Benoît Maubrey
Die Audio Gruppe
Performances with Electroacoustic Clothes
Audio Ballerinas
Towards the end of 1988 I had been experimenting with solar cells as a power source for the Uniforms (usually we use rechargeable 12-volt batteries) and came to the conclusion that they had to be mounted on a horizontal surface in order to catch as much of the sun's rays as possible. The artist Susken Rosenthal helped me build a transparent disc-like skirt out of plexiglass that could hang loosely on a belt from the waist. On this surface we placed the solar cells and electronics. A visiting dancer friend who saw the prototype explained that we had created a “tutu” -- the skirt-like piece of clothing that dancers wear in classical ballet pieces such as Swan Lake. This is how Audio Tutus came into existence. We also discovered that the hard but flexible tutus (made out of polycarbonat plastic) were ideal for mounting speakers, microphone jacks and amplifiers, not unlike a disc-jockey's mixing board. Under the guiding impulse of our new chief engineer, Manfred Thiem, we started experimenting with new equipment -- for example, a digital chip (256K) for sampling sounds, an electronic metronome, a photovoltaic resistor (to be used as a light sensor), and a miniature radio receiver. With their photovoltaic sensors the Audio Ballerinas can react to light, not unlike a Geiger counter responding to radioactive substances. The pitch of the sound could change according to the intensity of the light. This occurred when either their own shadows or the shadows from their surroundings (tree, clouds) interfered with the direct light as they danced. In effect, they could thus translate their body movements into sound.

With their receivers, the tutus rendered audible the radio waves traveling through the air (my favorite sound is actually the “white noise” between the radio stations). In the end, we had a plexiglass dress that could spontaneously pick up sounds, record them digitally, play them back, amplify them, repeat them (via an electronic repetitive "loop"), and alter their pitch. For example, the tutus could record five seconds of the sound of a bell tower ringing nearby and instantaneously play back the sound. The additional electronic features allowed the wearers to change the speed of the loop or the tenor of the pitch (like a rudimentary sampler) to make the bell sound like a heavy brass gong or, in the other direction, a jingling bell. A piece based on this idea, called Digital Memory, is at the core of an Audio Ballerina performance. In each place where they perform, the first task of the group was to find a particular local sound -- a sound indigenous to that site or country -- that could be borrowed for this piece. These new technical additions allowed us to do away with the Walkman players and tapes that we had been using previously. In fact, equipped with these “digital memories” (samplers) the Audio Ballerinas had metamorphisized into a sort of mobile ensemble that, instead of playing regular instruments, went around “stealing” (i.e. recording) sounds from around them, altering and re-arranging them into multi-acoustic compositions.
1991. INTERFERENZEN
Art from West Berlin Exhibition, St Petersburg.
Performance with local Bolschoi dancers sampling Lenin’s piano at the Lenin Museum (Marble Palace).
Performances with Electroacoustic Clothes: Audio Ballerinas

Audio Ballerinas
Digital Memory
Performances using live sampled sounds.

Sampling an Aborigine playing his didgeridoo.

Sampling Franzl Kinateder
a famous Munich yodeler.

The Audio Ballerinas sampling the saxophonist Mats Gustafsson.
Kulturo Bro 2000, Ystad, Sweden
In 1991 I was invited to take part in the INTERFERNENZEN Exhibition in Riga, Latvia. The Iron Curtain was in the process of falling but the political situation was still uncertain. I was accompanied by the technicien Manfred Thiem. We brought with us a plexiglass skirt from West Berlin and, using parts from a locally produced RIGA 310 radio and cassette player and working overnight in our hotel room, produced a Latvian Audio Tutu. With the help of a local performers we created a performance that started at the main train station and ended at our hotel. As a sound source for the Tutu we played live radio from Radio Free Riga: in the course of the ambulatory performance we drew a large crowd of people.
In 1992 the Audio Ballerinas were invited by Berlin's Museums-pädagogisches Dienst to perform at the Friedrichsfelde Castle. For this occasion we borrowed Baroque costumes from a local theatre and slipped them on over the tutus. For one performance the performers were equipped with Walkmans with pre-recorded sound of breaking glass, for the second performance they sampled the Baroque instruments of a live quintet and ambulated through the park.
What began in 1989 as a site-specific project (i.e. solar-powered electro-acoustic tutus commissioned by the festival LES ARTS AU SOLEIL, l’Aeronef/Lille) soon blossomed into a full-fledged troupe. When I returned to Berlin with the electroacoustic tutus, I recruited a group of local dancers, trained them to operate the tutus, and organized a series of performances in the reunited Berlin. The Audio Ballerinas grew to include a core of 7 dancers, a choreographer, two engineers, and myself as director/manager/ and performer.

Since the conception of the Audio Ballerinas’ in 1990 the equipment and choreographies have been systematically upgraded and streamlined. Due to the efforts of the technical staff (Jago Whitehead, Thomas Berndt, Gerrit de Vries) we are now using the 4th generation of Audio Tutus with modular (interchangeable) electronic elements. The performances have been to an extent “standardized”: through the experience of international tours and the successive efforts of choreographers Hugo de Carvalho, Lotta Melin and Katja Rotzoll a repertoire of “audio ballets” have come into existence.

For example: the PEEPERS choreography in which light-to-frequency sensors enable the Ballerinas to produce sounds through the interaction of their movements and the surrounding light.
Choreographed Sounds and Orchestrated Movements: Performances with light

Sensors produce sounds through the interaction of the dancers’ movements and the surrounding light.
Light-to-frequency sensors enable them to produce sounds through the interaction of their movements and the surrounding light.
In the year 2000 while shopping in a local department store I discovered a small child’s electronic keyboard manufactured by the Yamaha company. Even with my own rudimentary electronic skills I was able to take it apart and discovered that the keyboard, once disencumbered of its plastic shell and keyboard, was a goldmine of electronic sounds, melodies, and rhythms that could be triggered by other ways than simply pressing the keys of a keyboard. For example by equipping the dancers with mercury tilt switches they could switch a sound on or off simply by moving their hands (or any other part of their bodies). From the spectators’ street-level point of view (remember the Ballerinas with their wearable technology are always close to their public) it seems like it is the dancer’s body that is generating the sound: a group of dancers simultaneously moving their bodies have the effect of an “orchestrated movement” – in effect it’s choreographed sounds that are occurring all around them.

During the Kulturbro festival (Ystad, 2000) I had the group first try out with these movement triggers in their hands, over the course of the years the YAMAHA choreography has developed into one of the central elements of the AUDIO BALLETs.
Audio Ballets
Choreographed sounds and orchestrated movements:
Electronic sounds triggered by movement
Like the Guitar Monkeys (see catalog AUDIO CLOTHES AND UNIFORMS), the Audio Ballerinas also use Piezo contact microphones in their performances. Instead of attaching them to second hand guitars, they fastened them onto other “instruments”, such as umbrellas or a simple metal rods, which function like giant phonograph needles being dragged on the ground and amplified via their electroacoustic tutus. Hence the original title of the piece: The Earth as a Record Player.
Over the years the Audio Gruppe -- all while fulfilling its various engagements-- has been consequently developing its repertoire. Members of the group --some of which have been involved in the productions for 10 years or longer -- have developed their own solos with a particular instrument and/or costume.

In 1994 Die Audio Gruppe started working with "indoor" theatre spaces: cooperating with the director Elisabeth Zündel at Berlin’s Theater zum Westlichen Stadthirschen in Audio Drama. In this piece the actors performed within the audience (as opposed on stage and separated from them) in order to showcase the fact that they were "wearing" their sounds. During this time Elizabeth Brodin perfected her Seguirya piece (a dancer moving in a circle of light using a light sensor). Each evening Benoit Maubrey produced his own Feedback Fred character wearing an oversize loudspeaker box on his back and "feeding back" his own voice through it via a microphone mask: this personality can likened to a cross-cloning of Hamlet and an electronic-loaded Hunchback of Notre Dame. Two years later Audio Ballerinas and Electronic Guys was presented at The Kitchen in New York City: this piece was a collage of different audio characters set in an around the audience.

More audio-figures began to emerge from the collaborative street performances, the Tokyo performances added the Audio Geishas’ sampler-and-stroboscope lighting duos to the palette (see catalog AUDIO GEISHAS and ASIAN THEMES). But it was only in 1998 after the creation of the Audio Kimonos that the Gruppe was able to present an evening at Berlin’s legendary SO36 club. This piece included 4 Audio Ballerinas, 4 Audio Geishas, and 4 different solos (Electronic Guy) with a total of 12 participants. Six months later a similar event was presented at the Malta festival in Poznan in the courtyard of the local classical ballet school where the core personnel of the Audio Gruppe was supplemented with 3 of the school’s teenage pupils. In February of 1999 DAG was invited to present 3 solo works at the International Dance and Technology Conference (IDAT) in Phoenix, Arizona where the group was able to hold its own against bombastic multimedia "intelligent" stage productions. In this context it is important to note that some of the Gruppe’s costumes have muted into highly individualistic and self-contained sound units. These are individual "phonic" bodies -- not devices of highly developed technology-- that produce their own personal sounds and movements in intimate and close-to-the-spectator performances.

Ingrid Martinez. Solo
Audio Box, double light-to-frequency controller.
Cambio Canstante, Venuela, Spain 2003

Audio Ballerinas and Elisabeth Brodin
Peeper Performance

Audio Ballerinas
Solos, theatres and stages
Feedback Fred
Sound and Movement Conference
Microphone face mask and loudspeaker box.

In 2002 I was approached by Berndt Schindowski, chief choreographer at Musiktheater im Revier (Gelsenkirchen Opera House) who commissioned me to create 12 electroacoustic costumes for \textit{HIGH FIDELITY}, an opera on Elvis Presley. His wish was to adapt the Digital Memory choreography to a dance piece using the late singer’s songs (in effect: sample, play back, and distort the original songs through the dancers’ movements).

During a recent festival in Seoul I had discovered portable samplers that were used by Korean merchants to sell their ware at local produce markets -- recording and amplifying their own voices with the daily prices of fruit and vegetables. They functioned on the 12-volt batteries of their small trucks and were very dependable. These were integrated into the new costumes. The engineers Thomas Berndt, Gerrit de Vries and Jago Whitehead re-wire the devices in the same way as the Ballerinas’ Tutus: pitching mechanism to alter the sound and photoresistors to enable the dancers to alter the sound via light.
Detail of a solar-powered Audio Tutu: the LINE performance. 1990, Festival les Arts au Soleil/ Aeronef, Lille, France. Electroacoustic Tutu, solar cells, piezo microphone and metal rod.
In 1991 the Audio Ballerinas were invited to perform at the European Land Art Biennale in an open coal mining area near Cottbus. In this situation we demonstrated alternative energy forms in a performance context.

Photo below right: solar-powered electroacoustic Tutu amplifying a piezo microphone scraping along the abandoned train tracks.

Photo below left: 7 East German volunteer Ballerinas with solar-powered electroacoustic Tutus and “apple” radio receivers. The radios are sold as electronic kits and can be powered by electrodes inserted into apples. Instead of apples we used solar cells: in the course of this dark-to-dawn performance (5 to 8 AM) the Audio Tutus gradually reacted to the increasing daylight: playing at first white noise and later -- when the sun has fully risen -- amplifying a cacophony of local radio stations.
AUDIO GUILLOTINE. Festival Perspectives. 1989 Saarbruecken.
Detail from the AUDIO OPERA (with R. Buron) for the 200th commemoration of the French Revolution.
Guillotine, Electronic Guy, Audio Ballerina (with breaking glass sound), loudspeaker boxes with politicians’ voices.

the ELECTRONIC GUY.
Performance solo 1989 to present
Electroacoustic tuxedo, sampler, guitar and radio receiver.
My decision in the early 1980s to stop working with pigments and canvas came from a desire to interact directly with public spaces. By building loudspeakers into clothes I could intervene in any given environment in a temporary and cost-efficient way: loudspeakers and circuitboards are cheap and can be salvaged from surplus electronics and discarded toys. My artistic tools are electroacoustic clothes: costumes and suits that are equipped with loudspeakers and amplifying systems that allow the individual wearers to react acoustically to their environment. Basically each person wears one part of a composition: the position of the individual „audio actors“ and their movement within a space produces the final composition. The orchestration of the mobile sounds creates the final musical score (see AUDIO CLOTHES 1983-85). Series of different „audio clothes“ are developed in regards to a particular theme or site as „Audio Uniforms“ (see AUDIO STEELWORKERS, AUDIO VACUUM CLEANERS, GUITAR MONKEYS, AUDIO CYCLISTS) or in relation to a local culture (see AUDIO GEISHAS/ Japan, AUDIO JEANS/ USA, AUDIO HANBOK/Korea.

In 1989 the AUDIO BALLERINAS started using a variety of electronic instruments in order to personally interact with their environment. Among others, light sensors that enabled them to produce sounds through the interaction of their movements and the surrounding light and movement sensors with which they could individually trigger electronic sounds. These were then collectively choreographed into „audio ballets“. A variety of other electronic instruments (samplers, contact microphones, and radio receivers) allowed them also to work with the sounds, surfaces, topographies and electromagnetic waves of the space around them.

The AUDIO PEACOCKS (since 2003) use plexiglass costumes shaped into a peacock’s fan-like plumage. They are equipped with 16 loudspeakers and 150 watts power. The „audio-plumage“ is highly directional and functions like an electroacoustic radar dish. An Audio Peacock can either amplify its own electronic instruments and /or voice using a microphone and sampler, or receive sounds from outside sources via transmitter/receiver and disseminate them in a space by orienting his high-tech „plumage“.

VIDEO PEACOCK is the most recent performance project from Benoit Maubrey. An Audio Peacock costume out of white plexiglass is used as a mobile projection screen. This is an audio-visual performance where the electro-acoustic quality of an Audio Peacock is visually enhanced via a video projector. Video-taped images can be projected simultaneously to the sounds on the costume. In a more spectacular sense the Peacock’s own filmed image can be projected live onto itself in a form of „video-feedback“. The self-produced voice and sounds can also be used to manipulate the images projected onto the costume.

THEATER AND STAGES: Over the years the Audio Gruppe has been consequently developing its repertoire. Some of its members have developed solos with a particular instrument: certain costumes have mutated into highly individualistic and self-contained sound units. These are individual „phonic“ bodies that produce their own personal sounds and movements in intimate and close-to-the-spectator performances. Since 1997 after the conception of the AUDIO GEISHAS (sampler-and-stroboscope lighting duos) we have presented staged pieces consisting of collages of up to 12 different audio characters set in and around the audience.

Only recently I have developed the PHONOMANIACS and SOUND JUNCTION concepts which are site-specific sound events for 20-30 electro-acoustic costumes: multidisciplinary performances taking place both inside and outside the different rooms of a large vacant building. These are „modular“ event -- that is, the exact composition and elements of this „sound opera“ can only be determined according to the building and site. In general it includes the following audio costumes: AUDIO BALLERINAS (dance), VIDEO PEACOCKS (video+internet), AUDIO GEISHAS (light), AUDIO CYCLISTS (sport), BONG BOYS/AUDIO VACUUM CLEANERS (street theatre), GUITAR MONKEYS (noise/music), and FEEDBACK FRED (performance).
1952 born in Washington, D.C.
1975 Bachelor of Arts Diploma from Georgetown University
lives since 1979 in Berlin / since 1990 in Bruck o.T. Baitz (near Brandenburg)

Performances and Festivals (a selection):
  -- AUDIO IGLOO, sound sculpture in the Singuhr-Hörgalerie, Parochial Church/Berlin.
  -- Thailand New Media Art Festival/Bangkok.
  -- "Soundscape & Shadow" Musikfestival, Denkmalschmiede Höfgen.
  -- Lowlands Festival, Holland.
  -- Schweizer Kultursommer.
  -- LEM Festival (Gracia Territoria Sonor), Barcelona.
  -- BUGA Park Potsdam, AUDIO PEACOCKS, gARTen event.
2002 AUDIO BALLERINAS, Location One, NYC.
  -- HIGH FIDELITY production, Musiktheatre im Revier, Gelsenkirchen (co-production with Berndt Schindowski).
  -- AUDIO PEACOCKS, Artist in Residence at Lieux Publics, Marseille.
  -- Hamburg Bahnhof, Museum fuer Gegenwartskunst, Berlin.
  -- Postdamer Festspiele.
2001 KunstMuseum / Wolfsburg.
  -- Berliner Festspiele.
  -- New Haven Festival for Arts and Ideas.
  -- Seoul Performing Arts Festival.
  -- Medi@terra, Athens.
  -- Musee des Arts et Industrie, Saint-Etienne.
  -- FETA Festival, Gdansk.
2000 Monaco Dance Danse Forum, Montecarlo.
  -- Tollwood Festival, Munich.
  -- Postdamer Musikfestspiele, Potsdam.
1999 IDAT (International Dance and Technology Conference), Phoenix, Arizona.
  -- Tanzzug, Kulturhus Aarhus, Denmark.
  -- AUDIO IGLOO, commissioned electro-acoustic sculpture at Hull Time Based Arts, UK.
  -- Les Nuits Savoureuses de Belfort, France.
1998 MALTA Festival, Poznan, Poland.
  -- Stockton Riverside Festival, UK.
  -- International Symposium for Electronic Arts, Chicago.
  -- MALTA Festival, Poznan, Poland.
  -- Stockton Riverside Festival, UK.
  -- Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.
1997 Sound Art Festival, Krakow.
  -- 1997 AUDIO GEISHAS, ICC-NTT Tokyo City Opera House.
  -- ISEA, Chicago.
  -- Ostranenie Festival, Stiftung Bauhaus / Dessau.
1996 XIX International Triennale Exhibition of Milan.
  -- SONAMBIENTE Sound Art Festival, Academy of Arts, Berlin.
  -- International Street Theatre Festival, Holzminden (1st Prize for "Mobility and Flexibility").
  -- "Audio Ballerinas and Electronic Guys" Tour USA, The KITCHEN (NYC), Scena Theatre (Washington, D.C.), Buskers Fare (NYC).
  -- KRYPTONAL Festival, Berlin.
  -- 38eme Ragissants, Grenoble.
1995 Krakow (THE KRAKOVIAN MEETINGS).
  -- Sound Art Festival, Hannover.

  -- International Symposium for Electronic Art, Helsinki.
  -- "Audio Drama", co-production with Theatre zum Westlichen Staatstheaters, Berlin.
  -- German Television Video Prize, SWF, Baden-Baden.
1993 MEDIALE, Hamburg.
  -- Art and Computers, University of Moscow.
  -- "Augentie", Schloß Pluschow, Mecklenburgische Künstlerhaus.
  -- BECK Forum, Munich.
  -- ULTIMA Festival, Oslo.
1992 Cleveland Performance Festival, Ohio.
  -- The Night of Electricity, Rotterdam.
  -- TISEA, Sydney.
1991 European Land Art Biennale, Cottbus, Germany.
1990 Festival les Arts au Soleil., Aeronel Lille, France.
  -- Sound Symposium, St. John's, Newfoundland.
  -- "Ubane Aborignale", Berlin.
1989 Festival PERSPECTIVES, Saarbrücken.
1988 Festival des Arts Electroniques, Rennes, France.
  -- Festival of European Street Theatre, Aurillac, France.
1987 STEIRISCHE HERBST, Graz, Austria.
  -- Galerie Giannozzo, Berlin.
1986 ARS ELECTRONICA, Linz, Austria.
  -- Berlin Atonal Festival.
1985 Bundesskonzertschau 85, Berlin.
  -- "Berlin in the Gasteig Art Center", Munich.
  -- Alternativa IV, Lisbon.


Awards:
European Award for Street Theatre Award, Holzminden 1995
Franklin Furnace Fund for Performance , NYC 2006

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