

# SHAPE 2020

ISBN 978-80-906994-4-1  
[www.shapeplatform.eu](http://www.shapeplatform.eu)



SOUND  
HETEROGENEOUS ART  
AND PERFORMANCE  
IN EUROPE

**SHAPE is a platform for innovative music and audiovisual art from Europe. It consists of 16 festivals and art centres. SHAPE aims to support, promote and exchange works by innovative and aspiring musicians and interdisciplinary artists with an interest in sound. The platform attempts to present a variety of idiosyncratic music and sonic art from all over Europe, and to provide audiences and professionals with insightful lectures, talks and workshops by experts in various fields related to sound and performance.**

**Each year, SHAPE's 16 member associations collectively choose 48 artists and musicians to participate in a mix of live performances, residencies, workshops and talks at festivals and special events.**

**All SHAPE members are also part of ICAS (International Cities of Advanced Sound) – a global network of independent non-profit organisations dedicated to advancing sound cultures, music and related arts.**

**Initiated in 2015, SHAPE is a seven-year initiative co-funded by the Creative Europe programme of the European Union.**

## SHAPE MEMBER ORGANISATIONS

CTM Festival  
Berlin, Germany  
ctm-festival.de

dgtl fmnsn  
Europe  
depart.one

Festival Maintenant  
Rennes, France  
maintenant-festival.fr

Insomnia Festival  
Tromsø, Norway  
insomniainfestival.no

Les Siestes Électroniques  
Toulouse | Paris, France  
les-siestes-  
-electroniques.com

MeetFactory  
Prague, Czech Republic  
meetfactory.cz

SONICA Festival  
[MoTA – Museum  
of Transitory Art]  
Ljubljana, Slovenia  
motamuseum.com

ORF – musikprotokoll im  
steirischen herbst  
Graz, Austria  
musikprotokoll.orf.at

RIAM  
Marseille, France  
riam.info

Rokolectiv  
Bucharest, Romania  
rokolectiv.ro

Schiev  
Brussels, Belgium  
schiev.com

Skaņu Mežs Festival  
Riga, Latvia  
skanumezs.lv

Terraforma  
Milan, Italy  
terraformafestival.com

TodaysArt  
The Hague, Netherlands  
todaysart.org

UH Fest  
Budapest, Hungary  
uh.hu

Unsound  
Kraków, Poland  
unsound.pl

# SHAPE SUPPORTED ARTISTS 2020

The artist roster has been created disregarding divisions of genre, age or popularity. Rather, creative novelty and successful experimentation have served as core values, with additional emphasis on the inclusion of upcoming and underexposed artists and scenes that are often overlooked by promoters or media outlets specialising in music and art.

Afrodeutsche <sup>[UK | DE | GH]</sup>  
 Aloïs Yang <sup>[FR | TW]</sup>  
 Animistic Beliefs <sup>[NL]</sup>  
 Aquarian <sup>[CA | DE]</sup>  
 Ben Bertrand <sup>[BE]</sup>  
 Borokov Borokov <sup>[BE]</sup>  
 c/a <sup>[UK]</sup>  
 Cam Deas <sup>[UK]</sup>  
 Céline Gillain <sup>[BE]</sup>  
 Clara de Asís <sup>[ES | FR]</sup>  
 Hugo Esquinca <sup>[MX | DE]</sup>  
 Dorota <sup>[HU]</sup>  
 Elina Waage Mikalsen <sup>[NO]</sup>  
 Elvin Brandhi <sup>[UK]</sup>  
 Farida Amadou with Steve Noble <sup>[BE | UK]</sup>  
 Fausto Mercier <sup>[HU]</sup>  
 FOQL <sup>[PL]</sup>  
 Frédéric Gies <sup>[SE]</sup>  
 Jay Glass Dubs <sup>[GR]</sup>  
 KūR <sup>[RS]</sup>  
 Lawrence Lek <sup>[UK]</sup>  
 Lyra Valenza <sup>[DK]</sup>  
 LYZZA <sup>[NL]</sup>  
 MA'IWA  
 [MA'AM + AIWA] <sup>[HU]</sup>  
 Marta De Pascalis <sup>[IT | DE]</sup>  
 Moesha 13 <sup>[FR]</sup>  
 object blue <sup>[JP | CN | UK]</sup>  
 Oli XL <sup>[SE]</sup>  
 Oliver Torr <sup>[CZ]</sup>  
 Peter Kutin <sup>[AT]</sup>  
 Piezo <sup>[IT]</sup>  
 Poly Chain <sup>[UA]</sup>  
 Rian Treanor <sup>[UK]</sup>  
 Richard Eigner <sup>[AT]</sup>  
 Rojin Sharafi <sup>[IR | AT]</sup>  
 Rrill Bell aka  
 The Preterite <sup>[US | DE]</sup>  
 Sacrifice Seul <sup>[FR]</sup>

Schacke <sup>[DK]</sup>  
 Simina Oprescu <sup>[RO]</sup>  
 Širom <sup>[SI]</sup>  
 Stellar OM Source <sup>[FR | BE]</sup>  
 Svetlana Maraš <sup>[RS]</sup>  
 Tadleeh <sup>[IT]</sup>  
 upsammy <sup>[NL]</sup>  
 Virgen María <sup>[ES]</sup>  
 VTSS <sup>[PL | DE]</sup>  
 xin <sup>[US | DE]</sup>  
 Yann Gourdon <sup>[FR]</sup>

# SHAPE PLATFORM 2020

The following interviews have been selected from SHAPE's archive of weekly artist talks, which is ongoing via [www.shape-platform.eu](http://www.shape-platform.eu). The eight conversations below approximately represent the diversity of ideas, values and interests that fuel both the platform's artists and its member organisations.

Some of these interviews were recorded during the global pandemic of COVID-19 and reflect the sudden and considerable challenges these musicians had to face as well as the ideas they generated in response.



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## Afrodeutsche

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



**AFRODEUTSCHE**

# “I’M ALWAYS TELLING A STORY”

## Is music your main thing nowadays?

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

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

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

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

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

We know we exist but we haven’t felt connected with each other. It’s not just me, it’s not just my music, it’s the reality of it. We exist.

## These histories are often forgotten.

I had to be quite brave when I took on the name Afrodeutsche because I knew that it wasn’t mine. I couldn’t own this. It was meant to be for African Germans. I had to think about it and be brave about it because it’s an untold history. I wanted to talk about it with my music.

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

All of the 90s Detroit sonics very much spoke a language which I feel I understood. It’s very cosmic and I feel very connected to the music. It’s overwhelming how connected we are.

## I remember back in the 90s, growing up in the middle of nowhere in Eastern Europe, I was given a mixtape with Underground Resistance stuff on it and how special it was.

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

## It’s easier to share all of this nowadays.

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

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

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

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

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

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

I loved that band so much. It was four of us on organs and synths, and Graham Massey on drums. We wrote original music, but we also used to do covers of Rachmaninoff. I used to make our costumes. We used to wear capes. I remember the first time we tried on the capes that I made from a material similar to thin fake leather. I made hoods that came over our eyes, so you couldn't see them. You could just see our mouths. They were incredibly hot. At one point I turned round and Graham was drumming

and he'd managed to take off most of his costume and leave the cape on. So he was trouserless while drumming because he was so hot. The music was geared towards a baroque kind of style in an electronic way.

**You also work in film and theatre.**

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

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

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

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

There's a lot going on for everyone. It has always been this way, but it's also about whether or not people feel they can share how they feel or what they're going



through. People are starting to understand that it's OK to share the dark side of their lives rather than it being a wonderful Instagram 'great day', 'what I've seen, where I've been' kind of vibe. People appreciate and respond to honesty and vulnerability because it's relatable.

**Music can also be a way to decompress.**

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

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

I have been in therapy for quite a number of years now. I had an awful experience with a therapist in 2016. It meant that I couldn't trust anyone, but I really appreciated what therapy had done for me in the past. I ended up going back into therapy and I had a really heavy experience with this new therapist who has helped me through these past two years. I was sat with her and she said to me "You need to write down certain events in your life to help you process these things". I'm not very good with text and I realised that I could do it through music. And then I thought of requiems. I listen to a lot of classical music and requiems for me are just amazing pieces of work. I saw them as ways in which composers could make sense of their existence. Life and death and everything in-between. I thought maybe I should write my own requiem: me processing my life and my existence. The work is 14 pieces long of which I'm going to do the first seven at CTM. It's extremely personal and I don't think it's going to be like anyone's expecting. I'm going back to my classical way of thinking, with arrangement and instrumentation. I'm absolutely terrified of how it's going to be received because it's so personal. It's a requiem. Over the years when I've spoken to people after my live shows I feel that when I've gone through something and I'm able to translate it into music other people have felt the same way. It's almost a kind of therapy.

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

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

## Dorota

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



DOROTA

# EASTERN EUROPEAN PANEL BLOCK ROMANTICISM, SCAM LETTERS, MONKS

*We caught up with Áron and David on a peaceful March evening in the centre of Budapest, days before the city was brought to a standstill by the coronavirus pandemic.*

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

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

**Áron Porteleki:** It was also funny that once, when we got in touch with her, she sent us a text message saying “Oh, it's really amazing you're called Dorota, because I'm just writing a book with three main characters called

David, Dániel and Áron.” We were flabbergasted, but she was joking, of course.

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

**DS:** We had a lot of creative ideas around the music from the beginning, but we hadn't had much experience in putting them into an understandable form for the audience. This issue really came out regarding our second creation, the overly ambitious *Frik*, which involved three albums, two movies and an interactive website. It was a fully fledged fiction, about 10 hours of content – imagine the weirdness of the third season of *Twin Peaks*. One needs complete devotion to absorb it and to understand the contextual elements. For example, there's one part which is a text composed around the recurring rhythms of the songs, explained with medieval numerical theories, Dogon (Malian tribe) mythology, and details from Nigerian scam letters.

Now, with the new album, we have kept everything rather simple in terms of form. We made four music videos for the vocal songs on the album.

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

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

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

**AP:** Dávid Pap, an important figure in the Budapest improvised scene, was launching his label and we decided to do a fundraiser gig for him and also play our first concert there after two years of silence. It was a very

strong and warm feeling to be together and to be with an audience again, so we decided to give it another go. We applied to the National Cultural Fund to make a new album and we said: if we get it we'll make it, if not, then not. We ended up getting the money and making the album.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**You work a lot with mythical, fictional spaces.**

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

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

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

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

### Do you also reflect your local cultures?

**AP:** It's not that direct. On *Frik*, we spoke about romanticism in every way, also reflecting on our 'national' culture. I was brought up in a family that was involved in folk music, I have also played it on the viola since I was a child. As a band, we never really played any Hungarian folk songs or wanted to reflect them. I had a problem with romanticising cultures or cultural tones by using parts of them without any context. It was not Dorota's focus. Though David wrote a really interesting pseudo folk song 'Szavadivi' (the last track of *Frik*), where he created his own authenticity.

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

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

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

### What are your current plans?

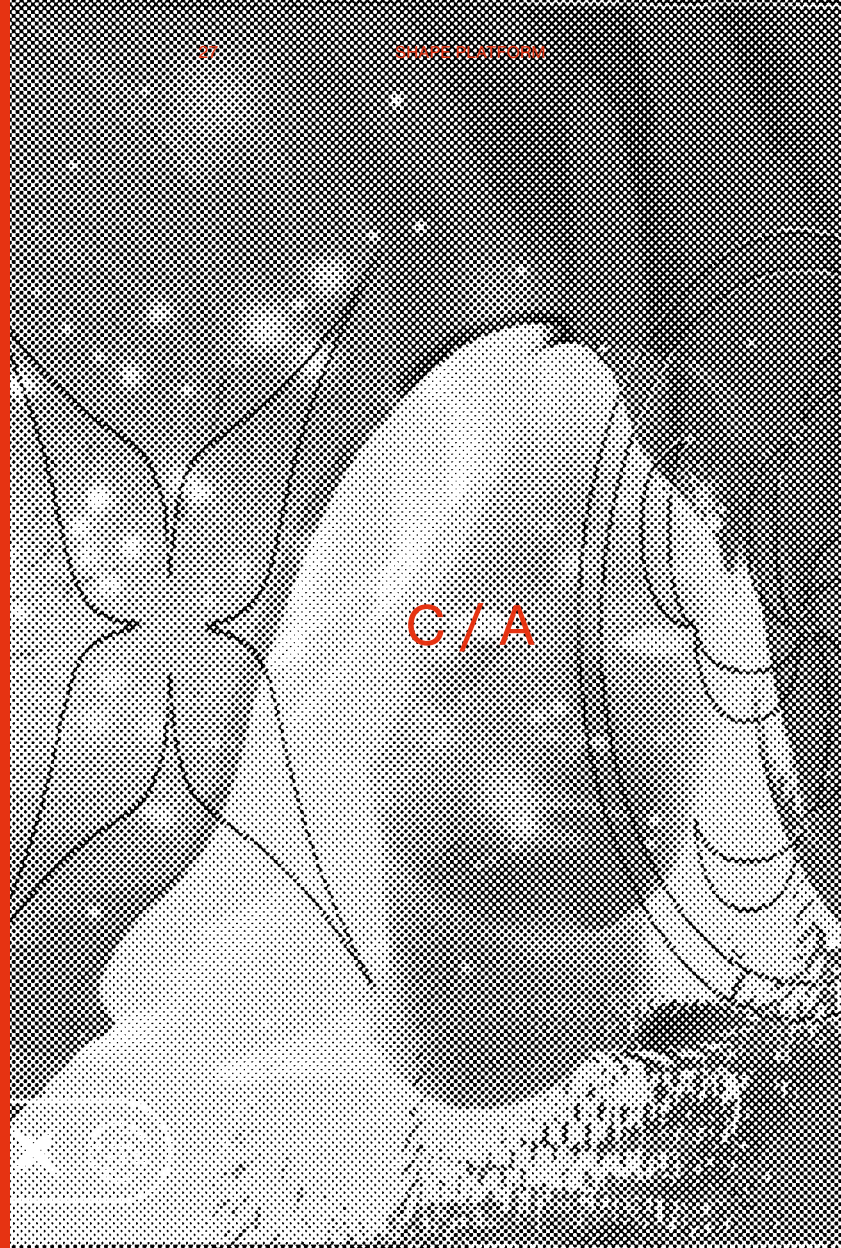
**DS:** After eight years of playing music for seated, deep-listening audiences, now we are discovering how to create a concert where we want to get people into a full body trance. So, in a lot of ways, we are a beginner band now.

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



**c / a**

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



# “WE WOKE UP TO A DYSTOPIAN DRAMA”

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

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

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

The show was to start with this long text about this nightmarish vision of empty central London streets and hints of a storyline where you would get scenes of an individual who, for some reason, could not go outside (today we have a word for it; lockdown) and is immersed in this new layer of the web, browsing a web

page created by this entity with notes about the importance + role of non-verbal communication (e.g. proxemics, haptics and chronemics) methods in our lives.

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

Now, such symbolic imagery, sitting somewhere between arcane and modern technology, feels somewhat off-putting because with the pandemic, it seemed as if we had almost shifted to an alternate reality, and we mean in a literal sense – we woke up to a dystopian drama. Even to us, it felt like some decision we had made had altered our destiny. We two are very powerful conjurers and, even if rarely, we know that sometimes our strong emotions or long-lasting, meditated thoughts do have a direct effect on people's perceived lives and realities, but even we are not conjurers powerful enough to create such a distinct diversion. Strangely, when we talk about this issue with people, almost all of them can identify a single point in their recent past which might have caused such a shift, almost like a falling point from an edge or a very strong choice. People should question the origin of this more.

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

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

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

Honestly, if it hadn't already become the norm in 2020, we probably would still be working on it in our spare time.

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

If not replaced, perhaps they could develop to the degree that they will be advanced enough to be simpler and fun alternatives. There is no need to compare or think of them as replacements. People do all sorts of things online together, why not gather and enjoy music too. It's just that going outside brings so much stuff together, high volume music, fresh air, lights, face-to-face meetings and social interactions and everything is a part of the experience.

Not sure how to put this or if it might sound awkward, but there is this small part of us wondering if there should even be people trying to manipulate this in order to serve their purpose in the greater scheme of crafting how society functions. Again, it is great that these things are happening and perfectly understandable that people are cherishing technology that keeps us connected and informed, but it feels as if there should be more warnings out there.

Thinking about it, if beforehand we had not been into such ideas, we possibly would not have contributed to any such virtual events, we just wanted to see how it feels. If you feel an unbridgeable distance from the rest anyhow and have no desire to be entertained, why bother? We were just watching a talk by Slavoj Žižek and he said something like "even this stream [the one he is doing the interview on] is hosted and handled by a company called Zoom and it can be turned off at any given time by someone". Even we did a few shows hosted on Zoom and it actually felt intrinsically bad somehow. Especially given the nature of a 'rave', this feels more relevant, doesn't it?

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

The duo's first self-released LP, **THE ONLY WAY WE KNOW TO HAVE FUN** is to be released as **ENGLAND'S COUNCIL OF LEGISLATION AND GOVERNING BODY OF HYPER REAL SIMULATIONS AND CONSTRUCTS** in October 2020.



## Elvin Brandhi

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

## ELVIN BRANDHI



# SCREAMS, BRASS, SEAGULLS

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

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

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

I need the contrast to my work on Ableton, to embody music spontaneously, substituting the capacity to endlessly revise sounds and tweak structure with an experience of direct mediation. This is why we can use whatever, even just voice. Our main technic is psycho-energetic. The idea of a family band transgresses the immunological distinctions between public, private, realist, absurdist, art, and logic, structure and experiment. Yeah You's work method and use of space challenges the distinction between practical and experimental, the absurd convenience of making music while driving for example. The idolisation of object and artists put creativity on a pedestal to prevent it from contam-

inating the orthodox standards of public activity. Yeah You might be what counter-culture looks like when it infects the domestic.

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

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

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

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

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

The Villa, the temple. The variation of what can emerge under one roof is immense. It is always so inspiring to live there and work there. Amazing music coming out of every bedroom door. The studio is a metamorphic sonic laboratory. There is a really unique atmosphere of total commitment without competitiveness, I get critical feedback but never feel judged. Bangers is the common cause. My time there is a huge part of my hope in music infrastructures not

becoming crushed by an accelerated copy paste hype chuck cultural industry. I keep needing to return, it's one of my homes.

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

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

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

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

The complete alienation from routine gives us a chance to critically reflect. This return to basics, and the unprecedented rupture from the adrenaline-paced, jet-set work of constant self-representation in creative industries will open a lot questions. Despite it being an involuntarily unifying experience, it's hard to account for others... everything depends on where you were and who you were with when the world froze. People are

mortified, relieved, invariably confronted. But people are breathing and thinking, which maybe those of us on tour, even if we experienced a rich collage of collision and insight, didn't have room for. In the reassembling of momentum, artists might be more aware of how the pace of their movement affects their work.

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

## Céline Gillain

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



**CÉLINE GILLAIN**

# “I CAN’T BE CREATIVE IF I DON’T HAVE TIME TO GET LOST A LITTLE”

## Where are you and how are you doing these days?

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

## Are you affected by the current situation in terms of your work & art?

This crisis is reconfiguring many aspects of my life, the way I interact with people, of course, and how I feel responsible for them, how I organise, how I tend to put pressure on myself, and most importantly, it has given me space to think. This crisis has reminded me that I can’t be creative if I don’t have time to get lost a little, to kind of drift; imagination is linked to randomness, to something that is beyond my control. It’s like I’m reed-

ucating myself how to think. And I know I’m not the only one experiencing this right now. Everyone I know is. Which is why I think we have to radically reject the idea of going back to normal.

There’s no way we can go back to business as usual. It’s not just a sanitary crisis, it’s an imagination crisis. Our sense of purpose is resetting. And, as a consequence, I sense that self-expression has become irrelevant. Don’t get me wrong: art, in its broadest form, is more relevant than ever but it has nothing to do with self-fulfillment. It has to be larger than that. The social value of music is huge, and that’s what I’m willing to explore even more from now on. But of course, I’ve only been able to question my existence because I haven’t got sick or haven’t lost any close ones. Every morning at around 7am I can hear my next-door neighbour leaving for work (she’s a social worker) and while I go back to sleep, I realise that my self-isolating, even if it’s complicated, is a luxury.

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

The concept of freedom is kind of elastic. My desire for emancipation is evolving, adapting. I have quite recently become acquainted with the music industry and its rules. Once you accept playing according to those rules you become an entertainer, which is weird when you think about it. And it’s not necessarily a bad thing either, but the risk is that you might experience a profound loss of meaning. In order to be profitable as an artist, the industry expects you to behave in certain ways, like, for example, you should be productive (it’s how you’ll grow), you should be grateful and should never complain (you’re actually paid to do what you love) and you should be fully committed (you don’t want to be seen as an amateur).

When you make electronic music, you’re called a producer. If you make experimental music, you’re

called a composer. If your music makes people want to dance, then it'll be considered a product more than a piece of art. Body vs mind, art vs industry: those dichotomies are very powerful in the electronic music field when they just don't make sense at all anymore. A lot of people agree with that today, but the infrastructures are still very separated (if you play in a club or in an art centre, it will be a very different experience). I want to test the limits of those rules and explore their porosity. What this crisis reminds us is that being creative takes time, that there's actually a difference between being productive and being creative. No one knows where this is heading but I think it's simply a great opportunity to rethink the way we've been doing things.

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

Yes. I want to invent my own way to be free and my own way of being a woman. For me, those two things are intertwined. One of the things that has kept me from feeling free is a sort of self-programming I've inherited from my mother (and her mother before her) that you should behave the way you're expected to because if you don't you'll be marginalised and that's the worst thing that could happen to you. Women are still mainly expected to be nurturing and sexy, and that's limiting the way we see ourselves. I want to allow myself to be aggressive, ugly, seductive, crazy, hilarious, inconsistent, wrong, smart. Once you've managed to clear the way a little, at first you're perplexed, confused. The situation's changed drastically these past few years but growing up there were very few role models out there, and it felt like you could either conform or jump into the deep void. So, the 'Bad Woman' is simply a person who doesn't do what is expected of her. She's never where you expect her to be. That's the role model I've invented for myself.

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

When someone takes a picture of you while you're performing, that picture when shared carries a piece of you that you can no longer control. The tricky thing about that is that it becomes a self-sufficient thing, a thing people can own. But nowadays it's the case for everybody. Everyone is exposed, everyone's image is a commodity whether we like it or not. Our image, like any content we share online or generate, is data. In a sense, we all became performers when we became producers of data. So, the moment we become active on the internet or own a smart phone is the moment we accept being used and exploited, the moment we lose control.

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

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

Growing up in the 80s in a small village in Belgium, I discovered pop music through TV, radio, and local

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

During my teenage years in the 90s, pop was adventurous and hybrid. Björk's 'Venus as a Boy', Massive Attack's 'Karmacoma', and Tricky's 'Overcome' will forever be models and represent a certain idea of perfection to me.

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

**Do you think art has the potential to change society these days? (are art and especially art scene/s transgressive in 2020?)**

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

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

**What are you looking forward to most after the end of the quarantine?**

Hugs.

## Rojin Sharafi

**Rojin Sharafi is a sound artist and composer of acoustic, electro-acoustic, and electronic music. Her work crosses the borders of various types of music and enthusiastically makes use of genres such as noise, folk, ambient, metal, and contemporary music. She was awarded the 2018 Austrian Female Composer's prize at the Wien Modern festival. Rojin Sharafi is pursuing her master's degree in sound engineering and composition at the University of Music and Performing Arts in Vienna where she is delving deep into research of digital music performance.**



**ROJIN SHARAFI**



# ROJIN SHARAFI'S MUSICAL JOURNEY

## How have you been in the last two months during this strange time that we've been experiencing?

Part of me was gratified to have more free time, to be at ease with finishing work, to have short to-do lists, and fewer deadlines.

I was happy that I could go deep into my thoughts and resurrect old ideas, spend time with myself, enjoy music and start new collaborations. I had missed the feeling of spending quality time with myself.

The other part of me was disappointed that lots of gigs and projects got cancelled or postponed. I also missed my friends and family.

People are experiencing the pandemic differently depending on the countries they live in, their socio-economic class, race, etc. As we know, freelancers are one of the most vulnerable groups in society. That's why I think it's important to find sustainable and long-term approaches to support our music ecosystem and to prepare ourselves for situations like this one.

## You left Tehran for Vienna to study music at the age of 17. What led to this decision and what sort of milieu/community did you grow up in?

I was fascinated by the abstraction of music as a kid, which is why I decided to study music in Vienna. I was also interested in cinema, literature and theatre. I found it intriguing to make narrative music, which is still abstract yet has a detailed composition in its form and texture. I started to experiment and improvise with different musical instruments and to elaborate on their sounds, performance techniques etc. It was a period of awakening. I also started to compose and improvise experimental acoustic music. I used to listen to rock, metal, jazz and contemporary classical music regularly, whereas

electronic music entered my life later. When I was 17 and living in Vienna, I started to go to techno clubs and danced to techno music. I remember I was fascinated by details of the sound and by techno's delicate transitions. I started to search for a more experimental techno music, and I automatically entered the world of electronic music.

I'm very interested in work that engages different senses, interacts with the audience, changes strategies, and is very unpredictable. I like to build textures out of unusual layers. I like to combine different elements to build a sound that is very detailed and complex yet is easy to connect with and to process; you don't know where it's going to lead you.

## You are studying both composition and sound engineering at a music academy in Vienna. One is presumed to be a rather artistic, creative field, the other more technical. How do these two disciplines intertwine in your work?

I find the intertwining of these two disciplines very fascinating. For example, you can simultaneously create a concept for a multichannel sound system in a space and perform music controlled by a motion sensor.

I have learnt a lot from both studies. Sometimes I think I could develop two different sensitive ears: one which is focused on the quality of sounds, timbre, frequencies, intonation, and rhythm, and the other which is more focused on form, texture and layers of sound.

I think they both helped me to have a better understanding of space, acoustics and instruments. In sound engineering, you learn, for example, how to develop concepts for recording an orchestra, how to analyse different interpretations of a piece, or how to set up live sound for a band. I can use this knowledge for my own music to work on very fine details of sound.

Additionally, for sound engineering, you need to know a wide variety of music from different genres and eras to be able to record and mix them. I can see those influences on my music.

It helped me to fearlessly experiment with electronics, gear, and analogue and digital devices. I built my own speaker and amplifier as I started to study sound engineering. I enjoy both the technical and the programming side of music, as well as the creative and the performance aspects of it.

**How important is interdisciplinarity in your work – a rapport with other artistic fields like cinema, performance, art?**

Many of my works are based on approaches from other artistic fields. For example, I try to elaborate on the form of a film and see how it is possible to compose a shorter piece using a similar form, or I try to use montage techniques in making music. Similarly, I ask myself how I can use the concept of breaking the fourth wall in a music piece! I find these bridges between different disciplines intriguing. At the same time, I'm a very visual person, and images stay long in my memory. At some point, I would like to hear those images, so I start to imagine myself in specific locations and try to reach what I like to hear there!

I'm very interested in collaborating with other artists. I find the dialogues that arise during the process of making a specific piece very inspiring. I've learnt a lot from entering the worlds of other artists or letting them enter my world.

I try to have the same approach to my live performances. They are about experiencing a concept together. I work as much on the concept as I do on the composition of the music; they develop side by side.

I like to reverse and focus the spotlight from the artist to the audience. Each audience has their own perception of what's happening on stage, and I like to leave the doors open for different interpretations and observations. In my opinion, a big part of reality (if I'm allowed to use this word) is not happening on stage, but in the way in which the work is perceived by different individuals. In this context, I see myself as part of the audience, too. Additionally, I'm very interested in the idea of a 'show.' I really like to create a specific

space and to invent a unique path of time with my music.

**Your sound is abstract, but you also use traditional samples (though processed and contextualised). Apparently, you used to collect ancient and folk music from different regions, especially from Iran. Could you talk about your relationship with Iranian music as such?**

Cultures are like stones; they contain time, variety and change. They are complex. What I find especially fascinating are cultures that are underrepresented in the mainstream musical milieu, and rituals and traditions that are old, raw, and unspoken. I think in each country both traditional and folk music exist together. In my opinion, folk music is much more interesting because it's very contemporary and intuitive.

I am amazed by how different the music scales and systems are in each region in Iran. Sometimes these microtonal scales and complex rhythms and melodies are very surprising. I try to write them down and use them in an appropriate context.

**Your last album, *Urns Waiting To Be Fed*, appeared on Zabte Sote, a label curated by Ata Ebtekar (Sote) that focuses on the contemporary Iranian experimental electronic scene. How do you view this scene (from a distance) and was there perhaps a momentum that led to the growth of this scene?**

I think the scene is growing every day, and it's very important to have platforms that present and reflect the movements and innovations of the scene. Besides that, due to the sanctions against Iran and government laws, it is very difficult to establish a label.

Zabte Sote was an absolute necessity, and I'm very glad that Ata Sote Ebtekar started this label. Equally, SET Experimental Art Events is an amazing organisation, which I admire for their curation.

I find the Iranian electronic music community creative, capable, and diverse. It feels like a family to me.

**Urns Waiting To Be Fed. What does the title of your record mean?**

I was inspired by long-form literature – the Shahnameh – and the formalistic cinema of Tati, Carax and Dumont. Folklore elements and the micro-tonality of traditional instruments mingle with synthesisers and electronic, defamiliarised sounds; electronic elements that sound acoustic and acoustic elements that sound electronic. The origin of sounds varies, but the sounds form their own village and history together.

Are the urns going to be fed with water, bones and ashes? Where are the ashes? The ashes of myths and humans and the water of the stream. Is there a symbolic image of filling the urn from the river? While 'A Barrel of Monkeys'\* is 'Floating on the Stream'\*? What an image! We wave our hands saying 'Sayonara'\* to them. They laugh and turn into 'Darwinian Demons'\*. [\* tracks from the album - Ed.]

**What projects are you working on right now?**

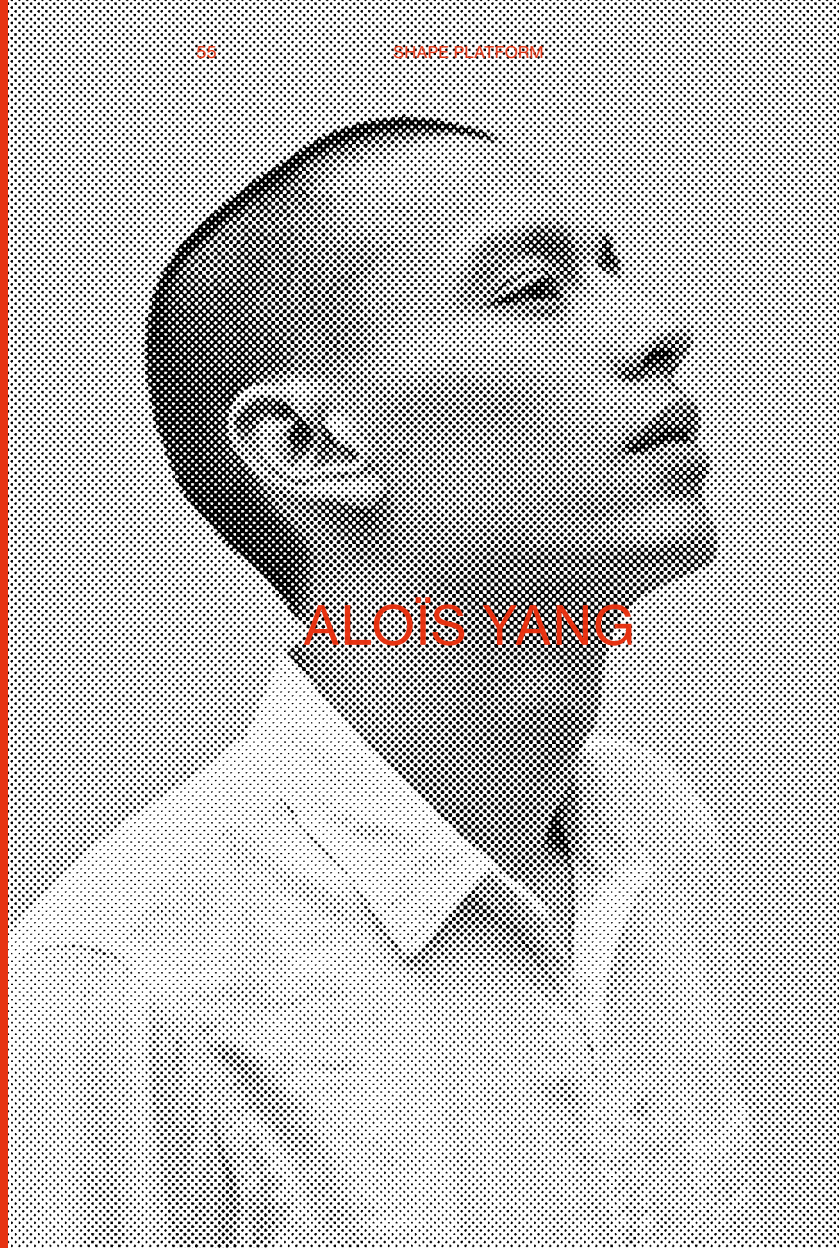
I'm working on a new music video, two sound design projects, and two albums that are almost finished. One of them is electronic music with poems written and narrated by me, and the other is a concept album, which is more rhythmic and harmonic compared to my debut. I can't wait to release them! I'm also working on a multi-channel music piece that is planned to be performed at Dom In Berg in Graz at the musikprotokoll festival.



ROJIN SHARAFI

## Alois Yang

**Alois Yang, born in France, raised in Taiwan, now based between Berlin and Prague, is a media artist, performer and experimental musician who produces work that explores relations and interactions between people, sound, and the external world. His work is influenced by both science and the imperfect human understanding of nature, and investigates the perception of time and space in both the 'outer' physical world and 'inner' metaphysical levels of awareness – as a manifestation of how we contextualise overlapping realities between body and mind, objective explanation and subjective projection, analogue and digital, the certain and the unknown.**



**ALOIS YANG**

# “I WANT TO CREATE A SONIC ENVIRONMENT WHICH IS LIKE WALKING INSIDE MY BRAIN”

**You're quite international, having lived in several countries. Do you feel inspired by the environment in which you live?**

When I'm in Prague, I spend most of the time in my home studio. I enjoy the size of the city and the calmness here. The performance and art scenes are very open and friendly, in most cases, allowing me to present new performances, and experiment with new ideas about space, technological set-ups, and interaction with the audience. I travel a lot, and also co-organise a small artist residency named 'Outsideininsideoutsideoutoutsidein' at Torhaus Gallery next to the Saxon Switzerland national park. We do a two-week laboratory of knowledge & practice-sharing, and experiment with diverse art forms that bring our awareness back to nature. At the end, we do a public event over one day and one night called 'Art Trip', which takes place both in the forest and the gallery as the performance or exhibition space. I think any kind of environment could inspire me, but most important is how I respond to it and how I create meaning and magic.

**Nature seems to play a big role in your work.**

It all began three years ago; I was into water. Observing how water moves in a cycle through different states and environments brings us insight into systematic interactions with surrounding conditions, and also provides measurement of present time and space. As the most common substance on Earth, it reminds us of our interconnection with nature.

Inspired by this phenomenon, I created an interactive installation 'Micro Loop Macro Cycle', playing with how I can create an artificial environmental, cyclical system as an instrument of reflection and embodiment of one's presence in the dynamic state of present time space. Sound, as the medium that generates comprehensive environmental sonic information, is initiated by a drop of water melting from a piece of ice, and then amplified. It interacts with the space through an 'organic spatial feedback loop' created using bespoke software and a multi-channel sound system.

**You mention the duality of objective existence and subjective experience in your work.**

I want to point out the human-centric perspective of looking at non-human sentient beings, the position of a superior consciousness perceiving the physical-natural world from another point of view, the ability to connect with nature in the unconscious, when mind and body are not separated, as a spontaneous experience of becoming one within.

**Are these pieces more about sound and its perception or is there a wider commentary on ecology?**

I'm interested in the topic but I don't want to choose a specific subject to manifest or solve the problem, because I think that is not the purpose of my art. I'm trying to raise awareness about how we consciously or unconsciously connect and disconnect from nature. For example, if I enter an installation that is about nature, I'm aware I'm part of the audience and I'm at a gallery and there's this intellectual understanding of what's going on, and what I need. I believe sound plays an important role in entering the 'experiential stage' of who and what I am. Thanks to its ability to have an immediate impact on our body and even our subconscious, we have the freedom to decontextualise the moment in order to open more space for contemplation and reconnection with the nature inside of us.

### **Nature is something uncontrollable – do you take into consideration chance and unpredictability?**

I often use bio and natural inputs to achieve generative and organic outcomes. I could spend a lot of time and logical energy in Max/MSP to programme a system that has its own life. My artistic approach involves using data-sonic-spatial-bio feedback loops, as 'sonic happenings' – a co-occurrence with the surrounding physical material, the character of the space, the property of the technology, and also the state of the listener. In my work, I see all this as one big living organism.

### **How did you get to this point? What is your background?**

From the age of 17-25, when I was living in Taiwan, I was into DJing and producing electronic music. After completing my bachelor's degree in product design, I moved to the UK to take a master's degree in design interactions at the Royal College of Art in London. It is there that I found an integrated approach to combining my skills and interest in sound with critical design thinking. With design as the instrument and sound as the language, I see the potential to interact with a subject or idea that is far beyond what happens in daily reality.

### **Sound is more flexible in terms of what you can do with it?**

It's the technology that enabled the flexibility to connect sound with my subject and environment. When I have an idea to investigate, I start by building my own instrument with software, sensors, microphone, and speakers. In this development, all the technical decisions reflect and refine my conceptual direction, in other words, create an experimental environment which permits sound to emerge from the logical process, in order to have its own voice.

### **What are you currently working on?**

I am always looking for new spaces and realms within which to experiment with the idea of representing the particular energy flow of the moment through audio feedback loops.

In the performance 'Sonic Animism: the Emergence of 30-feedback-system', I was using a pair of electromagnetic sensors worn on my hands, which brought the electric energy into sound from the inside of machines processing the 'environmental cycle system', for example, my laptop, mixer or speaker. These sounds are then amplified into the space and developed into an audio feedback loop captured by another pair of wearable microphones, in relation to my body movement and position in the space. This sound is then fed back into my computer as data that determine the 'form' of the soundscape, hence, complete the cycle to where it begins.

Recently, using similar approaches, I have been looking at the energy inside the brain. I want to create a sonic environment which is like walking inside my brain, using an EEG headset– a wireless brainwave sensor. I am focused on prototyping a model of a sonic energy field in space, based on the listener's neural oscillations. It is an attempt to diminish the separation between inner and outer space, as the body becomes one with the environment, and the environment becomes one with the body.

### **What about the mind?**

I believe the mind is capable of doing a lot of things, and I still have a lot to learn from it. I'm interested in the nature of the mind, which I think is fundamentally an experiential knowledge – science, technology, spiritual practice, experiments with consciousness, philosophy or art can all bring us closer to an explanation, however, in the end, we are left on our own to face the ultimate truth.

## FOQL

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



FOQL

## “IN POLAND, ART IS ALWAYS AT THE VERY BOTTOM OF THE PECKING ORDER”

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

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

I guess you cannot even compare what the state offers to artists in Germany and in Poland. In Poland, art is always at the very bottom of the pecking order. Especially independent art. It's not considered to be anything important or anything that builds and keeps bonds between people alive. Art is only useful when it's state propaganda or a tool for historical politics and it's always been like that. Every government acts for its own good.

I managed to receive social benefit from the Ministry of Culture, I'm also on a three-month scholarship funded by the state – so again, I'm not gonna complain. I think

that it happened only because I was super patient. I was waiting for this social benefit for almost three months and I had to make 15 phone calls and write 10 emails to get it. Many people are not so cheeky as I am and I'm sure they just give up even before they try.

For me, this situation is very interesting to observe because it perfectly unmasks how essential it is to be financially privileged in the so-called 'art world' in order to be successful. People don't realise how extremely hard it is to not give up your dreams when you come from a poor, working-class background as I did.

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

I think I can say that the pandemic relocated me back to my hometown, because I really did not plan this. I moved to Łódź in March, at first only to help my mother and then, after three months, my partner and I decided that it made more sense to move here for good. Now I feel it's a very good decision. I left Łódź almost 10 years ago when it was in huge economic crisis. I had no job and no prospects, so I just packed my stuff and landed at a squat in the centre of Warsaw. I didn't plan it. I was very angry, and I hated my hometown because it made me struggle a lot. I spent almost a decade in Warsaw, and it was an extremely good time for me, it helped me realise that I wanted to, could and would be an artist. I met hundreds of amazing people from all parts of the country and I learned from them that we could really build this world together. I don't want to sound like some kind of childish dreamer, but I really believe that what you can change is your local environment, your local scene etc. That's what I've learned.



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

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

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

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

I'm happy that I'm back.

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

Yeah, I was a very active member of the Oramics collective for two years and I think we accomplished

a lot of amazing things. Personally, I believe that the curating of *Total Solidarity VA* is a really big achievement and it also somehow created a microtrend for charity compilations in Poland. But at some point, the feminist profile of the collective became too narrow for me – I wanted something more and got involved in building the local scene on many more levels than just a feminist one. That's why I decided to leave Oramics last year and dedicate all my time to the development of Radio Kapitał – the first community radio in Poland. I guess it worked. I consider Radio Kapitał to be a huge success and soon we will have our first birthday, which is something amazing for me. Not many people believed we would survive that long, but we did, and we have over 300 people involved in building the project. This is really mind-blowing. It's like one of my biggest dreams coming true. My second important project is co-curating the Pointless Geometry label. Today we are having three amazing premieres and I'm very proud of them. The label is also celebrating its fifth birthday so I'm not ashamed to say – check out our 39 amazing releases. If you don't know much about the Polish experimental scene it's a good place to start.

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

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

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

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

# SHAPE SOUND, HETEROGENEOUS ART AND PERFORMANCE IN EUROPE 2020

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**Printed by** Calamarus, s.r.o

Published by MeetFactory o.p.s., 2020

ISBN 978-80-906994-4-1

[www.shapeplatform.eu](http://www.shapeplatform.eu)

The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents which reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.



# SHAPE SOUND, HETEROGENEOUS ART AND PERFORMANCE IN EUROPE

SHAPE is a platform for innovative music and audiovisual art from Europe. It consists of 16 festivals and art centres. SHAPE aims to support, promote and exchange works by innovative and aspiring musicians and interdisciplinary artists with an interest in sound. The platform attempts to present a variety of idiosyncratic music and sonic art from all over Europe, and to provide audiences and professionals with insightful lectures, talks and workshops by experts in various fields related to sound and performance.

Each year, SHAPE's 16 member associations collectively choose 48 artists and musicians to participate in a mix of live performances, residencies, workshops and talks at festivals and special events.

All SHAPE members are also part of ICAS (International Cities of Advanced Sound) – a global network of independent non-profit organisations dedicated to advancing sound cultures, music and related arts.

Initiated in 2015, SHAPE is a seven-year initiative co-funded by the Creative Europe programme of the European Union.