lots of time searching for the right quantity of water to use. The hydrophones are very sensitive and I needed slow and careful movements both with my right hand in the water and my left hand on the mixer. It didn't take much time to realise that the interest is not about controlling and tuning the bowls exactly as I want (which is never possible anyway) but about letting the instrument sound as it wants and making an appropriate environment to make it happen. With this set up, I'm playing with risks and hazards. It's quite magical. Recently during a concert, I felt my hands become magnetic in the water as if they were doing things perfectly without me and had become part of the ceramic and water. Actually, playing this instrument is like an act of meditation, but I don't know if the music is meditative for listeners.

Water is an important element of your work. The symbol of life, in its purest and also cataclysmic way. What does water mean to you? Can you describe your work with it – the electro-aquatic instrument, for instance – and your work with water bowls and hydrophones captured on your album, *Musique Hydromantique*?

I've been attracted to the lively sound of my waterbowls instrument. With the underwater feedback technique, which I've explored these past years and which makes up a big part of my last album, *Musique Hydromantique*, I've been diving into the sculptural quality of the instrument's fluid timbre. I pitch-bend the feedback frequencies by moving the water with my hand and this makes the sound texture three-dimensional, as if seeing a mass of water floating in the air. My relation to the water is highly sensual and I cannot really think of it symbolically when I'm playing music with it. I made an installation work using melting crystalline ice, to create a random drip music. Once in Berlin, a visitor to the exhibition told me that it's like a lament of the Antarctic ice and the world crying. I also felt that there was something about tears but I didn't think about these things when I was realising the piece.

What role do acoustics play in your work and how do you work with them during your performances?

The waterbowls instrument is affected by many elements: temperature and humidity that change the quantity of water and change the tuning

quite radically, the position of the speakers and hydrophones, and most significantly, a room's acoustics. The bowls don't resonate in the dry acoustics of an auditorium with carpets and curtains. For my last album, *Musique Hydromantique*, one of the recordings was made in a former textile factory in Mulhouse in France, a huge empty concrete space with very high ceilings. My bowls sounded like a miracle, so many frequencies were feedbacking like never before...This acoustic phenomenon seems almost ghostly to me. Sound and electricity are invisible. In theory the phenomenon I heard is technically explainable but it's still so mysterious to me.

Hydromancy is an ancient method of divination by means of water. The meanings of divinatory arts have changed since the Age of Antiquity when people used divination as a way of judging a criminal or deciding war tactics. But I thought the emotional intensity of wishing for something might not have changed. When recording my album, I was connecting my personal wish with this hydrophonic feedback that seemed to me ghostly and supernatural.

What are you currently working on?

I'm working on video documentation of my performance with new sound materials: samples of archived sound, voice, glass, stones, shells, new bubbles, inner-body sound... I've been struggling, but that's a good thing! It took me almost ten years to feel comfortable on the waterbowls so it's normal to take time with new gear and materials.

What are your dreams – in terms of your work and life?

I feel like I'm living a dream life. On a personal level, I have everything essential – my family in good health and music. I just hope that it will continue like this and that I will keep growing. I travel a lot and meet wonderful people everywhere, which gives me so much positive energy. I feel very grateful for my music community. It's been incredible. I meet so many people who want to change things and are doing things with strong visions. I believe that there's a revolution going on and hope it will be sustainable.

FROM DANCEHALL TO MAGICAL REALISM: AN INTERVIEW WITH SOURDURE

Under the moniker Sourdure, Ernest Bergez works within a hybrid sound field, combining raw electronics, acoustic instruments, and non-musical sounds. As a guideline, he makes a fundamental effort to meld experimentation with popular music and vice versa, taking traditional songs and dancehall themes from the French Massif Central area as the starting point for his experimentation. Sung in French or in Occitan, his songs give an odd sense of temporal distortion, dissolving the frontiers between the old and the new, original and traditional.

You combine electronics with traditional music as well as dancehall and pop. The result is a sort of melange of sounds, styles and musical worlds. Can you talk about your work in general, and its conceptual aspects?

The term dancehall is not exactly appropriate as it refers mainly to Jamaican style...still I use it because the idea of music for the dancehall literally is part of what I do and I feel very close to how dancehall and rub-a-dub music works: popular 'folk' music with rhythm tracks and declamation. I started working with traditional elements about six years ago. Initially I was mainly into electronics, using modular logic and self-generating processes for composing. Right now I tend to work on a more direct and physical axis. I use electronics interfacing with live, acoustic or electro-acoustic instruments: violin, foot percussion, voice, frame drum...In a studio situation, most of the time I record live tracks, aiming to get a defined sound image immediately.

I try to set the aesthetic at the recording and not only rely on the later mixing process. Once the recording is done, I dub the tracks using cascaded audio effects. For a live situation, I use a small modular set up triggered by my right foot, which provides a real time and totally synchronous accompaniment. This is combined with amplified violin and voice, which are also processed through the modular system.. The electronic is an extension of the acoustic and vice versa. As for the conceptual aspect of my work, one could say that I'm at the intersection of popular ground, traditional fashion, experimental mind and a surrealistic/magical realism aesthetic.

You focus on a particular geographical area – the French Massif Central, can you talk about it, and why you chose it in particular?

I'm attached to the Massif Central area, and especially Auvergne, through my family. Some years ago I discovered that there was a living musical tradition there, and immediately became curious and affected by it because of the type of musical forms I heard: drone-oriented or repetitive and hypnotic pieces, crazy and happy dance music, beautiful songs with odd lyrics. Even though they were completely new to me, these musical forms found a direct connection with those I was working on in the electronic/electro-acoustic field: extended droning pieces, surrealistic musique concrète-like songs, organic automated rhythm...To sum up, at the time the motto was 'always the same; always different', and traditional music from Auvergne matched oddly well with it.

On top of that, I discovered that Auvergne is an Occitan speaking area and I suddenly realised I wanted to learn that language and sing in it. I heard Occitan in records my parents used to play when I was a child, and this had a strong impact on my vision of the country I lived in; there was actually a language other than French spoken in France!! I bought a violin, with no intention of learning how to play but with the idea of recording drones in the style of Tony Conrad... at the same time I started learning traditional songs from archives, and from friends (songs sung at parties and for dances). I began learning songs in Occitan without knowing anything of the language, trying to reproduce tonality, accent and articulation...Soon all of that began to influence my way of using electronics and my approach to composing; the philosophy of acoustic music started to melt into an electronic/modular/sequential logic, which eventually led to a complete hybridisation.

Working with traditional music in the electronic music field has become popular. There are also questions attached to this: how can we deal with this heritage in a respectful way, without exploiting/ exoticising this material. What is your opinion?

I think that you've raised one of the main issues regarding traditional material here. Of course traditional music, songs and words transmitted from the mouth to the ear, are a precious legacy. But strangely, I don't see traditional music as music from the past, to me it is music from the 'ever-now'. As soon as some music or word is transmitted from one person to another, it starts to mutate, because of memory, because of the constant crossovers that occur in life. Tradition is a constantly evolving corpus of known fashions, approaches and styles, it is defined through the multiple occurrence of itself. I think that the question of respect can be solved quite rapidly and easily. It's a matter of dealing with the codes, conventions and institutionalised forms which characterise the traditional musical object. At a minimum, you have to know what's making the object efficient, recognisable, how it's 'used' and in what context (for instance dance music) and be a part of it. Knowing the rules and playing with them, that's the first stage of creation. The second stage could be: knowing how rules define the game, making new rules to keep the game exciting or slightly modifying the rules to see how it works with people.

Regarding the problem of exploiting traditional music and the exoticising effect it can have when it is put into other sound worlds, I think it occurs mostly when the composer is not engaged with the tradition. (That applies also to the inverse situation: a traditional musician using electronics without any knowledge or experience of it...). I'm anchored in the musical tradition of Auvergne, even if I do strange stuff with it. I don't approach tradition with the idea of renewing it or making it more appealing or even extracting whatever I like in it to do whatever I want with it. Instead, I compose with elements of tradition and elements of total invention without distinction. To me there is a continuity

between the existing and the 'new'. In the same way, I don't see electronic instruments as heterogeneous elements of the tradition, they are integrated into my practice of traditional music (just as violin or voice are integrated into non-traditional music). That's hybridisation, not juxtaposition, as is the case most of the time when traditional elements meet electronics (for instance: the convenient and self-sufficient use of African traditional music samples anywhere in electronic dance music...or traditional music with a four-on-the-floor kick and pumping bass...)

Can you talk about your latest album, *L'Esprova*?

Released by Pagans and Les disques du festival permanent, *L'Espròva* is the second album I made starting with traditional material. It has a warm, Mediterranean, folk-tale-like, ambiguous and sometimes humorous mood, which I think Mathieu Tilly aka Druidhigh Visuals expressed really well in the artwork. The word 'Esprovà' in Occitan covers ideas of a trial, a print, proof, the overcoming of a difficult situation and the outcome of a process. As with my first album La Virée (which could be translated as 'The Turn'), this one was named after the kind of experience its creation was for me. *L'Espròva* is a digest of three years of research, testing and in-depth experiments relating to songs and traditional melodies. It is a synthesis of a studio/modular/dubbing approach and the kind of live performance I've been elaborating since La Virée. It's also the outcome of two learning processes I'm going through: learning Occitan (in two different local varieties: Languedocian and Auvergnat) and beginning to write lyrics. I wrote in an immediate, tempestuous, almost automatic fashion, in French and Occitan.

The result is a direct, naïve, speech-like kind of poetry, quite close to the way I speak. The album is equally made of traditional and 'invented' material and through the whole process of creation, the frontier between revisiting and arranging and composing has never been so thin and undefined to me. There has been a long process of digestion of the songs, making the words mine, finding the right intonation, changing modes and sometimes melodies. The same process happened with the violin. The album combines most of my musical and conceptual obsessions: building narrative structures into songs, confronting fiction with reality to obtain hallucinatory effects, making the album a meta-structure in which elements refer to one another, using quarter tones on violin and voice. To give me some blank territory to work on, I decided to use brass and woodwinds, which I had never worked with before and which always attracted me because of their joyful, exclamatory and 'prophetic' character. There are a bunch of guests, on winds, brass, voice, guitars...it's a bit of a joyful mess!

URIEL BARTHÉLÉMI: ‘YOU CAN LEARN HOW TO USE THE TOOLS, BUT NOT WHAT YOU HAVE TO SAY’

Uriel Barthélémi is a drummer, composer and electro-acoustic musician. Following his studies at the conservatoires of Reims, La Courneuve, Montreuil and Ircam, he embarked upon electro-acoustic compositional work. This has led him to collaborate in numerous areas of the performing arts from 2002 onwards: dance, puppetry, theatre, as well as the visual arts. In parallel with his compositional work, he performs as a drummer for several projects and conducts research into drum and computer connections, developing his own software in Max/MSP. These multiple themes have made him reflect upon the concepts of performance and improvisation, to take into account the concepts of plasticity and physicality of sound through spatial layout, as well as question the place of the performer and psychological contexts.

You studied at conservatories and music institutions. Can you talk about how music education influenced you and how relevant classical music education is in experimental music nowadays?

I studied at conservatories for a long time: double bass, drums, jazz, electro-acoustics and theory. Of course it influenced me a lot in how I play, analyse and build music. But still, I don’t think real substance in music can be taught in such places. You can learn how to use the tools, but not what you have to say. This is maybe the biggest difference between a more traditional way of doing music and electronic music nowadays. The tools got much faster, easier to understand and practise with, but you still have to do the work. And also, in sound, you can hear the difference between someone who is doing things quickly, using presets, and someone who is deep into his or her research. Classical music education might perhaps help some musicians in furthering the harmonic field and in the structures of a composition.

You also develop your own software and research drum and computer connections.

I’ve been doing this for more than 12 years now. I’ve built some specific delays, reverbs and ring mods for the drums, for example. In the beginning, I was looking more for complex effects – granulars and delays – but over time, I arrived at simpler tools that I can use live while playing the drums. It’s impossible for me to be trapped behind the screen. Now I’m using these effects for improvised sessions or to build specific textures that I rework later. I’m also developing some kind of analytical tool to enable the use of the data produced by the drums to feed the electronics, whether for sound or video interactions. The idea is to have tools that I can play as extensions of the drums. So there will be sounds that complete the spectrum of the drums and also that give me some real responses when playing with the help of Euroracks and modern analogue synths.

Many people see drumming as something primordial, wild and full of energy, while computer music-making is considered to be cerebral and nerdy. How do you connect the two, especially in improvisation?

There is an infinity of drumming styles; drumming can be wild and violent but also super quiet and melodic, and/or very complex and mathematical... I’m using a lot of very different dynamics, and can play pianissimo with fingers to super loud. So I’m trying to also have a wide range of dynamics with electronics, to be able to adapt my type of electronic sounds to my drumming. The way I put effects on the drums allows me to have this range of dynamics, but even with these tools, I put almost no effects on the drums when I play really loudly. In these loud moments, I’m rather triggering synths, like the OCS-2 from Nozoid, which allows me to still have interesting textures with a big acoustic sound. This question of dynamic range also arises from the fact that I sometimes perform with theatre artists who are not necessarily amplified. The audience has to understand what is being said, so I had to find techniques to do something interesting without destroying the text. In addition, I‘m increasingly taking into account the architecture & acoustics of venues. Sometimes, when you’re performing in big halls like the Palais de Tokyo, you have to find a way to be fully understood, and it has a huge influence on how you play. I kind of like these uncomfortable situations that force me to find a way to make things circulate.

Spatial sound is also something that you explore in your work. How does space influence sound, and what is your favorite space/place that you’ve played so far?

I used to work a lot with spatial sound in performing arts, theatre and contemporary puppet theatre. I’ve just done an installation with 46 speakers above the audience, exploring very precise movements and small sources of sound. I very much like the granular sounds and spaces that you can create with such a system. But still, I think my favorite places were not using spatialisation, but acoustic space, like for example the Gare du Nord, the biggest train station in Europe, a huge hall with thousands of people constantly passing through. I had the chance to play there and use this huge resonance chamber and that was an amazing experience. I also like very small venues, where the audience will hear the almost silent sounds. I kind of appreciate performing outside more and more. I was invited to perform in the desert in the emirate of Sharjah. This was an incredible experience because you feel so small compared to the elements around you. Even with a huge sound, you know that you are nothing.

Is psychogeography and the emotional/mental aspect to music-making something that influences your work?

Yes, depending on my different projects or collaborations. My language has been built like this, using a lot of mental images. In my most recent projects, I’ve been taking into account psychological/political contexts more, like the decolonisation process, or the way time is increasingly fragmented, putting our minds in different psychological strata very quickly. I also like to explore the relation to time with regard to interaction with video or dance.

You're playing at the SHAPE x Nyege Nyege showcase in September 2018 (Ed. note: interview conducted before the festival). What are you preparing for the show and is the context of the festival and East African music scene in general something that you're interested in?

I'm preparing a very energetic set, using one analogue synth, drums & laptop. I'll be oscillating between some very rhythmic tracks with fast tempo and 15/4 or 6/4 metrics, to some more raw, harsh improvised moments and abstract textures. I know a bit of East African Music from Ethiopia or Eritrea, but the videos shared by Nyege to give a preview of the traditional bands from the places around there in Uganda are really incredible, super powerful and totally unexpected for me. So I'm very excited, curious, and ready to learn...

BÉRANGÈRE MAXIMIN: 'THERE ISN'T MUCH ROOM FOR DREAMS NOWADAYS'

Working out of her private studio since 2008, Bérangère Maximin has developed her own approach to sound art and electronic music, composing dense, immersive pieces with immediate impact. Through four albums which have aroused international interest, she has revealed a taste for mixing disparate sounds together with a sense of detail, effusive lyrical playfulness with the digital material, and tight nuanced writing. She has collaborated with the likes of Fred Frith, Christian Fennesz, and John Zorn. Her releases have appeared on Tzadik's *Composer Series*, Sub Rosa's *Framework* and Crammed Discs's *Made To Measure*, and she has held numerous residencies at locations such as EMS Stockholm and INA-GRM in Paris.

Can you talk about your childhood? I've read that you grew up on Réunion Island in the Indian Ocean. Do you think this influenced your artistic development and sonics (the affinity for space and some sort of aquatic aural element – like waves, for instance)?

I spent my childhood and early teenage years in Réunion, the native land of my mother, and moved with her and my brother to the South of France when she found a job there. I had just turned 15. I had never really felt atypical until I stepped into my new school. There I realised that most people, the other teenagers as well as the adults, didn't even know where the island is located and that my way of life before I moved there had definitely been different from big city life. I had spent most of my time outdoors on the beach, or on my uncle's farm, and was always surrounded by my entire family since we were all living in the same house. Two generations side by side, with a minimum of eight people sharing lunch and dinner every day. For us, this was normal. I lost my island accent quickly and adapted quite easily, but I always felt like the oddball at school and when compared to other Europeans. I felt like the one who sees things with some kind of distance, with a particular angle. I'm an islander in spirit, and from the moment I left Réunion I have always felt like I entered the whole rest of the world, not only France. So from that moment on, I've always felt like a citizen of the world above all.

The Creole culture is part of my identity. It affects my vision, and it undoubtedly acts as a grid through which I see things in general. This grid is in constant evolution throughout my life and musical experiences. I still have a very strong connection with maritime people and cultures. I like their philosophy and sense of humour. Also, living on an island is a special atmosphere and it keeps resonating with you even if you've become continental. Every artist who has experienced living in isolation, surrounded by water and nature, can't help but refer to it in their work. It's the same for me. Naturally, a tropical feel is palpable through the metric and pulsation of some of my pieces, for instance on Tant Que Les Heures Passent, but strangely enough, I had never really realised it until a cousin had a listen and pointed this influence out.

In my most recent pieces, I've explored the contrast between the urban and the pastoral in the city. So in a sense, I've been digging further into my roots as an islander who lived in an environment where the urban landscape grew in the middle of rough and wild nature and a volcano whose regular activities push the city to adapt and transform. I've recently moved into a new flat. It's just one subway stop away from the centre of Paris but is a radical change of environment. I now have a very big terrace in front of a private garden with trees and flowers, with birds singing in the morning, and where I'm spared the traffic and the noise of dense humanity. I had lived in the centre for over 15 years, so this is a big improvement that I appreciate very much. The immediate impact was that I've started making more contrasting music. I've been reconnecting with silence as a breath, a pause, and as a sound itself, and have reincorporated it into my material.

You mention being influenced by a diverse range of artists, including Pierre Schaeffer and Stockhausen, to Pansonic and Autechre. Can you talk about their respective impact on your work?

I am a music lover so I have a very eclectic taste and make a point not to hide it. I grew up in a family that wasn't much into arts, apart from my dad who was a record collector. My parents got divorced after a few years together and I didn't get to see my dad often after that, but my high school friends would play me great music of all kinds, which was all new to me. I had so much to explore. To use a comparison with music making, it was like everything was layered in a mix rather than a collage with articulations and cohesive progression. It was going in all directions and still does today, when I blast music at home. I have a soft spot for that period of my life, that hunger, that fresh attitude, that great excitement.

I loved that time when I could jump from flamenco to Congolese rumba to sixties British mod, R&B to improvisation bands from the seventies and onward, and a bit later from long-play sound pieces by Stockhausen or Pierre Henry to releases on Mille Plateaux and the first Mego records, without thinking too much. My listening is still eclectic today, but it's become a more self-conscious process. Everything sounded new to me back then, and quite mysterious.

Musique concrète, acousmatic music, sound art, and the multiplicity of aesthetics within these genres, are continuous inspirations up until today, with new records like Ana Dall'Ara-Majek's release on Quebec empreintes DIGITALes or the map of fictitious islands from Andrew Pekler, which resonates with my personal story. So is the abstract electronic music from the late nineties that I first heard while studying acousmatic composition at the conservatoire; performers and DJs like Terre Thaemlitz, Fennesz, Scanner, Pansonic and Simon Fisher Turner are big influences, but less musically than spiritually if I may say. They first showed me a certain way of creating music and a certain lifestyle that goes along with it. Newer names such as Helm or Valerio Tricoli, are further examples of how to be very independent and yet open to other forms, how to incorporate new forms into a very personal approach. I totally feel that I'm a part of that approach.

Musique concrète is another important factor in your work, with Paris being the birthplace of these groundbreaking sonic experiments.

Musique Concrète was born in France but then quickly spread through the whole world. It is still a great influence on composers like Matmos or Daniel Lopatin (the duo album with Tim Hecker for example) or Holly Herndon, to name but a few.

As a technique, it indeed remains essential to me. The comings and goings between what you hear and what you do without a written score, the ambivalence and independence of the sound from its source, are at the core of my work. They're in my music's DNA.

Can you talk about your 'sonic architecture' and the importance of dramaturgy in your music?

In my last series of works released under the names *Dangerous Orbits (*Crammed Discs, 2015) and *Frozen Refrains* (Atlas Realisations, 2017), as well as in *Infinitesimal* (Sub Rosa, 2013), I've explored the themes of multiplicity, time dimensions, the simultaneity of possible futures, and dissonant emotions, with the leading idea of music as an articulated memory, a force of imagination, reinvention, and power.

Being an original time vector, which fills the gaps between visual arts and life, the art of sound allows us to think of history as an entire part of the present moment. Appearing as sound events that unfold one by one, phrase by phrase, from moment to moment, music stands as an active transition. Simultaneously, the present becomes a framework, the past a genealogy, the future a plan of action. With the wonderful specificity of never being explicit, music nevertheless shows a new understanding of reality, a new frame of possibilities and potential transformations, in a very palpable way.

My work acts as a connection between evocative sound images, the way memories pop up in the mind, and abstract objects meant to describe the subtext, reflecting wordless internal thoughts and notions. Often taking the shape of some sonic travel diary, the impression of constant movement given through the whole piece, the series unveils itself as tightly intertwined moving layers, with a mix of contrasted textures, often playing in complementarity rather than opposition; a very reactive material which tends to evolve and change with the permanent viewpoint of the observer, which undoubtedly affects what is observed.

Space is a very important parameter since it allows me to establish a hierarchy inside the structure, and some dramaturgy where I place the short sounds and sequences, give them a precise role and make them change; a sound choreography of sorts, which is always guided by the idea of creating a sensation of strange familiarity, the cursor changing place on every piece, to offer a wide range of combinations of details and dynamics. I imagine the listener as caught in a refined net of strong images and emotions, then almost suffocating and being overwhelmed by it, and finally carefully, smoothly, gently heading back home.

You once mentioned you have a love-hate relationship with music. Can you elaborate?

I've been in a love-hate relationship with art in general because I like it to remain open and accessible, but when it does that, I'm not satisfied. It's then

not enough, like something's missing. That's the duality. It's the same with performance; I'd love to be able to play on any PA system in any venue for the love of art, but in fact, the presentation restitution of your music depends so much on the quality of the speakers and on how the room reacts to the acoustics. You thus can't afford to just say yes to every opportunity. It's frustrating but indispensable to think twice before accepting an invitation to play. The audience doesn't necessarily know that what you're playing is getting wasted because of a dismal system or because too many people are talking in the background, they just think that what they hear is how it is! They're bound to think that you are the one responsible for everything. This is why over time I've found myself choosing my performances more carefully.

Can you talk about your collaborations, for instance with Fred Frith and other artists?

When I started performing on stage I needed to practise, so I took collaborations as an opportunity to enrich my vocabulary. These past years I've been more focused on improving my solo sets.

My second album, *No One is An Island*, is meant to document the period when I wanted to challenge my writing with others, especially guitarists, for I find that it's a very interesting mix. The choice of contributors was natural. I contacted the composers and performers I had met during my first two tours, and, knowing that they liked my music and that we got along well, I felt confident to invite them to play with me. I'm happy to say that I'm still in touch with each one of them even though we're all busy doing our own things.

I first met Fred Frith in a similar situation; on tour in 2010. I shared the bill with Norberto Lobo and Fred, and he told me afterwards that he enjoyed my set. He had listened to my debut album and liked it as well. The following year, I joined him in San Francisco for a few concerts he put together for me and Yan Jun. Then I invited him to play as a duo in France for two concerts on some reconverted boats: the Batofar club in Paris and Bordeaux's iBoat. Then we played together again at Instants Chavirés in 2016 during his three-day carte blanche programme. We'll play next at musikprotokoll in Graz this coming October (2018). I'm very much looking forward to it.

I've also recently spoken with my long-time friend Frédéric D. Oberland, who collaborated with me on *No One is An Island*, at a record label fair organised by Villette Sonique in Paris. He was introducing his new label, Nahal Recordings, that he launched with Mondkopf. We've decided to record a new series together. This idea is very exciting. Actually, we have a pre-recording meeting scheduled this week, so... to be continued!

Do you have any dreams in terms of your work?

I prefer to imagine the future in terms of projects rather than dreams. We live in a very busy and competitive time and to be able to survive as an artist in this climate, you have to adjust. I've loved social media networks as a communication tool since their inception, but on the music business side, they force you into a daily reality check of things happening around you, which is both excellent and destructive. So I'd say there isn't much room for dreams nowadays.

That said, my career has been like a dream from the start. I feel grateful and lucky to be able to experiment and create music with such great support from the labels I've worked with since my debut on Tzadik. Who would have thought that when I first gathered my electro-acoustic pieces together, they would end up in such great collections? No really, it's a living dream in a sense. I just wish I could play more concerts and that this very nice and encouraging relationship with the labels continues.

JUNG AN TAGEN: 'MY MAIN APPROACH IS STILL PSYCHEDELIC'

Through the use of synthesis and sampling techniques, Jung An Tagen builds aleatoric arrays, repetitive figures & polyrhythmic moirés that speak equally to the body and to the mind. The grammar of this music is confounding, the language itself immediate, oscillating between modern composition and ritualistic techno, immersion and repulsion. In 2016, the Viennese artist found a local home at Editions Mego, a label with more than 20 years of expertise in this territory. In the past, Stefan Juster appeared with different monikers on labels such as Not Not Fun, Blackest Rainbow, Orange Milk or his own imprints, and worked on artworks for different artists e.g. Kevin Drumm, and as an experimental video artist.

Even though you are now releasing on Editions Mego (Ed. note: interview conducted in 2018), and the music you have been making in the last few years follows the lineage of computer/experimental music such as Florian Hecker etc., you were previously associated with Not Not Fun, the iconic Californian label which was one of the flagships of DIY, lo-fi underground. Can you talk about this era and your association with the imprint (NNF)?

Because in Europe techno was highly popular in the nineties, noise was more an electronic phenomenon, and very sophisticated and computer-based by the mid-noughties. Around this time in the US, a scene formed which, as you said, came from a more DIY and also a more psychedelic background. Labels like Not Not Fun, Heavy Tapes, New Age Tapes, early Woodsist or Night People represented aesthetically a complete shake up of every ritual I knew, so I was very drawn to it. Also, nobody knew them so it seemed very conspiratorial. In the beginning everybody just used Casios, delay pedals, voice, drums etc. and made drone. Later it branched out into a more synth approach with, for example, Oneohtrix Point Never, more hypnagogic/vapor with James Ferraro, or some people even formed bands again, e.g. Religious Knives. Ten years of this passed and everybody matured in their own way. Around that time I also felt that I needed to explore new ground, and that was the birth of Jung An Tagen. NNF is still a really good label, they even did a techno/house sublabel with 100% Silk, which was very funny for me personally because it closed the circle of my history.

So, where would you place your new album, *Agent Im Objekt*, for Editions Mego which, compared to the previous one, centers on rhythm?

By featuring a lot of artists, the previous album also had a big social aspect. This time I wanted to be very coherent. Everything is spawned by a 16:17 polyrhythm, plus I used a kick drum.

At some point you also replaced analogue gear with software. What importance does this have for your work in general?

When I used hardware/instruments the approach to music was realtime. But after a while I realised that I'm really not a good musician in the traditional sense.

It's more fun for me to think about sounds, create them, compose with them and then think about their use in a track or in a live setting. I love to think about time and structure, things that happen when I take my hands off the machines.

As an electronic music artist you have to be a composer, musician, producer and an instrument maker at the same time... which can be quite a struggle. If you are more a musician, as, for example, Charles Cohen was, then you need your very own specific instrument that you know how to play. But a computer is way more helpful most of the time for what I do. Making complex sequences or synth patches is a breeze compared to hardware and it's obviously way cheaper. I also like the thought of escaping the current hardware fetishism that's going on with modular synths. When I play live I still don't look at the screen though. I still think that the machine we all check our emails and Facebook on shouldn't be too centered in a live ritual.

Can you talk about this "ritual" in terms of your live performance?

For the moment I have a very clear setup: I play in front of the speakers, because I need to hear exactly what the audience hears. Working with monitors is nonsense. This way I usually form a triangle with the speakers. With this gesture I introduce them as my instrument, at least that's how I see it. With the audience facing me we form a closed circle together. When it's very dark and we are all connected by the same frequencies I can achieve the best results.

You established the mysterious Virtual Vienna Institute. Can you say something about it?

At some point I used a ridiculous amount of monikers. I was working in a kitchen where we served a lot of academics, like Anton Zeilinger from the Faculty of Physics. I got this funny picture in my head that all my monikers worked in an institute, and used it from that time on as a vessel for all my work. I use it less and less though.

Your work has become increasingly cerebral. Can you talk about the evolution of your sonic aesthetic?

Nowadays I look for very specific qualities in sound and structure. It often lies in the balance between simplicity and complexity, harmony/disharmony, etc. My main approach is still psychedelic, so ideally the sounds should have a direct effect on your body but also give your thoughts certain directions. For example, a pure sine wave can be very powerful in a live context but also makes a very fragile, glassy impression on a record. Or in terms of structure, I love polyrhythms that still have a very simple repetitive structure in them. It serves the same purpose, like Arabic arabesques. The sounds themselves become more clean to emphasise their specific qualities; meanwhile, the arrangements become more structuralist.

Can you talk about some of your inspirations – musical and non-musical?

Architecture is maybe the biggest. It's very unspecific and subtle but I'm very moved by certain forms and proportions. I also dream about them a lot. I watch all kinds of sports and think about their movements and aesthetics. Classical experimental film. I work all day and when I've done enough I go for a walk, buy some ingredients and cook. I know that sounds corny but it's actually impossible not to draw lines from there.

LAWRENCE LEK: ‘MUSICIANS ALWAYS FIND A WAY TO SUBVERT THE SYSTEM’

Lawrence Lek is a London-based artist, filmmaker and musician who creates virtual worlds, simulations, and soundtracks. He uses advanced technologies, such as computer-generated imagery, virtual reality, 3D animation and gaming software, as well as installation and performance, to simulate and develop digital environments that are described by the artist as “three-dimensional collages of found objects and situations.” By rendering real places within fictional scenarios, his digital worlds reflect the impact of the virtual on our perception of reality. The soundtrack to his film *AIDOL* is being released by Hyperdub.

In one interview you said: "I use art and the so-called art world as a microcosm to explore the impact of technology on culture. I transpose my concerns about art now onto the future." How do you view this dichotomy (technology / culture) and its impact on humans? What is the role of art in this?

I think art is meant to blur the boundaries between any distinctions. Technology itself is often the subject of my work, but not in the clear-cut dystopian or utopian way in which it might often be portrayed. In the world I often invoke – a hybrid postcolonial Europe/Asia – technology is integrated into culture; it’s the mechanism that brings about societal change. I don’t mean that the political aspect of technology is erased, or that the forces of state power are absent, but that I’m trying to find a way in which culture – in all its terror and beauty – can somehow be integrated and flow with technology.

You were active in the DIY electronic music world around 2008, when more grassroots, self-organised musical structures that were the antithesis of music corporations seemed possible. What was the momentum that led to the change and do you still see hope in independent music operators subverting the new music platforms and algorithms?

I guess there are two big trends; first, this move towards the platform economy, and second, the prosumer adoption of creative technology. In the platform economy, networked effects are the most important thing; the platform becomes more valuable the more content and users it has, and this is a never-ending spiral until another platform emerges with a new feature – which is copied and replicated by yet another service. In the algorithmically-controlled music industry, it’s about accumulating users, fans, and content. As for the second aspect – what’s called prosumer technology, more content gets made because, quite simply, it’s easier than ever to make music that sounds like it took a long time to make. Think about Garageband/One-touch beat sync/Generative melody/Genre Sample Packs/AI generated music. So,

there's both much more content and stronger control over how it gets shared on platforms. Of course, if you're a musician there is always a way to subvert the system.

You are releasing the soundtrack to your work *AIDOL* via Hyperdub (Ed. note: interview conducted in 2020). Is it difficult to separate the sound from the image? How do you approach the sonic side of your work – do you first create the images, followed by the sound that evokes them?

AIDOL is, literally, a film about music – the storyline follows a fading superstar who recruits an AI songwriter to ghostwrite new songs for her comeback performance. Just as with other projects, I usually compose the soundscape or soundtrack while I'm designing the environment or writing the script. When I'm building virtual worlds, I use music to fill in the space that images can't capture. World-building is often discussed in terms of its appearance, whether visually, narratively, or texturally. But I always start with an idea about the experiential qualities of a place. Usually, I work in CGI or rendering, which is a very pristine medium and dates back to when I worked as an architect. You can make the fictional world more real, or immersive, by constructing the environment, the artificial landscape within which the player or viewer exists. And the soundtrack and the soundscape are essential. The sonic world expands the imagination beyond what the eyes can see.

Individualism has been a paradigm that has permeated humankind – from the Enlightenment to Capitalism. With the dawn of AI and machine learning, many fear humans might be replaced by machines. Humans, however, have always used objects, machines, prostheses (in the McLuhanian sense). Is this fear justified? Do you fear for the future?

Fear isn't really the right word. When I started researching AI for my last film, *Geomancer*, I had a strange realisation. Most narratives about AI or nonhuman 'aliens' revolve around anthropocentric projects: we imagine how much AI will be like humans. But the more I started thinking, the more I started wondering – actually, how much is my thought process like AI? This is another thought at the core of my video essay *Sinofuturism (1839-2046 AD)*. It's not just about how AI is human; it's about how the human is AI. Isn't being a composer or a musician just like being an organic algorithm? For example, you listen to things, categorise them into what you like; you learn an instrument; you copy from many different sources; you study existing patterns and eventually might arrive at something original; you work hard to learn from mistakes; you play games to learn how to improve. Of course, there are reasons to fear machinic computation; but right now, those systems aren't autonomous, there are human networks intertwined with them.

Many of your works also draw on concrete historical events – like the setting of *AIDOL*, inspired by a resistance movement in the jungle led by miners and labourers involved in resource extraction on the Malaysian peninsula (if I'm correct). Can you perhaps talk about the references in your films?

The projects often use a combination of alternate histories and speculative futures. *AIDOL* is set in the year 2065 in Malaysia and is about a human-machine conflict embedded in an eSports game called *Call of Beauty*. I thought of the AIs in the film as a hybrid of two groups of people who lived on the Malaysian peninsula – the Senoi, one of the groups of the indigenous Orang Asli, and the communist anti-colonial movements of the 1950s, who were predominantly the descendants of Chinese immigrants. Why these two groups? The Senoi were (wrongly) identified by Western anthropologists in the 1960s as having a unique relation to the dream-state, in that they treated it as a kind of psychoanalysis. However, this was later seen to be an invention of the observer, who saw in the tribe only the utopian fantasies that they wanted to project. This fantasy-projection relationship is one side of what I see humanity projecting onto AI: our hopes for how technology will create a brighter society. The second group relates to how the conflict between communists and colonialists becomes mapped onto the AI and humans – or, rather, the Farsight Corporation, who govern their relationship.

Can you talk about the Farsight Corporation, whose presentation resembles that of a fancy creative tech company?

In the screenplay for Geomancer, which is also set in 2065, there was an AI company called Farsight. I thought: what if I take that fiction seriously? So, in 2018, I started a production company with the same name, framing subsequent exhibitions as if I were an anonymous content creator employed by this entertainment corporation. Farsight is thus a kind of 'reality fiction'. In *AIDOL*, the sequel to *Geomancer*, Farsight expands into the music industry, and their record label attempts to manipulate a singer to produce the kind of music that is so generic it can appeal to anybody, all the time. That's why they end up recruiting the AI composer to be a ghostwriter.

Can you talk about your work *Sinofuturism (1839–2046 AD)*, which was presented online by Rokolectiv. It subverts Western cliches about China, which has become a global power perhaps in spite of its political system and its repressive features.

As mentioned earlier, I made *Sinofuturism* in 2016 almost by accident, largely because I observed how polarised debates were about China and technology. Being Chinese myself, I thought it was strange how little subversive discourse there was in the field. Of course, Afrofuturism, Gulf futurism, and other futurisms were being discussed as ways to challenge the implicitly and subtly one-dimensional viewpoint that is imposed on places that do not come from a Western humanist mode of thinking about politics. After all, there is often an implicit assumption that humanism is the ideal for contemporary society. I made *Sinofuturism* to play with this idea.

For example, one of the principles of the video essay is that Chinese cultural development embodies seven key ideas that run against the rational humanist ideal. The seven chapters of *Sinofuturism* are organised according to other characteristics embraced by Chinese culture that are somehow seen as anti-humanist. When I was researching deep learning, I noticed that the

portrayals of AI in the media mirrored those of Chinese industrialisation. The portrayal of the workers in the tech manufacturing industries as a 'nameless, faceless mass' capable of endless work is exactly how robots are presented as a threat to humanity. The difference is, of course, that the Chinese workforce is biological but becomes dehumanised through their representation. The political idea is that rather than denying these corrupt traits, *Sinofuturism* embraces them and embodies them in a non-human life-form, an AI robot whose goal is to optimise and survive. Just like any culture, I suppose.

JAY GLASS DUBS: 'IF MY HEAD WERE A CITY, THE MUSIC WOULD COME FROM A DISTANT BUILDING'

Dimitris Papadatos, aka Jay Glass Dubs, was born in the USA in 1981 and subsequently moved to Greece where he grew up. Through his work as a composer, musician and sound artist he has become a leader in experimental dub electronics and a core member of the Bokeh Versions squad. His work focuses primarily on spirituality and transformation and is an exercise in style focusing on a counterfactual historical approach to dub music, stripped down to its basic drum/bass/vox/effects form. Jay Glass Dubs is a prolific producer and has released a diverse and expansive body of work on such labels as Bokeh Versions, The Tapeworm, Anòmia, DFA Records, Ecstatic, and Berceuse Heroique. He has also collaborated on critically acclaimed releases with Not Waving (as Not Glass), Guerilla Toss and Leslie Winer and has released remixes for artists such as How To Dress Well, Jabu, Maximum Joy and others for labels such as Domino, Young Echo, ESP Institute and Smalltown Supersound. Dimitris' work has been presented in various international institutions and festivals including Berlin Atonal, Meakusma Festival, Documenta14 and BBK Bilbao.

You responded to my email about the interview early in the morning. Are you a morning person in general? What does your day look like? Do you have a routine for your music creation?

Yes, I definitely am. I have always had my studio in my home, apart from a very short period when I turned what is now my home into a studio, so I guess you could say the spaces where I live and work have always been intertwined. In order to not be lazy and procrastinate, I decided to approach studio time as proper office time. So, I wake up early, shower, get dressed as if I am going to work and start working from 9am at the latest to 8pm at the latest. 'Working' doesn't necessarily mean I am making music to be released. Practice, trying new things, writing, making a mix, doing admin work is all a part of it. Sometimes not working is a part of working, when I indulge myself in the pleasures of looking at a blank screen. I try to give creation sufficient time, so I never push things around in my head. I let it come when it does. As an artist, I believe inspiration should find you while you work, so to me it mostly happens amid experimentation or while a mundane process is taking place. Ideas are there for the taking, all the time and everywhere, if the eye and ear are vigilant.

You were born in 1981, seven years after the end of the rule of the far-right military junta. Has this influenced your childhood and cultural upbringing?

Growing up in Greece almost a decade after the change of government definitely influenced all my generation. I think the most apparent way that this change was manifested was through our parents' lives. After the seven years of the junta,

a sad outcome/remnant of the Greek Civil War which occurred right after the Nazi occupation of Greece, people were thirsty for freedom and political and social changes. The said civil war had divided the country into two opposing war camps, the left-wing partisans of the Communist Party that fought for freedom and the far-right guard dogs of the government aided by the UK and the USA. This division was and will always be a historical taboo for Greece.

In the early eighties, when PASOK, the new populist Socialist party that promised money and work and prosperity for everyone, became the leading political force, a big section of the left was absorbed by it and many of the most liberal right-wing voters also started to find fertile ground for their agenda.

All this political fermentation created a new human type, the 'Neo Greek', a formerly oppressed, poorly educated, politically fanatical, nouveau rich idiot type who would occupy the country for the next 30 years and change their guise according to each given situation, which led to an unprecedented volume of corruption that has affected my contemporaries and will affect generations to come. You could say that my generation grew up with this model as a prototype for success.

You could also say that my generation is therefore doomed. It's sad and scary. What's even more sad and scary is the fact that all this constant rearrangement of power had the opposite effect of what it should have.

Of course, there are many voices of social and political opposition to this mess, voices that support equality, solidarity and social justice, but there is sadly also a huge part of the population that has been brainwashed by the media and by far-right political groups and has developed hatred, nationalistic views and an immense fear of the 'other'. Dreaming of being an artist in this situation can be frustrating and disheartening, but of course in every teenager's life something happens that changes everything. For me it was definitely punk rock that made me see other ways and changed my life completely.

Apparently, you have a large music collection of laïkó, a Greek music style that draws from traditional songs and was most prominent between 1950 and 1980. Can you talk about your collection and perhaps the contemporary Greek music scene?

I have a music collection that thankfully covers a lot of genres, but the laïkó section is one I definitely feel proud of in terms of the possibilities it has opened to me as a listener.

For my generation, this music is a bit of a cultural taboo, considering it was mostly prominent, as you very rightly noted, in these years of political unrest. I find that there are many undiscovered areas that this genre has almost unintentionally revealed to me as a composer and an artist in general. The straightforward approach of the lyrics, the sublime simplicity of the music, the subject matter that draws inspiration from everyday life and its direct connection to the vast Greek musical tradition are some aspects of it that I find intriguing and worthy of further research and exploration.

Also, the fact that these composers and lyricists were almost forced to produce a hit song every week, their prolificity and talent, is to me an

astonishing paradigm of what the human mind is capable of. Composers like Vasilis Tsitsanis, Apostolos Kaldaras, Akis Panou, and Mimis Plessas, to name just a few, are glowing examples of inbuilt creativity, artistic integrity and social struggle. They were what one would now call musical artisans, but they had a very centred and strong artistic voice that was there for the taking for generations to follow.

The contemporary music scene in Greece is not very interesting to me on the whole. There are a good number of musicians/bands/acts that do exceptional work, but the largest amount of musical production is a flattened attempt to copy what is happening abroad. It lacks identity, structure and ambition. It's produced as a local version of a commodity. It's normal in a small place and scene that it happens this way. Most Western artistic production is merely a cultural appropriation but in Greece there is also the factor of a faultily functioning locality, where, for example, the local musical tradition is considered taboo therefore it never actively gets reapproached, or when it does, it's merely a formalism. We never encountered the Enlightenment, the sexual revolution happened very late, punk rock too, so our approach to Western culture was always that of the colonised, unable to overcome the Western cultural embargo and guilty enough to admit to Eastern cultural slavery. So, an identity that could be strong and prominent was lost within the references and low self-esteem of the creators.

The fact that there is absolutely no support from the state surely helps to create this lack of identity, but I think artists in Greece should start thinking in a more collective way and for reasons more important than just having a good time.

Or start being more like Vangelis (smile).

In 2015, you started the Jay Glass Dubs project, in which you sort of deconstruct dub, which in a way is already a genre that favours recontextualisation. What led you to dub, as such, a genre with its own particular history and stylistics? Could you talk about your reinterpretations of it?

As a listener, I am of course interested in dub as a genre, but I wouldn't say that as a creator it has influenced me more than, let's say, post-punk or seventies prog rock or the laïkó that you referred to above. What I find really interesting and adventurous in dub music is the methodology; the process and approach.

This recontextualisation that you are speaking of is at the core of the genre's own history, but is also a vital factor for the evolution of music in general. What I am offering in this case is a certain counter-factuality. I'm stripping it of its historical importance and therefore reapproaching the formalistic elements that define it. It's a much broader experience than simply using the genre's properties. I like to see my work as a contextual discourse between myself and the history of music in general and not dub music specifically.

I am trying to create something that will be timeless. And to me, this timelessness requires the existence of a certain filament that connects disparate elements together in a way that may not be apparent directly or instantly. It takes a lot of work, knowledge and concentration from both the creator and the listener. To me, this thread is unravelled while the work is

happening, it's ongoing research and experimentation that keeps me interested and present in it and I want to maintain the same level of interest for the people who receive the music. I like to see my process as an exhumation. If my head were a city, the music would come from a distant building while I sat next to some water. A nuance of a language that I am constantly learning.

How important are the specific dub techniques to you – dubplates, echoes, the studio as a tool?

Dub music was merely the result of a mistake in the studio and in time it overcame its own origins by reassociating them successfully in a certain part of history. I follow similar and quite simple properties in my work. There is a basic idea around which I set the tracks up, but it all develops through the use of time signatures as arbitrators and effect processing. I will record and/or sample slight segments of music and sounds, transform their presence into time and reapproach their form through effect processing. For me, the manipulation of the effects is a vital factor of the composition itself. I am not a trained musician in terms of academic experience, but I have been experimenting with recordings for more than 15 years now. I have solid studio experience since I have been releasing albums for a while.

The studio gives you the gift of time and constant real-time feedback in trial and error. All the mistakes that happen, the ideas that turn out wrong and the technology that allows the user to accelerate their overcoming and find a solution are parts of the composition, and may or may not merit academic discourse as much as a traditionally composed piece of music would.

Your latest album, *Soma*, has the body at its centre. Can you talk about the concept and how you applied it to the music and the lyrics? (which I guess are not random samples, but specifically made for the album)

Soma was created through and in the aftermath of the hardship of a break-up that was traumatic for both myself and the person I was involved with. It was not only the break-up from a person but also a separation from a whole life that I had up to that point taken for granted and I had to change all my rituals and habits so I would avoid any awkward confrontation. I moved house, stopped hanging out with the same people, avoided certain streets etc. Of course, this psychological hardship affected my physicality as well. I had become this vessel that had no needs, no experiences and no position. I would stay inside for months, working on what would become this album. I would see very few friends and they were definitely worried about me. But this process was healing for me. While *Soma* was taking shape, my broken self-esteem re-emerged, and, combined with a reawakened sexual life and better exercise and nutrition, I started reclaiming my body and its position as a physicality within a space from which I had felt ostracised.

I know that is all might sound a bit annoyingly over-sensitive coming out of the mouth of a white cis male, but I was a mess, and through my work for *Soma* I allowed myself to enter a process that was both cathartic and therapeutic. The music and lyrics speak of all this process; the fact that we decided to have all the songs in the first LP and all the instrumental music in the second LP is

actually describing this passage from pain through trauma to redemption. In the first LP, the lyrics, the ones I wrote and, surprisingly to me, also the ones that Jasmine, Maria and Danai wrote for the songs they respectively sing, are very much connected to this process.

There are references to sexual frustration in “Apple, Sliced”, “The Wrong Frame” and “How Glass Bred”, social discomfort in “Dots On Nails” and “Your Raps” and escapism as a form of therapy in “Shape” and “Our Reversed Uniforms”. The second LP is much more social and optimistic despite its bleakness and darkness. The ideas developed here are strolling around my obsessions: jungle, traditional music, krautrock and so many more. In a way, it’s more extroverted and danceable. In general, I wanted to make a record that has these two sides, that can provide an immense intimate listening experience but can also be danced to in a club (whenever that may be).

SUPER SHORT-TERM ECSTASY AFTER SUPER SHORT-TERM COLLAPSE: AN INTERVIEW WITH JESSIKA KHAZRIK

Scavenging sounds from online and on-site detritus, trans-millennial compendia of healing, and militarised ads and technologies - Jessika Khazrik's sonic scapes intimately investigate the ecological and techno-political premises of the economies we inhabit or forget. Often born out of vocoded collaborations with multi-modal neural networks skewed with incomputable Arabic rhythms, Khazrik festively uses spaces of congregation to search for locally entrenched universalisms that could collectively respond to the dystopias of our times. Khazrik's indisciplinary practice as artist, writer, technologist, producer and DJ ranges from composition to machine learning, performance, visual art, ecotoxicology and the history of science and music.

You grew up in Lebanon's Armenian jazz scene. It was there that your interest in music, technology, politics and literature was spurred. You also started performing in Beirut's metal scene at a pretty young age.

Music played several transformational roles in the life of my father, who was a promoter of Armenian rock bands in the sixties-seventies, a vocal jazz singer and a club manager in the seventies and eighties, in Beirut. He (pretty mysteriously) withdrew from performing a few years before I was born and opened a jazz venue in north-east Beirut. Most of the memories of the first eight years of my life happened there, in the familial company of jazz. Besides my dad's programming and playlists, family gatherings played a huge role in diversifying my early exposure to music. My family comes from various places in Asia; Armenia, Lebanon, Iraq, Syria and India, and many emigrated to Europe and America then came back, left again, stayed, etc... As is often the case with communities who have experienced several displacements, folk music is deeply cherished, remorphed and retained. So, in parallel with jazz, I grew up surrounded by Armenian, Chaldean/Iraqi, Syriac and Lebanese folk music. One can clearly feel the influence in my work with the voice and drums and in my hybrid/DJ sets.

How have all these influences and environmental impulses impacted you in your work in music and technology?

The technological shifts of the nineties were deeply formative of my subjecthood. From a non-musical technological perspective, I underwent complex bone surgery at the age of six months, and as a follow-up, I had to be X-rayed over 35 times during the first 18 years of my life. X-ray rooms are so immersive, and I still retain very uncanny memories of how these biomedical imagery rooms and the technologies they contain developed, almost with every check-up. I remember well my feelings towards the disembodied voice of the medical operators in the dark, my body that was instructed to obey, the breath that you were ordered to hold so the machine could image clearly, the uncanniness of looking at the spectres of your bones against light, the potential risks that were pre-emptively probed with radiation, the deep gratitude I feel nevertheless towards radiation, etc... My first works in performance stemmed from this personal biomedical history, and recent projects like *Post-coronialism* (2020-ongoing) and *Pharmakopoeia* (2021-ongoing) implicitly echo that.

But also, before even knowing what a mix was and what I was doing, I began making my first mixtapes at the age of seven. It was with two CD players, two cassette players, a radio, and FM microphones. A few years later, thanks to LimeWire, Soulseek and online blogs, I began listening to everything that ineffably spoke to me; from ambient, to IDM, darkwave, No Wave, electro goth, etc... And when I was around 11 years old, I discovered SAPI 4.0 and began meddling with speech synthesis and haven't stopped since. I was very active in online forums and proto-social media platforms from around that time, and that was where I discovered metal music. My first experiences playing live were with death metal and black metal bands. I was 14, but my bandmates were all five to eight years my senior. I'm still in close affinity with the metal community in Lebanon though I haven't really played metal in the last 13 years. Metalheads are greatly discriminated against and violated by the security apparatus in Lebanon, and it is within this community that I first experienced as a teenager the need for solidarity outside of contexts related to racism and sexism. Jazz still feels like a deep, mathematical lullaby to me, it helps me focus. And I do feel a quaint echo of jazz all throughout my music, though I have never played it. It will always be there.

How have you perceived the profound technological changes since the nineties, and how have you started utilising and critically approaching technologies in your work?

Super short-term ecstasy after super short-term collapse with so many casualties? Repeat x7365746384735 and make it proxy?

The mixture of growing up in the nineties, surrounded by promises of reconstruction of the built environment in post-war Lebanon on one hand, and of the self on the internet on the other, has stirred an unquenchable curiosity in me to delve into both the past and the future to probe what has led us to this very dystopic, neoliberal and asinine actualisation of 'reconstruction'. This curiosity and discontent, paralleled with my own experience of targeted+mass surveillance, have spurred me to initiate research-based projects, multi-generational conversations and reading groups around the political economy and history of computation and AI.

These projects range across several media. They include, among others, the techno-feminist radio project *I Hate the Past but it Seduces Me* (2015), the bi-lingual reading group 'قراءة الحواسيب *Reading Computers* (2017–18) where we read as many texts from the 10th-12th centuries as we did from the 21st, the ML composition and print made with videos I took of my friends *Artificial Intelligence Is Work* عمل الذكاء الاصطناعي'(2018), the seminar *That There Is Counter-Information: Art, Cryptography and the Meta-Datification of Discourse* (2018) that I curated upon the invitation of the late Bernard Stiegler, may we collectively

remember him and his work today. Also, for several reasons that we might arrive at later, not all of my work in technology is made publicly nor is it attributed under my official name, or even, under any name.

Differently and convergently in different projects, I show how we cannot look at this history only from the lens of the 20th and 21st centuries or from one geography; it stretches way before and beyond. To seemingly return to the nineties and swiftly move in and out of them, a book that has taught me profusely about the underlying politics of that particular period in internet history is Wendy Hui Kyong Chun's *Control and Freedom*. In this book, the trenchant Chun shows how the concept of cyberspace pre-dates ArpaNet or any actualisation of the internet. I think it is the same with rave culture. It has multiple older roots, though it was spurred into electronic actualisation in the nineties, and it continues. That said, both rave culture and the internet are still in their infancy, and this gives me hope.

What role does voice have in your work and its deconstruction/ vocoderisation, its transformation by technology? (you also use neural networks to alter the voice etc.)

For me, voice is the life force that conjoins the body with the environment. It is the first testimony of their interdependence, and our desire to exit and to return. As the instantiation of the vibration of matter in space, voice is the antithesis of a vacuum. For some philosophical traditions, voice is the primordial carrier of the ultimate lie or anti-virtue by being occupied by the medium of falsification, language, or the body's most extensive medium of healing. For others, voice is what makes us political beings. I learn from and play with all of that. My work is very much centred around resuscitating, studying and re-setting voice as a very intimate, ecological and techno-political medium of proximity, transmission, distanciation and desire. This is usually channelled through exercises in inter-breathing and collective vocalisation, speech synthesis in machine learning, linear predictive coding and more traditional forms of vocoding coupled with vocal encryption and voice coding. At other times, I try to simply channel this corporeal, technological and political fascination with voice through the medium of writing with different modes of address and a multiplicity of voices.

You've been critical of certain technological platforms (techno-capitalism) and platform capitalism as such, though it is the primary tool of creation for many artists these days. You also utilise it in your work. How do you as an artist who is aware of the modus operandi of digital corporations approach this issue in your work? (also, as an alumna of MIT)

In parallel with my practice in music, visuals and writing, I have been for the past six years working as a technologist and technological advisor in projects concerning the techno-politics of 'AI', the public accessibility to knowledge/whistleblowing, and counter-surveillance/digital security. It all started with my political advocacy in Lebanon, particularly the need to protect our communication channels, and my academic work in computational linguistics and the history of cryptography prior to continuing my studies at MIT. My experience at MIT was very transformative as I ended up studying

and engaging with different labs and research groups, from the very feminist Science Technology Society (STS) department, to the Urban Research labs, and the Computer Science and Artificial Intelligence Labs (CSAIL). During my time there, I became very active in the anti-DRM protests and organised work lobbying the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) that was, at that time, moving towards a drastic change in their policies by pushing for a proprietary privatisation of electronic media, both online and offline. I also learnt about the militarised history of today's disciplinary organisation of knowledge (and ignorance), which became the subject of my theoretical research.

For all the above reasons, and due to problems relating to time and the desire to remain uncontainable, I am basically not really on social media and not at all as an artist. In the last two years, I began collectively developing web media platforms that push for a different techno-political genealogy based on anonymity through collectivity and collectivity through anonymity, care as an anti-capitalist strategy, transclusion as a hyper open-access tool for the transmission of knowledge+desire and peer-to-peer economies. We are now in the last testing phase of one of two, and I can't wait to share them with you! It's all peer-to-peer and doesn't require any personal information, not even an e-mail or a phone number. It's a bit like the experience of the multitude in a rave, which I find deeply endearing and healing.

Your project *Pharmakopoeia* قرابادين explores the common origins and futures of remedies and media, as well as the notion of healing in a 'post-coronial' world. What role does healing have in your work?

My life and work tend to be very transclusive and inter-referential, without ends in sight and with many returns. And I think we are all eternally searching for healing... Healing from time, from first-hand or second-hand memories and trauma, from disease, from the toxicities that capitalism produces and agnotologically circulate, or even simply, the senescence of our bodies and stimuli... So far, I have personally experienced a lot of healing ruptures in my life through music, media, non-human and more than human vessels that wouldn't necessarily call themselves healing practitioners. I am deeply seduced by altruisms and collective action. I am committed to that in ways that transcend my teleological understanding.

To give a tangible example, a few years ago, when investigating the disposal of toxic waste in my hometown, I stumbled upon the body of work and personal archive of one of the earliest environmental activists in Lebanon, Pierre Malychef (1925–2014) who was an ecotoxicologist and herbal pharmacologist. I have been archiving, learning from and circulating his work since then – making sure his work is constantly resuscitated. This was many years before 'I officially' launched *Pharmakopoeia* قرابادين, but I really think it has always been there. Also, one of the main goals of *Pharmakopoeia* قرابادين is to challenge contemporary politics of attribution as well as the organisation of knowledge and experience. Parallel to that, I have experienced a lot of collective loss and grief through the violence of capitalism, militarisation, the political assassination of friends, etc.. I feel I can tackle all of the above in different orchestrations and combinations under the umbrella of this long-term search.

As for *Post-coronialism*, I very serendipitously started the open collective study, solidarity, and strategy group without even intending to a few days into the first lockdown. It began with very amicably inviting two friends to join an informal conversation on the 12th of March 2020, around the very immense question of how we can make, together, a non-militarised emergency response in this sickening world economy/ecology. My friends ended up inviting two of their friends, and very quickly we began meeting online for three hours every Thursday, over eight different time zones!

To tell you more about the open group, we all commonly work on/for the urgent spread of indisciplinary care, the demilitarisation of the health, education and labour sectors and the ecological, systematic and agnotological comorbidity of Capital. In this worldly terror, I do think we need to aspire big and topple what presents itself as inevitable. In the past year, our work as *Post-coronialism* has been centred more towards online community and tool building through the collective development of one of the web platforms I mentioned above.

You also mentioned DJing as an important part of your practice. How do you approach it? Are you more of a selector, or do you rather create certain sonic energy flows?

DJing teaches me a lot about the power of concurrence, the multitude and intuitive knowledge. For me, it is about bringing together multiple frames of reference that rarely meet. I am clearly very interested in combinatorial approaches in all the whole of medicine, music-making, machine learning, etc.. And, I'm very grateful that through DJing, I can conjoin all of the above. It is so endearing to make bodies move or just accompany them with music without perennially transforming space. It is so humble and it has the potential to ephemerally subvert the predominant politics of attribution of our age. Of course, depending on what you are doing, where, how, etc..

In the last four years, all of my DJ sets have been hybrid sets, so there is a lot of my voice, production, and edits in there. I also use a lot of machine learning for my edits, and two years ago, I figured out how to use machine learning live, in real time, while mixing. My usual setup for mixing live is three CDJs, any 4-channel mixer, one or two drum machines, one or two vocal processors, an external FX pedal and an iPad. So yeah, it is very much about being multiple, concurrent and moving super fast or super slow.

What currently occupies your mind?

Transformation, the health of my parents and friends in Beirut and in this world, my debut LP...

THE SOUND IS THE SOUL: AN INTERVIEW WITH SIMINA OPRESCU

Simina Oprescu is a composer, video and mixed-media artist living in Bucharest who has focused on sound and composition for the past years. In 2015, she graduated from the Department of Photography and Dynamic Imagery at the National Art University in Bucharest and from 2017-2018 she studied at the acousmatic composition department of the Royal Conservatory in Mons, Belgium. She focuses on several concepts, including an analysis in how the fixed image and the moving image are mutually reinforcing*, being interested in how the background depth can be used as a tool for remodelling our perception of environment and movement and the use of sound as a way of expression, with or without an image as part of the environment.(*Like sound and silence).

When I first saw you play – at Rokolectiv, in Bucharest in 2019- , your sound stood out in the nightclubby environment. You started with a radio play and continued for several hours, into a more techno environment. Is this interplay between a more aesthetic/ sound-art environment and a more functional/dance one something that you feel is part of your work?

Haha yes, I remember, I started with the radio play *Il Colombre* by Dino Buzzati, which can be found on my Soundcloud. It's my idea of creating a space inside a totally different space and demonstrating that it works. It's creating a different environment, having in the back of my mind the deconstruction of the sound, or its decomposition (and when I see decomposition or deconstruction from a more complex point of view), our thoughts are not always linear, so sometimes they involve a thought that gives us pleasure, hope or it can give us anxiety and panic attacks. It's the same with music and decomposition in my view, you can manipulate to feel and move with the sounds that you choose to use. So this is why the space for me is a space for playing, actually playing with it, to have an experience that isn't like a gymnastics club experience (though that can also be really liberating). It's also about trust. On both sides of the scene.

You graduated from the Department of Photography and Dynamic Imagery at the National Art University in Bucharest. What is the relationship between sound and image in your work? Do both translate into the other?

Sound and image can be intrinsic. We have movement and vibration in both. It just depends what you choose to be first for you, not scientifically, because sound is the first to be perceived. So here it's a matter of choice, it's just where you are positioning yourself. To the sound? Or to the image? One can influence the other, but in my experience I've seen that sound is clearly superior to image.

Can you talk about your use of 'sound objects' in your composition? In one interview you mentioned "the sound of aspirin in a glass of water", which is very evocative. Do you get inspired by these random sounds, or do you rather create them? How do you discover sound/s?

There is a 'vocabulary of sound' as I call it. In 2018, Anette Vande Gorne almost gave me an epiphany with her *Treatise on Writing Acousmatic on Fixed Media*; which helped me a lot to arrange all the sounds in little folders in my head, on textures, dynamics, velocity, colours, timbre, montage...and how to find them in day-to-day objects and then record them. Personally, I found it absolutely fascinating. Because for the first time, the medium was not constraining me. It is everywhere, a sense of freedom. Image felt like a prison.

In that sense, is sound something that is something internal, or does it rather come from the outside in? How do you process it?

It is radically internal for me. Sometimes I hear a sound or a form of montage or effect (but always in other compositions not pure sound) that can inspire me but for me sound is the story of oneself and then the story of the soulless environment let's say. The room is the body, the sound is the soul and emotions passing by, and you are the brain. This is how I see it. The textures and the intensity come to me from the feeling which I alone attribute to that sound; the sound is just a sound, a vibration of molecules. I get inspired a lot by stories, poetry and mythology.

You recently participated in a project that aimed to score silent Romanian films from the early 20th century. How was this experience for you?

Yes, it was *Possible Sounds of Early Cinema* made by Image and Sound which was formed by Emilian Mărgărit and Elena Dobîndă.

It was intense, and working on a silent film, I felt the freedom of the image and all the possibilities of manipulating it but, for the first time, I chose to actually use diegetic sounds to recreate the atmosphere of the Drăguș village. I wanted to feel it alive, and alternating with a fictitious sound, I tried to catch the inner ensemble of the movie, the whole general atmosphere, and then work on it by chapters.

It is about the first sociological and ethnographic documentary in the world, *Drăguș – Life in a Romanian Village*, made by Professor Dimitrie Gusti (1880–1955, founder of the Sociological School of Bucharest) and his team of trained sociologists and students.

The documentary tracks the activities and customs of the mountain village Drăguş (Făgăraş county), later established as a special site for Romanian sociologists and anthropologists. After intense field research, the shootings took place between 15.07 – 15.08.1929 and were supervised by Dimitrie Gusti. Cinematography and film editing were by Nicolae Barbelian, while Paul Sterian and Nicolae Argintescu-Amza were the directors and screenwriters. The absolute premiere of the film took place on the 4th of December, 1929, at the Romanian Athenaeum in Bucharest, and the official premiere was on the 5th of March 1930, at the National Theatre of Bucharest. The film projection was accompanied by a work by Constantin Brăiloiu, based on local songs collected

by Harry Brauner and performed by musicians brought from the village of Drăguş. In the 1930s-1940s, the film was presented abroad (France, Germany, USA) illustrating lectures by Dimitrie Gusti. All the movies, including this one, can be found with subtitles in English on www.imageandsound.ro.

Bucharest has an interesting artistic scene, with a fascinating legacy of spectralism (Iancu Dumitrescu, Horațiu Rădulescu, Octavian Nemescu, etc.), as well as contemporary non-academic electronic experimentation. Could you talk about it?

And also, Anamaria Avram, she was a major force, a great loss... Yes, all these great composers had and still have a major influence, mostly on a sort of common feeling of sensing the possibilities of the impact of sound and music, also this phenomenological sound which creates a different space, transforming it entirely. So I think this legacy is well established in our blood. It is a common feeling, a powerful drama in our souls eager to be heard, a story that needs to be told. I've met Iancu Dumitrescu and Anamaria Avram, who always said "Forget the rules! Forget everything you learned!"- but my input on that is – you have to first know the rules and then forget them; and Octavian Nemescu along with his wife, Erica Nemescu who helped him with realisation and engineering most of her life.

There is also Corneliu Cezar about whom Octavian Nemescu wrote: "In 1965 the first studio of electronic music in Romania was born. It was imperfect. Corneliu Cezar was the first one there, he was a fascinating, complex and universal personality. He was a composer, poet, painter, astrologer, a kind of Romanian Jean Cocteau. He made the first electronic Romanian song; it was called 'Aum'. He was one of the pioneers of the music avant-garde from Romania." It is impossible for the Romanian to escape a kind of poetry and story in their sound. I see us being expressive and really wild in our souls, and time and space for us just means that we know we are eternal, and have nostalgia for a past life; if you like it, good, if you don't, we won't stop doing it. We are old Latin souls, we are intense. It's not nationalist, it's about ethos. But so far, we have lacked venues, these we don't have, and they are absolutely necessary for a community to form.

Can you talk about your project *The Hidden Environment – The Feeling of the Cave* at this year's Musikprotokoll (2020)?

It started from an idea I had while I was in quarantine and self-isolation, in that energy of solitude which at times almost felt suffocating (now I kinda miss that absolute silence in nature because of the lack of people), that we are all connected but we live and feel different experiences on the same planet, on deeper levels.

As Andy Clark and Donna Haraway argued, we are natural born cyborgs which means we are capable of changing and inventing, using technology as a tool for growth and exploration of the hidden environment that is our mind and future. It is believed that the use of voice in singing, chanting or gargling can be a healing method through the Vagus Nerve – the trauma nerve. Reflecting on trauma reminded me of this feeling that more or less all of us have felt, a feeling that the old ways of the world can't continue as before, thus finding ourselves reinventing new forms of proprioception and communication all alone. While this reinvention is committed to a stable point, we find ourselves in a schizoid dichotomy between the old environment and a new one. This feeling reminded me of two expressions of Leo Frobenius in Paideuma: 'open space mentality' and 'cave mentality', which describe the dimensions of the possibility of having a conception of the world as soul dimensions, meaning 'the open space of the world' and 'the' 'cave of the world'.

'Cave mentality' is characterised by a narrowness of consciousness, by a permanent uneasiness, by a feeling of a lack of freedom and therefore by fatalism, by uninterrupted pressure and under such pressure, by explosive discharges in the form of fanaticism. On the contrary, nostalgia and a feeling of infinity push towards constructive deeds; a convincing impulse towards creation and natural joy in the freedom of the world. Both fundamental conceptions are only manifestations of a soul way – so-called 'inner sounds' – sounds you hear as part of your conscious and unconscious mind, similar to but different from an inner voice. We exist in a duality – soul space and living space.

Therefore, inside this hidden environment lie the monsters, the angels, the shadows, the hope, the mystery – the universal complexity of thought inside the speed of sound.

SHAPE SOUND, HETEROGENEOUS ART AND PERFORMANCE IN EUROPE

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Editor & interviews: Lucia Udvardyová

The coordinating team of SHAPE is
Michal Brenner, Viestarts Gailītis, Rihards Endriksons,
Lucia Udvardyová, Pavel Kraus, Barbora Hřebíková

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