eartrip

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SACHIKO M THE RENT
FLUXUS | MATTIN | UNAMI
JOHN COLTRANE IN SEATTLE
REVIEWS ARTICLES CRITICISM

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EDITORIAL

The time has come once again for a new issue of 'eartrip' to find its way onto the technological stream, bits and bytes of information travelling down the information superhighway (to hell?). First, a qualifying note: I realize that, in these editorials, I tend to rant about the virtues and vices of the internet with dull frequency; and that this may seem a little hypocritical, given that the World Wide Web is the medium which allows me to publish at all. And yet, engagement with the form in which one is writing is crucial if one is not to become glib and boringly comfortable; further than this (and hopefully not coming on all Marshall McLuhan), technological forces shape the way we live, work, listen and *think*, and it would be unrealistic not to consider the way in which they do so. This shouldn't simply mean naïve, knee-jerk anti-technological primitivism, but a careful consideration of the entire situation, in both its positive and negative aspects.

So, onward…I've had a pile of CDs to review sitting on various shelves for the past couple of years: some of the CDs get taken down and off, put into the CD player, listened to and written about; and then their place is taken by new ones, fresh from the post, destined to languish for months while I manage not to listen or to write about them. There is something to be said here about information overload, about the way listening to something in order to write critically about it encourages a kind of attention that, while perhaps more focussed and analytical than the usual casual soaking-in, also feels rather too narrow, restricted: as if I'm listening to the disc merely to turn out some pithy phrases or neat summaries, rather than for anything of inherent value in, or anything I can really *learn* from, the music itself. I've also been thinking recently about the constant enhanced speed and ease of access to – everything, really, music included: such apparently 'democratic' instant availability should not necessarily be considered a virtue, in the way it takes root in our Internet/ cable TV/ ADHD schizo brains, part of the 21st-cenutry mindset engendered by the intermeshing of utopian technological hopes / capital and the profit business / globalization. (For all the ecstatic joy and noise that electronics have brought to music over the years, there's always that other, darker side of the coin – the sense of complicity at the suffering of others, the global outsourcing of exploitation / manufacture which enables us to dream our technological dreams in insulated comfort, and which Keith Rowe set out to explore in 'Harsh'.) 'How is the internet changing the way you think?', asks a survey of various musicians, philosophers, writers and public figures by the online think tank The Edge Foundation[1]: note that the question takes it for granted that there *has* been some change (not 'has the internet changed…?' but 'how is the internet changing…?'). Such change is imperceptible, irresistible: it seems that many of us are increasingly unable to imagine a world without facebook, which has become (positively) a platform for organising nationwide political protests and riots, but also for lazy 'slacktivism' (in which e-signing a petition becomes a replacement for genuine political activity, while at the same time allowing us to feel good about ourselves (like assuaging guilt through giving to charities, but without the financial rub)). Similarly, while social media and blogs enable devotees of esoteric or neglected disciplines (such as the music covered in this magazine) to form some sort of online 'community', such communities seem no less prone than sites covering, say, celebrity gossip or sports, to the sniping, back-biting, and Godwin's law absurdities that you can see beneath any youtube video. Reading through such debates, even casually, quickly reveals their absurdity, and such caricatured interaction perhaps does not need to be taken too seriously; yet there is still a nagging fear that – for example, through the obsessive detailing of the supposed minutiae of everyday life, the creation of a kind of real/virtual persona through photos, videos, 'tweets' and status updates on social media sites – the internet may be taken as a substitute for real, lived life, online communication replacing real-world communication and interaction in 'meatspace.' This strikes me as something that needs resisting; and, even if we leave aside the social networking element of things, one is still faced with the problem of information overload

1 http://edge.org/q2010/q10_index.html#responses

replacing (standing in for) real knowledge or understanding (just as online interaction or activism replaces those activities in the physical world). True, the increased flow of information allows us a greater understanding of particular artists' outputs, the history of musics that reveal their true depths, interconnections and cross-currents previously hidden, unknown (I could make myself an 'expert' on, say, Archie Shepp, in a couple of weeks, if I so chose: the recordings, the discographies, the bootlegs, all available at the click of a mouse, the touch of finger on computer keyboard). But if we are to listen with the true concentration, dedication and emotional engagement that so much of 'our music' (whatever that is) demands, we need some tonic to tabs, mp3 snippets, web browsers and youtube links. That's why music with the sheer bloody-minded persistence of Sachiko M can prove such a balm (as well as producing headaches, scowls, expressions of acute discomfort): deciding to spend some time with some of her albums, and then write up my impressions outside the confines of the review format, as I've done for this issue, was certainly an…experience, though the results may, I don't know, make for *tortuous* reading. Elsewhere in the following pages (as I wrap up what's turned out to be a rather longer editorial than planned), a dialogue surrounding John Coltrane's extraordinary 'Live in Seattle', recorded in 1965 though not released until after his death (of which sad event 2012 marks the 45th anniversary); a piece on what I guess you could call sounded performances, from Fluxus to Mattin; an interview with Canadian group The Rent, considering the music of Steve Lacy and the notion of free jazz repertory and interdisciplinary endeavour, among other things; a survey of Billy Harper performances available in online video format; and the usual reviews of CDs and concerts.

Finally, I must note the sad passing of composer, bassist, bandleader and educator Graham Collier, who died, suddenly and unexpectedly, on September 9th, 2011. Collier was featured in an interview for Issue 3 of 'eartrip', and had recently published his book 'The Jazz Composer', as well as running a related, and regularly-updated website. His death, no doubt, comes as a great shock and a loss to many musicians, friends and listeners around the world.

David Grundy // Cambridge, March 2012

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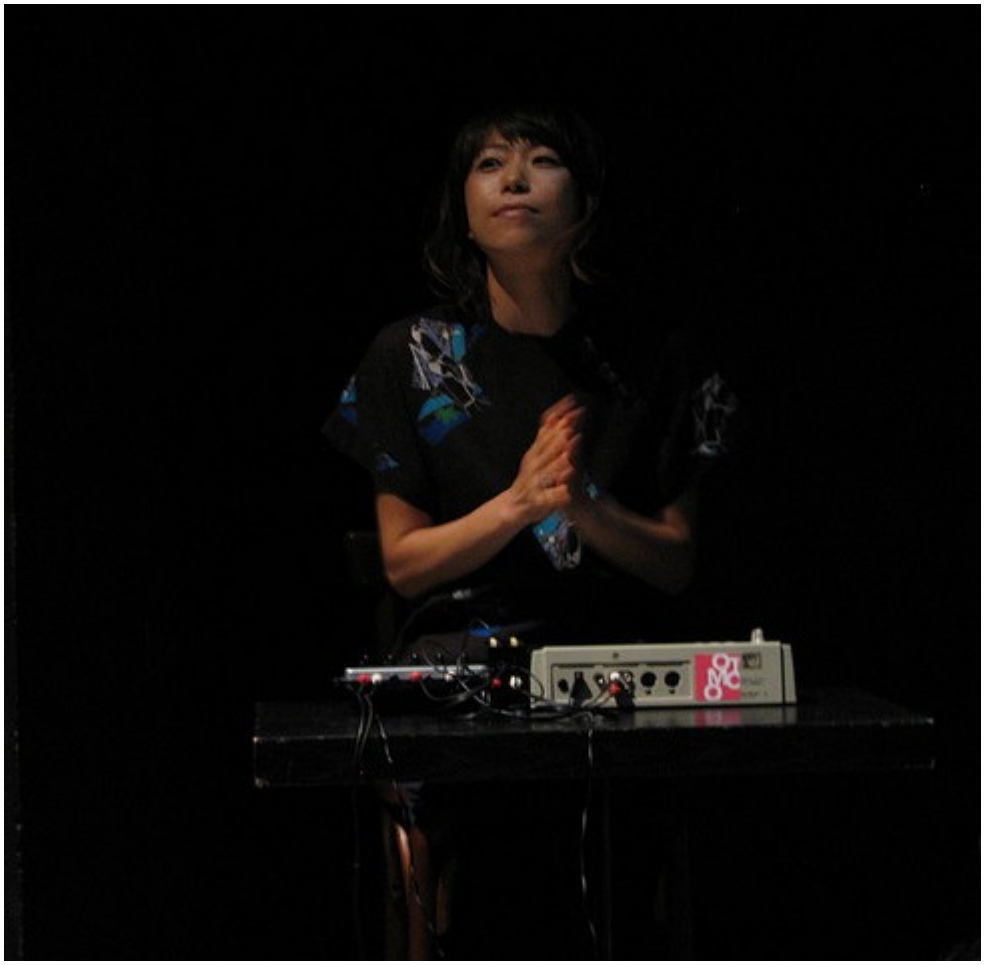
Listening to Sachiko M

By David Grundy



> "Of all the extraordinary musicians to have emerged from that scene (and there are dozens whose work I love), none has affected me more than Sachiko M. Something about her conception of strength and beauty is absolutely in sync with me and I almost always find her music utterly entrancing no matter how severe it gets. And that part of it, her amazing willingness and persistence in limning out extreme areas, of staying with *one thing* for inhuman lengths of time. I love it and am thankful for it."
>
> Brian Olewnick, 'Just Outside'

A few months ago, I decided to listen to the complete Sachiko M discography, and form my impressions into some sort of extended piece of writing. My reasons for doing so are still not quite clear to me: though I was no doubt consciously or sub-consciously inspired by Richard Pinnell's various schemes of this kind, involving work by Jeph Jerman and Luigi Nono; and also, by the fact that the reviewing of discs tends to encourage a particular kind of listening, garnered towards 'up-to-the-moment' reviews, that misses out on the kind of attention one is forced to pay when one chooses a particular artist to focus upon, when one consciously decides to start really delving into their work.

I should qualify my initial statement at this stage: I decided to listen to *selected recordings* featuring Sachiko M, rather than the *complete* discography, which is pretty crowded, and which contains quite a number of releases in which she plays a supporting, or background role (for example, the

appearances on numerous Otomo Yoshihide sessions, where she may tend to get submerged within a large ensemble). Consequently, I realise that this will be far from a complete overview of her work (in any case, as so much is done in live performance, the notion of 'repertoire' or of charting artistic evolution through a series of fixed points becomes problematic); instead, it will be a personal response to music which, by now, should have managed to shake of its reputation for being wilfully extreme and of conceptual interest only. As other critics have pointed out, it is music that is, at times, very physical in terms of the way it encourages one to perceive space (for instance, the fact that a sine wave appears to change 'shape', or sound quality, if one moves around the room), and very sensuous in its timbral content (though there are people who simply can't stand these sort of high, tinnitus-type pitches, however hard they try to listen – and this is fair enough). Once one has accepted its parameters, and provided one does not have the aforementioned aversion to sine waves, its apparent extremity becomes almost warm and inviting (in a slightly masochistic way), forcing a focus that is rigorous for both listener and musician, but which also unites them in an intimate and even ecstatic kind of shared experience. At the same time, harshness, roughness, and a sense of risk are a major part of its appeal (as with the solo work of Toshimaru Nakamura; the sense of machines that evade the grasp of total technical control (one invents one's own techniques as one proceeds, with an object not originally designed to be played as a musical instrument)). Sachiko may have famously described herself as a 'non-musician', but the attention to subtle shifts, patterns, changes of details in her work, that sculpting of organized sound, marks her out as an artist with a clear sense of what she wants to do and how she wants to do it, even as she leaves crucial space for the unexpected and for failure.

Otomo Yoshihide / Sachiko M – Filament 1 (Extreme, 1998)

Sachiko began her musical career playing samples in Yoshihide's jazz/rock/punk noise band Ground Zero; as she explains in an interview for JaME (http://www.jame-world.com/us/articles-58659-interview-with-sachiko-m.html#ixzz0vgOXmlAN), this very much entailed working within parameters set by Yoshihide, sometimes using sound sources that he himself had chosen. It was really only after the group had disbanded, and she had begun to work solo (using the sampler's internal test tones exclusively) that she began to develop a recognisable sound, but her collaboration with Yoshihide continued and has, in some ways, been the most important of her career. Despite her claim that "I can also take pleasure in playing with others, but I have this habit of always saying no," she's adapted (probably not quite the right word) her sound into Yoshihide's avant-jazz bands, where it can tend towards ornamentation or background effect behind more obviously emotional or narrative saxophone solos; evidence, perhaps, of the distance she's willing to travel, in musical terms, to work with him, and evidence, too, of his respect for her craft and her refusal to compromise her style and way of working to suit different generic contexts. In any case, Filament has been a continuing presence for what is now well over a decade.

The record itself (released on the aptly-named 'Extreme' label) begins with a constant dull thump, like the thud of a heartbeat, and turntable white noise (the sound a record makes before the music starts, when one has just dropped the needle and it catches some flecks of dust on the vinyl surface). These two simple elements, joined at the end by a couple of discrete beeps, suggest something of a prelude; letting the listener in with gentle, barely-there pulses that mimic the beats inside a human body, while at the same time stressing their otherness, their machine quality. (I think, in fact, that this is a solo Yoshihide track; what appears to happen here is that the musicians alternate solos, rather than playing together, for the first half of the record at least.) But the second track is prime Sachiko: a single high sine wave, an immovable object, something that is *just there*, yet somehow seems to wave (as befits its name), to waver, to dip up and down along with the involuntary movements of one's own head. While some might describe this as 'sadistic', 'non-musical', as something which disregards or is actively hostile to the poor audience, it might perhaps be more accurate to see it as a dialogue between music and listener, in which the listener is forced to assume the more active role (or chooses to try and match the lack of activity they are hearing; quietening the mind, stilling the body as one tries to enter the music's own stillness). When one gets to this level of listening, the smallest change (if one's attention is focussed at that point) becomes a major event, and here, the immovable wave skips a total of thirteen times (I counted), as Sachiko introduces the minutest element of variation to provide some sort of climax, a sense of acceleration before a brief silence that still seems to echo with the memory of that unshakeable wave. The process (or lack of) on this piece is a small-scale version of what happens on the solo 'Bar Sachiko', recorded five years later, but its placement as the second track on a record of five-minute pieces gives it a different impact: the pieces on 'Filament' feel like miniatures, studies, etudes, exploring particular aspects of both musicians' set-ups in a focussed and almost low-key way. 'Bar Sachiko', by contrast, with its extreme simplicity of means coupled to what, given this simplicity, seems like an extreme extension of length, is a much more obviously challenging work, so conceptually simple that one could hardly call it conceptual at all – instead, it's a study in listener perception and performer patience, something which can't be taken lightly and which it's clear, as one listens, isn't going to change any time soon.

Back to 'Filament', piece three (Yoshihide) consists of various forms of the sharp, buzzing blare that one gets one pulls the end of an audio jack out of its output socket; great to hear that so much can be got out of that sound in five minutes, but it's not a sound that I'm particularly fond of when it appears in electro-acoustic work (and it does crop up from time to time). Nothing more than personal preference, but there we are. Sachiko's next piece blares out sharp beeps over a skipping low drone, like foghorns calling to each other across a dark expanse of water. Despite the ostensible harshness of the beeps, the effect becomes rather soothing, that gentle rocking, lulling, underlying tone creating a kind of alien lullaby, comforting precisely because of the lack of change. The following piece is hers as well: a pulsating high pitch (presumably causes from the interference patterns created by the near-conjunction of two almost identical waves – i.e. 'beating' effects), this one not really all that different from a smoke alarm in timbre. But once again, as on the second track from the album, the introduction of minimal change towards the end (done by the tiny twist of a switch) – a slight, seconds-only speeding-up in the rhythmical pattern – provides a nice, sharp ending, a reminder that the music one is hearing does involve some sort of human agency, however apparently slight. Yoshihide, back for the sixth track, is on a glitching-CD trip – Yasanao Tone territory ('Solo for Wounded' came out the previous year), and somewhat similar to recent work done by Korea's Balloon and Needle collective – the sound of everyday electronics malfunctioning, machine language, or code, punching out messages that no one can understand, like a lost tongue that has only just been invented. Track seven finds Sachiko back with more, lower-pitched beating frequencies (feedback feeding back on itself), going in little cycles, rising up and then subsiding; eight is harsher, with grinding bass tones laid under whines and squeals reminiscent of those one sometimes hears in radio white noise when one's searching for a station. Nine is perhaps the most eerily beautiful of all the record's tracks, barely-perceptible samples from a record merging with the trademark high tones, suddenly cutting out to leave a

single sine at the piece's end. Ten is twice as long as all the other pieces so far, and is somewhat surprising, given the way that one's adjusted to the record's path so far of held tones and occasional rhythmic patterns: intense silences are peppered with little blops and bleeps from the sound vocabulary of 1980s computers (with a mini-power-drill half-way through). Depending on one's frame of mind, this is either going to come across as soporific and eminently ignorable, or as edge-of-the-seat stuff (the latter more so if one is listening with a group of other focussed individuals, rather than distracting oneself with the internet or the hum of one's laptop fan or the view out of the window.) It certainly feels *radical*, even if I can't say that I really like it, or even that it works: but that kind of risk-taking, that tendency to do things that sometimes simply fall flat on their face – a kind of bloody-mindedness, or just perversity – is one of the things I most admire about Sachiko's work.

Toshimaru Nakamura / Sachiko M – Un (Meme, 1999)

One can say that the main difference between Sachiko's solo performances and her group collaborations is that the solos – at least, in their most extreme manifestations – tend to erase the difference between foreground and background: they may consist of little more than a single tone, or perhaps a couple of tones, with no melody, no harmony, no accompaniment, and very little actual rhythmic change (apart from the 'fake' effects created by one's head movements). By contrast, the presence of another musician, or a group of musicians, necessarily creates a counterbalance, a counterpoint, another layer to offset and complicate the simplicity of the sine waves. This is to generalise; throughout the solo work, there are elements of change and (as we can hear on, say, track four from 'Filament 1') of setting up two interacting layers roughly equivalent to solo and accompaniment, or melody and supporting voice.

The duo with Nakamura is quite different to that with Yoshihide, the two musicians appearing to bring out in each other concerns with concision and clear structure, their sounds at times even leaning towards a techno / electronic-pop tinge. (Though needless to say, it's not a tinge that would bring in anyone accustomed to beat- or loop-driven electronica.) For me, the record has a quirky, almost humorous side to it which marks it out from the rest of Sachiko's work (avant-pop group Hoahio excepted). The first track, a fifty-seven second dialogue between what sounds like the electronic equivalent of slide whistles, sets the tone; while the eighth, 'Unplaced' has a bouncing synth-bassoon type melody merrily bouncing its way through sliding pitch descents: these ease into some sort of tense equilibrium over a cd-skip effect, before the 'bassoon' comes back and the track quickly cuts off before it can do any more damage. Some might find this sort of thing rather cheesy, in an early synth FX kind of way, but I find the playful element it conveys rather charming: Raymond Scott without the tunes and with a predilection for noise. And if, as I've said, 'Un' is something of an anomaly in Sachiko's catalogue, something of its slightly manic edge does carry over onto her first solo recording, 'Sine Wave Solo,' released the same year.

Sachiko M & Toshimaru Nakamura Live at Super Duluxe, Tokyo, 2004

'Modulation #1' [on Otomo Yoshihide, 'Cathode' (Tzadik, 1999)]

Still from footage of a performance by Otomo Yoshihide, Sachiko M & Jim O'Rourke, April 2009 (released on the DVD 'Ensembles 09: Pre-Opening Live at Shinjuku Pitt Inn')

The tone chosen here makes everything music around it: muffled clanging sounds on the recording itself (those you'll hear inside any artsy modern concert space, part of the building's ambient hum), the sound of my fingers typing this now, the car passing the open window outside the room where I am listening to this track. The tone amplifies, emphasizes the sounds, the rhythms and pulses inherent in environment – makes them stand out against itself, rather than drowning them out; it isn't, though, the virtually un-modified tone of 'Salon de Sachiko': this one swells out, puffing out its chest, breathing in and out, seeming to dip ever so slightly before resounding back, that slight variance, quaver, hesitation, dip, giving it a somehow human edge, if you want to see it that way. Harsh gratings now, as more tones join to make the first shudder and wobble, tinnitus high pitches sprinkled over the top, barely perceptible low hum below the central tone; density and ferocity, amped to the max, the other tones dropping out, back to the original, loud in itself. One of Sachiko's most deliberately 'harsh' tracks, it seems to me. Ko Ishikawa's sho – I suppose one would call it a mouth organ (a wind instrument, made of bamboo, that actually sounds like a real organ, as opposed to the Bob Dylan variety) provides additional tones here, though it meshes so completely with the sine waves that one may have a hard time distinguishing the two. Proof, though, that Sachiko's sound isn't merely a reflection of hyper-modernity, the 20th and 21st-century machine: these dense clusters, these 'unearthly', 'inhuman' sounds date back to AD710, originating as an imitation of the sound of the phoenix (or heavenly lights), and are an important part of traditional gagaku music, providing gradually-moving 'aitake' (tone clusters) to accompany the melody. One might see this track, then, as an updating of traditional musics, removing the ceremonial/ritual/rhythmic/melodic elements of court performance and concentrating instead on the basics of the sho's sound. As a western listener, a tendency towards 'Orientalism' no doubt asserts itself - a tendency to hear such sounds as 'exotic' or 'avant-garde' in themselves, rather than as part of a continuum or culture (hence, the early twentieth-century modernists' embrace of African art as 'primitive' or '(nobly) savage' - shocking the bourgeoisie while reinforcing their racist prejudices about non-white civilisations - or the use of gamelan-like textures as exotic ornament in the work of Benjamin Britten, Claude Debussy, and Francis Poulenc.) So it's probably best for me to leave the cultural ramifications alone – and, truth be told,

I'm not best qualified to write on the sho's history; nonetheless, on the simplest level, we can say that this is a fusion of 'ancient' and 'modern' that works far more organically than the tired attempts at musical fusion that so often grab cheap headlines,[2] and provides a somewhat unexpected alternative perspective on Sachiko's art.

Debris (F.M.N. Sound Factory, 1999)

1999 saw the recording of three twenty-minute EPs, each on different labels, each curtly titled with single words beginning with the letter D, each a concentrated study of a particular area of sound, rather like an extended version of one of the 'Filament' tracks. 'Debris' consists of two pieces, the first opening with spaced submarine sonar beeps which alternate with sharper, higher tones, Sachiko gradually playing with the speed and elongation of both sets of tones, the hint of a human hand amongst what might otherwise come across as sound effects from 'The Enemy Below.' The occasional fizz or tinnitus whisper spurts and sprouts over the top, though never developing into 'climax': each parallel layer moves along on its own level, in its own time. It's all careful and rather beautiful, the repetition giving it a sense of structure which renders it somewhat more accessible than that work from the more austere range of her vocabulary.

On the second track, 'Half-Moon', we come across the first appearance of Sachiko's work with contact mics: an occasionally deployed sub-stratum of her main set-up, for which an entire solo disc was once in the works, but which seems not to have been something she felt she could work with in any extended sense (a solo set at Amplify 2008 was apparently notable for its almost completely experimental approach, structure as such jettisoned for the most abrupt and clanging of transitions, the most nakedly bare tonal palette – an event in and of itself, but almost impossible to take further – perhaps. (More here–http://ihatemusic.noquam.com/viewtopic.php?f=7&t=3356&p=151385&hilit=sachiko+m+contact+mic#p151385.)) Technically, this is more connected to the physical means of producing sound than the empty sampler, but in terms of effect, it's even further from 'music', from consistent rhythmic organisation or clearly delineated sectional material. Crackly, prickly, like masticating mouths or burrowing, ferreting animals or insects in undergrowth, it's not, I have to say, my cup of tea, exactly: what does strike me, though, is that Sachiko's speciality is to have taken areas of sound that have formed elements within wider canvases, wider arsenals of technique in the work of others, and to have really pared them down, concentrating on microscopic detail, expanding such detail out to fill the whole sound-scape. Whether this is 'of sufficient interest' or drama to provide compelling listening is barely even a consideration – this, however, doesn't derive from a kind of 'who cares if you listen' mindset (though most people would probably rather listen to Babbitt than Sachiko, if you gave them that tough choice), but rather from a more 'amateurish', unselfconscious approach, at once entirely open to accident and abrupt change and capable of extreme, tight control.

2 See, for example: **http://classical-iconoclast.blogspot.com/2011/04/sheng-and-sho.html**.

Werner Dafeldecker / Franz Hautzinger / Sachiko M/ John Tilbury– Absinth (Grob, 2002)

Tilbury's piano is the key voice here, its luscious bell-rings slotting into the electronics much as it did with AMM for many years (and has done, subsequent to the group's split, in duo with Rowe). It's interesting, in fact, to compare the way Tilbury interacts with Sachiko's more piercing and unadorned sine waves, as opposed to Rowe's then more fuzzy radio and drones.[3] Rowe and Tilbury might be the 'classic' combination, and probably the more musical and memorable one, but sometimes getting outside those kind of well-established partnerships gives one on a new twist both on what makes them tick and what more could be brought to the table. (That said, I'm not arguing that we should listen to this as a mere AMM substitute.) Dafeldecker and Hautzinger have both gradually moved away, like many free improvisers, from their initial start in jazz and rock – in Hautzinger's case, post-Miles and Bill Dixon melancholia leading onto studies in breath and spittle, quarter-tone variations, austerity and control; in Dafeldecker's, early work with the raucous Eugene Chadbourne giving way to an association with Malfatti and the ultra-minimalists established through the semi-composed work of Polwechsel. But dividing the musicians up into boundaries and camps isn't, perhaps, very helpful, despite the fact that Sachiko's philosophy of – or, let's say, her *practical approach* to – group improvisation tends to emphasize, rather than smooth over, differences in approach. She's not one of those players who will simply slot in, as if imitation were the highest form of flattery and mimicking your duo partner was somehow a means towards real dialogue; and yet she's not really interested in finding a 'third way', either. One senses that, like Keith Rowe, she's interested in, or at least comfortable with, failure, lack of polish, with seeming arbitrariness or 'wrongness.'[4] (One must also ask, though, if this interest in failure is simply a means of throwing out the baby with the bathwater; rejecting, perhaps, 'taste' as socially or economically determined, but, rather than criticising or analysing narrow or elitist categories and assumptions (especially as they relate to one's own listening experience[5]), simply replacing them with an 'anything goes' approach that leads to quietism and impotence (and that mitigates against the total mental and physical dedication to the music abundantly manifest in the music of a John Coltrane or a Cecil Taylor). Given this, it might help to provide an example of *un-interesting* failure: Tilbury's one-off performance with Ami Yoshida, an important collaborator of Sachiko's and one who seems to share her sometimes perplexing approach, was, by all accounts, a case of rather dull mis-communication, of things simply *not gelling*.[6]) In any case, the pairing of Tilbury's piano, which always suggests more conventional harmonies, tonal centres and movements, sparse though it is, ; the result being that the more abstract playing of the others tends to come across as background to the piano, rather than being fully enmeshed with it.

Andreau Neumann / Sachiko M / Kaffe Matthews – In Case of Fire Take The Stairs (Improvised Music from Japan, 2002)

Whereas 'Absinth' featured Sachiko in an otherwise all-male group, here, there's not a man in sight or sound. I wouldn't want to get overly didactic, theoretical or essentialist here, but let's consider, for a moment, what interpretative possibilities could be opened up if we considered 'In

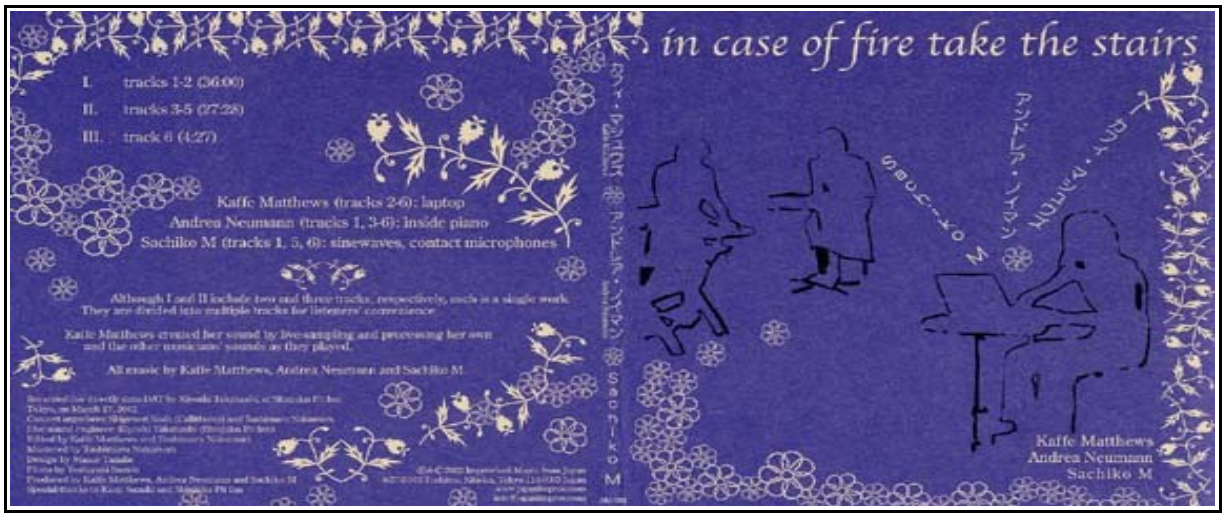
3 Recently, Rowe appears to have begun working with a much sparser set-up and sound palette (at least, he had when I saw him live earlier this year (see the reviews section of this issue)).

4 A point of comparison here might be Keston Sutherland's discussion of 'wrongness' in poetry: Sutherland, 'Wrong Poetry' (Textual Practice 24 (4), 2010, pp.765-782 (available online at http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/0950236X.2010.499663)). (See also: http://bebrowed.wordpress.com/2010/09/09/keston-sutherland-on-wrongness-in-poetry/.) Rowe's comments on failure appear in Kurt Gottschalk, 'Keith Rowe: New Traditionalism' (New York City Jazz Record 1 (113), 2011 p.9 (available online at: http://nycjazzrecord.com/issues/tnycjr201109.pdf)).

5 In this regard, consider Carl Wilson's attempt to write about Céline Dion in 'Let's Talk About Love: A Journey To The End of Taste' (Continuum, 2007).

6 Though there were mitigating circumstance: the third musician, Seymour Wright, had been mugged the day before the gig. For discussion, see: http://www.bagatellen.com/archives/reviews/001041.html

Case of Fire' as specifically female improvisation, a change from the traditional macho bluster that sometimes crept into European free improv, via, no doubt, American free jazz[7] (suffice to say, with the exception of vocalists like Vanessa Mackness or Maggie Nicols, or now-defunct ensembles like the Feminist Improvising Group, it would be, and still is, highly unusual to go to a typical free improv gig and find a woman on stage.) That the proportion of male to female seems somewhat higher in the more electronic/ minimally-based 'EAI' scene is, perhaps, due to the fact that it is a music which does not place a high premium on macho swagger, bluster, or technical display: not to imply that female musicians are not, or cannot be, fearsome virtuosos (check out, for starters, Marilyn Crispell, Irene Schweizer, Joelle Leandre, and Karen Borca, who coaxes incredible nuances from the unwieldy bassoon and should be far better known), but perhaps there is something about the porousness and unassuming nature of EAI that made it more attractive to those not enamoured of male tribalism. I do realise that I may be getting close to David Keenan's ridiculous, and controversial piece in The Wire a year or so ago, in which 'sexy' cock-rock guitars and energy bluster were contrasted to 'de-sexed', grey (female?) EAI.[8] And, while projects such as the duo with Ami Yoshida (to be discussed next) do engage with a specifically feminine, even feminist tradition of electronics and voice (viz., Delia Derbyshire, Yoko Ono, Patty Waters, Diamanda Galas, et al), you'd be hard-pressed, on a blindfold-test, to say whether the performers on 'In Case of Fire' were male or female. Joining Sachiko are Andrea Neumann, whose work with a specially-modified version of the insides of a piano brings to mind, of course, Keith Rowe's table-top guitar, and Kaffe Matthews, whose live-sampling laptop renders porous borders between instruments. To some extent, then, we have a reach to the edges of 'musicality', an interest in the edges and the insides of instruments, modifying them to suit purposes other than that for which they were intended. The disc's title suggests a parody of the 'fire music', 'volcanic', 'explosive' metaphors which litter free jazz criticism and album titles, as well as a kind of deadpan, diurnal attention to the details of place (presumably, the words come from a fire exit sign at the venue where the music was performed). Indeed, the first, and longest track is relatively subdued, all quiet pop, click, hiss – or as Olewnick puts it in his review, 'pings, clicks and throbs' (those words which inadequately describe an area of sound-making that has not yet developed its own technical vocabulary – that exists, perhaps, outside the question of 'technique' as such). The second is louder and more 'traditional', perhaps, in its drone associations, though this isn't of the ecstatic La Monte Young variety, nor, even, quite, of the doomily raw stuff we get on AMM's 'The Crypt'; rather, in its own sweet, sleek, raw way, it winds its way out of the speakers and makes the space its own. And that's a vague critical comment, certainly, and the last track is an exquisite coda, to which I won't do justice either, but, as a whole, this is certainly a very fine album – marking, I think, the only time the three musicians played together. Perhaps a reunion might be in order…



7 See the final chapter in Valerie Wilmer's 'As Serious As Your Life'

8 See the discussion at 'I Hate Music': http://ihatemusic.noquam.com/viewtopic.php?f=3&t=5677&sid=99cf2bfb30cc89870ce8751ff917d56c. Keenan's original review can be viewed here: http://mutesrv.siba.fi/~vikuoppa/WIRE_on_guitar_impro.jpg

Cosmos (Ami Yoshida / Sachiko M) – Tears (Erstwhile, 2002)

> "I think with these musicians, focuses are on hearing the sound, not physically playing musical instruments," Sachiko concludes. "Sometimes the instrument is an obstruction. They just want to listen more to the sound."
>
> Clive Bell, 'Sachiko M: Sampler Amnesia' (The Wire, April 1999)

In his recently published 'Sinister Resonance: The Mediumship of the Listener', David Toop describes his fascination with the disembodied, uncanny nature of sounds: hearing is the first sense to develop, inside the womb; a state of aural innocence in which the developing foetus has no idea that the sounds it hears might 'mean' something, might signify something other than themselves, might have any other significance than mere presence. Once we emerge into the world of sight, however, a sense which allows one to get a clearer fix on things – I know that something is there because I can see it – hearing becomes less trustworthy, relegated to the domain of music – moments of aesthetic pleasure within certain defined, delimited boundaries (sometimes even tied to sight, as with the case of the music video) – or registered on the periphery of the audible threshold as annoying, briefly interesting, as background sound or ignorable environmental chatter. Given that hearing is no longer connected to the struggle of survival –it might be useful to listen for the sound of approaching cars when crossing the road, or to notice the shrill of a fire alarm when the building is set ablaze, but we do not need to listen for approaching predators round every corner – it becomes easy to ignore, and, despite the fact that our lives are made up of a myriad of different sounds, hearing can become ambient in a way that sight less often does, or does to a lesser extent. Perhaps this tendency to ignore sound comes from a fear that it is easier to trick by means sound than by sight – sound, as something immaterial, instant, temporary, gives us no sense of permanence or stability, nothing certain to latch on to: even recurring sonic patterns (the sound of a rain shower or a thunderstorm, the roar of an accelerating car) are never quite the same in each repeated instance. When we cannot tie what we hear to what we see, it becomes doubly difficult to evaluate the significance of a particular sonic event: to filter out peripheral noises and to concentrate on those that might offer us immediately relevant information. This is the basis, as Toop points out, of the classic trick purveyed in horror films (and in horror fiction before that): we hear something, maybe several things, but cannot tell its source or what it is 'meant' to signify. Removed from their usual contexts, sounds become uncanny: canned Light Music floating down the corridors in 'The Shining', the sound of a harp when none is physically present in 'The Haunting'.

One might draw Ami Yoshida's use of the voice into this discussion: uniting natural and technological in an uneasy blur that perhaps reflects our experience of an increasingly complex, technologically-based world. For Clive Bell, "[Yoshida's] raw vocalisations are "cries", like animal voices or birdsong, and often sounds electronic." A line from Roy Fisher's 'City' springs to mind – "The society of singing birds and the society of mechanical hammers inhabit the world together, slightly ruffled and confined by each other's presence" – though perhaps things are more integrated in Yoshida's voice-scapes. In some ways they are more extreme, extremely human than Ute Wassermann's 'bird-talking', though they lack the basis in song and in 'funny noises' that gives Phil Minton's dada-clown-gymnastics their humorous edge; bringing a broader range of possible reference than Sachiko's sine waves, they are nonetheless to hard to pin down into any particular cultural context, into any recorded history of conventionalised expression. One associates the voice with song, or speech: in the case of Schoenberg, with an uncanny union of the two; in the case of James Brown, with the sung/shouted exhortation, a rhythmic punctuation and addition to the onward thrust of instrumental propulsion (as also with Charles Mingus' moans, whoops and hollers of encouragement to the members of the band, demonstrated most conspicuously on the 1962 recording 'Oh Yeah!'). Electronic manipulation has turned the voice into a manipulable device in a limitless arsenal of sounds – to be put through filters, (satanically) reversed, chopped

up (Burroughs), stretched, smeared, distorted – from the 'high art' of works like Stockhausen's 'Gesange der Junglinge' to the creation of robot voices for Dr Who's Daleks in the BBC Radiophonic workshop. And Ligeti's clustered sound masses, as popularized in '2001', brought to the fore a treatment of the voice that didn't really on the 'correctness' and 'precision' of the western tempered scale –similar in content to the mass chorales of sacred harp singing of Scottish pibroch. The voice, then, was being melded into new shapes by a combination of technology and shifting aesthetic attitudes – instruments becoming more 'voice-like' (Ornette's saxophone, 'like a person laughing…or a person crying', Dolphy and Mingus' 'talking' duet on 'What Love'), voices becoming more textural, less 'natural', in the manner of extended instrumental techniques. But Yoshida avoids the connotations of both speech and song that are present in almost all of these innovations and revivals (even Ligeti's dissonances have a certain movement to them, and the sound of massed voices evokes the familiar roar of communal singing, from the enthusiasm of untrained church congregations to the grandeur of Tallis' 'Spem in Alium'). Similarly, Stockhausen's 'Gesang', however much it distorts it source (the voice of a boy chorister), clearly derives from it; Yoshida has it the other way round, creating something similarly disorienting out of her purely acoustic voice. The sound is familiar enough to be recognized as a voice, and thus doubly disturbing because of the way it departs so far from what the voice is 'supposed' to do. On 'Pink Noise', a duo with Mattin's computer feedback, Yoshida's fellow Japanese experimentalist Junko uses what is easily identifiable as a scream throughout – and that recording arouses a strong feeling of discomfort – but Yoshida's self-described 'howling voice' is not quite a whisper, not quite a scream, though it contains elements of both: sounds made, often, from the back of the throat, creating sound by drawing air *in* rather than expelling it out – an *interior* sound, quiet – in live performance, she grips the microphone close, her eyes shut – not singing to herself, and not singing to you. If Sachiko claims that she and other musicians in her circle are interested in listening to sounds rather than getting tangled up in the mechanics of making them, Yoshida's vocal techniques have an unavoidable physical effect – in one video, we see her taking an enormous gulp of water after making them, for example. Her voice doesn't 'humanise' Sachiko's electronics, but sounds equally alien to them, making them if anything, more stark: what is emphasized here is the broken up, 'blip-blop', insectoid nature surrounding the 'purity' of the sine tones. Yoshida doesn't exactly fill the field with a multitude of events, but she does prevent it from coalescing into any sort of timeless drone state: it is a voice, and it remains at all times on the edge – of audibility, of song, of screaming – even of being a voice. [9] As, perhaps, this disc remains on the edge of being music: treading that line, tearing the temple veil in two.

Cosmos live at the Vancouver New Music Festival, 2004 (Photograph by Robert Kirkpatrick)

9 Ed Howard believes that "Yoshida's goal, even if she does not always achieve it, is to produce sounds which could not be identified as emanating from the human vocal cords." (Review of Astro Twin/ Cosmos split at http://www.stylusmagazine.com/review.php?ID=1233).

Keith Rowe / Oren Ambarchi / Sachiko M / Otomo Yoshihide / Robbie Avenaim – Thumb (Grob, 2002)

A short album, this feels like part of a larger whole; presumably, it's an edit from a longer live performance. There's no clear sense of beginning – instead, we just launch straight into a dense, yet somehow rather wispy slab of sound made up of continuous tones, with assorted crinkles and crackles round the edges (some of which we can identify as the sharper, extreme high-pitched pops and hisses that Sachiko tends to use in group situations); a fairly undifferentiated electronic mass, with occasional sounds of an amplified string being struck to remind us that three of the five participants are still, nominally, guitarists. Around the twenty-minute mark, higher pitches begin to dominate, swirling around like slowly-decaying alien whistles: the Clangers with robot voices. The impression is of sounds that have some sort of physical presence: they attach and detach themselves from each other, from some sort of undefined centre, clinging and sticking and then floating free. Overall, things are never as massive or inexorable or droney as, say, the Rowe / Nakamura / Sachiko / Yoshihide three-disc set on Erstwhile, and this transparency does have a certain appeal. As the Grob label write-up puts it: "Thumb [is] about something like "absence in presence," about, well, the artsy trick of improvising like a quintet and sounding simply like a duo." This seems about right - and, of course, notions of simple climax or linear narrative could hardly be expected in the post-AMM lexicon. Nonetheless, there is rather a sense at times (particularly during the middle section) that the music isn't really 'going' anywhere, is content simply to drift along, almost as EAI wallpaper, as ambient background (though, following that mid-session dip, there is an immediately-following constellation of collective focus around a particular set of sounds (perhaps generated by Ambarchi?), which sets up the high-pitched 'finale'). Why the whole concert wasn't included on the release is anybody's guess, and that 'excerpted' feel perhaps doesn't do the music many favours (it already seems slightly unfocussed simply by being arbitrarily faded in). The tendency of treating particular records as touchstones, or 'major releases' is one that improvised music, as continuing practice rather than an industry devoted to the production of masterpieces (despite Rowe's frequent comparisons of his own work to classical music and landmarks of western visual art), should lead one to be wary of affording particular discs particular places in the canon. Yet, in a sense, 'EAI' (if we accept that term in its broadest sense), may be the most documented form of improvised music yet in existence: every subtle change, every move in a particular artist's development, is mapped out, captured in pristine stereophonic detail, on immaculately-packaged discs, written about at great length on online fora; analysed, dissected, packaged within an inch of its life. (And perhaps that sense of debate and community is one of the vital forces which keeps things fresh and self-critical; EAI is certainly nothing if not thoughtful about its own methods, practices, forms, ideologies, sometimes to a near-absurd extent[10]). This comprehensiveness, though, does make some sort of discrimination or evaluative placement necessary, if one is going to get through all the music available without suffering information overload; and so it *is*

10 Though perhaps this is more of a 'Berlin scene' trend – witness the group Phosphor, who, after performance, gather together into a huddle to discuss the ethics of what just happened – in contrast to the more gnomic pronouncements of, say, Toshimaru Nakamura or Sachiko M herself. Then again, that appearance of reticence, or some quasi-Zen quiet wisdom, might be a product as much of the language barrier as of any conscious programme: Japanese musicians having to communicate in cryptic or compact English because they don't have enough acquaintance with the language itself to express themselves more fully in it. Of course, this illusion accounts for at least part of the music's appeal, but it does remains a whole or partial illusion. There is a strange balance, though, when trying to talk about work such as Sachiko's, between a kind of (over-)intellectualisation (parts of this article included) and a rather flat, basic critical vocabulary: once one's taken on board the initial assumptions and qualifications necessary to spend large parts of one's life listening to this kind of music, itself a difficult task, and then resorted to the kind of judgements anyone might make about a Top 40 Chart hit. 'I like it'; 'I don't like it'; 'It was nice'; 'It didn't quite feel right.' I guess that's part of the experience of actually being a musician and making music – certain elements of the creative process, of formally putting something together, become clearer than they would be to a non-musician, but certain instinctive, gut value judgements remain in some way inexplicable, un-theorizable. This bit probably shouldn't be in a footnote.

important to say that, in the end, the aforementioned Erstlive disc contains more interesting music than 'Thumb' – rather like comparing an average Blue Note blowing section with one of the label's true classics like 'Maiden Voyage' or 'Speak No Evil.'

Bar Sachiko (Improvised Music from Japan, 2004)

> "When producing sound, even if one reduces as much as possible what is called "self-consciousness," one can never completely eliminate it. This is because the "I" that produces, decides to produce, and thinks about producing sound and the "I" that listens to, decides to listen to, and thinks about listening to sound are always there. The minimal "I" performing minimal "listening" and "sound production," possessing a minimal "will"...
>
> Atsushi Sasaki, 'The Oscillating "Will" and the Flickering "Self" '
> (Liner Notes to Filament, '20902000')

There is always a human decision prefacing this music: at its simplest, the choice to turn the machine on and select one of its test tones is a human decision, and the decision not to alter that tone, or only to alter it very gradually (for example, a performance in Auckland in which a single tone was slowly faded out), is also a human decision. In fact, one is arguably far less passive than in a more traditional musical situation: though, as an audience member, one is not clapping every five minutes after the completion of a solo or a particularly agile display of virtuosity, one is made aware of one's own presence, of the presence of everyone else in the room, of the space one is in – a heightened atmosphere in which the inescapable presence of the sine tones is the sound of *reality*, of the here and now, even as it is also a state far different to that of our half-aware, flickering everyday consciousness. This is not a blissful, meditative moment of the kind created by such drone pioneers as Eliane Radigue or La Monte Young – it has none of the religious baggage, and seemingly, is less related to a particular cultural moment. While 1960s ultra-minimalism can be said to emerge from interests very much of that time – concern with altered states and non-western belief systems, a desire to break away from the clipped three minutes of the commercial pop song – it would be hard to place Sachiko's work into the same kind of zeitgeist-y narrative.

Perhaps, in forty years, we may be able to do so, if we so wish, but, certainly at this stage, that lack of contextual baggage is refreshingly open, honest (as well as leaving the musician open to charges of charlatanism – you have no programme behind your music because you don't know what you're doing, there is no intent to your work). The lack of 'context' is, in large part, due to the fact that Sachiko has given little in the form of interviews or written commentary on her work (at least, in English); like Toshimaru Nakamura, she seems more interested in making sounds and letting them float free, than in trying to tie them down with explanations or programmatic statements. Hence, the functional or brusque song and album titles – 'Sine Wave Solo', 'Do', 'Sinewave 3' – hinting at certain images or situations ('Half Moon', 'Salon de Sachiko', 'Don't Touch') – but avoiding any kind of wording which would shoehorn critical or listener reaction into a particular way of reading the music. One recalls her comments about switching from sampler to sine waves: "Sampling must be composed largely around a meaning, conveying a message, where as sinusoidal waves are nothing more than sound. I think also that this is the reason that I quit sampling, as it was too difficult and trying." That sounds practical and a little self-deprecating, but it's also a philosophical stance, an argument for the creation of meaning without the need for an ever-proliferating array of signs and wonders, spectacular and excessive pile-ups of events and actions. In this way, a space is opened up for performer, listener, and music, as three separate entities (yet three entities in oscillating relation) to move outside prescribed categories, to *perceive* as a creative act. Merleau-Ponty argues that

> "each perception…re-enacts on its own account the birth of intelligence and has some elements of creative genius about it: in order that I recognize the tree as a tree, it is

> necessary that, beneath the familiar meaning, the momentary arrangement of the visible scene should begin all over again, as on the very first day of the vegetable kingdom, to outline the individual idea of this tree." (Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 'Phenomenology of Perception') –

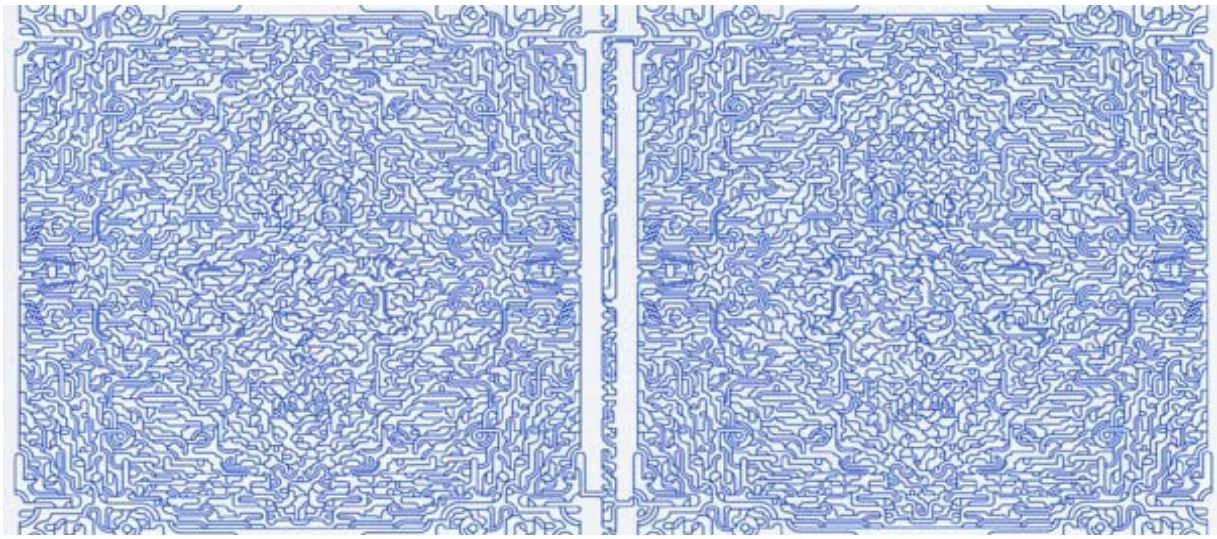
but the most minimal of Sachiko's music goes further than this, for there is nothing so familiar as a tree, a natural or human object, to recognise in it. Yes, we know that we are hearing a sine wave: we know what a sine wave is, what it sounds like, and what it looks like in a sound editing programme. But it does not 'mean' anything as concrete as a tree – does not signify, as other sounds do, the presence of something related to information which we can process and use to make decisions. The sound of wind alerts us to changes in the weather, to possible dangers or changes to our immediate situation; it also ties in with nostalgic childhood reminiscences – a breeze stirring through trees bringing back memories of sitting outdoors on a summer's day – or suggestions of particular places where the wind was particularly strong or frequent. By contrast, a saxophone is a machine, designed for purely aesthetic purposes; and yet, those aesthetic purposes are very much connected to meaning, if in more oblique ways. Over the past hundred years or so, then, the instrument has cumulated emotional and cultural resonances which allow us to hear it as signifying particular things – the 'spiritual intensity' of a Coltrane solo, the smooth dinner music of Kenny G or Grover Washington, the lewdness of a bar-walking 'honker'. In comparison with the wind, or with a saxophone, sine waves – most familiar to people as the 'test tones' heard during the interruption of a TV transmission – seem to have far less specific 'purpose', far less connection with any specific cultural, emotional, or otherwise meaning-centred experience. They simply are what they are – a near tabula-rasa. As Nakamura puts it, "I wouldn't say I like my music, I would just say my music is very comfortable to me and very natural to me. It's not really important if I like it or not, it's just there." And again: "A couple of days ago, a guy came to me after a concert in Nantes, and told me; "I read you don't want to express your emotion but I think your music is very emotional." So I told him, "It's you who find it's emotional. It's your emotion, not mine. I don't try to spray my emotion to the audience." "So, can I say it's an emotional music?" "Please enjoy your own emotion." […] Sorry to keep repeating it, but my music is just happening. Maybe listeners want to make some association with something else and then want to understand more deeply. "OK, he is from Japan so their must be some relationship with his tradition." Maybe in the air and in some part of my body, yes, but it's not my intention and I don't know anything about it."

> "Here, the meaning of "listening to sound" is more important than that of "producing sound." (Otomo: "What is the relationship between listening to sound and producing sound?") The first thing one does is strain one's ears and attempt to grasp the sound that is there. It makes no difference whether it is "I" or "you" who produces the first sound."
>
> Atsushi Sasaki ('The Oscillating Will')

Given all this, how does one listen to 'Bar Sachiko?' Reviewers have tried different tactics: Bill Ashline analyses the physical shifts and illusions created when listening to the record in his apartment, while Brian Olewnick compares the process to that of a Barnett Newman painting, in which a vast expanse of the same colour comes to contain multitudes of hue and shade and variation as one enters more and more into the work, as one makes that perceptual shift necessary if one is to see it as more than just a blue rectangle with a line down it. I suppose the trouble is that there is very little to actually describe in the music itself – here is one sine tone, lasting for so many minutes, joined by a second tone, possibly consisting of three tones, with the third almost beyond the range of hearing. Thus, the focus is, as already noted, placed squarely back on the perceiver, the spectator, the receiver (the listener): what can one hear in this music, how is one hearing it, how should one hear it? For all we talk about 'active listening', and the importance of the audience member as more than a mere spectator, pandered to by showbiz cock-rock

gimmickry or lectured or 'improved' at by the edifice of 'classical' culture, it's not very often that we are placed so squarely in the driving seat. It's not that Sachiko is doing nothing – for the decision to play a tone, when to change it, when not to change it, requires great patience and confidence, a real lack of fear; to answer the questions, 'shouldn't I be doing something more?', 'shouldn't I be doing something more 'musical'?' with a simple 'no', or 'not yet'. It is the listener, too, who asks, 'what the fuck should I do? how should I listen?' And the critic is left to chronicle their own experience of this kind: no longer the educated, informed individual passing judgements and dropping hints to others – 'this is what's going on here, this is what you should be listening out for' –they have to hold their hands up and say 'I don't know what's going on here – I can't tell you how to listen'. Of course, that first statement is, in some sense, untrue – it's obvious what's going on here, any idiot can hear that for themselves – we are being presented with a single sine tone – but knowing and understanding, or knowing and somehow fully engaging with a situation, rather than looking at it from outside the goldfish-bowl – really being in there with a creative process, a mode of interaction – *that's* hard – *that*, you can't fake.

So what do you talk about? Make comparisons, place the work in the context and community of other work going on around it, fit it into a socio-political frame? Done and dusted. What now? The beating in my ear, the grumbling in my stomach, my eyes glazing on the wallpaper in front of me, or staring into the dark murkiness of my eyelids – seeing, perhaps, the flickerings of a Stan Brakhage movie as light hits and drifts through the skin. What now? Perhaps that question is your answer – as in that beautiful last poem of Beckett's, its title, that phrase repeating, again and again, 'afar away over there', that phrase, 'what is the word' – simultaneously question and statement, inflexible yet variant, the knowledge that there is nothing beyond the question, perpetual questioning not as madness or total scepticism but as a state, almost, of wonderment, of continually discovering, knowing – something – nothing. Not that one should not engage, should not desire to change, should not wonder, should accept everything without question, thrust into order from above, thrust into systems of injustice. But, for the moment, to listen, unsure how, unsure why, unsure whether one 'gets' what's going on or if it's worth the effort; not an 'innocent' listening – the impossibility of that – so, a mode of listening that brings with it all the person's cultural baggage and personal bullshit; but as innocent as it can be, as one can be, alive to that experience so many of us had the first time we heard whatever it was turned us onto improvised music or music beyond the contours of what was expected by the taste-makers and those whose tastes they make: yes, maybe, the words of another, 'the sound of surprise.' That moment where one says – where *I* say, not, 'I get this', but 'what.' The silence of not knowing what to say. Not knowing where one is. De-centred. The fragility of that moment. The honesty of it. The terror. "If someone had asked me a question, I'm not sure I would have remembered how to speak."[11]



11 Stewart Lee, 'Epiphanies: Stewart Lee on Morphogenesis' (originally published in The Wire; now available online at http://www.stewartlee.co.uk/press/writtenformoney/morphogenesis-epiphanies.htm)

Empty sampler as Art Object: part of Sachiko M's 2005 installation, 'I'm Here, Trois.'

Keith Rowe / Otomo Yoshihide / Toshimaru Nakamura / Sachiko M – Erstlive 005 (Erstwhile, 2005)

So, the big one: four musicians, four hours, the fifth release in Erstwhile's live series. Of the different musicians' contributions, one might say that Sachiko and Rowe have both moved on to less 'pure', more abrasive, broken-up sounds since this was recorded. At the same time, it's clear that those two dimensions have always existed in Sachiko's work – particularly in combination with other musicians, and when using contact mics, she tends to stress the unpredictability, the sudden jolts, inherent in her instrument of choice. And, in any case, to take the extreme paring-down and 'purity' of 'Bar Sachiko' as a template is somewhat inaccurate – rather, I would characterise that disc as an extreme manifestation of a particular aspect of her work (just as 4'33" is an extreme piece for Cage – its ramifications perhaps spreading to other pieces, over many years, but more a kind of necessary provocation than as a template with which to compare everything else). Rowe, meanwhile, was going through what we might term a 'drone phase' when this was recorded – the phase that yielded such albums as 'Weather Sky', with Nakamura – though he has since moved away from that (not that drones and held tones are not still present, crucial elements in his vocabulary). Yoshihide, on guitar and turn-tables (though the non-guitarness of the guitar is more Rowe-ian than normal), seems to be tying himself down here, or at least,

exploring a different side of his musical personality – the music can get loud, but not in the ferocious sense we associate with his more emotionally-driven free jazz and orchestral music; while Nakamura, as ever, combines moments of stasis with jarring and even perverse extremes of pitch, sharp jolts and blurts that suggest disruption of the laminar surface even as they manage to fit within it.

Let's say that, overall, there's not much stop and start; there's a continuous web and mesh of sound you can get lost in. (That's not to suggest that is by any means background music – while the attention can wander, inevitably, during the four hours (or perhaps I haven't been practicing meditation enough), a crucial sense of development, of something shared unfolding over time, can be lost if that attention wanders too far (into another room to make a cup of coffee, for example)). In any case, it's perhaps the finest recorded example of this kind of music-making, simultaneously stark, and, because of the presence of four musicians, always filled with sound, if not sound that immediately signals itself as 'activity'. An apparently monochrome group sound reveals itself, as one adjusts oneself, as the music makes one adjust to itself, to posses numerous dimensions and overlaps. Some have said this is the four musicians dissolving into one, that Cageian, ego-negating, quasi-Zen stuff. But while that is important, the more you listen to this stuff, the more you start to put together, to follow and trace the individual musician's approaches, meshing and merging, yes, adapting to each other, yes, but still there as individuals, together. Not the unwavering togetherness of a choir (forced anthems, false communalism as imposed from without) but the ragged togetherness of an unforced communalism, in smaller and more intimate space. This is what I'm trying to say, this music of small spaces and quiet places and attentive audiences, this is the creation of a community, through the tenuousness of music – not a political model necessarily, though maybe there is an element of that, but I won't get into that here, won't impose it onto this music, as I'm sure the participants would not wish (Rowe excepted, maybe). But we don't all have to be card-carrying communists or theoretically-aligned anarchists or whatever to make music in this way, togetherness in the room and with intentness and purpose, a way of working in all seriousness but with room for mistakes, the unknown, humour even, this is what brings us together; 'us' as those playing, and 'us' as those 'merely' listening as well. Yoshihide: "One thing I can say for sure is that the boundary between listening to this CD and playing this music is totally dissolved, and there is only a difference of time and space where the sounds are heard."

Nakamura, in his liner notes, stresses patience, the everyday, acceptance, through contrasting descriptions of two different four-hour periods. The first, in one sentence, is described simply thus: "Played a concert with Sachiko M, Otomo Yoshihide and Keith Rowe at Backfabrick in Berlin." The second takes up several paragraphs, and yet is a description of various activities seemingly far more banal than making a work of art – monosyllabic conversations on the phone, preparing food, ironing a shirt, taking a nap. The writerly inheritance here is Cagean – specifically, perhaps, 'Where Are We Eating? and What Are We Eating?'. What Nakamura is suggesting is not so much that these activities are more important than making the music, but that the music evades descriptions – 'words don't go there', as Fred Moten says of Cecil Taylor's poetry. Nonetheless, there are obvious, and obviously intended, parallels – the careful preparation of the food with the unforced, careful attention of the four technology-fiddlers in the room, a certain attitude to going about things with scrupulousness and care, but also with a kind of bloody-mindedness or counter-intuitive reasoning. One event occurs, a distraction, something else, a lull (the nap), then that initial event comes back (the second phone call), the response being similar, but slightly modified (the answer 'maybe' turns to 'no'). Of course, the way Nakamura answers all his friend's telephoned enquiries with "maybe" and then "no" might suggest the way those used to more established forms of free improvisation react to the apparently non-dialogic quality of the playing here; just as posing a question does not always yield a definite answer, so one musician's musical suggestion may not be taken up, may be ignored or actively worked against through a deliberate non-listening. And yet, still, that sense of community, of something being

worked on and worked towards, together (audiences and listeners included): that transition noted by Messrs. Olewnick and Pinnell, from the more fervently questing, noisier moments of the second disc to the…let's call it 'emptying out', of the third disc: "that bleak and beautiful plateau."[12]

Time passes, then – how could it not? and not be felt, extending long beyond the three minutes of the standard pop song, the three to thirty to sixty minutes of a concert-hall work, the ninety minutes or two hours of a film. Four hours is a long time – an investment, if you will, time which could easily otherwise disappear into a vacuum of 'leisure activity', the blank vagueness or ennui that exists as a reaction to the strict parcelling out of time during hours of work: the factory bell or horn (well, perhaps that's a distant memory, in our globally outsourced age), the eye always kept on the clock in the corner of the office, and so on. That concept, of duration, of endurance, is, therefore, a statement in itself, before we even hear the music: as with Feldman's Second String Quartet, time itself is a crucial aspect of the work, and, as with the Feldman, a vocabulary has to be developed so that the material employed over the course of the four hours does not seem moribund or repetitive or unnecessarily stretched. (One recalls the honesty with which Nakamura cut short a proposed lengthy solo concert after forty-five minutes, feeling that he'd exhausted his options, that to continue would be in some way dishonest, a curtain drawn over the transparent fact that there was nothing more to say.[13]) So here, minimal events occur in overlapping waves and blocks, difference felt or sensed in slow transition rather than obvious signalled cut (as, too, in Eliane Radigue's infinitesimally-shifting drones). And yet, while I've stressed the importance of the four-hour duration – the work itself signals the importance of time –once one gets into really listening there is almost a sense that time is being negated: not in easy transcendence, a nirvana taking us comfortably out of this world (like new age music), but a sense of being made intensely aware of the moment one is in, of the present; and also, an acceptance of boredom or willingness to let things unfold not at the coked-up, whizz-bang pace of illusory super-knowledge and technological 'progress.' Of course, though this is done precisely *through* technology, through alien electronic or 'hi-tech' sounds, whatever you want to call them: through getting inside the machine, tweaking the leavers, bending it to other purposes than the utilitarian ones for which it was intended.

Press play. Ambient sound, the distant echo of piped shopping-mall music (my hallucination perhaps: some kind of phantom melody). Footsteps, the unnatural echo of cold, large spaces – bunkers, the underground; or the hum of machines in nuclear bunkers, technological support after the technology above ground (progress-making bombs, the motion of history) has had its say. OK. These are fantasies, irrelevancies – cold-war logics buried now in acres of fuzz, distortion, 'the end of history'. Is it 1 minute 25 seconds before the music starts? Sine wave, Sachiko, Rowe coming in underneath almost straight away to adorn, to complement, his buzzing suddenly switched off before the drone becomes too comfortable. Jolts, clangs – electronic, acoustic, hard to tell, both merging into indeterminate similarity in the echoing space – Nakamura's deliberately jolting, 'non-musical' bursts, as yet restrained, the drone building, louder, lower swellings, volume building, simultaneous ephemerality and enormity of the edifice (all it takes is one of the musicians to twist a knob, flick a switch, pull out a cable, and the thing will collapse – like removing one of the foundations from a building and then building again from the collapsed structure, the ruined edifice, a new building in itself. And they are all perverse enough not to care about 'success', to be entirely willing to build and re-build in this seemingly irresponsible way – cut out the drone if it becomes too comfortable, too beautiful.) But thus far they are building, sine wave still sounding, tho' almost merged into background as little bursts of white-noise static and those Roweian tinkles, sounds with just the barest connection to the string-and-fret sound of a guitar. The dull buzz of an exposed cable-end, the inscrutable 'om' an

12 See: http://www.bagatellen.com/archives/reviews/000936.html (ignoring, of course, the ridiculous name-calling in the comments section – the kind of name-calling and reductivist, bone-headed argumentation that seems to characterise all online discussion for a the lower one scrolls down the page…)

13 http://www.spiralcage.com/blog/?p=139

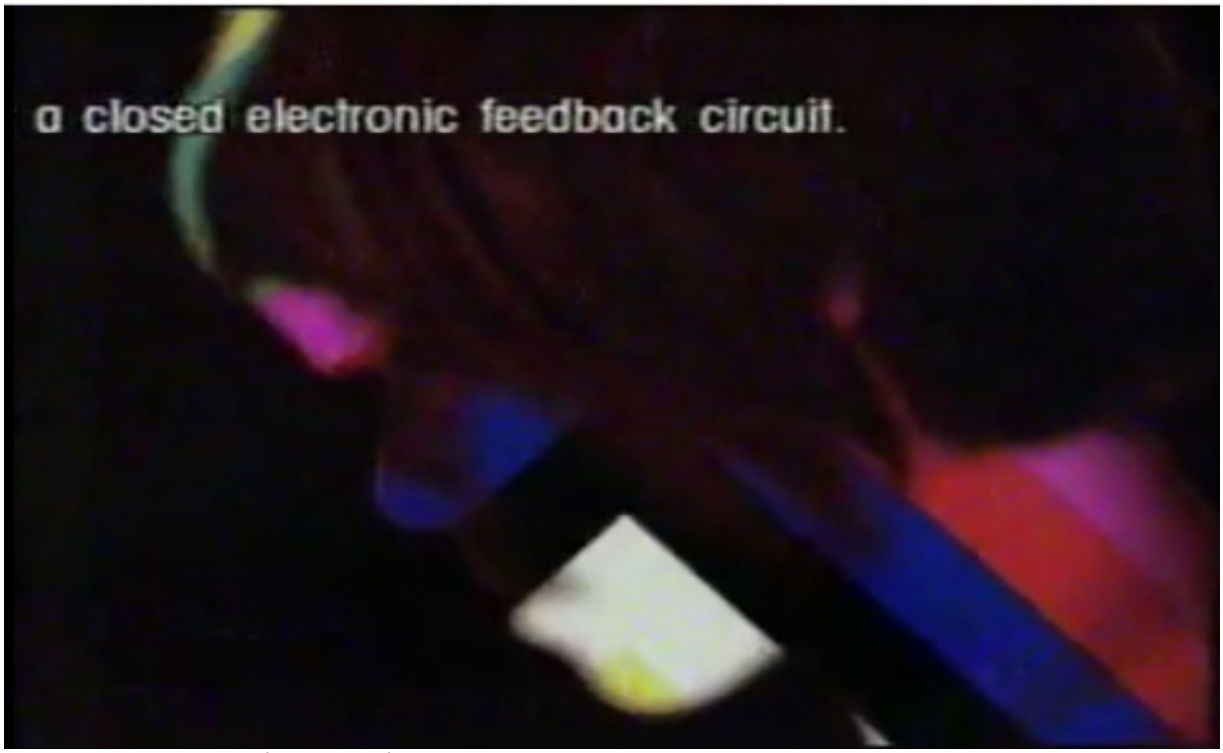
amplifier makes when you plug in, before you put sound through it: its speaking voice drowned out by your own, by guitars and whatever else, by rock music and noise (the hidden pulse beneath all of that, like John Cage's blood and nervous system singing in the anechoic chamber). Nothing happening, nothing doing, still that sine wave, sudden exposed string, as if Rowe's struck it by mistake. To you it all sounds like equipment left to run, stasis, background noise, but now, as if anticipating your dissatisfaction, slowed-down shamanic wail, taped voices, manipulated (these are guesses), groans, volume on the rise, again, bass ripping, vibrating ear, a new sine wave, more piercing, to replace, drown out, that one we've been aware of for the last however-many minutes; and *that* fades, a new combination, two waves together, dipping and themselves swelling, feedback's contour, yes, a (sound) wave in its contour like the sea. But nothing breaks here, no crashing on shore, no stormy climax; now they disappear, the sine space filled instead with – now, nothing? This might be the signal somewhere else for applause, the comfortable twenty-minute set (free improv's equivalent of the three-minute pop song), but we're in the presence of patient people here. Was there a silence, a pause, a dip? I didn't notice, I was too busy adjusting my controls, selecting another sound. The first appearance of Rowe's radio, a woman's voice, newscaster stiff, World Service, perhaps? An Englishman in Japan. Words unclear. Accent without direction, voice as halo. I've forgotten that Yoshihide is playing here too. His contribution less clear than the more typical sounds of Rowe, Sachiko, Nakamura (typical in the sense that they bear the particular musician's particular stamp – not so much as jazz 'licks' – timbres, perhaps, Barthesian 'grain'); typical of his unwillingness to be pinned down, his trickster-switch from noise-turntables to noise-guitar to Mingus-covering keeper of the free jazz flame (Jojo Takayanagi's heir apparent). Things are perhaps stiffer, firmer, now, the sounds not bending and dipping and waving and ducking so much, those queasy, near-nauseous moments where the musical ground seems to be ceaselessly shifting beneath your feet: like walking on water, the musician as jesus lizard, or, less dramatically, that slight rolling I sense beneath my feet as I type this on the seven-hour ferry (it's the ideal opportunity: four hours out of seven, plenty of time to take in the whole of Erstlive 005 and then stand on deck for another three hours to get the grit from my ears, to re-accustom myself to the sound of wind, human voices). Volatility, feedback threatening to scream-shard us into covering our ears; imperceptibly shading into almost ambient loops, the murky comforts of repetition overlaid with repeated fizz and sizzle (as when Lee Patterson dissolves tablets into amplified, fizzing glasses of liquid). And, once again, that super-low frequency – sounded once, then cut. And the loops, cut. Contact-mic cracks, thuds. Splotch. Squelch. Discrete events, as if to make up for, or contrast with, the previous thirty minutes' droning. One of those transitional periods. At the crossroads (with Robert Johnson). Roads not taken; threads picked up, dropped. That focus on transition, change, un-hurried non-stasis, as a moral imperative. Don't ever get comfortable; as if in four hours you could ever become comfortable – that time limit (a limit in reverse, expanding out, rather than cutting off, hemming in) demanding that you be in it all for the long haul, that you carry on beyond the 'natural' swell, beyond the 'natural' pause.

You can see how this sort of thing could go on for ever. I mean, does it ever really end? That kind of dedication, that kind of attention to sculpting sound and being in a space is a life-long task, and not one you can just pick up and throw away over the course of a twenty-minute set, over the course of your latest album. The project goes on. How to end this particular one, right now, is by moving onto the next item in our discographical survey…

Salon de Sachiko (Hitorri, 2007)

Here we have the long-form setting of 'Bar Sachiko' applied to the more rustly, relatively 'busy' activity of some of the EPs from five year earlier: thus, rather than constant continuous tones, we get short beeps and even sections of fairly straightforward rhythm, interspersed with silences and rustling contact mics. Somehow that feels more 'difficult' to me than the monotony of the sustained tone – it's flickering, unsettled and unsettling, a little like Nakamura's 'Maruto', I guess, though the play there is actually between the two approaches – the somewhat ramshackle,

abrupt, 'non-musical' white and brown and pink noises, pings of feedback, hives of activity, and the near-unbearably elongated drone. Onward…



Still from Episode 4 of 'Subsonics' (Broadcast on SBS, 2003)

Chooi Joonyong / Hong Chulki / Sachiko M / Otomo Yoshihide – Sweet Cuts, Distant Curves (Balloon and Needle, 2008)

Balloon and Needle's work might be seen as a new off-shoot (OK, I'll say it, rhizome) from the aesthetic established by Yoshihide, Sachiko, Nakamura et al in the late 90s: and while their use of malfunctioning devices recalls Voice Crack's 'cracked everyday electronics' (see Sachiko's collaboration with them on Poire Z +), the actual sounds are less obviously 'musical' than Voice Crack. Focussing on a vocabulary of harsh, loud and juddering skips and clicks, from miked-up turntables, CD players and computer hard drives, one might call their work 'noise music', but it doesn't have the sense of release and catharsis suggested by that moniker – instead, it feels precise, considered, the work of amateur scientists carefully and rather gleefully setting off little experiments in chaos and seeing what results. Sachiko and Yoshihide's work as Filament, despite its similar concentration on 'peripheral' machine noises, white noise, pops and jumps, has a greater sense of structure in comparison: Balloon and Needle almost seem unconcerned as to whether the sound they make appears as music or as an experiment that happens to be conducted in sonic form. Putting the two duos together ensures that the set is fairly abrasive, never something one can slip into – sharp, prickly, perhaps a bit meandering. In terms of the Sachiko 'ouevre', it's hard to know really where to place this, and it's far easier to listen to it as a product of the very distinct music made by musicians in the Korean scene – a music I don't feel I've sufficiently grasped, certainly not enough to make any really coherent critical comment on it. And again, onward…

Keith Rowe / Sachiko M, 'Contact' (Erstwhile, 2009)

A big one, this – or marketed as such, by Erstwhile; that sense of the Rowe industry, of the desire to create 'great cultural monuments' very consciously asserting itself against the garden-shed, take-it-or-leave-it anarchist eccentricities of certain British improv scenes. (I'm not going to judge between them, I can take or leave both, and we can ignore the packaging or presentation,

can't we.) Included on the double-disc are the live performance this duo give at the Amplify festival in Tokyo in 2008 (here titled 'Oval', the first disc's second track), coupled with three more tracks recorded two days later in the same space. The title would seem to refer to the 'contact' between the two musicians; also, more materially and specifically, to the physical contact generating the sounds on Sachiko's contact mics; and to Rowe's use of the disembodied guitar as a similar point of contact with which to set off amplified touch-signals – as a vibrating, squelching or harshly metallic *surface*. Points of contact.

Because he's playing with Sachiko, no doubt (compare this to the way he modifies his approach in the recent duos with Radu Malfatti, also on Erstwhile), Rowe's playing is very much *restrained*: on 'Square,' rustles and crackles that fade away almost as soon as they've begun, frequent but unobtrusive, like a small animal ferreting at the edge of Sachiko's unbending single sine wave. 11:40 – Sachiko lets out her first other sound, a quick beep, to which Rowe responds (though that word suggests something more straightforwardly dialogic that what actually transpires) with a slip, as if he's brushed his hand onto the guitar body and his hand's slipped off; semi-willed accident as the appropriate move (this something I've noted in Angharad Davies' playing too, in concert), dimmed, dipped out once again – cut short, curtailed. Then swarming back up (I guess the volume pedal was under close control here), activity still reduced to the faintest whispers, any suggestion of a change or climax for the moment postponed. Those bumps and clangs, almost accidental, the white noise hiss that fuzzes up with them as that volume goes up and down. Another tone joining Sachiko's first, compressing the sound slightly, then back to the first, itself quieter now, disappearing now, judder and buzz into a prickled bed of silence. Very little…almost nothing. Sine tone back down, and up. These things, barely there, there bare and stark. How monotony's avoided: a sense, always, that things must change, that these tiny bursts (it would be wrong even to use that word to describe them), these little fiddly patches of sound must build themselves up to something, that the sonic picture must fill out – that tension, then, but also a sense of tension's reduction, an *acceptance* of these two parallel courses set up, and then hardly changing, miniscule movement almost un-registered (though this is far from a La Monte Young-ian trance, exists at a kind of sub-level rather than filling everything in Dream House swell: Sachiko sine-ing or silent, Rowe turning the volume up and down. (For all we know, he was making sounds the whole time, but, with that volume manipulation, choosing to broadcast only, say, 50% of his activity – which would be a nice indicator of the kind of restraint he practices, even if it's not, um, true)).

Plastic bag rustle/ zip and unzip. I've said that Rowe was restraining himself, but it would seem, from 'Oval' (the first meeting, the live track) that *Sachiko* was restraining herself equally. It's a different kind of restraint to that practiced on 'Bar Sachiko', though, centring more around silence, around what seems to be a deliberate lack of event, the absence of any real focus to encourage attention. There's nowhere for one to get lost – so things feel *more* constrained than on 'Bar Sachiko,' and when a sine wave does come in, bright and hard and unwavering as ever, it feels like something of a relief. And then it just cuts out, after a few seconds. Huh, I guess I can't say I love this music (though 'Square' is a fascinating exercise) – compared, to say, 'Filament', it feels terribly bare, and I feel my own listening become, at times, *listless* with that bareness. How to deal with that non-narrative stopping and starting – successions of sounds and silences that don't feel like incidents, or actions, or events, but like aural hallucinations, those prickles of sound or light that whine and flash out at you as whispers on the edge of sleep. No doubt, there's a real focus needed to make that kind of music (one review suggests that it's as if there are sounds going on in the silence – the silences are never resting places or pauses, are always packed with possibility, with the same kind of intensity as the sounds, perhaps even more so). So of course it would be unfair to fall back, as I must admit I am tempted to do, on all the old descriptors used to slam down Sachiko's work (that it's boring, colourless, emotionless, whatever). What I can say is that I *admire* 'Contact' rather than ever really feeling that I have, or can, *engage* with it. Sachiko's art, I guess, treads such a knife-edge between boredom and concentration, between revitalising focus and

impermeable blankness, that, for me, it does sometimes fall over on the wrong side of those categories.

More often than not, though, I'm forced to realize that it *is* worth making the effort to engage with even the work of hers that I just don't get on with: there is time I will willingly make for it to unravel itself, or, more accurately, for me to adjust myself to it – whilst maintaining the frisson of that original encounter which is a large part of its unique quality. I don't think I'd ever be happy if this music became, uh, *comfortable*: and maybe the work that I find hardest to get along with is, perversely, the most valuable of all, in that respect.

Photograph from the 'erstwords' blog: Amplify Festival, 2008.

Time to round things off. I've never managed to catch Sachiko live on those few occasions when she's played here in the UK over the past few years – a large dimension of the whole experience no doubt missing there – and I haven't heard the most recent solo material, 'I'm Here…Departures', a mini-CD released to tie in with an art gallery installation (the reviews indicate that it's something of a crafted summation of the various techniques she's developed over the years, somewhat fuller, busier, more filled with electronic sound than her, I guess we could now call them, 'classic' works.) So, to end, the most recent material I've been able to access is a murky video fragment from a 2011 live performance which finds Sachiko in duo with the 'feedback drums' of DeAthAnovA (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dc8VRXJJOp0) – about whom I can find out pretty much zilch, but whose feedback swells and occasional struck bell or cymbal giving the piece a kind of see-sawing, sea-sick swell that has imparts a much more upfront sense of drama than we'd maybe expect from Sachiko. I like it; I like the balance between that drama and a more static, ritual quality –though Sachiko herself seems to slip in between the cracks rather than staying up front, occasionally adding a sharp fizz or flutter that actually adds colour to the percussive thumps, even acting as percussion in its own right. On the face of it, then, she's very much the backing partner, the percussionist in the 70s jazz fusion band, the colourist whose fills and shadings could be dispensed with without losing the central narrative thrust or overall momentum. But I'd like to think of that reticence as a strength: and the more you listen, the more you realize she's doing – a high held tone towards the end acting as a wire-strung tension-builder, overlapping and meshing with the feedback and with the drum thump and clatter in a beautifully drawn-out way; filling up the space, un-noticed, choosing the right time to drop out, to select another sound, to let up a jacking rasp or one of those alien electronic whines. For all the talk of being a 'non-musician', she's a master at what she does, formally: that balance between deliberate

naivety or 'wrongness' and the most delicate craft, the most apt and fitting 'rightness', and I'd say she's done as much as anyone in changing *the way we listen*, over the past ten years or so. Stan Brakhage titled his film of autopsy footage, 'The Act of Seeing With One's Own Eyes'; and while I'm in no way comparing the experience of listening to Sachiko M to the experience of watching the disassembling of corpses, there is that same sense of intense focus, of refusing to blink or look away from what is difficult, what is intense, what we might otherwise dismiss as too uncomfortable to dwell on. Not, 'The Act of Seeing With One's Own Eyes', then, but 'The Act of Listening With One's Ears'; of cleaning out and cleansing those ears so that the world sounds again, and sounds differently, outside the haze. At its best, listening to the music of Sachiko M teaches us how to listen anew.

THE DROP AT THE FOOT OF THE LADDER

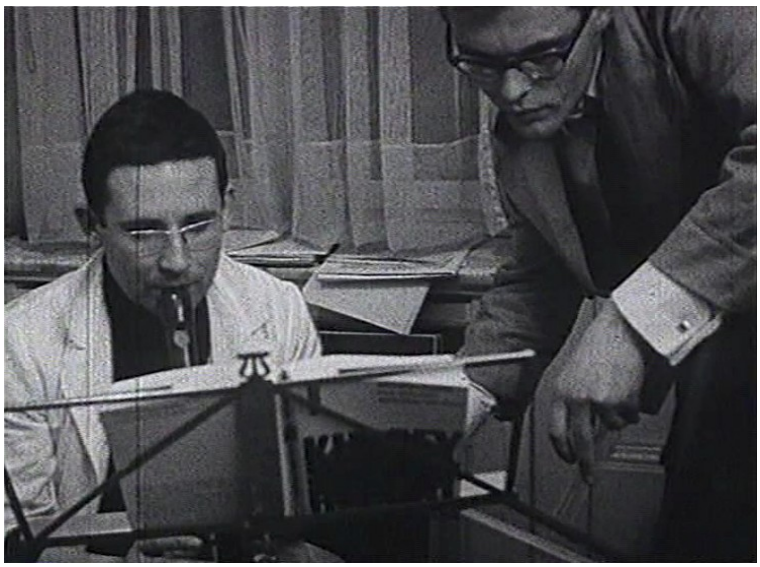
Musical Ends and Meanings of Performances I Haven't Been To, Fluxus and Now

By Lutz Eitel

Wolf Vostell is crawling around on the floor, sticking pins into chunks of raw meat. Beside him stands a rough wooden structure, like makeshift three-storey asylum bedding, on which students loiter, their faces tied around sloppily with black straps. One ragged man gorges on hamburger meat in methodically unappetizing fashion. Over in the next room Joseph Beuys is massaging his own face with doll boxing gloves, then refreshed he seats himself on a crate made up like a cockpit with tape machine, alarm clock and a music stand to which is attached a rear view mirror (for fine-tuning his performance or keeping an eye on the viewer). Charlotte Moorman is testing the sound of a cymbal by throwing it through the room. The gaze of the bearded man on her left shows that the resulting crash must be a strange and wonderful thing while she's making a gesture that signals: exquisite. Nam June Paik bangs both forearms flat on the piano keyboard every other second, the piano sounds tuned down and wobbly, but maybe that's just the film we're watching. He rests his weary head on the keys.

These images are from a 24-hour happening that took place on the 5th of June 1965, the closing event of Galerie Parnass in Wuppertal, a gallery with a rich post-war history that included staging the proto-fluxus summer fest *Après John Cage* in 1962 and a year later Nam June Paik's first solo show, *Exposition of Music – Electronic Television*. The scenes have been captured for a German documentary that investigates the latest developments in performance and pop art, *Kunst und Ketchup* (Art and Ketchup, directed by Elmar Hügler). With the antics on display, one wouldn't be surprised if the narrator struck a note of ridicule, but despite the mildly ironic aloofness with which he repeatedly stresses the opacity of proceedings, he somehow doesn't play it for laughs. An exasperated comment like, "It was very hard to comprehend the action", immediately leads to a quote from philosopher Bazon Brock (who also features, striking poses in a headstand) that "to comprehend is to reveal one's own dependencies". Still, a bit of hype is necessary, and the voiceover informs us that now carnival societies must fear the competition since, for ten marks, here you get a super-show with jugglers, flagellants and ascetics. Which sounds great but is promising a bit much if you compare it to performance and body art from the next decade – in Wuppertal in 1965 no performers were in danger of being harmed during the proceedings.

Then also, quite apparently no bourgeois sensibilities were harmed during these performances. You just have to watch the society ladies with the handbags who are here for fun but also have a serious curiosity that is quite touching amongst the art pranks. (My favourite scene is where Eckart Rahn sits in a lab coat making funny wheezing noises on a recorder while staring hard at a German translation of the Kinsey Report on the music stand, and you hear a voice from the audience whisper: "Can you see if maybe he has music sheets behind that somewhere? No? Really?")



Judging from the faces in the audience, this was a popular avant-garde. If, in retrospect, Fluxus seems a movement expanding common notions of what art could possibly be, it is important to remember that the artists didn't leave their audiences behind. Fluxus was co-founded around 1961 by the gifted marketer and mediocre artist George Maciunas, inventor of the label and the

guy who mostly held things together (partly against the will of the artists involved). Fluxist Dick Higgins, in his 1979 *Child's History of Fluxus*, put the early story thus:

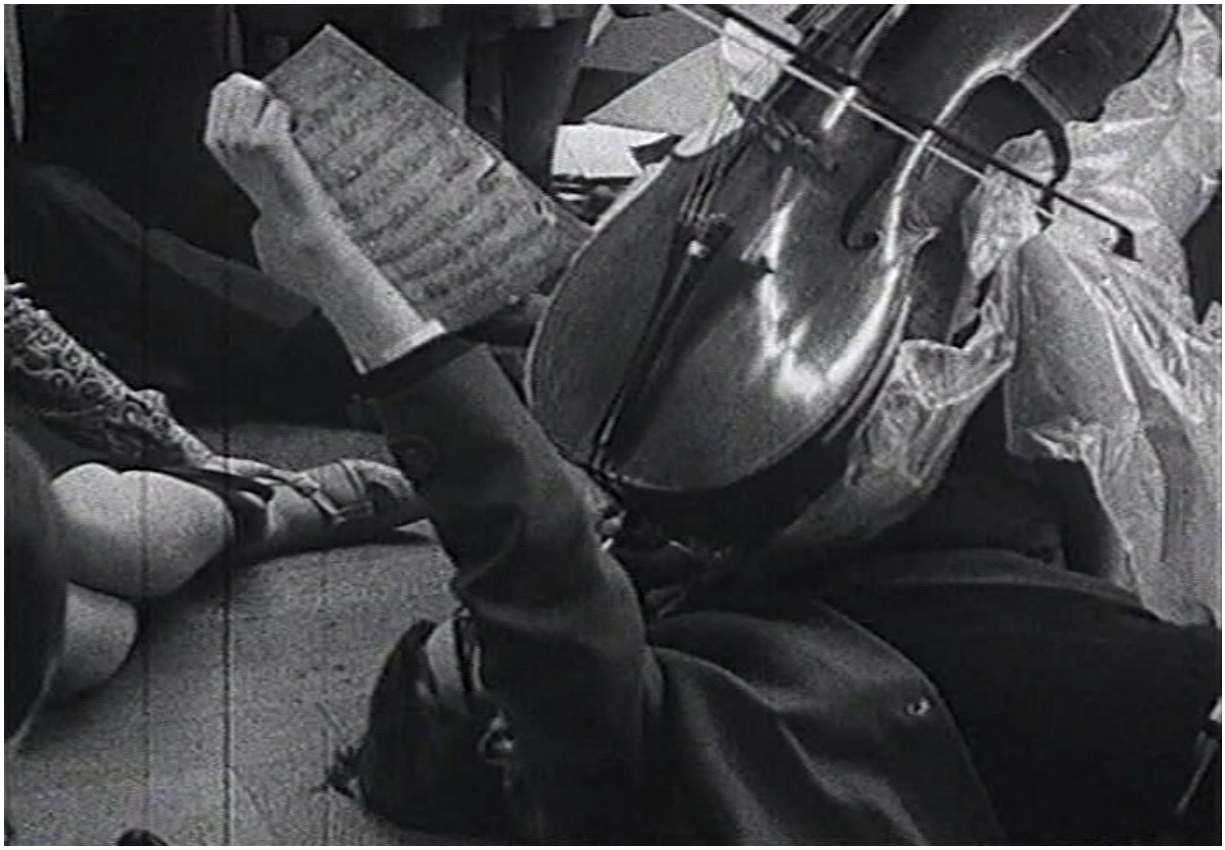
"In September 1962 the first of the Fluxus concerts happened in a little city where George Maciunas was living, in Wiesbaden, Germany... The concerts certainly did get written about! They were on television too. Poor George Maciunas' mother! She was an old-fashioned lady, and when the television showed all the crazy things that her son George was doing at the Fluxus concerts, she was so embarrassed that she wouldn't go out of her house for two weeks because she was so ashamed of what the neighbours might say. Oh well, you have to expect that kind of thing. Actually some of the neighbours really liked the Fluxus concerts. The janitor at the museum where the Fluxus concerts were happening liked them so well that he came to every performance with his wife and children. By and by other museums and public places wanted Fluxus concerts too. So Fluxus concerts happened next in England and Denmark and France... Fluxus got famous."

The huge differences between the artists who came together under the Fluxus label can easily be seen in the artistic approaches on show during the Galerie Parnass event. Simplified: the Germans worked with symbol-laden imagery and metaphor, while the actions of the visitors followed a more surrealist (anti-)logic. (The term at the time wasn't surrealist though but "neo-dada". It is probably a major factor for the positive audience reaction that people felt this kind of art had been firmly established since dada, just as today many music-related performances will make one think of Fluxus. Only then the tradition was a good thing and now it makes things appear a bit old-hat.)

Vostell's work is driven by images that are clearly political: he is "crucifying" raw meat which he then lets lie around the place for the rest of the event until the chunks begin to smell bad. The personnel he employs for his performance sit in close, roughly built bunks that signify our industrialized life-styles and, with the bandage-like straps over their faces, a certain post-apocalyptic mood: the abject life waiting for us after the big one. Beuys of course has a more hermetic symbolic language, and accordingly the voiceover has the most difficulties over his performance – calling it "artistic yoga, spiritualized abs training", before confessing: "The meaning of this action remained a secret." But watching the action it doesn't seem so hard to read Beuys' performance at all: he warms his thick boots against a heap of lard, then after a while he fussily prepares himself to lay his cheek against another cushion of lard beside him on a little stand. Even if you are not aware of the life force ascribed to lard by Beuys' self-mythologizing (tartars had saved his life after a plane crash in the Second World War by covering the badly hurt future artist with the stuff, come on), the transmission of energy between performer and material is acted out in sufficient awkward purposefulness to make clear that you're watching the deepening of a relationship which has considerable power, especially since the viewer can't help a certain revulsion at the thought of emulating the artist.

Against that, Charlotte Moorman's solo performance is like a methodical vaudeville act. Her cello piece is a catalogue of gestures, extended techniques, props like whistles, sirens, even a pistol, hoot, zing, bang, boom with effortless elegance. Seen from today it sounds a bit obvious, Spike Jones with all the fun drained out of it, or indeed the carnival. (I'm not sure what her piece is. The closest on record I know from her would be the different versions of Cage's *26'1.1499" for a String Player*, but more disjointed and with more props here.) Late in the proceedings of the 24-hour event, around 10 pm, she plays strains of romantic favourites wrapped only in cellophane. A man lying on the floor almost nailed by the endpin of her cello holds up the music sheet, while Paik accompanies on the piano. They play careless salon music with barely a twist, and if you wanted to you could read that as a subversion of bourgeois ideals of domestic music making, but of course the familiar tones also make this pure entertainment. And again, the audience is delighted. (Laugh tracks being rather typical for Paik-related musical performances. On Ubuweb

there is a recording of his *Etude for Pianoforte* at Atelier Bauermeister in Cologne from October 1960, where the audience screams with delight. A review of the premiere of that etude a year earlier had ended with the words: "In the fourth movement, the finale furioso, Paik ran about like a madman, sawed through the piano strings with a kitchen knife and then overturned the whole thing. Pianoforte est morte. The applause was never-ending." Also of course think of John Cage performing his *Water Walk* on the popular TV show I've Got a Secret in 1960.)



These transatlantic differences in artistic approaches tend to get lost when one tries to understand Fluxus as a somewhat coherent movement (and that is also why many of the artists involved often had their doubts if the involvement in fact would hurt their own art). In the German documentary of course the European perspective wins out and maybe that is why Moorman and Paik do come over as a bit lacklustre. It is the Germans that dominate the central theme of the film: art and life. Vostell, in a later segment especially dedicated to him, gets to repeat his rather straightforward view on this: "Art is life and life is art." To Vostell that means a political responsibility for the artist who has "to sharpen the consciousness of human beings for all the facts of life." Likewise Beuys has a famous dictum, more complicated in its implications, that "everybody is an artist" (a potential which, to be set in motion, nevertheless sort of depended on the art of Beuys).

On first blush, such thoughts might seem to tie in with Allan Kaprow's slightly earlier idea of a "blurring between art and life". But Kaprow, inventor of the happening and not himself a Fluxist, who staged scripted actions that increasingly were not made for an audience at all, was not interested in conflating the two, but rather in giving his art more natural living spaces. He wanted his art to resonate not within the gallery but within life, and he wanted to use the materials of life, but it is still art distinct from life. In a conversation with Robert C. Morgan he described it thus: "What I am primarily interested in is the kind of activity, like the brushing of my teeth – whether associated with happenings or not – whose reference to other art events is very, very remote, if indeed possible to make at all."

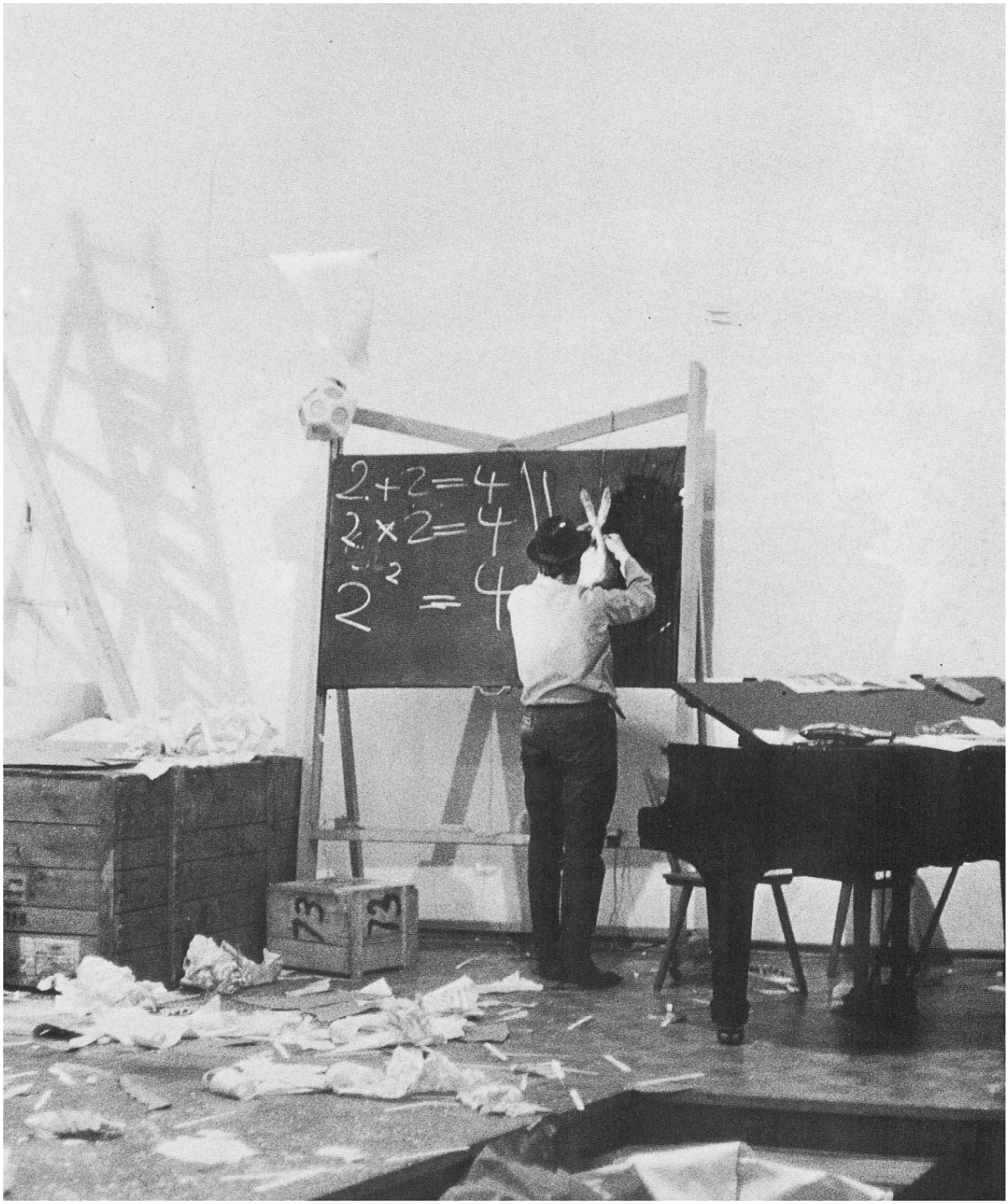
In his 1958 essay "The Legacy of Jackson Pollock", Kaprow wrote out the following predictions for the "young artists of today": "All of life will be open to them. They will discover out of ordinary things the meaning of ordinariness. They will not try to make them extraordinary but will only state their real meaning. But out of nothing they will devise the extraordinary and then maybe nothingness as well. People will be delighted or horrified, critics will be confused or amused, but these, I am certain, will be the alchemies of the 1960s."

This turned out to be a rather astute prediction, but when 1960 had arrived the need arose to already go one step further beyond or below the "real meaning" of events and into something more undetermined. Walter De Maria (soon to have a short brush with Fluxus): "Meaningless work is obviously the most important and significant art form today. The aesthetic feeling given by meaningless work can not be described exactly because it varies with each individual doing the work." An aesthetic feeling that can not be described exactly, this of course stands no chance of surviving being digested by art history, and the need for a larger historical narrative probably is the main reason why meaningless work has not become an official art movement of the time. The simplest form of historical narrative for 1960s avant-garde art includes that it was made in opposition to the establishment and to easy money (Pop being the problematical movement here, but that wasn't fully recognized as avant-garde). The avant-garde had to offer institutional critique and knock art off its supposed pedestal every day anew. It has become nearly impossible for us to see anything from the 1960s as meaningless if it fit into that larger trend, though often the meaning will lie only in its historical context. Here's a telling quote from Hal Foster et al.'s *Art since 1900* that shows you how high the pressure is to fit the narrative. They sum up Kaprow by admonishing him that he "might have been too indirect in his wish to underscore the hold of market forces on our lives and on our consumption of art in particular." Such expectations already had a deep history in the 1960s, Duchamp for example repeated complaints about the commercialization of art endlessly in his later interviews and even pretended to have stopped work altogether (while making editions from his readymades).

Kaprow himself, from the same conversation with Robert C. Morgan quoted above: "The problem with artlike art, or even doses of artlike art that still linger in lifelike art, is that it overemphasizes the discourse within art, that is, art's own present discourse as well as its historical one. Peripherentiality is loaded so much in art that the application to, the analogy to, the involvement in everyday life is very difficult." *Push and Pull: A Furniture Comedy for Hans Hofmann* from 1963 is Kaprow's sly comment by on his own attempts to get around these forms of discourse and how discourse wins back no matter how messy you get. The instructions read: "Anyone can find or make one or more rooms of any shape, size, proportion and colour – then furnish them perhaps, maybe paint some things or everything. / Everyone else can come in and, if the room(s) are furnished, they also can arrange them, accommodating themselves as they see fit. / Each day things will change." Instead of just letting the action stand, Kaprow offers a counternarrative that gently pokes fun at the agonies of real-life furnishing and mixes that with formal composition theory Hofmann-style: "Consider whether or not you're a red-head and dressed in Kelly green. Are you fat, fatter than the table? In that case, quickly change your clothes if the small chair's colour doesn't correspond; and also lose some weight. What about the kids? And their toys? I'd suggest allowing for a variable proportion of three yellow toy ducks to be considered equivalent to one medium-sized violet dress (softened by black hair, brown eyes and leopard-skin bag). Now these relationships will be seen to exactly balance the combined density of the orange large chair, the brownish mantle ornament and the beige stripe running around the baseboard. You mustn't neglect the spaces in between the furniture and how they figure in the total space. They are, in fact, 'solids' of another order, and each negative area is coloured and qualified by the punctuating components (tables, chairs etc.) around it..."

The visitors to the piece's premiere at a group show given by Hofmann and his students at a warehouse in New York 1963 enthusiastically joined in on the fun. Photos from that are just like everybody's remarkable tolerance for meaningless art (or art whose meaning remained undecipherable to those watching the protagonists making fools of themselves by polite standards) in the footage from *Kunst und Ketchup*. It is like a glimpse of a garden of innocence we cannot get back to. Though honestly I do not even want to go back and visit the Galerie Parnass because, well, the performances look amusing at best and the music sounds awful. Even Charlotte Moorman's playing seems not designed to produce satisfying music (while she was, by all accounts, a very good musician, her small body of recorded work already indicates that for her the event itself was the important thing). Wrapped in cellophane, quoting romantic chestnuts, she references the making of music rather than making music herself.

But anyway it seems avant-garde music was not necessarily held to the standards of concert hall craftsmanship. Beuys could improvise clumsily on the piano and call it an homage to John Cage straight-faced. He prepared the piano after Cage (though his preparations would again be with materials that for him had a symbolic significance, and the whole gesture of preparing the piano was to free it from its repertoire and its serfdom to the bourgeoisie). Beuys on the piano sounds completely awful because he even tries to make music and just doesn't have the ability...though what do I know, after hanging up a hare on a chalkboard and before tearing its heart out at the Festum Fluxorum in Düsseldorf 1963 during what he labelled his first ever Fluxus performance, he played suggestions of Satie pieces from memory and, "Here he played piano so beautifully that I could not forget that tune," according to Nam June Paik.


2+2=4
2×2=4
2²=4

*

Here's a classic: the performer carries a stepladder on stage, places it carefully, then, with varying degrees of fussiness (you can't just get this over and done with), places a bowl at the foot of the ladder, half fills it with water from a pitcher, then climbs the ladder with the pitcher and tilts it, aiming nonchalantly, until drops of water from the lid of the pitcher fall down splashing on the surface below. There is the sound of water dripping, which we hear like never before.

The piece is *Drip Music* by George Brecht from 1959–62, a classic Fluxus staple. The score allows different realizations, it reads: "For single or multiple performance. A source of dripping water and an empty vessel are arranged so that the water falls into the vessel." Then there is a second version with only the one word: "Dripping." The classic performance of the piece is probably influenced by another, more explicitly staged "Fluxversion" with added fun props: "First performer on a tall ladder pours water from a pitcher very slowly down into the bell of a French horn or tuba held in the playing position by a second performer on the floor level." So in the most common realization, we have the head of one and the tailpiece of the other set of instructions.

Above, on a beautiful ladder – it looks like they spent hours hunting for props in nearby antique shops – is Dick Higgins in 1962, performing a rustic version running water from a pot into a metal tub. The version below is George Maciunas at the Fluxfest Amsterdam in 1963 with portable gear. Note the woman on the left who closes her eyes the better to listen in rapt attention. She is internalizing the sound to illustrate Brecht's 1986 dictum: "You are actually doing something – even if it's listening to water dripping – even though it sometimes can seem passive...you are still invited to see if that ever turns up in your experience, or even make one for yourself. If you want to."

(Note also that both performers seem to be pouring rather than dripping. The stage requires a grander gesture. Still it looks like in their versions the water sounds might rather have been like taking a leak, which to my imaginary ears goes against the spirit of the piece.)

The quote above is after Gabriele Knapstein, who in her book on Brecht offers the most useful analysis of his event scores that I have found. Every reading of the *Drip Music* score(s) will hinge on the second version, the continuous form of a single word, "dripping". The first version offers the basic layout of a performance, the second allows the event to happen independent of planful actions anywhere. Knapstein says: "With this utmost reduction of specifications Brecht opens up the sphere of operations to allow a realization of the score in very different situations. The drip event cannot be presented in a stage performance only, but also in an everyday situation, where for example a dripping faucet might move into the centre of attention and become a 'sound event'." This reading is of course completely valid, but let us for a moment think about how the viewer would in concrete fact experience this second version of the piece: by only reading the score, acknowledging the possibility of a staging of the first version, then by imagining a dripping faucet or whatever...and making a mental note that George Brecht now owns the sound of dripping faucets forever. (To accidentally encounter an actual dripping faucet and see it as a performance of the Brecht piece would run counter to the artist's supposed intent of focusing our attention on the thing. We would not be open to the sound of the dripping and instead just recognize: ah, that's Brecht, and be satisfied with correctly identifying the author of the sounds.)

There is another contradiction in *Drip Music,* which makes straightforward experience of the work difficult, in that it is pretty overdetermined as pieces go (see especially Douglas Kahn's *Noise Water Meat* for a humourless recital of that). It references the history of music from Händel to more explicitly Cage's compositions *Water Music* (1952) and *Water Walk* (1959). There is a reference to the drip paintings of Jackson Pollock, to whom Brecht had devoted a section of his text *Chance Imagery* (1966), in effect describing how later developments in intermedia art grew out

of Pollock's splashing. Apart from these art references, the work had evolved from science-related research: a burette had been the source for the drops in early versions of the piece, the artist dripping on different materials to test their sound properties or experimenting with different dripping rates. "My life is devoted to research into the 'structure of experience'," Brecht explains the scientific background to his work (adding in parentheses: "I don't think we can determine the 'structure of nature'.")

A heavy piece, a far from meaningless art. But while Brecht was aware of most of these aspects, we must keep in mind that art-historical references in 1960 did not yet give immediate meaning to a work to the extent that we see it today. These were rather amusing associations, the work lay in the event itself, especially in the props whose choice would be the most important aspect of a realization. Knapstein quotes Hermann Braun, a good acquaintance of Brecht, who in 1996 recalled his earlier meetings with the artist: "How often we sat together in a pub, and then he suddenly took the salt shaker and a beer mat or whatever just lay on the table, and he put them in relation in a little experiment, and then explained to me: that's really all I want to say. Connections like these seen as events..."

But let us now return to the guy up the ladder. Does he make, after Knapstein, a "sound event" out of the dripping? That would require a lot of creative attention from the audience (especially, as we've seen, if the guy pours and there's no chance to get into a meditative mood of waiting for the next drip). In the early days, when the piece was still unknown, the action was suspenseful: what would happen next, now is that really all there is? Later the performer's interpretational choices would be in the foreground, ladder or no ladder, pitcher or watering can, Keaton or Chaplin. Can an actual performance of the piece still be "about" dripping? Interestingly Brecht himself, in contrast to many of the Fluxus crew, took a lowercase route. Liz Kotz writes: "Brecht's realizations of his own and others' scores were characteristically spare, disciplined and anti-monumental, often permitting such events to remain unseen or barely perceived."

Fluxus perfromances were meant to be repeated, they were collected in a Fluxus handbook, you could book "Flux events" from Maciunas and compile a menu after your tastes. Or do it on your own. Brecht in 1991: "Anyone with one of my scores for a chair or ladder event can find, or realize, such an event privately. No problem. If such an event is realized in public, it should be titled and/or announced as 'A George Brecht *Chair Event*, realized by (name of the person who realized it).' If you feel you require 'authorization' for the event, then send me two colour photos of the work, 20×25 cm, I will then send one photo back to you, with, on the back, my signed 'authorisation'." This, Knapstein notes, would cost a fee.

Today, though, as a repertory piece, *Drip Music* is usually a challenge to the performer in that *other* post-Cagean tradition, where you know what to expect when *4′ 33″* is on the menu and since there is no silence anyway, there is no deeper need to listen to what you have already comprehended. And most often in practical fact *4′ 33″* is a performance of Music for Keyboard Lid, often acted out with barely suppressed hints of piano virtuoso gestures (cue fluttering coat-tails). (Of course there actually is a Music for Keyboard Lid, La Monte Young's *Piano Piece for David Tudor #2* (1960): "Open the keyboard cover without making, from the operation, any sound that is audible to you. Try as many times as you like..." It would be possible to realize both this and *4′ 33″* in a single performance. Young's composition is still "about" silence rather than the piano lid, though, so it's more a comment on Cage than a companion to Brecht.)

Here's a Cage quote from 1958 pertinent to the question of making a repertory piece out of *Drip Music* as an open event: "A performance of a composition which is indeterminate of its performance is necessarily unique. It cannot be repeated. When performed for a second time, the outcome is other than it was. Nothing therefore is accomplished by such a performance, since that performance cannot be grasped as an object in time." (I would now bargain with him: what

does the first performance actually accomplish other than the knowledge that the piece is being performed, which translates it out of the realm of poetry into that of fine art?). Anyway, repeat performances of *Drip Music* or *4' 33"* are doomed to disappoint since both pieces are much richer in discourse than a performance could ever hope to be. The performance is a recognizable object only in the score, out of time.

Cage immediately goes on to say: "A recording of such a work has no more value than a postcard; it provides a knowledge of something that happened, whereas the action was a non-knowledge of something that had not yet happened." This kind of reasoning dates his thoughts: why would a recording be just a postcard from the event instead of its own thing? It is again a way of seeing things, though, that does a lot to explain why audio documents of the events discussed here so seldom offer much to listen to.

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So what about the music, the actual sounds? Brecht hasn't left us many postcards at all – as was to be expected of a composer whose *Solo for Violin, Viola, Cello or Contrabass* from 1962 demanded that the soloist polish rather than play the instrument, or whose *Flute Solo* of the same year had two words for an instruction: "disassembling" then "assembling". Even if these works have musical titles (as had the works of many other Fluxus artists), they were not about sound. It was

the concert situation that interested the artists, an attitude in classical music audiences that would allow them to potentially perceive events with a concentration that would make complete works out of little gestures.

But this not true for the composer La Monte Young, compiler and editor of the 1963 *Anthology of Chance Operations,* which featured event scores, performance instructions and more proper compositions by Brecht and other Fluxus protagonists, the New York school and others. For Young, all his work was about sound. He included a series of his own compositions from 1960 in the anthology that have proved among the most quoted of musical events, even if most of them have not made it to many repeat realizations.

One piece that could be found in the Fluxus core repertoire and had been performed by Brecht and others was *Composition 1960 #2*. The score reads: "Build a fire in front of the audience. Preferably, use wood although other combustibles may be used as necessary for starting the fire or controlling the kind of smoke. The fire may be of any size, but it should not be the kind which is associated with another object, such as a candle or a cigarette lighter." (Brecht in his characteristically humble interpretation lit a book of matches placed on an upturned glass on a stool, which also means contradicting this part of the score.) "The lights may be turned out. / After the fire is burning, the builder(s) may sit by and watch it for the duration of the composition; however, he (they) should not sit between the fire and the audience in order that its members will be able to see and enjoy the fire. / The composition may be of any duration. / In the event that the performance is broadcast, the microphone may be brought up close to the fire." It is only in the broadcast that sound plays a role, the instructions for the performance itself are addressed solely to the eyes.

(By the way, it strikes me how different the sound in my head must be when I read the score today from those somebody in 1960 would imagine...their acoustic fire presumably closer to the real thing while mine is a fireworks of contact-miked in-the-face crackles, bumps and hisses...)

The other classic of Young's work group is the butterfly piece, *Composition 1960 #5*: "Turn a butterfly (or any number of butterflies) loose in the performance area... The composition may be any length but if an unlimited amount of time is available, the doors and windows may be opened before the butterfly is turned loose and the composition may be considered finished when the butterfly flies away." Reading the score, I'd imagine this as a silent event (rather more silent than Cage's silent piece in fact...I'd also imagine sunspots and the audience perched on pews and there's always only one small white butterfly, don't ask me why), but Young has repeatedly stressed that these compositions to him were about the sound. From an interview with Richard Kostelanetz in 1968:

"I started thinking about the butterfly. Alone, it made a very beautiful piece. Being very young, I could still take something so highly poetic and use it without the fear I would have now – that it would be trampled on. Now, I would offer something quite a bit more substantial than a butterfly or a fire – something that can't be so easily walked on. After all, a butterfly is only a butterfly. No matter how much I write about the fact that a butterfly does make a sound – that it is potentially a composition – anyone that wants to can say: 'Well, it's only a butterfly.'" Kostelanetz: "Your point, then, in bringing into the concert situation a jar of butterflies and then releasing them, was that a butterfly makes a sound." Young: "True. Another important point was that a person should listen to what he ordinarily just looks at, or look at things he would ordinarily just hear. In the fire piece, I definitely considered the sounds, although a fire is, to me, one of the outstanding visual images."

Looking back from 1968 also, critic Tom Johnson noted, "For several years I had been hearing crazy stories about La Monte Young. About how he turned a butterfly loose in a Berkeley

auditorium and said it was a piece...", and it is pretty obvious that the daring of this gesture would overlayer the little sound involved, and only through the viewer's reflection that it still was supposed to be a musical composition could that sound be heard (today again louder than before, what with chaos theory and the butterfly effect, invented a dozen years later). The other thing I find interesting in the Young quote above is how eight years down the line the composer already felt that the freedom there had been in 1960, to take something as fragile as a butterfly and call it a piece, had already gone. That corresponds to the pressures of the need for a proper narrative put on Kaprow by the critics and on Brecht unwittingly by his more aggressive peers.

As already mentioned, Brecht's own interpretations tended to be so low-key that catching the event and identifying it as a piece was often all the audience could manage. If we return to *Drip Music*, it was only in much later interpretations that the sound came fully into focus. Of course the work should be perfect for kitchen sink interpretations on YouTube, though again most performers there overdo the pouring and it is very seldom that the videos transcend the joy of the uploaders' discovery that indeed it was simple to find all utensils for a realization in the household. Among the more high-blown projects, Fluxus co-founder Ben Patterson realized and recorded an interesting version in 2002, which was released on the Alga Marghen label and can be listened to on Ubuweb. In his notes on the recording he says: "Recently, as I was preparing a concert of classic Fluxus works, I decided to re-examine the original scores, rather than rely on my memory of performances of the traditional interpretations of these works." (That's pretty funny considering the score consists of 25 words.) "Thus, I discovered that George Brecht's original instructions for *Drip Music* allowed for both a single source or multiple sources of dripping water. Remembering George's first career as a chemist, employing laboratory equipment to produce multiple, dripping sources seemed appropriate. A device was constructed including 3 gerbil water bottles suspended from metal rods and a piece of moulded plastic packaging, amplified with contact microphone." The result is rather like a percussion piece, since the drops don't fall on water but on what sounds like empty plastic containers of some size and volume. Because of the three sources, there is slowly decelerating phase shifting between them, so our thoughts are more of minimal music (Steve Reich) than the event of water dripping.

While Patterson's realization sounds very nice but uninspiring, the score can of course be blown up to an overproduced event like the 2008 realization at Tate Modern, which saw a long row of performers each with their vessel and bowls amplified, and sounds of a horde of towering giants pissing into waterfalls came blasting from the loudspeakers.

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It seems difficult. One would expect that at least a composer of the stature of Karlheinz Stockhausen, if he entered the fray, would easily produce a memorable soundpiece from Fluxus ingredients. But the film made by Peter Moore from footage of the American premiere of Stockhausen's *Originals* in New York 1964 (three years after their German premiere) suggests otherwise. The work is a rather theatrical affair of 18 different scenes to be performed in sequence or simultaneously, with prescribed character roles (artist, composer) all on a choreographed journey of finding themselves. Since the composer had kept the details of realization open and was rather delivering a structure, many of the proceedings were determined by the director of the event, Allan Kaprow. The film offers glimpses of diverse roles for musicians (played among others by new music luminaries Max Neuhaus, James Tenney, Alvin Lucier and Charlotte Moorman, who is lying on her back playing with the cello on top of her), a lengthy spot for Nam June Paik as performer of "action music", realizing his own earlier pieces (his casting being the only hands-on decision by Stockhausen, the Korean did not yet belong in that circle and first met Moorman there), and on the margins the director's son Anton, whose role it was to play with cardboard boxes at the side of the stage.

Watching postcards from that extravaganza – which took place in classical concert venue Judson Hall for five nights over a week as part of a festival organized by Charlotte Moorman – there again seems to have been too much of a budget for the events on show, designed rather for small venues that force direct interaction with the audience. Here fashion models do the catwalk between the stage sets and huge backdrops overtower the usual household gear like stepladders and stuff... Nam June Paik is washing himself in a basin fully clothed, drinking soap water out of a shoe before banging his head against the piano...all against a hysterical laugh track and finally bathing in the spotlight for applause...it all does feel too complacent, too self-congratulatory, the overblown production draining the sense out of events realizable with hardly a budget at all. So one sympathizes with the knowledge that outside the hall a number of New York artists staged a protest – among them Henry Flynt, Tony Conrad and George Maciunas (against his own sheep involved; this protest is not in the film, by the way) – attacking Stockhausen as a "cultural imperialist". (That was some years before Cornelius Cardew wrote a treatise called "Stockhausen Serves Imperialism" which contains no allusion to the earlier insult but starts from similar thoughts. The New York protesters saw a "characteristic European-North American ruling-class

Artist" and the power relations between him as all-mighty composer and the poor executing performers, not to speak of an audience badgered into submission, seemed offensive to them. All that of course before they had witnessed the presentation. Stockhausen had a reputation.)

We are only in 1964, and the peers already demand an art with an anti-institutional narrative. Art movements of the 1960s were expected to demolish elitism, to push art from its pedestal. Director Kaprow was obviously already for his contemporaries "too indirect in his wish to underscore the hold of market forces on our lives and on our consumption of art in particular." Butterflies were no longer sufficient. It is no coincidence that around this time it became obvious Fluxus was past its peak.

What about the soundtrack, original recordings from the event layered as wild sound over the images? Stockhausen's *Kontakte* are used here as incidental music in the version with piano, but they are hodgepodged with bar jazz, sounds of the spectacle and other assorted noises in a literal fashion that detracts rather than adds to the piece.

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Speaking of questioning the power relations between artist and audience, La Monte Young's *Composition 1960 #6* goes like this: "The performers (any number) sit on the stage watching and listening to the audience in the same way the audience usually looks at and listens to the performers. If in the auditorium, the performers should be seated in rows on chairs or benches; but if in a bar, for instance, the performers might have tables on stage and be drinking as is the audience."

If we now fast forward to today, the artist most interested in using indeterminate performance situations to stare back at the audience is probably Mattin. He works with improvised music (where he often plays, if at all, computer feedback) and noise (where he might remain motionless in silly get-up behind his console, blasting room recordings of audience patter at intolerable volume back at the hapless listener), attempting to upstage performance situations with results ranging from consensual discomfort to unasked-for disruption. His approach to questioning the power relations can be rather simple, asking audience members at the top of his lungs: why they are there, why so mannerly, how could he make them leave? On the theory level, improvisational practices and noise for him have a direct political impact which he sort of invokes in texts that work with tropes from critical theory, used mostly against the discourse they were borrowed from, in the punk spirit that says you do not have to master an instrument to play it. The questions he poses about the concert room are more hippie than punk, though: "What would it require to emancipate oneself from the situation and the roles that we accept when we enter such a space? How are social spaces produced in a given situation? What are the accepted conventions? Can we challenge them? Can we change them? Can we dare together by abandoning old conventions?" (from the foreword to his 2011 text collection *Unconstituted Praxis*).

At a 2009 concert in A Coruña, Mattin played a duo with veteran leftfield improviser Keith Rowe. (And if the jump forward in time has been too violent for you, here are random connections: Rowe having played with Cardew, Stockhausen's accuser, in AMM, Mattin releasing a record titled *Keith Rowe Serves Imperialism* on his label after the Cardew pamphlet. Or Rowe, who will often find a conceptual twist to his music, doing a set having had his hair cut on stage by duo partner Toshimaru Nakamura, which is usually what a realization of Dick Higgins' Fluxus piece *Danger Music Number Two* (1961, score: "Hat. Rags. Paper. Heave. Sheave.") boils down to, except that Rowe says he really just had his hair cut on stage and it had nothing to do with the whole Fluxus thing... The photo of Mattin and Rowe was posted on the internet forum i hate music on a thread dedicated to the event by Miguel Prado. The thread also contains Rowe's response quoted below and the information about Mattin's motives from posts by the artist himself.)

Mattin decided before the concert, unbeknownst to anybody else, that he would not play or even hold to an instrument, a situation that his duo partner would then have to cope with and decide to make music or not. That might lead to a problematic and potentially interesting situation between performers and towards the audience. (In fact Mattin describes the experience of just sitting there as rather excruciating, but that is his pleasure and hardly adds to the meaning of the piece.) He would have the whole event recorded with several microphones, and when the first person started applauding Rowe's performance, that recording would be played back at the audience (all that had gone before – music, room and audience noises). so the concert would continue again for the same time.

Mattin's performance decision was built on several ideas: for example, a reference to the custom in Rowe's former improvisation ensemble AMM to not plan anything ahead and to not talk about performances; or the notion that the recording would conflate performer and audience, in effect levelling the hierarchies. The actual experiences in the room, though, would be driven less by ideas and more by the psychological dynamics. Duo partner Rowe did not see it as an upstaging of conventions in his post from 9 February 2010: "I felt the performance tended to reinforce the artist and audience relationship, Artist as master and an overly manipulated servant, Artist as master at the centre, dominating all aspects volume / duration / content / interest / audience

entering a forced and manipulated relationship, provoked into reaction, Artist as mystical visionary at the centre to be viewed looked at regarded bowed to, the captive audience vs. Mattin's rigidity."

In 1965 Claes Oldenburg, then an artist with some ties to Fluxus working in happenings, described the viewers' role in these terms: "The audience is considered an object and its behaviour as events... The place of the audience in the structure is determined by seating and by certain simple provocations." While that's a much too cynical statement for Mattin, who prefers a sometimes naive enthusiasm for audience liberation, the situations he creates could at the outset be seen as a continuance of the Oldenburg tradition. (Also remember that Kaprow got rid of the problem by eliminating the audience altogether.) Against this conflict between artist and audience, Rowe's vantage point is the more communal, treating the listener as emancipated. But while that leaves Rowe to play music that breaks the conventions, if he so pleases, an art that questions the power relations in the manner that contemporary discourse would expect – that delivers the questions "What are the accepted conventions? Can we challenge them?" to discuss them on a meta level – is easier to realize from the rather aggressive stance that Oldenburg or Mattin would take, since it allows to identify an "other", which can then be overcome. The right to identify conventions is what makes the artist (or, within the wider discourse, often the critic) master here. Since Rowe like him also addresses the performer/audience relation in his art, and both in fact suspect the other of assuming too much "status" as an artist, Mattin's dissociation roughly follows the class distinctions we have seen in the conflict around Stockhausen:

"While I get the impression that Keith is interested in bringing improvisation more to the level of classical music, or high art (he often mentions ultimate modernist painters such as Rothko, Pollock), I am much more interested in bringing improvisation down into the mundane. So any sound in the room is equally valid, and everybody in the room is able to not 'disturb' the situation but to add to it. However I am doing this slowly with rudimentary methods and from my safe 'performer' status, basically because I still have to learn a lot how the concert situation and the structures that hold it together functions." So while Rowe to Mattin seems sort of interested in serving capitalism, the latter explores the capitalist situation until he has collected sufficient data and developed the necessary craftsmanship...to then bring everybody down. (Quoting the above is arguably a bit unfair, since the respect Mattin has for the older artist gets in the way of the reasoning, but it does show up that, even following his approach, it is still the artist who decides when and to what degree the audience will be liberated.)

For Mattin, improvisation is not just what the musician does with his instrument, but he may also appropriate audience reaction, which is where power relations really get complicated: "Do we really need to play the sounds ourselves to improvise? Can we not allow other sounds in the room to sound, or to appropriate them? ... Do I need to 'produce a sound' to be defined as someone who is improvising? Would not that be thinking in capitalist terms when you always have to produce?" So the artist forces the audience to improvise over the fact that he won't play along with their expectations and improvise on stage, and then appropriates their reaction (which would mostly have been turning over to the other performer who actually played, and then, after the playback set in, struggling to grasp and evaluate the concept) to re-define improvisation from below. The concept invites being made fun of. But on the other hand it works: the questions the artist wants to provoke while sitting there attempting his best Buster Keaton face for 90 minutes are not our thoughts from the audience, but he's putting in enough energy to indeed make us ask ourselves about the situation.

What's driving him...why wouldn't he want to make good music...why doesn't he like me...do all artworks bring their own discourse...if this were a more traditional music I'd just think he was too drunk or he chickened out of playing with a legend...what's the canon of best institutional critique...and yes, in one question artist and audience are united: why don't we do something against it?

In a sense, Mattin doesn't have a work at all here, except the audience starts improvising and then he becomes like a figure in the play, and it doesn't much matter which narrative spin we give the thing, if we throw beer bottles, make Rowe stop to listen to the sound of Mattin just sitting there or if we merely consume the situation... In Mattin's conflation, all sounds are of equal value anyway.

*

Late 2009 in Paris, Mattin performed a duo with Taku Unami, where both men sat on chairs beside each other and cried, or pretended to cry (depending on your willingness to suspend emotional disbelief) for the audience. The work had a title with a vaguely vintage-Koonsian ring to it, *Distributing Vulnerability to the Affective Classes*, and it came with a statement that included theoretical thoughts on the terms "vulnerable" and "affective" which I will leave out of the discussion (though they did strike a chord with me, since e.g. Beuys as a performer often works from an awkwardness that makes him seem very vulnerable, while at the same time he's still the most top-down performer there ever was).

Let us instead look at the passages in the statement that concern the audience/performer and performance/space relations: "When can one feel [an] activation of the space taking effect? When there is a dense atmosphere which makes you aware that something important is at stake... When this dense atmosphere is produced, the people involved become painfully aware of their social position and usual behaviour. If the density of the atmosphere is sufficient it can become physical, disturbing our senses and producing strange feelings in our bodies... Every movement or word becomes significant. What is created is not a unified sense of space or time, but a heterotopia where one location contains different spaces and temporalities. Previous hierarchies and established organizations of space are exposed. The traditional time of the performance and distribution of attention (the audience's respectful behaviour towards the performers etc.) is left behind."

There is a recording of the event on the site of the *Wire* music magazine. Listening to this, it immediately becomes clear that "the traditional time of the performance and distribution of attention" have not been left behind, the audience are a marvel of respectful behaviour. The very fact that they're not putting an end to the show seems so decadently tolerant that it makes trying their patience appear a desperate necessity. Judging from the recording, the performance stayed in a kind of carefully calibrated half-assedness, where it was left to the audience if they wanted to get emotionally involved in the staged crying. No attempt to go whole hog, no Stanislavski histrionics that would force the audience into a kind of psychological experiment...the vulnerability lies not in the act of crying, but in the bad performance of it – here Mattin and Unami indeed do use that sense of awkwardness that can make very personal performances possible, again think Beuys or, say, Mike Kelley in his performance work. Good craftsmanship in fact would just make this an acting display... There is a feeling that I often have with Mattin: I as a viewer would like to be challenged in my preconceptions by him, only he doesn't do it well enough – though my expectations of good craftsmanship for this context are of course a contradiction in themselves.

But all of that is again contradicted by the collective epiphany Mattin envisages in his statement: the "activation of the space taking effect", "something important is at stake", "every movement or word becomes significant". That is of course completely delusional – the reality of being in the room will for most people stay within accustomed emotional parameters. Come on, it's just art. But this delusion is also a fantasy that is the very anti-Utopia of meaningless art.

Maybe half an hour into the performance, the artists start howling sustained notes and music creeps in as a reference. I prefer not to hear that as music proper. And I don't think it's improvisation compared to the decision to not play.

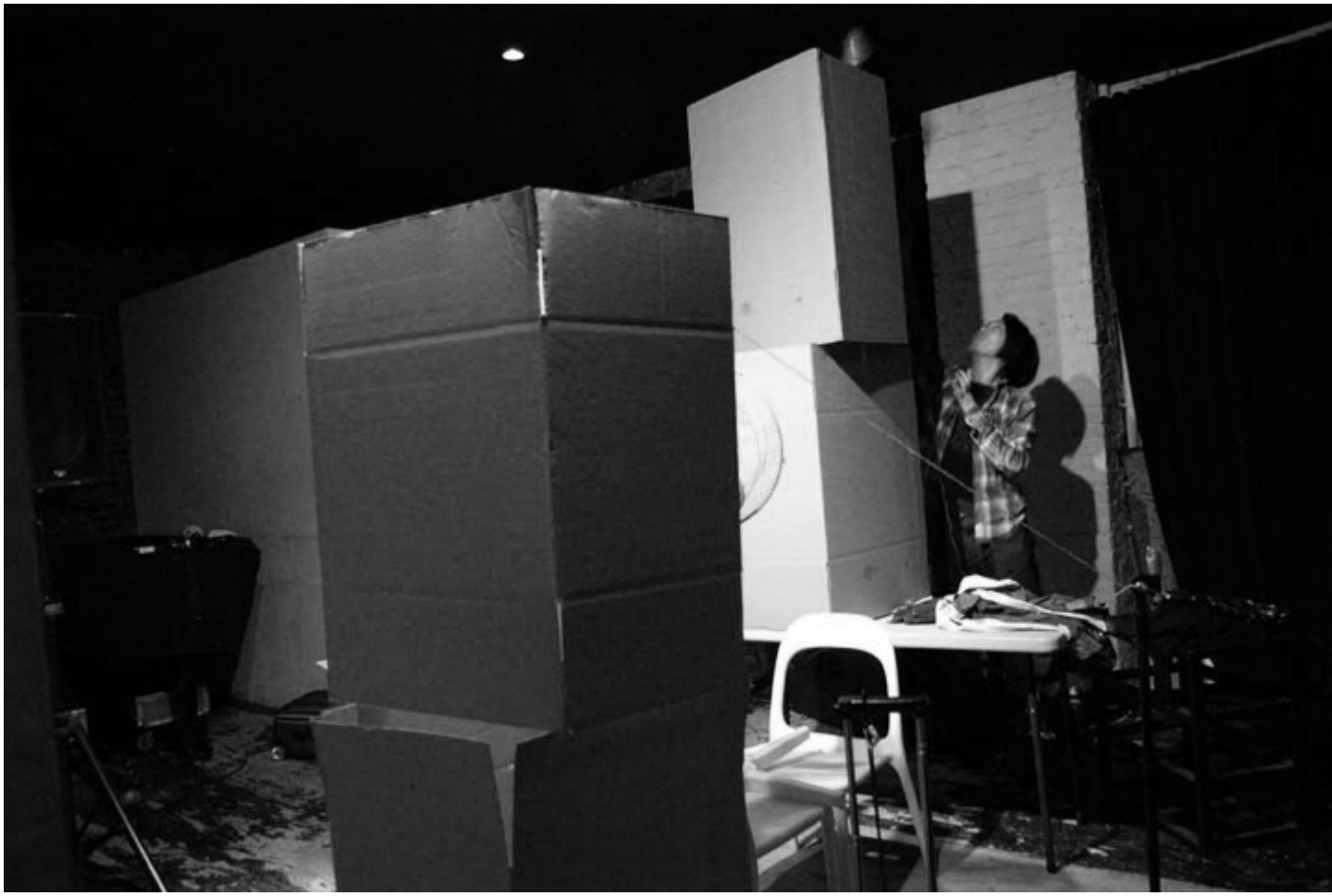
*

Unami in his own work can approach the question of play or no play from a different angle, for example when his chosen instrument for improvisation is clapping. As a gesture, this has a burden of references about as suffocating as Brecht's dripping. Clapping one's hands can be a signal to pay attention, a gesture of approval, applause. It marks time, it can also mark space, it's a method sound artists will use to check the acoustic properties of a place. There are possible references to Yasunao Tone's Fluxus *Clapping Piece* (1963) and Steve Reich's *Clapping Music* (1972). And this is just from my Western perspective, I wouldn't know about the sound of one hand clapping or prayer claps.

On the track of Unami's duo *Two Hands* with Angharad Davies (on Winds Measure, recorded in 2009) where both musicians just clap, I find the passages where the widely spaced-out claps are more authoritative a fascinating listen. The sounds really seem to be marking space, or the artists seem to be marking their territory. (Remember we haven't been there. This idea would not work in the live situation, where territory would be claimed through position in the room, where watching the artist's body language would play a greater role and the impatience of waiting for the next clap. We came to listen to the music.) But for most of the recorded time the clapping isn't that authoritative, instead rather like an acoustic limp handshake. One could read that as a rejection of craftsmanship, going against the grain of the instrument, like Lachenmann would write for handclaps. But since clapping hands is not an instrument with conventions that would need challenging (outside of Flamenco?), the piece during these passages only carries as long as you're interested in the spectacle of gauging your own reactions, listening to the sound of yourself waiting for the next clap.

And yet, when we now think back, we wouldn't have listened to the sound of a single Fluxus clap in that manner. And if we indeed did Manage to listen to the drip, we accepted it such as it was. There is today a world of decadent subtlety added to our listening to barely expressive stuff.

This subtlety seems to have been the crux for Unami's solo performance at the Amplify festival in September 2011 in New York. The festival again has a thread on the i hate music board, where organizer Jon Abbey, musicians involved and audience members discuss proceedings and link to reviews – it is a wealth of sources that one could only wish for on the earlier Fluxus pieces, where it is mostly impossible to find audience reactions that are not a mere anecdotal recounting of events and gadgets used.



Unami in his solo performance built shaky edifices from cardboard boxes held up by bits of tape and of string, which he then gave to audience members to hold, and to finally bring the structure down with, on his cue.

In these areas of improvised music, the choice of an instrument can give the sounds a conceptual drift: the no-input mixing board of Toshimaru Nakamura or the exposed computer hard drives of Jin Sangtae have such poignancy that they make a great story and lend themselves to academic interpretation, whether one could actually make good music with them or no (luckily, these two can). Mattin, if he plays, is often credited as playing computer feedback, which is not immediate art like the above examples, but still offers sufficient references. Keith Rowe laid his guitar flat like Pollock the canvas. But cardboard boxes, no.

I seem to remember that Cage once said it wasn't necessary to have witnessed a performance of *4' 33"*, but it would suffice to know it existed. As we have seen, that would be an understatement, since the weight of theory built upon the piece can hardly be carried up on stage, and the sound

of not playing the piano tends to be drowned out by the poses the performer strikes. The story of "the silent piece", like the story of refusing to enter a duo, like the butterfly or the drip, can be told in many a meaningful way that allows the work to live beyond the reach of the actual realization. These stories are the meat of most of what we have seen so far. Charlotte Moorman was maybe the greatest example of that: playing naked in cellophane, playing blocks of ice or jamming a bare-chested video artist between her knees and playing him – together with a set of beautiful photographs and fun videos sending postcards from the events – make one forget the scarcity of satisfying recorded sound. Even the clapping, while it does not make a great story, is a very organic way of asking the question: is that which you perceive still music, and should it be listened to as such – is it, indeed, worth spending any attention on at all? – and you can ponder that from my description above without having heard the sound or seen the movements.

Of course cardboard boxes hold a lot of references, too: they can be works of art (Warhol and Rauschenberg), they have been piled up in Fluxus (remember Kaprow's kid in the Stockhausen show), one could think of makeshift poor houses in slums, of coverings for the homeless. Of moving the household. The artist's favourite association, I learn from a post by Abbey, is filmmaker Kiyoshi Kurosawa's use of cardboard boxes and their sound effects, especially in action scenes. My favourite association (especially when taking into account Unami's duo with Takahiro Kawaguchi from the same festival) would be dance, something like Grand Union, an improvisational (!) dance group that grew out of Yvonne Rainer's ensemble (here's a pic I found of them at the Walker Art Center 1972)... Still, it doesn't add up, the cardboard box as a prop is so familiar that it makes no sense to look for forebears or anything: there is no story, no meaning to get out of it which would in any way transcend the very traditional discourse about "low" materials and art.

It would seem you had to be there. The first-hand reports suggest that it was very special witnessing the performance. Abbey relates the reaction of his wife Yuko Zama (who also took the two pictures from the Amplify festival I'm using here), describing how she "tried to spend some of the concert just paying attention to the sounds: the string pulling through the cracks of the box, the tape pulling out, the fan (with and without the plastic bags), etc, etc. She noticed that Unami was paying attention to the sonic element of the show very carefully, she was very impressed by this element and with the balance between this and the visual components." So here, finally, the sounds take centre stage (of course this performance, which contained no external sounds or instruments, took place at a music festival, but remember that Fluxus events were also called flux concerts and the pieces had musical titles – the performance situations were on the whole rather similar, give or take half a century).

For Unami's duo with Takahiro Kawaguchi later in the festival there is a detailed eye-witness report from Mark Flaum (mudd). Proceedings do seem to recall a choreography more than a composition, and they do show parallels with Fluxus performances in the matter-of-fact kitchen-sink surrealism of events: "The performance began with a ladder. / Or maybe the performance began with the musicians crashing and banging in the back corner of the room. Hurling boxes and detritus as they collected mic stands, extra chairs, cardboard and other debris to heap on and around the ladder. The light was low, and Kawaguchi placed flashlights to build freakish shadows on the walls... Both operated with a firm sense of purpose, marching up the growing pile, firmly placing the pole or plank they had collected in the back, and then marching to the back without any signs of communication between them. Unami tied his string to the top of the ladder and

abandoned it, so later when he returned to retrieve it he had to step over a heap of chairs and a pole without hesitating. With it he strung a line from the ladder to the back of the stage, which he proceeded to hang with garbage bags like laundry... Meanwhile Kawaguchi...hung a trash bag from one of the hanging poles and began to fill it with the clockworks seen in his previous set, cranking them once again with a pair of pliers to set them ticking away..."

What is especially interesting here is that the two had published a CD made from sounds produced in a presumably similar manner, *Teatro Assente* (2011) on Abbey's Erstwhile label. Flaum: "So there was sound. If my eyes were closed I can only imagine it would have been quite similar to the content of the album, filled with thuds, buzzes, and clicks. Not to mention the crying and the noise." (Unami had cried here, too; also, the performance seems to have ended with a noise that could be interpreted as more conventional music.) "But to be honest it was very difficult to process the sound with my attention captured by the rest of the performance."

Teatro Assente is not a postcard of some performance act that has happened; rather, it is an audio performance of staged sound. It is not narrative in the sense of a radio play; still, there are actors, most distinctly a woman placing her steps in front of the microphone or speaking a few muffled words. The tracks on the record have titles that do suggest something happening – for example "she entered the theatre and took her seat, 5 times at the same time (beep on her appearance and disappearance)" – but while these are narrative suggestions that might help one to perceive suspense arcs within a track, they are not written from a (fictional) listener perspective. They can also obscure how perfectly each sonic gesture is placed within distinctly outlined listening spaces. The different layers of sound are clearly defined and fleshed out: that of sounds happening and of post-treatment, of narrative and non-objective sounds – and if I now go into the sound picture blow-by-blow, I can't help spinning my own narrative because these images keep coming up...but I will try to keep them down sufficiently to make the structure of the whole piece as clear as possible.

(As a last aside before that, it should be mentioned that Wolf Vostell, whom we met at the very beginning of this text sticking pins into raw meat, beginning in 1959 made a series of audio

pieces within his so-called *dé-coll/ages*, where he played, cut up or treated field recordings and found sound. Some of these used recordings from happenings, and *Manifesto*, from 1963, with its thumps and slashes over the background of chatting gallery visitors, would especially qualify as an antecedent here, although the sounds hadn't been worked into anything comparably complex – it is a collaged, decontextualized slice of life as art, or of art as life source material, the perfect sound for Vostell's agenda. Collected on an LP in 1983, reissued on Tochnit Aleph.)

Teatro Assente begins with a beehive of Kawaguchi's clockworks, as mentioned by Flaum above, falling into little rhythms and out again, busily shifting phases. The street outside is a distinct hum, so the clockworks are inside, this is where the artists sit in the sound picture, our creative backplane, and the ticking is oddly relaxing... Then, after 4 1/2 minutes the play begins: an entrance, steps coming up over a wooden floor. Very deliberate footfall: these steps want to be heard, they're acting for the microphone. They cross the aural field from right to left, where they stop, a few muffled words confirm our suspicion it's a woman. The same back out again. The moment she's on the threshold suddenly the clockwork hive stops, having existed just for her. Her steps recede up the stairs.

The second track starts out with a more quiet room ambience, the woman enters more naturally, you hear her snuffle her nose. She starts running some kind of little machinery, maybe a weaving loom (the woman alone with her domestic chores, and does that count as a Vermeer reference?) If we take the title, "her cellphone rang while she was watching the blank screen of the theatre", the noise would have been an empty projector rattling, to my ears it's homework. But no matter, the atmosphere is different from the first track in that the action seems not directed at the microphone. Quiet again, then something falls, distinct shades of cymbal/drums within the crash stressing the staged performance element, while other noises that sound more like tin cans and pot lids are of domestic origin. Quiet again, silence punctured by falling stuff. Almost eight minutes in, a mobile buzzes on mute, muffled conversation. Some castanet clockwork starts to twitch until its spine is broken... And then suddenly the woman's steps appear right near our ear on centre stage again and take their pronounced exit, as always panning sideways, dragging a tin can behind them. And all that had happened before in this track in retrospect seems to have been a projection achieved by stagecraft.

The third entrance is announced through beeps that set up a laboratory vibe. Very slow steps hit the stage, then slightly quicker ones performed by the same feet overlayer those, then another pair, up until five same persons are in the room at the same time. This happens twice like a repeat experiment to check the results. The timelines are multitracked as in a multiple exposure, like Foley sound signifying parallel universes (can those be heterotopias, too, or ways into them, at least?).

The fourth track is the comedown from that. You are here.

Piece number five puts the clockworks from the intro into a distance. After two minutes comes a drawn-out "oi" from a male voice and bass drum thumps that indicate the man is sitting at a drum set. White noise that increases in volume, some squeaks and steps, and then a clank that is picked out of its natural acoustic surroundings by a gripper from behind the soundboard and put through a heavy delay, repeating repeating. Immediately the clockworks fall into step. If only you apply a little postproduction to your life the everyday becomes musical. Later huge locks open metal bolts to large doors, playing into the artificial vastness of the delay space. The delays are very hands on, you can practically hear somebody at the controls twiddling the feedback and time knobs of the effects pedal, with the ambience going stutteringly up at a higher and down at a lowering repeat rate. This treated delay space relates to the multiple realities in the previous two tracks. Authority over the soundspace has been firmly established.

The next piece demonstrates the capriciousness of authority, starting close up to the clockwork hive, more rhythmical, less complex, with steps walking around our creative centre. Then a sudden cut to a wealth of birdscape (the title suggests a tropical rain forest, but some birds in here sound strangely familiar).

Track seven starts with a much quieter room tone again, which relates it to the second. Only there is no female protagonist, just vague nervous shuffling. An accidental tapping of amplified guitar string gives us not enough of a warning. Then the fuzz of guitar effect sounding like cheap screamo preset on a cheap portable amp and then...picture-book black metal riffage, clean and not too loud, rather of the diligent guitar shop variant. Serious, drily executed, like an exercise. Befuddled tapping exercises on the higher frets lead us almost into shred territory, before the intensity riffage brings it home again, bolstered by a noise track hinting at real aggression, until the amp is suddenly switched off. The dryness of deliverance and the sort of unquestioned authority...if I had to name the style I'd call it executive metal.

The final title track is by far the longest of all, so you would expect a sort of finale summing up all the parts –which *is* sort of what you get up to a point, only the character has been changed. The shuffling is more rhythmic than before (closer to music), an easily recognizable bass drum thump that signals music! where before the thumps might have been careless activity. A motor is humming tunefully (closer to music). Things are picked up, beaten in a vague rhythm, thrown away. Like exploring the room, sounding the room, finding out what might be useful for musical performance. In fact like the performance at Amplify described above might have sounded. This is the only track that offers no obvious sonic fiction but stays with the narrative of the sounds themselves.

But then suddenly it becomes a fiction through spoken word into the microphone: "Dokoda", a man says, something other dokoda. Metal guitar mostly focussing around a single note. A huge stomp right in the middle of the aural field, then, like tin cans rolling out from that, amplified sound tentacles outstretching, the only "gorgeous" sound on the record... And there I notice the tension has gone. The big arc, the precise work with space and gesture and the setting up of sound stages for possible narratives of the earlier tracks, all sacrificed. Instead we proceed into (post-)deconstruction. The steps walking across the stereo field are now panned back and forth hysterically. Other sounds too, somebody behind the mixing board is proving to me that I can't trust anything, that he can do anything with this blend of realities that he chooses. Like an unreliable narrator. The moment I make a note of that: rotor blades coming up the horizon: *Apocalypse Now*, *Heart of Darkness*, textbook unreliable narrator!

Later I ask Jon Abbey what the words the voice says mean, and it turns out they are first "where it is" and then "where am I", and I feel a bit like having been cheated out of a reality at the end of a movie, when it's all revealed to have been only a dream.
One would have wanted a summing-up. Or at least a ladder.

But it just breaks off...

(Audience object, seated and provoked by Claes Oldenburg at his happening *Ray Gun*, Judson Gallery, New York 1960, with Kaprow in a beard near top left and Cage laughing the loudest.)

JOHN COLTRANE – LIVE IN SEATTLE

On September 30th, 1965, John Coltrane's group played a concert at the Penthouse Jazz Club in Seattle. The music was recorded for Impulse! Records, though not released until 1971, four years after Coltrane's death. Recorded the next day were 'Om', still perhaps Coltrane's most controversial record, and, a fortnight later, 'Kulu Se Mama' and 'Selflesness', all of which featured little-known additional musicians alongside the so-called 'Classic Quartet' of McCoy Tyner, Jimmy Garrison and Elvin Jones. 'Meditations', recorded in November of that year, marked Jones' and Tyner's final appearance with Coltrane, as they became increasingly dissatisfied with the music's moves towards what became known as 'free jazz'. As such activity indicates, 1965 – the year which had also seen the recording of the land-mark 'big band' album 'Ascension' – was a crucial period in Coltrane's work – or so it has always struck me. It was a turning point, a crossroads (to adopt the old blues/ voodoo figure), a time of 'transition' (the title of yet another record from this time), and 'Live in Seattle' is one of the most powerful examples of the peculiar kind of pressure operative in such a situation. Often, it feels as though two opposing forces are simultaneously in operation, each desperately trying to pull the music in different directions. That such struggle is never fully resolved is, of course, part of its dialectical importance even now, and, given this, and given the potentially transformative political situation we're now living through, I thought it would be relevant – necessary, even – to examine the music in depth.

Coincidentally, just as I was thinking all this, the poet Sean Bonney, who I've been badgering to write something for this magazine for the last couple of years, wrote and posted the second in a series of 'Letters on Harmony' over at his blog 'Abandoned Buildings.' (This piece has subsequently been re-published in physical form, with accompanying commentaries and

responses, as part of 'Four Letters / Four Comments', by Richard Owens' Punch Press (see http://damnthecaesars.org/punchpress.html)). The letter in question is not directly an article or an essay 'about' Live in Seattle: indeed, what's so intriguing about this series (which follows on from those other letters Bonney has been writing since August 2011, on 'Silence', 'Spectres', and 'Riots and Doubt') is the generic blend of, say, manifesto, speculative enquiry, and prose poem; the combinations of free jazz, dialectical theory, the notebooks of Lenin, and shifts in thought prompted by recent political events. Nonetheless, it seems to me that such writing says something *more* valuable about the music, and that music's continued relevance, than a simple review or perhaps even a musicological analysis would, or could: it suggests to us how we might *use* this music. By 'use', I don't mean that the music could be an active tool in political change. I mean, what would really happen if, as Bonney suggests, you played 'Live in Seattle' through the speaker system at Walthamstow shopping mall? Very little, probably – minor annoyance or puzzlement, security men coming to turn off the hideous racket and replace it with dulcet chart sparkles, an odd incident in a crushingly regular day. Certainly not a riot; certainly not those sounds of riot we hear, or want to hear, in the wailing and screaming horns of Coltrane, Pharoah Sanders and Donald Garrett; those sounds we did, in fact, hear, during the riots which took place in England during August 2011; those sounds of protest and dissent which have, increasingly, been heard and felt all over the world over the past few years. Nonetheless, 'Live in Seattle', and like artworks, could in some way function as a spark or a prod or a paradigm-shifter which could cause us to make connections and to think and plan and dream up possibilities for de-stabilisation and re-contextualisation which we could then apply in our thoughts and lives as a force which *is* political, which does force or suggest or in some way prepare for actual change. This is a fantasy, perhaps: some kind of quasi-Messianic narrative in which 'John Coltrane died for you.' Well, no: we reject that mysticism. And we're not pretending this is in any way a final answer, that the solution to all our woes lies in some jazz record made in the 1960s which wasn't even released at the time and which even ostensible 'John Coltrane fans' still call things like 'ugly' and 'violent' and 'boring.' So what *are* we claiming, then? Why don't you just read on… ***(DG)***

Quotations for the Time Being

> "People told me for years that my rhythm playing and that of Dennis Charles held Cecil back. 'Why didn't the rhythm, section break free' is the standard question. But didn't Cecil use this rigidity as a springboard or a warp for freedom….? When he goes free against it, isn't it all the more amazing and effective?"

Buell Niedlinger, Liner notes to Cecil Taylor, *The Candid Sessions* (Mosaic, 1989)

> "How was it that the esoteric religious knowledge of the Egyptian and Babylonian priests was transformed into an anti-democratic force which achieved a hegemonic role in western thought? For this was the true legacy of Pythagoras, inventor of philosophy, 'the first to use the word 'harmony' in its musical and philosophical sense.'

Tony Conrad, *Slapping Pythagoras*[14]

> "In the best of jazz, the freedman-citizen conflict is most nearly resolved, because it makes use of that middle ground, the space that exists as the result of any cleavage, where both emotional penchants can exists as *ideas* of perhaps undetermined vitality, and not necessarily as 'ways of life.' "

Amiri Baraka, *Blues People*

14 These two quotations (from Niedlinger and Conrad) are lifted (with gratitude) from the 2006 double-issue of David Meltzer and Steve Dickison's jazz and poetry magazine Shuffle Boil, where they appear as appendages to Clark Coolidge's excellent piece on the Cecil Taylor Feel Trio box-set, 'Two T's for a Lovely T.' The issue in question appears to be currently out of print, though other issues are available from: http://www.spdbooks.org/Search/Default.aspx?SearchTerm=shuffle+boil.

> "Then he began to play, yet again, at the limit of the possible and the perceptible."

Daniel Berger, 'John Coltrane' (*Jazz Hot, August-September 1967*)

> "To show the listener almost immediately how he has changed the form of the piece, he plays with the very beginning line of the melody for almost two and a half minutes before he executes the bridge…Trane closes out the standard on the tenor saxophone, bellowing the hardest he can on its lowest notes - Ab and Bb - completely revolutionizing the *form* of the standard but keeping the *content* right there."

Bill Cole, *John Coltrane* [on 'Out of this World', Seattle]

> "[Of Coltrane and Sanders' collective soloing]: They both grab rhythmic lines and hold into them with great tenacity, constantly interchanging roles of accompanist and soloist; and near the end their glissando lines sound like sirens…This music is unquestionably at the ritual level in terms of its function."

Bill Cole, *John Coltrane*

Second Letter on Harmony

Sean Bonney // 11th November 2011

OK lets try again. Though bear in mind, this is gonna be naive as all hell. I mean, I haven't done the requisite study, of what harmony is and what it has been etc. What I can gather, from a careful reading of some of Lenin's *Notes on Hegel* - he's got something in there about the Pythagorean harmony of the spheres proposing a perfect cosmology, a hierarchy built on scalar realities that justifies social conditions on earth, where everybody is in their place, and nobody is able to question the beauty and perfection of these relationships. Straightforward. And for it to work, for all these justifications to hold true, a fictional body is essential: the *antichthon*, or counter-earth. Thus, at the limit, the gravitational pull that holds the entire system of hierarchical harmony

together is an untruth, but an untruth with the power to kill. But if this untruth is the site of justification and corporate (ie ritual) slaughter it's also the site, magnetic as all hell, of contention and repulsion, which can transgress its own limits until something quite different, namely, crime, or impossibility, appears. For Ernst Bloch, the revolution was the crossroads where the dead come to meet. For Lorca, music was the scream of dead generations - the language of the dead. But our system of harmony knows so well it contains its own negation that it has mummified it, and while we know we live within a criminal harmony, we also know we are held helplessly within it as fixed subjects, or rather as objects, even cadavers, of an alien music. But never mind, just as protest is useless only because it stays within the limits of the already known, so the hidden harmony is better than the obvious. Heraclitus. Music as a slicing through of harmonic hierarchies etc, poetic realities as counter-earths where we can propose a new stance in which we can see and act on what had previously been kept invisible etc. Ourselves, for one thing. That sounds just great, absolutely tip fucking top, until you remember that, equally, the harmony of the money fetish is that of the commodity fetish now become visible and dazzling to our eyes, ie we don't have any kind of monopoly on harmonic invisibility, and all of those occultist systems that some of us still love so much have always been bourgeois through and through. That is, its not a question of gentrification, but that the whole process has always started from the invisible spot where your feet are, tapping whatever fetishised rhythms right into the star encrusted ground. That famous green door with its sign "no admittance except on business". That is, however much we may claim that it is not protest, but a fast alteration in the structural scansion at the city's core, the hidden contours of our songs are still a nasty little rich kid fluttering his hecatombic chromosomes all over our collective history. Shit. Its why I still hate Mojo magazine. OK. Now lets get really obvious. Once, revolutions took their poetry from the past, now they have to get it from the future. We all know that. Famous and so on. In its contemporary form, the slogan Greek anarchists were using a couple of winters ago: we are smashing up the present because we come from the future. I love that, but really, it's all just so much mysticism: but if we can turn it inside out, on its head etc we'll find this, for example: "the repeated rhythmic figure, a screamed riff, pushed its insistence past music. It was hatred and frustration, secrecy and despair . . . . That stance spread like fire thru the cabarets and the joints of the black cities, so that the sound itself became a basis for thought, and the innovators searched for uglier modes". That's Amiri Baraka, a short story called "The Screamers" from 1965 or something like that. That is, metallic, musical screeches as systems of thought pushing away from, and through, the imposed limits of the conventional harmonic or social systems, thus clearing some ground from where we can offer counter-proposals. Slogans. The battle-cries of the dead. Tho, obviously, Pizza Express and the Poetry Cafe have done as much as is in their power to neutralise any truth content that might be lurking within that possibility. On September 30th 1965, Pharoah Sanders, McCoy Tyner, Donald Rafael Garrett, Jimmy Garrison, Elvin Jones and John Coltrane recorded the album *Live in Seattle*: it is, according to someone quoted on Wikipedia, *"not for those who prefer jazz as melodic background music"*. Its one of those examples of recorded music that still sounds absolutely present years after the fact, because it was one of the sonic receptacles of a revolutionary moment that was never realised: that is, it has become a Benjaminian monad, a cluster of still unused energies that still retain the chance of exploding into the present. Play it loud in the Walthamstow shopping mall and you'll see what I mean. Yeh yeh yeh. I'm thinking about a specific moment on the album, around thirteen minutes into "Evolution", when someone - I don't think its actually Coltrane - blows something through a horn that forces a dimensional time-loop through the already seismic constellations set up within the music's harmonic system, becoming a force that moves beyond any musical utterance, while still containing direct, clear communication at its centre: ie fire and death on your uptight ass. Among many other things, obviously. I guess Seattle, like anywhere else, is sealed up in its gentrification by now. But anyway, that horn sounds like a metal bone, a place where the dead and future generations meet up and are all on blue, electric fire. CLR James once said that "the violent conflicts of our age enable our practised vision to see into the very bones of previous revolutions more easily than before". Go figure. Due to its position in the Pacific Ring of Fire, Seattle is in a major earthquake zone. On November 30th 1999 Seattle WTO protests

included direct and rational attacks on, among other things, the Bank of America, Banana Republic, the Gap, Washington Mutual Bank, Starbucks, Planet Hollywood etc etc etc. "Cosmos". "Out of this World". "Body and Soul", you get what I mean. Two years later, in Genoa, the anarchist Carlo Giuliani got a police bullet in the centre of his face. Remember that name. Capital's untruth, its site of corporate slaughter - ie ritual slaughter - the silent frequency at the centre of its oh so gentle melodies. Ah, I can't see to finish this, I've had a lot of valium today. But anyway, to put it simply, the purpose of song is not only to raise the living standards of the working class, but to prevent the ruling class from living in the way that they have been. The violent conflicts of our age make it impossible to recollect musical emotions in tranquility, unless it is the kind of tranquility that makes clear the fierce shrill turmoil of the revolutionary movement striving for clarity and influence. A high metallic wire etc. The counter-earth rigged to such sonic stroboscopics that we, however temporarily, become the irruption into present time of the screams of the bones of history, tearing into the mind of the listener, unambiguously determining a new stance toward reality, a new ground outside of official harmony, from which to act. Or put it another way, next time some jazz fan tells you that late Coltrane is unlistenable, or something, punch em in the face. Seven times. More later.

John Coltrane – Selflessness / Live in Seattle

David Grundy // 20th December 2011

Coltrane in 1965 is what I keep coming back to. Now that all this stuff is on the you tube, I've been listening to it again, taking advantage of the potential to skip back and forward in a track, to listen and re-listen to particular second-long clips without having to juggle the fast-forward function on cassette or cd player – just with mouse clicks, to listen to a ten-minute or a ten-second section three times in a row...and all that jazz. McCoy Tyner's playing was so *thick* at this time, his chordal voicings approaching clusters in their density, and his rhythmic monotony a crucial part of the dialectic between stasis and continuance/momentum that gives his playing its peculiar quality. (This is similar, I suppose, to the trance states induced by particular kinds of tribal drumming, but you're not going to go into a trance here: the rhythm is too insistent and also too broken-up (thanks to elvin jones, "gretsch freak"[15]) – it doesn't have that swirling endlessness that makes alice coltrane's playing on, say, 'live in japan', ultimately boring (much as I love her harp-like-swirl and the use of the entire range of the keyboard, from lowest thud to highest tinkle - and tho' of course the boring and monotony as such are in some sense a crucial part of both pianist's playing styles, in a way i'm not sure i've yet quite grasped or come to terms with. (Tho' this might provide a clue:

> The venerable Curt Sachs may have put his finger on what is at issue here in *Rhythm and Tempo* (1953), when he discovered that "rhythm" itself, to misquote Freud, is a primeval word with antithetical senses. On the one hand, *rhuthmos* (Greek) denoted river or flow. On the other *rhythmus* (Latin) denoted blockage or dam. Sachs's point is not that Greeks and Romans had different cultural coordinates (to a large extent they did) but that coiled within rhythm itself was a certain undecidability - perhaps the very same undecidability that Derrida traced in the connotative oscillations of "tympan."
>
> John Mowitt, 'Percussion: Drumming, Beating, Striking' (Duke University Press, 2002), p.24))))

So there's this thing called 'selflessness' that coltrane recorded in '65 - it's from those studio sessions that were included on 'the major works of john coltrane', a 2cd box set impulse released in the 90s sometime, and which i remember listening to after borrowing it from my local library (who for some reason owned this (now probably out-of-print) thing alongside art blakey and stan

15 'Elvin Jones Gretsch Freak (Coltrane at the Half Note)' is the title of a poem from David Henderson's 1967 collection 'Felix of the Silent Forest', published by The Poets' Press.

getz and MJQ and courtney pine (they subsequently sold off all this stuff, no idea where it went: perhaps some old-people's home now possesses 'ascension', 'om', 'selflessness' and 'kulu se mama' on two shining discs and plays it as dinner music)). that was the first time i heard 'ascension', and 'selflessness' is a side-note compared to that…but 'side-note' is the wrong turn of phrase entirely, this is *vital* shit. i hate it when, say, allmusicguide does one of their fucking capsule reviews where they go, 'o, this is fine, but not the best place to start if this is your first time with player x', relegating most everything to some deferred future where you're an 'expert' and can therefore 'take it.' to that I'd say, *launch yourself in*, yeah? - of course you won't fucking understand it, I still don't, coltrane himself didn't, this is at the limits, it's hard to understand when you're up in that air... - but, ok, I heard 'expression' and 'ascension' early on, and i loved the passionate melodics of the opening heads ('ogunde' is based on a folk song, after all), and i didn't really *understand* pharoah sanders at all, and in fact i actively disliked him, but these things take time, go on with it, get on.

('selflessness' and 'live in seattle', which are the things i'm going to write about here, both feature donald rafael garrett on bass and clarinet, which is ostensibly the reason i'm considering them both together. garrett's not someone who was much heard from, or about, but val wilmer's 'as serious as your life' posits him as one of those crucial mentor figures during the mid-60s (giuseppi logan as another), whose contributions to the music and to the scene were certainly not proportional to their scant and inadequate documentation on record. (http://www.bardoworks.it/rafael.html has some further info.)

Donald Rafael Garrett in concert in Pisa, San Zeno abbey, 1983

// now let's get on, 'selflessness' opening with one of those melodies coltrane was writing around this time, ostensibly as serene or joyous up-cry, but which turn into a kind of desperate keening -as if one wished *too much* for that transcendent, solving/dissolving joy, for that synthesis, for the one final note that would provide the answer to the thousand fractured, cycling notes played through before: coltrane himself blowing the melody strong, sanders dipping and diving around him, with some wonderful watery, rattley flutter-tonguing.

& rafael garrett's arco bass insists on being taken as a third lead melody voice, blending with the horns, rather than partaking in the strummed and thrummed deep-end accompaniment that jimmy garrison, the coltrane quartet regular, would have provided. – to illustrate this, let's take the first ten minutes or so of 'evolution', from the 'live in seattle' recording, where Coltrane, Sanders, and Garrett (this time on bass clarinet) soar in imitative, roaring and meshing blasts and honks, while Garrison provides a solid rhythmic underpinning which seems to be going on its own separate box or booth, tethering down the 'out of this world' massed vocalised ecstasies of breath and air and metal, and essentially playing the flamenco-inflected bass solo which he then proceeds to deliver once the horns have stopped playing (this solo being a regular occurrence on Coltrane's live recordings). the absence of a drummer highlights just how 'free' the horns were capable of be(com)ing, of moving outside established licks in a flowing and melting and melding way: formally, one could describe this as 'rhapsodic' (in the sense that the term 'rhapsody' comes from the Greek 'rhapsōidos', which itself comes from the combination of 'rhaptein', to sew, stitch together, and 'aidein,' to sing). & jazz itself is, perhaps, ultimately a rhapsodic form, based on fragments, breaks, discontinuities, allusions and quotations – at the same time that, as in hip-hop, *'flow'* is central: propulsion, momentum, 'looking ahead'. nonetheless, garrison's desire to provide an established 'jazz' element does contrast with what the horns are doing (tho' to start off with his picked harmonics sound suitably 'exotic'); their flow reaches an extent to which it becomes *overwhelming,* dispensing with clock-checking time, with finishing a tune in ten minutes so that people can go and buy drinks, so that time itself becomes a felt, controllable thing, slowed down and speeded up at the musicians' will – for the ultimate example of that, you'd have to look at those mammoth extended pieces by the Cecil Taylor Unit, where time itself stretches so much it almost seems to break, to fracture, to become meaningless.

well, now we're here, hell, let's just *listen* to the *whole* of 'evolution' – garrett's thin-reed wail on clarinet, notes bent, metallic melted to malleable shape-shift, transitioning into sanders' shronking and then that unbearably beautiful way he ends his solos with a kind of desperate lyricism, keening up-slide to notes. again, that *thin-ness*, not the full-bodied-ness we think of when we think of free jazz – say, Brötzmann or Coltrane himself – not that *filling out* of the sound-space: yeah, Sanders can do that, does do that, but what I'm talking about here is his use of *fragility*, a sense of self un-stable and breaking under the pressure and force of riots and revolutions and that late 60s belief in cosmic transformation; yeah, fucking *eschatology,* if you like, material transformation – sound is material, isn't it, it could speak another reality into being and not simply be contained within the glass-cash-register chinking register of the night-club / the record-label / the hit-parade / the culture industry. Uh, yeah, if Sanders' multiphonic explosions of simultaneous multiple notes, overtones, difference tones intend to vibrate the space into the fullest potential possible, the most filled wholeness - "every kinda chord you can hear under the fucking sun" - his solos at this time end with, say, two successive notes, the stalled beginnings of a melody, as his saxophone moves into being a voice, trying to sing a song to itself but now having to flutter-tongue burble and cry in woundedness – and it's the *transition* here that gets me, in this say, thirty seconds of music which expands out beyond itself as a non-melodic ear-worm which encapsulates for me what Coltrane could have and was constantly trying and failing to do - that failure as *built into the condition of the music*, the condition of music itself, the condition of the world itself that would not change as was wished – a desire that cannot express itself in logic, barely even in illogic, gesturing towards the "possible world," yeah, a "community of risk," someone in some other context said that.[16]

16 See 'Certain Prose of the English Intelligencer' (Mountain Press, 2011).

that transition i mean is when sanders' solo is ending and suddenly, without warning on the audio version at least, coltrane, i think it is, comes out to the microphone and starts shouting, comes in roaring, 'OOOMMM' 'OORRRRHM' / 'OOOOOM' – 'OM', the primal word, the primal vocalised sound that sets the universe into being ("and god *said*, let there be light" - light and sound as one simultaneous flash, an explosion into being as the origin of the universe, some collective pre-evolutionary memory of the big bang) (see simon weil's fine article 'circling om' (http://www.allaboutjazz.com/php/article.php?id=14286)) - that roaring is *almost* a parody of some horror-movie 'black-magic' voodoo roar, but it transcends that, it's not transcendent, it's a bellow of roaring animal pain outside language, outside the formal language of music, outside song - is not speech, is not song – is both – those moments when coltrane would take the horn out of his mouth; as miles davis had advised, but not to stop playing, instead to give vent to that roar of exhilaration mixed anguish…

more transitions ('transition' the title of a record from this year, coltrane's music itself in transition, in creative mentor-exchange with the new thing saxophonists – sanders, shepp, carlos ward, ayler, john gilmore – for whom he was a talismanic figure, the leader and legitimiser of the movement – tho' he was equally influenced by their own side-slant attack; the 'classic quartet' splintering apart, that tension, between tyner's static rhythmix and the way his playing cannot *help* but ratchet up in intensity and depth and drive when placed in the same physical space as coltrane's boiling over; jones perhaps the prime force driving coltrane out into polyrhythmic ambiguity (that means, simultaneity), (*energy music*), himself frustrated (exhilarated?) by the wall of sound above and beyond him (reportedly throwing his drum-sticks at the wall at the end of 'ascension'); garrison the one hold-over, once the transition to that final quintet was accomplished – and yet, it's precisely that tension, that push-pull, that gives this music its power, and its *objective social content* – this the year of the watts riots– rip it up, split it up, all felt as personal upheaval, split and shatter into collectivity, that transition into new forms is *of course* painful, as any transition is, who knows where and what horror or beauty it could turn into, treading on thin ice, on air, tight rope tightened or loosening.)

so, transition, when coltrane stops shouting and the horns go triple over garrison's jazz moves, when they're wailing da-naaaaaaahhhhh-nuh, da-naaaaaaaaaah-nuh (I can't fucking 'transcribe this', as onomatopoeia or notation or whatever - it is un-fixable in that sense, less we develop the technology to contain it - and if we did that, then we'd be in some society where our understanding of what went beyond our current grain made life liveable, where wounded cry was not just some impoliteness to be ignored, ill-advised feeling-show)); when Tyner comes in under and it's like some floor locks into place beneath the horns, and then he solos, the relief of that, there's only so much reality or surreality or irreality you can endure... 7:08 into Tyner's solo, Garrison pluck-repeating single note, the music freezing into repeated locked-record-groove stasis, like stammer-stuckness, like Coltrane repeating the head to 'confirmation' twenty times in a row,[17] seeing it from its different angles, its different permutations, trying to reach every possible harmonic implication, to see the whole thing from all fucking angles - but different to that, I suppose, in that repetition is used in Tyner as a particular dramatic effect, whether gravity pillar-thick chord or as harp-like arpeggiated swirl with thick deep-end muscle - a space he moved into at this time, 1965, which never before or since was quite the same, had a lightness to it that this gravity-insistence - well, it's that, but at the same time it suggests that moment when everything's gonna split open - it never quite does - well, the horns come back in and thick cluster bash, is pentecost tongues to "set fire and death on whitey's ass" (if you believe amiri baraka...ok, this is not hate music – or maybe it *is* - "what we need is hatred. from it our ideas are born" (genet) – maybe it is, and maybe the critics were right (the london evening standard's jack massarik, & his infamous off-mic "torrents of hate" jibe when some coltrane was played on one of bbc radio 3's afternoon jazz snoozefests) – but if they were right, they were right in a strictly narrow sense that made them see that hatred as mere perversity, misanthropy, nihilism;

17 See Amiri Baraka, 'Black Music' (2010 reprint), p.70

any hatred that there is in the music would have to be inextricably linked to love, love and hate mingled, hate motivated by love – by which i mean that there has to be a sense of what *has to be done* (perhaps *hateful* things) if change is going to be more than just a willed-for moment of religious transcendence, reliant on the intervention of an on-high god we ceaselessly invoke with or without the hope that he will finally choose *now* to intervene – it is still an in invocation then, but an invocation to action, however direct or indirect, to change systems of oppression and exploitation, bigotry and misery. of course, coltrane has an odd relation to direct action, we see this in that awkward interview where frank kofsky tries desperately to make him into a post-malcolm marxist but only succeeds in getting him to talk about the need for universal peace...archie shepp, the disciple, no doubt encouraged him to raise the political ante, there were young black men in the clubs at which he played shouting 'black power! black power!', and maybe coltrane would have become more politicised if he'd lived until the 60s - but this is the same as the 'what would malcolm have done if he'd lived' argument that those on the left still engage in from time to time. (counter-facts, counter-histories are all very well, but they never happened, did they?)

oh, ok, back to 'selflessness' again, and finally: things move on out. i'm so used to thinking of sanders' playing as undergoing a trajectory, from wild yawping, coruscating, disturbing beauties with coltrane (and those couple of blue note dates, 'symphony for improvisers' and 'where is brooklyn' w/don cherry), and then, once coltrane dies and he becomes a leader in his own right, a more controlled use of the free playing as occasional effect, climax, or 'interlude', between burbling, mellow, melodic rambles over ethnicky grooves and repeating chords...but here sanders' playing is not just the squall or blast of sound i'd remembered it as; rather, he develops rather jauntily carnivalesque rhythms (in a very distant pre-echo of Sonny Rollins, circa 'Don't Stop the Carnival'), tho' this is done, it shd be noted, thru unusual and forceful tonguings or fingerings (or however it is he gets those effects).

dig too, on these recordings (on this and 'live in seattle'), how the two main horns, sanders and coltrane, sometimes seem to swap over, coltrane adopting sanders-esque howls, sanders sliding his own melodicisms alongside coltrane's prophet-like, authoritative pronouncements. i'm not using 'prophet' here as some un-thought-through metaphor: prophets (i'm thinking in the biblical sense here) use poeticised, metaphorical, fanciful language (i mean, 'revelations' is sci-fi before the category of sci-fi, right?) to call down the abuses and corruptions and degradations of current society; to predict the calamities that will befall the society if it does not change it ways (or have those ways *changed for it*); and to posit an alternative future in which that society is healed and mended and transformed. is coltrane not doing all three of those here, as far as the limits of his instrument and his epoch and his imagination will let him?

of this kind of *total engagement* there is still need.

Listening through Live in Seattle: A Conversation

Sean Bonney + David Grundy // London, 8th January 2012

[Pharoah Sanders begins his solo on 'Out of this World']

DG: It's not like that solo he did with the Jazz Composers' Orchestra ('Preview'), where it's just Bang-Bang-Bang. It's something to do with the way he articulates the notes, sliding up to them and then sliding down, away, again.

SB: Well, the claim in the liner notes is that he is just interested in the material sound. It's horrible, it's thin and…unwell.

DG: You associate him with having a very big sound, a wide sound, like Ayler. Coltrane too – though with Coltrane, here, you have those moments where he's fading away, where he steps away from the microphone and just repeats the same phrase five times – that kind of ghostly thing, voices fading out and in. The same on the Sanders solo – you have this weird sliding thing which just keeps repeating, the articulation slips in and out – it's getting quite sharp and then it fades away. It's traumatic, it's not celebratory….

SB: Not at all – this is what Nate Mackey discusses when he writes about Coltrane's solo on 'All Blues' in Stockholm: that it sounds like it's a scraping round the edge of the wound, or scraping round the edge of its sound.[18]

DG: I guess it's that vagueness, which is a weird thing – because you think of free jazz as being hard and sharp…

SB: Which very little of it actually is…Mackey quotes a poem of his which mentions 'Out of This World' ('Ohnedaruth's Day Begun'):

> the riff hits
> me like rain and like a leak in my
> throat it won't quit. No reins whoa
> this ghost I'm ridden by and again

The whole essay is really about possession, which is always a minefield to walk into…He talks about it as a forking of the voice: "The solo Coltrane plays on Miles' composition 'All Blues' has the quality of reaching for another voice, stretching the voice…It has that quality of *duende* that Lorca talks about as a tearing of the voice, a crippling of the voice that paradoxically is also enabling" – and he relates it to Legba, the voodoo "god of doorways, gateways, entrances, thresholds, crossroads, intersections. Legba is crippled, the limping god who nonetheless dances."

DG: I guess it's that point when things are just breaking apart, which is what happens in those weird transitions and shiftings…

SB: It's taking that reaching for another voice that Mackey talks about – the two voices of Coltrane and Sanders, and the split voice in their individual playing as well. Elvin Jones in an interview puts Pharoah Sanders down, says that he thought he was just ripping off Coltrane, which I think misses the point, because Pharoah Sanders is really doing what Mackey claims of Coltrane in the Stockholm recording.

DG: McCoy Tyner is weirdly solid on this, but it's kind of stuck.

SB: Well, we were talking about this before: one of the thing's that interesting about this particular record is that tension between the original quartet and everything else that's starting to happen.

DG: Which I guess fits in with all that stuff about breaking out of old forms and that being traumatic…And stuff like this where Tyner's just repeating figures – it's not repeated to get into a trance, it's not repeated to get into a trance state, it's more like a destabilisation.

SB: And even though it's a 'ballad' it's absolutely claustrophobic.

DG: You're maybe nodding your head slightly, but it's not the usual jazz foot-tapping. I mean, it's got a very clear, defined rhythm, especially when Tyner's playing, because he always punctuates on the beat, with his left hand. What do you think of the bits where he's not playing, where it's just the three horns floating around, where they don't have that grounding? Do you think it has to have that tension to work, formally?

DG: Well, it's difficult to say. Those sections – like the first ten minute of 'Evolution' – probably only work in the context of the other things happening – without them, they would just become tedious. It's a characteristic of all of the 60s Coltrane music – like when McCoy Tyner will break

18 Nathaniel Mackey, 'Cante Moro' (www.groovdigit.com/authors/mackey/cantemoro.html), also published in Waldman / Schelling (eds.), 'Disembodied Poetics' and Mackey, 'Paracritical Hinge'

away and it will just be Coltrane and Elvin doing a duo for god knows how long, and then Jimmy Garrison will come back in, and then McCoy Tyner will come back in, and that's a standard thing – so you've got a similar thing going on with all these horns playing, and maybe attempting to reach back into a more conventional jazz form.

DG: I guess the massed horns goes back to earlier New Orleans things…I mean, it's more explicit in Ayler…

SB: Well that's what [Amiri] Baraka always claims for collective improvisation, but we don't really know, because we don't have any records.

DG: But I guess that myth is necessary, in some way…And there *is* some pretty wild stuff that was recorded: Wilton Crawley, this clarinet player, does all these trick effects, sounds a bit like Dolphy or Braxton. Fess Williams, Mingus' uncle, too. Those older players did use much dirtier sounds, smears.

SB: And they probably did also play for hours, just improvising.

DG: Well, that's what happened at Minton's, with bebop.

SB: And the only reason those recordings are so short is because of the material possibilities of recording. It's like I find, say, 'Conquistador' or 'Unit Structures' easier to listen to that some of the more recent Cecil recordings, just because the necessity of keeping it down to twenty minutes maximum.

DG: Well, those one-hour-plus pieces do break out of the format, don't they. And I don't think that long-form Cecil Taylor is boring in the way that, say, 'Live in Japan' is boring.

SB: It's not boring, but it's hard…say, 'Erzulie Maketh Scent' – it's quite hard to sustain the concentration for an hour and a quarter.

DG: You get into a kind of trance state, though at certain points, where it all just washes over you, where you're registering certain details almost subconsciously… Whereas here it's more linear.

SB: With the horns back, and with Elvin's drums coming in, it's unease and paranoia still, but with this circular thing – it is out of this world, but in a vacuum or a limbo.

DG: It's like trying to break through to something, constantly reaching up and then being forced down, and then at the end, when it comes back to the melody, it's like that Rimbaud poem, 'Qu'est-ce pour nous, mon couer…'– you've had all these metaphors of natural disaster and upheaval and continents shifting as a metaphor for revolutionary change and collective transformation, and then it ends, "It's nothing. I'm here. I'm still here."

When I was first getting into late Coltrane, I always liked it when he comes back to the melody, after the freer improvisations – when he came to the melody at the end it felt he'd won through to it, that he'd struggled through. But maybe it's not that, maybe it's something more like defeat.

I wonder, actually, talking about melodies, about the way he played 'My Favorite Things' at every concert he did, all the way through, so that it constantly evolves and changes – I wonder why he felt need to use this show tune as the basis.

SB: Yeah, he's taking off from a conventional popular music form. Coltrane's not really a

composer is he, he's taking off from these show tunes – he's insisting that this music is available from a very mainstream tradition.

DG: Well, if we look at the track-listing here, 'Cosmos' is by Coltrane, 'Out of This World' is by Harold Arlen, and there's 'Body and Soul', there's a bass solo by Jimmy Garrison, 'Evolution' is by Coltrane, and 'Afro-Blue' is by Mongo Santamaria. And I guess he never played 'Giant Steps' apart from on that record, which is the peak of that kind of technical playing. I mean, loads of other people play it, but he never did – it's almost as if he didn't want something that was that purely technical, he wanted something with more sentiment.

Do you think there's any intention to make it sound like police sirens?

SB: Well, they probably didn't sit down beforehand and go, 'oh, let's play like police sirens'; but it can't not sound like that, can it, given where they're playing and who they are.

DG: That said, I think they were all a bit…out there, in some ways. Archie Shepp's the spokesman, the political one, but he's a bit atypical, out of all of them.

SB: Well, yeah, Ornette Coleman's not a materialist, is he, he's…esoteric – which Coltrane is too. In his book, Frank Kofsky keeps trying to get him to make political statements, which he just won't really do.

It's hard, because I've always listened to this and thought it sounded really nightmarish, but then wondered how much I'm being led by that passage in the sleeve notes, without having a musical vocabulary, without really being able to understand technically what they're doing with scales and harmonies.

DG: But I think the bits which are the most nightmarish are the bits which aren't to do with scales and harmony – it's the way a note is bent, or the way someone articulates a note in a way you can't notate, or makes a sound which there's no technical term for – it's just a cry...It's like that Baraka phrase, 'sliding away from the proposed.'

SB: This is more *trying* to slide away from the proposed – like when Pharaoh is making these sounds while that circular piano thing is still going on behind. It's almost as if it reaches some kind of lid and wants to get outside of it but can't, and just keeps getting pushed back, over and over again, slowly.

DG: It's almost a parody of that repeated thing, Tyner and Jones underneath. There's one bit in particular where they're repeating together on the beat, in unison, while Sanders is sliding away over the top.

SB: But it's also the same thing towards the end of that section, when Elvin's drums are getting more and more insistent but still just being knocked back.

DG: Maybe a problem with the late stuff is that Rashied Ali does open that space up, so there isn't that ground for them to…

SB: It doesn't have that tension – they have got to that ecstatic place that they want to – like a plateau – Alice's piano is doing the same rolling around as Ali's drums.

DG: And on 'Interstellar Space', where it's just Coltrane and Ali – there's not much to hold on to, is there. In 'Ascension', they're always refreshing themselves – it's Ensemble // Solo // Ensemble // Solo // Ensemble // Solo, and there is some kind of harmonic pattern – they're

freely improvising over a basic chordal, or modal pattern in the ensemble passages.

SB: There's still a head, of sorts, even if the head is this huge wall of sound, and it ends with the bass and drum solo, and back to the head, so it's still within a recognisable jazz structure, however far that is stretched.

DG: Does Baraka have anything to say about this tension between tension and structure, and trying to move out of it?

SB: I don't think he does, not really – his problem with the later Coltrane is that he's lost contact with the street, whatever that is: Baraka's concept of what the street is. Baraka listens to Coltrane and Archie Shepp, and he thinks they're getting to that, getting to something which Baraka imagined had been lost in jazz – but then, had it ever had that? The black music which connected with the street, which Baraka knew very well, was R&B – it's what he writes about in 'The Screamers', about the repeated riff – it's 'out of this world', as in that Mackey poem we mentioned earlier: the riff like rain, like a leak in my throat which won't quit.

DG: It's that same kind of repetition, that same kind of stuckness as with Coltrane, but the sense is that if you kept repeating it enough, something would happen, you'd break through into some other space.

SB: Yeah, and it has something to say about these notes, these ugly notes, like the ones that Pharoah plays, as forming a new ground for thought. But in 'Out of this World', it seems as though we're *not* having this new ground for thought; or we *are* having it, but these new thoughts are still impossible.

DG: And there's always the danger that you get through and you don't actually want them, don't want their consequences – which I guess is the contingency of any situation like that.

SB: Well that's where Baraka always uses the metaphor of killing – for him, Coltrane is murdering the popular song. For Baraka, these new modes of thoughts are achieved through violence – the feeling that you have to kill; or do this kind of violence to the symbolic, and to yourself. The constraints of the music become the constraints of the social situation, but also, with that circling and repeating, they become that social situation being pushed to its limits, to its contradictions, making apparent the basic claustrophobia and paranoia of 1960s America – and not just in terms of the racial situation.

DG: That contradiction's important because, if it was true that this was actually reaching people, it wouldn't have that contradiction, it would have actually broken through – and it's impossible to think of what it would be like to break through because it hasn't happened.

SB: Because historically, and still now, the only place that breakthrough can end, given the constraints, is in riot or a terrorist atrocity, and that just always closes everything down again: the constraints become sharper, more unavoidable and more cruel.

DG: You're trapped in that cycle – like in the Coltrane thing – the moment is never protracted, it will always come back down.

SB: And in 'The Screamers', the action in the story is that they go out in the street and they do riot.

DG: Yeah, they move out in a sort of procession – they move out of the confines of the club into the world…

SB: And then the cops beat them up. "They were strutting, and all their horns held very high, and they were only playing that one scary note." It's the riot that completes it: "ecstatic, completed, involved in a secret communal expression," and that's the secrecy that's aimed for, earlier on in the story. "Ecstatic, completed, involved in a secret communal expression. It would be the form of the sweetest revolution, to huckle-buck into the fallen capital, and let the oppressors lindy-hop out." But then the cops come in their paddy-wagons, so it gets closed down again, and they're forced to retreat, "onto the sidewalk, into the lobby, half-way up the stairs, then we all broke our different ways, to save whatever it was each of us thought he loved."

DG: In fact, when they go out, they're not even intending to riot, they're just marching out behind the musicians.

SB: They're just marching around and having a laugh, out in the street, but then the cops come and water-canon them, so they go and get their knives.

DG: It's all about control of the geographical space: the fact that they've moved out into the street from the club, from this enclosed space, this space which is supposed to be reserved for 'entertainment', kept out of sight. When the music comes out and up into the 'normal' world, the everyday world, it has to be clamped down on, because of the revolutionary potential which Baraka senses in it. Just as 'Dancing in the Streets' was taken as a coded song about rioting. The energies that inform the music and the act of violent revolt are potentially the same, and the one could release the other.

SB: "This stance spread like fire through the joints and the cabarets of the black cities, so that the sound itself became a basis for thought, and the innovators searched for uglier modes…The repeated rhythmic figure, a screamed riff, pushed in its insistence past music. It was hatred and frustration, secrecy and despair. It spurted out of the dipthong culture, and reinforced the black cults of emotion." What it's screaming for is some kind of unity, I suppose. "There was no compromise, no dreary sophistication, only the elegance of something that is too ugly to be described and is diluted only at the agent's peril." It's like Burroughs!

DG: 'Dipthong' is a gliding between two adjacent vowels – which would seem to be similar to what Pharoah Sanders was doing…It's interesting where Baraka talks about ugliness and obscenity, because jazz has always been obscene, in that sense. Like that Buddy Bolden song called 'Funky Butt', which is about being stinky and smelly – bumping and grinding…

SB: The tension in the whole history of popular music, and probably other forms of music as well, is that you have these periods of obscenity and ugliness which then become all slicked-up, and then something else comes along and breaks that again – in the history of rock 'n roll you've got rock becoming this slick thing like The Eagles, until punk comes along, and then punk also becomes this slick style.

DG: I wonder what the whole spiritual, hippy stuff did to that. We're talking about Coltrane being obscene, but there's also all that spiritual stuff, which then goes into Pharoah Sanders making peace and love music.

SB: Well this is also Baraka's interpretation of the music, and this is Baraka's problem with the late Coltrane, because he's not…there's lots of ugliness on this record, but those screams on 'Out of This World' aren't sexual at all, unlike the R & B screams Baraka's talking about. Whereas people like Archie Shepp, their playing definitely is sexual.

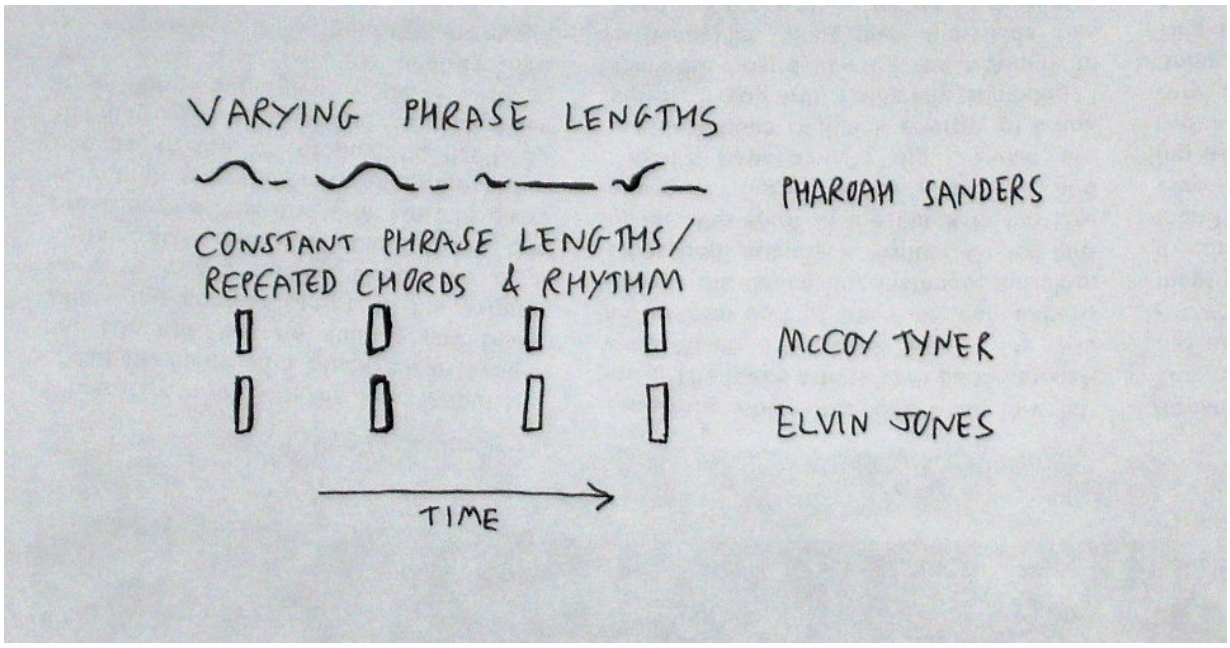
DG: Well, he's using the honk in a very different way. Ekkerhard Jost talks about his way of articulating notes as 'staccatoed legato' – it's sharp & smooth at the same time; it's very low-down.

SB: Pharoah Sanders did start in these kinds of bands, honking, bar-walking, and Coltrane played in them too. It always struck me that the whole jazz-rock fusion thing, this notion of fusing jazz and rock, had already been done in 60s music, in the sound of R & B and honking – that whole sensibility was pulled into jazz. Ornette is also coming out of that: they're all knowledgeable jazz players, but they've also got a woodshedding in R & B and rock 'n roll, which the earlier players obviously didn't.

DG: There's that Cecil Taylor record, 'New York City R & B.' I guess jazz-rock was moving more towards the floaty, ethereal side of things, rather than getting-down type music.

SB: Yeah, it's hippy music – the rock it was fusing with was Pink Floyd, people like that. But, getting back to 'Live in Seattle', this is doing the same thing here that Baraka's talking about in 'The Screamers'– the piano just keeps on repeating.

DG: But it's not exhilarating in the same way, it's not repeating till it reaches orgasm – here, it's just again and…again and…again. You know it's coming, you anticipate it, but you don't *want* it to happen again. And over that, you've got Pharoah Sanders finding about four different ways to articulate the same two notes. If it was a graph, you'd have the piano, bass, drums repeating, on the beat, with the same phrase lengths, and Sanders would be varying the lengths of the notes, the phrases – say, extending the first note, then, the next time, extending the second note.



I guess Baraka doesn't really try to write a jazz poem till the 70s.

SB: Well, you have things like 'The Bridge', which comes out in 'Preface to a 21-Volume Suicide Note.' It's only a jazz poem if you know what the bridge is – the bridge section in a song. "I have forgotten the head/ of where I am. Here at the bridge. 2/ bars, down the street, seeming/ to wrap themselves around my fingers."

DG: The simultaneity of it is interesting – in poetry, one word can mean three things at once. So, "Here at the bridge, two bars" –the most obvious meaning, in context, is a bar where you'd go to get drunk and to hear the music, but it could also be, say, a two-bar break, bar-lines, even prison bars. And the bridge itself is both a physical bridge and the bridge of the tune; the 'head' the head of the tune and also, in some vaguer sense, 'going out of one's head', losing one's mind, one's cool, one's mental grip on the situation. Which is also what happens to the musician, on the bridge of the tune, forgetting the head, being forced to improvise.

SB: And again, it's all about breaking out: "I can't see the bridge now, I've passed / it, its shadow, we drove through, headed out." "The changes are difficult, when / you hear them, & know they are all in you, the chords // of your disorder meddle with your would be disguises."

This is probably a better jazz poem than his later ones, which are less about the music itself than about the iconic being: 'AM/TRAK' is not a poem about Coltrane's music, it's a poem about his life.

DG: Which is why 'Comes through in the Call Hold' by Clark Coolidge is interesting, because he's not trying to approach the music through subject matter, but trying to improvise with the music.

SB: Here, as in 'The Bridge', the sound is resonating with the sound that's already inside you, and is something that can enable you to get out and move past. It's all really obvious shit, you know!

DG: It's also that thing of losing your self; whether, or how far, the music is 'self-expression'. People always criticize Coltrane for going on and on, like a boring drunk person at a bar talking about themselves – but it's not really showing off technique.

SB: Though he is working rationally through chords and things – he's not just sitting there like some kind of shaman, spreading all these kinds of cosmic truths in a moment of inspiration – that's not what's going on at all.

DG: No, you have to get at that stuff through technique.

SB: He's choosing the notes, and he's choosing the notes for a purpose, relating them to one another. Maybe that's as far as that approach can be pushed, which is why Pharoah Sanders has to go into pure sound. That's what Don Ayler claims as well, that it's no longer about notes, but about sounds and the connection between sounds. But those moments when the Ayler brothers are playing this kind of wall of sound are sandwiched between several minutes of notated, or at least composed music, as with Coltrane. 'Change has Come' has got that same kind of repeating thing as 'Out of this World', except it's getting faster and faster and faster until it does break out.

DG: Whereas Coltrane doesn't vary the tempo in that way – or, there are quite clearly delineated breaks and transitions where the change happens.

['Evolution' begins: three horns soloing over bass, no drums and piano. Towards the end of this section, several of the musicians put down their horns and start screaming 'Om'.]

SB: Again, this is all about reaching after an impossible ecstatic release, rather than achieving one…I always thought it was interesting to compare the way Coltrane voices the syllable 'Om' to, say, the way Allen Ginsberg does. At the riot in the Chicago, he starts chanting 'Om' as a way of calming every one down – like a true counter-revolutionary – but for Coltrane it's exactly the opposite, it's screaming – it's almost like the musical instruments have been scraping at the edges of something and then the musicians put the instruments down and just start screaming, and then what can they do after that? Here, it comes back down, it goes into a piano solo.

DG: I guess the reason Coltrane was working with all these younger or less well-known musicians – like Sanders, like Garrett – was that he didn't want to be the star of the band, taking all the solos – he wanted it to be more collective.

SB: And also getting away from the single voice – this is one solo, but it's not just one person soloing, there are three horns there, so it's gone beyond Mackey's split single voice.

DG: It's more like three separate voices as a single voice; or, one crowd made up of many voices, a swarm of diverse voices. It's moving beyond the idea of the solo as one person – you'd have to find a new name for what this is: collective improvisation, everyone soloing at once.

SB: But they're all playing on this similar line – they're overlapping, coming out of each other. It's a broken voice, but not a shattered voice – it's as if the voice is suddenly able to say several things at the same time.

DG: There are points where, say, two of them are overlapping and then there's one point here where they're all three of them overlapping. I guess, in terms of comparing it to a crowd situation or a riot or a march, there's a certain unifying purpose, like robbing a store, or marching towards Millbank…[19]

SB: Or that moment when you're no longer marching and you have made that break out of the systems that you've imposed on yourself, and you're suddenly standing around in the courtyard of Millbank singing 'build a bonfire' while the anarchists wave flags from the top of the building. But that's a moment of an *illusion* of breaking out, because of course suddenly you're just standing around, and it's great and everything, but you are just standing around, and nothing more can happen, even if you decide to go along and break all the windows and smash the place up – you're still stuck there, there's no further breaking out possible at that moment. Though I think everybody who was there felt that having been there gave them a sense of further possibility.

DG: And the improvised logic of it – when you're marching along and you spontaneously decide to go off the planned route – well, maybe a few anarchists secretly planned it, but the illusion is still that you move along, find a way of evading the police, dodge down side streets...Like in that David Henderson poem, 'Keep on Pushing', about the Harlem Riots in 1964: the song that he's referring to isn't jazz, it's by the Impressions, but it keeps threading its way through, like those notes which fade in and out which we were talking about earlier – you're moving around, you're mobile, you've got sets and forms you can pick up, it's not totally formless, but it's not pre-ordained.

SB: You're still in the structure, you're still in the city, the street system.

DG: You have those Frank O' Hara poems where he's walking around, like some kind of version of psychogeography; the David Henderson poems are a more politicised version of that, a more politicised flaneur.

19 Refers to the November 2010 protest against the education policies of the British Coalition government, at which a group moved off from the designated route to break into, and occupy, the Conservative Party headquarters at Millbank Tower.

SB: Whereas Baraka is usually still – in the early poems, he's inside somewhere, he's looking out of a window at something, and his streets are always deserted: like the street in 'Black Dada Nihilismus', where there are men who may or may not be loitering just outside the glow of the street lights, waiting for the chance to hack you to death, or the beginning of 'The System of Dante's Hell,' where he's sitting at his desk lacerating himself and just looking out of the window, again at this *deserted* city.

DG: It's not about collectivity, really, it's not in a big crowd – and even when he moves on from that and tries to say, 'come on, brothers, sisters', etc, it's abstracted, they're not in a place, they're in a fantasy version of Africa in his head.

SB: Which is the weakness of the later poems – even then, he's talking about a fictional community he wants, and which he can only speak *to*, he can't speak *from*. So he's forever there saying, 'Come on Africans, be beautiful', or he's saying, 'Organise yourselves into a revolutionary party', but the weakness of those poems is that he's standing outside of this and he's trying to tell some imaginary community what to do, this community that he longs for. But that's probably not quite true, actually – 'cos Baraka rejects those earlier poems because of their isolationism, some kind of individualistic anxiety. Maybe the problem with the later poems is to do with historical factors – the failures of the left in the United States etc. I mean, Baraka's performance on 'Fried Shoes' is great – "this is a communist poem" etc – especially in the context of all the Buddhist crap around Naropa.[20] But we can only watch it from the hindsight of the collapse of the left – which changes it. The destruction of community.

DG: What community is 'Live in Seattle' in?

SB: Is it even concerned with that, or is it just six people standing there and doing this, and then there are people in the audience?

DG: I guess Cecil Taylor is more concerned with the notion of group and ensemble than Coltrane is, and he explicitly theorizes it in his writing. There's that bit in 'Mumbo Jumbo' by Ishmael Reed where Moses misreads the book and says he's going to give a solo concert where no one's allowed to join in with whistles and handclaps, etc – Reed says that's the moment when the divide between performer and audience is set up. I don't know if Coltrane cares about the audience or wants to reach out in that way, or if he'd actually be displeased if they started waving tambourines and so on.

SB: This is probably one of the bits on the album where it gets closest to some ecstatic thing, but it doesn't quite reach it.

DG: It's still nightmarish, it sounds like someone screaming.

SB: But it's not so much like the earlier pieces, where it sounded like someone trying to break out of something, trying to articulate something and not being able to do it; here, it *is* being articulated, but it's not ecstatic, we're not all reaching up to the sun like in the late Albert Ayler piece…What physical space *is* this? What physical space is this suggesting or conjuring? It's a hellish thing…

DG: Like being in a black hole or void, when the ground opens up beneath your feet. It's that moment of uncertainty and transition when you move into the impossible, and you can't stay there: "the place is/ entirely musical. No person can live there."[21] Which is from a poem about

20 Refers to the film 'Fried Shoes, Cooked Diamonds' (1979), which contains footage of various poets, including Baraka, reading at the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics, Naropa Institute, Boulder, Colorado.

21 J.H. Prynne, Thoughts on the Esterhazy Court Uniform (Poems, Bloodaxe, 2005)

Haydn, rather than a poem about free jazz, but it's still applicable. Everything being musical sounds like Cage, actually…

SB: That notion that music is any sound that you might happen to hear. I hate that, I think it's bullshit.

DG: It's about a quality of attention: phenomenological, being in the world. It does aestheticize everything though – if, say, you treat a riot as a piece of music of theatre, you sell it short.

SB: Which is the mistake that these Voina people make.[22] They're either thinking of their whole lives as works of art, or they're dodging the actual responsibility of political activity but saying 'oh, we're just making art.'

DG: Which is like Norman O. Brown saying everything's poetry, or the Situationists saying we need to make everything poetry. It's eschatological, some kind of nirvana where everything dissipates…

SB: Absolutely, it's the same moment with different names: so, for people like the Situationists who'd grown up with the Surrealists, it's going to be poetry; for Allen Ginsberg, it's going to be Nirvana; for a revolutionary, it's going to be that moment of transformation into the collective.

DG: It's a kind of thinking that it's impossible not to have if you want any kind of change. Marxism is eschatological. But at the same time, total dissipation is not really something you'd want – which is why those moments when you're reaching out of the force fields are like the death drive or something – wanting to go back, wanting to re-enter the womb. I guess the idea is that you have to go into a new form, but how do you make that transition without everything just crumbling?

SB: …Without just *dying* – "no person can live there." If this continues forever it will kill us.

DG: "Did John's music kill him?" There's that poem by A.B. Spellman. There's also an article Spellman writes in 'Ebony', before the poem, I think, in which he says: "I remember wondering aloud to my friend Marion Brown, himself a brilliant saxophonist, if John's music could have killed him – the man, after all, did not smoke, drink, chase women, eat meat or get high for the last several years of his life – and a..." this bit is awful, you'll have to excuse the hipster sexism... "and a hip-looking, micro-miniskirted chick sitting next to me said, 'you know brother, I was just thinking the same thing. When I first went to hear him I couldn't believe what I heard. Like there are some things that are so personal and so threatening that you don't even say them to yourself. But Coltrane would give all that up and then he'd take it even deeper.' "[23]

"No person can live there" – no person can live 'out of this world', either.

SB: But also, equally, no person can live *here* – that's the argument of any revolutionary, that you're trying to get out because to be in is impossible. Like in 'Black Dada Nihilismus' – "find the West // a grey hideous space."

DG: Which I guess equates to the two poles in the music as well – on the one hand the repeated, insistent, claustrophobic element, but on the other bits like that clarinet solo, where it all opens up, but that's equally strangling, fearful. In the Rimbaud poem it's not, 'oh, it's all going to be great, we'll have a great revolution.'

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22 Voina is a Russian street/ performance art collective: http://en.free-voina.org/

23 A.B. Spellman, 'Revolution in Sound' (Ebony, August 1969)

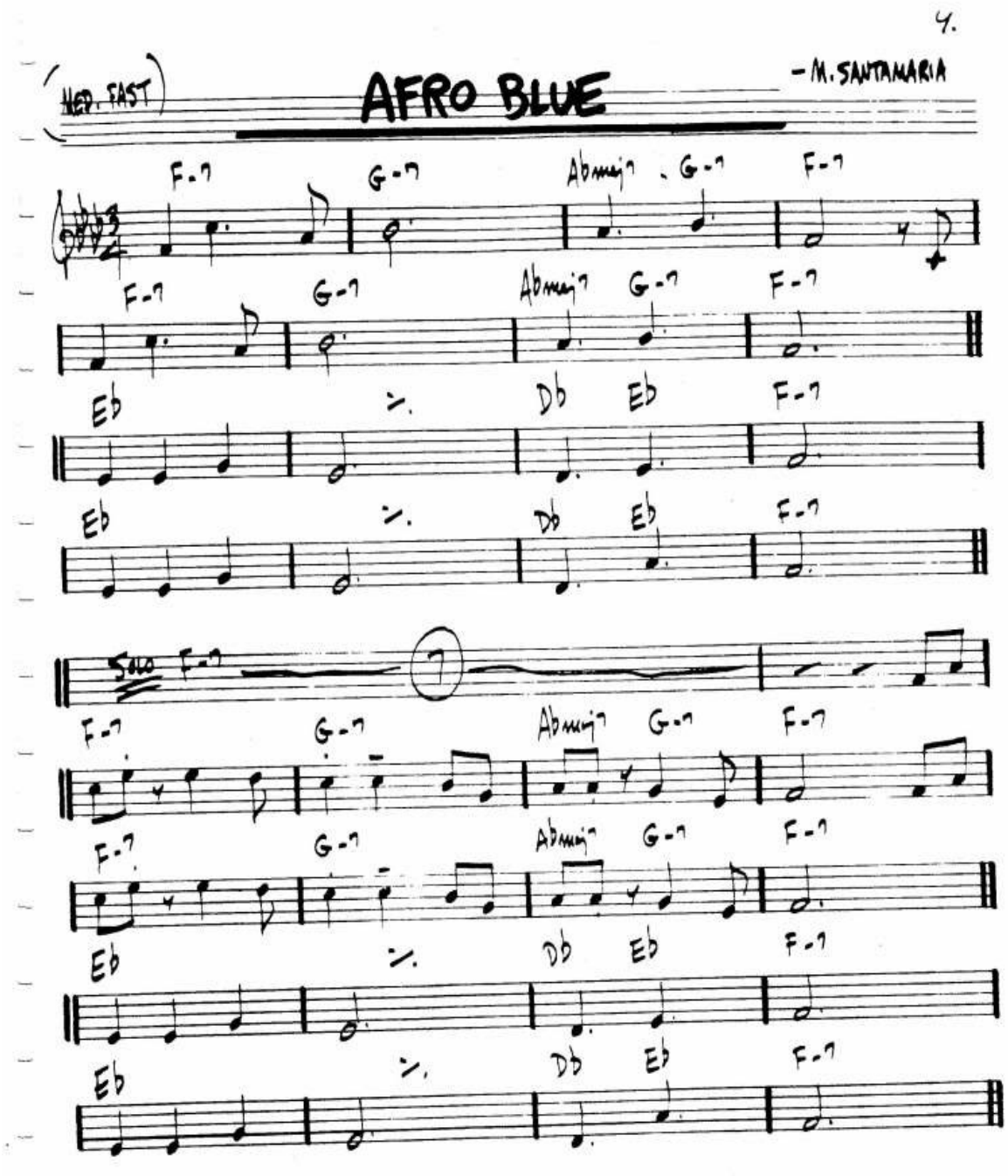
SB: No, it's, 'the revolution will kill and crush us all.' But it's still necessary. Diane Di Prima says, in the 'Revolutionary Letters': "for every revolutionary must at least will his own destruction / rooted as he is in the past he sets out to destroy."

I think it's interesting on this album as well that the collective solos which come at the end of every piece are really quiet – they're almost like the bed of the piece under this pounding from McCoy Tyner and Elvin Jones. Maybe that's something to do with the recording quality – but it makes it interesting, listening to the record, because it reverses what you would normally expect: the rhythm section are right in the foreground and the collective solo is this thing that's beneath it.

DG: The voices of the dead bubbling up.

SB: What Pasolini calls 'the magma.'

['Afro-Blue' begins]

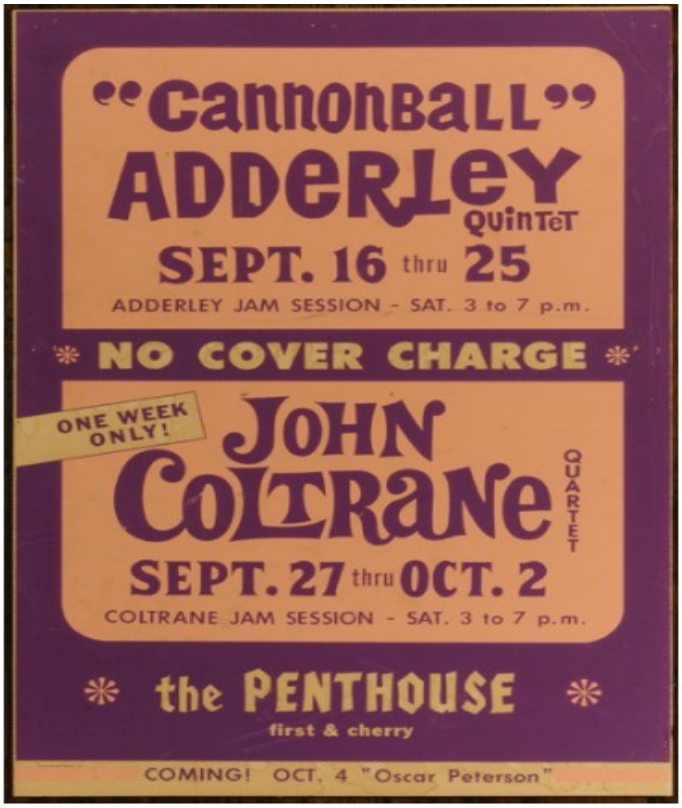


DG: This one has a totally different atmosphere to the rest of the album, at least at the start.

SB: It sounds quite tentative and chastened. Compare it to the version that opens up the 'Live at Birdland' album – there it's a huge, joyous, triumphant, confident statement, and here it's not that at all. I suppose this is the only tune on the album which comes from his standard repertoire.

DG: Mm. I suppose, before we end, we should say something about the specific context of the particular club and the city that Coltrane was performing in for the album. So, the Penthouse, Seattle: they had weekly live jazz radio programmes there. There's an article about the album in Seattle Music Weekly. "Veteran DJ and patron saint of Northwest jazz Jim Wilke was there that night. He reports that the Penthouse jazz club was crowded, but may not have been a sellout. Cannonball Adderley's appearance the week before had been a much bigger deal. 'To some people, Coltrane was still Miles' former tenor-sax player,' says Wilke."[24] Here's Wikipedia: "World War II brought many changes to Seattle, including a "flourishing" "vice scene downtown", where "booze, gambling and prostitution" were unchecked by "paid-off cops". The Showbox Ballroom was a major center for these activities, and was open twenty-four hours a day, geared towards active members of the military. Police officers also tolerated an after-hours jazz scene, based in Chinatown, Seattle and including most famously the Black and Tan Club. This period produced a few local performers of note, including Hollywood star Ray Charles…Seattle's local regulations changed in 1949, facilitating a shift from "private clubs" to "restaurant-lounge combinations" which "didn't support much in the line of creative nightlife" and even helped to drive out the city's jazz nightclub scene…The early 1960s saw Seattle become home to a local dance scene…a series of teen dances… Perhaps Seattle's most famous black musical export is Jimi Hendrix, who began performing in the city but didn't gain a major national or regional reputation until moving to England."[25]

SB: Well Seattle was also historically a very political town – the Wobblies, and all of that.



[Meanwhile, the record ends]

DG: And that's the end of the record.

SB: It just fades away. Great, isn't it.

DG: Do you have any juice?

Sean Bonney's Letter on Harmony was initially published on the blog http://abandonedbuildings.blogspot.com.

David Grundy's piece was initially published on the blog http://streamsofexpression.blogspot.com

(Left) Silkscreen poster advertising Coltrane's gig at the Penthouse

24 David Stoesz, 'Coltrane, Live at 45' (Seattle Music Weekly, Wednesday, Sep 29, 2010) http://www.seattleweekly.com/2010-09-29/music/coltrane-live-at-45/

25 Much of this article appears to be sourced from Clark Humphrey, 'Loser: The Real Seattle Story'

INTERVIEW: SCOTT THOMSON & SUSANNA HOOD of THE RENT

Open Ears Festival // Thursday, April 28th 2011 //
Coffee Culture Café, Kitchener, Ontario.

Interviewer – Ted Harms

Ted Harms (TH): So, tell me how you got here, your interests…

Scott Thomson (ST): I started playing music late. I wasn't conservatory- or university-trained as a musician. I started at twenty-five, and had already spent a couple years being involved in various ways with music: as a concert presenter, as a reviewer, radio broadcasting. I just felt like getting closer and closer to the music and eventually I started playing which seemed like the ultimate proximity.

TH: Has it always been trombone?

ST: I tried a couple of instruments. I tried to find the 'voice.' I started with, interestingly enough, higher pitched instruments – trumpet and clarinet – and then I started playing trombone and that was just right as it's about the same as my vocal range – maybe there's something to that, I'm not sure. I was interested primarily in improvisation when I started.

TH: Were you listening to improv music as a kid and young adult?

ST: I came to it relatively early on. I was probably nineteen when I started listening to Derek Bailey or Anthony Braxton or Evan Parker or whomever. I got into it really deeply, really quickly, which prompted this desire to get more involved. Doing a radio program at the University of

Guelph radio station – programming it week in week out, doing the research – was a great education. I was reading and listening as much as I could to figure out what the hell was going on. And soon after I started playing, I began meeting people with whom I could play. John Oswald was a very early collaborator.

TH: Was he in Guelph at the time?

ST: I was in Toronto at the time. I was spending a lot of time in Guelph but some time in Toronto as well and I started playing with John when I was living there. We continue to play as a duet and we often play with [percussionist] Germaine Liu. Along the way, I got involved in different kinds of music through other people's groups. Ken Aldcroft was an early collaborator in this regard. I started playing in his group, playing essentially jazz-based compositions in an open improvisation spirit. The most long-term groups I've been in are the duet with John/trio with Germaine, the Ken Aldcroft Convergence Ensemble, and Friendly Rich Marsella's The Lollipop People, which is essentially a pop group although unlike most pop groups. It's very interesting musically.

TH: It has a bit of a cabaret element to it, no?

ST: That's the word that gets applied to it but I'm never sure what that means. I'm not so good at or hung up on genre labels, but that term seems to mean something to a lot of people so I'm happy to go along with it. I call it two-beat dance step music – *oom pah*, basically – but with some country and some other stuff in there as well.

I also got involved as an organizer and founding board member of the Association of Improvising Musicians Toronto on which I served until early 2009. And through AIMToronto, we got to work with and produce concerts with Evan Parker, William Parker, Eddie Prévost, Joe McPhee, Lori Freedman, Michael Moore, Dylan van der Schyff, Anthony Braxton…it's a long list!

TH: That's a good list!

ST: And growing, at least in term of that organization's work. They just did a thing with Hamid Drake. The one with Anthony Braxton spawned a spin-off project, the AIMToronto Orchestra, which is now separate from AIMToronto organizationally. Kyle Brenders is the artistic director and I'm the administrative director. So, that group formed to do a project with Anthony Braxton that premiered at the Guelph Jazz Festival and was released on Spool Records. It's a seventeen-piece creative orchestra and just released its first studio record a couple weeks ago called *Year of the Boar* on Barnyard Records. My first recording under my name was also on Barnyard, duets and solos by myself and clarinetist Lori Freedman, who continues to be a great friend and a great collaborator – she and I are both based in Montreal now. Though we seemed to play more when I was living in Toronto – don't ask me to explain that one!

Anyway, at a certain point, I got really interested in the idea of repertoire, a body of composed work that I could play with a group to see what potential the material holds for developing a collective sound and discovering music through improvisations. The models are everywhere in the history of jazz, but there was a really strong one in Steve Lacy, an American soprano saxophone player and composer who started out playing traditional jazz and Dixieland in early fifties with the greats: Buck Clayton, Vic Dickinson, Pee Wee Russell, a bunch more. So, that was his education and then Cecil Taylor came up to him and asked, "Why are you playing this old music?" And all of a sudden he was playing in the first Cecil Taylor Unit! And then he was playing with Gil Evans with later with Carla Bley. In his own late-fifties groups, the music that he wanted to play was by Thelonious Monk. At that point, Lacy may have been composing things but he wasn't performing his compositions in public, as far as I know. What he was doing in public was

playing repertoire, and doing the research to really uncover what the Monk repertoire holds, and he made a conscious decision to focus on Monk for quite a few years. He recorded the first all-Monk record other than Monk's own bands, and played for six months in Monk's quartet – he became the fifth member of the quartet which he equated with getting his Master's degree. He then formed a quartet with Roswell Rudd, my teacher, to play only Monk every night. This was in the early sixties and they released the great record, *School Days,* which is recently reissued yet again on the Emanem label, who put it out first on vinyl with subsequent issues on Hat Hut…

TH: Sorry, you said Roswell Rudd was 'your teacher'. Have you had lessons from him?

ST: I studied with Roswell two summers ago at his home in the Catskill Mountains. It was great. He's a beautiful guy and so warm and so full of the stuff that I hold dear which is, well, to boil it down, musicality and kindness. There's lots of other stuff there but that's the main stuff.

So, Lacy and Roswell were working together in the early sixties playing Monk's music. Lots of people are playing Monk now and doing it extremely well and I didn't feel a pressing need to explore that repertoire and to present it in public. But when I started playing I was already a fan of Lacy's and I would go to hear him every chance I had which was difficult because he didn't often play in Southern Ontario. I'd drive to Buffalo – there was a club called the Calumet where he'd play with his trio almost every year. It was amazing, so beautiful.
Towards the end of his life – he died in 2004 – he played a solo concert at the Guelph Jazz Festival at the Guelph Youth Music Centre, which is a really nice venue for that. It was extraordinary. It was clear that he was dying, he was in pain. There's a record that has just come out on Intakt called *November*, which was his last solo concert, recorded in Switzerland. So, that was the November after the September when I heard him. It was kind of the same feeling. He was in such pain that every time he clenched his diaphragm, he'd let out a little grunt. And it was really quite moving to hear him play.

I just thought to myself, listening to this music – this beautiful music – who is going to play these pieces, who's going to play this incredible repertoire? So, that planted the seed. At the time, speaking of Thelonious Monk, I'd been driving to Kitchener/Waterloo to play with Kyle Brenders, who plays a bunch of reed instruments, but soprano sax is one of his principal horns, and Brandon Valdivia [on drums] and the three of us would get together and play Monk's music. We'd improvise collectively and play Monk tunes. And we tried doing it in public and it just didn't come off as I'd hoped. It's evidence of how tough that music is. I still work on it but I don't play it in public, at least for now anyway. But it was clear that the three of us had sympathetic interests, Kyle and myself in particular. So, after Kyle moved to Toronto in 2007, after he studied with Anthony Braxton at Wesleyan University, I approached him about playing Lacy repertoire, and he was really excited by that. I started transcribing tunes and I had a small folio of photocopies of Lacy original scores and so we used that as a basis and slowly we put together a band.

Brandon was the drummer and Wes Neal, an amazing bass player with whom I have played quite a bit in Ken Aldcroft's group, came on board. That was the beginning of The Rent. We played as a quartet in early 2008 and rehearsed a lot. Along the way I met Susanna Hood, who's a startling performer, incredible performer. She's a dancer, primarily, in terms of her training, but also an extraordinary vocalist and really unsung in Toronto in her ability to sing song material. I said, well, I want this woman in my band, I want her to sing and eventually to dance as a soloist in the band. I knew I was onto something when I got her aboard and we had a rehearsal and it was amazing – those are not easy songs to sing. Very wide interval leaps, tricky rhythmic things – she's great! All the reviews of the record consistently say how great she is & they're right.

What wasn't part of the plan – though I'm sure happy it worked out this way – is that, along the way, the two of us fell in love and eventually got married. So, it seemed like there was some

synergy going on because, of course, Lacy performed with his wife, Irene Aebi, and that partnership really sustained that musical activity throughout their nearly four-decade collaboration. Susanna and I are just getting started but we're inspired by the model of long-term collaboration to develop the work together.

The band did a couple of residencies at my venue in Toronto, Somewhere There. I say 'my' because I opened it in 2007, partly in order to sustain residencies of this nature wherein a musician or a band, based in Toronto, could get two months of weekly gigs. I found at the time that it was really easy to get a one-off gig in Toronto but really hard to keep anything going and have some sustained period of playing together so you could actually develop repertoire and a group sound. So, we wound up doing one residency in 2008 and then another at the end of 2009. Unfortunately, well… it worked out very well in the end, but, unfortunately, Brandon decided to go away to South America for the winter so I was left without a drummer for the second residency. We'd really developed a whole bunch of this stuff; at that point we probably had about twenty-five or thirty Lacy tunes in the book.

So, I called Nick Fraser, who's pretty much my favourite drummer in Canada right now, hoping he would consider it, and he said 'yes.' So, he did our residency and the band just took off musically. He's just such a swinging drummer, just so tasteful, and he can really drive the band. We recorded immediately after that residency at The Farm, Jean Martin's recording studio in Toronto and released the record on Ambiences Magnétiques, a Montreal-based record label run by my friend Joane Hétu. She has been very supportive of the project, was delighted that we were recording Lacy. And since then, we released that record in the middle of 2010, and along the way Susanna and I got married, and then we moved to Montreal, so now the band is based in two cities.

TH: Thank God for the 401 [the highway connecting Toronto and Montreal]!

ST: Thank God for the 401, for Via Rail, for whatever means of transportation allow us to get together, which I still try to do about once a month, often playing in Toronto at the Tranzac Club. But we get to play a couple of festivals, like this one, and we're playing at the Guelph Jazz Festival in the fall. At this point, I haven't counted lately, but there are probably thirty-five to forty Lacy tunes in the book. Moreover, like Lacy who, after he did that work with the Monk book, started writing his own music to be sung by his wife and played by his band, I've been writing my own music lately for Susanna to sing and The Rent to play. So, at this point, we have a handful of my songs in the book as well. And, it seems like, in time, it might turn into a band that plays my music instead of Lacy's music. But, for now, the Lacy music is still the core of the thing and I want to focus on that because it still needs and invites a lot of work. It's still very motivating. So, that's the history.

TH: Steve was very much pre-occupied with playing regularly. One reason he moved to Paris was so that he could play every night and not just a one-off gig here and there. It isn't just enough to get a band together and rehearse because everybody would like to get paid for the gig and playing it live does add an edge to it because you can feed off the audience and the venue.

ST: But the energy input and output is just completely different in our specific situation. Playing every night is virtually impossible now, but it's important to play when we can because the music lives in people's ears, not just in the band's ears.

TH: The thing about Lacy though, at least from what I've read, is that by the end it seemed everyone just wanted him to play Monk or to not bring the band. Are you worried that, in light of bringing in your own songs, that The Rent will be known as a Steve Lacy project?

ST: I'm not worried. If somebody really wants us to play Lacy music, at this point, I'm more than happy to do so. That may change, but I don't feel any conflict with that. First and foremost, I'll try to do what I think is right. But I also understand the economics of the situation. There are going to be some festivals and some promoters that want the Lacy repertoire. I can't really worry about that. That people want the band to play at all is, to me, the most important thing.

TH: Steve was concerned about his legacy and saying in interviews that he hoped that his songs live thirty or forty years after he's gone, that people are walking around humming Lacy tunes. Just like he had a hand in the Monk revival, or the Monk continuation, and he used Monk as a springboard for his own music.

ST: He was an incredibly prolific composer and he has so many more compositions than Thelonious Monk does. There's no questioning the quality and importance of the Monk canon but Lacy was steadfast and diligent about documenting his work. With the exception of Anthony Braxton, I can think of few contemporary jazz and creative musicians that have documented their work so intensively. It's interesting what you say about having the music live on in people's minds, ears, and hearts. There's a two-CD set called *Futurities* from the early eighties. It's a larger group playing a suite of songs that set poems by Robert Creeley. They called it *Futurities* because when they were doing the rehearsals and performances, someone suggested that these are the standards of the future – they're great and they're going to live on. He took that one step further and named the whole disc after that. And, appropriately enough, a couple of those tunes are in our book.

TH: You mentioned the Robert Creeley connection. Lacy had a long list of collaborators, and not just musically; there are the poets he worked with like Creeley, Brion Gysin, Lew Welch, etc. How does that inform The Rent? With Susanna involved, you're already getting the dance aspect, which again was what Lacy did, having written two or three ballets, but where are the future collaborations for the group?

ST: They are too numerous to name. I'm thinking of new ones all the time. The current collaborations are right there in front of us. Lacy was one of the most, if not the most, literary of jazz musicians. He truly believed and felt the inseparability of the arts, a 'Renaissance Man' sensibility, something he learned from Duke Ellington, among many other people. So, his pieces are dedicated not only to musicians, but also to painters, poets, writers, dancers. And I like to think I bring some of the same sensibility. I mean, part of the history that I didn't say before was that I have a couple of degrees in English Literature, I used to help edit a literary journal and I read poetry all the time. I'm deeply inspired by Lacy's hugely original approach to setting contemporary verse to music by letting the rhythm of the language dictate what the music is going to sound like. And so his treatment of Robert Creeley and the other single-poet projects he did are great. There is a bunch of suites – he started with the *Tao Suite*, where he set Lao Tzu, the Robert Creeley *Futurities*, and later on he set Blaga Dimitrova, the great Bulgarian poet, in a recording called *Vespers*, which is a beautiful project and we do two of those. There is also Taslima Nasrin; it was the last large-group project I saw Lacy do, which is called *The Cry*. She's a feminist poet of Indian descent who writes really heart-wrenching verse. And Gysin as you mentioned. The model is a trenchant one for me, and I'm setting poets and poetry I admire to music.

TH: What poets? Any that are contemporary?

ST: We lost P.K. Page last year and she's probably number one on my radar right now. Jan Zwicky is a superb poet, as well as a contemporary philosopher that people are going to read because she has such a great writerly voice. I've tried setting some of Don McKay's work to music but it's pretty complex, metrically. Some things live just fine on the page and they don't need to be touched. The mark of a good poem isn't whether or not I can set it to music! Thank God! As I was saying, it's not like the poetry is untouchable; I don't approach anything if it's too

precious but, in practical terms, some poetry doesn't want to be set to music. Some is musical enough as it is and doesn't need to be set.

P.K. Page's poetry, for example, a lot of it is danceable. And the connection between song and dance is a priority not only for Lacy but also for me. She's a painter, as well, and the interdisciplinary feeling is bred in the bone of her work.
But in terms of the interdisciplinary nature of the band, one thing that people don't know from just listening to the recording is Susanna's contribution as an improvising soloist as a dancer. It's really a key component of the band. It creates a fairly unique dynamic in terms of a band playing tunes. It is one thing to improvise with a dancer in a freely improvised context, but it's something else altogether to be working with this material, and it brings to bear some really interesting questions about what it means to dance on song material. What's the role of a dancing soloist? And these are questions that Susanna answers startlingly well, and that's something that you need to see to appreciate.

The Rent: Scott Thomson, Kyle Brenders, Nick Fraser, Wes Neal, Susanna Hood – 2010 (Photo: Jean Martin)

…as it happens, Susanna appears and joins us…

TH: So, Susanna, how do you get involved in the process?

Susanna Hood (SH): Well, I was trying to describe this the other night to somebody after our last show. I want things to stay on an intuitive level, but I would like to get to a more analytical approach to dancing on these songs and I'm starting to engage more actively in some of this research. If there's the head that is written that we're improvising on musically, what movement vocabulary specific to that song offers the jumping off points to improvise as a dancer? At this point, with most of the material, I haven't done that kind of work. So, I'm working on the basis of my experience singing the material, which is corporeal in and of itself – the music feels a certain way inside of me.

I'm also working from the content of the lyric and when I'm actually out there moving, in general, the way I think about sound and movement is very similar. I can say that I hear movement and I see sound – so, those synapses are firing in me all the time! And then when I'm out on the floor improvising, I listen in a different way when I'm moving…it's hard to describe. My whole body becomes a listening organ so some things I'm very conscious of hearing while, with other things, it's a quicker-than-thought response and I think different contributions to the improvisation pop out more specifically to me at different times. I'm listening to different people in the ensemble at different moments but I do have a special relationship to the rhythm section. I listen to Nick a lot – not in a way that I could say what he was doing or tell you exactly what Wes [The Rent's regular bassist] or Rob [Clutton, subbing in for Wes for this gig] is doing. I would say they're more in my bones. I relate to the horns in a different way, a more linear way; I find I'm either responding directly to them or not at all. But the rhythm section is always present. I'm working to manifest physically what I'm hearing but also making my own choices. In this way, I like thinking of myself as one of the horns, in a way.

TH: For the rehearsals, how much do you work up cues for the other musicians to say we're going into this section of that section of the tune, and then how much wiggle room is there? Because if you find a groove, you want to keep it going and hopefully everybody can get on the bus with you. But if there is a song structure, at times you might need to drop what you're doing to go back to the head or we're wrapping up.

ST: The rehearsal process is fundamentally one of understanding the material better. And that usually has to do simply with investigating the notated parts.

SH: Sometimes we do improvise together…

ST: …but we never work out cues. One of the principles that I'm working with is that the musicians are there because they make good choices. I wouldn't ask people to play if I didn't think they would make good choices. I have faith in their ability to organize the music well. So in that sense, it's really an improvising band; we improvise on, from, and through material and that happens at a couple different levels.

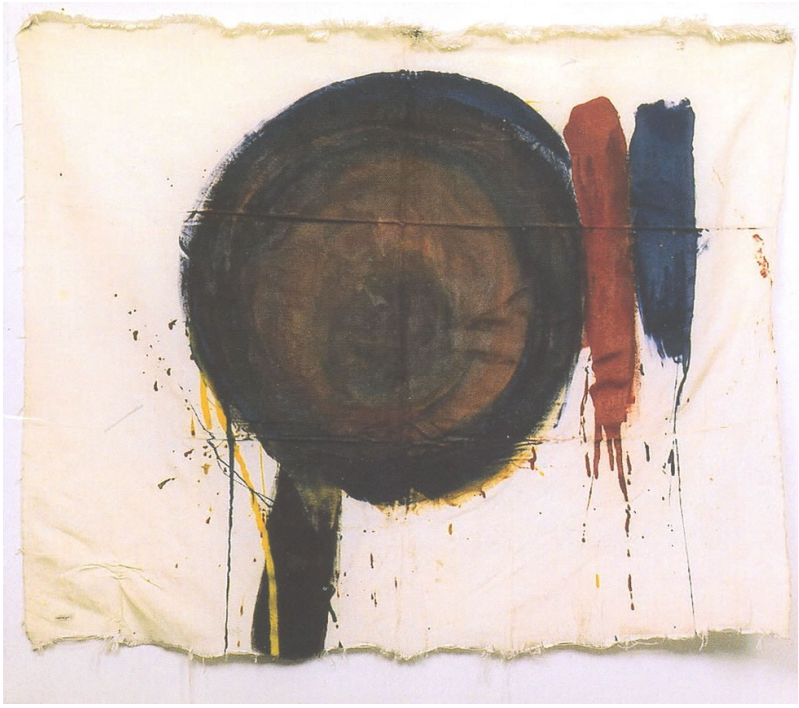
It happens not only on the levels of rhythm, harmony, pitch but also in response to lyrics and to movement in space. And the more we play together, the better that gets. For me, the best rehearsal is simply to play. I'd love to rehearse more but it's just not practical right now. I want to pay my musicians and the economics of the situation just don't make it practical. But I don't think the music is compromised because we have discovered so much in performance already and will continue to do so. There will be some great surprises on Saturday. Rest assured!

TH: This music is a high-wire act. It's not like going to NASCAR to watch just for the crashes but you do want that "on edge" aspect of it. You know that you're seeing and hearing something and it's never going to happen again. Even when you have the CD and people, unfortunately, might show up wanting you to play "The Mad Yak" just like you did on the CD because it's so great. And then they get there, but it's going to something different. The song is just the framework and then the band is filling in the gaps.

ST: I can't spend too much time and energy worrying about what people expect. Who knows what people want to hear? I don't think people know themselves what they want to hear until they hear it. For me, and I daresay for the whole band, the working process is a positive one because it involves a lot of risk and play. We have material to play with, on, and through and as we're doing that, individually and collectively, there's a chance that it could just grind to a halt or fall of a cliff. That's exciting to me. And most of the music I love functions this way. It just gives me the motivation to keep doing it, and also to write new material so that we have other contexts in

which to explore that group dynamic.

Before I forget, there was one other aspect of the interdisciplinary nature of the project that bears mention, the cover of our CD. It is resonant because it's a painting by our very close friend John Heward, a painter and a percussionist based in Montreal. John was a close friend of Lacy's. He and Irene would stay at John's studio when they were passing through. John and Lacy also did a duo recording together, and John's been a staunch supporter of ours through the whole project so it was natural not only to include his work on the cover, but also, when we make it work, to hang some of his work in the space where we're performing. We've done that at our CD release in Toronto and I'm hoping, in time, to be able do something more elaborate, which involves a kind of set design of some of John's paintings so that we can really make things vibrate together – the music, the dance, the poetry, and the painting. These things are all happening together and it's really exciting for me.



TH: I've got some Lacy quotes and I think we've touched on a lot of them already but Susanna, as well, I could just get your response to these quotes, and just how The Rent is either trying to embody them or use them as a jumping off point.
This is one is just what we were talking about: "The unity between all the arts as well as the infinite possibilities of collaborations between artists of different disciplines and different persuasions has long been apparent to many of us." Susanna, how does the art influence you, how does the rhythm section influence you…
SH: This project certainly, as Scott's saying, embodies a lot of those meetings specifically, but I would say, in general, that's how I'm inspired to work; a lot of my work outside of this context has been influenced by visual art. Almost every project I've ever started has its roots there. My father is a painter and maybe this influence comes from there. Certainly, when I first started making work, a lot of the principles of the time when people like John Cage collaborated with Merce Cunningham plus the various artists they worked with like Jasper Johns to Robert Rauschenberg were at the core of the way that I create. I call myself a dance artist because it's convenient and one needs a label and I'm lucky that the dance world seems pretty open to a fairly broad definition of what dance is. And, as I said, for me, sound-making and movement-making come very much from the same source and I have an intimate experience of that because my instrument is my body, a vehicle for both of those aspects of my work in general and this band in particular.

ST: There's only one thing I would add. I've talked about this in the context of the band, but in general, I made a conscious choice to be in the world of art-making because I get to meet and work with amazing people, the best people, and it doesn't matter if those people are painters or dancers or writers or musicians or dedicated fans. They're just really exciting and interesting people and the kind of people I want to populate my world with. So, it's a no-brainer not to close myself off to the influence of any particular discipline.

TH: Another quote, which we've touched on already: "What I'm searching for is a certain rapport between the piece and the playing, something that makes a unity between the structures and the playing. I'm seeking a music that unifies these different things. For me, composition and improvisation must be the same thing – it forms a whole. And since, for example, on *School Days* it was on the way towards that." With dance, you might have some steps or movement that you want to get into certain pieces. But how do you allow that to open doors as opposed to keeping things to a rough plan?

SH: I think it really comes down to listening. The most concrete part of my role – the thing that is the least changeable – is the lyric, is singing the song. And even there, every night is going to be different. I'm listening to the way the whole organism is functioning and that's what makes it interesting and alive and that influences how I perform. It wouldn't make any sense to shut off my ears and launch into movement or sound.

TH: But what if you find something that works? What if there's one time when you think "That's it! This is what I need to do."

SH: I haven't found that yet – fortunately or unfortunately! And generally, my experience in this band and anywhere else is that anytime I try to hold on to something or recreate something it's almost surely a recipe for disaster or it's not juicy anymore. That's not what it's about. It's a constant act of letting go. That's just my relationship to improvising in general.

TH: And that works into the next quote. The interviewer quotes somebody else: "The only value of a work of art is the value it gives to other people."

ST: Is that from an interview by Raymond Gervais?

TH: *[checks source]* Yes, it is.

ST: Raymond is a new friend in Montreal. He presented Lacy's first concert in Montreal. He's a very interesting man and I'm looking forward to getting to know him better. The quotation is from…

TH: … Giuseppe Chiari. Lacy's response is "Yes, of course. Sartre said the same thing. It means that once it's done, it's not yours anymore. It belongs to everyone and it's for them to do something or not notice."

ST: This is not my music. One could say this is Lacy's music but obviously it's not Lacy's music either if he says it belongs to the group, it belongs to the people; it lives in the ears of my bandmates and in the ears of the listeners.

TH: And as we were saying before, the audience, in music in general and especially in improvisation, the feedback you get, either emotionally or visually or mentally, is a component as well.

ST: It better be! Or why are you playing in public?

SH: It's palpable. The whole room is collaborating with what's going on. The music is all of our responsibility in that moment. And everybody in the room is contributing to that in different ways.

ST: And if it's on the level of language, so be it. If it's on the level of composition or written materials, so be it. If it's on the level of improvisation, so be it. Hopefully it's all those things at once. But the possibility is that it is any of those things, which just opens up the field.

YOUTUBE WATCH – BILLY HARPER

Harper was the debut recording artist for both the Black Saint and Soul Note labels and is, I guess, one of those cult figures among jazz fans who venerate a certain kind of muscular and soulful brand of post-bop that sprang up around the early '70s and that continues to be played by those of its practitioners still touring, still recording. It's comfortable within its own limits – the timbral vocabulary of post-Coltrane free jazz (extremes of register, techniques which we designate as 'honks' or 'squeaks', in our inadequate vocabulary) mixed with the harmonic contours and the (tempered) speed-freakery of post-bop – and yes, truth to be told, it's perhaps somewhat less adventurous than, say, the Miles Davis Quintet of the mid-60s, certainly, in formal terms (many of the pieces that will be played are very much 'blowing tunes'). But it can blow out the cobwebs and warm the cockles of the heart too, when it wants to, or when you want it to, and I've always had a soft spot for Harper's music, so here goes…

Max Roach Quintet – Italy, 1970
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yEgsOUhpOpU

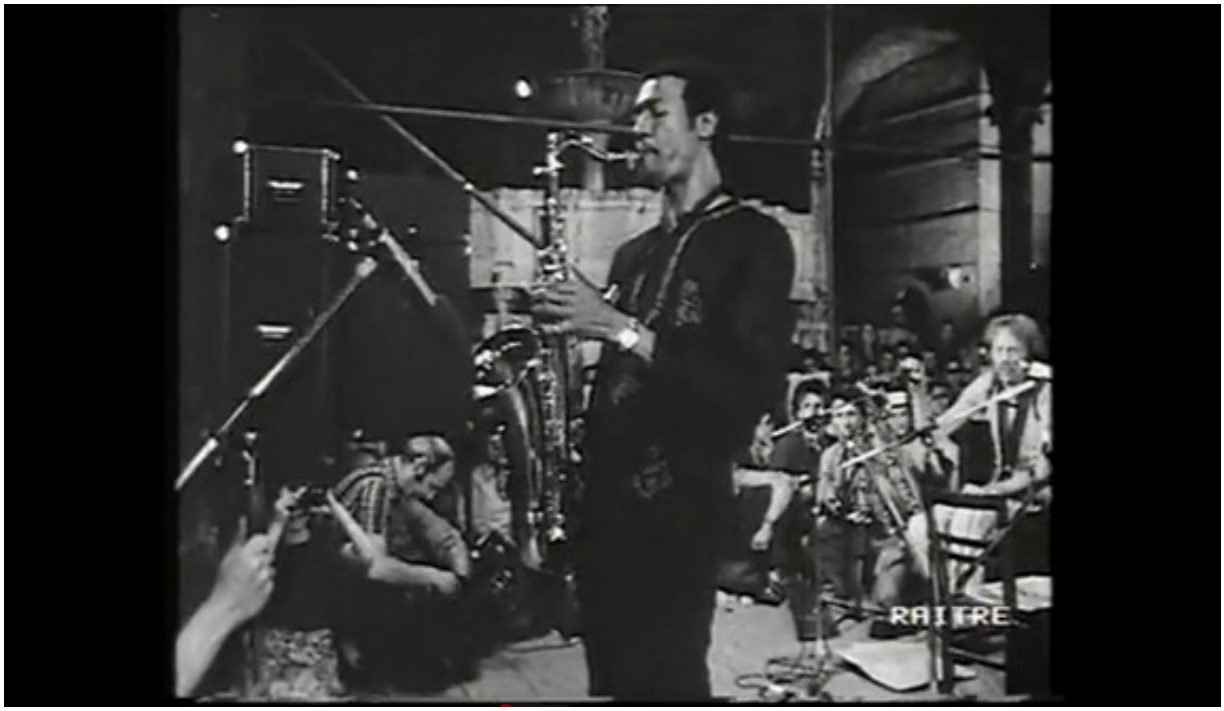
A number of fine saxophonists had passed through Roach's band during the 60s, including Eric Dolphy, Coleman Hawkins and Gary Bartz, so Harper was not exactly the best-known of the bunch. Added to the fact that this particular group never cut an album for a major label, their performances being represented on record by a couple of live dates from Tokyo and an album entitled 'Nommo', released in 1976, and one might call this both Roach and Harper's 'forgotten period'. It's worthy music, however, documented in a nicely (and seemingly genuinely) off-the-cuff manner, in an intimate setting and with the musicians joking around before they begin playing. Harper's stylings sound, admittedly, rather more 'straight-ahead' than we might expect of him – it would take another couple of years for him to fully develop his characteristic mix of a steely, hard-edged tone and strongly emotive, gospel-flavoured melodicism.

Lee Morgan Group – Live on 'Soul', 1972
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aB7eL5tXNUI

A session for Ellis Haizlip's TV show 'Soul', taped on January 28, 1972, three weeks before Morgan was killed, shot on-stage by an ex-girlfriend with a grudge. Horace Silver's band (featuring vocalist Andy Bey singing lyrics about the importance of healthy eating) shared the bill. The tune

is by bassist Jymie Merritt, from the 'Last Session' album, and dedicated to Angela Davis (the band are just launching into Morgan's signature tune, 'The Sidewinder', when the clip cuts out). Morgan is an interesting case: given the success of 'The Sidewinder', which started off a trend on Blue Note albums for opening boogaloo tracks intended to become similar hits (Wayne Shorter's 'Adam's Apple' being one of the better examples), he's perhaps remembered for the wrong reasons. Fine though 'The Sidewinder' is (the record as a whole, and not just that track), the rest of his output contained more variety and subtlety than some might give him credit for. Who knows what might have happened had he not been killed when he was; but, at the start of the seventies, he had started to pursue a new and interesting direction as a leader, absorbing influences from modal and free jazz and fusion to create something more self-consciously 'advanced' than his previous work. The results have something in common with some other, rather overlooked albums made by trumpeters at around the same time – Donald Byrd's 'Kofi', Wood Shaw's 'Blackstone Legacy', and Freddie Hubbard's 'Red Clay' – lengthy tracks, occasional use of electric instruments, a sound somewhere between the Miles Davis 'Second Great Quintet' and the early, lengthy fusion sides laid down by Davis and the initial Weather Report line-up. This shouldn't suggest that the musicians were 'selling out'; on the contrary. Morgan had surely had enough of responding to commercial pressures after being leaned on by Blue Note to reproduce the success of 'The Sidewinder'; probably, he felt that he had to branch out in a new direction, and fusion's electric instruments and lengthy tracks were, at that stage, experimental approaches, rather than the bloated, pretentious, or bland noodling that would soon be spawned in abundance. Of course, Morgan's music of this period was never really 'fusion' as such – for one thing, and this is most germane to the subject of this survey, Harper's playing was never going to fit too easily into that sort of context, having developed from his days with Roach into a much more arresting and individualistic pattern – guttural honks alternating with blazing held upper-notes, coupled to a sense of space and expansive melodicism. One never feels that this was the kind of playing that could be restricted very easily to a one-minute slot: when Harper starts playing, he has plenty to say and he will say it all. Given that fusion's bloated expansion was what would lead to the gradual demise in marketable creative jazz, it's perhaps ironic, then, that this music touches on it – but then again, as we'll see in the next clip, there was plenty of creative jazz at the time that was taking inspiration and even compositional material from the rock sphere without subsuming itself to dullness, stupidity, or pretension – and, in fact, using it to be *more* experimental.

Gil Evans Orchestra
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ihDjcW9u6y4



Harper excels as a big-band player, his big, tough, Texas sound well able to soar out over large groups, as on his own, vocally-enhanced 'Capra Black' (carrying on from his contributions to Max Roach's spirituals record, 'Lift Every Voice'), or from the ranks of big-bands led by Thad Jones/Mel Lewis, Charles Tolliver, and, here, Gil Evans. The Evans big-band of the '70s and '80s always struck me as providing a rather different slant on 'jazz-rock' to most other groups – whether this be the prog groups from the classical/pop side of the fence, or the jazz musicians trying to get into the electric groove, with increasingly smooth, predictable and anodyne results as the '70s wore on. Though an electric rhythm section provided a fizzing, street-smart base, the line-up was mostly the standard acoustic fare of the traditional big-band – spiced up, of course, with Evans' feel and flare for unusual instrumental combinations and solo spots (such as Howard Johnson's tuba feature on Jimi Hendrix' 'Voodoo Child'). One might well say that the music was less 'cool', more 'hot' than the more famous collaborations with Miles Davis – there is a times an almost Mingus-like feel, of celebration and urgency and sanctified passion, for which Evans relied heavily on the burning avant-soul stylings of Harper and his successor, George Adams, as well as a pre-sell-out David Sanborn. Harper's compositions provided further fuel and spark for such directions, ensuring that the music was as much soaked in the blues and 'spiritual jazz' as in Hendrix and quasi-rock (though, of course, they were all part of an African-American continuum of expression, for which Evans, a white man who gave the appearance of a lugubrious dandy, had great respect and appreciation). What I love about this big-band, apart from the instrumental textures (which, admittedly, can seem a bit brash and un-subtle, even melodramatic, in comparison to 'Sketches of Spain' or 'The Individualism of Gil Evans', though they avoid the TV-movie vibe of, say, Lalo Schifrin and Quincy Jones), and apart from the *driving* soloing of Harper in particular, is how loose it all feels, that combination of spontaneity and even raggedness with complexity and tight scoring shared with the Sun Ra Arkestra. That spontaneity is enhanced by the format here, as an Italian TV broadcast catches the musicians arriving back-stage before we see them in concert.

Thad Jones/ Mel Lewis Orchestra – Suite for Pops, Part 1
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vbyFHre_nPU

Continuing the big-band vibe in a straighter bag; I've never been an enormous fan of the Thad Jones/Mel Lewis group, though they were big jazz stars, along with Francy Boland and Don Ellis, in a now rather forgotten vein: not exactly 'retro', often spiced-up with trendy elements like sitars or pop covers, but also rather anachronistic in the increasingly electrified world that had swamped acoustic jazz in the wake of 'Bitches' Brew' et al. What these groups were was unerringly professional, a far cry from the prima-donna antics of overpaid white rock stars; their music

swung, and, sometimes, could be strong and moving – particularly when someone like Harper showed up to take the band out of the pocket. It's not quite the same as Gato Barbieri wailing over Oliver Nelson's arrangements – Harper is set further back than that, as one in a line-up, rather than as star soloist, front-and-centre – but there is an interesting frisson which leads the group to greater heights, rather than seeming ill-matched. More evidence of Harper's work here would be welcome, though there doesn't seem to be too much documentation, in video or on record.

Billy Harper Quintet Live 1995
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=051oYvUStB0

We have to skip forward a good twenty-years now – not that Harper dropped out during the '80s, though he wasn't heard much on record, not beginning to regularly release albums again until 1989's 'Destiny is Yours' (which introduced his regular group of Eddie Henderson, Francesca Tanksley, Clarence Seay and Newman Taylor Baker.) 1995 was the year he released one of his very best albums, the two-bass hit 'Somalia', and this is somewhat in that vein – extended, meaty tunes played with unwavering resolve, music that says, take me or leave me, this is what it is and this is what I'm going to be doing. No-nonsense, yes, but with a single-mindedness and sense of investment too often lacking in the standards and quasi-hip originals of rather too many acoustic jazz groups both then and now.

Billy Harper Quintet + Choir – Poland, 2007
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BmWx_srHHvI

More than just a simple revisit of 'Capra Black' territory, this performance (the entirety of which can be seen on a DVD which I reviewed in this magazine a few years back) ranks among my favourite Harper moments. Working once more with that regular quintet (minus Henderson), Harper's extrapolations on gospelized themes are given immense, soaring punch by the addition of a Polish choir and extra brass instruments, the church-service elements that always characterise his music really brought to the fore here, without falling into overt and creaking solemnity or sentimentality (as Ellington's 'Sacred Concerts' occasionally did). 'Cry of Hunger' hasn't sounded as magisterial since its recording debut, while this piece, 'Light Within', remains exhilarating and joyful precisely because its joy is tempered by a sense of – I don't know, struggle? Pathos?

Charles Tolliver Big Band – Mourning Variations (Vienne 2007)
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S7b9VyYAeD8

Tolliver's arrangement of a spiritual, commissioned in the '70s, a time when, post-Jackie McLean, he was flying high, co-running the now-cult label, Strata-East, recording fine big band music with Music Inc. and with smaller groups. A hiatus lasting through much of the '80s and '90s finally ended with the return of that big band, playing many of the same compositions, and packed full of fine players, some of whom had been in the earlier ensemble as well. To get an idea of the energy and perhaps unsubtle, but nonetheless utterly thrilling directness of the music, watch Tolliver's conducting here – physically accenting each ensemble punch, something in the style of Harper's own 'Cry of Hunger' (at least, in one version of the tune recorded live in the early 80s, where enormous pauses between each melodic stab add huge weight and tension, space or silence building up, expanding, and finally bursting into loud sound) – watch the drummer's face as he takes his cue – ecstasy and seriousness mingling with just the sheer pleasure of it all. Harper is his steely self, rising to altissimo wails at the end of his solo, while Chris Albert takes things into the

gospellised bop territory that Tolliver excelled at in the 70s. In both this and Harper's big-band work, we hear the ensemble as adding heft and grandeur to things (the template perhaps set by Coltrane's 'Africa/Brass' in the early 60s); while some moments sound like they could have come from a small-group bop record, interjections from the whole band during a solo, spurring the soloist on and punctuating their discourse, and sometimes trickily-written out themes, ensure that the music's orchestral dimension remains central. In terms of mood, we vary from confident affirmation; perhaps the most interesting pieces are the ballads, as in the arrangement of 'Round Midnight', also to be found on youtube, where what can seem a soporific and over-familiar theme is turned into, respectively, music for a movie title-sequence (complete with delicious swooping saxophones), a stark contrast between the near-bombast of the ensemble arrangement and the melancholy starkness of Tolliver's own solo declamation of the familiar melody. Here (I suppose one would call this a ballad, though Tolliver's repertoire refuses any simple, binary division between slow, romantic love songs and high-tempo bop fire-crackers), the spiritual starts as muted woodwind mourning, ending up as something ecsatically open, still sorrowful but in an affirmative manner (the 'blutopia' of the blues impulse), the exhilaration of 'letting it all hang out', all-out emotion staying just the right side of dignity and grandeur (I can use those words, right?).

The Cookers – The Core, 2008
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0yNHlHoY1T8

Something of a super-group assembled by young trumpeter David Weiss (who also appears alongside Harper in the Tolliver big band clip): Kirk Lightsey (probably best known for playing in The Leaders with Arthur Blythe and Lester Bowie), Cecil McBee, Billy Hart, Eddie Henderson and Harper. Imagine this line-up in the '70s and they would have packed a real punch – and, of course, they still do, though expectation perhaps makes the combination seem less special than it might otherwise (a bit like those reunions of old rock star 'greats'). But it's still more than exercise in simple nostalgia, and here we get to see them stretch out for nearly half-an-hour on a single tune, with ample solo space for each musician. Never sniff at a Cecil McBee bass solo! Or the way the group ratchet things up as that solo ends, with the entry of the drums, with the ferocious growl that sets Eddie Henderson's solo on track, with Lightsey's equally ferocious comping, Handy's wailing…It approaches bombast, I guess, but try putting this on – loud! – and telling me it's not something...It'll wake you up, that's for sure…

CD REVIEWS INDEX

"*Criticism is always the easiest art.*"
- Cornelius Cardew

<u>Historical/ Re-issues</u>

Reviewers: *David Grundy, Ted Harms, Sandy Kindness*

ANOTHER TIMBRE: SILENCE AND AFTER 1

CHRIS COGBURN / BONNIE JONES / BHOB RAINEY – *ARENA LADRIDOS*

Label: Another Timbre
Release Date: November 2010
Tracklist: Govalle; Marfa
Personnel: Chris Cogburn: percussion; Bonnie Jones: electronics; Bhob Rainey: soprano saxophone
Additional Information: Recorded in Austin and Marfa, Texas, April 2010

> "At the same time, there is silence, a silence which is not an absence of sound but which is the object of a positive sensation, more positive than that of sound. Noises, if there are any, only reach me after crossing this silence."

There is, often, a gorgeous sense of calm about this record, not a loss of focus or laziness but a willingness to let little happen, for however long it takes, for however long it needs; not imposing, not leading, following the sounds as and when they ask to be heard or made. Though it's by no means a particularly silent listen, one feels that the lines quoted above, from Simone Weil, do somehow fit: each sound is filtered through a corresponding quietness, each sound is coaxed out of silence and falls back into it, like a wavering fleck of light suddenly emerging, then disappearing back into shadow again. This shouldn't imply the monastic discipline or asceticism that Weil might have at the back of her mind; rather, the sense is of something relaxed, not casual exactly, but unworried about grabbing attention or creating something that screams 'I am important! Listen to

me now!' As time passes, not much might have happened, and so what? Spaces are filled enough, more than enough, so much of the time, and a genuine contemplative quietness can do no harm. To some, this may come across as aimlessness; and, true, compared to the composed or partially-composed work in this area, there is less obvious 'focus', less of a clear structural framework. But for me, that's quite an attractive respite; listening to 'Arena Ladridos' allows one, free of overt structural considerations, to quite clearly imagine oneself into a physical space, to imagine the musicians sitting there, in front, perhaps, of a small audience, inhabiting the small room for forty-five minutes, sometimes filling it with sound, sometimes easing back and letting the room itself have a say in matters. There's something about the logic with which things unfold that means this could be nothing other than a concert recording: the presence of hesitancies, even meandering moments – the imperfections which prevent things from having a surface's that's too shiny, that's 'just-so'.

The first piece begins with tinkling bells, maybe just jiggled or shaken or knocked slightly with the tips of fingers, electronic crackle, and wisps of breath amplified/modified through saxophone bell and keys. My somewhat whimsical way of listening to this opening minute or so is to imagine that the three musicians are 'introducing' themselves, in overlapping fashion. Here is percussion; here is electronics; here is a saxophone. But the separation is really less clear-cut: though it's normally fairly obvious which sounds are percussion, the concentration on vague or merging tones from electronics and saxophone tend to create a grey area in which anyone could be creating any particular sound. At one point, the sound of a passing car seems to sub for Jones' electronics, replacing her drone tone with something remarkably similar. It's not all subtlety and hush, though: Jones' playing is, at times, quite deliberately harsh, generating sudden beeps that sound like a warning signal, an electrical malfunction, an alarm, and Cogburn's playing can be quite assertive, though he generally treats his drums as a surface to rub and scrape rather than one to strike and beat.

Indeed, there's quite a variety of incident on display: there are a large number of events, however unhurried the pace, and one never feels that the players are holding anything back, practicing an overly studied reticence or aloofness; instead, they are using *patience* as a general method of working, and the results are to make gestures which elsewhere might seem small or un-dramatic (a surging consonance of crescendo – a half-choked wail rising and falling on intake and outtake of breath – the sound of almost conventional rhythms from drums) possess intense power and concentration. Equally, though, things could go the other way, all three musicians temporarily silent, while a dog barks, or a car distantly passes – where a sine tone sounds like a sucking in of breath or a tiny, suppressed whisper – sounds, sometimes, that seem to come from outside human agency, like those eerie screeches and rumbles one hears from on high in railways stations and near building sites. This or a swelling drama, a concord/concourse, not rising to shared climax, surging only to swell down again. Matthew Horne, in his review of the album for 'Tiny Mix Tapes', describes the process as a group aesthetic in which all three players hover around a particular area for several minutes, attempting, and failing to break out, before eventually moving away in quite dramatic form: "The trio quickly settles into what would be called a restrained 'attractor,' i.e., a stable point or cycle at which the variables hover around (up to minor perturbation). Just over four minutes in, the group attempt to dislodge the muted aesthetic, with each crescendoing simultaneously. But this perturbation is weak, resulting in a regression back to the original, minimal attractor. It isn't until around 12 minutes that the group breaks free of their initial state: Rainey's sax oscillates wildly while Jones introduces an intrusive feedback more akin to [Toshimaru] Nakamura's troublesome no-input mixer, thus disturbing their environment enough to evolve the system." It's a nice formal encapsulation of a music that seems to avoid formal systems in the moment of listening, of unfolding: but perhaps it belies the actual lack of overt tension (so often a driver of improvised music) that I feel when playing the CD back; despite abruptions from Jones or from Cogburn, despite intricacies of flow and of incident, the overall impression is unforced, unhurried, unharried. Here, as Weil puts it, noises have to cross the silence before they can be heard. **(DG)**

RHODRI DAVIES / LEE PATTERSON / DAVID TOOP – *WUNDERKAMMERN*

Label: another timbre
Release Date: November 2010
Tracklist: A Salamander lives in the fire, which imparts to it a most glorious hue; From the ashes springs a seven-pointed flower; The Toad with Colours rare through every side was pierc'd; In the dead body of a calf are generated bees; Whose falling drops from high did stain the soyl with ruddy hue; In Ashes lies the Salt of Glory
Personnel: Rhodri Davies: harp, ebows, electronics, preparations; Lee Patterson: amplified devices, field recordings, etc; David Toop: laptop, steel guitar, flutes, percussive devices

Patterson's use of field recordings and amplified devices (presumably, those burning and bubbling liquids which he manipulates rather as a professor handles chemicals in a science lab) gives the music a tactile quality amidst the more dominant e-bows and laptop drones that overlap, build up, fade down, move in thickening and thinning cloud masses. Toop's more generally acoustic set-up – he's credited with flutes, steel guitar and percussive devices, as well as the laptop – isn't as fidgety as in the genre-hopping days of Alterations, the group he shared with Steve Beresford, Peter Cusack and Terry Day, but the occasional blown flute tone adds an element to the sound mix that's more directly traceable to human origin – the sound of breath. In his review of the album for Point of Departure, Stuart Broomer puts it this way: "There are instants when Toop plays flute in a way that's so direct and traditional that it's possible to associate the sound with an ancient pastoral diversion, even the invention of melody." It's an attractive proposition, and the combination of Patterson's labyrinthine rumblings (like being encased in thick masses of earth, crawling with roots and insects and shifting geological movement) with the 'ancient' sound of the flute – the origin of music as imitation of nature (wind, water, air, earth) – and Davies' less 'naturally'-based electronics, might be viewed as a union of the most 'cutting-edge' musical technology with the most atavistic of suggestions, the most primal and minute of natural processes and settings. Indeed, the track titles (taken from a poem by fifteenth-century alchemist

George Ripley,[26] amongst other sources) suggest mythology, occult investigations, gnosis: an intersection between magic and science, the new and the old; a cabinet of curiosities ('wunderkammer') – a memory theatre in which knowledge is not so much systematised (as it was in the cabinets' successor, the modern museum) as dramatized, in a bric-a-brac juxtaposition of art, intellectual disciplines and religion. While this alchemical strain is not exactly a 'sub-text', a direct thematic parallel with the music herein, some comparisons do suggest themselves– objects changing from one thing into another, as when, say, one sound sets up a drone, others joining, merging with, and eventually subsuming it; and the transformation of base matter (field recordings changing into music, solids dissolving into liquids in Patterson's glasses). Rather than be too programmatic or extravagantly metaphorical about this, though, it would perhaps be best to take the disc for what it is – a high-quality document of improvised sound. If I had one criticism to make, it would be that the fade-outs on a number of tracks create a sense of disjunction that doesn't really sit well with the overall workings of the music: compare, for example, the way the first piece disappears just as some particularly interesting interacting sonorities are starting to emerge, with the longest, twenty-minute track, in which the development of various threads stretches out at what feels a much more natural, breathable length and pace. That's a fairly minor quibble, however, about what is in general a very strong release. **(DG)**

LOOPER – *DYING SUN*

Label: Another Timbre / Cathnor (joint release)
Release Date: November 2010

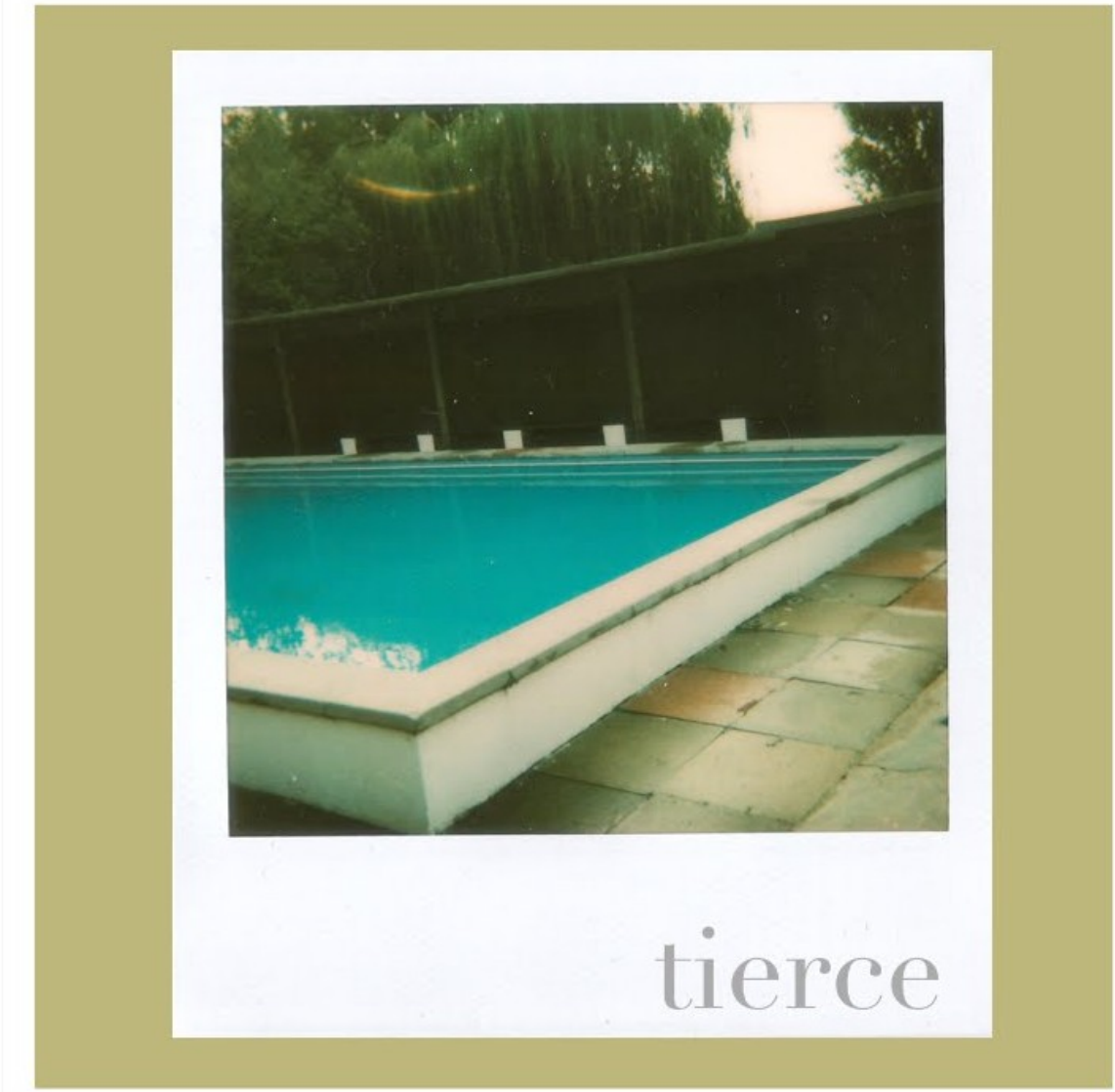
26 http://www.levity.com/alchemy/rpvision.html

Tracklist: Grand Redshift; Hazy Dawn; Near Eternity
Personnel: Nikos Veliotis: cello, electronics; Martin Küchen: saxophone, pocket radio; Ingar Zach: percussion
Additional Information: Recorded in Albi, France, January 2010

I suppose one could describe the music as drone, but this certainly isn't the nunc-stans of rhapsodic / ecstatic drone in the Eliane Radigue / La Monte Young tradition, for no one note is sustained throughout; instead, a shifting succession of low-end growls and wavering beating tones move from background to foreground, underneath little repetitive units, or, one might term them, 'loops': Zach's elephantine rhythmics, swishes and washes and slow treads; Küchen's saxophonic breaths, pocket-radio whispers, and shaver buzzes (in combination with the electronics, giving a foley effect); Veliotis' back-of-throat-electronic rumble, and, sometimes, extreme bass-register cello playing, merged in with this. The tick-tocking aspect – shuddering, juddering, mechanical motion set unstoppably going – feels relentless and sometimes disturbing (depending at what volume you listen); most notably, a clicking sound, the ghost of a metronome or someone making a popping, clip-clopping sound with finger and cheek, and, towards the end of the first track, a really ferocious amplified thudding (shaver still swirling away somewhere underneath), Küchen's sax doing little wails of protest or grief over the top. This sun is not dying in a glorious, orange sunset-blaze, but imploding, exploding, shattering into an on-setting darkness full of murmurs and buzzes and sinister whines, finally just coming to a sudden stop, the light going out like nothing other than a miniscule match. But then it begins again (track two), more buzzing machine-loop rhythms, distant gong beat, pitched saxophone breath in between the two sets of sounds. The elements remain largely the same, volume rising, Küchen switching saxophone for the interference buzz of the pocket radio, gong swelling gradually upwards, wave upon wave, that initial machine-loop on and on like a buzzing insect, trapped in a light, slowly frying for the purposes of art in the manner of Damian Hirst's 'A Thousand Years'. Any temptation to rise to noise-levels, to thrust one really deep inside the insect-o-cutor, is avoided, and when the track finishes after only nine minutes it feels to have fairly flown by. And so back to droning, ritualistic tread for the final piece: bass drum trotting out a regular thud, radio on held whine, electronics pushed to the back, shuddering with the drum's acoustic vibrations, Küchen's breathing this time more subdued, human edge furring implacability of the others' repetitive slow march. Now drum stops, drone bathing stereo picture, Zach chiming gongs, radio whine still holding, then suddenly stopping too; quieter, higher-pitched drones, pulse-like thud (electronics? drum?) fading out, as if the natural rhythm of one's own ear, one's own pulse were taking over from the music. The album as a whole feels fairly short, the last two tracks miniatures after the serious rumblings of the first - and that's surely testament to the way the group can sustain one's interest with a fairly bare palette of sounds. A sober little listen, then, worth amping up the volume to feel the full effect; something of a downer perhaps, not nearly as serene as track titles like 'Hazy Dawn' or 'Near Eternity' might suggest, and, arguably, all the better for it. **(DG)**

ANOTHER TIMBRE: SILENCE AND AFTER 2 – CUTTING EDGES

TIERCE – *CAISSON*



Label: Another Timbre
Release Date: 2011
Tracklist: Caisson
Personnel: Jez riley French: field recordings, zither, salt, paper, camera, contact microphones, internal electronics; Ivan Palacky: amplified dopleta 180 knitting machine; Daniel Jones: turntable, electronics
Additional Information: Recorded live in concert at seeds & bridges, gallery eleven, Hull, 13th November 2010

Tierce's disc is nicely abrasive, yet relaxed – is that a contradiction in terms? More evidence of my increasingly de-sensitized, skew-whiff listening practices? Let me explain: what I mean is that the sharpness of metallic scrapes and whirrs from knitting machines, turntables, and the like, is somehow neutralized, or softened, by the overall fullness and slowly – gloopily? - evolving textures of the music as a whole, each musicians' field of activity itself comprised of further fields, several layers opened up at once, discs left spinning, drones left droning, scrapey things continuing to be scraped. In this context, French's field recordings tend to act, not so much as interludes, nor as palette cleansers, but as moments of clarity – though the recordings themselves probably contain just as many layers as the louder electronic tactilities of the music itself.

Interesting to consider, in fact, the variety of ways in which the field recs are incorporated, not so much as decoration, but as something like external prompts to enter into different sound fields, or as some kind of glue or paste to mark a particular transition – Annet Németh's 'Paupers Guide to John Cage' uses them in a similar, though perhaps more integrated way. This certainly has more of traditionally improvised feel than Németh's piece (even if Németh's is more of an 'intuitive composition' (a term, in fact, that French explicitly prefers to 'free improvisation')): some of my favourite parts of the disc are those moments when one layer suddenly cuts out and the whole texture radically changes, a change that the musicians either work with / against to suddenly fill, in a change of direction, or leave hanging, as a silence, or near-silence, in which sounds will only gradually be built up again – as at the section which occurs shortly before the twenty-five minute mark here, French's recording of corridor-echoing footsteps and floorsqueaks, itself full only of intermittent activity, peppered with two sets of white noise – one fizzing and popping in something approaching an extremely spread-out rhythm (though its temporal experience can't really be said to be rhythmic), the other continuous, a bit like a boiling kettle or a distant train-track squeal / rumble crossed with muffled aeroplane take-off, though with wind-chime decoration at the edges (a rich sound, certainly, one which moves into electronic feedback to suggest that it was generated through physical means, though there may field recordings aspects melding into it as well, for all I know). This is, in fact, what feels like the most extended 'section' of the record as a whole, non-imposing, and perhaps not confrontational *enough*, after the sharp-edged sounds of the opening, the field recordings rendered somehow bland, ticking along with generally urban-based noises, the final section charting some gentle stroll round a block of flats, ending with the sound of a buzzer. Said buzzer, though, thankfully ushers in some zitherized scraping and electronic swells that proceed out of silence rather than from that ambient / ambulant fuzz, and are actually quite exquisite, hints of an almost impossibly slow-moving melody. Maybe that focussed and fragile intensity could not have been achieved without the long field-recording section before it – that said, I'd have preferred, heretical as this might make me sound, that a little editing had gone into the previous section. As it is, the rest of the disc ticks, or looms along nicely, the pitched feedback drone building up, some utterly eerie looping sound made from I don't know what source – it sounds like a muffled wind-up toy, maybe Palacky speeding up and slowing down his knitting machine? –winding and wrapping itself along the rumbles and buzzes and static electricities that have now entered the sound picture: and a few of the elements we hear here – that near-melody, the wind-up toy-or-not – are true little burrowing ear-worms, exquisite indeed. **(DG)**

JAME SAUNDERS – *DIVISIONS THAT COULD BE AUTONOMOUS BUT THAT COMPRISE THE WHOLE*

Label: Another Timbre
Release Date: 2011
Tracklist: imperfections on the surface are occasionally apparent; PART OF IT MAY ALSO BE SOMETHING ELSE; components derive their value solely through their assigned context; materials vary greatly and are simply materials; although it may appear to vary by the way in which units are joined; any one part can replace any other part
Personnel: The Edges Ensemble: coffee cups; Philip Thomas: piano, melodica, harmonica, radio; Tim Parkinson, James Saunders: radios, bowed wood, bowed metal, coffee cup on brick; Rhodri Davies: harp and objects; Stephen Chase: guitar, radio and melodica; Angharad Davies: violin

Saunders' titles, all sourced from various artist's statements, imply a connection with the kind of experimentation in both social and musical group dynamics that, for me, represents one of the most valuable legacies of John Cage's work (the Number Pieces in particular) – and, of course, the way in which that work has been extended or taken in new directions by the Wandelweiser composers. Or maybe I'm just thinking of the overall title for this series of pieces: the balance between autonomous division, individual part, and the whole that those contributions make up. I suspect, though, that Saunders is thinking more in formal terms (not that the two can be disconnected – it is precisely through formal innovation and exploration that the socialities of music production (or, more accurately, reception) are being addressed). By this I mean, I guess, that hearing the music outside its concert environment becomes a rather ascetic practice, rather than an exercise in collective listening and the experiencing of a particular space: this is certainly one of the starkest and sparsest of the Another Timbre discs, not because of lengthy silence but because of the 'other timbres' of the sound-producing objects and surfaces themselves. Instruments as such are not frequently deployed, and when they are, they're restricted to a similarly limited register ('PART OF IT MAY ALSO BE SOMETHING ELSE', in which Philip Thomas' melodica mimics, or attempts to fill, the decaying spaces of his previously-sounded piano tones). I mean, I like dragged coffee cups as much as the next human – and radio hum, and all these gentle rubbings and scrapings – but for them to fill up so much space over this 58 minutes asks a lot. I suspect, maybe, that this would be a perfect disc for that drifting space between waking and sleep when you might reach for the headphones instead of counting sheep – though it would be a little unnerving perhaps, as if some rats were slo-o-owly crawling along the skirting board with bits of sandpaper stuck to their feet. This is perhaps a little flippant, but it is my honest reaction; certainly, Saunders' music here makes Annet Németh's AT disc, for instance, sound as lush as any pumped-up Romantic orchestral smorgasbord. Well, maybe my favourite track is the first, and maybe that's because I haven't cultivated sufficient monastic patience to sustain that peak of interest through the whole disc: but, in any case, let's see, what do I like about it, or, more broadly, what happens in it? Here's Saunders' programme note: "It is for ten players, each with a cardboard takeaway-coffee cup and five different surfaces. The cups act as resonators when dragged across the surfaces. The performers must each source different surfaces (e.g. glass, brick, felt, sandpaper) such that there are 50 different surfaces in total." Though the piece is written, then, so that 50 different surfaces are in operation, it's hard for me to distinguish between, say, card and tin foil and bricks and floors – that's not even five, so where the other forty-five come from is beyond me. It's serene, certainly, like taking a tiny element out of, say, a Lucio Capece performance, and turning it into a fully-fledged composition: almost an obvious move, if you have a certain frame of mind, and as the trends towards near-total minimalism may be leading us. Of course, the picture I have in my head of ten musicians sitting in some white-walled concert hall, small and chilly, watched by a rapt audience of the usual suspects, is maybe what makes the piece for me: its sheer incongruity, coupled with its obvious, and serious technical and formal thinking (for which, check out the liner notes), make a combination that reminds me of Saunders' and Tim Parkinson's collaborations, as, oddly enough, Parkinson-Saunders (in which configuration they also appear here). In particular, I think of their performance, at the recent Audiograft Festival in Oxford, of a series of 'pop songs', featuring both musicians making chunky boom-boom rhythms out of tables and chairs and hand claps and a whole miscellany of household materials, while chanting words sourced from self-help pamphlets and surveys. It seems so perverse as to be idiotic: middle-aged men playing around, because they can – but of course it isn't, it's the flipside to the more sober coin with which we're presented here, with that same emphasis on a limited

palette. But the palette itself is just more interesting there – and there are funny bits too! Yes, as Dominic Lash points out in a blog-post which rather splendidly connects Saunders and Simon H. Fell, the intention is to make that limited palette seem to generate enormous elements of microscopic and fragile detail, once you achieve the necessary focus to zoom in that far: yet if, say, the layered simplicities of a Rothko, achieved through hours of working and re-working of layers, of a tactile engagement with surface, achieve transparency through density, the opposite move, here, of trying to achieve a kind of density through transparency, or limitation, just doesn't, for me, pay off. Lash suggests that the tactility of the dragged coffee cups on the first track approaches the erotic, to which I might reply, 'whatever turns you on' – and of course, I hope that the coffee cups were made of sustainable, recyclable materials, and that they weren't from Starbucks. In any case, I know that Saunders finds such fragile and non-standard sounds beautiful, and I have at times found them beautiful as well, and in that case we are both in the same near-psychotic boat, but I guess that over the course of this disc I have fallen out of it, and I'm drowning in inappropriate metaphors here, so for now I'll just go under those Lethian waters and stop. **(DG)**

PATRICK FARMER / SARAH HUGHES / DOMINIC LASH – *DROPLETS*

Label: Another Timbre
Release Date: 2011
Tracklist: For Maaike Schoorel (1); Elusion (improvisation); For Maaike Schoorel (2); Nachtstück
Personnel: Patrick Farmer: percussion; Sarah Hughes: zither, piano (1-2); Dominic Lash: double-bass (all tracks)
Additional Information: Tracks 1-3 recorded at The Drama Studio, Oxford Brookes University 30/01/2010; Track 4 recorded in a small wood above the village of Hathersage, Derbyshire, 11/09/201.

I'm going to begin this review at the end of the disc in question – with the final, solo recording by Dominic Lash. I first heard Eva-Maria Houben's 'Nachtstück', the piece in question, performed by Lash at the house concert which launched The Set Ensemble (the Oxford-based group he mentions in his liner notes, dedicated to performing the music of the Wandelweiser group). This performance was, in fact, my first encounter with Wandelweiser, which had somehow, up to that point, slipped under my radar; in the year since, its profile seems to have risen more and more, with concerts, recordings, articles and debates, proliferating in both real and virtual space, as an increasing number of listeners become aware of this body of work by a group of composers with often very different practices, but a core of shared concerns. As I heard it in Oxford last summer, 'Nachtstück' came from the deep and ancient world of the drone, the basic element of much 'folk-music', that held sound which can seem to go on forever, and which creates an exquisite interplay and dialogue with silence once it stops – and then, sometimes, re-starts. 'Nachtstück' also became about the environment in which it was played – not only the relaxed, yet private and intensely focused atmosphere generated by one person performing in front of a tiny audience in a

domestic setting (a return to 'chamber music' in the original sense of that term), but also the sounds of a fly buzzing around the room and landing on people's arms, on furniture, on the roof and walls; those classic, lazy, mid-summer sounds of distant lawn-mowers and car engines and voices; and, most significantly, a summer rain show, which, as I noted in a review written at the time, seemed an especially fortuitous unconscious echo of, or homage to, Taku Sugimoto's 'Live in Australia'. Perhaps it was the newness of this experience, of the shift between foreground and background, music and environment, and the eventual mesh between them – music as part of environment, environment as part of music, neither as necessarily more important than the other – but I still hold Lash's performance of 'Nachtstück' that day as a special hour, un-fraught by the difficulties of more busy urban environments (those by-now clichéd ambiences of Tokyo and London and Berlin - sirens, the whooshes of passing cars, creaking chairs, throat-clearing, stomach-rumbling – or, most memorably, another performance in Oxford in which a piece by Stefan Thut disappeared into the sound of a drunken sing-along next-door). Lash, as he explains in a useful online interview with Simon Reynell concerning this release (to be found at the Another Timbre website), doesn't see a conflict between such environmental uncontrollables and between the frequent near-invisible delicacy of the sounds produced in the music; nor does he see these uncontrollables as mere ambient 'cushioning' for the music. Rather, adopting a metaphor turned metaphor from Antoine Beuger, both (largely pre-determined) music and (indeterminate) environmental sound are part of the same cloth, a cloth of all possible sounds, out of which one 'cuts', or has cut for one, the sounds that one finally hears. In the case of the environment into which 'Nachtstück' is placed on this recording, such concerns are perhaps less paramount than they might be in such a dramatic instance as the Stefan Thut performance: as Reynell notes in his own comments on this release, it was the house concert with which I began this review that inspired the version that has eventually been released (Reynell was a fellow attendee), as a kind of amplification of the small environmental details which had so struck him in Oxford. In other words, the location was chosen for particular sonic reasons, rather than simply being imposed as the city-centre location of a particular concert hall where a performance happened to take place. That there was again a rain shower is perhaps not surprising, given that this is England – perhaps it was even half-hoped for, as a means of adding another layer of richness and event to the piece, though the difficulties Lash faced in keeping his bass dry and un-damaged perhaps dispel that notion – and this is only the most easily-noted aspect of performing the piece outdoors. Whereas an increasing number of composers and improvisers have incorporated pre-prepared field recordings into musical settings (one of the most notable recent examples being the exceptional Michael Pisaro release on Another Timbre which was included in the first batch of the 'Silence and After' series, last year), or have presented untreated field recordings as something between music and document (work of this kind can be found, for example, on Jez Riley French's 'Engraved Glass' label), playing a piece outdoors breaks down the distinction between recording and environment, so that the music can fully exist as part of an outdoor setting. The logistical difficulties of such an operation are perhaps why it is not more often attempted – that, and the tendency for a kind of diffuseness to spread over the music, a kind of relaxation and lessening of intensity, sparked by the lazing-back sounds of birdsong and sheep and drifting flies that we are all familiar with from television and radio and BBC sound-effects cassettes. This has been my experience, at any rate, but I'm happy to say that Lash, as anyone who has heard is recording, or better yet, seen him live, is a musician of exceptional focus, and well able to deal with the distractions of a rustic setting.

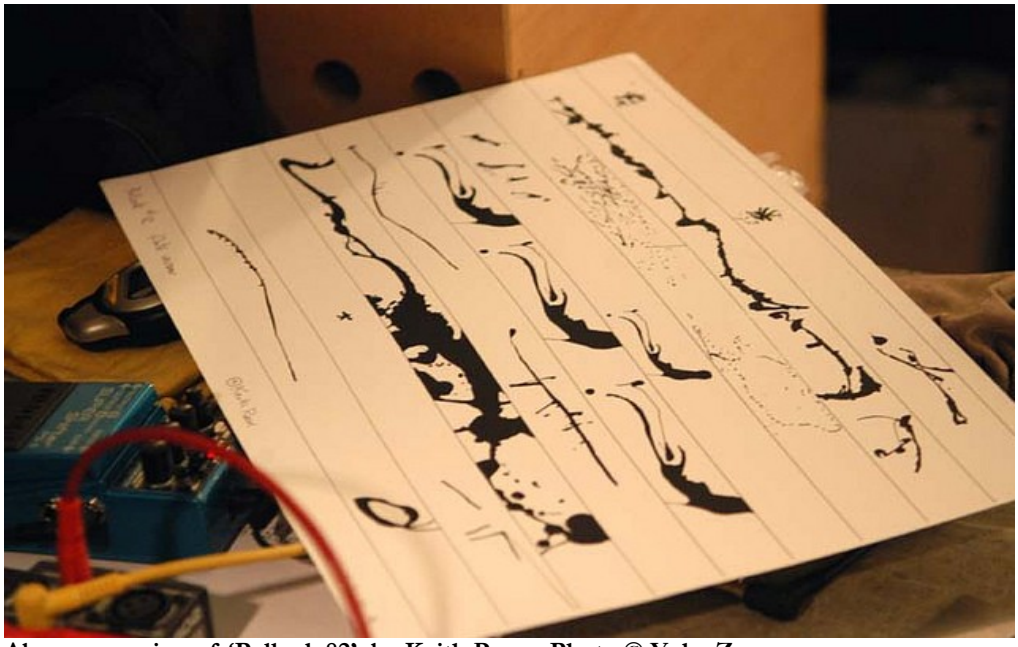
So this music, which I've been skirting around for many sentences now, how does it unfold (and for that matter, gabby as I am, what of the tracks with Patrick Farmer and Sarah Hughes that make up the rest of the disc)? One problem I've addressed, or at least hinted at, in reviews of Wandelweiser music and concerts published in the previous issue of 'eartrip', is that of a too un-critical attitude towards the external sounds which can often end up providing much of the 'content' of an otherwise very quiet composition. At its crudest, this would mean (to re-iterate what I realize I've just said at the end of the previous paragraph) experiencing a piece of music in

much the same way one would experience a tape of bird-song recordings, or of lazily-buzzing flies and distant baaing sheep in a summer meadow – a pastoral idyll that falls back too easily on generic tropes of 'relaxation', 'harmony with nature', etc. The answer to this problem is that the fascination of the work lies precisely in the interplay and relation between the 'natural' and 'human' elements; not so much that the wind, or the rain, or the buzzing flies, are 'instruments', external objects moulded and shaped for aesthetic purposes by a controlling human agent in much the same way as a double-bass, but that they are 'framed' by the human sounds to become something other than they would if simply heard unadorned. Listening to the recording, of course, reveals other layers, theory melting into and becoming enriched by physical practice. The first appearance of Lash's bass, against a steady white-noise background of wind blowing in trees, sounds like a muffled, deliberate call, the after-echo of a horn signalling across the hills – there is that ancientness about it, connected no doubt to the deepness and the droning nature of the sounds the bass is made to play. Perhaps that's a little too fanciful (I've just been reading Robbe-Grillet's 'Nature, Humanism and Tragedy', and no doubt he'd chide me for my too-easy humanising of nature, my projection of fey subjective whimsicalities onto the world of objects). Disregarding metaphor or analogical methods of description, then, we can simply say (hopefully without opening another can of worms), that there is something very beautiful about the way that a particularly delicate high harmonic is at once almost drowned out by a sudden swell of rain, the distinction between musical 'foreground' and ambient / natural 'background' existing as something malleable, rather than a line set in stone. Something beautiful too about the way the bass notes seem to be acting as some kind of commentary, or complement to the rain shower, while at the same time carrying on as before, not so much ignoring the context as becoming wholly subsumed within it, content to take place, to be placed, within it. And something (thankfully) rather funny (this isn't all po-faced wonder in the face of nature) when a low bass tone ceases, immediately followed by the protesting 'baa' of a put-out sheep.

So now, as promised, back to the start of the disc, to the three pieces in which Lash is joined by Patrick Farmer and Sarah Hughes (these three roughly corresponding, in total length, to the solo 'Nachtstück'). Two realisations of the same piece by Taylan Susam bookend a 20-minute improvisation: the presence of the improvisation significant because Lash has grown increasingly wary of approaching so-called 'reductionist' music through improvising parameters (though improvisation remains central to his work elsewhere), preferring the discipline, the task-based play between rigidity and looseness, freedom and constraint, that the very particular scores of Wandelweiser composers offer. Can one, though, tell the difference? Could one, in a blind-fold test, distinguish between the 'composed' and the 'improvised'? Perhaps there's a certain following of linear logic that's more present in the improvisations than the compositions (somewhat counter-intuitively, one might think): a thought can be finished, a line of questioning followed, taken for a walk, without coming up against a notational instruction that says 'now move onto something else'. This doesn't mean 'gabbiness' – the music is far quieter than that I've heard Hughes and Farmer make on more recent occasions, where Farmer, in particular, has acted as a kind of sonic agitator, suddenly letting out bursts of un-expected noise, often accompanied with very definite physical actions and movements (abruptly emptying a tub of compost onto a turntable to produce screes of feedback, for example). But the popping, tapping, rasping manipulation of (I'm guessing here) a plastic cup, does set things at an edge un-imaginable during the previous few minutes, when extremely high, delicate sounds came out like a little chorus of minimalist mice. The chorus from the film 'Babe' gone Wandelweiser, perhaps – or, mice as painted by Maaike Schoorel, reduced to little blobs and blurts of colour and shade on a white ground.

Maaike Schoorel, 'Twilight' (2004) © The Saatchi Gallery

Schoorel is the dedicatee of Susam's piece, and a painting of hers, entitled 'Twilight', forms the (fairly direct) inspiration for the score itself, alongside a quotation from composer Joseph Kurdika: "little fields of sounds.... or not fields - plops.... puddles." Just as the painting, though derived from a photograph, is not a realist representation of twilight, so the piece suggests itself as a kind of 'translation' of the painting into something else, recognisable, perhaps, as having derived from its particular source, but quite different in effect, contour, timbre. Such re-contextualising (in which a photograph becomes some seemingly abstract dabs of paint becomes some restrained whisps of sound) perhaps explains the inclusion of two 'takes' at the piece (another re-contextualisation); those two takes also allow us to consider the degree to which a score such as this is fixed, and how far the musicians' interpretation is the main shaping force of the piece as it unfolds. Whatever one decides, the notion of 'playing' a painting as a graphic score (set out in more overtly 'musical' form by Keith Rowe's 'Pollock 82' (laid out as it is above and below lines which approximate a musical staff)) seems to me an exciting one, a technique that could be opened up so that one could go, say, to The Tate Modern, and play 'scores' by Barnett Newman or Mark Rothko or Cy Twombly – or, for that matter, by Claude Monet and Louise Bourgeois.



Above: a version of 'Pollock 82', by Keith Rowe. Photo © Yuko Zama

We have a number of layers, or levels of relation, here – Schoorel's paintings are abstracted versions of photographs, detail taken from itself so that it appears as another kind of detail, not specific, yet forced towards particularly resonances or suggestions by the painting's titling (presumably, the original photograph was of a twilight). Susam takes the painting and, without providing an exact 'translation' into music, an aural equivalent, or something that exists entirely on the coat-tails, as it were, of another artist's art, does create a piece which exists in relation to it and in dialogue with it. As he notes in a short essay on his blog, "In my music, titles function either along the lines of the above, or are dedications. In fact, 'nocturnes', is my only title so far that is not a dedication. In my text about the audience I distance myself from the idea of a consistent 'humanity' as addressee of my pieces. In that light, it is easy to understand that my pieces bear titles such as *for joseph kudirka* or *for blinky palermo*. I wrote those pieces for a person - when that's established, who cares about the title, about the name?"[27] In that sense, though the piece should not be considered subservient to its apparent 'subject' or dedicatee, it does set up a net-work of relations (and this is the sense in which it is 'political'[28]) : firstly, between the composer and the dedicatee (whom he/she may know or not know – the dedication could, as in the case of 'for louis couperin', be to someone long dead); secondly, between the performer, the composer, and the dedicatee; thirdly (and fourthly, fifthly, etc), between the listener(s), critic(s), performer, composer, dedicatee. I'm reminded somewhat of Frank O' Hara's 'personism' – except, of course, that music cannot have the direct address that words can – there is nothing inherent in a non-vocal sound that says 'I am addressing this directly to you'. This doesn't mean we have to fall into the trap of a too-lazy 'universalism' (along which lines The Beatles are 'great' because their music contains some mathematical formula or universal human subject that makes it relevant to everyone and anyone (such views tend to be exclusively western-centric and inherently culturally imperialist)). But it's nothing quite as direct as O' Hara's sexual metaphors (which in any case don't quite fit the very public world necessitated by book publication, fame, exposure, etc): the piece of music is not really a "lucky pierre", sandwiched between reader and writer.[29] One online critic describes Schoorel's paintings as "almost silent".[30] Of course, one immediately clamours, all painting is silent, whatever Kandinsky's Blavataskian synaesthesia might otherwise suggest. Similarly, all music is ephemeral, non-visual (particularly if one closes one's eyes when listening, so that the sounds I'm hearing are not, say, associated with the computer screen in front of me or the rather drab curtains in my room). But it *is* a communication – sound does always tell us something, even if not always as a direct propositional statement, an easily-got-at-gobbet of information. And perhaps that communication could take place between two art-works – between a painting and a composition, between that composition and its realisation – a kind of personism of art-objects, as well as of persons; a work that, because it concerns itself exclusively with its own "immanent logic," allows itself a much more intimate mode of address than the loftily human(istic) 'great work' template allows – which actually allows in a *more* human space than the ostensibly 'humanist'. As Susam puts it, "After the task [of composition] is completed, I consider the result not a message with a specific address, but rather the possibility of an occurrence that will always be embedded in a certain situation. The meaning of this occurrence can only come about within an essentially social situation. And, as Christian Wolff has it: one person making music and one person listening already makes for a social situation. At the heart of the matter, I compose for a scene of two."[31]

I think, in the context of a CD review, we've drifted off-piste, off-point. And I've probably barely talked about the actual sounds of those two Taylan Susam pieces. But you can find that out for your self. So let's end there. **(DG)**

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27 Taylan Susam, 'the title' (http://nothingbutaplace.blogspot.com/2010/01/title.html)

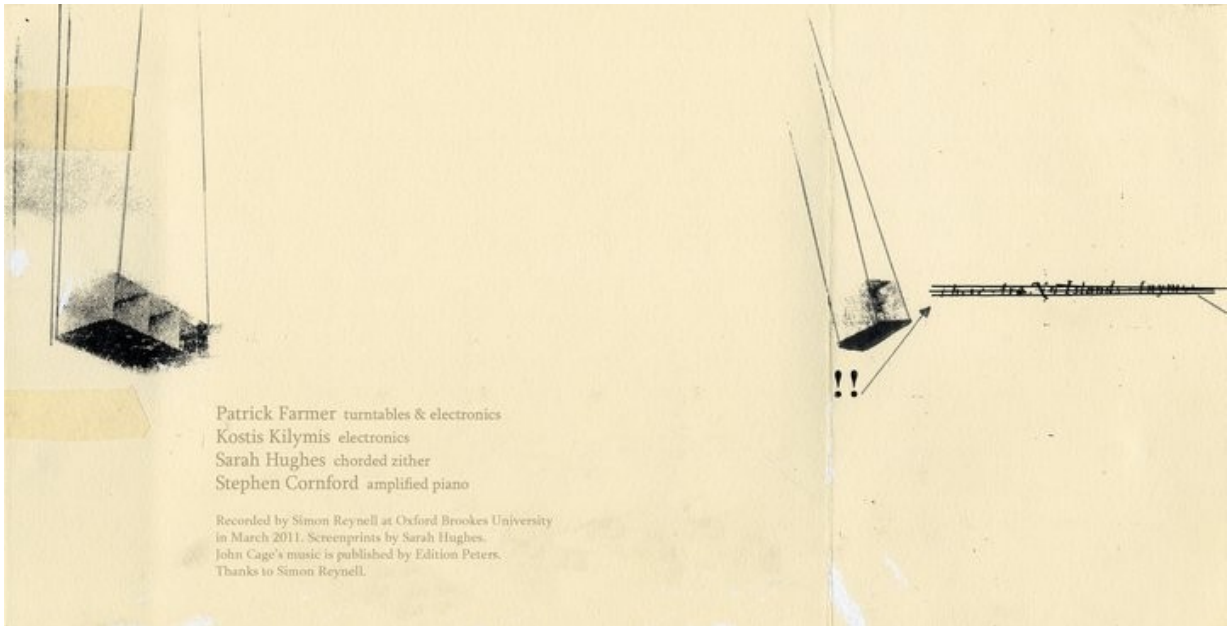
28 See Taylan Susam, 'music and politics' (http://nothingbutaplace.blogspot.com/2010/01/mao-tse-tung-once-said-that-there-is-no.html)

29 References are to O' Hara's 'Personism: A Manifesto' (originally published in Yugen # 7 (1961); reproduced online at http://www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/20421)

30 http://www.artnet.com/magazineus/reviews/honigman/honigman4-20-06.asp

31 Taylan Susam, 'Music, the Question of the Audience, and Two Lazy Answers' (http://nothingbutaplace.blogspot.com/2010/01/music-question-of-audience-and-two-lazy.html)

FARMER / KILYMIS / HUGHES / CORNFORD – *NO ISLANDS*



Label: Another Timbre
Release Date: 2011
Tracklist: Improvisation; Improvisation; four6 [Cage]
Personnel: Patrick Farmer: turntable, electronics; Kostis Kilymis: electronics; Sarah Hughes: chorded zither; Stephen Cornford: amplified piano
Additional Information: Recorded at Oxford Brookes University Drama Studio, March 2011

This disc captures well, I think, something I really enjoy in the playing of Farmer, Hughes and Cornford, certainly – I'm not really familiar with Kilymis' playing, though Organized Music from Thessaloniki is indeed a fine enterprise – which is the balance between an almost tentative stillness and quietness (the potential, at least, for that to be there) and an almost visceral wildness – as when, on the first improvisation, a sudden blart of feedback rudely blares out like a mistake, is ignored, and doesn't recur; or the fact that, at the end of that improvisation, everyone else's gentle electronic ebbings away are overlaid with Farmer's loud and physical and tactile turntable-surface frictions. It's an aesthetic a million miles away from capital n Noise Music – though bits are noisy, and many of the sounds produced would be considered 'noises' by most 'straight' listeners – but it's not in the least prissy or monastic in its restraint, delighting in the rasps and whirrs and burrs of its ugly beauties before settling into a kind of contemplative ambience in which the distant, twittering frequencies of birds or passing planes act as spectral, barely-registered presences, sitting there waiting for the musicians to stop dropping things on zithers or making whooshing noises with electronics or manipulating the insides of pianos. Maybe that's partly a quality of the room itself – I've seen Farmer and Hughes, this time as part of the Set Ensemble, with Bruno Guastalla and David Stent, perform a different version of the Cage piece which makes up half of 'No Islands', once in rehearsal, with the door open on a balmy spring afternoon, and once again in the evening, where a different focus or tension (and the presence of audience) was brought to bear on proceedings. In both cases, though, the room – a square black box, quite tall in relation to its width – seems to inspire a kind of openness, a relaxed focus, perfect to the simultaneous focussed activity of both Four6 and improvised music: set away from the main body of the Oxford Brookes campus, on the side of a hill, above allotments and trees, inside it feels as if one could create a safe and sequestred world of focussed experiment, and yet at the same time feel open to what occurred outside, in entirely un-cloistered freshness. I guess this information is anecdotal, but, after all, Keith Rowe is always stressing the importance of the room, or space, in which one performs, and it's that combination, of person and environment, that allows music like this to breathe. As too you should listen to it in a space where you can breathe, to let the many wonderful things here soak in – for there's a delicious and perverse richness at times, as when (this on the

second improvisation) a generally sober drone is packed over with all sorts of strange and wonderful little interventions: a rumbling stomach imitation; someone (Farmer no doubt) emptying something out of a bag; a whoop-wailing theremin-like sound which actually made me laugh out loud on first hearing, at its voice-likeness, its incongruity, its near-parodic yet curiously touching emotional tint. 'Four6' is the quietest thing on here, though the door to the studio is now open and the birds outside are in full and frequent voice; and maybe I prefer the (relatively) wilder territory of the improvisations, but, as the disc rides out on those continuing birds, a piano-bell-toll, a siren (outside intervention), a bowed zither zing, a turntable scrunch, another piano strum, and a fade-out, all this making its way into the otherwise silent living room here at 1AM, I'll take the Cage piece too. This is, as they (who?) might say, a *sweet* record. And now I'm going to listen to some Delicate Steve. **(DG)**

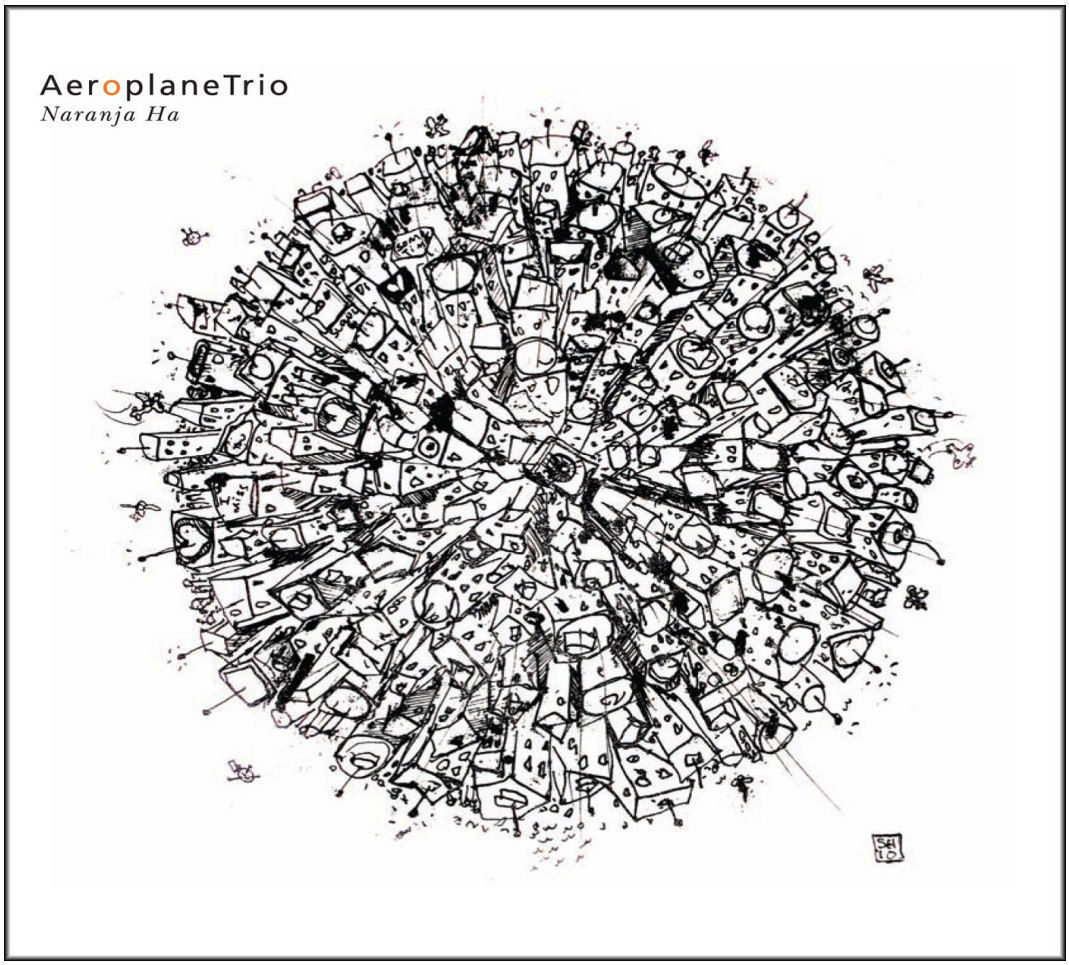
ANETT NÉMETH – *A PAUPER'S GUIDE TO JOHN CAGE*

Label: Another Timbre
Release Date: 2011
Tracklist: A Pauper's Guide to John Cage; Early Morning Melancholia
Personnel: Annet Németh: piano, clarinet, household objects, field recordings, domestic electronics
Additional Information: Released on CD-R

I know nothing about Németh, and thus have lazily reached for comparative judgement markers almost soon as the music hits my ears. But not too much, I hope, because this sounds very much like its own thing. Michael Pisaro is, yes, the obvious comparison to make here (at least, on the first track, which gives the disc a whole its title as well): the combination of instrumental/electronic timbres, for one thing – piano (with occasional clarinet) set off against sine tones and field recordings – though those recordings are less prevalent, and the music as a whole more 'busy' than, say, 'Fields Have Ears 4'. 'Busy' is, of course, a relative term (and must come across as absurdly relative to those not immersed in this particular field of music-making);

certainly, while there's very little actual silence, there are pauses which feel like interludes between episodes, or breathing points. One in particular, six minutes into the first track, very beautifully isolates a temporary snippet of what sounds like a wailing baby bird – at first I thought a seagull, but it's less harsh than that, plaintive and almost heart-rending here. The piano improvisation itself, which, as Németh notes, forms the 'spine' of the piece, is as spare and controlled as one might hope for and expect, alternating between grey-grave middle-register soundings and the occasional inner-string pluck. At times it takes on tolling-bell weight, sombre in a way that, say, Pisaro's 'Asleep, Street, Pipe, Tones', or (more apposite for this piece's soundworld), the aforementioned 'Fields Have Ears 4', are not: this, in part, accounting for the piece's distinctive character; that and the fact that the field recordings are so spectrally murky, as if emerging from that speckled grey cloud which adorns the front cover (the composer-photo/phono-grapher peeking out of her window at the foreboding blankness of suburbia). OK, I'm imposing a programme here, perhaps drawn in by Németh's comments on the Another Timbre website, imagining her popping out of her door, furtively, surreptitiously, to gather sounds, the whoosh of the road and the occasional call of a circling bird and the frenzied Neighbourhood Watch glare, the curtain-tugging neighbourhood stare, looking out for suspicious artistic activity. Yet there are bits which open up to some other suggestions– little folds in the space-time continuum through which appear, now that I've got that image in my mind, reminiscences of some grey summer sea-side (these images are all very British, I realize – and, of course, I don't know where Németh lives), like the prompting of Proust's madeleine cakes, or the smell of salt brought in by a sea-gull. But this is *sound*, of course, so the squeaking and scraping turns from gull to skateboard to rusty wheel or gate, the piano is plunked with unexpected and reverberating force (still a single tone), sounds swirl in and out behind it, the music continues, non-development but full of ambiguous incident. I guess, then, that it's quite a busy piece, in fact, in terms and in the turns of all the various sound-producing methods and little episodes which have gone into making it: actual and processed clarinet, objects inside and outside the household, electronic manipulations. And I do really like that domestic element stressed in Németh's brief notes and in the Another Timbre interview: John Cage on the cheap, as it were, though, perhaps, with less of the almost religious solemnity that might go into Official Concert Performances of his work in certain circumstances. 'Early Morning Melancholia' is quite a different animal to the Pauper's Guide, is wails tamed and neutralized, as Németh notes: the simultaneous feeling of absolute despair and total numbness that particular kinds of depression can induce. I mean, it's beautiful, again, too, much more sparse than its longer cousin, less explicitly referential in its samplings, which are disguised by simple twists of electronic manipulation – slowed down, pasted over with white noise, woozily slurring and sliming in and out of an overall trajectory that's meandering and unclear, repetitive and agonizingly slow, without the anchoring Pauper's piano to tie it down. Maybe I've emotionally over-invested there – and maybe I should have read Németh's interview *after* listening to her pieces (after all, Reynell notes in one of his questions that, for him, the piece's "dream-like" quality is "beautiful and actually quite up-lifting") –but, as with Ap'strophe's 'Corgroc' (reviwed in the previous issue of eartrip), there seems to me here a definite emotional element -as there is, indeed, in much of the best 'eai' – that's not easy or comforting but difficult and sometimes overwhelming. Yet so easy for those very same elements which make up such work – sine tones and held drones, electronic noises and slow-motion movement, an overarching structure which makes use of overlapping, repetitive, non-developmental near-stasis in a quasi-intuitive manner – to generate music that can seem life-affirming and to sparkle with positive and wholly calming serenity balm (shit, that makes it sound like aural bubble-bath. Badedas for the Ears! But you get the picture, hear, it, watchfully, whatever). And yeah, in sum, this is really very impressive work, and do I hope that we hear more from Németh, and, well, Another Timbre Strikes Again. **(DG)**

AEROPLANE TRIO – *NARANJA HA*



Label: Drip Audio
Release Date: 2011
Tracklist: Pre Rumble; Lucky Loonie; Rock Paper; Whitehorse; Plastic Farm Animals; Callejuela; They Came And Took Away Our Kittens; Subtle Shock; Whatever Happened To The Sand People; Crow's Nest; Lagoon; Live At Ironworks; Getting To Naranja Ha.
Personnel: JP Carter: trumpet, cornet; Russell Sholberg: bass, saw; Skye Brooks: drums, percussion

The Aeroplane Trio are a group of multi-taskers – JP Carter on trumpet & coronet, Russell Sholberg on bass & saw, and Skye Brooks on drums & percussion. And to further the tasking, each member belongs to handful of other Vancouver-based ensembles and noise-makers such as Fond of Tigers, the Inhabitants, NOW Orchestra, Tony Wilson 6tet, etc… Not to be outdone, the packing also does double-duty as it not only holds the CD but a DVD containing a live performance and a 15+min. documentary.

While this counts as their debut, the group has been together for almost a decade and each contributor has enough background and experience with other groups to ensure that this recording is very confident and relaxed.

"Pre Rumble" begins it all and makes a solid opening statement, despite being more on the 'sound' end of the musical spectrum, as opposed to the 'music' end, which is pretty much where the next track "Lucky Loonie" [*] starts, with a pseudo-jazz intro complete with walking bass line and ringing crash cymbal. "Rock Paper" is rollicking & short'n'sharp like its predecessor and "Whitehorse" [**] is a great bass & trumpet feature. "Plastic Farm Animals" takes us back to the vibe of the opener with sporadic but confident outbursts from the trio. "Callejuela" [***] has simple and elegant statements from Carter with some equally tasteful contributions from Sholberg; clocking in at under 7min., it's the longest and slowest tempo of the written tunes but

never drags. "They Came and Took Away Our Kittens" features Sholberg's saw skill, and is a fine demonstration of how spooky such an instrument can be, giving the waterphone a run for its money. "Subtle Shock" is a short improv while another improv, "Whatever Happened to the Sand People," ups the noise by a few notches, which is the most rambunctious these guys get here. "Crow's Nest", driven by some solid bass playing, makes a cool and casual statement, while the closing track "Lagoon" winds things up on an ambient note, with almost didgeridoo-esque low horn, thumb piano (courtesy of Sholberg), and cymbal-washes.

The DVD has a documentary and a live show. The documentary is no-nonsense: just the trio sitting around, talking about they each got started in music, early experiences in creative music and how they came together as a group. A little bit of talk on how they do what they do but, thankfully, it's pretty short, has a few humourous moments, and doesn't delve into the mumbo-jumbo that often comes out when people try to discuss or explain this kind of music. The live show is well-done and well-recorded – this isn't just somebody's mom with a jiggly handycam but a nice multi-camera work with good sound (though the audience clapping is louder than the band). The improv sections get a bit more wooly than those recorded on the cd. There ares two improv tunes on the DVD and, of the three titled/written tracks, only one appears on the cd. As with the CD, the written tunes are more tuneful and jazzy than the improv – not that that's a bad thing, as this trio can clearly handle both approaches. **(TH)**

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[*] For all the non-Canucks out there, a loonie is the name given to the Canadian one-dollar coin, as it has a picture of a loon on it; to extend the portmanteau, the two-dollar coin is called a toonie (pronounced: two-nie), with a polar bear on the reverse.
[**] The capital city of the Yukon Territory in Canada's north.
[***] Spanish for alleyway or sidestreet.

JAC BERROCAL / DAVID FENECH / GHÉDALIA TAZARTÈS - *SUPERDISQUE*

Label: Sub Rosa
Release Date: 2011
Tracklist: Joy Divisé; Human Bones; Cochise; Quando; David's Theme; Ife L'Ayo; Porte De Bagnolet; J'attendrai; Jac's Theme; Powow; Sainte; Final; Zilveli
Personnel: Jac Berrocal: trumpet; David Fenech: electric and acoustic guitar; Ghédalia Tazartès: vocals, accordion

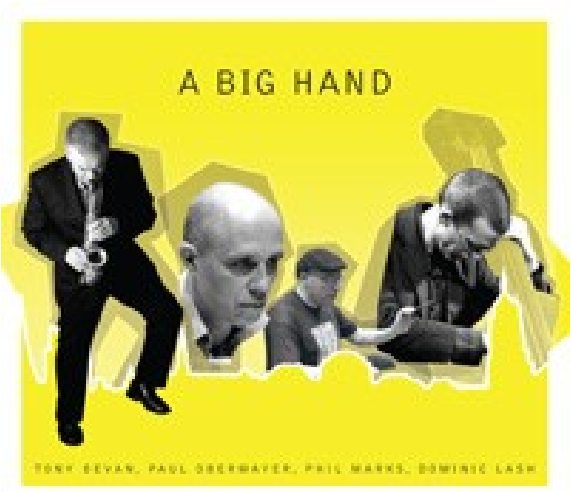
Good to see Ghédalia Tazartès' profile rising slightly in recent years: it must have been about four years ago that I blogged about his work, having heard 'Tazartès' Transports' on a sharity blog, the situation being at that time being so bad that said blog entry featuring as the top hit whenever I googled him in the next year or so. Since then, coverage has improved – a nice article by Howard Slater for Mute magazine, a Wire profile (and, yeah, that blog entry got turned into something for a previous issue of eartrip, but let's not count that) – but, more importantly, Tazartès has started doing gigs both in France and abroad (all of which I've sadly missed). New people (wire readers, I guess) are starting to hear of him (tho' he's not yet a really *trendy* cult hit - guess we'll have to wait till Thurston Moore discovers him...); new work is coming out. It's all good.

Tracks from this particular project have been floating around the internet for a couple of years now – the little gem here titled 'David's Theme' is a really gorgeous example I remember listening to over and over upon that initial download – but hearing the whole disc is really where it's at. As on Tazartès' own solo recordings, short pieces splice into & crash up against each other, like fragments of larger wholes, or abortive pop singles which just couldn't be fitted into the requisite verse-chorus-verse-chorus structure. It's *just right*, like a killer mixtape, a playlist any eclectic college radio DJ would be proud of – but just right in a sometimes deliriously wonky or obviously stitched way. Sure, it's not as lo-fi as the solo home recordings (viz., the clean sheen on Berrocal's trumpet, the bursts of rockish guitar or gently throbbing bassy loops from Fennech), but it's still full of unexpected and delightful transitions, bizarre and wonderful conceits: an ethnic fair-show swathed in vaguely jazzy, vaguely ambient electronica'd swirls and blurs.

Murmuring, or shall we say grumbling, Tazartès initiates proceedings as an old priest or an old drunk – or a drunken old priest, a tipsy holy man; Berrocal tooting air, Fennech doing rubber-band echoes on his electric guitar, Tazartès' voice now rising alongside Berrocal's blues-hued trumpet. Some sort of bizarre vocoded effect, sudden blarts of electric distortion, all getting nearly swamped in wispy white noise, trumpet farts leading us into 'Human Bones.' Quasi throat-singing rumbles, alternating with thinner old man's laments: funeral rites, death songs, underworld passages – these slipping into the echoes of Native American chant that flutter around the edge of 'Cochise'. (Tazartès' work is like, or *is*, a hallucination of what 'world music' might mean to an eccentric old western nomad, pan-culturalism without the ideological programmes or the naive hippie gloss). Berrocal's trumpet multiplies into a spectral line of buglers blowing a spectral fanfare; now 'Quando', and the first appearance of Tazartès' accordion, alongside Fennech's tickle-plucked acoustic guitar; 'David's Theme', aforementioned, gently blown along on Fennech's simple pattern of alternating guitar notes, Berrocal letting out moaning, swaying tones before taking up a melancholy little theme which could have come out of a forgotten Ennio Morricone spaghetti western score (Tazartès' distant whistling only adding to the effect). 'Ife l'ayo' is 'fake jazz' with a melody not too far off from that disarmingly nursery-rhyme like staple of Miles Davis' 1980s concert repertoire, 'Jean Pierre' – played strictly for laughs here. (Well, maybe not *quite* strictly – but you can't help but smile a little, no?) 'Porte de Bagnolet': all sorts of weird goings-on around the steady drum patter, Tazartès singing out in questing tremble, his accordion dancing and shaking or holding weird clusters and quasi-electronic low tones. The drunken sailor goes crazy, strings together a bracing atonal run on his accordion as he thuds against the walls; eventually falls asleep, hears that cautiously beautiful dream music. Some guy's playing exquisite, sad echoed trumpet; some guy's tinkling a guitar; some guy's singing in that hangover haze…Why is that voice suddenly coming up so close to my ear, so close I can hear its mucus rasp? This guy's telling me – well, he's *singing* it to me – telling me, 'j'attendrai toujours'...why, I don't know...

Bells, music boxes, middle-eastern(ish) melodics – and that growling again, deep and dark from the throat. The Native Americans are back – or the Hollywood extras playing them are back, back for their 'Powow'. There seems to be something wrong: the frame drum's beating but there are some reverse-effects wisping and rasping past my ear as this old man mutters and whispers and groans and talks and sings to himself. And now, the switch between the gorgeously echoed gliss or gloss of Berrocal's trumpet and the defiantly acoustic, 'old-timey' sounds of Tazartès' battered old accordion on 'Sainte', as he launches into a quavery tavern sing-along, Fennech, or Berrocal, or both, dropping little clangs and bangs around him like the tavern clientele drumming on the table, a kid with a big drum, some siren fading it out like it was all another dream. And it all is: Tazartès' art thrives on fanciful imaginings, on improvised fantasies and fantasias in invented languages, quasi-folk-forms, primitive tinny keyboards and rhythms and electronic manipulations. If Fennech and Berrocal add a post-Milesian sheen not all too dissimilar from the work of, say, Nils Petter Molvaer or Jon Hassell, Tazartès imparts that necessary roughness, that semi-parodic, semi-sincere sense of pathos and occasionally boozy fun that lends his band-mates' echoed ruminations a kind of grandeur they might not otherwise possess. It's music that constantly suggests little narratives, little stories that are dropped almost as soon as they're taken up; that suggests places, exotic locales, filmic locations or treated archive recordings of now-forgotten ceremonies; a jump-cutting, surreal movie for the ears. What genre it's all in I really couldn't say. Do check it out.
(DG)

BEVAN / OBERMAYER / MARKS / LASH – *A BIG HAND*



Label: Foghorn Records
Release Date: 2010
Tracklist: Rock Me Baby; Heart of Stone; They Smell Like Giants; Lonely Girl; Box of Frogs; One Punch and Out; He's Spartacus; Giants (Of Jazz-Funk); I am Not a Lizard; Got You Sucker!
Personnel: Tony Bevan: soprano, tenor and bass saxophones, flute; Dominic Lash: double bass; Phil Marks: drums; Paul Obermayer: electronics

Straight out the blocks, Bevan's free jazz take on R&B(ish), Lash and Marsh digging in and not letting up, Obermayer flickering and flashing on the edges of things, sometimes as if a phantom guitar's wormed its way into the bands, at others more obviously electronic in its texture. 'Heart of Stone' has Obermayer's sampled descending bass line picked up by Lash in glorious wooze, Bevan's soprano in-step with that rhythmic articulation, blowing hard, as is his wont, phrases in bursts, in blocks, the final note of one triggering the first of the next, up and down, snakes and ladders. Bevan does that stop-start thing a fair bit, in fact: those staggered pauses, like an over-extended breath, heightening the expectation of the phrase to come but still catching one off guard when it does – like someone walking in spasms, a regulated stutter. Or perhaps someone with the shakes after drinking too much coffee. Nervous energy, most certainly. This imparts the

disc as a whole with a sense of 'punchiness', but one that somehow feels fragile, Bevan's tongued out-cries or repeated wails often underscoring that slight feeling of desperation, constriction, having to get something out there and said before the moment passes. The jittery nitty-gritty of Obermayer's electronics of course contributing to that a good deal, of course: check his interventions under the wailing soprano of 'Lonely Girl'. A good deal of humour here as well, I think, despite the keening emotional register in which Bevan often operates: check the bloopy-farty start of 'Got You Sucker!', Obermayer making sounds like one of those farmyard-animal-noise-toys you used to be able to find in kids' shops – somewhere between a cow, a sheep, and a creaking gate – almost satirizing Bevan's bass sax gasps and growls, but of course in a spirit of dialogue and lumbering fun, banter rather than man-spiritedness. Also of note, the fact that none of the tracks out-stay their welcome – they generally last only five minutes or less – and each feel like well-developed pieces, rather than merely sketches or cast-offs, each tracing a specific trajectory, each exploring a particular area with concision and verve. The band are focussed and on, the joint is jumping. OK! **(DG)**

RHYS CHATHAM - ***OUTDOOR SPELL***

Label: Northern Spy
Release Date: 2011
Tracklsit: Outdoor Spell; Crossing the Sword Bridge of the Abyss; Corn Maiden's Rite; The Magician
Personnel: Rhys Chatham: trumpet (voice on 1); Beatriz Rojas: cajon (3); Jean-Marc Montera: electric guitar (4); Kevin Shea: drums (4)

If the titular first track is fairly reverent dronology, Chatham's electronically-aided vocals somewhat reminiscent of throat singing, occasional trumpet lines swelling out the texture as the piece progrssess, 'Crossing the Sword Bridge of the Abyss' imparts a visceral physicality to the enterprise: popping trumpet farts (I mean, of course, pedal tones) underlie the piece as a rhythmic bed, like a perverted march, numerous echo-enhanced trumpet lines swirling round over the top, overlapping so that the origin or end of any one line seems to disappear into the miasma (much as in Chatham's guitar orchestra pieces, I suppose, though with more a shimmering, light-dancing vibe, the timbres occasionally reminiscent of acknowledged influence Jon Hassell, but without a hint of world-music-lite, and some glorious higher register flares and lower register burrs that

suggest latter-day Bill Dixon as much as anything.) Perhaps the track goes on too long for its own good, unable to coast along on the endless chunky/diaphanous overtone ooze and rock-like rhythmic thud of the guitar pieces, each individual phrase instead swelled and swirled and looped away so that each ends up resembling the other, insubstantially the music's substance. Of course, the aim is for a trance subsumption into un-thinking pleasure and bliss ("I find that by deadening, possibly destroying the intellect, you can actually make people feel" Chatham opines in a 1996 interview for Dead Angel magazine): it's just that I don't feel that the trumpet, even electronically-aided, has the sheer overwhelming power necessary for that experience. Given this, 'The Magician', which doesn't attempt that out-of-mind experience, is probably my favourite track: Jean-Marc Montera's guitar has a woozy bite to it, and Kevin Shea (of Talibam! - a group with whom Chatham has collaborated – and Mostly Other People Do The Killing) blasts around the gloopy flickerings of Chatham's trumpet in decidely non-repetitive fashion. It feels like the music is constantly bubbling over, loosing any linear grip it might have in frantic loops and obscured corners, twists, turns. Well, maybe it's not quite my thing – it has a bit of the 'rock musicians do free improvisation' vibe going on – but it is pretty exhilarating at times nonetheless. **(DG)**

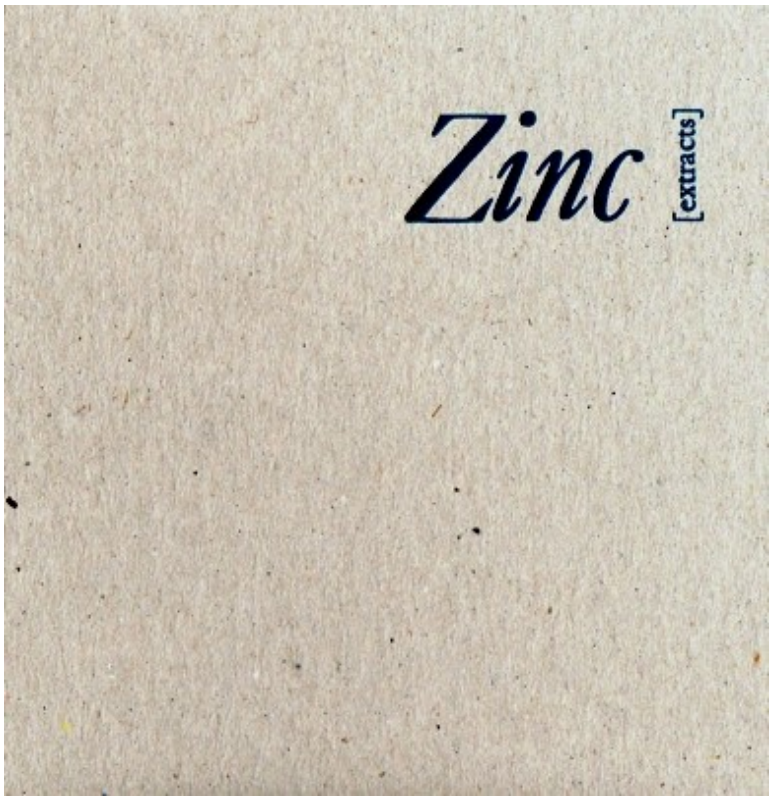
CHICAGO UNDERGROUND DUO – *AGE OF ENERGY*

Label: Northern Spy
Release Date: 2012
Tracklist: Winds and Sweeping Pines; It's Alright; Castle In Your Heart; Age of Energy
Personnel: Chad Taylor: drums, mbira, electronics, drum machine; Rob Mazurek: cornet, electronics, voice

So the disc opens with a swooping electronic thing that sounds like it might be about to go into Debussy's 'Girl with the Flaxen Hair', but it gets a load of low-end fuzz and fizz instead and a processed voice comes over the top and it all goes meandering-spacey: then after five minutes or so Mazurek (I guess) settles on a loop and Taylor's drums come thumping in with electronics going their own sweet way over the top. It's loud, brash, a little vague in its grooviness for my tastes: does 'good jogging music' sound dismissive? I'm trying to think of comparisons here, and I'm going back, perhaps lazily, to 1970s jazz fusion – say, pre-Jaco Weather Report, or Miles Davis' bands: for me, Chicago Underground, at least on this opening number, lack the single-mindedness and nastiness of the grooves those groups came up with. I prefer what comes next on the track:

the backbeat and the bassline loop drop out for transitional electronic ambiences, brush shuffles ushering in some freer drumming, Taylor keeping the track boiling over under electronic meander. Then suddenly a bompy dance music-type loop, drums dropping out, Mazurek's cornet heard for the first time, again a little Miles-ish – maybe more like Leo Smith in Yo! Miles – a touch plaintive, now digging in more fiercely as Taylor bops along with the loop. It's fun, certainly, though fifteen minutes of this rather than the rather bitty preceding jam might not have gone amiss. That rides the track out; 'It's Alright', by contrast, is a fuzzed-out 'ballad', Mazurek crooning, or, more accurately, whispering that titular phrase into a bed of muffled echo and drone, his subsequent cornet solo buried and distorted under various bits and blobs of electronic jiggery-pokery. I can't help wishing here that the electronics here had taken more of a back seat – the intense distorted haze that increasingly predominates seems more like a bunch of effects slapped on top of the music than a vital part of the aesthetic itself. What, for example, does pushing Mazurek's cornet through filters so that its tone becomes all broken and jagged and wobbly really add (beyond some specious 'novelty') to his playing in itself (which sounds, from what I can hear of it, rather pleasant)? Further, I'm not sure the Duo say more in ten-minutes plus than they could have in half that time: concision is not a strong point of 'Age of Energy' – though of course, it's not meant to be. Taylor's mbira is (again) distorted as 'Castle in Your Heart' gets under way (rather Konono No. 1), Mazurek's trumpet sounding like it's being played in a distant toilet; the playing itself is all very nice, with shades of Don Cherry's work on 'Bitter Funeral Beer', for instance – though, again, it's hampered by the unnecessary lo-fi'ness slapped on in post-production. Final track, 'Age of Energy': meh electronics over boom-boom drums, gets its act together a bit more when Mazurek digs his cornet out, again slightly processed , just cornet and drums, ending on a nasty held note before the electronics finish things off. So, the disc as a whole is loud, and sometimes punchy, sometimes rather vaguely spacey: it has its moments, but I'm rather put off by the post-production slapped over the whole thing, and the reliance on rather broad-brush electronics. There is, above all, no real room for improvised interaction or sudden changes of pace here – no real sense of risk – once a particular set of parameters are put into play, they stay there, as generalized mood, thumping but a little directionless, never quite engagingly energetic nor, indeed, blissed out enough to make a real, lasting impact. **(DG)**

STEPHEN CORNFORD / SAMUEL RODGERS – *ZINC [extracts]*



Label: Consumer Waste
Release Date: 2010
Tracklist: [untitled]; [untitled]; [untitled]
Personnel: Stephen Cornford: piano feedback; Samuel Rodgers: piano and objects

Interesting to come at this one after hearing Lawrence Dunn's 'If I in my north room', a download-release on compost and height of roughly the same length. Both releases (this is, in fact, an earlier recording, coming as it does from the 2009 sessions that produced another timbre's 'turned moment, weighting'), concentrate on the sounds that may be extracted from the interior of a grand piano, Dunn in exclusively acoustic fashion, Cornford and Rodgers with the help of electronic treatments and with the use of more conventionally 'pianistic' (or 'prepared-pianistic') sounds. A brief 'prelude', with buzzing low strikes and the sound of objects rattling against the piano strings, merges seamlessly into the longer second track: patches of feedback ring out, Rodgers' gleaming, repeated strikes of the keys, like a tolling bell, causing the feedback to swell slightly with each strike – a wavering line, seemingly stable and similar, but subtly morphing from instant to instant. There's maybe a danger of things becoming overly pretty, even tonal, in a kind of vaguely post-Tilbury territory, but the concision of the tracks, and a certain sense that things might suddenly slip away into noise, given the unpredictability of the feedback with which Cornford works, prevents that from happening. And the duo do have a real sense of structure, fading and swelling with purpose, rather than simply meandering along – particularly so on the final track, where the longer running time allows a number of distinct sections to develop. The piece begins with Cornford holding a high-ish tone while Rodgers drops some notes from the lower end of the keyboard; as the first tone fades, Cornford introduces another, both moving into near-inaudibility while Rodgers begins to gently scrabble. A sense of uncertainty, of possibility here: without the held tones, what might happen next? Metallic crinklings of sound from Rodgers provide the base for another drone to gradually emerge, inexorable momentum, a louder swell of feedback seemingly overwhelming this before settling back down to join it, along with what sounds like a tamboura (the effect presumably produced from holding an object on one of the piano strings). And then somehow it all fades back down again to silence: an oddly affecting combination of delicacy and swelling electronic noise, poised between extreme restraint and a lack of deference towards the piano, as concert staple, as the solid heart of the western classical tradition. In a talk on Cornelius Cardew at the 2011 Bath Festival, John Tilbury argued that the piano was an experimental instrument, if you chose to treat it that way: for one thing, a pianist can't take a particular piano home with them, as can those who play more portable devices – they may have only a few hours to get used to the particular niceties of touch and timbre offered by the specific instrument with which they have been presented. One might see Cornford and Rodgers, in their shift of focus from the keyboard to the stringed interior of the piano, and the use of electronics to morph what was already a musical machine, a mechanical device, as exemplars of this experimental approach, along with the likes of Andrea Neumann, Sebastian Lexer, Chris Burn, Cor Fuhler and Tilbury himself. Along the way, they create some fascinating music. **(DG)**

GERALD CLEAVER / UNCLE JUNE – *BE IT AS I SEE IT*

Label: Fresh Sound New Talent
Release Date: January 2011
Tracklist: To Love; Charles Street Sunrise; Fence & Post – [Alluvia // The Lights // Lee/Mae // Statues/ UmbRa // Ruby Ritchie / Well]; He Said; Charles Street Quotidian; 22 Minutes (The Wedding Song); From A Life of The Same Name
Personnel: Gerald Cleaver: drums, voice; Andrew Bishop: flute, soprano & bass clarinet, soprano & tenor sax; Tony Malaby: soprano & tenor sax; Mat Maneri: viola; Craig Taborn: piano & keyboards; Drew Gress: bass; Ryan Mackstaller: guitar on 'To Love' & 'He Said'; Andy Taub: banjo on '22 Minutes'; Jean Carla Rodea: voice on 'He Said' & '22 Minutes'; John Cleaver: voice on 'He Said'

There's a particular sound I hear on those jazz records touted as where it's now at – beyond the more messianic purity of a Charles Gayle or a Brötzmann, that older generation's honings or repeatings of forms essentially discovered in the 1960s (not that there is not fertile ground to tread there, tho') – those records where compositional acumen and complexity, generic ground-shift, roughness delivered with polish and skill and tightness, create a *total* package whose breadth might at some times intimidate us, at others strike as just too smooth, too catch-all – the risk of relativism, in that. But, ok, there's a real excitement here, and who hears what is *new* inside the borders of what they *know*, in any case? Always there is, or should be, that necessary discomfort on the first or third or fourth hearing, even on the tenth – that refusal to be captured into the comfortable categories of how you know to listen. But, hell, isn't this 'catch-all' breadth also *the way we listen now*, in any case? – abstruse limits of contemporary composition to screams of free jazz "collective inarticulate harmony" to hip-hop, say, in one day, a rap song's sample leading on to the classic soul or jazz record from which it was sampled, and that onto to other backwards or forwards reaches and traces of influences and homage – the changing same, the continuum, feeding onwards into the future and back into the heritage of tradition. It's what (to take an odd example, but bear with me), Amiri Baraka put into practice on 'Nation Time' from '72 - R&B group, backing vocals, free jazz band, 'African' drummers and chanters, alternating and joining behind his spoken word to exemplify that 'changing same' dictum, to cover the spectrum of those 'survival codes' he found valuable and alive in that totality of black culture, from the blues to the abstract truth, from James Brown's scream to Ayler's. And if the Laswell school attempted

something similar through bands like Material (I can still dig 'Memory Serves', if only for what such fine soloists as Billy Bang impart to the whole enterprise), that for me remains too much mucked in '80s mechanized gloss - drum machines and slap bass, don't say you don't wince a little now when you hear those so up-front, so coldly present. But that was then, now, now...What's exciting about this record (and, too, about Matana Robert's 'Coin Coin') is the way it coalesces those influences, fragments into something with an identity and a legitimate onward creative flux-motion of its own: history and the now as dialogue and broken, stuttering single sentence, rather than as parcelled out into obvious influence boxes, rote-parades of the easily-acknowledged, historicised forebears.

Like, listen to the opening freak-out – all sorts of rich and wood-gooey timbres, bass clarinet and keyboards and keening multiplying woodwinds soar-dipping with righteous shouted poetry, flashes of church organ – "TO LOVE" shouted, like a sports chant or a war chant or a love cry, I guess, sanctified with the possibility of over-boil, screeched viola now, freakout, "knowledge of the heart's desire" – "TO LOVE" the rallying cry bringing things back again, Cleaver rolling those drums with relish, cymbal bash, can I get an amen. YES you can. (See that anecdote Henry Threadgill tells about playing free improvisation at an evangelical meeting, in the pages of George Lewis' 'A Power Stronger Than Itself.') Then, 'Charles Street Sunrise', flute balladry over held bowed bass, some of those timbres like that mellow low-ish flute you hear over dark rumblings on 'Faded Beauty' from Andrew Hill's 'A Beautiful Day', that richness or weirdness of texture that I so love in jazz from Gil Evans on (not that this is really Evans-ish), some deep sadness or contemplation, the way the soprano dips in sweet at the end, fade-out solo on bass-piano unison.

That attention to timbre is really where it's at – if, say, you'd tired of sax-bass-drums line-ups, fifty years down the line, here you could wallow in clarinets and flutes and violas and the rumbling electronic nasty buzzes of 'The Lights', almost something out of a grungy electronic free improv group in a London basement – or the rich wooziness on 'Lee/Mae,' where viola and organ and saxophone do the kind of chamber choir all those many (so many) ECM albums try for, but without the usual resultant pastel or monochrome sludge, a keening to it that sludge just lacks, keep this from your coffee table. But where my heart really is with this record is the track 'Statues / UmbRa', the penultimate piece from that 'Fence and Post' suite, where Craig Taborn's piano figure sounds like the looped jazz harmonies which give those classic tracks by, say, Nas, with production by Pete Rock or Dilla, samples by Ahmad Jamal or Bobby Hutcherson, their emotional flavour, their piquancy, their serene, semi-melancholic sense of flow; then the way the echoed multiplying voices come in uttering un-catcheable poetry, ears bombarded in stereo with un-coalescent messages, refusing closure, refusing linearity – words or brief phrases catching like wool on wire, only to be blown away again on the wind – "to be free- form...nations... organise...make ourselves....the one class against the other....essentials of life..." – the effect's something like David Henderson's treated poetry on Ornette's 'Science Fiction', here triggering furious distorted organ freakout under repeating desolate steadfastness of the horn's repeated figure. And the title, 'UmbRa', its Ra-like pun linking Sun Ra with the Umbra poetry movement, shadow, darkness, blackness, futurity (the thought crosses my mind, is this actually Henderson's reading on 'Science Fiction,' sampled?).

Taborn's solo on 'Gremmy', diamond-hard, running and looping like mad. And Cleaver, a drummer who knows how to write a tune. Cleaver knows how to write a tune. **(DG)**

CHRIS CUNDY / DOMINIC LASH – *TWO PLUMP DAUGHTERS: MUSIC FOR DOUBLE BASS & BASS CLARINET*

Label: Creative Sources
Release Date: February 2012
Tracklist: Plaits; Gingko's Corner; Gravity Leaves; Enough of the Duster; Fork Lift; The Singing Room; April Cottage; Three Out of Ten; Two Beautiful Sisters; Creeping Past; Angles; Tentative Tenacity; Something and Nothing Lignin; Without Doubt; Archibald Tait; Strung Along; Deuce
Personnel: Chris Cundy: bass clarinet; Dominic Lash: double bass

Yes, as Steve Dalachinsky tells us in his liner note ekphrases, this disc is about wood, about those exquisite woodnesses of the bass clarinet and the double bass, resonance and polish - almost velvetine- but also gutted string and scrapy belch-bellow. On the first track Lash actually plays exquisitely high up his instrument's register, sounding like a small, pinched chorus of strings rather than just one bass, and then, his held harmonic, as a droning saxophone, Cundy with just little hints of those show-stopping, popping finger snaps that David Murray deploys to such great effect on 'Ballads for Bass Clarinet'. The tracks are short and sweet, but not just a collection of effects or moods; rather, they flow into each other, or when they do break with and against each other, that break becomes part of the overall architecture, silences and pauses included, as part of one essentially continuous, multifaceted, episodic dialogue (whether or not they're sequenced in the order they were recorded is neither here nor there). Elegant but, yes, as 'plump' implies, with a certain earthiness concealed behind any dainty manoeuvres: liable, that is, to fart into those engraved armchairs which decorate the front cover. There was one bit somewhere where I thought Cundy was going to go all Marcus Miller (I actually quite like Miller's bass clarinet playing, it redeems the 80s-ness of his Miles arrangements), and then he let slip an improper plosive. And Lash's bass growled. Oh my. But seriously, this music's got beauty in its guts and garters. The recorded ambience is nice too – a church, I suspected; a chapel in Cheltenham, the liner notes tell me – not too ECM-y, but makes the whole thing nicely glow, not blankly falling into the dull blockage of a dead acoustic, dead ears. Just what, this gorgeously warm March afternoon, window open to a sedate breeze, I need. Garrulous chatter, mutter in force or haste, tock clock effect, pull back, a quizzical brow furrowing, ploughing on, cut short. Relaxed intensity. **(DG)**

LAWRENCE DUNN – *IF I IN MY NORTH ROOM*

Label: Compost and Height
Release Date: April 2011
Tracklist: If I in my north room
Personnel: Lawrence Dunn: piano, objects
Additional Information: Download release, available from http://compostandheight.blogspot.com/

"If I in my north room
dance naked, grotesquely
before my mirror
waving my shirt round my head
and singing softly to myself:
"I am lonely, lonely,
I was born to be lonely
I am best so!"
If I admire my arms, my face,
my shoulders, flanks, buttocks
against the yellow drawn shades,-

Who shall say I am not
the happy genius of my household?"

William Carlos Williams, *Danse Russe*

Nothing as nakedly grotesque, or as sarcastically lonely as the Williams poem here: but that slightly self-conscious suggestion of the artist as ridiculous solo poseur, indulging in capricious and self-obsessed activity while the rest of the household sensibly sleeps, is presumably intended. There's really no need to worry on that count, however: in the close-recorded hush of this north room, an improvisation unfolds that seems akin to a jotting in a journal, a diary entry, the record of an experiment in progress, rather than a polished jewel of gleaming and closed-off formal perfection, and is all the better for it. Dunn treats the inside of the piano as a kind of resonant, pointillist percussion: many of the sounds have a creaky, thudding edge to them, that combination of echoing wood and metal that gives the piano's innards their particular quality. It's a somewhat claustrophobic listen; maybe because I'm visualising someone sticking their head and arms under the piano lid to get at the instrument's guts – though the sounds also suggest the rather evocative and not particularly musical image of someone stuck inside a room with wooden walls that is constantly under pressure of collapse from mounds of earth outside: a lonely Womble trapped underground after an earthquake. The music is fairly quiet, but it's also very prickly, and it bustles with a kind of barely-suppressed nervous energy; tapping, scratching, clattering sounds abound. One always senses, too, the potential for extreme volume – all that is required is for the sustain pedal to be depressed and for a handful of notes to be banged out on the keyboard, combined with a few swooping strokes across the strings themselves – and it's to Dunn's credit that he foregoes this temptation, instead getting quieter and quieter by the end of the piece, so that distant echoing voices make their way through a door or an open window into that north room where a piano sings softly to itself. Then it's over. Fittingly for Compost and Height's download series, this feels like a glimpse at work-in-progress, rather than a fully-fledged 'release' (for one thing, it's under twenty minutes long); as I suggested earlier, this may actually be what accounts for much of its charm. In any case, worth checking out (it's a free and everything). **(DG)**

BRUNO DUPLANT – *DEUX TROIS CHOSES OU PRESQUE: SCORES BY MANFRED WERDER*

Label: Engraved Glass
Release Date: March 2012
Tracklist: 2009/4; 2009/5; 2010/2
Personnel: Bruno Duplant: phonographies, sine tones, double bass & horn
Additional Information: Recordings made in Waziers & Douai, France, 2011. Available as a digital download only, from http://engravedglass.bandcamp.com/

Utterly gorgeous. As a fusion of environment and playing, that true immersion that Werder seeks when, say, he realizes 2010/1 by sitting on a park bench for six hours, this is fine indeed, the gorgeous low rumblings of a bass with unobtrusive sine meshings (the influence of Pisaro here, no doubt) never quite imposing themselves at the front of the stereo picture, but nonetheless slightly more prominent than their surroundings (because, after all, it is music we are listening to here, even if the music (sound) of environment is a legitimate part of that music, as Wandelweiser has taught us). I mean, this sounds far more interesting to me than the non-interventionist realisations of Werder's score on 'Im Senfinental' - perhaps, somehow, the sounds of human interaction, semi-rural or small-town rather than city, but nonetheless the suggestion of human communication, transport, and so on, ultimately do have more resonance for me than the sound of a waterfall or wind, which my mind still filters off into sound effect otherness or just refuses to find *communicative*. What am I saying: maybe, that there's an actual meshing of performance and of environment that is more than just letting the environment speak while you make no sound (the latter occurring on 'Im Senfinental' - wonderful in situ, perhaps, but not ideal for aural record - and the importance of the person-to-person presentation of this music is one I think Werder would be keenly aware of – what we are sharing in this space, now, together; or, what space we are sharing in, now, together.) Whereas, here, I get the sense of eavesdropping into a quietly private, yet open and available realization, socialized both by its nearness to the sounds of human (and animal activity) to which it is *open*, and by its (re)presentation on CD, in my ears, now; being written, now, for your eyes, and, hopefully, for your ears, in due course (i.e. go and download this). It sounds as if Duplant has left the window open, or cocked his ear to the door while playing inside (my fantasy here: that uniquely pleasurable sensation of being half in and half out the house, the possibility of going out but staying in nonetheless, the outside's warmth and light and

sound entering into the newly freshened shadows of the interior); maybe he's playing out in the garden, as children, occasionally, joyfully, are heard to play; as traffic whooshes in up-close engine register, then back off into just vague breath-whoosh (louder on the second track, the first more rural, but domestic, the birdsong muffled and fairly sparse).

That easy openness nudges me back to the first time I ever heard Wandelweiser music live, at a house concert with a similar sonic environment (distant traffic, muffled birds, neither fully urban nor fully rural, a quiet summer's day, concentration drifting and then focussing in sharp intensity); you don't just let the environment speak, but, rather, you speak *with it*, underneath it, sitting just on top of it, sometimes totally silent, resonance rumble as idle rumination or firm concentration, easing into and out of the field. Moments of meshing or confusion that are precious and beautiful: is that a horn on the final track, or a bass? or an electronic tone? does it matter? timbre released from the yoke of instrumentality, acousmatic without any sense of anything other than the pleasure and the rightness, the fitness of the sounds, their unobtrusive delicate necessity. When you don't know if the slowly crescendoing, rumbling drone is a distance-drifting aeroplane or Duplant's bass. Or, whether, even, the whole has been elaborately constructed in post-production, field recordings as the illusion of playing in a place in which you are not physically playing. That not mattering in the slightest. **(DG)**

JOEL FUTTERMAN - *REMEMBERING DOLPHY*

Label: JDF Music
Release Date: 2010
Tracklist: Posta Lotsa; Les; Out to Dinner part one; In the Blues; Serene; Miss Ann; Fire Waltz; 17 West; Out to Dinner part two
Personnel: Joel Futterman: piano
Additional Information: Recorded October 2010. Available from http://www.joelfutterman.com

Though Eric Dolphy often performed with pianists – Misha Mengelberg on 'Last Date', Herbie Hancock on 'The Ilinois Concert', not to mention Jaki Byard, Mal Waldron and Andrew Hill – one

might argue that he tended to work best in a piano-less setting, eschewing the instrument's tendency to form a firm harmonic base by comping underneath the soloist, and instead choosing to float and dart over the alternately looser and sharper clouds and jabs of Bobby Hutcherson's vibraphone, or, in the case of earlier sideman days with the Chico Hamilton Quintet, over the lazy warmth of guitar and cello. Joel Futterman's decision to record an album of Dolphy's compositions on solo piano, then, is an intriguing one, immediately raising the question: how to translate the angularity of line, and, above all, the timbral qualities that made Dolphy's playing so unique - the bird-like and 'speaking' tone, alternately whooping and mellifluous (based as this was on the combination of embrochure and fingering) to the hammer and strings of the piano? Futterman's answer is very much to translate Dolphy's work into his own solo style, a style evidenced to fine effect on a series of recent releases on his own label. Whereas most of these have been lengthy improvisations, the decision here to play five – ten minute versions of compositions obviously has an impact on the music's flow; but the logic remains the same – in part, perhaps, because each of the recordings is an unedited first take. This seems entirely consistent with George E. Lewis' comment on his own 'Homage to Charles Parker': "As I recall, the ethos of "Homage" was influenced by an LP liner note I read in which Miles Davis answered criticism about not playing Duke Ellington's music on an Ellington tribute concert by saying that performing at the highest level was the best homage one could give." Futterman's homage is more direct – he is actually playing a selection of Dolphy's tunes – but that ethos of paying tribute by sticking to your own path (while, of course, admitting the enormous influence of predecessors) is very much present here, and seems to me a much more honest way of seeing the music – as a living continuum – than the repertory route popularized, for example, at Lincoln Centre. The music's history is inescapable – David S. Ware says of his recent quartet 'Planetary Unknown' that, "The last 100 years of jazz, there was our rehearsal" – but perhaps the best way to acknowledge it is to keep 'Looking Ahead' (in the words of one of Dolphy's albums). That said, Futterman's style owes much to the strong left-hand of stride players – free jazz, of course, was always a negotiation between innovation and tradition, and some of its apparently most shocking developments came right out of the earliest stages of the music. Indeed, mining the possibilities of pre-swing styles, when the music was still blessed with a dose of roughness and grit, can come across as quite a shock to those for whom 'jazz' means a particular set of 1950s developments – 'cool', third stream, etc – the piano instead as percussive and driving, capable of being simultaneous 'rhythm section' and 'soloist'. This rhythmic momentum characterises much of the record (with a pause for one of Dolphy's most melting beautiful compositions, 'Serene'); often, it seems that Futterman is setting up several layers of simultaneous dialogue, sometimes even managing three at once, despite the fact that he has only two hands… And though, as noted above, it's impossible to reproduce Dolphy's timbral qualities on the piano, the angularity and the register leaps are very much there.

There's a lot crammed into this music: within the first two minutes of the first track, 'Potsa Lotsa', we've moved through the theme and into an improvisation on its upward-rising tension – an ascending figure that resolves itself, not by transposition to a higher chord, but by the hammering out of a repeated, clustered version of the previous chord – via some vaguely Monk-ish twists and a brief left-hand vamp that suggests Horace Silver's 'Song For My Father'. And that's before the scampering full-keyboard dissonances that move things from strongly-stated rhythm to free pulse, and the ecstatic pedal'd shimmer that unexpectedly closes out the track. The concept of transition is an important one for Futterman, and the move from this brief closing passage to the delicious horn-like phrasing of 'Les' – the pianist here very deliberately playing single-note lines rather than cluttering the piece with chords – is like a refreshing splash of water to the face. Indeed, it's not just transitions between tracks that count – in one piece there may be clearly demarcated shifts, laid out for dramatic and musical effect. During 'Les', as he traces out an involved set of variations down the low-end of the keyboard, Futterman depresses the sustain pedal so that each note's resonance merges into the next to create an increasingly dissonant sound-cluster – territory which could easily have been explored for minutes at a time – then suddenly releases it and returns to the

jazzier angularity of the solo line. An exhilarating move, this suggests a musician always desirous of keeping himself on his toes, a quality that translates to the listening experience. And, at a time when it's all too easy to hear jazz through nostalgic ear-muffs, dulling the still-revolutionary qualities of its greatest practitioners, this is a healthy reminder of the ample territory still to be explored in the genre.

Space, sadly, doesn't permit a full examination of every track, but I will note the cool breeze of Futterman's own 'Out to Dinner', in which sparsely-placed chords sound out over a cat-like left-hand line – and the transformation of 'Serene' from Dolphy's version, which was just that, into something more ambiguously – and brilliantly – tenter-hooked. It also seems very appropriate that 'Fire Waltz' is played here, given that it's a piece by Mal Waldron (as played in a breathtaking version by Dolphy's group); Waldron's left hand was always his strength, becoming more granite-strong as the years went by (check out 'Free at Last', the first ever ECM album). In fact, Futterman's left-hand is less pronounced here than on some of the other tracks, as he chooses instead to emphasize the languorous quality of the melody – perhaps that's in preparation for the following thirteen-minute version of '17 West', a tour-de-force in which one of Dolphy's lesser-known flute pieces is turned into a pell-mell suite of motion and invention, darkly alternating chords repeatedly pounding their way into solo flights as reiteration of the tune's base, as spur to yet more variation, creation, discovery. Never carried away with itself, it stops, suddenly, in the middle of things, to allow another slice of 'Out to Dinner' the more pensive closing word. I've been enormously impressed by Futterman's increasingly-documented recent work, and 'Remembering Dolphy' is surely the sound of a musician at his peak: it comes very highly recommended. **(DG)**

JOEL FUTTERMAN / KIDD JORDAN / WILLIAM PARKER / ALVIN FIELDER – *LIVE AT THE GUELPH JAZZ FESTIVAL 2011*

Label: Creative Collective
Release Date: 2011
Tracklist: 8 Untitled Tracks
Personnel: Kidd Jordan: tenor saxophone; Joel Futterman: piano and Indian flute; William Parker: bass; Alvin Fielder: drums and percussion
Additional Information: Recorded at the Cooperator's Hall, River Run Centre, September 11th, 2011, at the Guelph Jazz Festival, Guelph, Ontario, Canada. CD-R available from http://www.joelfutterman.com/purchase.htm

This is really fine, turbulent free jazz, self-released by the musicians involved (though it easily deserves to sit on a major label). Jordan plays with a fierce attack and bite, alternating tart continuous lines with sudden shrills and squeals, Futterman following him all the way: there are moments where one will play a phrase that the other echoes in joyous recognition and imitation, the band as a whole a thoroughly *supportive* unit, as befits their billing as 'The Creative Collective'. Check, for instance, track two, Futterman digging in with repeated clusters, Parker's walking bass accelerandos and decelerandos, Fielder's really pretty subtle drumming – there are moments where he almost seems to be playing nothing at all, but his continuous cymbal whispers and tappings and ridings keep things fluid and open in a way that a more bombastic approach would not – fundamentally unshowy, but extremely effective. I said 'free jazz': but this is far from simply a 'blow-out' – it's music of flowing episode and transition, moving from shrill peaks to declarative gospellizing and sudden reminiscenses of Coltrane (beautiful because unexpected, not mere acts of de rigeur homage) within the space of a few minutes, no need for any supporting themes or heads to get things going. When Futterman launches into a series of jazz chords, you can bet they'll be exquisite; and you can bet that they'll spur Jordan onto tongued R&B and/or church extrapolations. Then Futterman'll be inside the piano, Parker harmonic plucking, Fielder's fluttering percussion, Jordan's quiet wail. Parker's bowed bass solo, just right, melodic and solemn. And when the piano comes back in and Parker switches to a repeated accompanying figure, Fielder relaxed and unhurried behind them, wow. There's real patience and purpose here. And things turning on a dime, one figure that suggests boogie-woogie leading instead to a roiling pedall'd build-up or a dissonant sheaf of near-simultaneous notes or something else entirely: music that moves, in both senses. **(DG)**

CHARLES GAYLE TRIO – *STREETS*

Label: Northern Spy
Release Date: 2012

Tracklist: Compassion I; Compassion II; Glory & Jesus; Streets; March of April; Doxology; Tribulations
Personnel: Charles Gayle: tenor saxophone; Larry Roland: bass; Michael TA Thompson: drums

Back in the '60s, ESP-Disk decided, for whatever reason, not to go ahead with their planned Charles Gayle recording session (he'd have to wait another twenty-odd years to make his debut on wax); Northern Spy, the new label set up by various members recently departed from the revamped ESP team, now make up for that omission with a fine new set from the saxophonist's trio. Gayle's occasional in-concert adoption of the character 'Streets the Clown' (a bit of face paint, a red nose, a hat, and a Victorian-style suit) puzzles audiences perhaps as much as his occasional anti-abortion and -homosexuality rants (rants, indeed, which are sometimes wordlessly translated into 'Street's' performances); perhaps realizing this, the packaging is minimal here – a little clown cartoon on the back, all black and white save the red nose, Streets holding a saxophone in one hand and a flower in the other; some photos of a clown'd-up Gayle striking poses with his saxophone on the front and inner covers; a brief statement thanking the label for putting out the record. The focus, then, can be on the music, the religiously-framed titles par for the course, vague enough to be Gayle's personal matter, what's sounded, what's heard the important thing. 'Compassion I's theme is joyous, Gayle repeating it with zest, testing and teasing out rhythmic variants on its simple six-note contour, bursting it out into note streams, the final or even mid-tones of his runs tongued-turned, burred, rasped and gasped, slurred with delirious pleasure, jouissant exegesis. Roland's bass won't sit still, hasn't from the off, Thompson's drums bash and lollop, in on the fun. Whoever it is punctuating the cracks of Gayle's declamation on 'Compasion II' with little grunts (perhaps it's the saxophonist himself) adds, not just the rather clichéd notion of sweat and grit and bodily labour that Anthony Braxton decried as the 'sweating brow syndrome' (we want to see our heroes WORK for their money!), but something humorous, a kind of involuntary gasp that doesn't pretend to a Keith Jarrettian crooning ecstasy; it's at once more self-aware and more un-guarded, caught up in the joyous energies of the whole affair. Perhaps it's ridiculous to expound so much attention onto such a little thing; but you almost know, don't you, what I'm going to say about how the rest of the music goes – not that the music itself isn't actually fresh and enjoyable in a way that so much free jazz per se is not, can increasingly come to pall or stagnate. Gayle's almost every bent and slurred note is part of a delighted and delightful toying with rhythmic articulation and timbral intonation, not just stentorian fury or pained prophecy (free jazz's apocalyptic rhetoric, as much a product, perhaps, of critics' quasi-libertarian valorization as of the musicians themselves (Gayle the homeless, touched genius, the lone hero on society's margins, the crankier the better)) – not just that, then, but a sense of sanctified *joy*. Damn good. **(DG)**

GORD GRDINA TRIO WITH MATS GUSTAFSSON – *BARREL FIRE*

Label: Drip Audio
Release Date: 2011
Tracklist: F. W. R; Burning bright; 229; Enshakoota: Barrel Fire.
Personnel: Gord Grdina: guitar, oud; Tommy Babbin: bass; Kenton Loewen: drums; Mats Gustafsson: saxophone.

The danger of the high profile guest star is that they'll overshadow the existing group, reducing a lot of hard work and effort to being merely the supporting role. The Gord Grdina Trio's augmentation by Mats on sax, though, comes together very nicely and the trio does not retreat quietly, instead creating a fearsome foursome. This recording is from their performance at the 2009 Vancouver International Jazz Festival and either there's enormous sympatico & quick sight-reading or the four of them rehearsed as it's not just a rambling free-form blow-out.

The trio's strength comes from an arm's length of credits and groups shared amongst Gord Grdina (guitar, oud), Tommy Babin (bass), and Kenton Loewen (drums) – both as leaders but also as support for others in and outside of the trio. It should be noted that Gord's not just dabbling on the oud but is a serious student and player, as can be seen from his involvement in the Persian/Arabic/Indian quartet Sangha and the East Van Strings.

At times, the group out-Aylers the Marc Ribot-led Spiritual Unity project – the guitar-driven sound with Gustafsson's honk and skronk, especially on the second tune "Burning Bright" – and is enough to drive one straight to Slug's Saloon. The music rolls and sways and churns, but isn't just an unyielding torrent as tasteful solos from Tommy and Kenton (which bookend "229"), as well as Gord breaking out the oud for "Enshakoota", which ends with a nice blow-out from Mats. The tempo and ferocity definitely comes close to red-lining but there are enough down-tempo sections to keep your interest up and attention focused. **(TH)**

G9 GIPFEL – *BERLIN*

Label: Jazzwerkstatt
Release Date: 2010
Tracklist: Trotz, geil; Rumba brutal; Ganztonleiter; Aufsicht; Dem Dt.Jazz; Absicht; Television world; Das Thema; Drei; Hartz
Personnel: Gerhard Gschlößl: trombone; Axel Dörner: trumpet; Tobias Delius: tenor saxophone; Wanja Slavin: alto saxophone; Rudi Mahall: bass clarinet; Alexander von Schlippenbach: piano; John Schröder: guitar; Johannes Fink: bass; Christian Lillinger: drums
Additional Information: Recorded August 2009

Gipfel means "summit" or "peak", and of course economists are not on the agenda here; it's a matter of nine musicians at the top of their game. The fact that few of them would be household names in Britain is neither here nor there. Gerhard Gschlößl is the leader by virtue of having come up with the idea, put the ensemble together and composed half of the themes.

But probably the best known names here, apart from Tobias Delius, who seems to be the only non-German present, are Axel Dörner, Rudi Mahall and Alexander von Schlippenbach. If people are still under the misconception that all Dörner can do is his "new Berlin silence" ultra-reductionist thing, either this album or *Monk's casino* should be enough proof of his wide-ranging jazz capabilities. In addition to this his extended techniques are heard on *Ganztonleiter* (which, as the name implies, is a theme based on whole-tone scales) in a passage of counterpoint with Gschlößl's post-Ellingtonian expressionist trombone. I assume passages like this are improvised, but it's hard to be certain. Eric Dolphy is one of the influences Gschlößl cites, and the implications of *Out to lunch* can be heard in the elastic treatment of time, especially in the passages between theme statements. When theme statements are introduced with such precision in the middle of tempo-free "improvised" passages, as in *Drei*, listeners might be led to wonder how much is really improvised, how much is pre-planned. (Could Jelly-Roll Morton's practices be an unacknowledged influence here?)

I'm inclined to think the titles of the first two tracks have been printed back to front, unless this is a kind of surreal joke on the musicians' part, as track 1 is more like a manically methodical deconstruction of Latin American rhythms. Mingus is another predecessor Gschlößl namechecks in the liner notes, and a few bars occur in *Dem Dt. Jazz* which are quite reminiscent of the passage with Latin rhythm in *Open letter to the Duke*. This strikes me as something of an *hommage*, and on the whole this music does more to continue the **spirit** of Mingus's often emotionally turbulent music than any number of worthy dynastic pastiches.

Das Thema is extreme in the sense that very low-register instruments are foregrounded, tom-toms, trombone and what sounds like either a contrabass clarinet or a bass sax (uncredited). As Mahall has been known to play contrabass this seems to be the most plausible explanation. With its very slow (largo?) time in addition to the low pitches it reminds me of a 45 rpm vinyl record being played at 33. It lives up to its title, since there seems to be little or no improvisation in its two minutes, fifty four seconds.

Dörner's two contributions as composer, *Aufsicht* and *Absicht* are original and unusual in concept; the former's thematic material consists of dissonant chords, but the closing theme statement differs from the opening one in being briefer and faster; *Absicht*'s theme consists largely of fragments and this approach continues in the improvised parts. It ends abruptly (in mid-phrase as it were) with nothing resembling a harmonic resolution.

It would be hard to single out every improvised episode for celebration, as there is literally not a dull moment on this album. Schlippenbach's dramatic voicings, Mahall's dynamic and sometimes brutal attack deserve attention, as does John Schröder's guitar playing (I had heard him before only as one-time drummer with *Der rote Bereich*). Wanja Slavin is also an alto player to watch, or listen out for in the future. Gschlößl himself also contributes to *Potsa lotsa: the complete works of Eric Dolphy*. (See *Eartrip* no.6)

I actually find it a source of optimism that these musicians have the curiosity and the energy to engage with these complex compositions and improvise on them in an intelligent and imaginative way that takes into account the implications of jazz in the past, and yet avoids simply rehashing it (with or without elements like rock beats or pseudo-exotica being grafted on, which happens in some of the more threadbare efforts.) There is so much detail here that something new can be heard on each listening. *G9 Gipfel Berlin* merits more attention than it has yet been given in British circles. **(SK)**

JONAS KOCHER – *SOLO*

Label: Insubordinations
Release Date: 2011
Tracklist: Solo
Personnel: Jonas Kocher: accordion, objects
Additional Information: Available as either a free download or a CD from http://www.insubordinations.net/. Recorded October 23rd 2010 at 'zoom in' Festival, Bern.

Handsomely packaged in an 18x14, screen-printed thin card sleeve, this absorbing and focussed thirty-five minutes of solo accordion begins from a quiet place, distant church bells (possibly a field recording?) gradually disappearing under the wheeze and whoosh of Kocher's 'breathing' effects. Not until four minutes in does a recognizable note emerge from the instrument – low, growling, rumbling, somewhat reminiscent of the contrabass clarinet that Anthony Braxton whips out on occasion – and it's around these frequencies that things hover for a while. Throughout, one really gets the sense of the accordion as a physically responsive thing, full of fluttering air, clicking and clacking keys, sometimes surprisingly similar to a voice (due precisely to the reliance on air to create sound). From the picture below it appears that Kocher treats the instrument to various preparations and 'non-standard' attacks, but, much of the time, it would seem that he's managed to get 'inside' the accordion to the extent that he can bend it to his will, away from its traditional harmonic ties and generic markers, simply by playing it in conventional fashion.

In the resonant concert space, Kocher doesn't go for easy drones, but lets the extended dying echoes of each note ring out dramatically into pregnant pauses, cut-off clicks and hoarse interjections. His sparing use of register and space – we don't, for example, really hear any high notes until eighteen minutes in, when the striking of a piece of chiming metal percussion 'sparks off' ringing, twinkling, near-whistle frequencies not too far away from Sachiko M territory – gives the piece immense contemplative force, unpredictable yet content to take its time. One senses that Kocher is deliberately surprising himself as much as the audience – twenty-six minutes in, having settled into an off-kilter rhythm like the click-clack of train on tracks (territory which could easily have been explored for a further length of time), he suddenly stops, lets hang a short silence, briefly launches into a new wheeze (somehow managing to approximate the sound of a saw cutting through wood), then stops again and plays some conventional notes. In description, that sounds a bit programmatic, even schematic – in the moment that one hears it, though, it comes across as a fine example of improvisational quick-thinking. Perhaps Kocher knew exactly what he was going to do when he launched into his emergency stop – perhaps it was a calculated move, made for dramatic effect (and there would be nothing wrong with that) – but, for me, it seems to carry with it an element of risk (what if the next note or tone after the silence came across as corny, jarring, ugly?): an *edge* that gives the whole performance a pleasing sense of vitality and importance. Aptly, it all ends without warning, glacially eerie tones giving way to grinding growls whose seemingly inexorable, lumbering progress is cut off as if a switch had been flicked: almost brutal, certainly honest, well in keeping with the music's spirit of invention and discovery. There is no coasting here. **(DG)**

TOSHIMARU NAKAMURA – *MARUTO*

Label: Erstwhile
Release Date: 2011
Tracklist: Maruto
Personnel: Toshimaru Nakamura: no-input mixing board

Nakamura to begin with is working with the smooth fizz of that tuned white noise, I guess you could it, which he deployed to more ambient effect on 'Egrets': here, for the first five minutes, it sounds as if something's constantly going to get started, that he'll stop fiddling around with the switch that keeps bringing the fizz out of and back into focus and settle into a nice comfortable drone or at least a sustained sound that we can bathe in – it's like someone constantly attempting to zoom in and focus on an object but constantly failing, the result a blur that keeps re-adjusting every few seconds, stuck on the same increasingly absurd task. It feels fragile, certainly, musician working with the physical sensitivities involved in negotiation with machine, keeping three sound areas going at once, though after a few minutes they perceptually mesh into one, the outlines becoming blurry and rather queasily hazy. Suddenly on six minutes, he cuts out nearly all the sounds so that we're left with a low hum that at first I thought came from my laptop – removing headphones proved otherwise – before another burst of shriller and more fractured, jagged (though less wavily mirage-like) sounds emerge, only to die once more into the deep throb of bass blare. Things come and go: that bass doesn't feel like the comforting glow or wash of drone music, but inexorable – *make it stop!* – the events passing over the top of it, the slow but subtle shifts in the tone itself, the warps and blurred blurts of white noise, all as intense claustrophobic hallucination, hemmed-in. If this is meditative (as I even find Sachiko M's music can be – see the ludicrous extensions of the article on Sachiko elsewhere in this issue), these are – to borrow a title from Charles Mingus – 'meditations on a nightmare', dark-toned crackle, attention flitter against unstoppable ugly presence. Or, you know, Nakamura is someone who knows his instrument, who can produce things as diverse as this – harsh, uncompromising stuff – and the almost ambient, relatively rather pleasant sounds on the afore-mentioned 'Egrets'. It certainly feels like someone who's challenging themselves, though: OK, what criteria are there to go on, in such alien territory, you might ask, but, really, a good decade into Erstwhile's existence (first record in 2004? ok, not quite, but you get the picture), you needn't. I hiccupped. That bass tone jumped, but as my throat subsided, it came back as strong – stronger – than before. To hear this live would be some kind of physical endurance test, I can't help but feeling – though Nakamura himself always seems so sedate, so calm in his manipulations (there's that great picture of him somewhere online, grinning at a PA he's somehow managed to set a-smoking through the force of his electronics). Now it's flies being electrocuted in the underground buzzing lights. Light traps. That still-going 'drone',

tone (I think modified a little, wobbling now, less bass-y, perhaps, or maybe the aural hallucinations are setting in already), keeping the frequent switches in higher-register and white-noise-flecked activity up above it from feeling anything other than temporary distraction: no escape. I try to hallucinate rhythms inside that tone, but it's too monolithically dis-embodied, too one-track monochrome. It's as if Nakamura's staging a contradiction as the basis for an entire piece of music (or at least, a large chunk of it): the inexorability of that sustained tone undercutting (or setting up?) the jittery shifts and episodics above it. That tone admittedly now subsiding somewhat, though still there, merging into others around it, a drop in intensity, waiting for the next outburst – not cruising, but waiting to see what will organically evolve out of this thing – a patient approach to structure and development, certainly, neither going for the big noise climax nor for total stillness, but existing in-between those two poles – a subdued agitation, unsettling, on the edge. Some variation on those opening blur sounds we heard at the begin, refusing to let the music settle into the drones it wants to inhabit, that we want it to: impatience with this refusal to settle either side of the verge, scrabbling instead for the last details to be tidied up before we can begin, smoothly. As if the whole piece was an attempt to get going, the constant interruptions of electronic throat-clearing, those flies hitting the buzzer, fried. A hushed, uncertain menace – the threat around the corner: I've no idea if Nakamura found this piece uncomfortable or emotionally difficult to make – after all, the most affecting pieces, in whatever ways, can arrive just as much out of a focus on technique and on particular qualities of, say, structure or timbre, as out of soul-bearing. Whatever the case, it's not an easy listen: a valuable one, though, in terms of Nakamura's discography and development, in terms of contemporary electronic improvisation, all these things. Perhaps above all, certain qualities of structural tension and frustration are being actively toyed with, or deployed ('toyed' sounds too playful; 'deployed' the more appropriately confrontational descriptor) in a way that even several listens probably won't effectively wring out. Probably, Nakamura himself doesn't even know. I'm sure he'd like it that there was a bit, about half-way through, when something that sounded like the parody of a doorbell made me jump, and the immediately faded out. Maybe there's a sly humour at work here, even. And I'll leave you with that thought as the discs ends, with the attendant tinnitus ringing in my ears and that bass tone *still going on*, quiet as it's now become, before its final, eventual cessation. **(DG)**

SKARABEE – *EARDRUM* / tusK – *HAPPY SHOPPER* (Split)

Label: Self-Released
Release Date: June 2011
Tracklist: Happy Shopper; Eardrum
Personnel: Stuart Chalmers: tapes
Additional Information: Limited edition cassette, available via the artist.

Ah, that familiar sound – the broken, fuzzy hiss of a cassette tape before the music begins. As with his previous projects, Stuart Chalmers is aware of, and here engaging with, the notion of music as product / physical object, embracing the DIY aspects of a self-produced, limited edition release which will be heard by only a handful of people (maybe just some reviewers and some people he gives them out to at gigs). His albums might just be cassettes in boxes (actually harder, and probably more expensive to produce than CDs, nowadays), maybe with a hole burned into the plastic container, maybe a plain silver disc or one he's written on in felt-tip-type scrawl – and maybe next he'll just leave them out on park benches or slip them into the CD racks in charity shops or send them to the hip DJs on Radio One in tribute to the late Amy Wimehouse… One of the two side-long tracks here is entitled 'Happy Shopper', which, for all it's meant to be an ironic comment on commercialisation and banalisation and false consumerist satisfaction, makes me think as much as anything else of Chalmers' own pick-and-choose approach to instruments: a constant chop and change, as if trying to keep up with the relentless technological novelty, the gadget-fever of the twenty-first-century world. He switches instruments every time I see or hear him play, it seems, from his original guitar to a circuit-bent kids' keyboard to a bugbrand he's now dispensed with, and finally onto tapes connected up to loop- and delay- and god-knows-what-

manner-of-other pedals. (By the time I write this, he's probably changed his set-up once again.) I'm sure I said this in my review of his last release, in the pages of this magazine; I've written up a few of his recent things (all limited editions like this one), which include disks under both the original 'Skarabee' and the more recent 'tusK' personas. Here, those two manifestations of his musical personality are thrust together on opposing sides of a cassette, names stencilled scruffily onto said sides like graffiti on a wall. If one was expecting 'Skarabee' to continue in the quiet, scratchy, ghostly ambiences of 'Tlön', one would be sorely disappointed, for 'Eardrum', as its title suggests, verges into noise territory, building up loops on top of and round and about each other, wild bleeps and blops, clacking percussive rhythms fractured and splintered into poly-rhythmic speed shuffles, dances with two left-feet to the accompaniment of exploding psychotic voices, or maybe just a splitting headache. It's exhilarating, bright, seemingly chaotic, but with a definite forward pulse and a traceable pulse created by the repetitive nature of the loops (though it's certainly not 'minimalist' – this is a far more creative use of loops than the usual comfy bed-rock they provide). So, multiple personas, a schiz-flow flowing off the alias-driven world of hip-hop (perhaps), (MF) DOOM gone electronic, gone voiceless, gone wordless, steering away from soul-samples and superheroes and instead entering the world of '80s video games (the avant-garde version). There are tricks from '90s club music, too – the incremental speeding-up of a rhythm so that it becomes a juddering, jarring blart, accelerating headlong into temporary white-noise out-of-body ecstasy before the rhythm comes back in – except here Chalmers stays with that white-noise moment, dispenses with familiar bass-lines or drum-loops, shudders back down into tape-fuzz silence. 'Happy Shopper', though less 'noisy' in terms of overall volume, is actually the more difficult listen, its entire sound-palette laid out in the first few seconds, with the looped sample of what sounds like a little girl's laughter, gradually morphed and manipulated out of itself, somehow always jarring and mocking, rather like a car-alarm with a mind of its own, lower rumbles and whines all but drowned out by its insane insistence. It ain't pretty, and you'll probably have a hard job getting hold of a copy, but it's very much a worthwhile listen. **(DG)**

SUBTLE LIP CAN – *SUBTLE LIP CAN*

Label: Drip Audio

Release Date: 2011
Tracklist: Chickle That Bottom; Crumple, Power Down; Inside Look; Tid Lac Boam; Suddle Lip Can; Runst From Thag; Crumpled Up Seed; Polloer.
Personnel: Isaiah Ceccarelli: percussion, piano; Bernard Falaise: guitar; Josh Zubot: violin, low octave violin.

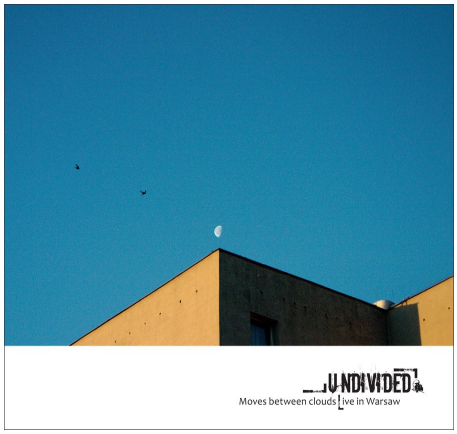
Realistically, dividing the world in half is never a good idea – it's over simplistic, the unhelpful "if you're not my friend, you're my enemy" thinking that has gotten us into so much trouble over the last…oh, I don't know… 2.5 millenia. Not that we at Eartrip HQ need to know exactly who our friends are, but the sound vs. music line in the improvisation world can be used to separate and sort; we're not using it as a cleaver but a handy equator-esque latitude traced along the outside of the sphere. Some people can easily move between the hemispheres while others find a one place, like it, and stay there.

Subtle Lip Can consists of Isaiah Ceccarilli on percussion, Bernard Falaise on electric guitar (no effects mentioned in the credits but a few pictures have a handful of gizmos on the floor) and Josh Zubot on violin. I harp on the Drip Audio inter-connectedness in other reviews but this group is relatively free of those associations. But as there aren't that many Zubot's out there (an internet address site lists a grand total of 52 Zubots across all of Canada), it shouldn't be much of a surprise that Josh is brother to Jesse Zubot, Drip Audio co-founder, member of Fond of Tigers and 72 b'zillion other bands. But no worries about familial nepotism here, as Josh is quite able to hold his own and doesn't need a brother's coat-tail to ride on.

As a trio, Subtle Lip Can is probably very happy being on the sound side of this planet. This group's music isn't busy but still maintains a consistent level of engagement. And it all seems to fit. This is not a recording of a group of people making neat sounds at the same time - their foreground is as engaging as the background, everybody seems to stay out of each others frequencies, and the music consistently sounds fresh and unrehearsed. Subtle Lip Can is a trio but by being on the edge of recognizable tones, at times they sound much larger than that – hard to say who's playing what and when, but when sounds are traceable, it's does seem to be democratic as far as who's "taking the lead".

Not wanting to not undermine my earlier assertion, but compared to some of their Drip Audio brethren, this Montreal-based group does give off a different vibe from their like-minded Vancouver-based labelmates – while they let musical ideas and statements rise and fall, there seems to be a greater continental vibe and feel to their tunes. **(TH)**

UNDIVIDED – *MOVES BETWEEN CLOUDS: LIVE IN WARSAW*



Label: Multikulti
Release Date: 2011
Tracklist: Hoping the morning say; Moves between clouds; What a big quiet noise
Personnel: Bobby Few: piano; Mark Tokar: double bass; Perry Robinson: clarinet; Klaus Kugel: drums; Waclaw Zimpel: bass clarinet, clarinet, tarogato
Additional Information: Recorded live at Teatr Akademia, Warsaw, 20-09-2009

Wonderful to hear such marvellous but underrated musicians as Perry Robinson and Bobby Few together on this live date, as the guests of a very fine trio of Polish musicians. All those clarinets give it a kind of European folky vibe, I suppose, which makes a nice change from the usual free jazz sax-bass-drums thang (this does, after all, come out on the Multikulti label); and while Waclaw Zimpel's melodies may at times be a little *too* elegant and stately (their exposition takes it time – which is by no means, formally, a bad thing, keeping us out of by-rote string-of-solos territory), Few's churning piano and the usefully busy drums of Klaus Kugel (cymbal bursts and kit socks constantly spilling out of left and right stereo channels, busily and invigoratingly excited) ensure that the surface is never flat, always pulsing, waving, rolling on. 'Hoping the morning say' is in the tradition of rubato balladry – swelling on drones and extended melodies, not seeking 'development' as such but moving inexorably from solemn calm to churning near-turbulence; 'Moves between clouds' is more spaced, Few's chiming piano and Kugel's bell-tree percussion atmospheres gradually ushering in a rather mournful two-clarinet melody, Tokar's bass providing urgent tremolo commentary and support. It's six minutes before the first solo comes in (Few takes it, perhaps in recognition of his seniority), clarinets then entwining round each other, impassioned then subdued, boiling up before dying back down again. The three tracks are progressively longer, moving from ten to fifteen to twenty minutes, and album closer 'What a big quiet noise' again evolves slowly and with care. It begins ominously, Few hammering out a woozily-and-continuously repeating piano figure, the clarinets' dark intonations become steadily more high-pitched until it all explodes into a trademark Few solo, pedalled, chordal, swelling, *heavy* and *thick* rather than linear or quicksilver – now thinning out to join the clarinets in twittering overlap, caught at a point of stuckness or tension, sudden silent drops, then back in again, heavier, Kugel's drums kicking up a storm, menaced exihiliration – and then we're in a bass solo, that arco space, creak and groan, quietened to almost nothing, the most delicate of piano tinkles, not as 'comping' but as amplifying, complementing the solo's pose, its poise; and wonderfully back to sonorous drone, piano repetition, clarinets slow in their entanglements, their sounding together: music taking its time, showboating set aside for focussed digging in, sustaining, organic evolution. Applause would kill the mood lingering after the final notes subside, and, somewhat unusually for a live recording, all that's removed; the audience similarly attentive, narry a cough or a whoop to be heard. **(DG)**

VARIOUS – *60 INTERPRETATIONS OF 60 SECONDS BY 60 SOLO IMPROVISERS*

Label: Apprise Records
Release Date: 2010

Tracklist: 160; 260; 360; 460; 560; 660; 760; 860; 960; 1060

Personnel: Track One – Linsey Pollak: rubber glove bagpipes; Chas Smith: copper box; Rachel Arnold: cello; Fatima Miranda: voice / field recordings; Yuichi Onoue: kaisatsu; Todd Taylor: banjo //

Track Two – Yurko Rafaliuk: tsymbaly; Jeff Albert: trombone; Laure Chailloux: accordion diatonique; Leon Gruenbaum: samchillian; Leanid Narushevich: electric guitar; Araz Salek: tar //

Track Three – John Oswald: alto sax; Christine Sehnaoui: alto sax; Susan Alcorn: pedal steel; David Sait: guzheng; Pekko Käppi: jouhikko; Andrea Centazzo: gong //

Track Four – Misha Mrks: prepared guitar; Joana Sa: piano; Martin Grutter: piano; Paul Dunmall: soprano sax; Joe Sorbara: drums / percussion; Kyle Bruckmann: oboe //

Track Five – Damon Smith: field recordings / 7 string double bass / laptop; John Butcher: saxophone controlled feedback & piano resonator; Tom Boram: analog modular synth; Ignatz: guitar / voice / drum; Helena Espvall: cello / effects //

Track Six – Tim Hodgkinson: clarinet; Beatrix Ward-Fernandez: theramin; Christian Munthe: guitar; Mia Zabelka: violin / effects; Rayna Gellert: fiddle; Tobia Tinker: harpsichord //

Track Seven – Perklis Tsoukalas: oud; Michael Keith: ukulele; Szilard Mezei: viola; Gino Robair; metal / glass / plastic / stone / motors; Joe McPhee: alto sax / voice; Michael Snow: piano //

Track Eight – Rob Coppard: bones; Johannes Bergmark: platform; Philip Gibbs: slide guitar; Aaron Ximm: field recording / broken radio; Philo Lenglet: prepared acoustic guitar; Carmel Raz: violin //

Track Nine – Ben Roberts Eclectiktronik: turntables/ cassette decks; Helean Gough: field recordings; Leonel Kaplan: trumpet; Gerry McGoldrick: shamisen; Ronny Krippner: church organ; Alessandro Alessandroni: keyboard / whistling //

Track Ten – Olivia de Prato: violin; Heribert Friedl: chair; Robin Hayward: microtonal tuba; Bruno Duplant: contre bass; Mike Smith: hurdy gurdy; Paulo Chagas: oboe

Additional Information: 'A perpetually evolving snapshot of the artists and their contributions to this project can be found online (presently at http://www.guzheng.ca/)

The notion here, an admirable one, that free improvisation is an international form of making music, that it transcends the genre specifications into which we critics can't help but box it (eai, efi, post-minimal-masturbation, whatever): that improvisation, in fact, is a method fundamental to the making of most music in the world, and has been arguably since music's invention (however it's been described or theorized at various stages of its development). Canadian musician David Sait's curtaorship of this project is laudable indeed, and must involved a good deal of work: the disc comprises ten sections, each of which forms six different improvisations into a suite (generally hovering around the five-minute mark – some of the pieces are obviously slightly longer or slightly shorter than a minute). There's both contrast and cohesion then, connections made between contributions disparate in both geographical location and musical approach, not forced into some false unity, but allowed to sit alongside one another, some kind of true global democracy, a universal history of where we are now, or where we could be. (Fatima Miranda's piece, for instance, draws on a field recording of African immigrants watching a football match in a Spanish city traditionally inhabited by gypsies: out of this new social situation, the possibility for a racial communal togetherness: "a new sound reality in the cities" as the expression of a true multi-culturalism. I mean, that sounds so twee, right, and it's easy enough to say all this about a one-minute track, or to come off as some kind of hippie fantasist, but these are measurable, concrete realities, social and sonic situations, right – Miranda's piece, her passionate singing, its layering over that resonant field recording, is beautiful and it is *about* and *is* something, yes?) So much to hear here: if any disc was made for repeated listenings, this is it. After a while, one learns simply to sit back and listen, to let the myriad bursts and stretches of sound and silence flow into one another; if the familiar tones of John Butcher, Paul Dunmall or Joe McPhee crop up across

the disc, one might also encounter such unexpected joys as the fleet fingers of Todd Taylor (officially the world's fastest banjo player!), or Chas Smith's copper box (presumably played as a bowed percussion instrument), in one of the sparest and most haunting interpretations of sixty seconds that the disc has to offer. Or, take the third track: the transitions from John Oswald's already deconstructed saxophone (his piece sounded as a single breath), into Christine Senhaoui's startling negotiations between breath and finger pads, into Susan Alcorn's delicately-judged pedal steel guitar and Sait's own expansive guzheng improv (harking back, in my mind at least, to McCoy Tyner's gorgeous koto solo on 'Sahara'), into Pekko Käppi's jouhkko (an instrument kin to the Kazakh kobyz and a whole range of bowed lyres stretching from Russia to the North American Inuits), into Andrea Centazzo's gong. There are such varieties of timbres here: smatterings of folk tradition, the focus on basics of breath and touch, the amplification of the tiniest creaks and crevices of the instrument through extended techniques that you hear in Senhaoui or in Kyle Bruckmann's unearthly oboe solo, through to those pieces more obviously in the lineage of what we have to come know as 'free improvisation' – Martin Grutter's scampering piano, Paul Dunmall's reedily-bent soprano sax. Some favourite pairings: Tom Boram's deliciously squiggly analog synth buzzing round the stereo picture before suddenly giving way to the hazy clarity of Ignatz' melancholy imagined folk music; the weird confluence between Tim Hodgkinson's slurring clarinet and Beatrix Ward-Fernandenz' looming, whooping theremin; the contrast between Mia Zabelka's almost-unrecognisably distorted violin and Rayna Gellert's richly recognisable fiddle. Other highlights: the presence of Alessandro Alessandroni, of Ennio Morricone soundtrack fame!; Ronny Krippner playing George Friedrich Handel's house organ (the fact that this is Handel's organ at all is enough for me already, even if it is only a replica); Robin Hayward's microtonal tuba; Mike Smith's hurdy-gurdy; Rob Coppard's musical bones; Heribert Friedl's *chair*. Delirious. All of it. A real pleasure. **(DG)**

RE-ISSUES

RADU MALFATTI – *WECHSELJAHRE EINER HYÄNE*

Label: Et Le Feu Comme Matière Formatable Technologiquement
Release Date: 2009
Tracklist: Wechseljahre Einer Hyäne

Personnel: Intersax (Ulrick Krieger: soprano sax; Martin Losert: alto sax; Tobias Rrüger, Reimar Volker: baritone sax)
Additional Information: Download release, available in FLAC or MP3 format from http://www.etlefeucomme.be/radumalfatti.htm. Recorded 19 September 2003 at Podewill, Berlin; originally released as B-Boim 007 in 2007.

Omitting any notion of 'development' or climax, Malfatti's composed music moves beyond even the 'lowercase' improvisation (of which he remains a distinguished practicioner) in which those elements may still sometimes surface. The details here are essentially unchanging: the music recorded in front of what was either a very attentive, or a very small audience, in a room less subject than normal to the sounds of hissing traffic, revving engines and the like that so often form a backdrop to such pieces. There are, nonetheless, significant 'ambient' contributions, in particular, the faint, high hum of a fridge (I'm guessing here) which first becomes noticeable (or first imposed itself on my threshold of perception, anyway) around 20 minutes in, and adds a rather lovely electronic element to an otherwise entirely acoustic work. Oh yes, the composition itself consists of held chords, all four instruments sounding together in a burnished cloud of sound, one usually left at the end to hold the tone for a few seconds more before also dropping away. (In most cases, it seems to be the baritone that's left hanging.) There are perhaps two chords used here - I'll have to admit, that kind of detail isn't what I pick up on in this kind of music; there may be a lot more going on that, harmonically. But the tones generally stay around the same area, last around the same amount of time, open with the anticipatory hiss of the musicians' breathed-in air, end with that continued solo note. Though one looks forward to the recurrence of the musical tones, there's no sense of tension as to when and where they will re-appear; instead, acceptance, calm, the contemplation of an essentially unchanging object that, nonetheless, moves in time, moves and changes as the listener's perception moves and changes. Attention may wander and then come back, modes of listening may subtly shift. "In the music of Malfatti, there is not even a beginning or an end any more," writes Tobias Fischer in his review of the album for Tokafi. "As each breath of sound manifests itself as a self-sustained event, there is no longer a need for a next move at all." This captures for me the essence of the work – that it suffices in itself, but that there is always the possibility of its expanding out (or of the opposite, 'contracting' into silence); it need not to be circumscribed. The music might as well have gone on for an hour as for half of that. One might even wish that it had, and reach once more for the play button. While the debate about Malfatti and Sugimoto's embrace of composition and increased silence rages on, it seems to me that what we are hearing here is a music in which there's no need to make grand statements; Malfatti is supremely comfortable within this area, and is thus able to craft, with the help of the performers, a finely-honed piece that pretends to be nothing more than it is, that doesn't feel 'extreme' or stretched in any way, but as natural as breathing and being. **(DG)**

ROSCOE MITCHELL – *BEFORE THERE WAS SOUND*

Label: Nessa
Release Date: 2011
Tracklist: Mr Freddy; Green; Outer space; Carefree; Akhenaten; And there was peace; Jo Jar; Carefree (take 2)
Personnel: Roscoe Mitchell: alto sax; Fred Berry: trumpet, flugelhorn; Malachi Favors: bass; Alvin Fielder: drums.
Additional Information: Recorded 1965 at Station WUBC, Chicago; previously unreleased.

The *Sound* of the title refers to Mitchell's innovative, some would say trail-blazing, album of the following year, and this album with hindsight provides glimpses of some of the elements taking shape for that and future Art ensemble of Chicago music.

To put the situation in perspective. At the time of this recording Dolphy had been dead a year, Ornette Coleman was dividing opinion with his trio featuring David Izenzon and Charles Moffett, and his performances on trumpet and violin, Coltrane was moving farther and farther out, and while Mitchell and his proto-AACM colleagues were making this music *Ascension* was awaiting release. Cecil Taylor and Albert Ayler had both made their musical presence felt, but their period of greatest influence still lay ahead.

So out of this ferment did anything rub off on these young proto-AACM players, looking for new ways to make music ? Not, it seems, the maelstrom of Coltrane or Taylor; implications may have been drawn from the liberating effect both had on music, but the influence, if it could really be called that, which springs to mind most readily is the early Ornette Coleman quartet, given an almost identical instrumentation, a willingness to distort the values of the tempered scale for the sake of sometimes highly vocalized expression, in conjunction with an emotional (or vibrational, in Braxtonese) approach that is less than full-on or in your face.

The opening track with its head-solos-head routine does bear some resemblance to the early Coleman quartets; yet neither horn soloist is given to the down-home folksiness which informed both Coleman and Cherry's playing in those days. While on the following track, Fred Berry's only composition of the album, there is a semi-modal harmonic feel that manages never to sound like Miles Davis and the slow melody line (if not through-composed, then Berry's improvisation is based very closely on the thematic material) in conjunction with tom-toms playing at a faster tempo, a feature they might have picked up from Elvin Jones' drumming on *Crescent*. By the 1970s this kind of rhythmic duality had almost become commonplace.

By the time we reach *Outer space*, the longest track, a multiple or compound theme can be found, complete with changes of tempo. Mitchell and Berry both have a few solo bars in the middle of this theme, which are probably improvised. (But in view of the substantial parts of *Sound* which appear to be improvised but are revealed by alternate takes to be pre-composed, who can really tell?) After the trumpet solo, the drumming grows fragmented in keeping with the alto's asymmetrical phrasing, till there is a brief section of contrapuntal improvisation. As what is arguably the most forward-looking track on the album, it still lacks what Mitchell was to cultivate with such mastery later on- the use of silence and space as an integral part of the music, especially in his trio work with Tom Buckner and Gerald Oshita. Of course artists cannot be blamed for not accomplishing what they did not set out to do at any given time.

Of the two takes of *Carefree* the second is shorter and taken at a slightly slower pace, and does not have the collective improvisation which surfaces briefly on the first take. Another two versions of this piece can be heard with a different line-up on *Congliptious* (1968). *And there was peace* reveals some dynamic contrast in the writing, but does not approach the extremes of pianissimo found in Mitchell's later composition. Berry here delivers a highly effective solo which, in its almost tempoless lack of tonal centre, presages some of Wadada Leo Smith's later solutions to this kind of playing. Favors' well-judged use of bowed bass should also be noted. He contributes the only non-Mitchell composition of the set, apart from *Green*. His *Akhenaten* is a challengingly jagged and asymmetrical theme, which develops in triple time for the improvisation, with something of a march feel in the drumming, which eventually becomes subdivided and fragmented.

Favors' essential part as core member of the Art ensemble needs no further documentation, but for an account of what happened later on to Fielder (notable for his contribution to *Sound*) and Berry, who seems to have made even fewer recordings, I would refer listeners to George E.Lewis's book *A power stronger than itself: the AACM and American experimental music*, still the single most comprehensive source of information about this movement.

It should be clear by now that this release is a document of invaluable historical interest, being the earliest known recording to date by AACM members. While it is not as epoch-making as *Sound*, only the most narrow-minded listeners could deny that it's jazz, and in refutation of the frequent claim that "new thing" musicians were incompetent or mere opportunists, these four are obviously highly competent, as the negotiation of some very tricky thematic material exemplifies. But apart from such considerations, it works as music, and any listeners with an interest in the work of Roscoe Mitchell, the Art ensemble, the AACM or other forward-looking music of the period will not be disappointed by these performances. **(SK)**

(L-R) Roscoe Mitchell, Spencer Barefield, Tani Tabbal, Jaribu Shahid

GIG REVIEWS

PHAROAH SANDERS QUARTET AT CHELTENHAM JAZZ FESTIVAL
Cheltenham Town Hall, Cheltenham, Saturday 30th April 2011

Pharoah Sanders had been placed pretty near the top of the bill for the festival weekend, and, tellingly, his name was printed alone in the brochures, with no information as to sidemen – perhaps an acknowledgment that, however competent the groups he's worked with in recent years (generally in standard quartet format), it's *his* name, *his* reputation, *his* past that's going to draw audiences, rather than the cutting-edge nature of his collaborations or any real promise of newness, of the real frisson that his work was so capable of generating back in its day. As it turned out, Sanders (on tenor only) was accompanied by Jonathan Gee on piano, Mark Dresser on bass and Gene Caldarazzo on drums, all of whom got lengthy solo spots on every tune, resulting in the rather by-rote feel a standardized succession of such spots can often generate (oh, it must be time for the bass player to run through some basic blues changes; and now the drummer to play some familiar patterns; oh right, and here's the melody again, to play us out). Gee did turn in a couple of bright moments in which his crossed-over hands allowed for some more timbrally interesting left-hand voicings, but in general seemed to shy short of where his own ideas might take him, seemingly about to develop an interesting line of enquiry but abandoning it for an easy chord change or a familiar lick; there was never much sense of the momentum or drive that would have perhaps lent Sanders' own playing a little more bite. Dresser got one fairly nice solo, picking up on the repeated thrums behind 'My Favourite Things' to go for some slightly less obvious 'jazz bass' moments. This even brought the hall to a temporary hush – not a cough to be heard – before Caldarazzo's solo broke the mood and re-established the template of weary familiarity. (Boom-crash-boom, cymbal, boom-crash-boom, cymbal, etc.) Polyrhythmic dexterity? Furious pell-mell momentum? Floating free pulse? No, we'll have none of that, thank you: this is a *jazz* festival, man. The result was music that was quite competent but also rather dull, and would surely have been less easily excused if Sanders (a 'living legend', no less) had not been at the helm. The 90-minute set felt at times, like something to go on in the background of ice-cream tubs, marquees and beer tents (which you could never in a million years say of 'Ascension', for example); neither was there much of the sense of joy and exuberance that Sanders brings to his small club dates,

however corny that might be (foot shuffles, tambourines, audience sing-and-clap-alongs, hollers into the microphone). In large part, this may have been due to sound problems: I'm not entirely sure whether this was the fault of the Town Hall's natural acoustic (all high ceilings, chandeliers, marble pillars and balconies) or the PA system, which added a harsh and muddy edge to a not exactly complex group sound (surely the standard jazz quartet line-up of sax, piano, bass and drums shouldn't present too much of an amplification challenge?); perhaps it was a combination of the two. In any case, Sanders was clearly somewhat uncomfortable with the sound balance during the opening numbers: 'Giant Steps', which should have provided a punchy and invigorating opening, instead came across as somewhat awkward, the trajectory of Sanders' solo lost in a fog of generalized jazz noise. 'Naima' allowed things to settle somewhat - the hall could cope with ballads at least, and the best moment of the evening was probably the later rendition of 'A Nightingale Sang in Berkeley Square', which was played straight. Trouble was, this made the whole thing feel incredibly restricted; I know Sanders' repertoire and sound has confined itself to early-60s Coltrane laced with a few shrieks and rough edges for the past few years, but even these token nods to a freer past were edged out as he left most of the work to his sidemen while he sat in the shadows at the side of the stage, his gold lamé kaftan as muted as his playing. Youtube allows us to witness a much less desultory showing in Paris the previous night; one can suppose, then, that the audience here merely got unlucky. Regardless of that, one does wish that Sanders would stretch himself once again; no matter that he's 'earned the right' to rest on his laurels, there are any number of fine improvising players who could, perhaps, jog him out of established patterns and endless re-iterations of 1960s templates. Just look at what happened when John Tchicai toured the UK with John Edwards and Steve Noble last year (as reviewed in the previous issue of this magazine). Probably not much chance of Sanders playing in that company (the turn towards easy melodicism and old-fashioned acoustic jazz came a long time ago), but one can always dream...

SUPERIMPOSE DUO + OXFORD IMPROVISERS TRIO: SEAGROATT / THOMAS / TELFORD
Folly Bridge Inn, Oxford, Wednesday 27th April 2011

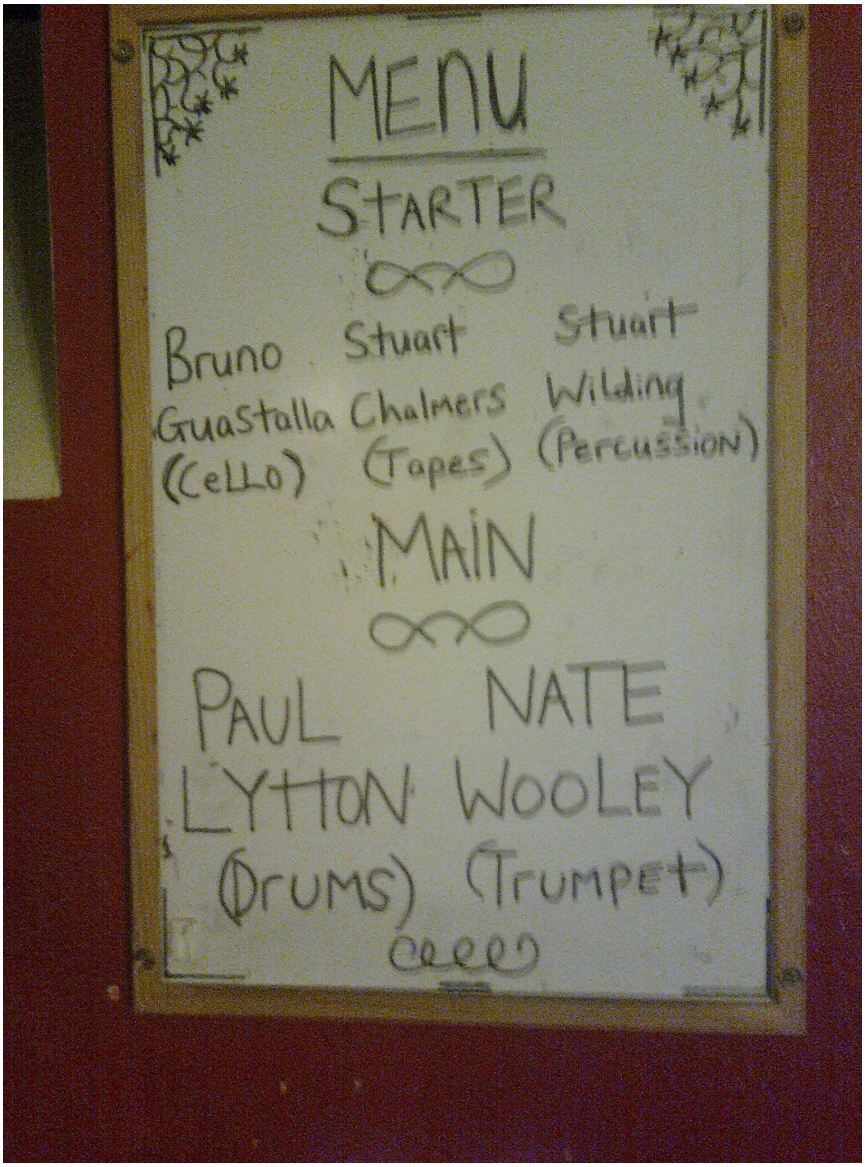
Superimpose, the duo of Mathias Muller (trombone) and Christian Marien (percussion), had travelled over from Germany for a week-long tour of the United Kingdom, which, fortuitously, happened to take place during the finest weather of the year so far. The sun had set by the time they began to play, and Real Madrid were slugging it out in a bad-tempered encounter with Barcelona on the TV screens downstairs; by contrast to that rather ugly affair, Muller and Marien were in fine sync, concentrating with patience and skill on specific textural areas during a thoughtful twenty-minute opening set. Neither played their instruments in particularly conventional ways: Muller would disassemble and reassemble his trombone, vocalizing and blowing through it in non-standard fashion, as well as inserting various mutes (including an old soup tin) into the bell to constantly modify the timbre, while Marien, sticking mainly to a large modified bass-drum, which he had shorn for travel purposes and placed upright on a set of legs, scraped and rubbed surfaces as often as striking them. From the droning, groaning start, they seemed to have a total sense of what the other was doing at any one time: at several points, both stopped simultaneously, shared a pause for a few seconds, and then began again, resisting the easy temptation to relax and allow the applause to follow, instead forging ahead with new sets of ideas and developments.

Following Superimpose were the trio of Jon Seagroatt, Pat Thomas and Roger Telford; saxophonist/flautist Pete McPhail had been scheduled to play with the three as part of a new quartet, but his absence due to illness meant the debut instead of this smaller configuration. Given that two of the musicians play in the originally Southend-on-Sea-, now Oxfordshire-based improv band Red Square, one could call the trio 'Red Triangle' or something of the sort (Red Triangle turning out to be, on further research, the first registered trademark in the UK, for Bass breweries) - but, in truth, they sounded very different to Square's electric power-drive, due in large

part to the fact that both Seagroatt and Thomas elected to leave at home the electronic elements (keyboards and kaoss pad respectively) that usually form part of their arsenal. As a result, Seagroatt's jazz-influenced soprano really came to the fore, Thomas's acoustic piano adding scintillating but chunky chordal depth and weight, while Telford's free-floating pulses allowed plenty of room for melodic dart and dive. This wasn't your common-or-garden, balls-to-the wall, no-let-up free jazz: there was barely any hard over-blowing or ten-finger cluster-bashing, and textures were generally sharp and clear rather than dense and over-powering, though the performance was fairly loud throughout. The best comparison I can think to make is with 'Wili the Pig', a little-known, but superb live recording by a quartet featuring John Tchicai and Irene Schweizer: a fine template indeed to aspire to, and Seagroatt, Thomas and Telford seemed to be channeling a similar stream of relentless, flowing energies. A fifteen-minute first piece fairly flew by, ideas pouring out and on with little space for a pause; there followed a second, shorter improvisaton which saw Seagroatt switch to bass clarinet, his warm and woody tone far more meliflous than the yawping post-Dolphy sound of such players as Frank Wright - one particularly smooth transition between notes even reminded me of Marcus Miller's rather beautiful velvet tone on the instrument (though thankfully without the drum machines and slap bass). Despite having to contend with a piano which had clearly not been tuned for quite a while, this was a really exciting performance by a group which it can be hoped will continue to perform together; and it was impossible not to admire the poise with which Seagroatt's half-quotation of Henry Mancini's Pink Panther theme was inserted into the midst of a committed improvisation with no hint of smugness or showmanship.

After an interval, a new set of musicians from Oxford Improvisers joined the returning Superimpose for a group collaboration. This new combination of cello and bandoneon (Bruno Guastalla), analog synth (Martin Hackett) and electric guitar (David Stent) might have seemed an incongruous fit, but it was precisely that slight sense of rough edges, of what might, by conventional standards, seem timbral incompatabilities, that made their first improvisation so intriguing. Guastalla took matters firmly in hand with an opening bandoneon chord, initially appearing rather too smooth for the context, but resolved (or made more ambiguous) by a final note that added a beautiful sense of uncertainty in place of firm resolution. From there the field was open, Guastalla returning to bandoneon later on (including a fine passage in which he squeezed some noisily rhythmic air from the bellows), as well as adding his spiky cello to Hackett's unpredictable synth, Muller's by now more garrulous trombone, Marien's alternately quiet and dramatic percussion, and Stent's mixture of e-bowed wails, ringing chords, and choppy rhythmics reminiscent of the rawest early blues players. A longer second piece was perhaps slightly less focussed, the regular whoosh of passing cars outside obscuring some of the detail in the more hushed moments, but there were always plenty of *things* going on: this was music of events and incidents, though with space to build and develop if something particularly interesting was collectively chanced upon. Thus, the five players did not all play at once, all the time; as had been agreed before-hand, room was left for smaller ad-hoc combinations to emerge, though these tended to be fairly brief and to overlap. Players were, however, willing to sit out when necessary, to consider the circumstances in which they might usefully re-insert themselves into the mix, perhaps changing the dynamic, pushing the music in another direction; notable examples were Marien's adoption of a slowly repetitive, almost ritualistic three-note figure on tuned percussion and Hackett's own repetitions, drawn out around charged silences and scrabbly fills from the other players, which drew the performance to a compelling close. No worries about 'scenes' of classifications here; just an evening of fine music, untainted by all the critical negativity and disillusion which pits 'European Free Improvisation' (seen as monolithic and out-dated) against 'Eai' (seen as the new way forward). Instead, this was just good improvised music, period.

NATE WOOLEY / PAUL LYTTON DUO
TRIO: GUASTALLA / CHALMERS / WILDING
Folly Bridge Inn, Oxford, Monday 16th May 2011



First, the new trio of Stuart Chalmers, on tapes, circuit-bent keyboard, and mouth instrument, Stuart Wilding on percussion, and Bruno Guastalla on cello and bandoneon. A surprising and satisfying set – short pieces, fragilities, consonances, transparencies of texture, clusters of concentration, vapours trailing off. A wispy concision; some might say also the hesitancy of a first-time grouping – but in terms of pure pleasure of sound and texture (particularly Wilding's bowed bells and bowls) and the contextual dimension added by Chalmers' tapes (fragments of voice, of orchestra, reduced to half-registration, working on and in the subconscious memory, like when the radio seeps in to your half-asleep ear and infiltrates your dreams), very worthwhile. The following duo, by contrast, play one, intensely focussed piece (and a one-minute encore). Lytton, like Roger Turner, has a quickness of hands and a mastery of a style that is, at least partially, about a kind of anti-mastery, the inclusion of accident – things falling off and onto the floor, clashes and bangs of bags and hands that are not part of the 'drummed' rhythmic flow – emptying from these bags the numerous accoutrements / junk which are actually not accoutrements at all, and are at times just as central as the actual drumkit to overall sound-making, all in the midst of the superfast, wired rhythmics of the thing, its heated moments; blurring this 'unpacking' with the motion of hands/sticks on drum so that it all becomes one

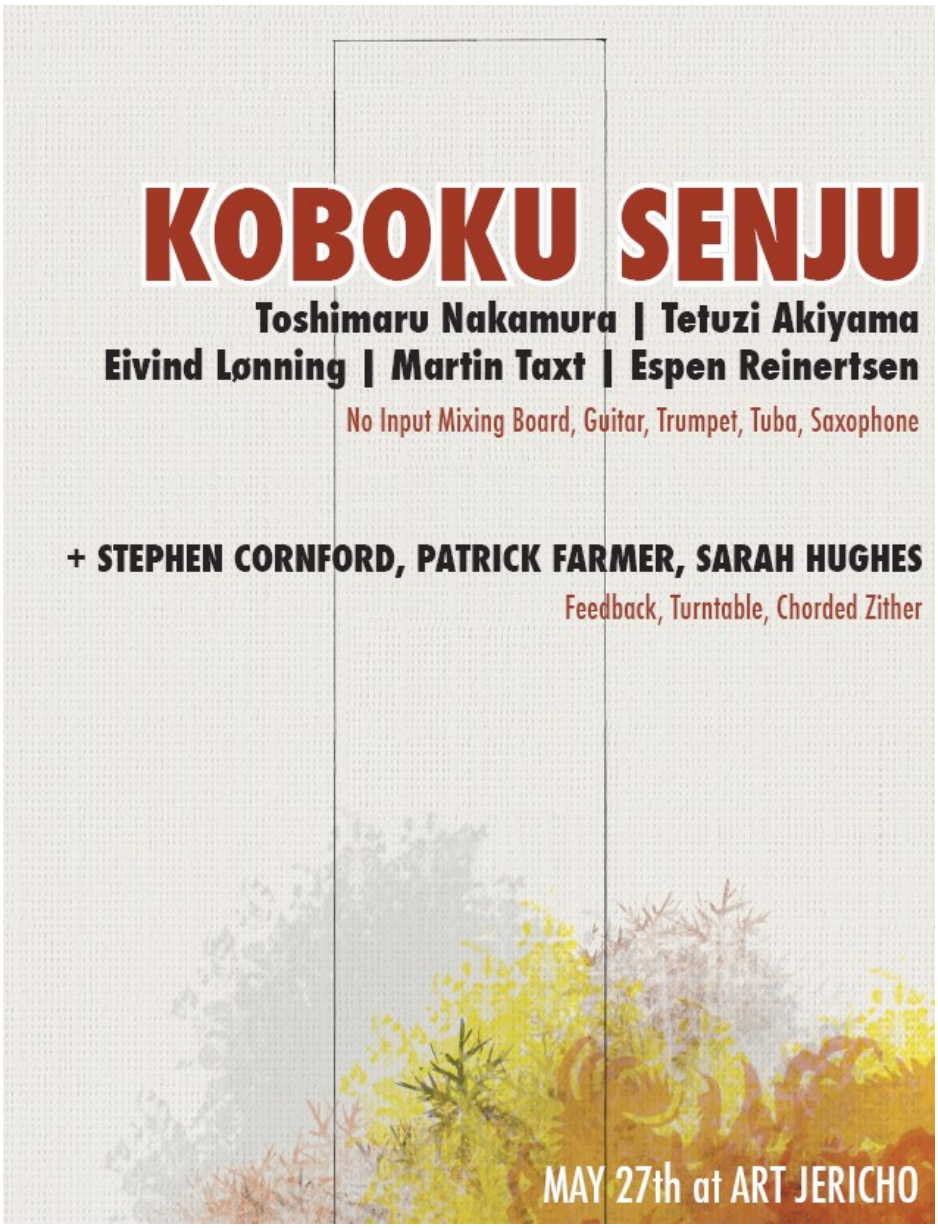
motion, like a juggler, like intuition (definition: arriving at a thought so quickly that one is not conscious of the process leading up to, so that the thought seems to be appear instantaneously in the mind, as if by magic). At moments, utter ferocity, bashing the drums with enough force, it seems, to break their skins (the floor shakes (vibrates)); at others, space round Wooley's burred trumpet, with its sidemouth vocals, with its low, held muted note harmonising with traffic's low rumble outside; ritual image quality as the bearded Wooley stands with trumpet held vertically in the air over his head, projecting upwards so that saliva can fall back down in such a way as to be sonically manipulated, holding the instrument there for an age, gradually lowering it to rest horizontal again, into quietness and the final rest.

KOBOKU SENJU
TRIO: CORNFORD / FARMER / HUGHES
Art Jericho, Oxford, Friday 27th May 2011

As I walked through the door of Art Jericho (a neat little gallery space down a back-street of half-built and shadowed buildings), Patrick Farmer (on turntable and various objects), Sarah Hughes (on chorded zither (i.e. autoharp), played with various modifications and electronic treatments) and Stephen Cornford (on mixing board and objects) were creating an immediately absorbing kind of pindrop-music; indeed, the sound of a pin dropping could very well have formed part of their arsenal, perhaps connected up to some sort of feedback device or scratchily amplified on the turntable. The first ten minutes or so trod a pleasing line of simultaneous tension and stasis; there was a lot going on, in terms of events and changes (particularly from Farmer, who seemed to be playing the role of agitator, suddenly creating loud, harsh jolts of feedback and noise in unexpected places), but, at the same time, much of this took place over a fairly stable drone, provided by Hughes' bowed zither. Then something happened, and the music moved away from this course (which it could easily have held for half an hour or more); things became more broken up, even theatrical, from delicate quiet sonorities which the half-sitting, half-standing crowd seemed to be craning forward to hear, to Farmer's aforementioned jolts and outbursts. When Hughes bounced a small red balloon off the strings of the table-top zither, so gently that it seemed to make no perceptible sound, the performative aspect kicked home; though the three musicians were sitting fairly still at their three tables, or work stations, this didn't feel like a solemn or reverential set-up – instead, they became garden shed scientists, fiddling around with arcane and quasi-magical devices fused from the cutting edge of electricity and the homely detritus of eccentrically-kept junk. Hughes' strongly diatonic instrument also militated against the harshness of some of the other sounds; her employment of a simple melody (played with such delicacy that her thumb barely seemed to brush the strings) adding a folkish, even ambient touch that was all the more effective for being sparingly employed. Towards the end of the set, Farmer picked up a box and emptied its contents (compost? Chinese take-away? dried leaves?) onto the turntable, all in one motion, the gesture radically changing the sounds coming from his set-up, and providing a nicely serendipitous correlation between physical movement and sonic event. It was typical of the trio's unforced and easy improvisational method; improvisation as the discovery of the genuinely new, the creation of surprising and pleasing relations and juxtapositions, a sound laboratory.

If Farmer could have been said, broadly speaking, to play the 'agitator' during the trio set, then Nakamura filled that role during the start of Koboku Senju's performance at least, his sharp, fizzing high tones and sudden bursts of scrunching feedback giving the impression that the machine was controlling what sounds were about to come out as much as he himself – though his pose of calm concentration (which might perhaps be mistaken for sleepiness), barely moving anything more than his hands, suggested that such a situation would not have perturbed him in the slightest. It was if he was reading a book or scrutinising a sculpture, looking down at the no-input board and waiting for it to reveal its secrets to him, rather than manipulating it with obvious physical dexterity or virtuosity. Akiyama's guitar playing was similarly untroubled and relaxed, though more conventional in terms of technique: he began with three capos clamped on the instrument's neck, gradually removing these as the set went on, playing relatively brief melodic phrases at untroubled, though fairly regular intervals; neither settling into finger-picking nor Bailey-esque improv; later on, rubbing a metal slide over the strings to produce an arco effect. This combination of melody and the textural improv of Nakamura and the three Norwegians (Espen Reinertsen on saxophone, Eivind Lønning on trumpet and Martin Taxt on tuba respectively) was something that perhaps shouldn't have worked in context. Indeed, what makes Senju stand out as a group is their seemingly rather clunky line-up of three brass/wind instruments, electronics, and acoustic guitar. In the end, though, it was the mesh rather than the abrasiveness of the instrumentation that compelled. Having listened to electro-acoustic improvisation for a number of years now, I thought that the days of not being able to tell which

instrument was doing what might be over (that initial shock when one first hears the employment of extended techniques –, that disorienting, blurring effect), but, even seeing the music live (which should make who's doing what clearer), it was sometimes hard to believe the evidence of one's own eyes. How is it possible that a trumpet can produce sounds like that merely by tilting the mouthpiece to the side of the mouth? *Is it* possible that a saxophone can sound so un-jazz-like? Are those high sonorities really coming from the *tuba*? All this was compelling enough – meshing, merging, and those collective swells (not so much climaxes) out of which emerge a moment of piercing clarity, often provided by Akiyama's melodies – but what really tipped things was the moment, about half-way through the set, when the three horns suddenly moved from extended techniques to a succession of three-voice jazz melodies. Presumably improvised and unplanned, it was, like Hughes' zither melody in the first half, a moment of lovely and unforced surprise – and what was more admirable was that Senju didn't just stop there, as they well could have, but moved back to textural playing (Taxt, at one point, removing part of the tuba's tubing and clinking it against the body of his instrument; at another, turning the whole thing sideways so that the enormous, gramophone-like bell pointed directly at the audience; Lønning circular-breathing, smoothly but with an edge of roughness, a popping breath sound that came around every few seconds – simultaneously the result of physical necessity and a part of the music). Really, the hush at the end (I say hush, despite the sound of Friday-night parties passing down Walton Street) and the following applause, were more than well-deserved.



KEITH ROWE (SOLO)
London Review Bookshop, London, Wednesday 22nd June 2011

During a brief introduction, Rowe explained that he would be playing two sets: interpretations of, first, a page from Cornelius Cardew's 'Treatise', and second, Christian Wolff's 'Edges'. In certain anniversary years of Cardew's birth, he plays Treatise throughout the year; this year (the 75th anniversary), he was up to page 68 (which is slow progress, apparently). However, as he made clear, the piece was being used as a point of departure, rather than being 'played' as such: thus, while he began the performance by keeping a fairly close eye on the score (looking at it continuously as he made one particular manoeuvre), things soon started to lead away from that in the flow, or succession, of improvised ideas. In any case, Treatise is a particularly open piece, designed to encourage thought, care and attention in interpretation, but also to allow the individual to make the music they might make anyway, in a more coherent, or at least, structured, manner: to group ideas that might, otherwise, flow somewhat diffusely or digressively, around a central series of specific points. One might also note that there's a rather different set of parameters involved in solo, as opposed to ensemble interpretations: whereas (according to one way of playing the score) the ensemble may feed back on itself, certain people's interpretations of certain symbols informing other individuals' interpretations in dialogic fashion, the solo performer is interacting solely with the score itself. Rowe remarked, in deadpan fashion, that we wouldn't notice much difference between the Cardew and the Wolff pieces – he was placed very much in the foreground, with the two composers somewhere in the background of his musical thinking, perhaps serving to focus the occasion (rather than taking an entirely free 'let's see what happens' approach, an exploration of *playing* as a wholly sufficient and interesting category in itself, à la Derek Bailey), but by no means providing a 'key' to understanding the performance, which one could appreciate in and for itself with no knowledge of the scores that were being played (or departed from).

Before describing the music, it might be useful to mention the reduced size of Rowe's set-up – a small mixing board, two radios (one tuned to BBC Radio 3 (perhaps pre-recorded, as three distinct, and quite different pieces of classical music were used), the other to BBC Radio 5 Live (mainly John McEnroe offering his pundit's opinion on the second day of the Wimbledon tennis championships, which was happening at the same time across the city)), a fan, an electric toothbrush, brillo pads, stones, pedals, metal objects, and, of course, the 'guitar' itself – a modified fretboard, laid flat on the table. I'll come back to the point later, but it struck me that this set-up offered, on the one hand, an element of risk – what if none of the sounds on offer really seemed to be working, and another option was desired that simply wasn't there? – and conversely, of stability – the opportunity to really focus in on a specific set of materials and concerns, generating an immediate sense of focus, a certain usefully freeing limitation (if that makes sense).

Anyhow, Treatise began abruptly, one might even say violently: abrasive, sharp, metallic sounds of fairly short durations, chosen deliberately for their jarring effect: at several points, as Rowe scraped a string or rubbed it with a brillo pad, a grimace of concentration, even anger, seemed to cross his face – albeit mixed with a certain glee in pushing things 'out there', in taking a particular action to its noisiest extreme. As the set progressed, a more familiar approach asserted itself, with drones coming in and out (often generated by holding an electric toothbrush over a particular string, e-bow style) – this leading at times to the sort of beating frequencies and timbres that have become common in the more drone-oriented areas of 'eai'. Things were, however, still broken-up – one sensed that, despite having (presumably) decided to take this approach before he started, Rowe was still feeling his way in, which gave the music a palpable sense of discovery, invention. Things weren't ramshackle, but they *were* unconcerned with propriety (despite the parallels he likes to draw between his own work and classical music, and his use of fairly substantial classical excerpts in the second set). It was above all about *improvisation* (in contrast to

the more conceptual work on the recent duo with Radu Malfatti, during which, at certain times, one senses that Rowe was rather less than comfortable (for instance, the fact that the recording of Jurg Frey's 'Exact Dimension Without Insistence' had to be pieced together from three separate takes, because Rowe found it too hard to limit himself to the score's narrow confines). (I don't mean to disparage the collaboration, or the Frey score, but to suggest that Rowe may be heard at his best in a situation more akin to the LRB gig.)) Actions here are directed, intended, precise – particularly given the use of the aforementioned small set-up, much reduced in size from those we have seen used in the past– but relations between sounds do not follow a straight narrative pattern. One might say that the second set *did* follow some sort of linear trajectory, beginning from sparseness – slow, scrubbing and scooping of metal on metal, as objects were moved up and down the strings, with 'peripheral' white hiss faded in and out – and moving into the loudest section of the evening, a particularly violent scraping action that made the blue lights on the PA flash and crackle. Nonetheless, this very loose movement towards crescendo (and I'm inevitably simplifying the actual process, the attempt to recall what happened flattening out the actual details of its unfolding) was hardly smooth progress, and certainly not indicative of the general feel the music took. Let's consider, as more representative, the endings of the two sets: Treatise stopping when Rowe dropped a metal object onto the floor by mistake (he'd just about finished anyway, but the sudden accidental clang made a nice abrupt snap out of 'the zone'.) A wry smile; "That's it." And that was it. Edges, meanwhile, finished with Rowe reaching over and switching off the small desk-lamp which had been lighting the score, as the sounds he'd been making simultaneously ceased. A brief silence (traffic whooshes and whispers leaking in from upstairs), but not luxuriating in it – and from the darkness, "that's it," again. There was something very *unaffected* about this, possessing more in common than one might think (contrary to my earlier suggestion) with Derek Bailey's no-nonsense approach: the desire to use one's materials (developed as they are through detailed and constant thought and philosophical investigation) in the situation that exists as one finds it, rather than imposing 'high art' into a world it won't fit. One thinks of the story about Zen archers that Rowe likes to repeat,[32] illustrating as it does the importance of knowing the room, judging the room, being a part of 'a perfectly ordinary dimension of reality'. Or again, his insistence on not practicing, on not rehearsing, of being actually terrified of his instrument[33]: this is not, as solo improvising can so easily become, the slotting together of a selected assortment of tricks, effects, techniques, patterns in a slightly different order to your last performance, but what he calls "searching for the sound in the performance." Some might argue that this shows a sort of contempt for that audience – as if, because Rowe doesn't woodshed at home, his stage performances become that wood-shedding, rather than a considered, crafted musical piece – and the process *is* somewhat (ok, *very much*) antithetical to the notion that dominates some forms of popular music, of putting on a choreographed stage show in which each element fits. (Then again, perhaps that extreme choreography is more a characteristic of an increasingly commodified and 'whitened' strain of pop – Madonna, Lady Gaga – where spectacle, costume changes, and dance routines take the place of shifts and discoveries in the music itself. James Brown, by contrast, might have put on a tight –a very tight – show, but there was still space for the music to breathe, for discoveries to be made within those tight parameters that were the music's raison d'etre.) What Rowe is doing, then, is not showing contempt for his audience (which, in any case, consists on this occasion of no more than thirty or forty people (the venue, in the LRB basement, wouldn't allow for any more)), but respect for them: taking for granted their willingness to participate in the thought processes he manifests through the sound he creates, to follow the music where it goes, to embrace the possibility of abruptness or jarring transitions or seeming 'failures' (where a new technique is tried out and falls flat or seems out of place). It's an attitude that, perhaps, emerges only from years of playing this music, of developing something of a thick skin, but also of knowing that one is performing in an intimate setting, for an audience who are sympathetic and willing listeners, willing to go (again) where the music demands: an attitude exemplified by the way

32 http://ageofeverything.blogspot.com/2010/03/keith-rowe-at-new-england-conservatory.html

33 http://www.paristransatlantic.com/magazine/interviews/rowe.html

he played through the sound of a mobile phone going off, that sound then becoming, briefly, a not-unwelcome part of the texture, rather like the found material heard on the radios – not to suggest that "anything goes", or that any interruption is valid (as in Cage's 0'00") (and, indeed, the use of radios seemed rather more pre-ordained, in the manner of sampling, than random or aleatoric) – but that there is a high degree of *flexibility* to the aesthetic, a flexibility that doesn't compromise serious dedication to a particular set of goals and methods. Accident and discipline here go hand-in-hand: as in the occasional sounding of the 'guitar's' open strings as 'accidental' by-product of other actions, rather the main intention. Another example: at one point during 'Edges', a low wadge of feedback conjured up, for me at least, the 'hard' sound of the rock guitar – but it happened so quickly that it barely registered as such. While I've suggested that Rowe could be considered more and more as a player of 'electronics' in recent years, his use of a modified, table-top version of the guitar (like a small chunk sawn off from a 'real' instrument), and that aforementioned occasional striking of open strings, reminds one that he does still have some interest in the instrument as such, even if aspects of its heritage rankle with him. Perhaps it's simply the uncontrollable resonance of history and tradition, asserting itself against or despite departures from it (in contrast to the parodic play with cliché and genre in Amalgam days, and in contrast to the very conscious use, in this performance, of radio'd classical music as something to dialogue with, a technique somewhat reminiscent of the way that Keston Sutherland's 'high modernist' poetry consciously dialogues with poets of the past, even as it studs and stutters itself with mangled fragments of the hyper-modern, the global-technological-late capitalist sphere[34]). In fact, though, it may be that very emergence of historical fragments from outside immediate intention which allows individual artistic development to take place: the shock of something unexpected – either unexpectedly new, or unexpectedly, and disturbingly, familiar – leading to that existential moment where one is forced into a decision – 'where do I go from here? what do I do now?' – and where one then *makes* that decision, where one then *acts*. From the Paris Transatlantic interview, once more: "You can't escape history, you can't escape memory - but I can honestly say, even now I will discover things I've never done in my life, and I constantly search for that. To a casual observer it might sound like something I've done before, and I know it isn't. I'm the judge of that, and I'm pretty severe with myself. I do not like the idea of reproducing something I've done before. I will happen on it, I'll suddenly find myself doing something I've done before…..*and then do you say "Whoa, I've done that before.." and stop, or do you accept it?* I'll accept it, and then quickly counterpose it with something…Stop it abruptly, so something *unethical* to it…" Un-ethical? The fact that Rowe even talks in terms of ethics brings us back to Cardew – 'Towards an Ethic of Free Improvisation' – and brings home the fact that this is, in fact, profoundly ethical music-making; well-suited to the visual coincidence (or was it intention?) that found Rowe setting up his table between LRB bookshelves marked 'Music', 'Religion,' and 'Cultural Studies.' Not that the music inspires religious devotion (though Richard Pinnell's review of the gig under consideration is indeed a fervent response[35]), but that it argues, and earns for itself a certain weight, a certain importance that one might be hard-pressed to think music could now have (except as all-encompassing distraction, as identikit-background-noise to music-video theatricals.) And, really, thank fuck for that.

THE CONVERGENCE QUARTET
Churchill College Recital Room, Cambridge, Wednesday 9th November 2011

The Convergence Quartet has been making regular visits to Cambridge over the past few years, and, even if the names of its individual members may not have been immediately familiar to the audiences to which it plays here, their pedigree should, really, speak for itself. I mean, Taylor Ho Bynum has been a regular collaborator with both Anthony Braxton and Cecil Taylor, two of

34 See Sutherland's interview at 'The Other Room': http://otherroom.org/projects/interviews/the-other-room-interview-series-films-2/keston-sutherland/

35 http://www.thewatchfulear.com/?p=5394

the most important composers, period, of the past, I don't know, forty years – Dominic Lash and Alexander Hawkins will be familiar to readers of this magazine – and Harris Eisenstadt is that rare beast, a drummer who also doubles as a fine composer, (and has already made numerous recordings with his own groups).

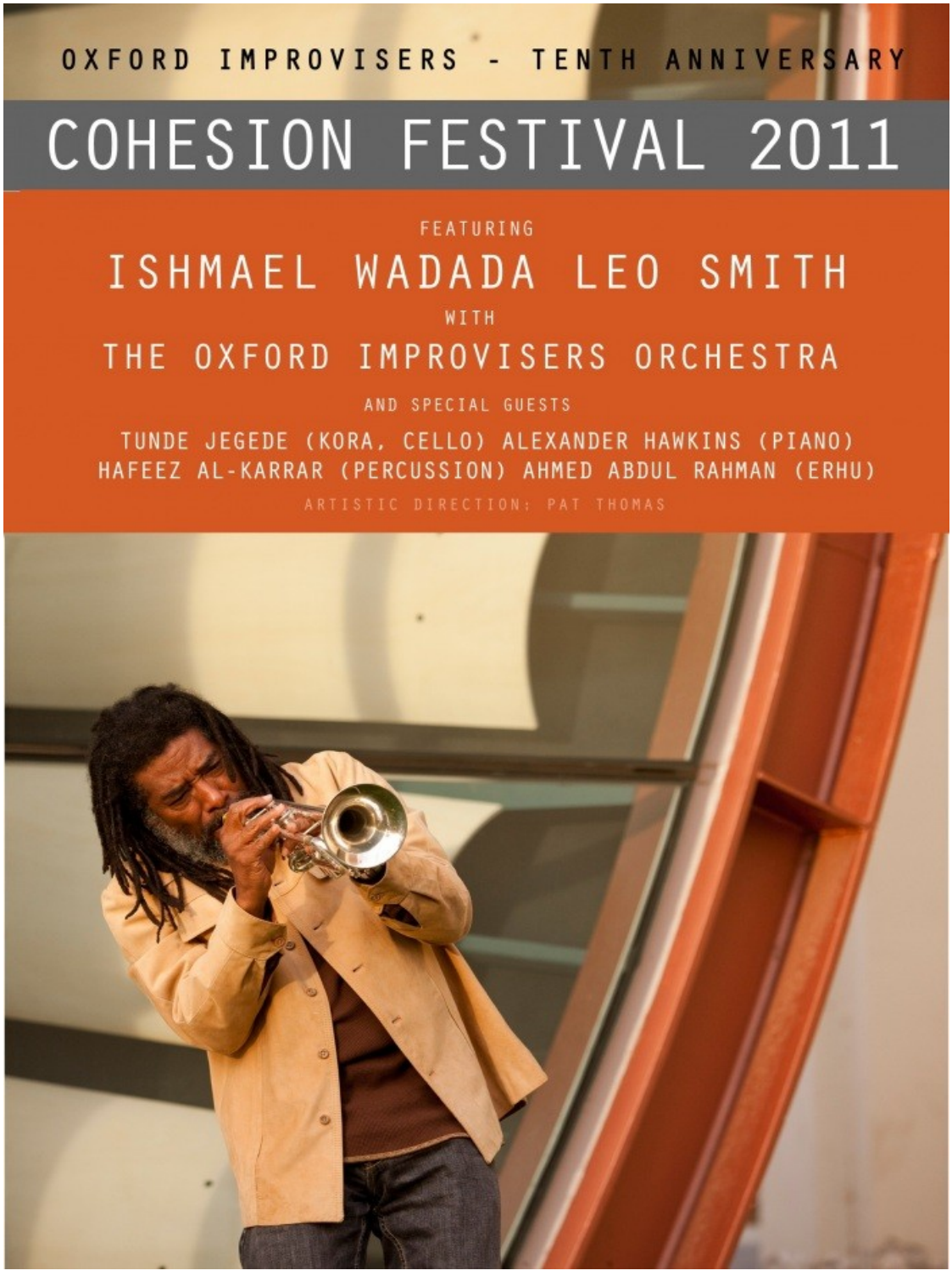
Such a by-the-numbers summary may provide an overly prosaic and even dull intro to what was a sparkling and enlivening gig: nonetheless, perhaps it helps to suggest some of the varied cross-connections and influences that make the music of this British-Canadian-American group such a rich and multi-faceted thing. While each player is clearly technically adept, unleashing passages of almost casual virtuosity that no doubt had the jazz-heads in the audiences nodding their heads or tapping their feet in rapture, what's particularly striking is the way that the group functions as a group, a unit, in which, for instance, more than one player will appear to be taking a solo at the same time. This is not the ecstatic discord of pure free jazz, however: the group tread a fine line between 'inside' and 'outside', their music based on near-constant shifts and turns, dips and dives – between 'head' and improvisation; between the multiple sections of complex compositions; and between varied, sometimes simultaneous emotional connotations. So this might be characterised as a twenty-first- century music, drawing, in a contemporary manner, on the whole scope of jazz history in a manner of which the post-bop throw-backs who dominate today's jazz mainstream could only dream.

The music the quartet play is almost entirely original – all are fine composers, with no need to rely on the same old standards that have been de-constructed and re-configured endlessly for the past half-century and more – ranging from Lash's tricky 'Oat Row', which emerged as a series of stately muted statements in duo with Bynum, to the latter's new piece based on a text from David Mitchell's novel 'Cloud Atlas', a straight-forward concluding blues, and – perhaps the highlight of the entire concert – an absorbing fifteen-minute medley of tunes by various members of the group. Sometimes, one gets the feeling that jazz bands are playing new tunes because they feel they have to stake their claim as leaders or originals – even if these tunes are singularly un-original or thread-bare. In this case, however, the compositions provide a framework for and around improvisation, rather than merely existing as a necessary evil, sketchy 'heads' to be quickly negotiated before the proper business of a 'blowing session' can begin. They are *strategies* which facilitate *coming together*, not in a manner that yields homogeneous pap, but rather, achieving unity through diversity, difference and change.

One might consider the band's name here: the word 'converge', denoting 'the coming together of at least two things', derives from the Latin root, 'convergere', 'to incline together' ('con' meaning 'together', 'vergere', 'to bend, turn, or incline'). All these phrases suggest fine parallels for the way the quartet works: multiple influences, interests, geographical backgrounds, coming together to form a music whose cohesiveness and sheer skill doesn't detract in the slightest from its raw excitement and carefully managed, bundled-up energy – or *energies*, plural, harnessed and released, drawn back and then let fly again in intricate and beautifully involving kind of choreography. The group's convergence is not an imposed, impersonal system, but a result of the accommodation of each player's inclination, their leaning towards or away from some harmonic, melodic, stylistic suggestion, from where their next improvised phrase might take them – leaning, like a 'lean-to', a provisional structure which can house several people under one roof, but which could be re-configured, taken down and put back up in some other, entirely different location. In concrete terms, then, each player's vocabulary is deep and wide, drawing from as far back as the 1920s – Bynum's delightful plunger-muted growls and vocalised wails: bluesy, gritty and heart-breaking in turn – through Hawkins' occasional nods to Bud Powell, Thelonious Monk and Cecil Taylor (incorporated into a piano style which prevents such disparate references from coming off as mere pastiche, as post-modern patchwork), through Lash's walking or droning arco bass, through Eistenstadt's Tony Williams-esque insistence on providing dramatic and melodic accompaniment to the front-line, fully participant in the music's ongoing argument,

rather than merely keeping time or chug-a-lugging in the background so that the star soloists can have their say in the spotlight. Formally complex, and yet fully capable of either straight-down gut-punch or a more guarded, wryly morphing emotionalism –let's say, Bynum's plunger-muted parody of a crooner, or his whispered wistfulness on 'Third Convergence; Hawkins' exhilarating switches between finger-flying single-note lines, or his sudden, elbow-jabbed cluster chords (just barely held in check) – The Convergence Quartet is no doubt one of the finest 'jazz' bands around, certainly in the UK, at this moment. Cambridge was lucky to have them pay a visit.

COHESION FESTIVAL 2011
Ishmael Wadada Leo Smith / Oxford Improvisers Orchestra
Jacqueline du Pre Music Building, St Hilda's College, Oxford
Saturday 26th November 2011



Leo Smith has been appearing sporadically in the UK for the past couple of years now – a particular recent highlight being his triumphant performance with Steve Noble and Louis Moholo-Moholo at the 2010 Freedom of the City festival – but this year's version of Cohesion, the Oxford Improvisers' annual event dedicated to concerts, talks, workshops, and community collaboration, gave a more in-depth chance for local musicians to engage with his work, for differing and varied approaches to bounce and rub off each other in extended dialogue.

Smith's pre-concert talk highlighted as errors just the kinds of phrases and categorisations that those writing on this kind of music always fall back on, so what follows will no doubt risk generalizing and eliding some of the qualities which characterised the evening, but here's an attempt, anyway. The evening's proceedings proper got under way with a major new project, in some ways the culmination of Smith's week-long residency. This new orchestral piece, written, and rehearsed over that past week, featured the two-dozen or so members of the Oxford Improvisers Orchestra – filled, needless to say, with a real wealth of (underappreciated) talent, musicians fully capable of acting as soloists in their own right, though their reputation, as it is, would restrict them to the status of the merely 'local'. I say 'merely' - the Cohesion festival, as it has existed over the past few years, has always been about establishing connections between different systems of global music, about inviting guest musicians to collaborate, about fostering that kind of cultural exchange. Smith, in that sense, was the perfect guest, unassuming, modest, yet with a strong and clear vision, setting up a directional framework around which a group of improvisers could coalesce, and with whose help they could develop in ways beyond the usual totally open approach which tends to be favoured (broadly speaking, of course) in European free improvisation.

The piece itself constantly returned, for refreshment and reinvigoration, to massed, non-transposable chords – enormous, resonant clusters of sound, filling and swelling out the resonant space of the JDP. In his talk, Smith had explained his interest in the open-ended, overlapping nature of such ensemble sound-clouds, in which subtle timbral shifts and pulsing motions occur with a kind of visceral, vibratory, physical effect – for instance, certain instrumentalists will run out of breath, while others are capable of sustaining notes almost indefinitely, so the sound never remains entirely static; is always in some ways pulsing, alive. (One of the nicest moments of the whole evening came when I noticed a couple of pre-teen children, watching from the upstairs balcony, drumming along on the railing, sensing the implied, sustained rhythmic underlay to those chords, their imperative, clarion call, seemingly indefinitely stretched and yet always threatening to break, like a tidal wave suspended, gloriously, in mid-air.) In between these chords, then, which functioned something like the repeated stock phrases in oral epic poetry – that is, as rest points in which new ideas can be generated – there were passages of solo improvisation (most notably, an extended, cadenza-like solo for violinist Malcolm Atkins), and moments in which simple, three- or four-note melodies or motifs would be passed around the ensemble, each instrumentalist sounding the motif in their own fashion, at different speeds, thus creating a kind of blurring effect in which the melodies swam into and out of focus, with the same kind of ecstatic, shimmering impact as the chords – a compelling simultaneity of the static and the fluid, the forward-driving and the endlessly-hovering, like the extended 'plateaus' of energy which Gregory Bateson identified in Balinese music and ritual. As Smith noted after the performance, it was a real surprise to find so many musicians willing to play this music – musicians, one might add, that are ignored, for the most part, by the 'hip' jazz or experimental press, always more keen to go for the trendy cross-over or the established name, and thus doing themselves out of much that is vital and ongoing in communities around the country. Make no mistake, while Smith's piece was deeply compelling in its own right, it sets up a framework which depends for its success on the improvising skills of the musicians who perform it, and the Oxford Improvisers passed that test (if one call it that, rather than, say, participatory work, creative collaboration and celebration) with flying colours.

After the interval, Smith took a seat in the audience as the orchestra played an improvised conduction, led by Pat Thomas. Beginning with sparse, textural playing in which Belinda Bell's sellotape manipulations were gradually subsumed into key-clicking and string-knocking from bass clarinets and violins, the piece modulated between louder explosions (generally held in check), and quieter, or solo passages, one of the nicest of these contrasts occurring during an unexpected tabla solo; dig, too, Roger Telford's scraped, singing cymbals, meshing eerily and strangely and beautifully with guitars and strings and winds and who knows what else.

If the timbral range of Smith's first-half orchestral piece was fulsome and wide – from the lovely, resonant low end provided by tuba, by double-bass, by mallet-struck drums and by twin bass clarinets, to the air-cutting high register of melodicas, violins, and a squelching triple-electric-guitar barrage – Alexander Hawkins' concluding composition, appropriately enough for the final item of the evening, had a more intimate, chamber feel to it, the melody again passed round particular instrumental groupings (the violins in particular), before the entire ensemble raised the volume level, then died away again, all the while playing under Smith's improvised solo (often in interaction with pianist Pat Thomas), his line ranging from low, vocalised blarts and growls to the most piercingly beautiful and direct of open tones, sent out soaring into the space (note Smith's calisthenics, bending low and then standing straight, horn pointing alternately to the floor and to the ceiling; it's part of his whole process of playing, that the physical means of producing sound should not be eradicated or politely hidden, but that making music should be a matter for the whole body, and that the instrument should function as that body's extension). As the orchestra faded out, Smith was left with just the held drone of Bruno Guastalla's cello, over which he played muted phrases of an almost nursery-rhyme-like simplicity, plaintive and wistful and delicate in that peculiarly affecting manner that would sometimes creep into Miles Davis' playing in the 1980s (I'm thinking of moments, in particular, from the 1985 album 'Aura'). And then it was over –a sigh, deep breathing, and applause – or, not quite over, just time for an encore, all of thirty seconds long; a contrast, just for the hell of it, I guess, in which Smith played above the entire-orchestra's eruption of sound (the control he has, to still be heard as a distinct voice above twenty instruments, is quite remarkable). And then it was really over –*boom*, Smith brought down his hand, signalled everyone out, performed a mock stumble, a pratfall on the edge of the stage, jumped up and off that stage.

(The music, of course, is never really over. It carries on. It is *carrying* on, right now, in this room, as I write, as I recall it to my mind. You can hear it singing all around.)

PADANG FOOD TIGERS / ALAN WILKINSON / C JOYNES

Portland Arms, Cambridge, Wednesday 7th December 2011

The banjo/acoustic guitar duo Padang Food Tigers, hesitantly plucking and picking into generously echoey amplification, made a virtue of meanderingly pretty and deliberately uncertain melodics: their music had none of the forceful grit and rhythmic thrust of C Joynes' set, but nonetheless retained a certain jam-sessiony structural logic of its own. After tentative opening nick-nacks, pieces would coalesce into repeated chordal or melodic patterns (generally played on guitar) which, rather than developing into a full-blown 'song', would then simply stop, signalling the end of that particular segment. That unfussy quality was what I liked most about it - though some sections might have been extended (the rather lovely low-pitched scrape of bowed banjo strings was deployed as momentary effect rather than sectional development), and though it was the sort of music seemingly designed to let attention wander and skim over its filmy surface, it was very pleasant, and I'd like to hear more of it.

Alan Wilkinson, the lone free jazz act sandwiched between neo-folk and fingerpicking, deployed his, what they call 'lung-busting' capacities to full extent in a solo set characterised by the kind of wounded, yowling balladry exemplified by Peter Brötzmann on '14 Love Poems'. That

album contains a superlative version of Ornette Coleman's 'Lonely Woman', and Wilkinson (who's previously played with Brötzmann) duly ended the set with his own take, sticking fairly close to the melody, making much of brief pauses which cut up the various phrases and phases of the tune into starkly delineated, dramatically separated blocks. His first piece, played, like 'Lonely Woman', on alto, started out with the kind of subdued rhythmic jitters that solo saxophone players tend to employ to mitigate the absence of a rhythm section, but things became less jazz-like as he progressed, deploying voice and overblowing to create the effect of sometimes as many as three separate layers to a single sound, circular breathing ferocious loops when needed, and letting rip with ear-splitting shrieks, sometimes to cap a particular intense section, sometimes as perverse contrast. In between the two alto performances, a work-out on baritone deployed the growling, floor-shaking capacities of the instrument, rather than the gruff velvety quality we'd associate with its most famous practitioner, Gerry Mulligan: aside from a particularly nasty riff, this was a piece characterised more by blaring, foghorn blasts than by phrasal development – and yet it ended with a tender-violent run-through of the melody to 'You Don't Know What Love Is', Coltrane's bittersweet early '60s version (the one stuck in my head right now) – or Dolphy's just *melting* one, on flute, on 'Last Date,' bent notes and all, heaven – transformed into a desperate, keening, bellowing waul. Always interesting to hear a hard-blowing player of Wilkinson's type (others on the British scene who I might place in this category would be, say, Tony Bevan and John Grieve) lay out his conception without the cushioning or prodding of bass and drums: the result, not too dissimilar from the Brötzmann solo model, the jazz side coming out much more strongly than in group improvising contexts, but with certain kinds of sound and texture that seemed more reminiscent of something John Butcher might have played a few years ago than anything coming out of European free jazz.

So, after the ear-rinse, as they say, Cambridge regular C Joynes, who happens to share a record label with Wilkinson, came out with his electric guitar (and, on one number, banjo) and strummed through a reliable set of old and new tunes, the first couple with an English folk-song tinge, the rest more broadly in Fahey/Takoma mould. A microphone was placed pretty close to his strumming hand, so bits of metal on string and those kind of gnarly, rusty effects made their presence felt: a deliberate embrace of a vaguely rough-round-the-edges, battered aesthetic, in timbre if not in technical execution (which was skilful as expected). The piece which most caught my attention was a dedication to Ali Fake Touré which towards the end threatened to get quite fierce, to build (or so I was hoping) towards some improvised Sharrockian squall or a section of really heavy riffing. It wasn't to be, but again, pleasant listening – a nice gig – that kind of evening. (Incidentally, best between-sets music ever: a chunk of Leroy Jenkins and Rashied Ali's 'Swift are the Winds of Life.' Try following *that* one!)

CAROL WATTS / JOHN BUTCHER / TRIO: TISHA MUKARJI, ANGHARAD DAVIES, DIMITRA LAZARIDOU-CHATZIGOGA

St Anne's and St Agnes Church, London, Tuesday 13th December 2011

As I entered the church, the cold silence hung heavy before Carol Watts spoke her next word, looking across at the door as she did so. I spent the next minute or so trying to close it as quietly as possible and make my way quietly over to a creaking pew without attracting adverse attention. Wandelweiser meets the poetry reading? To be sure, Watts' performance had a quality not too far off from the sparser final stages of Cage's 'Empty Words': language as music, in placement and delivery. Despite this, the point was not, as with Cage, to evacuate any tyranny of grammar or logical meaning – though the lengthy silences and consequent disconnections did ensure a sense more of words loosely connected to a thread, as beads on a wire, than of compacted meaning-clusters or progressions. From what I could gather, the piece was a reflection on blueness (with some jazz connotations, perhaps? The focus, though, seemed to be more on landscape, bare trees, liminal spaces, borders between body and land). I'm not sure how struck I'd

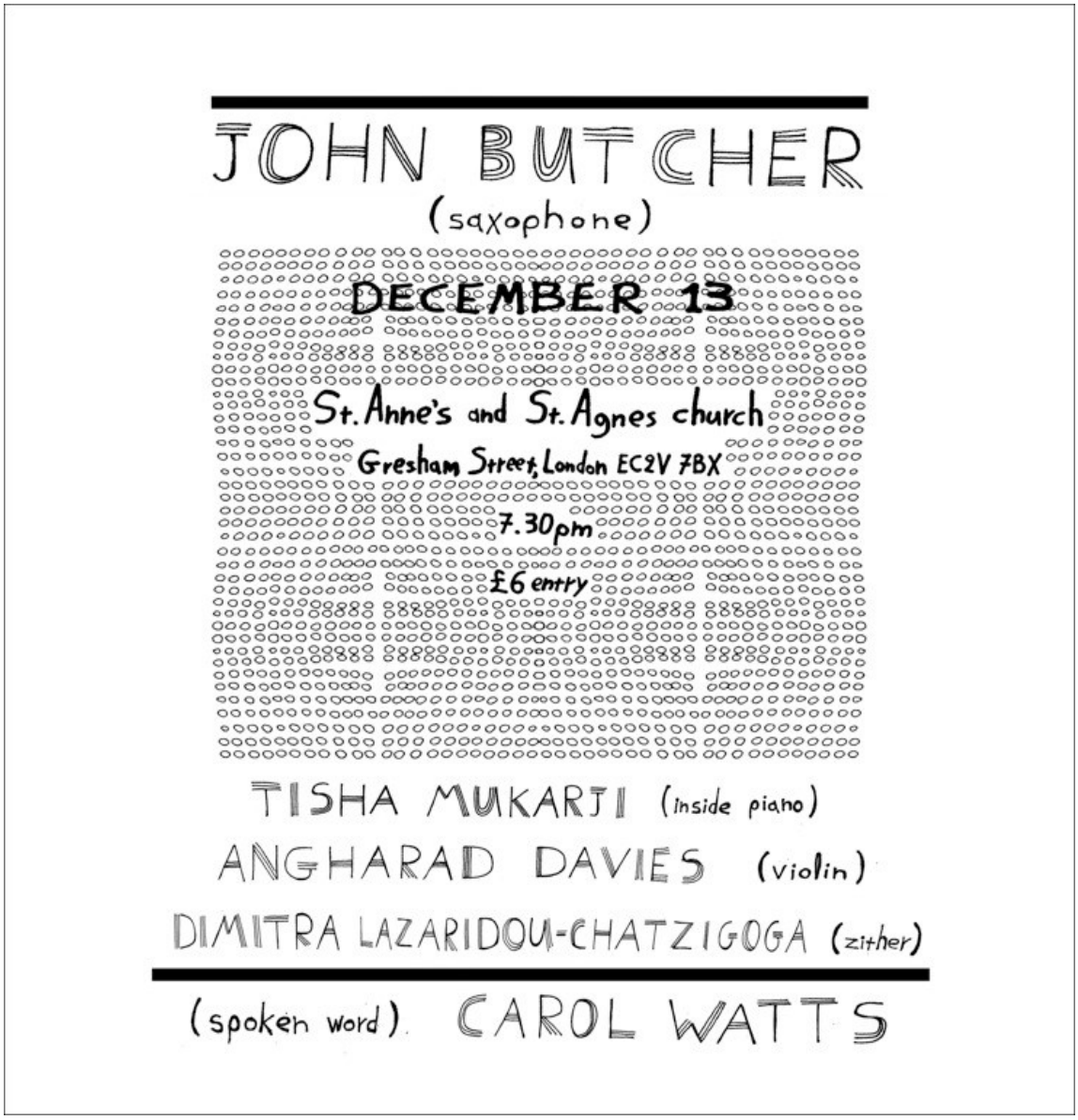
have been without the delivery, and as it was, the second reading – faster, but still elongated and oddly-emphasized – felt rather affected. That's not the right word – what I mean, I think, is that, whereas the first piece felt new, or, I don't know, apposite, *in place* – in musicality, if not in content (the two didn't feel inextricably interlinked) – the second, where content was foregrounded to a greater extent, pointed up more, to me, how the poetry wasn't really *where I was at*. Unfair, yeah, to make that kind of snap judgement without a close, previous reading relation to Watt's written work, coming at it in from the cold – and nothing to do with, say, *skill*, but there it is. It was freezing both outside and in, I'd just picked up a cold, walked forty minutes to the venue, and had a deadline in a couple of days, so perhaps my mind wasn't at its sharpest or most receptive...

But John Butcher was next, someone I've not seen live as much as I'd have liked in the past few years (last time was Freedom of the City in 2010); so, drawing the scarf tighter round my neck, I settled down...He began on soprano, delivering a church-reverb'd acoustic solo of space and polish, at one point letting out a wail that reminded me, of all of things, of those siren imitations Gershwin writes in 'Rhapsody in Blue', as well as a bit of Evan Parker-esque circular breathing, in which two simultaneous lines overlap & run alongside one another. There were also smacking puckered lip-reed sounds, like popping hailstones dropping; and, most notably, perhaps, simple recurring quasi-melodies ending on that harmonic burr familiar from most of Butcher's work (I guess you could call it a 'lick'). He'd opened with manipulated breath sent down the instrument's body, notes barely floating out their ethereal, high, un-squeezed timbres overhead, whispered above, with no attack, in gradual melody (indeed, when the first proper glimpse of that soprano timbre familiar from the most awful instances of jazz feyness came through, I have to say that I was worried for a moment. But no need for that, of course, even if the church acoustic did make it all sound a bit ECM-y at times.)

The second solo, on tenor: Butcher beginning by tapping the mouthpiece with the ghost of a grin on his face. Then bird-high whistle. Now a wail(moan.hum.) as wind swooshing down a tunnel, a funnel – not quite that. The low hum beneath sound inhabits the place's coldness as not quite trembling, as vibration felt through wood of the cold pew. Quasi-melodies again (we proposed that he'd played the same contours – essentially, the same piece – on the two instruments. Two looks at the same thing, variations on a theme.) Flutter-tongued grumbling through that pew. As the light goes off in the office window next door but for faint night-glow. (The after-hours cleaner was finishing up. That parallel world.) Solo logic. Butcher does his thing, has to be linear – that's why, I guess, he goes for those melodies. Or now foghorn coming through mist to *honk*, repeat, hold, *drop* and higher timbre circular breathe. All these layered (multiphonic) sounds / contain each other. And sometimes he resonates just one, or does that ethereal un-attacked breathing. Or, as now, smudged machine dirt. phttt. flarrrt. squirt. sqrueee. Lights back on in the office. Leaves blown about by the window. Ending as not ending, just a breath to be taken up again, space filled. Liking this in performance now, that shrugging quiet. You turn the sound on. you turn it off. It's over / not over. No performance grandstanding. That in itself as a valuable aesthetic statement.

Post-interval, the trio playing, a longer set, inside-piano and zither, Davies sliding her bow over and off the strings and edges of her violin in a move I've seen her deploy before, somehow at once both calculated & precise and off-hand and totally loose. Not having seen, heard, or heard of Mukarji and Chatzigoga before, perhaps I'm not best qualified to write on them: what emerged at the start was gorgeous though, little plucked zither notes (was it just two of them?) pipping out, not establishing too easy-chiming a bed (though they could have), the others coming in, hesitancies about startings and endings (Mukarji joked that we could get the applause over with before they started, to warm us up), aesthetics of indirection, not wanting to put yourself forward, wanting the music to be true collective submerging, floating on slowly modulating tones, rough metallic shards round the edges as Chatzigoga carefully placed and replaced various objects on the e-bow'd zither strings, Mukarji obviously aware that her instrument had the most potential to be

declarative or to take centre stage, and thus careful, with her nuts & bolts preparation, to ensure that her jangling notes had delicacy as well as sharpness, sometimes getting out tones of the 'where in fuck that come from?' variety (rose up in my seat to have a look. couldn't see exactly). On the second piece, it was at least those recognisable muffled booms you get with mallet thump on low-end strings (something Cecil Taylor's been seen to deploy, a little more haphazardly, perhaps). Every move has to count here. Every little gesture in danger of becoming too foregrounded or obvious. Abhorrence of the blatant. Always everything hovering on the verge of not-quite consonance, not-quite melody. The Balinese word 'sat' refers to that moment of suspension when, having to decided to make your move, to act, you have not yet moved or acted – and there's something of that aesthetic here, I think. Even when you do act, it's with a kind of tentative grace, always mindful of what's going on around you. Acting with care and attention. That sounds like some appallingly bland press release from your local GP, or your local MP. But you know what I mean. Shit, this stuff's beautiful, you know?



(All gig reviews by DG)

ROUND-UP: INTER-ISSUE MISCELLANEA

By David Grundy

Albums visited and revisited afresh and anew over the past year or so:

DAVID MURRAY with STRINGS, 'Waltz Again', from a few years back: time to rewrite the jazz with strings story; yes, Charlie Parker, yes, Art Pepper and Stan Getz and (less often mentioned in this lineage) Alice Coltrane and Ornette Coleman (where the strings actually bloom into fractal patterns and shards of light rather than forming alterantely limpid and gloopy lumps or pools of solid or stolid sound backdrop : viz : Skies of America : Universal Consciousness); in Murray's case, knotty melodies with blarts and blares and yowls in the multi-faceted 'Pushkin Suite'; and dark-toned, weirdly exhilarating ruminations in 'Dark Days', like cruising on a slow night joyride; too, balladry in that open-heart on sleeve lurching romanticism which comes out of Mingus and which is a legacy also not often talked about enough, certainly in relation to Murray - who synthesizes that with a freely discoursing style, a solo construction often more logical than, say, Frank Wright or Ayler or Pharoah (in his fire-breathing early days), harking back instead to early trick effects, Fess Williams or Wilton Crawley or somesuch, turning them into full vocabulary elements with which to do more than deliver show-stops or gleaming highlights - that whole-of-jazz-history thang which too generally comes off as glib, like parroting facts of dates or facets of styles (say, James Carter at his most technically gifted and least emotionally convincing) - but here turned wild and real and making you consider that as a real direction in which jazz could go, could get out of its real or perceived rut; his sense of ensemble dynamics and ability to just write really good, memorable tunes, too: and working with the right sidemen – Lafayette Gilchrist is up there with Matthew Shipp, I'd say, or will be in a few years; certainly, he excites me more than Robert Glasper, and can do that post-hip-hop-jazz-synthesis thing too, tho' he's at his best not doing that, just playing strong and dark and sweet as suits the mood and form, here.

Guilty pleasure, I guess: the recent internet (re-)surfacing of a 45" recorded in **1976** on the short-lived **PEOPLE'S WAR** record label by **THE ADVANCED WORKERS WITH THE ANTI-IMPERIALIST SINGERS:** i.e. Amiri Baraka, writing some lyrics/slogans and declaiming a bit, to some really good funk music by members of Parliament, Funkadelic and the Commodores, the dominant voice being that of Winston Sims on saxophone, who imparts the opening statement of the melody on second side's 'Better Red Let Others Be Dead' with a kind of yearning which I find quite moving, really, and bittersweet, even as I can't say why, exactly, on the surface of it, it is that, seeming instead simply to be purposeful and joyous, wanting to be and perhaps really being *anthemic* (and not in the awful U2 way music journos tend to use that word): "HEY SON, US BE RED, US BE RED...THE EARTH BELONGS TO THE PEOPLE - THE WEALTH BELONGS TO THE PEOPLE - the EARTH belongs to the people - the WEALTH belongs to the people." Yeah, well, the lyrics do have that *comedy* value, I guess - depending on yr politics - but can you not love lines like "and when they said party, they meant an anti-revisionist revolutionary Communist party...and if you asked them what truths they party taught, they'd say marxism-leninism-mao-tse-tung thought...marxism-leninism-mao-tse-tung thought" (chant x 5)...um, at least in context and sheer unexpected...clumsiness? daring? obliviousness? real and true belief?. And the music is, really, so good - the way a guitar suddenly comes thrumming in under the final repetition of that chant, little surfacings of slap bass, even the unintended reed-shriek in Sims' otherwise exhilirating and efficient solo on 'You Was Dancin', reaching towards some sort of organised chaos at the end, as massed horns blare melody recapitulations in increasing fervour and funk-feeling - another attempt on that synthesis between avant-garde and music of the people that Baraka attempted (with some success, often ridiculous nationalist phase lyrics/poems notwithstanding), on 'It's Nation Time', released four years earlier (pre- the third or fourth career conversion). And tell me, what other song connects marching to dancing in such a convincing way? Captures the protest potential of public social good-time music? It wants to be a 70s 'Dancing in the Streets'. Hell, maybe it almost is. What other pop song that you can think of

contains phrases like "in a capitalistic way?" Alright, I'm liking this for nostalgia (tho' I wasn't even alive at the time); or for retro-chic; but it *is* more than a novelty record, OK? Put it on before you go to the pub, feel yr feet lift off the ground outside.

There's also this, involving Baraka – **WILLIAM PARKER'S 'Inside Songs of Curtis Mayfield'** (this is the earlier live album on Rai Trade, not the 2-disc set that came out thru AUM/Fidelity a couple of years later) – one song in particular, the 'cover' of 'Freddie's Dead'. During the first few minutes one might think: what the hell does this rollicking celebratory riff have to do with that most sweetly sad and bitter of Mayfield's songs, that keening to-the-quick-cutting lament? those *pounding* drums (crisp clear recording), Parker's locked-in bass, the horns *on*. But then: Baraka screaming 'FREAAAHHHHDDIE'! over or under or alongside the righteous high-funk of leena conquest's delivery ('hey-hey...yeah-yeah...oh lord') - the first of these shouts spat out just as the chords change to that sad-sweetest part of the song ("ripped him off and abused him") - proceding to rap his own commentary, or gloss on mayfield's song, turning a lament and a call for love into a righteous political diatribe (but not as righteous or polemical or prosaic as some he's churned out): working on paradox ("death is the worst shit we know / but there ain't no such thing as dead") like conflicting emotions of sadness and anger at the news of this death, voice inhabiting these characters, etc. and then the central improvised section: the way that no one takes a solo as such, the horns engaging in collective riffing or blowing, one of the sax players (i think mateen?) at one point playing (7:03, check it) one of the most startingly scream-like altissimo tones I think I've ever heard (and I've heard a few....), suddenly, mystifyingly, playing the 'a love supreme head' - not, as too often, as corny easy cheap cliche 'homage' but somehow saying something with it, signifying, saying love sorrow hate, like mayfield, death shd lead us to love, baraka, death shd lead us to resist ("the main thing is to be against death! everything else is a chump")...then burrell's piano left with bass and drums, for all the world like we've suddenly entered dave brubeck's 'take five'...I don't know whether these are stylistic mis-steps, perhaps? To me they're engagingly perverse in a way I wasn't expecting from Parker's generally more righteous or even po-faced music: but hell, if you can throw A Love Supreme and funkified, soul-ified Dave Brubeck and political diatribe and curtis mayfield and silvio berlusconi into the mix and it still come out this true (those ruptures maybe what makes it hold true - all united by the beat, of course, that collectivity in rhythm that greg tate so loves in miles davis' 70s electric voodoo) - then you must be doing *something* right.

ANDREW HILL: realizing that there is a ton stuff out there that just don't get talked about or heard or re-released. I mean, what mostly *is* available is the 60s Blue Note stuff and the most recent recordings, made in the years before his death, but that leaves as a gap perhaps his most fertile and interesting period, the 70s into early 80s: two very different trios, one with Richard Davis and Roger Blank, **NEFERTITI**, released, I think, only in Japan, on the East Wind label - listen to the way Blank's malleted drums boil and swell on the 15-minute long 'Blue Black', which opens the record, rhythmic fluidity in long-form flow, really something in which the whole body finds itself pulsing and propulsing and flowing too, a kind of smooth jerkiness, absolutely gorgeous and involving, intelectually, emotionally, all of it; and **STRANGE SERENADE**, the other one, this on Soul Note, Alan Silva and Freddie Waits this time, again opening with a 15-minute long excursion, not quite reaching the heights of NEFERTITI, but, well, Silva is a fine addition to any trio...And **SPIRAL**, a couple of 1970s dates, probably most notable for featuring Steve Lacy, not someone you'da thought would make the most ideal horn partner for Hill, tart and sharp over Hill's dark and shaded and peppery voicings, and, well, maybe that suspicion would be proved correct, tho' I think it may take a few more listens to definitively get it or not get it...But what really gets me, here, is actually the final track, with **Robin Kenyatta on alto** - Kenyatta a name I'd heard but whose music I'd not come across much before, upon investigation rather wasting himself in fusion-poppy contexts (some mildly-Fela-like stuff; a jazz-reggae album with a rare guest appearance from the great Betty Davis (sadly not as full or rasping as on her classics early 70s solo records); a rather odd ECM album marred by some dated clavinet and echo effects,

and by indifferent programming, but still probably the best of the bunch - yes, so OK there's that, but then there's this, the final track on 'Spiral', a composition sharing its name with the tune that closed Archie Shepps' Attica Blues, where it was sung by Cal Massey's 7-yr old daughter, which I always found simultaneously touching and a huge, crudely sentimental misfire - 'Quiet Dawn' it is, anyway, no relation, just an original Hill composition, and not particularly harmonically adventurous or free-form or anything like that, just a ballad, but delivered with the most *scorching* and beautifully-judged soul by Kenyatta, not hysteria or sentimental grandstanding but just perfect, aching, tender playing, as I guess **Arthur Blythe** was capable of - check his version of **'Autumn in New York'** on another 'with strings' album (see above), **Basic Blythe,** a conviction that'd cut thru any studio string section...

CECIL TAYLOR, as always, more and more bootlegs piling up on the hard-drive even as he seems to be (eventually) cutting back on the concert dates, sticking mainly to solos, still as graceful and architecturally honed as ever, I hear, maybe more so, having reached a kind of fluid fixity that is, I guess, his 'late style', without, maybe, the surprise that that lateness would possess in Beethoven or Mahler or even Derek Bailey (the real grace of those 'Ballads' or 'Standards' records, the unflinching stripping-down of 'Carpal Tunnel Syndrome'). One recording in particular I've been returning to, a **1976 concert at THE POWER CENTRE**, Michigan State University, round about the same time as **DARK TO THEMSELVES**, I suppose, this same band on a European tour (which I believe was filmed at some stage, tho' the tapes are no doubt buried deep in the concrete archives of some broadcasting body, beside variety shows and old newscasts and all manner of things televisual): opening, unusually, with a drum solo, Marc Edwards with a power and intensity that still today he's putting to use, increasingly in noise-metal related contexts with the likes of Weasel Walter (and I see from facebook that he's just done a first-time duo with Mick Barr - sparks surely to fly there); then those long, long, Cecil melodies, compositions I should say, that weird elegance about them, elegance with the threat and promise of fire within, containing all the energy to explode out in unstoppable torrent as we expect, but lots of alternating episodes here, in a more compressed format than, say, the endless and overwhelming collectivities of **ONE TOO MANY SALTY SWIFT AND NOT GOODBYE**, a really gorgeous piano-trumpet duet in which Raphe Malik channels Miles and Cecil's piano with it just breaks your heart, another Cecil duo with David S.Ware, this time Ware on tenor treading more subtly a ground between his usual full-bodied musculature and some kind of more retiring, even delicately hesitant spirit that was in the air, in the crack and corners, the little edges and interludes of the music, that night. "Petals, just once through - Petals..."

Oddly enough, **ARCHIE SHEPP *singing*** – yeah, doing that – a version of **'Cry me a River'** from one of the numerous Japanese-label ballad albums he's been churning out since the 70s, here, tho', with the masterful John Hicks (also check out a duo performance, up on youtube, in which he duets with Pharoah Sanders on a tune of his called 'After the Morning', which is mellow and ecstatic without being boring or hide-bound as Sanders could be once his rapprochement with some kind of comfortable 'spiritual' post-bop semi-mainstream was completed). Yes, of course, it's pure showmanship, an *impersonation* of the wise, dissolute old blues singer, which mythology kicked off into, say, the Rolling Stones, or comes full circle into dull retro now with Seasick Steve (head of him?); but somehow he makes each nuance and contour of the tune *matter*, takes you into that song as great jazz singers do – not that I'm saying he *is* a great jazz singer, and generally those vocals do grate, actually, but here...I don't know, there's something in it that appeals, anyhow. Also, on a different, but similar record – same band, I think – a version of **'Blue in Green'** rather more intense and (melo-)dramatically melancholy than the usual approach to that tune, so indebted to the definitive version set forth on 'Kind of Blue'. Just little things like that – and, of course, Shepp's endless soloing in dark and righteously defiant, even I guess you could say, sexually-inflected, mode, on Jackie McLean's '**Hipnosis'**, from A SEA OF FACES - and a rather good version of **'Giant Steps'**, LIVE AT THE TOTEM (far better than the hideous distorted ugliness of the short attempt on DOWNHOME NEW YORK) - and a *biting* solo with the

Coltrane Quartet in 1965 at the Downbeat Jazz Festival at Chicago (this from a bootleg with distinctly B-grade sound quality, but that solo cuts through all the hiss, and the years)...There's still stuff in that discography that I'll keep coming back to, is what I'm saying, with all that.

Discovering **TOUCHIN' ON TRANE** for the first time (yes, this late), having blown a bit hot and (more often) cold on Gayle before that, not really seeing that kind of playing as a particularly useful way forward for what has become a kind of repertory music, really, even as it places itself in opposition to that other kind of, more media-friendly, repertory, the Lincoln Centre school...This though, something in there that won't be denied, as **DUO EXCHANGE** or S**WIFT ARE THE WINDS OF LIFE**, which I've sometimes been listening to in conjunction with each other, won't, beautiful records, all of them.

EXUMA and **NINA SIMONE** calling up **Damballah** – Exuma with a kind of joyful, almost sparkling righteous prophetic joy, big tympani bang and ragged chorus, shaking and spilling percussion all round him; Simone with a sitar and a new piano figure and a sorrow song gravity the right side of Diamanda Galas' goth-jazz take, which came right out of that. Feel the chill: "You slavers will know what it's like to be a slave/ A slave to your mind and a slave to your race / You won't go to heaven, you won't go to hell/ You'll remain in your graves with the stench and the smell." (All this going alongside my reading on voodoo at the start of this year, Damballah's association with serpents (check the hissing on the Exuuma version), invoked as destroyer, redeemer, revolutionary, I guess, that tone of militant destructive and necessary rage catching something of the mood as the Occupy movements and the resistance has to set itself in for the long haul, past the media-bandwagon 'isn't rebellion cool' stage, soon to drop off to what is hard and necessary and still there underneath it all. (More Damballah songs gathered here: http://cleanlivingindifficultcircumstances.blogspot.com/2011/03/saint-patrick-dambala.html)

AND, again Simone-related, the incendiary and brilliant **EMERGENCY WARD**, 1972, recorded at Fort Dix in front of an audience of black US-army personnel (as record opens, they're chanting "We want Nina!...We want Nina!") during the Vietnam war - so Simone does an 18-minute version (even longer live, juding by the fade-out here) of Geroge Harrison's **MY SWEET LORD**, but not as some hippie pseudo-religious togetherness thang ("Om Christ, Om Christ", etc), instead, as some amazing endless gospel rhythmic juggernaut ("You know the Holy Roller Church? Where it all started? We've OUTGROWN it now!") complete with poly-rhythms by a child singer like voice hiccups, gnats at the edge of the audio picture, complete with improvised interludes in which she discourses with weary sorrow, then, as the clincher, interpolating a poem by the Original Last Poets (they of the film 'RIGHT ON', which you should track down and watch), the utterly daring quasi-blasphemy of the final moments: Simone intoning "today, Lord, you are a...killerrrrrrr", the chorus triumphantly agreeing with an emphatic "AMEN" - then the whole groove starting off again..."I really wanna see you", tambourines and piano and choir. If that's not signifying, on Harrison's anodyne anthem, I don't know what is.

And:

THE IMPRESSIONS, keeping on pushing, via David Henderson's poem on the 1964 Harlem Riots // **JACQUES BREL,** rolling his rs and singing a lament for all yr sons with an ONDES MARTENOT behind him // **JARMAN, DYANI and MOYE** in concert in Italy just before the recording of BLACK PALADINS, Jarman burning on baritone, a 45-minute improvisation with dogged hard purposiveness and a beautiful 'humility in the light of the creator' // **KIM FOWLEY** doing his best to be the **ANIMAL GOD OF THE STREETS**, the boring and shambolic yet appropriate and weirdly convincing improvised vocalisations of **IS AMERICA DEAD?**, Fowley sounding as clueless as that title sounds, tetering on the brink of nihilism, politically a mess, some kind of post-hippie hangover, has to be heard to be believed // **MARTIAL SOLAL's** soundtrack to **A BOUT DE SOUFFLE**, still actually an unacknowledged

reason for that film's movement-embodying 'cool' (witness the clip in Bertolucci's 'The Dreamers' where Solal's strings soar just the right side of easy-listening as Jean Seberg hawks the New York Herald Tribune down the centre of the road) // **MARY LOU WILLIAMS** with congas and electric bass, digging on and in for solid and meaty groove on **ZONING** (and that very other experience, the duet with Cecil Taylor, EMBRACE as confrontation, contradiction as what life is unavoidably made up of, Maoist jazz?) // **MIKE LADD** sampling Ornette Coleman (I think) and spitting out outer-space-black-revolutionary talk on Welcome to the Afterfuture's RED EYE TO JUPITER ("starship nigga...outerspace MOUTHERFUCKA") // the **RIVBEA ORCHESTRA**, a 3CD-set out on Mosaic Records just before Sam Rivers' death, boiling dissonance funk, as on Rivers' 70s with-guitar record SIZZLE // **ODEAN POPE** with TIMPANI, and with MARSHALL ALLEN // **WILLIAM LAWES'** sweet chill melancholy ('For Ye Viols'), forget all that royalist background if you can, it *is* artistocrats' music, yes, but there's also that melancholic sense you can just as well trace in the resistance rituals of folk music - this stuff's all mingled up and spun round, at least in our listening now, the counter-factual tradition we can construct, if we want to or need it // **CORCOVADO (Milhaud's** version, not Jobim's, lilting in a different way, from SAUDADES DO BRASIL) // the **WAYNE SHORTER QUARTET's** Latest London Concert, broadcast on bbc radio, essentialy not much different from what I've heard that group do twice in the past few years ('over shadow hill way' and all of that) but still absolutely fine and involving and moving, and the version of 'Plaza Real' is ten millions times more fine than Weather Report's...And a damn good tune...And Danilo Perez delivering a gorgeous piano solo and luaghing with pleasure behind Shorter's soprano all the way thru, infection and enthusiasm and love and weirdness all there, we're better for it// **MIGUEL ATWOOD-FERGUSON's** orchestral arrangements of J-Dilla tracks and samples on SUITE FOR MA DUKES, hip-hop turned into a kinda post-minimalist film-score-style 'cultural monument' in a way I should find problematic, but which maybe even improves on an original like Slum Village's 'Fall in Love'. Bits similar in vibe to that disc the London Sinfonietta did of Aphex Twin and Squarepusher tunes a few years back, and some really nice orchestral colouring, particularly on the snakily (or snarkily?) driving 'Take Notice', and the arrangement of Erik Satie's 'Le Yachting.' Hell, I played this over and over, with pleasure, for several weeks at least...// **LUCIFER OVER LANCASHIRE**, The Fall on German TV in the late 80s, Mark E. Smith wanting the whole ballet company to turn up, instead, just one dancer, the weirdness of that juxtaposition, the moves really a fine fusion of that music's ragged rigid factory pagan rhythmix and some other kind of distorted curving 'elegance' // **THE COUP,** Dig(ging) it - in this year of Oakland revisited - "rhetoric flowing from the tip from my mao-tse-tongue"; "(Won't get no callouses) cause I'm spittin dialectical analysis"// **MILFORD GRAVES,** live in Holland in the 70s, the moment when Joe Rigby or Hugh Glover tries to play the organ and madly runs hands all over it but no sound comes out, the simultaneous solidity and limpidity of those saxophone solos constructed almost entirely out of overblowing and harmonics, and Graves, above all, drumming with energy and joy and screaming falsetto "Boom-BOOM/Boom-BOOM" so you can't help but break out yrself grinning along //

BILL DIXON, 'Envoi', calm as memory/anticipation/resignation in face of catastrophe //

JOHN CAGE's 'Emtpy Words' (Part III), delivered live in Italy to a hostile crowd who whistle, jeer and chant football songs both during the lengthy 'silences' and Cage's unruffled, steady babble – too slow, too steady to be called babble, those fragments evacuated from Emerson's diaries, chance remaining fragments of language turned into speech music. It would be easy to hear this as a battle between artistic delicacy and an unsophisticated crowd baying for entertainment, but I think the dynamics of the encounter are actually a little more complex. If one's aesthetic is to be based on openness to sound not controlled by the performer, to the 'music' of the entire space and social situation, then to delimit and place 'allowed' environmental sounds in a hierarchy is, to say the least, problematic. And I think Cage himself actually relishes the encounter, turning it to his advantage – not that he willed it in advance, but that he takes it as it comes, not with fatalism but with relish – at one point leaning into the microphone and sounding out a great rolled r as a

kind of deliberate dare to the audience, not mocking them but playing along with them, the cheers aroused only half-hostile. To what extent does this event challenge Cage's aesthetic? I'm assuming that the audience are left-, rather than right-wing, given that this is Milan; and I'm assuming that they're frustrated at his presentation as the authoritative 'great composer' – and more than this, by the fact that, as Great Composer, all he's doing is sitting on stage and reading out some nonsense texts. So if there is, somewhere in Cage's aesthetic, a willingness or even an active willing for anybody to do this, anybody to listen and thus to perform 4'33", anyone to submit a text to chance operations and read it out, there's also some sort of divide created by his position as an established (if not establishment) figure, wealthy and free to travel and have those odd decisions he makes be called art (a privilege not afforded most of those members of the audience – though of course this does injustice to the years of poverty that Cage went through before the money started to pour in (not that we should submit Cage's biographical trajectory to the bullshit of an all-American boot-strap pulling success story)). I guess we could compare this event to that documented in Klaus Kinski's 'Jesus Christ Erloser', where he actively seeks that confrontation with the audience, in a kind of self-destructive martyrdom complex – well, not even martyrdom, just a relishing of his status as lone prophet crying out on the wilderness-stage, a psychotic John the Baptist reverse-prophesying *after* Jesus' arrival (if that makes any sense). That confrontation might be seen, perversely, as an instance of performer inviting audience into the performance (even if, when some poor sap does come up on stage, it's only for Kinski to verbally flog him immediately back off it, grabbing the microphone out of his hand and invoking righteous, Messianic wrath) – it's almost a parody of that potential democracy, or anarchy, to which Cage strives at all times to be open; a parody, moreover, that is perhaps *more* open than Cage's continued lone reading up on the stage (compare that section at the end of the 'Erloser' film where most of the audience have left, those brave souls who've remained sitting in a circle round an exhausted Kinski, who's descended the stage (like Christ dropping down from heaven) to speak to them, almost in a whisper, from the floor. It's as if the whole show has been a kind of purification ritual, for both Kinski and the audience, in which those who can survive form the true and temporary community of risk that art strives to create, to dissipate immediately on the cessation of the evening's 'entertainment', but to be carried still, as some spark for potential activiation, somewhere within all those who so participated.) Well, then, if nothing else, the Cage recording (and the Kinski film as well) is a prime example of how to deal with a hostile audience, and a fascinating placing of Cage's aesthetic outside the rather pristine spaces in which it can tend, now canonised, to exist. But, of course, let's not forget that roughness, that playfulness, that experimentalism of the 60s and 70s – the period of text pieces, of electronic utopian musicircuses, of Buckminster Fuller and Norman O. Brown, of The Bell Telephone Company and of messages from outer space and from across the continent – work with a value to it we would do well to re-examine, rescuing Cage from seeming from his position as pristine (prissy?) zen master, tetering on edges, taking it our there.

And with that digression I guess this issue has come to a close. See y'all in, oh, a year's time, I expect...

List of Contributors

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