

MENTIRAS #9 - AB

J

A couple of years ago, when I was in Paris, you were living at *La Miroiterie*, a squat in Ménilmontant where you had installed your studio. Last week, I have been told that you are currently living « in the middle of the forest ». Can you tell me where you moved and if you were able to recreate your whole studio in this new location? Is isolation better for your work?

A

« The middle of the forest » is a slight exaggeration, more like on the edge of the forest, la forêt de Sénart to be precise, just South of Paris. After eight years with no privacy and surrounded by opportunists with a distorted version of the anarchist expression « Property Is Theft » which in reality meant, « Property is theft, so it's OK to steal your stuff, and if you say it isn't you're a capitalist nazi », I became a bit reclusive, being fascinated by things like shelves with books on them, rain not happening indoors, and all the decadent pleasures which capitalist pigs enjoy.

Isolation has always been better for my work, which is why I suffered more than most in that communal (as in everyone hated each other equally) shithole, where they couldn't even organize a piss-up in a brewery, as they say. I should probably just chill out and listen to some Bob Marley records, but from living in that place, which funnily enough is always called things like « magical » by people who should really have a Bob Marley record inserted up their rectum, I decided that the human race basically sucks.

J

Could you describe your studio? For what I know, you used to work where you live: your personal space was full of broken electronics, books, records and tapes. It definitely had a strong hoarder vibe to me.

A

Still the same vibe maybe, but the stuff is cooler and less broken, and it doesn't rain indoors. I had a studio for a little while, the other side of Paris, and I usually forgot to bring the one screwdriver or whatever I needed, so never managed to get any work done. Studios are great for storing work and to have somewhere to sell it which is not your bedroom, but that is the only reason I would want one, unless you mean

like *WDR* Cologne electronic music studio from around 1958.

Why do people want to distance themselves from their art? I suppose some people love going to their communal shared artists space, where they can secretly think everyone else's work sucks more than theirs does, surrounded by adoring techno gnomes rolling joints for them and watching them paint like Salvador Dali, but I can't stand anyone watching me work, gives me the creeps. Most people don't even know where I live, for this kind of reason.

About « hoarder », not sure about that, I don't save beer cans anymore, but if like me you want to build electronic junk and plastic claws that move when you open your fridge door you need to keep some old machines around to steal parts from, that is just the way it is, you can't buy much in hardware stores, here. Maybe soon I will be able to 3D print things, but then I would probably need spares for the printer...

Anyway, notable additions you probably haven't seen are quite a few exotic reel to reel machines such as two of the wonderful *hp / agilent 3964A Instrumentation Recorders* (one for spares), a *Lyrec Freda*, *Bruel & Kjaer 7006*, plus analog video gear, and hundreds of VHS films. I need a bigger place.

J

What do these machines do? And how do you purchase them? Is it only a matter of opportunity, or are you specifically hunting some items because you know already what you can do with them?

A

There is this John Cage quote on the back of the United Dairies' *An Afflicted Man's Musica Box* LP which stuck in my mind years ago « You don't have to call it *music* if the term shocks you ». Then comes the problem that all mixers, tape recorders, not to mention effects and of course the instruments themselves are designed for « music », which often means various filter circuits etc, anyway so I looked for recorders which just capture everything flat, and the *Bruel & Kjaer* and *hp* machines, which are designed for recording earthquakes, vibrations, insects, data, and so on do exactly that.

Talking about « audience », my stuff makes dogs bark. Why filter everything so it's only for humans? The *Bruel & Kjaer* has two speeds: super fast (thirty inches per second) and super slow (one and a half inches per second). The *hp* one has seven speeds and you can play the



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tape backwards or forwards instantly, and records with FM, which sounds like radio transmissions from a distant black hole. I am not sure this is really the place to go into detail but I have experimented a lot with building tape delays. There are many things which haven't been done. To answer your question, if it doesn't exist I try to build it, but also the ways some machines are designed means that they are very idiosyncratic. You should see the manual for the *hp 3964A*, weighs about three kilos, a work of art.

J

Reading a couple of your interviews, I read somewhere that you label yourself as an « introvert antisocial mind ». You also often describe your art practice as a something you do by yourself, like a recluse « mad scientist ». But you also seem genuinely happy about collaborations, or when you do workshops for kids, or teach. How do you balance things? Do you do the workshops for the money or for the creative input?

A

I think just because someone chooses to work alone, or needs to so as not to lose all concentration, doesn't mean they are some kind of art brut xenophobe on the fringes of society, *Mad Max* Eco-survivalist neither, but in one or two interviews I might have expressed my liking for the sorta *Frankenstein / Tesla* vibe, and some crankier people like John Hutchison. But honestly, the craziest « mad scientist » labs I have seen are in places like Ircam, or the Research & Development labs in Hewlett Packard when I was a kid.

I am very enthusiastic about collaborations when they happen unexpectedly, and try to keep things a bit open because I know sometimes surprising things can happen, but I see « too many cooks » happening everywhere, work which would get done a lot better by one person working without distractions.

I taught one day a week for four years at the *Lycée Autogéré* in Paris, (definitely not for the money, in answer to your question), starting with « circuit-bending » for a year, and then a new class called *Maison Hantée*, which grew from the (impossible) idea of building a haunted house, and took on different forms like film, sound, latex special effects, and so on. So I spent quite a lot of time (including a one week stay in a château) with a bunch of fourteen to twenty-one years old « kids » who I suppose must be the out-of-the-ordinary ones (or with out-of-the-ordinary parents at

least), and it was an interesting contrast to my education, where I was one of a very few weirdos in an extremely conservative academic system.

J

In your interviews and notes, you mention many friends and collaborators. Do you think of your peers as your main audience? Is your potential audience in your mind at all?

A

There is a small list of people whose comments could make or ruin my day, but I basically think that the « audience » is generated by the work / product. Also I think it is ok to make up imaginary audiences / censors etc, same for band names. *SOD* (a Japanese video company) makes videos for non-existent fetishes which they invent, and people buy them. I remember being really depressed about money things a few year ago until my close friend Mai Sau from Osaka sent me this mail, which of course immediately cheered me up (but made me a bit curious about bad air car for bitch girls...):

« see this world, so many expensive brand bag, brand underwear, newest style mobile phone, bad air car for bitch girls, expensive restaurant for one night drunk, newest *H&M* dress that everybody have, you are happy poor, even its can call rich you can paint, you can make sound, have great friends all over the world, have many fans even you don't know who is that someone keeping your drawings in room wall.

Happy !

good morning chinko! »

J

How do you produce the items that you publish? I guess you can dub the tapes with your equipment. I also remember some cdrs boxes which were at *Bimbo Tower*, that you probably burned yourself. But do you also print the covers yourself? Do you make books by yourself? Or do you prefer dealing with a label or a publisher?

A

I won some big battles with cheap shitty *Epson* and *Bother* inkjet printers, and now I know all the service menus and codes to make them behave as I want them to. It can be nice to let someone else do all the office work of printing etc, and I like my stuff to be seen and heard in

exotic parts of the world, so I do make an effort to let other labels release stuff, also to dispell any idea that I am promoting any kind of stupid punk DIY aesthetic.

J

You once wrote: « technicians are often little known », and a large part of your method is to dissect stuff, to expose its inside and play with it, understanding the inner mechanics of it. How important is craftsmanship in what you do, even though we are obviously not talking of « classical » crafts.

A

I really don't want to sound like a crazy art brut recluse or « everything's been done before in the '80s » old hippy or whatever, but I consider everything I do to be just « normal », (if a little low-tech) in terms of the amount of effort involved in creating it. Everyone used to be a « technician ». I don't know what they teach now (business studies), but when I was in art school we edited 8 and 16mm film, and we were taught how to stretch our own canvases with glue made from boiled rabbit skins or something, and I thought of this part as a kind of « ritual » which came before the act of painting (note that now I buy cheapo Chinese ready-made canvases). I am not that old, this was not so long ago. People have become more lazy and stupid, and machines have got more intelligent. I wish I was rich enough to just throw things away and buy new things when they break down, but I am not, so I got quite good at repairing and building stuff, same for (pirate) software, I needed to edit things so I figured out how to use the programs, that is all.

About technicians being little known (and the artists they work for getting all of the credit) I think I mentioned Karu Abe's work for Nam Jun Paik, although Paik always seems to give him credit and calls it « collaboration ». This credit is totally lost (intentionally made vague) in most sorta « Goldsmiths College » work (Damien Hirst et al).

My parents brought me up saying that it was a good thing to be « different » or « original », and maybe you can still find traces of this in education, where kids are praised for writing something « interesting », but now it seems like doing the same boring predictable safe thing everyone else does is being held up as a virtue, which is fucking bullshit, sorry to say.

Anyway so this « bizarre » idea (which used to be totally normal) that

being « individualistic » is good also made me want to build my own instruments, or at least mess up the ones I had, to be sure I didn't sound like anyone else (and had only myself to blame).

J

You also mentioned sometimes the instruments and tools that you have built for some « figures » of the experimental music field. Is this and the circuit bending workshops your main sources of income?

A

I also do some translation work, but I do sell some art occasionally too, and instruments when I can build them, and the label...

Building machines for other musicians is part of my secret plan for world domination: gradually all bands will sound more and more like *Evil Moisture*... just kidding, but actually that is another kind of collaboration, and I enjoy hearing what people do with them a lot.

J

How does this work? Is this sort of dialogue something you try to create? Are you glad to receive specific instructions? Or you would build these instruments anyway and simply enjoy someone using it?

A

I am terrible at building things to order, but I do have in mind the person I am building for and am usually pretty sure they will be happy with it. Obviously these aren't traditional instruments where there is an accepted way of playing, and anything else is called « extended technique » (even though one might not be familiar with these traditions and thus might find it perfectly normal to play bagpipes with a vacuum cleaner or whatever), and anything which might be called « improvisation » can include the interface of the instrument and the probability that it might do this or that, and also where what would be called « rehearsals » in a rock band are replaced by the actual design and layout of the circuits and choice of interface. Anyway it just seems like a friendly way to work with other like-minded musicians. Even if I make it difficult, I find that people often don't use the machine as I intended at all (for example using one of my delays with no-input to generate semi-random sounds), and this seems to suggest that people express their « originality » whether they mean to or not.



J

I remember seeing you playing while you were almost sleepwalking, or at least you seemed to be. How much do you plan when you play music live, how much is improvised?

A

Most of the planning goes into building / setup of the instruments, without using anything like sequencers or drum machines or backing tapes, etc. I know roughly what possible outcomes can happen in a chaotic bunch of spaghetti, so my favourite parts are when the instruments are doing all of the work. I usually find some way of getting around the fact that I hate being on a stage, one way is by sleepwalking (I guess), or video, setting up on the BBQ instead of the stage, recently some little props with water pump next to my machines like a cheap gore effect...

There is this old interview with Boyd Rice where he talks about an early *NON* gig on the *Physical Evidence* LP, about this kind of problem of « theatre », he didn't want to be on stage, so he put a scarecrow in front of an amp and he was hidden somewhere else behind a curtain. I think it is a nice image...

J

So you would consider yourself more of a composer or engineer than a performer? If playing in front of an audience doesn't bring much joy, except when the instruments play by themselves, why do choose to still play live?

A

Just because I feel I should try to be less shy and enjoy it more. Also there is still the possibility of just having the machines onstage, or projecting video, and so on. Or a scarecrow.

J

I really enjoy your comics modifications. Somehow they connect with your music work, and its focus on transformative processes. But when you describe your electronic work, there seem to be a sort of quest for a « pure » sound never heard before, not « tainted » by some preconfigured instruments. So the alteration of junk culture coexists with the exploration of abstract sounds. Is there a connection between the two?

A

For as long as I can remember I have always felt uncomfortable with recognizable sounds, like guitar or piano, for the same reason I get annoyed by Klaus Kinski in every movie I have seen him in; he is always too much Klaus Kinski so it interferes with the plot.

So I got drawn to music which seemed to be consciously avoiding or blurring this level of recognizability and avoiding « product placement ». After we go through the Pierre Schaeffer thing (and ignoring copyright) and say we can use anything for sound (or any image for making collage) then it comes down to personal taste, which I don't try to hide at all. I think people only point it out in art when they find it offensive or confusing, otherwise it is known as the artists « influences » ; often naked women and fruit, etc...

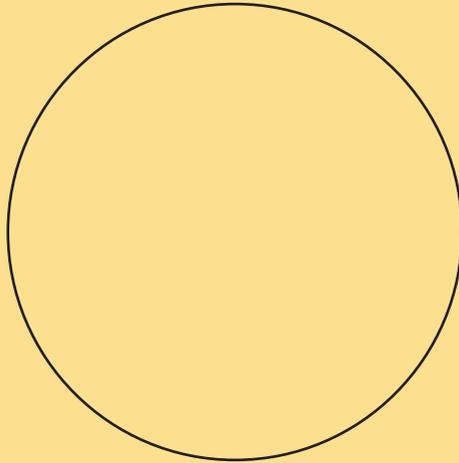
I think John Waters is the only person on the planet who should be allowed to use the word « trash », and the worst interpretation of my paintings would be that I'm trying to do a kind of perverted version of pop art.

About mixing collage and synthetic things, I treat it all as just « material » like in a visual collage, its actual origin isn't really that important, it is what is lying around.

I am completely obsessed by the border where the recognizability of sounds and images start to break down and become more vague (archetypal), but still familiar, and parts of it break off and stick to other fragments... consciously erasing or mutilating « clues » (recognizable speech, music etc)... where recognizability turns into a gluey mess (and this involves how an imagined audience would perceive it, or how friends would perceive it, about familiarity of sounds, archetypes, language and so on, to link to your earlier question). Same in my recent paintings and collages, and the video work especially. For me this is a kind of never-ending unfinished abstract cartoon, it doesn't matter if it is audio or painting or video, to me it is all dealing with the same things, the same part of the brain, and I care that people make those connections.

MENTIRAS (2014-)

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