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oral music histories and interesting interviews

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Introduction

Tristan Honsinger & Joel Grip

On Being A Medium



Today is supposed to be the hottest day of the year 2018 (9th of August). The temperature is expected to rise up to 38 degrees Celsius in the late afternoon, fostered by a severe föhn wind, which, while I was walking to the café, opened the laces of my right shoe.

Initially I had in mind to write an extensive Introduction which examines the whys and hows and ifs and whats of the one and a half years that have passed since the last issue of THEORAL was published. Primarily, I wanted to document my experiences with writing an application for an important artistic research research grant and how I failed to submit it. I wanted to describe the indifference of those who are inside towards those who are not, which also involves the government that is currently governing the country. But I decided not to.

Typing this, I am listening to the sweltering wind howling
around the building and the insisting
whispering of the oleander trees on the balcony.

In this issue, for the first time, we publish a written text. It is a self-reflective essay on the notion of the medium. The urtext was written for a short talk at the Poetic Research Bureau [a non-profit storefront for language-centered art and inquiry situated in the Chinatown area of northeast Los Angeles] which was organized by Andrew Choate. The text grew with its translation into German for a talk I gave a short time afterwards at the Bibliothek von Unten in Vienna, thoroughly outdone by the ensuing solo performance by Radu Malfatti. For this book, I retranslated it into English, almost without using the first draft. The talk grew into a poem in the form of an essay and it is not the last version. Therefore, I invite the appreciated reader to send me constructive and destructive comments [to philipp.schmickl@reflex.at or a letter to the address on page 2]. For helping me to achieve this unalterable version that you can read here on paper, I want to thank Kira David, Andrew Choate, Mathias Pöschl and Thibaud Voïta for sharing their ideas with me, for their comments and their corrections of my English.



The other half of the book is a conversation with Tristan Honsinger and Joel Grip. We met for the interview in the afternoon before their performance at the Jazzgalerie Nickelsdorf in December 2016. Their Curriculum Vitae, locating them on a time- and space-line, will not be rewritten at this point. CVs are a corporate-bourgeois parameter. Artists do not deserve being degraded into a list of achievements. Nobody does. The interview will show their life, where they went, what they learned, who they played with, why they did things, how they took their decisions in a way that is related to their art and not to the idea of a career. In case that you have never heard of Tristan Honsinger and Joel Grip, the following entry from the Jazzgalerie website may provide a short overview :

TRISTAN HONSINGER cello/poetry
JOEL GRIP double bass
03.12. 2016 | 21 uhr

it is physical, it is a dance. there is unknown music, HIDDEN,
to be discovered, deciphered. there is a past, there is a now and
there is a coming and there is something else. timeless, out of
time, swing. there are changes. time no changes. there are two
spines. backbones of improvisation. and a vast chatter. there is the
known and the to be known. there are two human beings? musical
instruments? Mouths. it is physical, it is a dance. there is known
music not known to our ears.

TRISTAN HONSINGER is pioneer of what we recognize as
european improvised music and free jazz. as a dancer and verbal

actor he takes the genres out of the genre. he has always been pushing the boundaries with his ecstatic and vibrant energy.

JOEL GRIP continues to schlepp his double bass around the globe, as if it were the axe chopping down the branch he is sitting on. a constant downfall of music establishing a moist ground for a coming backlash of woodpeckers making those guts vibrate the way you want it.

What I may add in the end, is that, maybe some ten years ago, Tristan was exactly twice as old as Joel.







Do you know Pasquale Mirra? Yes, we've worked a bit together, in Italy, with a dance project – which was misunderstood, as usual with dance. But we had a good time, playing with Enrico Sartori [alto saxophone, clarinet] and Antonio Borghini [double bass]. He's a very nice vibes player. I only know good vibes players. *Two questions: Who else, is a good vibes player? And why was the dance piece misunderstood?* Well, it was going to be something that we developed together through conversation but the dancers knew exactly what they wanted to do and they did it. And the music was like this and dance was like that. So there was no real reason that we even got together. *Okay, so it was misunderstood by the dancers, not by the audience?* No, not by the audience. The audience took it like they took it. It's quite usual with dance. Improvisation for them is at the very beginning of the process. The choreographers take from the dancers what is improvisation and then they fix it and put the dancers in a cage. They improvise and

then the choreographer says, ‘do that!’ and so they have to loop it until they memorize what they improvised. *So there were the musicians, the dancers and the choreographer?* Yes. *Would it have been possible only with the dancers?* I think so. But of course, the hierarchy is so, the hierarchy doesn’t change. *And the choreographer, did he also tell you what to do or only the dancers?* Well, she also told us. But we had the pieces of mine that we played and they had to fit their choreography into the music – which is not improvisation, it’s kind of a collage technique. The choreographer was not really interested in improvisation. It’s like in film. Films are made this way. They say, ‘Okay, do something!’ and ‘Oh yes, that’s good!’ and so the ideas are coming from people that are underneath the director. I know that some directors don’t really have an idea until the cast is there. Like Hitchcock – Kim Novak, I think, said, ‘Well, what do you want me to do, maestro?’ And he said, ‘You’re the actor, do it.’ And he’s absolutely not an improviser. He knows exactly what he wants to do. *But maybe also knows that there are people who know better what to do – in that case.* Well, there are many cases of people that you cannot put in a role and say, ‘you say this’ like Totò in Italian cinema, he was always improvising and there is this Little Big Man, do you know this film? It’s by Arthur Penn. The protagonist is an Indian chief, actually, in reality, and he improvised all his text. They couldn’t ask him to do certain things. So, there are of course these people that are good improvisers in acting and so on. *And did a similar thing happen to you in music, that somebody told you –* Oh, yes, it happened with my friend Mola Sylla. He wanted to do a kind of pop record and he asked me. And I played and they said, ‘well’, you know, they were talking to me like *this*. And I looked

at them and I said, ‘oohhhkay, I’ll try again’ and then the director, he said, ‘This is not a sport. We’re not here to make a sport.’ And I said, ‘Well, I’m not here to – If you tell me what you want me to do, that’s okay. If you don’t tell me what you want me to do, I do what I want to do.’ So it didn’t work. *No pop record?* Well, they made the pop record without me. I made a kind of chamber opera with Mola as a singer and Serigne [C. M. Gueye, percussion] – they’re both from Senegal – and I also used a Japanese singer [Hiroko Masaki]. It was a story about a secret recipe, cooky recipe, that turned into a code for a perfume that had special powers. I wrote all the music for this piece but Mola – he doesn’t learn music from paper, he’s an oral musician – he said, ‘Oh, ah, I can’t,’ you know. Because he had a block. I had it written all in French, but finally I said, ‘Okay, forget it, you just do’, and he finally decided, ‘Okay, I do kind of like talking and singing, French style.’ And the Japanese singer sang all her parts and Mola was flexible to do it his way. And it turned out really nice. The singer learned a little bit that in improvisation it’s more sometimes the timing that is improvised, and she learned how to fit herself in with Mola and yah, it came out quite interesting. And the music – we improvised the whole thing. *So, you wrote the text* – I wrote the text, I wrote the music and everything but finally I said, ‘Let’s leave the music except for the singer.’ And we rehearsed the music that we knew more or less, you know, how to get through it. It was an African-Japanese-South African company. It was my first experience of cross-cultures but in the end it worked very well because I said we’re going to improvise this. It was Kondo [Toshinori], Sean Bergin, myself, Mola, Serigne and this Japanese

singer, Hiroko Masaki. And a dancer, my old girlfriend, Hisako Horikawa, she was also part of it. She was the perfume. And she said, 'It's impossible to express in dance perfume. What can I do?' She was blocked also. So, everybody had a little bit of a problem. But it solved itself in that we had to do it. *Did you go on tour with that project?* Yeah, we did like six, seven performances, mostly in Holland and one in Bologna. *And all of these people were living in Holland at that time.* Yes, except for the singer, she was in Belgium which is not far. And it was just kind of very last minute decisions that we had to make because we had a director too, which was a little, difficult, I would say, because directors have a difficulty to work with improvisation. Mola changed his idea because it was a political thing. In Senegal they don't speak French on the radio, it's Wolof, and so the director said, 'Well, he can talk in his own language,' and Mola looked at me and said, 'That's even more complicated.' And then, right then and there, he decided to do it French style, and it was solved.

We rehearsed the thing in Groningen in Holland. It was a project subsidized by the Groningen funds. They payed me a thousand more and they didn't know which was quite good for me, ha. And people said about the piece, 'Yeah, it's like Stravinsky,' or something, you know, we got very high compliments but it was just purely trial and error. Really. *And how long did it take you to write the words for the opera?* It didn't take too long. I had a woman that helped with the French translation because I'm not an expert in French and it was mostly the music – we rehearsed the music and I was a character, Sean was a character, everybody had a character (a garden architect,

father and inventor of the perfume). When we played music we had our space, but if it was dialog it was moving around. *Did you do more things like that, operas?* Yah, yah, I've done three or four. Or it was more, let's say music theatre than opera – I know nothing about opera. But after this experience in Holland, they wanted me to make an opera. In Bologna. And you know, they say : 'But Tristan, you can't do *this*.' 'What do you mean?' Opera is technological, you know. And they had no budget for the stage and what have you. So it was half assed. Massimo Simonini, the director, he wanted to record it but where we did the performance, the acoustics were terrible. So, it was what it was. But a very good experience. It was much larger and finally I worked with a writer who understood what I was trying to do. I wrote the story and he understood the kind of texts that were needed for this piece. That was great because the texts were beautiful.

You played here [in Nickelsdorf] maybe ten years ago [2005] with mostly Italians. Yes, Small Talk [Cristina Vetrone, voice, accordeon; Vincenzo Vasi, voice, theremin; Luigi Mosso, voice, double bass; Enrico Sartori, clarinet; Edoardo Marraffa, tenor and alto saxophone; Antonio Borghini, double bass; Cristiano de Fabritiis, drums], they were all members of the Opera Mobile Galleria San Francesco. For me that was more a cabaret thing than opera because we had some very good improvisers in Italian. The lady, Cristina, and Lulo, he was playing second bass, they are wonderful improvisers with text. We played once on live radio and that's all we did in Italy, they just didn't get it. It was a kind of a literary project, we used texts from

different writers. *Italian writers?* Well, no, in general. We did a piece on Wittgenstein, which was very nice and yeah, Italo Calvino, Beckett, different writers. It was a good project, very rich. But the Italians, they have a hard time with absurdism or surrealism, they just don't get it. Like for instance here [in Nickelsdorf], there were Italians and they enjoyed it very much; this is the strange thing. Out of Italy they appreciate it, inside Italy they don't want to know. They don't really respect their own people, I mean, I worked with people of genius, really, and I was asked, 'Tristan, why do you work with these people?' *With these Italians.* With these Italians! Really, it's insane. **Joel Grip : It's the opposite in France.** Yeah, exactly. *But is it only that they don't respect their contemporary artists or what do they say about Dante, for example.* Well, I have done that too. I was accompanying this man reciting five or six chapters of Inferno in rhythm, and Dante is very rhythmical. *What's the name of this man?* It was an actor who has a theatre in Bologna, kind of popular actor. They did Brecht and Beckett but they had a big problem with me. It was crazy. *Why?* Well, they just didn't understand where we were coming from. *Small Talk?* Yes. I can't explain it. And it was all in Italian, and I said, 'You have a national treasure here,' as far as I'm concerned, 'some of the best performers in one group.' But they didn't want to know. You have to go outside of Italy to get appreciated. No one knew about Edoardo Marraffa, for instance, and I told Marraffa before we left to go to Nickelsdorf, I said, 'You have to play,' you know, 'you have to play and vibrate and *do it*.' So, he did. And all of a sudden Marraffa was on the map. But there was also Vincenzo Vasi, he's an incredible musician, well, most of them. *So in Bologna they didn't have a personal problem with you,*

it was rather the group or the performance? Yeah, well, the material that we used was maybe a little bit strange. But *I am* a little bit strange for the Italians. The way I do it. But I think it's on the line of old Italian ways, like Commedia dell'arte, this type of thing is still alive in Italy as far as sketches are concerned and how you do things. We got people who were really good, for instance this singer, Cristina, she's an incredible improviser, just with text, and this bass player, Lulo. There was a different brilliance in the group – but nothing. I thought, finally there is a group we can get work with but nothing. *And outside of Italy it's difficult because of the language.* Yeah, you don't get this thing. But if you go to Belgium, okay that's okay, because they go beyond the language. In Holland, for instance, it's like, 'Oh, I don't understand...' You don't understand? I don't either!

Did you live there, in Bologna? I lived outside Bologna, in the countryside. It's always much cheaper. And the cities are made for horses, really. All these cars and stuff make it a crazy environment, so I prefer to live in the countryside, it's cheaper and it's more genuine. In the village where I lived, someone found out that I was kind of a figure in the improvised music. They looked me up. And then they came down and said, 'We'd like you to perform.' So I performed in the church. And it was nice and so then the woman who had the cartoleria, which is a kind of a general store, she and her husband, they used to call me Professore. They would come to my door and say, 'Could you play on the square next Saturday?' And so I would go and just do my stuff. And they loved it. *You were playing and reciting...* reciting and, you know, doing stupid things that I do and they said,

‘Oh yeah, Charlie Chaplin!’ So in fact, in the provinces it’s more interesting. For instance here. It’s sometimes better because people they have no judgement, they don’t come with any judgement, they just take it because they don’t know. So, whatever I do, as long as it’s open, they enjoy it. **You get a function, a direct function in the society.** Yeah, I was the Professore. And I gave workshops in my house because it was a big house with many beds and so the farmers would come down from the village and we were all outside playing and people would come and say, ‘Would you play in our Festa de l’Unità?’ the communist festival, because it’s a real communist stronghold. *Around Bologna?* Yah, well, Bologna is the real center of communism. Now not, it used to be. **It turns into a kind of folk music.** Well, we never did it because they didn’t pay anything. They thought, okay, we’ll get these amateurs and you know. But it raised interest in the village. *And how long did you stay there in that village?* Ten years. *Okay.* In fact, when I left I approached my friend Massimo and I said, ‘Wouldn’t it be nice to do a festival in this village?’ Because there are different places where you could play and I still would like to do that. Because of my house, many musicians from outside can stay in the house and yeah, it’s possible to make a very nice festival. *Is this your house?* Yes, well, I rented this house. *And now?* They are still waiting for me to come back. Because I left a lot of things in the house. When I moved to Trieste, I came back in the summertime but when I moved to Berlin, it was too much. So I think they are still waiting for me to pick up my things in the house. *What did you leave there?* Some hats and some music papers. *And why did you leave?* Well, because when I did some music theatre pieces in Trieste, it became

impossible to stay because they wouldn't pay us. It was a corrupt psychiatric hospital [Hospadala Basaglia] that promised to have some money and they just, you know, lied to me. Basically. And so I said, 'Well, fuck *you*. I'm going to Berlin.' And that was the end of it. *And from Bologna to Trieste you moved* – because this psychiatrist invited me to do a project with the patients. He wanted me to make an orchestra just with drummers and guitar players, but I said no, I decided that I want to work with a choir because I had this piece in mind. In the early seventies, there was this psychiatrist who opened up the doors of the asylums, he was the first one in the world to do this : Franco Basaglia. He was very famous and important, but he died very young. In the eighties his assistances took over and that's when the drugs, the psycho-drugs started to happen. And they basically became rich selling these drugs, like really a business, a big business. And all these zombies, taking too much of it, the patients. It was impressive how present they were and how ghostly they were, at the same time. They needed someone in the middle, so there was the director, he was the chorus master. We worked together and everybody had their lines but we had to tell them : 'When I give you a sign, you do this,' they needed the director to say, 'Now!' And then they said these lines. It was a different vibe, totally. But very very nice. And then in the end, they wouldn't pay me. I invited Phil Minton, he did his thing, and Hisako [Horikawa], the dancer, she did her thing, in this project with this chorus and I invited different actors that I knew [Giuglio Cancelli and Giuglio Morgan] and other musicians. So it was a very very nice project but the psychiatrists, they just lied to me. *So, they wanted you to do it but they just didn't want to*

pay. That's it. They paid for one performance. *In a theatre?* In a theatre. Outside of Trieste. It wasn't really that great because of the actors but it was something anyway. *How many people were in the group?* We were like four or five musicians [Paolo Pascolo, Gabriele Cancelli, Giorgio Pacorig, Andrea Gulli] a singer, a painter and three actors. And of course, when I came back, they said : 'Yeah, let's do it again!' But it was the same thing, you have to cry for money to buy time. That's the problem today, there is no time. The only way to do something is to buy time, because you have to rehearse. And this is the big problem all over the world today. I was talking to Roscoe [Mitchell] about this problem when we met in the airport. In the sixties and the seventies it was possible and then slowly but surely, yeah, without money you can't do these things. You have to have someone like Hans [Falb] that says, 'Okay, come, and rehearse here.' Which I did with the string thing. *The Seven Seas Orchestra?* Yes. *Who was paying in the sixties and seventies?* There was funding. Holland was rich. **But there was also another collective engagement, no?** I mean, I also met Roscoe a few months ago, talking about collectives like the **Art Ensemble [of Chicago]**. I mean, he was with this Bruckner [Thomas] and *he* was rich. So he funded Roscoe's projects. **So this was a private mecenate.** He was doing it that way. And he is still someone that you can't work with without rehearsal. And me likewise. Last year we went to Norway and did similar work but we had two weeks, with a group from Berlin [Axel Dörner, trumpet; Tobias Delius, saxes; Antonio Borghini, bass] and some actors from Norway [Hanne Dieserud, Kirsti Sørli Hansen, Miguel Emilio Dobrodenka Steinsland, Sara Fellman]. Joel was there but he didn't perform, his

wife [girlfriend Franziska Hoffmann] was one of the actresses and musician. He was the babysitter but he saw the whole thing. Immediately after that we had to go to Holland [DoeK Festival in Amsterdam] and play in this quartet that we also performed here [in 2011] with Axel, Toby and Antonio. And Axel and Toby and Antonio they understood, finally, that okay, when you have a character you have to play your character no matter how abstract it is. If you have a character behind, it enters into the music, right. So for these younger musicians it was like a revelation to see this, that it was more than just music. So yeah, it's something that takes time, a thing like this. It could take ten years but after ten years it's really something. *So, in your groups you distribute characters to your musicians?* Well, there are songs that are kind of related to the story and so we sing these songs and the actors tell the story and we have all these different characters in different combinations that are simultaneous with the story that is going on. So there are two or three different levels going on at the same time, sometimes. And sometimes it's nothing, you know, we're just there. But you realize – I've been doing this a long time – that if you do open up the space and just show the space and the people doing nothing, it gives an opportunity for the public to actually get in and when they're in, they get it. So it's something that is in time today, let's say. *So, if I would be a musician and I would be part of one of your ensembles, what would you tell me?* I would say, 'You're a farmer, you're a scientist and you're a duck. Those are your three characters.' That's it. And at a certain point one character forms in the grouping, one person starts, and then they come together and bla bla bla or movement or whatever, the musicians tell a story from these



characters. So it's basically a Commedia dell'arte way. So if you're the captain, you improvise the text being a captain, that's all. And it works. *And how do I know that it's my turn?* There are signals. There are signals because there is no order. So, when, let's say the scientist comes out with his magnifying glass or whatever, people know, 'oh, now it's my time to be the farmer.' Or the duck. And it works like that. *That's in the composition?* Yeah, there are different scenes. Like there's a café, like here, and it all comes together, slowly, and then you have it. So it's kind of like appearing, construction and then deconstruction, that passes and then we go to the next whatever. So we're actually the piece itself, we're servants to the piece. There is no one that is directing. Like Antonio can bring in an intro and we know we're in this piece. It could be a song, it could be – *And in one of your pieces, can Antonio be only Antonio or only Antonio playing a character?* Well, Antonio doesn't have many characters. He's a nun and maybe one other character. The bass players don't have many characters. Antonio, I would call him 'the man that sees from above.' He knows what's happening, more than others, more than myself really. Because he's that way. And Steve Heather, he's a great actor, so we have a lot of things that we do together and sometimes he does other things. It works like that. It's basically learning to do what you don't know how to do. You learn. It's a kind of learning process. *And for tonight?* It's a little bit the same but it's purely improvised. **These characters come up but they are not pre-written.** But it's on the same line. And then, it's just a duo. **The more we play, these characters crystallize or become clear but we don't know if they will come.** *So you are inventing characters together?* Yes, inventing characters. Joel does a lot

of visual work which I like because we also do just-movement-pieces and are working with the instruments as objects, for instance. **And the body as an object.** He can stand on a chair and yeah – he’s quite something. He is a circus performer without even knowing it. So, these are the people I can work with because I also do things that I really don’t know but I do it. It’s just about that, really. And vibrating the thing to the people, that’s also very important. **For me,** I think, I learned a lot by playing with you about the notion of the body. You’re not just the musician, I’m not just in service to play that bass – or even if I am just playing the bass in a band – I am the physical person. It doesn’t matter how much I want not to be an actor, I am. I put myself on stage in front of people and I am a visual person, so why not use this. It’s also this thing, you know, in the old days people played with their eyes open. Okay, in free jazz the eyes started to close. Well, what we are doing is really *eyes open* because two things can happen at the same time and you have to be ready. **Yeah, there’s not only this inner film going on.** It’s about the picture, the movement, the voice. **And it’s never only about the sound,** I would say. Also for people who think it’s only about the sound, it’s not only about the sound. An extreme case, our dear friend Axel Dörner who can be extremely still playing fantastic sound images, I mean he is visual. He has learned a lot doing this experience in Norway. So when we got to Amsterdam and played, people felt that there was something happening. They could feel it, but they couldn’t point to it, it was too subtle. **And as someone who was watching the whole process with my kids in the hand,** it was a lot about accepting that, ‘Yeah, I’m a body as well, not just a sound maker. I move.’ And that was nice to see. Axel told me later on that

it was such a good experience. And we talked to people in France afterwards about this project but they did not understand. They could not accept that someone like Axel being one of the masters of this extreme sound producers would say, 'No, I'm a body.' Axel was doing incredible movements, you know, and he was a nun and he was a duck, incredible. And he was happy to mix this and not only be the musician behind the trumpet. And in Paris they were, 'Non, non, c'est pas possible, tu peux pas faire comme ça. C'est de la merde, c'est du théâtre.' It started in Sowieso [Berlin, Neukölln], where we developed this thing and Axel, at the beginning, was stiff and straight ahead doing his job. And you know, I'm moving around, Toby's saying something totally off the wall and then we start to move and then, well, Axel, one day, started to move. It started like that. And now he says something sometimes. Because there is this thing about shame. The musician suffers from this a lot, hiding behind his instrument. They are ashamed of what they are looking like and what we do is about kind of like getting free of that shame. Because then you have no problem to change from a movement work to a conversation to song to whatever. I think, some people have a problem with this when the movement takes away the musical experience. I think, a movement can really destroy the music, but when people are not ashamed, it can also really add something to the music. I think, many people have a really hard time to accept this. *That's also interdisciplinarity, no? Because what are you? Are you a comedian, are you a musician, a writer?* People always want to put this in a box and they cannot. This might be a problem for being booked for festivals. They would not be able to describe it and I think this is a sign of quality. Because in many of the projects

I play, it's like that. People say, 'oh, it's too much jazz,' and then is another guy saying, 'it's not jazz enough' or 'it's too contemporary.' It's always falling in between the chairs and I like that because it means that I'm at the spot where I should be as someone who thinks about this music and I try to develop and research things for myself. Well, it's also on the edge of psychotherapy, you know, it's almost like, when we're doing this, sometimes I can think, 'Oh, he's mad at me,' you know, or something, because he takes this position. So, it's very psychological but you have to be above this for it to work. You have to be cold in a certain way. **Dry. Sec.** It's an acting technique somehow. You're in these characters. *Are you watching yourself performing?* Well, I do. I try to do it. John Cage said that the important thing is that you put yourself in the audience when you're playing. And watch yourself what you're doing. So, basically, when you're on the stage, you are in and that's it, you can't get away. **For me it's more about accepting that I cannot do anything but acting. It's not a matter of 'now I go on stage and now I will act,' like pushing a button. No, I am acting all the time, I have to invent.** But you are naturally, out of all the people that I've worked with, you're basically ready to confront all possibilities. It's just that, embracing the fact that you can start with anything and you associate, what that means for you. **Yeah, for me it's easier.** We've also been trying to decide characters and places before we play, which I like, but I think I prefer personally what we are doing now. **The characters are there anyway.** Well, you jump into them. Sometimes I call him George and sometimes he calls me George but we have Henry too. *So, through playing you are developing the characters.* Yeah, the characters can last maybe three minutes sometimes and then we're off some-

where else. *And do you know each other's characters?* I don't think so. I think the fun is that he uses me and I use him. **It's a lot about this, I think. I make him fall and he makes me fall and at the same time I save him and he saves me. And this balance between – it's not about finding some kind of beautiful balance or harmony – yeah, it's about the harmony between really falling into the hell and then really being saved. Is it possible to fail in a way – or what would be a failure?** I think failure is somehow needed. You have to get into a black, dark hole, somehow. So you can come out, you're looking for the light in this darkness. **And sometimes these moments, they are the best. When you come out? No, when you fail.** You live this failure. **Yeah, you live this failure.** So it's not really failure. It's just part of – well, it's life. Life is up and down. **You take the energy of this failure and be it, become it.** You always have to find something concrete, I would say, that is not just between us, it becomes part of the whole space. So, it's nice, tonight we can clear the stage of the drums and what have you and have an open stage. Because we make these crazy visual things. You think if I smoke here? *I think* – it's not allowed. **Ah, it's the same room basically.** *[I went off to ask Hans]* It's okay? *Yes, one. One.*

So, Joel is one of your partners now. Well, this is the only duo that I'm working with. I'm really happy about that it can come down to a duo. Otherwise I have big groups. Yes, we work together, we work sometimes in trio, in quartet but it's basically the same kind of work. *Well, I took these three CDs [that serve as a stack for the voicerecorder] randomly [from Hans' shelf], I did not prepare them. But I read here Peter Kowald.* Yes. *Was he somebody that you were working with?* Now and again,

we didn't work that much. Sometimes I would go to Wuppertal but I don't remember playing in Wuppertal with Peter. We did something in the States and we did a tour in Japan but he was already working a lot with free jazz musicians from the States, that was his way. He brought Charles Gayle the first time off the street in New York to Europe. **To play in northern Serbia, in this festival, Kanjiža. That was the first time Charles Gayle played in Europe, I mean, so goes the story, it was in Kanjiža with Peter.** He's a complicated, very religious man but what he plays and says, you can believe it. *Charles Gayle?* You better believe it. Yes. *And other bass players who were important.* For me Jean-Jacques Avenel was important as a bass player because he learned the Kora from West Africa and his phrasing, when he played jazz, was more African than American, that's what I liked about him. **Special. And [Maarten] van Regteren Altena?** Well, he was along the way, he wasn't that – **Because there is this record [Live Performances, 1977], a split solo album.** Yes, because we didn't find anything good playing together. **And Joëlle [Léandre]?** Joëlle, yah, I played only two or three times with her. But one concert I remember being very good. By accident, I think. It was with Phil Wachsmann, Fred van Hove, herself and myself. It was a great concert, in Antwerp. *Other important bass players?* I met [Donald] Rafael Garrett from Chicago who was one of the beginners to create the AACM. He was important for me as a teacher, I was young and furious and he plays flutes, you know, it was a little bit mystical. **And he also had a direct connection to Wilbur Ware, no?** Yeah. He learned bass with Wilbur Ware in prison, probably in Chicago or maybe New York, I don't know. But he found himself in jail with Sonny Rollins – *Just by*

accident? Just by accident. I think prison was a meeting place for many jazz musicians, a place for rehearsal, reflection. *Hans Falb : Wollt's ihr noch was trinken?*



Yesterday you told me this expression : fuori campo. Do you want to talk about it? Well, I have this funny idea that when I play, I come to a point where I say ‘Now, it feels good, it’s my time.’ And then something slips –it’s almost like, I feel like I’m not allowed to do things. Something stops it, some mysterious element in the process. And I think, *fuori campo* explains it best. It’s the periphery that we find ourselves in sometimes, in this type of music making that some people, like Mats, for instance, he’s no longer in the improvising scene, he’s a level above it, or below it, I don’t know. Where I think I always remain on the periphery, part of the unknown, the invisible. And because I’m there I have learned many things that I wouldn’t probably have learned if I was in the center of activity. So, I feel that the way my life has gone, is always not there, it’s somewhere outside and this for me is *fuori campo*. *And what did you learn, fuori campo? Or why are you there, what do you think is the reason that you are on the periphery?* Because I’m doing things that people are sometimes ashamed to do. They don’t do it. Because, because, because. And

I do it, because, because, because. I do it because others can't do it, they won't do it and I think it's very revealing if you show this process, it's almost not allowed in certain circles. This meaning that main stream is something that people basically want to be – in the main stream. And I am not in the main stream. I'm a kind of brook off the river, going somewhere in the mountains and this experience teaches me what I should do. **Necessity** – Yah, because you have no choice, in a certain way. So it's basically about having visions, I would say. There are very few people with visions today. They tend to do covers of Mingus or covers of this or that. And I elementally keep to the things that I can do. Because I can't do everything. And today it's a little bit like you're working with people that want to do everything and they have problems with me because I put them off. They're like, 'What the fuck is he doing!?' You know, really. And then you say, 'Well, good bye.' And they say, 'Pfoohh, good bye.' **Au revoir.** But putting people on the spot is just showing the public the mechanisms – the public is no fool. It sees much more than the people that are actually doing it. They see much more. Going for the last 45 years I come together with musicians that think they are pulling the wool over the public's eye and they don't understand how much the public does see. And if you show them this : 'Yeah, oh, that's what I see too.' It's just a matter of not being ashamed of just showing exactly where we are : on a cloud, in a half floating boat, in a bear cave, god knows where, on the river Nile. *Hopefully!*

And this way of working and performing, did that grow over time or did you choose to go this way or how did it happen that you find yourself now saying

this here? Well, it's been many years. Probably because I lived with a very fine performer, dancer, mime, I don't know what you would call her [Katie Duck], and we would make these pieces together. From the early eighties on, any opportunity to make something more than just a musical performance, I would try to do it. And it's also about looking at someone, seeing through the person and realizing : yes, that person has possibility to be comfortable in that kind of situation. It's also picking people. Some people are good and I think I have a bit of a talent to bring certain people together in this type of work. *And was it difficult to begin with that?* It has always been difficult because you have never time enough to rehearse, it was always half. So, the performances were always a learning experience. I remember, I started with Katie Duck and Sean Bergin, we lived in Italy at the time and we would make pieces, also with another dancer [Virgilio Sienni]. Anyway, these were the days when we would work for a month on a piece and play it once. And that was it. And I learned from that experience that that's the way it is. It teaches you how special the things we were doing were, in terms of the main stream. And you get good at seeing, 'Okay, I want to ask you to play with me,' and somehow I have a little bit of a talent to convince people to do it. Even though they don't know what they are going to do. *Like Axel?* Yeah. But also Antonio, he's an incredible performer – if he does it. But he takes a very neutral position, which is fine with me. Also Klaus [Kürvers] : you can't ask him to recite Hamlet or something. But it is part of it to talk to the person and say, 'Okay, this is what I want you to do.' It's not about saying, 'No, it's not this way!' I just tell them the task and they have

to do it, that's all. I don't point my finger and say, 'No, you're doing it wrong!' Because I don't know from wrong or right. It's the same to me. So it's basically a matter of working with people, it kind of takes on the fragile part of a performance, the delicate, the female side of things, that it's not sure. It's not show, we're not showing anything, we're in this process. *And being in this process also means being fuori campo?* Yes, in a way it's fuori campo. But if you're in time it reveals things. Things get revealed and there are magic moments. People are always expecting that, anyway, but a lot of the times there's a lot of delusion because many people are very closed in a certain way. Also in the improvised music. It's all form, it's almost like a sculpture. The sculpture is made and that's what you have. This is not like this. It's fluid, it's transparent, it's fragile. **Yeah, we talked about this today. In Paris you can have a degree in improvised music.** *Ah, okay.* **People come out with diploma, you are an improviser now, you get a gig and you get payed.** Because you have to seduce the people, as well, you have to give them a certain confidence. Because I think people realize, when they do something, whether they have succeeded according to themselves or whether they have failed. So, you don't have to talk to them about it too much. It's just, you know, 'You have to be a cow with a psychiatrist and a basketball coach.' And there you have it. *Are always animals involved?* Well, I like animals. It's a surreal symbol. Like the bear is very important in history as a symbol. **And as actors they are great.** If you see a wild animal, for me, it's like a revelation. I once saw a deer leap in the air just in front of us taking a walk. The dog had fished out this deer and in leapt like this, leapt again and it was gone. But I'll never forget, never forget it. And this

is kind of like a revelation for me, something that I am allowed to see. *I still remember you talking about a pheasant. You were walking and it just went up in the air in front of you.* Oh yeah, I had a thing where I said, 'Okay, I'm going hunting.' With stones. And I'm walking in the field and I know there is a pheasant and what they do, is, they shock you. Like bl-----u, and then he goes *that* way and I throw the stone *there*. It's unbelievable but it's a great experience because it's about surprise. So I learned about surprise from a pheasant. *Does every musician get an animal character?* No, sometimes. I am a tree and I am a dog. Those are my two unhuman living creatures. *What kind of dog?* It's a detective, the assistant and her dog, so I'm sniffing about and they are following me around the stage. **A useful dog, it's not like a housedog, barking dog.** No, it's a police dog, detective dog. *Specialized.* Specialized, yes. *Working dog.* Yah, it's a working dog. *And now I remember what I wanted to ask before : Is it a way of performing or a way of being to put yourself into the fragile position?* It just happens that you are in a position where you're in the dark, completely in the dark and you react to this. So people see you in a fragile position, that's all. They don't know that you don't know. It's kind of like that. They feel this fragility.

Do you [Joel] want to ask something? Something you didn't have the time to ask Tristan. **We have too much time.** What I like is the silence. Sometimes we travel long distances and I don't feel this force that we have to entertain each other. I like the feeling of that it is the way it is. Well, in life, I need a time to reflect, it's just about that, that's why I don't have a telephone that I'm always looking at or these things because

it cuts out this very precious time that you have to just reflect. And I find a lot of people don't have the time to reflect because of, you know, what they have to do. *Or maybe they choose not to have this time.* Well, of course – *I also need a lot of time.* For a writer I think, it's really important to sometimes reflect for a month. *Yeah, I would love to reflect for a month.* And you never know when it's going to happen when things get clear and you see something. *Very often when it's dark, things get clear. And that's maybe when you put yourself into the black hole.* Well, it's like, you get on the stage and you're prepared, you have like twenty beginnings you thought of but it never – all those beginnings are useless, you always have to start somewhere where you don't expect.

You know, what is always interesting is how you worked together with people like Cecil Taylor, the kind of things we were talking about yesterday, I don't know if you want to talk about this. Well, he looks upon me as a dancer, in the first place. He has something with dance and movement. He is a very wise man, he has many complicated situations, psychologically he's very fragile, I would say. And I'm not really close to him, I mean, okay when I go and visit him in New York, we're friends and we talk, bla bla for fifteen hours straight listening to him repeat himself twenty times and going off on tangents and it's always interesting. And when we play, I think it's a little bit the same. I have to take a position with him, and I actually did find a good position without having to ask him, you know, I found it myself. And so, he likes those kind of people that do find a position in his way. He's not really interested in charismatic powers, he just has that, naturally.

And people gather and listen like this and the more they listen like this the more he becomes not understandable. So he plays this game, right, with all these young people that want to understand and get enlightened by Mister Cecil Taylor. And I'm wandering around, I come in and out, 'Ah, Tristan,' and then I go away and yah, that's our relationship. Unless I go to his house. Because I'm the only one that can stay up as long as he can. Because usually it's like six people and one, like Harri [Sjöström] – we're in New York and Harri says, 'Well, Cecil, I've got to get some sleep.' 'Okay, Harri, good night!' And then there's four or five and they all start to collapse, fall asleep. And I'm left with Cecil and we talk for ten hours with all these corpses. It's kind of interesting. *So, he does not teach.* Well, sometimes he gives – I've done – we did this gig in the Village Vanguard for six days and okay, he invites all the musicians to his house and we play for five hours. That's the rehearsal. 'Okay, we're ready.' Because Cecil confuses rather than teaches. He confuses. He makes these scores from A up to B-flat, down to G, up to you know, and they always start from the beginning and we learn it like this, but when we play, he starts somewhere in the middle and they're all confused. He really makes it difficult for them. So, that's his teaching. The confusion of philosophies. *And: just find your own place.* Yes. **And you end up having learned something.** *About yourself, maybe.* Yes, about yourself. Because Cecil is basically a rhythmic player but oddly, like half classical. It's not really main stream be bop or something like this, it's another world and you do have to – because if you are going to chase Cecil Taylor, forget it. Forget it. I mean, he's always going to be faster – and then he finds himself alone. But if you take

a position and you play long lines over the thing then he's like, 'Oh, yeah!' And then he starts to accompany me with these long lines. So, if you find it, it's much better. And there was this performance we did in Amsterdam, with a big group. It was called the October meeting and Cecil invited Frank Wright because Frank was playing with a Dutch main stream band at the same time. And so what happened is that there is Mark Dresser on the bass and Frank Wright, he puts himself in front of Mark Dresser with his ass right attached to the bass and Mark would say, 'Hey Frank, could you move a little bit.' 'No, this is my place.' And Cecil : 'Frank! This is *my* band!' It was a real drama. So we start the performance and there is a conductor and he doesn't know how to conduct, so Cecil is playing alone and I'm saying, 'There is nothing fucking happening,' so I jump in and we play for about two minutes and then I start like this [imitating deep drone sound] and the band becomes Frank Wright, Cecil, me and Han [Bennink], basically. And there were all these others who were totally confused. And we have to do it. That's how we met. It was an orchestra, there were a lot of people in it, George Lewis. He fired Anthony [Braxton] because he didn't come to the rehearsal. We didn't come to the rehearsal either but I said, 'Wow, we're sorry, Cecil, we woke up too late.' 'Okay. It's okay.' But Anthony couldn't do it. And then we did the Berlin thing the year after. The two cities were cultural capitals for Europe, in eighty-seven and eighty-eight, that's when I met him, eighty-seven. *That was the first encounter and then* – and then the next year in Berlin he put me in the orchestra again. *And since then there was a regular connection.* Yeah, for about thirteen years we worked *not that much* but regularly. And then, in

Berlin, something happened with his boyfriend and they split up in Berlin and the boyfriend was supposed to have organized this thing in New York City and I wasn't even there but he fired the whole band. It was his fault but he fired the whole band. Stayed up for like a week and it was a big mess. *And when was the last time you played with him?* In April [2016], in New York [at the Whitney Museum; <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/30/arts/music/a-cecil-taylor-retrospective-at-whitney-museum.html>]. We played in an eight piece group with Min Tanaka – he dances his ass off, really. They did a trio with Tony [Oxley] at the beginning and then the second set was with the eight piece group. It was nice, I was happy that I got to play once again with him. And it was short, it was like forty minutes, something which is unheard of. At a certain point he said, 'Thank you, gentlemen.' That was it.

Do you have more cooperations with Butoh dancers? Well, I work with this woman Hisako Horikawa, she's a kind of a parallel, not really Butoh. It's a lot of acting in it, because Min, he's a good actor and he's more of a figure than a dancer where Hisako, she's a real dancer. *It's interesting what you say that Min Tanaka is more of a figure.* Well, he's a rich man now because he makes films and he doesn't say anything. He's a very beautiful man and they just film him pouring water into a plant or something and he makes a hundred thousand dollars for a little part in a film. I feel there's a lot of theatre in the back of it. Hijikata [Tatsumi] was the man who kind of invented this style, Butoh. I think it started in the sixties with experimenting with Ohno [Kazuo], they were partners and he choreographed Ohno. His choreographes

are very small : the face or the eye or the mouth, he really is detailed. It looks like it's all improvised but it's all fixed. And so you have these three figures, for instance, that are moving like this and each one has a different choreography – it's quite astounding, the effects he gets. Well, they improvised as well, it wasn't all choreographed, but apparently he [jikata] was quite something, a bit like Cecil. He was always the last one, he would go and see performances of the younger groups that were kind of influenced by him and he would always be the last one. He was one of these people who didn't sleep. I think that's why he died so young. And he was crazy, he would go in the streets and convince young boys of sixteen to join his company and he would, you know, work them to death and they would escape. He was quite mad.

When you're on stage, is there a difference between a dancer and a musician, regarding everything we said before? No, I am as much a dancer as I am a musician, I would say. That's why I get along with dancers. But few dancers actually dance, that's the problem. *What do they do?* Well, effects around, you know. We're in this period of the importance of what is around, what the lights are doing and so on – around of what actually you are supposed to be doing. They don't do it. They act like they don't have to. And this annoys me. And finally, with Hisako, we get up and she would dance and I would play and she's dancing in a totally different way from a western dancer. It was a great feeling to finally have met someone—.



It was a revelation when I first took up the bass – I started to play electric bass and the first time I touched a double bass I had the feeling of the dance. Because I felt like my body had actually a function with this instrument, it's more physical than sonore. Yah, I was always jealous of bass players because they could stand up and play. I was always sitting down, I have to move my feet to keep it going. There is this American guy, he lives in Freiburg, Muneer Abdul Fatah, a cello player and he has a pin, a huge pin, and he plays standing up. So I also ended up playing with dancers which I liked a lot. The feeling of me becoming a dancer and the dancer becoming the musician – in a way I find it very interesting when that works out. It's not just me accompanying someone making movement and movement accompanying the sound. *When was that?* I worked in Japan with Butoh dancers, in Nagano. I also studied Japanese for some time. It was the year before the Fukushima accident, I had a lot of things going on with Japan, I got some grants and I studied Japanese. I could have really bad conversations with people, I could order and read a little bit. I could read thirty out of the five thousand characters. And then I had a one-month-tour, basically, starting on the 10th of march 2008, this was the day of the earthquake and the Fukushima accident – so it got all canceled and I ended up not going back. I was going every year to Japan at that time and after Fukushima I didn't go for three or four years and then again. *And now?* Not regularly, because I lost contact with the guy who used to bring me. He's a kind of a gangster but sometimes Hisako has the means to invite me. I also have my friend Chino [Shuichi], the guy that played here [Konfrontationen 2013]. He's very wealthy. When I went back to Japan after Fukushima, I

had twenty-eight concerts in one month with him. He lives in Berlin and Japan, so he goes back and forth. And he wants to bring this idea of Hopscotch [Tristan Honsinger's Hopscotch Ensemble] to Japan and I said, 'I want to make a Japanese cast, not a western cast.' Because I think their way of doing this will also reveal different things. I would like to work with children in Japan because they are very obedient in a certain way. If you tell them, 'You have to become an alligator,' they are, 'Okay!', they do it. I'd like to work with children from seven to ten, I think it's a good age. You write a story and you tell them, 'Okay, here is the rice field, they are cutting the rice.' I could do it with Hisako, she's very good with children. It would be another experience. The spaces are very different, very small, so it could be nice to make a kind of journey in different spaces, well, you have to think completely different. **The last time I was there I worked with mentally handicapped in the university of Kobe. They organize a group where they do music, every week they meet and play together. And Otomo Yoshihide, he's directing it quite often. He's very good. He's extremely good. The whole ensemble was invited to play in Cafe Oto [London] a few years ago. And the last time I was in Japan we worked with the same group and it was incredible, even though it was just one day – we worked with them and then we did a concert together – they were so good already. Working a few years with Otomo Yoshihide, so they were really on top of it. It really blew my mind, the energy and the will.** Well, children's concerts – we do this with the ICP [Instant Composers Pool], kids from ten to thirteen – and we're playing a song of Misha's and okay, they know the lyrics and they start making dance steps, in groups, so everybody's busy. They're

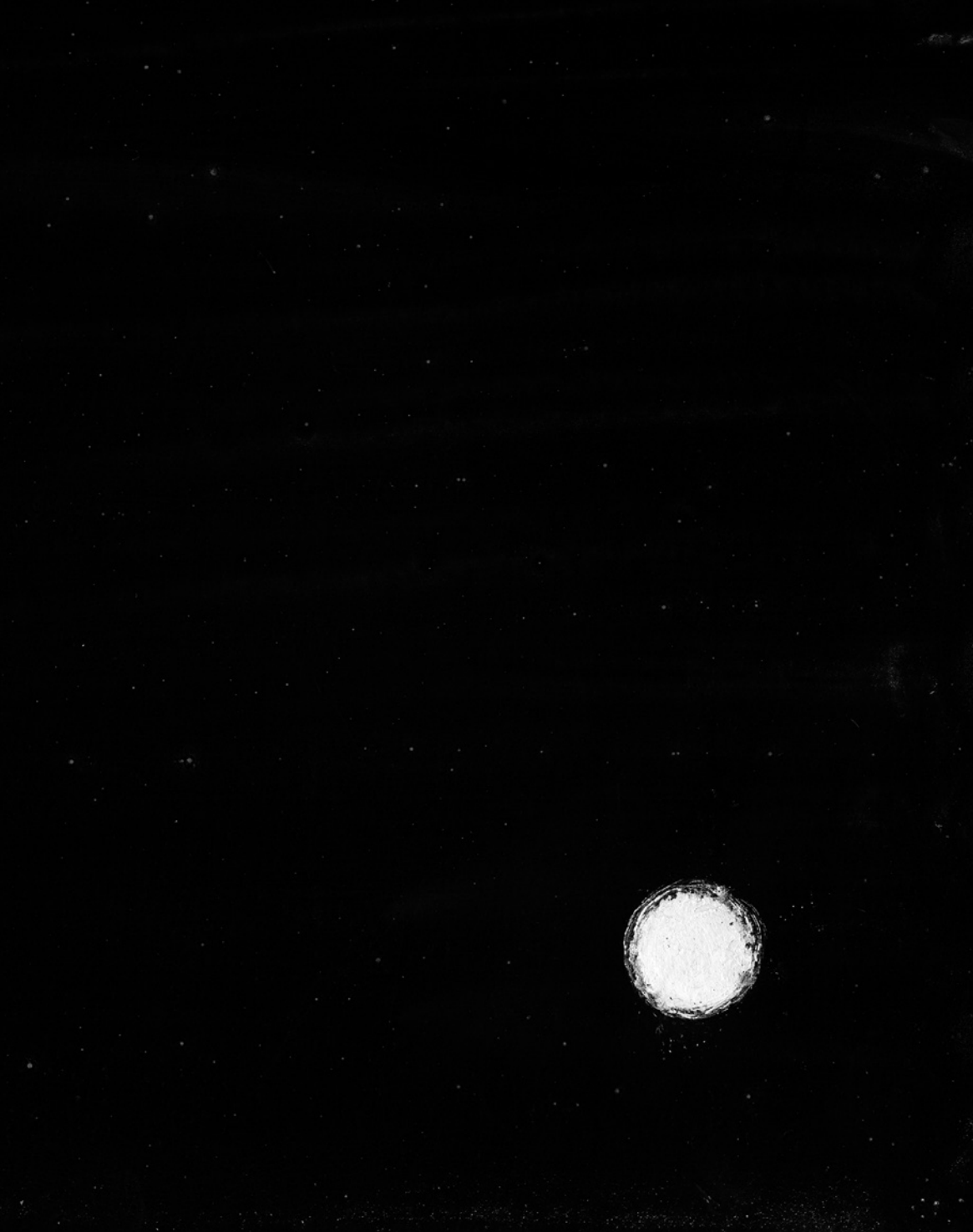
doing more than we are, really enjoying themselves – and then you have the teachers that say, ‘No, respect the musicians there!’ They don’t realize that they are inventing stuff. It’s quite amazing to work with these different or handicapped people, or schizophrenics, also very good! People with problems, are sometimes the best because they really do what you say to do. I had an experience in Ukraine, working with homeless children. For a few years I developed some projects there and it was incredible how improvisation – because their life is so much about improvisation, finding food, you know, or stealing something to get by and then you give them an instrument and they adapt it, they solve the situation. We did concerts in Crimea, when it still was Ukraine, at a jazz festival, on the beach, for two thousand people. We just went on stage and did a one hour long improvised set. Homeless kids. It was incredible. *How big was the group?* In Crimea we were altogether ten. But we worked in a shelter in Odessa and it was changing every day, some kids came, some kids left, it was an ongoing process. I have to pee again. And there again, the big problem were the people who gave the money, they wanted control, the politicians, but the project worked really really well. I met some of the kids who were ten at that time, now they are twenty. Last year I was in Odessa and a twenty year old woman came up to me and said, ‘You saved my life. Because of this project you did I didn’t go towards drugs and prostitution and would have been dead by sixteen,’ like most of them. ‘I ended up being a poet,’ and she’s a poet. But then the problem was that the Swedish donors, the Swedish queen and her headhunters below, they were worried about our project because it was so unconventional. We were there basically living with these kids, becoming

their friends and sharing everything. We were not there as teachers saying what's right and wrong and we accepted them how they were. So they started trusting us, feeling, 'Okay, maybe they are not just here to wash some money and get rich from us, they actually want to exchange something.' The Swedish officials were so nervous, so they cut the money in the end. Or they made our work so difficult that in the end I actually said, 'Okay, I give you back the money.' It became so stressful to do it but the work itself was good. *For how long could you do it?* It started in 2005 and lasted until 2008, three years. These things, they usually last two or three years, where you really put all your energy into it. In the end it's only about the people that actually did it. It's very rich, because I think it's a spiritual journey as well because you learn what you can do and what you can't do. *How often did you go there?* I was the initiator of this project working with people in Ukraine. The idea was to develop something locally there. I was involved in some way in finding the money and being the head organizer of it but also I went there five times per year spending two weeks really working with the children. The idea was that it kept going every week, we had like five people in Odessa who worked weekly with these children. And we had a musical room, I mean, we bought all the instruments. It was music, art and film. We also made many films with them. So, there were these regular workers and we came five times per year and did two weeks every day. That's when we went to Crimea. And we really lived together. For good and worse. Because the idea of the project was to attract the kids from the street and give them an alternative to these more prison-like shelters where they are being put, yah, like in a prison. And to give them the feeling of, 'Yeah, I want to come here

and I want to share something.' And give them enough confidence that they themselves could say 'no' to prostitution which is the case for women or 'no' to drug dealing which is the case for the men, the teenagers, and then death. Eighty percent die at the age of fifteen, from AIDS, HIV, sharing needles, having sex. But through this project many or some of them survived and became musicians and poets, like the woman I met again, it's fantastic. Yah, people always surprise me, they say, 'When you did that thing, it changed my life.' 'What?' Mark Sanders said that to me, he said, 'I saw you with Sean Bergin and Katie Duck and it changed my life.' *And what you were doing with Katie Duck and Sean Bergin* – was kind of a dance theatre. One time Katie was furious with me because I took a stance where nothing would happen, it was like a void and she was trying her best to get out of it but she couldn't, you know. And Derek [Bailey] and Richard Teitelbaum and a bunch of musicians said, 'Wow! It was a great performance.' And I swear, we argued the whole night, with Katie. She was just frustrated, furious with me. **Ah, it's fantastic.** This is what Derek was so special at, he was interested in the failing of improvisation, much more like for instance Evan Parker, he's more career-orientated. Sometimes the things that Derek chose to be on these Company records was very strange. And to me he said, 'Fantastic, Tristan, fantastic.' And then I did something with a tap dancer and I played blues, just, I don't know, it happened and Derek was angry at me and said, 'What!? You can't do that.' Hehe. And the tap dancer was really happy : 'Ah yes! Finally we have someone who can play the blues.' *Did you work often with Derek Bailey?* We worked. His last Company was supposed to be in Barcelona and I think he asked too

much money, so it didn't happen. And then, the year later he died. So yah, I was in contact with him until the end. He had Min Tanaka, John Zorn, a bunch of names, so he wanted good money. They didn't give it to him. So when was the last time I played with him? I don't remember the last time. It was some Company in London. There were a couple of Company tours as well that I made. Anthony Braxton was in it, Leo Smith, Han [Bennink], Lol Coxhill, Steve Beresford, quite a strange group of people. And this one didn't want to play with that one, it was like – *But did they have to play in the end with each other?* Yeah, because Derek made the program, he made the grouping. Every now and again he would say, "Tristan, who you wanna play with?" It went like that. And Anthony had a gig in Sweden or something and he went to Derek and Derek said, 'Well, if you go to Sweden, you are out.' And Anthony comes back in the car and says, 'Derek Bailey is a hard man.' So he didn't go. *And was he a hard man, Derek Bailey?* He was. He was pretty hard. Strict. You know, he was always impossible. We had a tussle because he was paying me and he said, 'Are there any other expenses?' 'Yes, I took a taxi from the airport.' 'Oh, really? So what.' And we didn't talk to each other for five years because of this little thing, you know. He would get mad at details, little things. A bit like Cecil, if you say the wrong thing... you're out. *Did you try to talk to him?* No, I just left it. And then we met each other in Amsterdam : 'Oh, hi!' – No but, *he* asked *me*, 'Are there extra expenses?' And I said, 'Yes, I took–' 'Wawawawawa. This is not what I asked.' What did you ask? *And did you play with the others [who are on the CD on the stack], Hamid Drake or William Parker?* I played with William. I always wanted to play with Hamid but he's

so busy. But I had a great time actually playing with Andrew. *Cyrille?* Mhm. It was so nice. I heard a rumor today, talking to Mats, because we have been talking about Henry Grimes in the last days here, that he's back and I am reading the book on him [Music to Silence to Music – A Biography of Henry Grimes by Barbara Frenz; Northway Publications 2015]. Because Mats is playing with Joe McPhee a lot and Joe, he is convinced that it's not Henry, it's his twin brother. Leon Grimes. Well not the way he played bass. Fucking hell. So I wanted to ask you. I think it's Henry. Because Joe's idea is that Henry was left-handed, I mean he played the bass normally but he was left-handed. Leon was right-handed and *this* Henry Grimes is right-handed. And he knew both, because Leon was a saxophone player and then stopped playing music. Then Henry disappeared and Leon disappeared and then Henry comes back. So, Joe met Henry, the new Henry, and he said, 'You are not Henry, you are Leon.' And he got all nervous and Henry is actually dead since a long time. That's the new – *I heard that too*. Yah, I heard it too. It's an old thing. That's funny. I just found it, I don't care at all if it's right or not but I just find it quite funny. I think it was Henry, because he has this way of playing that's so elastic. I can't imagine you can learn it. And he was a violinist too and what he played on the violin was unbelievable, way out there. Hehe, it's quite funny. *Do you want to leave it there or do you want to add some fragile thoughts?* Am I a woman tonight or am I a giraffe?



On Being A Medium.

Bright gatekeeping in a dark era

A person living in the so-called West in so-called 2018 is much more affected by mediated information than by first-hand-, first-eye-, or first-body experiences. Sources of information often remain unknown. The intention of this essay is to distinguish the phenomenon of mass media from the idea of being a medium, exemplified by THEORAL, and describe, from different viewpoints, its main characteristic: the sincere conveyance of information. In the end, the appreciated reader will be released, hopefully better informed, to make his or her own conclusions.

I – Rashomon

This film by Akira Kurosawa from 1950 is an examination of the relations between truth –the facts– and individual standpoints towards this truth; it is about the subjective realities that interpret and adapt the facts for particular purposes. The task here is not to dig deeper into the web of accounts that are presented in the film in which the protagonists try to put themselves into the light they seem to deem appropriate for themselves (by interpreting the facts) in front of a judge. This essay is about a more modest element of the film, an auxiliary role, a woman who is assisting in court: the medium.

She is needed in order to convey the testimony of the samurai who is killed in the beginning of the film. She is the only one actually saying something about the incident without having her own interest in it. She just establishes a connection between the inaccessible realm of the dead and the world of the living. In Japanese, she is called Miko, which is “[a] general term for a woman possessing the magico-religious power to receive oracles from the kami [gods] in a state of spirit possession. Nowadays the term generally refers to a woman who assists shrine priests in ritual or clerical work.”¹

The Miko and her duties underwent continual transformations over the centuries but they did not alter the fact that her exceptional spiritual abilities place her outside, or on the fringes of the profane playgrounds of society. She does not take part in the games that

1 From the online Encyclopedia of Shinto: http://k-amc.kokugakuin.ac.jp/DM/detail.do?class_name=col_eos&data_id=23353; April 16, 2018

are played in front of the judge, she does not claim her account to be correct, she has nothing to win and nothing to lose in the trial.

– The medium and the media

This “medium-scene” in Rashomon is the point of departure for this essay. The nameless woman receives and transmits the words of the dead samurai which are transformed in and through her body into voice – like breath streaming through a shakuhachi. She serves as a vehicle, an amplifier, a translator [translations require the most accurate reading, I heard somebody say]. She does not judge or censor the words she reproduces. It is, on the one hand, a very humble role she plays, but also a very important one that requires certain skills and expertise². She is the embodiment of the time and space between reception and emission³ of information. She receives the samurai’s words from the realm of the dead and articulates them in the world of the living –in court– without manipulation for her

2 Marcel Mauss writes in his *Théorie générale de la Magie* that was published in *Sociologie et Anthropologie* (2010) that not everybody can be a magician and that there are characteristics that distinguish the magician from the common people. “N’est pas magicien qui veut: il y a des qualités dont la possession distingue le magicien du commun des hommes. Les unes sont acquises et les autres congénitales ; il y en a qu’on leur prête et d’autres qu’ils possèdent effectivement.” p. 19.

3 This consideration was stimulated by Xavier Charles’ reflections about being an artist in THEORAL NO. 2: “un artiste, à mes yeux, est à la fois un récepteur et un émetteur. Quelque chose comme cela: un très bon récepteur ou un très grand récepteur, mais aussi un émetteur.” p. 41

Xavier Charles says that the artist is at the same time a receiver as well as an emitter and this is the interesting thing. It should be added that the difference between the artist and the medium is that the artist condenses and transforms what he receives whereas the medium just conveys it.

own sake, in contrast to every other interrogated person. Usually, one does not know how much time and space lie between reception and emission of information – it is the dark territory where the processing takes place, where gates are opened and closed.

The non-manipulation of information in the time and space between reception and emission is a utopia that might only be achieved by beings with supernatural powers. Manipulation, intentional or not, negative, neutral or positive, occurs, has to occur, in this invisible space inside the medium, and concerns the contents as well as the form of the message.

Putting this in relation to our contemporary (mass) media, the “powerful one-way systems for communication from the few to the many,”⁴ a lot of things can be said about immoral editors and journalists or political data firms controlling the news (at least) on facebook or fascist middle-European governments starving their (quality) newspapers or even preparing them to be sold to business men.⁵ But for now, it should only be pointed to the fact that *the media*, informing us day by day, are being deceptive as they sell subjectivity (very often; intentionally or not) for objectivity. The main stream –and mass media are the main stream of information– has nothing per se to do with truth, but is subjectively presented

4 Morley, David (2005). *Mass Media*. In: Bennet, Tony; Grossberg, Laurence and Morris, Meaghan. *New Key Words. A Revised Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, p. 212

5 In this essay no appropriate differentiation is made between quality media, social media, radio and television or rainbow press, etc. The term mass media, or *the media*, designates an entity that, unlike the medium, depends strongly on the market and politics.

as objective and therefore as true. Put in another way: mass media use the hidden space between receiving (or inventing) information and the broadcasting of it for their own purpose and profit.

III – Gatekeeping

The gatekeeper, in the media and in mythology (as well as on the passages between strata in society), is operating in this dark territory mentioned above. His techniques and practices can be neither seen in every-day-life, nor can they be understood by those who are affected by the gatekeeper's decisions. He is guarding (watching and protecting) something that is not accessible, he neither lets anybody in nor anybody out.

Cerberus was a monstrous, many-headed dog (the number of heads varied from three to one hundred), with a dragon's tail and a back bristling with serpents' heads. He barred the way to the Underworld to the living and prevented the dead from escaping it.⁶

In the mass media, the gatekeepers (editors) decide what is going to be published, and what is not. These presumably pluricephal characters sort out and adapt information from the massive and endless stream of information that is produced by private individuals, journalists, news-agencies, algorithms, etc. The decisions about which information can pass in what way are made in the dark territory

⁶ Chevalier, Jean & Gheerbrant, Alain (1996). *Dictionary of Symbols*. London: Penguin Books. p. 175

between reception and emission and are guided by considerations that serve the advancement of the publisher.

The medium has no gatekeeper, it *is* the gatekeeper, but one that opens the gates and does not process and bias the information that springs from the well, it solely serves as a channel. The medium may be also called a *bright gatekeeper*. A bright gatekeeper is operating in the Visible, in contrast to the *dark gatekeeping* that, like Cerberus, operates in the Invisible serving the interests of a few – or, if one looks at the mythological definition below, the forces of evil.

Following mythology, the evil is invisible and very powerful. It cannot be destroyed but it can be suppressed –temporarily– by strength (Herakles, for example) and by the spiritual forces of art, embodied by Orpheus.

It should be observed that it was with no weapon other than his own strength that Herakles succeeded temporarily in taming him [Cerberus; the character of Herakles unfortunately won't play a role in this essay] and that it was by the spiritual effect of his music that Orpheus calmed him, again temporarily. These two instances strongly support the neo-Platonic interpretation of Cerberus as an in-dwelling daemon, the spirit of evil. This spirit can only be tamed above ground, that is to say by a sudden – and ascensional – change of environment and by the individuals spiritual strength. To conquer, one has to rely upon oneself.⁷

7 Chevalier, Jean & Gheerbrant, Alain (1996). *Dictionary of Symbols*. London: Penguin Books. p. 175

It is the artist who relies on herself and has the strength or the urgency and commitment to look at the Invisible, like Orpheus did:

Through the magic of his music he succeeded in persuading the gods of the Underworld to set free his wife Eurydice who had died from snake-bite when fleeing the advances of Aristaeus. But one condition was laid down – Orpheus was not to look at her until she had returned to the light of day. Half-way there, in a fit of anxiety, he looked back and Eurydice vanished forever. ... Jean Servier compares the ban laid upon Orpheus and Eurydice in the Underworld with certain taboos ... in the eastern Mediterranean. '[M]embers of a funeral procession are not allowed to look back. Invisible powers are there who could be insulted by an inadvertent word or annoyed at being seen by a sideways look or glance over the shoulder'. Orpheus is the man who broke the taboo and dared to gaze at the Invisible.⁸

The Invisible, the dark gatekeepers, are not looked at, they operate in what is hidden and they pass unseen. What mythology tells us is that in order to tame the evil powers, one has to journey to where they reside and gaze at them. Being seen and having their practices revealed annoys the dark gatekeepers, disturbs them, jeopardizes them. It is the uncynical⁹ artist with exceptional abilities who is

8 *ibid.* p. 725-6

9 The idea of the uncynical versus the cynical comes from the fact that individuals are forced to be cynical in every-day-life in order to stay a part of society and/or or “succeed” in it. The uncynical is the non-accumulating, the sincere, the fragile, the fearless, the ephemeral, the non-perfect, the poetic. The cynical fears its finitude, its dissolution and the loss of property. This thought is elaborated by the author somewhere else: Linernotes to Katharina Klement, *Drift*. Chmafu Nocords.

assigned to execute this task because only she can gain power over the dark forces, even though only temporarily.

Although they share an uncynical attitude, the medium should not be confused with the artist. In *Rashomon*, she is in contact with the Invisible, the realm of the dead, but not in order to interfere with it. The medium does not take sides, it conveys testimonies of individuals who are caught up in the *Sturms und Drangs* of human life.

IV – Shamanism

The medium in *Rashomon* is a bright gatekeeper that opens the gates. She does not have to deceive in order to make a living or accumulate wealth. Unlike *the media*, she does not manipulate. She *can* be humble. She only transmits what she receives from the dead samurai who cannot speak for himself anymore. In the dark and obscure space between reception and articulation of the message, she does nothing, her ego is put aside. In this way she fulfills a particular role in her society. She personifies a phenomenon that very likely exists in all societies in their respective forms. Her social position is that of a shaman, a character who is in touch with the spirits. She might as well be called *bruja*, *Zauberer*, *witch*, *magicien*, and so forth.¹⁰ As already mentioned, being a medium is certainly

10 Marcel Mauss (2010): "... le magicien est défini par ses relations avec les animaux, de même, il est défini par ses relations avec les esprits, et en dernière analyse, par les qualités de son âme."- p. 32. Translation, P. S.: The magician is defined by his relations with the animals, as well as by his relations with the spirits, and, lastly, by the qualities of his soul.

part of the practices and duties of the shaman. Therefore, the medium, if she (the embodied it) is not a shaman herself, fulfills to a certain extent the same services as the shaman does in the social structure wherein she dwells.

According to the Routledge Encyclopedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology,

the 'shaman' (man or woman) occupies a central position in ritual and religious practices. He or she is the mediator between the human world and the world of spirits, between the living and the dead, and between animals and human society. Endowed with clairvoyance and assisted by helper spirits, a shaman fulfills many social and religious roles including those of soothsayer, therapist and interpreter of dreams. ... At major transitions in the life cycle and in the cycle of seasonal activity, as at times of crisis, disorder, war, famine or illness, the shaman give services to the group (freely), and to individuals (with some expectation of return).¹¹

And,

The shaman, a mystical, priestly, and political figure, ... can be described not only as a specialist in the human soul but also as a generalist whose sacred and social functions can cover an extraordinarily wide range of activities.¹²

11 d'Anglure, Bernard Saladin (2002). *Shamanism*. In: Barnard, Alan and Spencer, Jonathan (2002). *Encyclopedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology*. London and New York: Routledge. p. 505

12 Fiona Bowie cites Joan Halifax in: Bowie, Fiona (2006). *The Anthropology of Religion. An Introduction*. Malden and Oxford: Blackwell Publishing. p. 177

These descriptions may also be accurate or partly accurate for some musicians and artists. And they also apply for the medium as a social institution. The shamanic side of the medium translates from other worlds into the comprehensible –whereby translation does not imply alteration with any other goal than comprehensibility– in order to provide a basis for decision-making, in times of peace and in times of terror. The shaman as a bright gatekeeper is trustworthy because her social position lies outside the hierarchies of society.¹³ In this way, too, the medium is shamanistic.

V – THEORAL

Theoral, as a medium between improvising artists and the receptors,¹⁴ is related to shamanism not so much in its social significance; the relation rather stems from the fact that it uses the shamanistic technique of being a medium, albeit, in analogy: the intensity of the trance is very different. The task of the theoralist is to create information through the conduction of conversations as well as to organize and/or create spaces where ideas can be formulated, invented and dreamt up. The speaker should be comforted and encouraged to speak about his or her philosophies, worldviews and visions. This is the ideal version of how the reception of information

13 Marcel Mauss (2010): “Nous appelons ainsi [magique] *tout rite qui ne fait pas partie d'un culte organisé*, rite privé, secret, mystérieux et tendant comme limite vers le rite prohibé.” p. 16 Translation, P. S.: We call magic every rite that is not part of an organized cult, private rite, secret, mysterious and tending towards the prohibited rite.

14 It should be noted here, that the author will not analyze the meta-information and paratexts that are transported by THEORAL. This task may be undertaken by someone with a certain distance to the project.

happens. In the dark space between reception and emission, the theoralist practices the philosophy of getting out of the way, comparable to Michael Zerang's approach to playing music.¹⁵ When a book is conceived, the theoralist is possessed by the thoughts of his interlocutors, he writes everything down as he was told. He has to obey as if he was taking part in a magical rite.¹⁶ The shaman in Rashomon serves as an archetype for THEORAL which sees its main task in conveying voices – even though the theoralist was not able yet to establish a connection with the realm of the dead.¹⁷ The objective is to amplify as much as possible –however humble the means– the voices of artists who ventured to and gazed at the Invisible as well as others that are not heard as much as the loud and hypocritical voices broadcasted by the mass media. THEORAL as a medium has no intention of making a financial profit. The social and cultural capital that was earned on the way is enough to continue the bright gatekeeping that widens the spectrum of overtly subjective, and therefore true, information.

VI – Interdisciplinarity

The theoral way of working does not only correspond to techniques of shamanism but also to another “archaic” practice, that of

15 “On the stage, the highest form is when you have people that are really just out of the way – get out of the way and let the music happen. Then it shows you where to go. You don't show IT.” THEORAL N° 7, p. 44

16 Alexandro Jodorowsky writes about the Mexican healer Pachita, that if one wanted her treatment to work, he or she had not so much to believe in her magic but rather to obey her instructions however far out they seemed: “Alors, plutôt que de parler de « foi », utilisons le mot « obéissance ».” Jodorowsky, Alexandro (2001). *Le théâtre de la guérison*. Paris: Éditions Albin Michel. p. 173.

17 This may change with time; when reading the first edition of THEORAL, some people still can hear the voice of Marco Eneidi, who disappeared in 2016.

improvising music. The conversations that are the basis of the reception of information are taking their course like a concert, never like a rehearsal; they start *au hasard* or with a certain question (in its third to eleventh version). The most important thing is listening. Questions and statements arise out of the context that is created by all speakers. They are improvised in the sense that they are expressed spontaneously based on knowledge, experience, work and the vision of one's own art (or life or politics or whatever).¹⁸

The fields of shamanism and improvised music are not only corresponding in certain ways with methods of THEORAL, they also correspond with each other concerning certain practices as well as their social significance. How close they can get in the end depends on the self-conception of the ones involved. A deeper analysis of this connection will not be targeted here, but can be started with Tim Hodgkinson's article *Shamanism and Improvisation*,¹⁹ in which he speaks primarily about the performing side of the connection. For the purpose of getting closer to the similarities between a medium and a musician, listening to Hamid Drake is very illuminating:

“[T]he musicians are involved in the active inactive process of the awakening of other beings. They're active because they have the conscious awareness of it but they're inactive because

18 This characterization might seem very naive, but if one listens to conversations or speeches broadcast by the media –of course, never all of them– one gets the impression that what is said was prewritten somewhere else or –when the speakers really use, or try to use, their own words– that they just don't have a vision of what they are talking about, neither knowledge nor experience sometimes.

19 https://www.academia.edu/3356249/Shamanism_and_Improvisation; May 2018

they know that they themselves aren't necessarily the doer. They're being done, it's been done through them, they're open enough, they allow that energy to flow through them, they don't try and control the energy, it flows through them. And then the energy does whatever it has to do. But the energy is flowing through the people who are listening too, because it's one energy, it's the same energy."²⁰

The energy that runs through the medium engages the thoughts of the speakers as well as what those thoughts can do to the reader: stimulation and inspiration. As was said before, THEORAL does not control what it publishes, the theoralist gets out of the way and the information is let through. Even if it is not true what is published –in the sense that it never happened or was not said or done that way or another– the medium preserves his sincerity. It is true to the initial reception of the information and it conveys what the speaker wants to say. The medium in Rashomon is apparently transmitting a lie from the realm of the dead because the samurai is struggling to save his honor, which is much more important to him than truthfulness to what actually happened. This is another, much more powerful, truth.

Thus, in the so-called West in so-called 2018 where so many “agents”²¹ try to be the doer and achieve something or climb a ladder or knock

20 THEORAL NO. 12, p. 65

21 “An agent is a person who is the subject of action. Agency, then suggests intention or consciousness of action, sometimes with the implication of possible choices between different actions. The concept of agency has been employed by anthropologists and social theorists, especially those influenced by Max Weber, in contrast to structure, which implies constraint on action.” Barnard, Alan and Spencer, Jonathan (2002). *Encyclopedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology. Glossary*. p. 595. The contrast that is made here between structure and agency is problematic. Structure and agency are rather complementary than exclusive.

others off the ladder, or just try to escape the precariat, at least the medium does not take part in this scheme because the medium knows it is not the doer. Its busy (mass-) brothers and sisters and cousins and half-cousins, however, are blinded by competition and with their miserable behavior they leave brown stains on the white dress of the shaman. In other words, the medium has its place outside the hierarchies and does not strive and manipulate. It keeps its integrity and acts with the lucidity of a stranger (dignity of an outsider).

VII – Anthropology

The fundamental difference between the discipline of social and cultural anthropology and the medium is that the average anthropologist, like any other social scientist, is usually caught up in the ups and downs of corporate society or fierce academic competition. What they have in common theoretically is the idea of conveying the received or gathered information as truthfully as possible. The anthropological task is first of all description, and not interpretation or measurement.²²

In an article on human rights and multi-culturalism, the anthropologist Jane K. Cowan expresses something very fundamental of the discipline.

²² Of course, the theoralists are taking part in society and have to make a living, but this does not affect THEORAL. The difference is that THEORAL as a medium does not tend towards so-called success in this society; it tends towards being a medium. The anthropologist, like any other social scientist, may rather tend to adapt his or her projects in order to succeed in academia. But this is mere musing.

Anthropologists, even more than other social scientists, are concerned with ‘WHAT IS.’ Our foremost task is descriptive: We address the empirical, although this cannot be grasped except through the terms of a prior social theory. There is, thus, necessarily a dynamic back-and-forth movement between theory and data, requiring incessant critical reflection on our conceptual tools. ... anthropologists investigate how rights and cultural claims *actually* operate in the real world, not how they *should* operate, Political philosophy, in contrast, is concerned primarily with “what ought to be.”²³

From its beginning, THEORAL was driven by this idea of presenting *what is*, what people have to say and not what their words *could* or *should* mean. It was never about a larger concept, that uses the voices of others, or *the other*, for its own preconceived narrative. It always was and will be a medium that conveys the voice of a certain person²⁴ at a certain time in a certain environment.

VIII – Voice

In his articles about the urban poor and slum-and-shack-dwellers in Mumbai, the anthropologist Arjun Appadurai refers, among other things, to the notion of voice as a means for self-empowerment.²⁵

23 Accentuation P.S., Cowan, Jane K. (2006). *Culture and Rights after Culture and Rights*. American Anthropologist. Vol. 108, No. 1. Arlington.

24 THEORAL finds its interlocutors mainly among artists who practice improvisation. This choice is, of course, biased and very important. See chapter IX – Improvisation.

25 Appadurai, Arjun (2013). *The Future As Cultural Fact*. London, New York: Verso. p. 115-214

Before digging deeper into that idea, a poem by W. H. Auden:

September 1, 1939
...
All I have is a voice
To undo the folded lie,
The romantic lie in the brain
Of the sensual man-in-the-street
And the lie of Authority
Whose buildings grope the sky:
There is no such thing as the State
And no one exists alone;
Hunger allows no choice
To the citizen or the police;
We must love one another or die.²⁶

The idea of having a voice of one's own and to re/claim and use it leads to larger political contexts. In his essays, Appadurai describes strategies and practices of the urban poor as well as the NGOs that grew out of these societies, of how they work for an improvement of the appalling situations in the slums. Appadurai describes several principles of self-empowerment, like the capacity to aspire and the idea of a politics of hope that depend to a certain extent on having a voice, because

... the very poor, in any society, tend to oscillate between “loyalty” and “exit” (whether the latter takes the form of violent protest or total apathy). Of course, the objective is to increase the capacity

26 <https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/september-1-1939>; April 11, 2018.

for the third posture of “voice,” the capacity to debate, contest, inquire, and participate critically.²⁷

It should not be much of a surprise that, like most other things in society, voice is distributed unequally. The machinery of mass media is *covering* the planet with information that is produced to keep and develop the status quo. The natural striving for monopoly of each mass media complex results in strategies to mute its rivals. The voices that are raised from below in order to alter the circumstances remain unheard or are actively suppressed. Trying to make his or her own opinions and views of the circumstances heard, is resistance and a strategy for self-empowerment as well as a means of change. Of course, the sun of change will never rise, but there will always be people who disagree and oppose the darkness. It is to them that THEORAL serves as a torch.

In Appadurai’s account of the designs of self-organization and self-empowerment in the slums of Mumbai, an analogy to THEORAL shows itself in the way that a basic principle for self-empowerment is the belief that oneself, as part of a community –as the ones affected– is suited to speak as a specialist for change. In other words, it’s the people, the poor themselves, and the local NGOs that grew out of these societies, that have legitimacy: the shack dweller knows how to fix his shack better than anybody else. Appadurai gives the example of Dharavi, one of the largest slums in Asia.

²⁷ Appadurai, Arjun (2013). *The Future As Cultural Fact*. London, New York: Verso. p. 189

Dharavi today has a vast array of housing forms, alleys and paths, spaces of leisure and worship, work and play, all in the absence of full municipal recognition, legal security, or good infrastructure for sanitation, water, or power. Yet, over almost a century, the urban poor have gradually constructed a complex network of dwellings that has been directly produced by their actions of building. Thus, the value which Heidegger and Levinas have argued for, in terms of the metaphysics of human life, of being at home in the world, and of resisting the “enframing” of all human life by exploitative technologies, is in such informal settlements enacted in dwelling-through-building and building-through-dwelling.²⁸

To bring this to an adventurously audacious comparison with the experimental music scene, where the artist usually is fed before and/or after the performance, it has to be pointed out that the scene is functioning in an analogous way, parallel to the institutions that distribute the money to more commercial enterprises: most artists are existing-through-playing (and playing as a consequence of existing. One can exchange playing with improvising).²⁹ The above-mentioned analogy between the attitude described by Appadurai and THEORAL is due to the fact that it was born in a milieu, the milieu of the experimental music scene, which it serves as a voice, or as an amplifier of voices, and that it uses its techniques:

28 *ibid.* p. 124-5

29 Although experimental and improvised music is a stepchild of the institutions that distribute the funds, from time to time musicians get the chance to reach (temporarily) into so called high and relatively well funded culture, which is not the case for the poor.

existing-through-publishing and publishing as a consequence of existing (in this environment).³⁰

The approach of THEORAL to being a medium was exquisitely expressed by Henry Threadgill a long time before the first issue saw the light of day:

Who else ... would be better suited to speak about this product [the music] than the instrument through which it appears? Surely, if such highly creative music can come from such minds, the same minds can give some insight about it and themselves in relationship ... not just by being its creators and performers.³¹

In conclusion, it can be said that THEORAL –a publication that grew out of a community of experimental artists– is the medium for the voice of artists who have the capacity to look at the Invisible and who consider improvisation a central tool for their artistic practice.³² It uses the notion of voice in the sense of Appadurai (and Hirschmann) as “the capacity to debate, contest, inquire, and participate critically.”³³ Through the reflections on the relations of the individual artists with society, arts and politics, THEORAL conveys

30 Two important books on artists in relation to their communities are Isoardi, Steven (2006). *The Dark Tree. Jazz and the Community Arts in Los Angeles*. Los Angeles: The University of California Press; and Lewis, George E. (2009). *A Power Stronger Than Itself. The AACM and American Experimental Music*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

31 Lewis, George E. (2009). *A Power Stronger Than Itself. The AACM and American Experimental Music*. Chicago: Chicago University Press. p. 191

32 Improvisation is a way of looking at the Invisible. See chapter IX – Improvisation.

33 see footnote 27

alternative ways to cope with the suffocating social circumstances most of us are living in, or how art can be a model for everyday life, very often in the poetic and subversive spirit of improvisation.

IX – Improvisation

Apart from being a technique in life that grows in intensity with the degree of precarity, improvisation is also a method, in the sense of Michel Foucault, not let oneself be governed so much or to *such an extent*.³⁴ It is a way of expressing oneself spontaneously and artistically (or vice versa), based on knowledge, experience, work and the vision of one's own poetry.

Improvisation isn't something that is not well done or well thought out or something that is simply thrown together with the means at hand – it is not bricolage in the Lévi-Straussian sense³⁵ – like everyday

34 This is Foucault's first definition of critique in his speech on May 27, 1978 before the Société Française de Philosophie, What is Critique? or Qu'est-ce que la critique?: "L'art de n'être pas tellement gouverné."

35 The following quote from *La Pensée Sauvage* (1962) illustrates Lévi-Strauss' view of the difference between ingénieur and bricoleur: "On pourrait être tenté de dire qu'il [l'ingénieur] interroge l'univers, tandis que le bricoleur s'adresse à une collection des résidus d'ouvrages humains, c'est-à-dire à un sous-ensemble de la culture."

Translation: "It might be said that the engineer questions the universe, while the 'bricoleur' addresses himself to a collection of oddments left over from human endeavours, that is, only a sub-set of the culture."

He calls bricolage a "science « première » plutôt que « primitive »" (a prior science rather than primitive) in contrast to the real science of the ingénieur.

An improvising musician cannot be a bricoleur in that sense, because she also questions the universe and does not content herself with the leftovers of culture. The young and radical Peter McTrum from Edinburgh, who is based in Berlin, told THEORAL in 2017: "I am fed up with improvising in the idiomatic ways – or should I say idiotic ways? There is nothing new, everything has been played, every fucking color, pitch and volume! So I go up north to Whitehall and listen to what the universe tells me."

language seems to suggest. Let us not be deceived. Improvisation is an art form and holds great subversive potential.

☐☐ In improvisation, one's OWN comes into play, or at least, one's own interpretation of something that was already thought or done before. This might also be true for any given composition. However, what makes the difference –and what makes it subversive– is that improvisation happens spontaneously. Improvisation affirms the individual identity inside a community as well as the potential and the voice of the individual. Imagine an orchestra in which one musician, or the whole string section, suddenly and intuitively, decides to improvise instead of following the score or the conductor's lead. Or the light man in a theater; or a bus driver; or a newscaster – and everybody else doing something which is not an expression of herself.³⁶

☐☐ While improvising, one tries to control as little as possible and follow as closely as possible the thoughts and impulses that come from inside the body. In other words, the artist tries to look at the Invisible. Improvisation thus stands in outright opposition to most practices of our societies, which are predominantly ruled by control, domination and surveillance impacting *on* the body.

36 This is not a question of happiness. Many people are happy not expressing and/or looking for their *innermost wishes* (term from the subtitles of *Stalker* by Andrei Tarkovsky) and very often it seems not to be necessary, or their innermost wish is to serve and/or just be part of a more or less functioning society.



Improvisation is a technique of self-empowerment because it can help to avoid external determination. It is a way of trying actively to keep a balance between our (innermost) wishes, desires and ambitions and the chains that surround us: the ideological, economic and possibly religious constraints we suffer from. In that sense, improvisation is a tactic –or a practice– to defy surveillance and control and to feel free for a moment.³⁷

X – Conclusion

The so-called West in so-called 2018 is ruled by dark forces. Gatekeepers are invisible, they reside in the shadows of society and are serving their own interests. They rule via the media, and by police or military forces (mainly outside their own territory). On the other side, although first-hand experiences are scarce, faith and confidence in the media are very low.

The individual cannot escape –except every now and then for moments of improvised freedom– but it can disagree and think or even say “no”. The idea of the medium as a bright gatekeeper may help to disagree. Its work of conveying information happens in the visible: the receptor can comprehend its methodology. Bright

³⁷ One can improvise *inside* society but won't change it. A widely known word of wisdom tells us that one can only change oneself and not society. Improvisation can help the change, like McTrum concisely asserts: “It's only through improvisation that I found out about the importance of listening. Listening is really the first thing. If you want to change anything, first thing you have to do is listen. What's there?”

gatekeeping means an opening of gates and sincere transmission of information without serving a purpose other than informing. Of course, there is no impeccable medium (except supernatural ones), but what is brightly mediated, is inclined to be as true/truthful as possible, in the sense of being unaltered and not processed.

(auf wunderbare Weise FLASCHENPOST)

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Philipp Schmickl

Vienna, August 9, 2018

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Tristan Honsinger and Joel Grip

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