

NICOLAS BERNIER ARTICLES AND INTERVIEWS

— MILDА BATAKYTÈ, SECRET THIRTEEN (LT), JANUARY 3, 2015

« well thought-of concepts and executed works, beautifully and with the greatest diligence »

— MIGUEL ISAZA, INFINITEGRAIN (CO), MAY 26, 2014

« is one of a kind, taking roots from different disciplines and combining/expanding diverse artistic routes »

— MATTHIEU DESSUREAULT, LIEN MULTIMEDIA (CA), 14 FÉVRIER, 2014

« Face à cette extrême précision entre la musique et les éclats lumineux, l'illusion de voir le son et d'entendre la lumière est quasi parfaite »

— WIBKE BANTELmann, COMPUTER MUSIC JOURNAL (USA), VOL. 29 ISSUE 3, 2005

« This composer had the power to raise and hold the intellectual interest of the listener. »

— DONATA MARLETTA, DIGICULT (IT), MAY 21, 2013

« one of the most interesting and sophisticated artists in the contemporary scenario »

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MILDA BATAKYTĖ, SECRET THIRTEEN (LT), JANUARY 3, 2015

« well thought-of concepts and executed works, beautifully and with the greatest diligence »

Until the arrival of modernity, art always charmed the audience with its inexpressible grace, its accomplishment and a comprehension of the techniques that great artists once applied. A swift change in the arts happened alongside with technological developments and revolutions: there were some great men, whose lofty artistic aspirations were effectual, and who would have enough power of word to change the perception of what art is. This certainly did not deny the importance of the classic techniques or tools nor this kind of art in general. The evolution of the human world just rendered ingenuity and a wider selection of tools, techniques, some of which are just as difficult to overcome as those of classic painting and sculpting.

Indeed, some of the modern day art simply makes you wow and indulges in an ardent passion to figure out 'how and why?' That was the case when Secret 13 was acquainted for the first time with Nicolas Bernier and his work. This is a serious and exquisite kind of contemporary art, and it is Nicolas, who endues it with life and deserves to be talked about.

It would not be so accurately descriptive to say that Nicolas is only a sound artist; his works include installations, video art, dance, theatre, and performance – he is an interdisciplinary art voyager, so to speak. This leaves no doubt that his intellectual capacity is indispensable. Nicolas' well thought-of concepts and executed works, beautifully and with the greatest diligence speak louder than words. The awards won and the number of shows, performances and lectures under the guidance of Nicolas also acclaim to this. Speaking of lectures, the artist was also appointed as a professor in the digital music

department at Université de Montréal. It seems that the younger generations of Canadian sound artists are in good hands!

The artist confesses that when he is engaged in one of his creations, he would always try to avoid hastening the process and would spend hours upon hours reading, contemplating on the work, accumulating all of the bits related to the main idea; and visualise the final picture before starting to really actualize it. For example, the latest project "Frequencies (Light Quanta)" is based on the studies of the quantum physics theories, "the metaphorical relationships between basic quantum physics principles applied to the audio-visual creative process"; or BOÎTE, which was the aftermath of his mind becoming replete with ideas about Italian futurist Luigi Russolo's "The Art of Noises". Neither Einstein nor Russolo, who inspired Nicolas, created their masterpieces overnight. This long period of time during which the ideas were thoroughly considered and mental exertion that was invested might be few of the reasons why their works are held in the highest esteem.

The way people perceive the sound would purely depend on every individual: it is impossible to avoid other interferences of the environment, or to avoid clinging to associations, recollections, dreams, fears and other humanly sensations. Yet, revealing sound that is invisible by linking it to light or by disclosing the structure of the instrument that creates sound, the artist can in a sense, decide what to emphasize and which direction to guide our ears, eyes, and therefore our mind.

Nicolas Bernier's works are like the dose of a good action movie. Just like Russolo's noise, it "has the power to bring us back to life." It is intriguing, interesting, intellectual and modern. Moreover, in every respect only for the artist's skills and competence it is worth to call his works Art in its primary and contemporary definitions (and we have so many of them!).

Nicolas does not lack words to convey his organic ideas and perceptions of the world; because of that and because of his candour and likeable personality, it is a pleasure to introduce you to the interview with Nicolas Bernier about "how and why?"

Milda Batakytė: What would be your description of music and what would be of a sound?

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Nicolas Bernier: I do not think we can define music: each individual will make his own definition according to his own culture. But for me music is simply movement, and everything is movement. We can look at the gesture of a dancer and perceive it as music. We can see the people crossing streets in the Time Square as a giant cloud of particles, like grains of sand would spread in granular synthesis software. So everything is music, nothing is music, **everything moves.**

MB: Would you say you create sound or music?

NB: It depends. But I would be tempted to answer that I am making sound creation... that borrows in part to the music principles. When working on an artistic project, I do not force myself to work in a precise discipline, this is why I have been quite comfortable to work in different fields like video, photography, animation, design and visual art even though I find it more modest to say I am a sound artist as this is the world I am initially from. But for me, with the terms music comes a burden: centuries of developing a system like the tonal system in occidental music. And I try to stay away, as much as possible, from any systematic approach in my search of developing a personal language. In the meantime, I love organisation of things, and organisation of sounds. So in that sense, there always is a musical, a compositional side in my work. Therefore, music is for me tied to pre-established codes while sound art would be a freer form.

MB: Your art making tools require a high level of knowledge, do you proceed a theoretical research beforehand? Or you are an empiricist that would learn about the things during the process? What is the order of actions when you are creating something?

NB: I am totally empiricist. And a reaaaaallly slow learner. So I work very hard and I progress really slowly. Just doing things here and there, talking to people, exchanging, reading, learning bit by bit with trials and (lots of) errors. But in the meantime, I am quite conservative, not attracted at all by technologies and new tools so I am not always trying to work new software and stuff. My thoughts are more directed towards the organization of things, objects and the conceptual notions that I already know, that I have slowly accumulated and collected over the year.

Concerning the different steps in a process, these are never the same. I have to adapt to the challenges of every project. But the thing that is consistent is stage 1: the phase where I dream about the project for years. In this stage I am basically reading around a topic, collecting books. I am a book lover, and for me this part is really important even though it is just about being soaked in this topic. This is an abstract process that will unconsciously merge in the project in the creation phase. So there always is this first long step, and then the "real work" (or what people would consider to be the real work, but for me the real work is reading and dreaming) have to be done quite quickly in the urge of the moment, so stay really in it, doing/thinking only about one thing (the project) without losing the momentum.

MB: The concept of your latest work is based on the theory of quantum physics, what is the main idea that fascinates you the most? Perhaps it is the possibility of one particle to be in a few places at the same time, or is it the secret relation between these smallest elements that exist? Else?

NB: I think what fascinates me the most is just the simple fact that everything (like everything!) is made out of particles. From these finite molecules emerges the infinite universe. Infinity = vertigo and vertigo is at the same time frightening and fascinating. But crazier is the principle of discontinuity: these particles (the ones that make our material universe) are not just moving following a path. They will start at point A and then be at point B without having to do the travel between the two points. It is like we can say that the material is full of holes, our world is full immateriality.

On a more pragmatic level, there is the duality notion that states that the light particle (the photon) is a particle and a wave at the same time. In the installation, the light (which is a metaphor for the photon) is flowing like a wave in the structure but also jumping from one point to another like a particle.

MB: Would you say that your work is as much about the technological possibilities as about the nature? Is it a kind of depiction of natural processes that are unseen for the naked eye?

NB: In general, the main topic of my work is (nothing original in itself) to propose ways to materialize sound composition. But if I go in the

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direction of your question, I think my work is rather about eliminating the boundaries we make between nature and culture, and then between the old and the new technologies. A bit like I was replying in the first question: everything is everything, and everything is connected. And as much as I like to organize things into boxes, as much as I think that it is important to be aware that a lot of things do not fit into boxes, I prefer to play on those fine lines. But it is not about the technological possibilities, it is actually quite the opposite: I do not see my works as technological works, just as WORKS, that is it (works that is part of the culture I live in, and tools are just a part of this culture).

But, I mean, there is not big political statement in my work. It is just a reflection on these networked ideas that I am attracted by. On a more technical level, it is a way to explore the relationship between sound and light, which have been my main focus in the last couple of years.

MB: What is the terra incognita within the field that you are working in now, which you would like to explore more and transform it into the art of performance?

I always am in this terra incognita in some way. As an artist, if I feel I have to understand something, it is probably the time to move on to the next challenge. For now, the biggest challenge is in producing coherent sound performances. I think that we are just at the beginning of the sound performance era, even though it has been an active field since the inception of electronic sound in the late 40's. I think this search for performing sound with objects or invented apparatus, other than the traditional instruments, is still a tremendous challenge. What kind of gesture does one use to produce a kind of sound? What kind of instrument should one build? What is the correlation between the sight and the sound? How does one is entangling all the disciplines in one coherent discourse? How can we go further than having a technological discourse? I think we still have a few years before finding the key formulae to the practice of these kinds of live sonic performances.

MB: Your works are tour de force and now you are well-known artist worldwide. How difficult it was to break through the ice when you started creating? Was the art market as competitive as it is now?

NB: It is all a matter of being at the right place, producing the right work at the right time, and we do not have any control on this. In a way, it was not that difficult to "breakthrough", and on the other hand, it WAS extremely difficult. Let me explain myself. There is absolutely NO reason for an artist to be not active. There will always be things to do, events to invent, situations or dialogues to create; whatever field you are into, place where you live, or tools that are accessible. There are a lot of exciting things going on in the underground. And there is always a way to make your work accessible to the public, whether it is showing an exhibition in your own bedroom open to your friends, or at the most important museum in the world.

In that sense, without especially looking for a success, I have always been active, always doing things, founding labels, participating in various events, whether they were "under" or "over" ground. So, in a way, I never saw the dissemination of my work as something difficult to achieve. I started to produce work that was presentable quite early in my "career" (I do not really see this as a career but anyway). At the time in the early 2000's, I was mainly working with video, and this network was based on a "call for works" model. I soon started to send my stuff everywhere, literally, spending tremendous amount on shipping fees but with the results of having the work presented from time to time, even in these first years of artistic practice. But this was done on virtual platform, as my work was traveling but not me. I was also sending music to many labels but they were not really responsive. I was unknown and I arrived right at the point where there was already a really well established experimental electronic music scene, without an important need to welcome any newcomers, I guess. Beside, the hipness of electronic experimental music was declining, big festivals were happening less and less and labels were closing down one after another.

On the other hand, a shift happened from the laptop performance to the physical performance and this research on sound materialisation. Over the years, I developed quite an extensive experience in that field and this is where I fell in the « right time / right place » category. From there, everything went well.

But I do not take anything for granted and I am actually quite naïve about being known or not (it always depend on who you are comparing to). So I simply continue to create the same way I was

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doing 15 years ago, without thinking if a work will tour or not, taking creation really modestly.

MB: What is your opinion on Contemporary Arts? Is there anything left to create that would surprise the audience and would be worth to be called original work of art?

NB: Can we really say that something is original? What is originality? Because everything is made of what already exist, isn't it? Again, it is always a matter of culture, and comparison with the world that surrounds that specific thing. What is original for my mother-in-law is not necessarily original for me.

I do not think one should worry too much about being original; he should only worry about doing what he feels he should be doing. The only true originality is honesty, so if a work is honest, it will find its way, whatever way it is. But then, can we really be honest if we are influenced by the commercial culture that surrounds us? I will leave that question open ;)

MB: Is there a person or a collective that you aspire to and would like to collaborate with?

NB: I must say I am quite an independent mind. To be associated with a group of people is not really important for me. But there are, of course, a lot of people I would like to collaborate with. Like with the Need company or Romeo Castelluci in theatre field; with Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker or Hiroaki Umeda in the dance field; with Herman Kolgen in the media arts; with Dubmtype in interdisciplinary ... or with The Dillinger Escape Plan or Old Man Gloom in the music field. Man I would like to work or just remix these guys! In the sound arts, I would really like, one day, to make a project either with Tristan Perich or with Sébastien Roux. And I promised myself that one day I will get in touch Marc Ribot, the guitar player. I also have this little fantasy to release a record on Raster-Noton as they definitely made an influence on me.

But my biggest fantasy for the moment would be to find something to propose to Invada Record founded by Portishead's Geoff Barrow. Definitely one of the most interesting labels out there these days in my humble opinion, especially with the work by Beak and Drokk.

Life will show...

MB: What is/are your current project/projects that you are working on?

NB: The list of projects is endless. I would not give any details, because I would feel a pressure to do what I say and I do not want any pressure. I am not working with any deadlines, I like to take the time that is needed for a project and every project demands own schedule that develops while you work on it. Let's just say I will still continue to explore sound, light, physicality that integrates the discoveries of the past, as well as those of today.

On the other hand, I just started a new thing: I am now a professor in digital music/sound art at the University of Montreal. And this is really interesting to follow the work and to discuss with the younger generation. Quite an interesting challenge!

MB: Your works are rather hypnotic (kind of), how do you find yourself after a day working on one or other project?

NB: (Laughs) I must say I never really saw what I am doing as hypnotic but now that you say it. When working on audio, I will regularly clean my ears with music, listening to a lot of different stuff, and especially not hypnotic stuff like free jazz, punk rock, grind core or hip hop. So it helps to stay awake and jump back into the more hypnotic sound.

MB: Provide us with the name of an artist/artists in whose works you find your peace and joy?

NB: I could provide an endless list here but it would sound like I am namedropping so I will try to concentrate on just another couple of artists besides the one that I named in the previous questions: Morton Feldman, James Turrell, Dan Flavin, NoFx, Alain Bashung, Serge Gainsbourg, Timber Timbre, Janet Cardiff & George Bures Miller, [The Users], Ryoichi Kurokawa and Bill Orcutt, just to name a few.

But what is really making my joy these days is something else: skateboard. I do not know why I did not do this when I was in my teens. Actually, yes, I know: I was too busy making music. I am a bit old for that now...but man I am so addicted!

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NAIARA VALDANO, LABORAL BLOG (ES), AUGUST 12, 2014

« Nicolas Bernier has been selected to develop a production residency at LABoral Centro de Arte y Creación Industrial »

The Canadian artist Nicolas Bernier has been selected to develop a production residency at LABoral Centro de Arte y Creación Industrial during summer. In an interview to tell us his life, his philosophy and the work that he will carry out in the Asturian centre.

An increasing number of artists are interested in sound as means of expression and intend to "explore all dimensions of listening", as Román Torre wrote several months ago in this same blog (1).

Many museums, art centres and other institutions are starting to take notice of this phenomenon and have decided to support sound research through the creation of many platforms and initiatives over the last years. We just need to name a few projects to show this boom, like the show "ARTe SONoro" celebrated at La Casa Encendida in 2010 (2) or the programme of activities "Situación sonora: la deriva aural" created by the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía in 2012 (3). We should not forget, of course, the Master Programme on Sound Art developed by the Universidad de Barcelona jointly with Arts Santa Mónica and Hangar (4).

LABoral did not want to lag behind and opened some months ago its own Sound Lab. Despite the fact that this centre from Gijón decided from the beginning to develop a programme focused on sound, it is obvious that this lab is another step in the defence of sound art. It is coordinated by the musician and composer Daniel Romero and its main goal is "to promote and support artistic practices related with sound following three lines of action: Production, exhibition, research and education" (5).

Among all the activities so far developed by this lab, I would single out a production residency launched this year and awarded by the artist Nicolas Bernier. Born in Ottawa (Canadá) in 1977, this artist has created during his career many pieces like sound performances, installations, concrete music, live electronics, post-rock, acoustic improvisation and video art. At the same time he has worked with dance, drama, moving images and interdisciplinary contexts (6). Thanks to the residency he has recently been awarded, he will be working from August 18 to August 28 at the workshops of LABoral where he will be developing frequencies (light quanta), a new adaptation of his previous work frequencies (a) (7). The selection of the artist in residence and the exhibition of the work produced is a proposal joint by the Centro de Arte y Creación Industrial and L.E.V. Festival.

We have interviewed Bernier to learn more about him. I hope you enjoy it and it encourages you to discover his work more deeply. Give it a try, keep on reading.

Where do you come from and when did you start to develop an interest in art?

That's a long story, but let's say it all began as a teenager with indie rock music. At that moment I also started to develop an interest in visual design, doing the artworks for releases, posters and websites. But I come from a piece of land where art is not part of the everyday culture, so I grew up with lots of curiosity that couldn't be satisfied due to the lack of stimuli.

Then I moved to Montréal and everything changed. I first started to dig the music field and I quickly turned to my ever expanding fields of interest: drawing, film, video, architecture, literature, design, photography, science, etc.

What did you study and how has this education influenced your art?

Convinced that art was not an option, probably because of the (non-)culture of the place I grew up, I tried really hard to weigh down my artistic passions. So I first studied radio broadcasting and then marketing, mainly interested in graphic design and photography which lead me to work quite early in my life as a web programmer/

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designer. These studies have actually brought me a lot as art and communication are not so far away.

After a couple of years working in the web, I got bored and I decided to study electroacoustic composition at Université de Montréal. Totally naïve, I managed to make it even though I had no music diploma, totally autodidactic at that time. But then I took a master's programme, and then a PhD at University of Huddersfield and I got hired as a teacher in the digital music department of the Université de Montréal. Even though I never saw myself as a pure academic, academia had a strong influence on my life and work. This field is where I met most of my collaborators, mentors and friends with whom the intense discussions and divergent/convergent opinions helped to shape my mind. Some of his names were Martin Messier, Jacques Poulin-Denis, Delphine Measroch, Jean Piché, Robert Normandeau, Pierre Alexandre Tremblay or Olivier Girouard.

You are a multidisciplinary artist who has made different kinds of artworks such as performances, installations, music pieces, videos, etc. But is there any artistic concern or line of thoughts that connects all your pieces?

I guess I could repeat a line that has been in my curriculum since the first version, stating that my aim is to find « the balance between the cerebral and the sensual ».

This statement has different meanings. For instance, when starting a project, I think a lot, take lots of notes, read a lot of books, look at loads of images, stare for a long time at the stars... actually, I work quite slowly during the initial stage. But then, when It comes to actually doing the work, to materialising it, it's like this long phase never happened. I just do the work as fast as I can in a really sensitive/naïve way. All the cerebral activities are somewhere there, but working unconsciously in the background. I don't want the conceptual aspect to stand as a barricade to the actual artwork cause at the end of the day, this is what is important to me. This is an example of the cerebral/sensual dichotomies.

It's true that I have approached art in different ways but I think there is some traces of a personal language that always stay. This is a way to articulate the elements of a work, whether it is in space or time.

You have a growing fascination towards the basic sound generation devices and many of your pieces are based on sound experimentation. Why are you so interested in this world?

The interest in the basics of things is another line that connects my works together. Our world is so complex! If I want to understand what I am doing, I need to start at position zero. I am a really slow learner so I always start at the beginning of things. For instance, when I started working with video (about a decade ago), I didn't want to create complex synthetic and abstract images, but rather work with a limited set of material and composed with that. I felt the same thing with sound: I didn't wanted to create complexe synthetic textures so I started to work away from the infinite possibilities of the computer to record mechanical sound that I was manipulating with my hands, using montage as the main technique, the most basic medium-based composition technique if there is one.

As sound is the very reason why I am doing art, I am now interested in working with basic sound generation methodologies. This means that I look back and work with the sine wave as fundamental material.

I am also researching the history of acoustic and the sound generation system that was invented a century ago in order to be able to study sound phenomenas. This is what led me to research the possibilities of tuning forks for instance.

During this residency, you are developing frequencies (light quanta), a new work that experiments with particles and sound movements created with an audio-processing application. How would you define this piece?

The work frequencies (light quanta) is based on the idea of particles being the fundamental matter. On the sound level, all the sounds have been made using a granular synthesis tool developed by Italian sound artist Ennio Mazzon for the label Farmacia901.

Granular synthesis is exactly based on this idea of manipulating micro particles of sound. Based on the metaphore of the physics principle which states that it is the electron that is liberating the photon (or light quanta), these sound particles are used to generate luminous

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elements which consist of 100 independently lighted acrylic sheets. I see those as my sets of photons, my luminous particles. When activated, the audiovisual installation allows multidimensional visualisation of the sound enabling the creation of audio-visual patterns based on micro events organized in time and space.

How do you value the LABoral residency?

I am so honoured to have been invited for this residency at LABoral. It is giving me time and space to fully dedicate to the artistic work which is the rarest situation in my day-to-day hectic life. But I think I would be better to answer that question after the residency more precisely.

What other projects do you have in mind at this moment?

Oh... tons! But this idea of basic sound generation system will still haunt me for years. One thing for sure is that more «frequencies» will proliferate.

One last thing, just to let you know that the piece frequencies (light quanta) will be open to the public at the venue of LABoral from August 28 to October 13, 2014.

MIGUEL ISAZA, INFINITEGRAIN (CO), MAY 26, 2014

« one of a kind, taking roots from different disciplines and combining/expanding diverse artistic routes »

Nicolas Bernier born in Canada. His work is one of a kind, taking roots from different disciplines and combining/expanding diverse artistic routes, thereby developing sonic art that takes inspiration from fields such as *musique concrète*, dance or visual arts in order to build a unique perspective always able to offer a fresh and solid expression of the role of multidisciplinarity in today's art.

Bernier's work creates a bridge between the simplicity and complexity of sound, a detailed and open examination of the material reality and the way it functions, present in his refined techniques and well structured processes, and evident for instance, in his way of mixing performance, mechanic construction and digital experimentation.

His vision regarding microsound and listening is as unique as his approach, featuring meticulous explorations over elements such as texture, tone, frequency and harmonics, where the sonic element is valued as special, along with his particular focus on the transformation realized over solid, mechanical and visual elements, where all those "different" aspects get into one same dialogue, a single experience as the Frequencies (A) installation/performance (awarded golden nica at Prix Ars 2013) perfectly shows.

Bernier is a clear example of an artist in constant seek of not just inspiration, but the connection between all that inspires, with that becoming a invaluable source of inspiration himself. The way he explores perceptual territories often transcends what one's able to talk about, although, he seems to be always open to kindly talk about his work and expose some of his directions, interests and processes with it.

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Nicolas, thanks for taking your time on this. What are you listening right now?

David Bowie, Scary Monsters (and Super Creeps). I am kind of postmodern in my listening, jumping from an album to another, even though I tend to be more and more purist concerning artistic work. As a listener, I went back to my roots in the last few years: rock'n'roll, trip-hop, drum'n'bass and electronic hip-hop. And even though it can be quite subtle, all of this is actually influencing my work.

Could you tell what led you to explore sound and what would be your favorite aspect of it?

Sound is one of the few things that we can't grasp with our hands nor see with our eyes. Less is more. When I think about the very essence of sound, about the fact that it is just a propagation of particles vibrating in the air, I have the vertigo. The same kind of vertigo that we have when we think about the infinite expansion of the universe. It's quite incredible that this movement of air particles is making all those sounds. This makes sound quite intriguing and mysterious. It's one of the many things I will never fully understand and it's fascinating.

On a more pragmatic level, I started sound exploration as the average teenager, playing guitar, bass and drums in rock bands. But I have always been attracted to leftfield music and immediately approached music as creatively as I could, trying uncommon matches of timbre, instrumentation, rhythms, melodies and effects.

In an interview for Digicult you talk about your interest on combining digital and mechanic elements. Now I wonder... How do you think that bridge is related to the listening and perceptive side of your sound work?

I think this relationship is embedded in each work, in the time/space discourse itself. It's a relationship of form, matter and technique. Both influences (the mechanical and the digital) are always interwoven. For instance, I've worked quite a lot with recordings of mechanical sounds but these pieces have been built using "montage". Montage is not a digital technique per se but the digital means brought ways of editing that weren't as fluently used as in the

«analogue era». In those works, the mechanical matter is worked within a digital framework, creating some sort of time colliding. I'm here speaking about the *musique concrète* published on the disc *Travaux mécaniques*, but we could say the same thing about the performance work like *La chambre des machines* or *frequencies* (a). In this later one, the mechanically driven tuning forks are using the mechanic to generate a sound composition that is clearly influenced by the digital-sine-wave-based music that appeared at the turn of the XXI Century (which is influenced by the analogue-sine-wave-drone music of the 60's and 70's).

I think one of the difficulties of defining sound art is that we can't really define sound. It's such a wide notion that often leads to an interdisciplinary task. I wonder how that multiplicity of influences towards sound affects the way you work with it.

It's not only sound that is hard to define. One could argue that every phenomenon can be looked at from different angles. Everything is interdisciplinary in a way, everything is related to a perception which actually is a set of perceptions. One can think of a Banana as food, or as an object, or as an album cover (*Velvet Underground*), or as a visual artwork (*Andy Warhol*), or as a biological phenomenon, or as a scientific object and so forth. Everything is multiple. So I take interdisciplinary for granted. Whether one wants it or not, one has to deal with multiple ways of approaching/perceiving any problem. That said, I would then ask the question about the disciplinary purity. Because if we're speaking about interdisciplinarity, it implies that there's "disciplines" per se, that there's some kind of ways to work, or to focus on one specific discipline. This is an approach I have a lot of respect for, because it's a totally anti-zeigeist way of working nowadays. I actually think we should give more attention to artists who only work with sound, or only dance, or only moving images. For instance, I'm dreaming of seeing a modern dance piece WITHOUT music, but this is rare.

In "strings.lines" (Cronica, 2010) you feature a very interesting mixture of tonalities by merging violin sounds with tuning forks. I wonder how the whole group of performers established the guidelines towards the collaboration/direction of the piece and how improvisation gets in the place.

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The process behind strings.lines took part in 3 main stages: I first worked on the basic track, the composition itself which is based on improvisation sessions of manually manipulated tuning forks, using a variety of contact mics passed into a max/MSP patch. I worked on that basic track for quite a bit of time, around two years if I remember correctly. I then brought the musicians into the studio for an improvisation session. Chris Bartos on the violin and Pierre-Yves Martel on the viola da gamba. I'm not usually a big fan of musicians (apart from guitar players Marc Ribot, Bill Orcutt and John Fahey), but Pierre-Yves Martel is definitely one of my favorites, one of the most sensitive, and I consider myself lucky as I've seen him several times in concerts and even played with him. This single session ran really smoothly, I gave really simple directives to the musicians, mainly to play on one note and to concentrate on the grain rather the melody, for instance. But foremost, they were playing while listening to the basic track that I had previously composed so the most important directive was to try to imitate what they were hearing in their headphones. My good friend and composer Olivier Girouard often used that technique. I made them listen to the composition and they played on top of it. In the third and last stage of the composition, I took the instrumental recordings that I intensively edited and mixed back with the basic tuning forks tracks. For instance, something they had done let's say in the last track could be edited to go in the first and vice versa.

It was quite an easy-going collaboration. And I just wait for the moment we will find the time to work together again.

In an interview at Ableton, you talk about your preference towards intimacy when presenting your works. Why do you think it's important?

I don't think intimacy is important in an absolute way (more important than the overwhelming spectacle). I think that there can't be only one format, a "one size fits all" way of presenting performances. Presenters tend to do the more they can with the resources they have and this tends to force specific presentation strategies. But some presenters will show less events and will take better care of having the right context for each work. The idea of having a formula or a recipe seems to me like completely going against what art should be. Is the bigger the better? Not sure about

that, so I usually prefer to work in the opposite direction. To me, intimacy just feel like a better way to exchange with people.

What do you Mind in tonality that leads you to explore it in the way you've done with the "frequencies" series? Could you talk to us more about that obsession you say to have with timbre, tone and frequency?

Tonality has always been part of my work. When I started my electroacoustic composition classes about 10 years ago, I had absolutely no hesitation to take my indie-post-rock background into my compositions, even though I was surrounded by works that seemed to disregard the use of simple melodies, rhythms and acoustic instruments. I then had a stage where I mainly composed using the recordings of mechanical objects, but even there, where noise was the main sound matter, I was always sensitive to the work on the pitch. And I think one should always be sensitive to that because even when dealing with noises, pitch relationships remain there between what seems to be non-pitched noises.

Between 2004 and 2010, I worked towards some kind of post-post-modern aesthetic, hybridizing all my influences together, working a lot with interferences, dirty sounds and old objects. I was then refusing to make an art that would have this slickness, this minimalism, this clinical atmosphere that seemed to be all around, that seemed to be implied by the laptop computer. On the other hand, I've always been fascinated with minimalism (I am here referring to the visual artists like Dan Flavin, Richard Serra, Larry Bell, etc.). Even though I was working in a way that didn't seem minimal, there always been some elements; this idea of working around smallness and intimacy instead of the big spectacle.

The «frequencies» series is thus taking all the ideas I worked with in the past but in a more radical fashion. My set of rules is now more strict for each project. The aim is a return to basics, simplicity and purity: instead of thinking towards the idea that all the sounds can be included within a work, I'm here focusing on basic tone generation techniques. This is a more microscopic work, based on listening to the micro-variation happening between the tones instead of looking at the general form of matter. There's a Morton Feldman influence here I think, but even there, my indie-rock and *musique concrète* background is still embedded, in the way the sound events are

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articulated, always using rupture as the main compositional technique.

How do you think materiality in terms of sound and how is that related to the notion you have of space and form?

I think of materiality, period (not necessarily in terms of sonic materiality). I've always given quite a bit of importance to the material world that surrounds me. First because I'm attracted to the past, and more specifically, to the materials of the past. For instance, when I read old writings, I try to read the old book even when a digital version is available. Second, I suffer a little bit from the collector's syndrome. I never got out of that phase since it started when I was a kid. I like to collect, serialize and organize my material world. I also have some background in graphic design and have always been interested in visual art, maybe more than in new music actually. All these factors are then influencing the way I work with this relationship between sound and physical matter. When working on material pieces like performances and installations, I would think about the object, the space, the movement, the body, the light and how all these elements are linked to the sound composition. But prior to all of those pragmatic concerns, I would first start at the conceptual and semantics level, asking questions about the meaning and the reason of the material I use. This is important for me, to give a strong direction to the project. If we take the tuning fork for instance, it's used because 1) of its scientific meaning 2) its musical meaning 3) its sound quality that stand between the electronic and the acoustic because of the pure tone 4) the aesthetic quality of the object 5) the simplicity of the function. In other words, the reasons why I'm working with the tuning forks are intrinsically linked to the conceptual core of the artistic reflection.

Is there any particular way you like to listen? How do you do that process?

Like the average joe, I will listen by not listening: that is listening with my body, let it react without thinking too much, trying to keep some kind of the primary sensuality that sound is so deeply communicating. Some sounds moves me and some don't.

Finally, what would be your notion silence and how is it "present" in your work/life?

Silence in life doesn't seem really possible if you are not a monk (?). There is no silence in my life, cars and airplanes are passing non stop. One day, I even went far north in the province of Quebec, thinking that I would be able to record the silence of nature. Even there, planes were passing, so I gave up that idea of silence.

In my work, silence is more important. Usually not as the core material as it is the case in silence.musique (Leerraum, 2010) where noise is made out of silence. Silence is important to articulate the sounds in time. Like Claude Debussy and Miles Davis were saying: "Music is the space between the notes". I think this is actually quite true. As I am not that much into constant rhythm or pulse, the rhythm of a more abstract composition will be given by silence. The right silence at the right time for the right duration is what will give the sense of expansion and contraction of density which seems to me like one of the most important characteristic of time based art.

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DONATA MARLETTA, DIGICULT (IT), MAY 21, 2013

« one of the most interesting and sophisticated artists in the contemporary scenario »

Nicolas Bernier is one of the most interesting and sophisticated artists in the contemporary scenario. His piece frequencies(a) has been awarded 2 days ago with the prestigious Golden Nica for the "Digital Musics and Sound Art" section by the Ars Electronica Festival (<http://www.aec.at/prix/gewinner/>).

Nicolas is a sound artist working with digital and mechanical tools. Dichotomies seem to best describe his artistic production: digital/organic, tradition/experimentation, cerebral/sensual, mechanical/electronic. His artistic creations and collaborations range widely; he's also member of Perte de Signal, a Montreal-based collective and media arts research centre (<http://perte-de-signal.org/>), and PhD candidate in sonic arts at the University of Huddersfield (UK).

The Golden Nica was the occasion to interview Nicolas about his latest projects and his recent live performance of frequencies(a) during the Elektra festival in Montreal, directed by the artist and curator Alain Thibault.

Donata Marletta: Can you say something about your sound performance frequencies(a)? What did inspire you for this work?

Nicolas Bernier: The idea to work with the tuning forks came up quite some time ago when I was looking for a way to integrate stable pitches into my sound performances that were mainly noise/object based. I was trying to avoid the use of more traditional musical instruments as tonal elements. As I always worked with obsolete objects and that I am often thinking about the relation between music, sound, old and "new" technology, the use of the tuning fork made perfect sense. It made sense because the tuning fork has been a scientific precision tool in the past, because it is a symbol of tonal

music but foremost because it is producing a sound that is close to the pure sinewave, the very primitive sound used in electronic music composition. I then started a collection of all kind of tuning forks, from pre-440hz 19th century to more recent medical ones. I brought my forks everywhere with me (I was doing a bit more improv at some point) and then I made a first album made out of them (strings.lines, 2010, Crónica).

I gradually became totally obsessed with the thing that became my primary musical instrument in a way. But I was still unsatisfied because I couldn't be as precise as I wanted to, by manually manipulating the forks myself. This is when the idea of automating the forks came up.

Donata Marletta: You recently presented frequencies(a) at Elektra Festival in Montreal. How did you organise the setting up of the live performance? What kind of equipment did you use?

Nicolas Bernier: Elektra Festival gave me the best condition I could possibly think of for this performance: a small venue (100 persons max.) solely dedicated to the presentation of frequencies (a) for 3 days in a row. This is real luxury as usually the electronic music festivals are quite formatted: big room, big video screen, no time to adjust your setup according to the new environment. There is a reason for that so this is not a critique but the thing is that some pieces have other needs. This is the case of frequencies (a) as it was not built thinking about any standard presentation format but about the specific needs of the piece. As the piece is dealing with small objects (the tuning forks, small solenoids, gentle sounds, precision), the public needs to be close to the piece. It is built on the principle of intimacy rather than grand spectacularity.

Concerning the equipment, with the help of Laurent Loison and Olivier Lefebvre, we've built small acrylic structures holding the tuning forks and the solenoids used to activate the forks. Each of them are linked to contact mic and a light flux coming from the custom lighting table on which they are placed. The table is also hiding the electronics (a usb/dmx board). All the voltage sent to the lights and the solenoids are sent through this board. Then it is all a matter of composition, of organising the audiovisual sequences in time, which I do with Ableton Live and Max For Live.

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Donata Marletta: I find very fascinating the way you combine analogue and digital tools. How do you deal with these two contrasting elements?

Nicolas Bernier: This relationship between the electronic and the mechanical/physical was actually the trigger that made me want to work in the field of electronic arts. Today this dialogue between those elements is totally fluent but 10 or 15 years ago, at the apotheosis of the laptop performance, that mix was extremely intriguing as most of the work were either totally digital or not.

Since then my work always relied on the use of physical elements that are processed by the computer. The trigger for an idea or a project always comes from the physical world but the way I want to present this idea always needs the computing capabilities. But most important is for me the balance between the elements, trying not to fall in creating either a completely « natural » nor « digital » work. I actually think there is no distinction to do between the natural or the virtual/artificial. Everything is connected and communicating together, everything is processed in a way or another. For instance, one could see an artificial process by pouring water on a plant.

Donata Marletta: You have such a diverse range of works and collaborations, from dance, theatre, post-rock to visual arts, sound performances and musique concrète. Can you tell me which are your main references and “inspiring muses”?

Nicolas Bernier: I am profoundly interested by the arts and I am not sure I understand why there is some “categories”, if not for political and historical reasons. Nevertheless, I can't argue with this: my main medium is sound and will most probably always stay sound. But my interest lies everywhere, giving a multiplicity of influences to my work. When I am touched by something, I am not asking myself the question about what category the thing fits in. It is the same thing when I create; I just do what I need to do, not asking myself if it fits this or this category. This is why even if my medium is sound, I am often asking myself questions about the performative, the theatrical, the gestural, the visual and, of course, the musical.

So my muses are everywhere. I tend to be fond of people close to me. Denis Marleau and Stéphanie Jasmin are stage directors that I've

worked with and who had a strong influence on the way I understand live arts. Olivier Girouard, Jacques Poulin-Denis, Martin Messier and all the visual artists at Perte de Signal (a artist-run centre I am a member of) are all close and inspiring friends.

But if would need to name drop, I would say: Jim Jarmusch, Pierre Schaeffer, Marcel Dzama, Karl Lemieux, Janett Cardiff, Wong Kar-Wai, F. W. Murnau, Karlheinz Stockhausen, Luc Ferrari, Francisco Meirino, Ryoji Ikeda, Hermann von Helmholtz, Sol LeWitt, Alain Bashung, Zimoun, Portishead, Chris Salter, Vilém Flusser, Jacques Rancière, Marc Ribot, Wes Anderson, Sébastien Roux, Carl Andre, Arnaud Fabre, Jean-Pierre Gauthier, The Dillinger Escape Plan, William Burroughs, Dan Flavin, Mark Fell, Gilles Gobeil, Herman Kolgen, Robert Lepage, pe lang... and well, this is only what comes on top of my head of course.

Donata Marletta: You will present the world premiere of frequencies (synthetic variations) at the next edition of Mutek in Montreal. Is this work somehow connected with frequencies(a)? Can you give us an anticipation of this latest piece?

Nicolas Bernier: frequencies is actually a series of works mainly working around the pure/impure dichotomy, declining in 3 parts: acoustic, digital and electronic. I am, in a way, visiting the 3 mains historical evolution stages of the tone. The (a) in the first part stands for “audio” or “acoustic” because the tuning forks are producing an almost pure acoustic tone. The second instalment presented at Mutek (synthetic variations) is entirely based on digital sounds. In this performance I am using the same system used in frequencies (a) except that there is nothing acoustic, no tuning forks, no solenoids and no human performance per se. My first laptop performance in a way but visually translated into physical elements. It is consisting pre-written sequences of synthetic sounds with light synchronised within synthetic material, the small acrylic structures. I will keep the secret of the third part for now...

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MATTHIEU DESSUREAULT, LIEN MULTIMEDIA (CA), 14 FÉVRIER, 2014

« Face à cette extrême précision entre la musique et les éclats lumineux, l'illusion de voir le son et d'entendre la lumière est quasi parfaite »

Pendant longtemps, l'artiste sonore Nicolas Bernier refusait de faire de la musique électronique. Puis, en 2012, il a voulu rompre avec sa propre démarche et explorer la « musique de machines ». Ce changement de cap a pris la forme d'une série de performances son et lumière intitulées « Frequencies ».

« Avant, je faisais de la musique concrète avec des matériaux riches. L'électronique était l'antithèse de ce que je faisais. En 2012, j'ai eu envie d'aller voir ailleurs et de me concentrer sur des matériaux plus rudimentaires, c'est-à-dire le sinus et le bruit blanc, qui sont à la base de la musique électronique. Mon travail des cinq prochaines années sera basé sur la restriction des matériaux et l'exploration des techniques rudimentaires », dit Nicolas Bernier, rencontré lors du Mois Multi.

L'artiste y était de passage pour présenter « Synthetic Variations », deuxième opus de sa série « Frequencies ». Cette performance est constituée de courtes séquences sonores et lumineuses synchronisées. Les éclats de lumière s'incarnent à travers sept panneaux d'acrylique sur lesquels on a posé des bandes LED. La lumière et la musique sont contrôlées à distance par l'artiste à partir du logiciel Ableton Live, qu'il a modifié pour l'occasion. Face à cette extrême précision entre la musique et les éclats lumineux, l'illusion de voir le son et d'entendre la lumière est quasi parfaite.

Fait à noter, ce spectacle d'une vingtaine de minutes ne laisse guère de répit. Intense, il en met plein la vue et les oreilles. « Certaines personnes vont trouver que c'est écrasant ou étouffant, convient Nicolas Bernier. D'autres, plus habitués à ce type de spectacle, vont voir une construction formelle de sons et de lumière. C'est important pour moi que le temps évolue de façon précise. Tout est écrit et réfléchi. C'est un trip plus formaliste qu'émotif ! »

Cette performance fait suite à « Frequencies (a) », couronné d'un Golden Nica au prestigieux concours Prix Arts Electronica, l'une des plus hautes distinctions des arts numériques. Le spectacle a été présenté dans différents événements consacrés au multimédia (Elektra à Montréal, festivals Seconde Nature et Electroni[k] en France, Ars Electronica en Autriche et Bozar Electronic Arts Festival en Belgique). On y voyait l'artiste manipuler une série de diapasons, qui résonnaient en synchronisme avec des éclats de lumière.

Pour sa prochaine création, il compte utiliser de vieux oscillateurs électroniques et différents gadgets qui « pèsent cent fois le poids d'un ordinateur, mais qui ne servent qu'à faire un son ». Une sorte de retour aux sources pour ce grand nostalgie des vieilles technologies. « Souvent, en musique électronique, on a l'impression d'inventer quelque chose, mais c'est faux. Tant qu'à ne rien inventer, je préfère aller voir ce que les autres ont fait avant moi et le transformer à partir de mon bagage », explique-t-il.

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JULIAN COWLEY, MUSICWORKS (CANADA), ISSUE 115, 2013

« Object-based electronic music »

"La chambre des machines is a project where two electronic musicians are driven by the desire to be involved, as physically as they can be, in a performance context," explains Nicolas Bernier, discussing his ongoing collaborative work with Martin Messier. "It's not a conceptual piece; it was made in action, from day one."

The action on stage involves two mechanical boxes. Bernier's is taller and more old-fashioned in appearance, with a wooden frame and funnel-shaped speaker attached to its front; Messier's is more squat, housed compactly in metal. Each performer approaches his apparatus like a technician, spotlit in a darkened room. A clock ticks, electronic signals beep, a high tone drones. The twin operatives set to work, tugging levers, turning handles, pulling rods, and twanging springs. Pieces break away from Messier's machine as he clenches it like a pinball obsessive intensely absorbed in some arcane game. Bernier gazes quizzically, inquiringly, through black-rimmed spectacles into the interior of his machine, then scrapes edgy noise from metal strips with a violin bow, strikes bell-like cups, or taps cogged wheels. The levers judder, the handles grate as they crank, metal rods rattle loudly—some crashing to the floor. All the while, images of machine-like shapes and forms flash and flicker on a backdrop screen.

La chambre des machines arose from the merging of two earlier works by the Montreal-based artists. In 2008, Bernier was commissioned to give a solo performance at a two-day festival in Quebec, celebrating the ninety-fifth anniversary of Luigi Russolo's Futurist manifesto *L'arte dei rumori* (The Art Of Noises). With practical assistance from his friend Alexandre Landry, a skilled carpenter, Bernier built a sound machine inspired by Russolo's intonarumori,

noise-making boxes with protruding funnels. "As far as the actual construction of the machine was concerned, Alexandre did pretty much everything himself and had my total trust," Bernier now recalls. "But Russolo's intonarumori were closed boxes. You couldn't see the mechanism inside. I wondered what had motivated this decision. Maybe it was aesthetic: a formal object whose appearance counterbalanced the noisy temperament of the sounds it produced. I wanted to use a mechanical apparatus that actually showed the public how the music is made, physically. This was one of my main visual requirements, even though the sound might then pass through a computer, my main creation tool . . . which is of course another totally enclosed box, like those first intonarumori."

Boîte, the piece Bernier presented at this event, was developed through a process of discussion and trial and error over a period of six months. Initially, he and Landry tried to conform to five of the sound categories specified by Russolo in *L'arte dei rumori*: roars, whistling, whispers, screeching, and beating on material. "After some experiments, Alexandre and I moved away from trying to match those categories and just followed our instincts. There was a lot of back and forth between us: Alexandre would show me some experiments, and I would give my thoughts on what I was looking for and what I found interesting. I wanted some percussive noises, for example, and Alex had some difficulty getting that particular kind of sound, but finally we made it."

Around that time, Messier started performing *L'horloger* (the clock maker), a solo piece that was inspired by elusive issues of temporality and memory, yet was realized in a vigorously physical way, through Messier's manipulation of old alarm clocks and their mechanisms. When boîte and *L'horloger* happened to be programmed on the same concert, Messier and Bernier thought it might be stimulating, illuminating, and fun to find a way to work together. They started to develop a piece taking those solos as their point of departure. As its title La chambre des machines indicates, the prospective concert space became, in their combined imagination, that room in a building where the vital machinery and electronics are lodged. The role of the performers would be to attend and activate these apparatus. La chambre des machines sprang into existence, and more than three years later, they are still finding occasions to perform it.

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Bernier and Messier met during the mid-2000s, at the University of Montreal, where both were studying electroacoustic composition. "We used to have intense late-night discussions, barely agreeing on anything," Bernier recalls. "We had both started out as drummers, but I was more into the smoother side of electroacoustic music—ambient, continuum, field recording; Martin was into the more raw side—distortion, masses, rhythmic sounds. We took different paths, and to be honest I never thought we could ever meet artistically; our ideas were too divergent aesthetically, even though those conversations were really nourishing."

In retrospect, Bernier suggests that their differences in taste and outlook were effectively resolved in the making of *La chambre des machines*. The piece brings together and sustains a suspenseful balance between Messier's rhythmic proclivities and Bernier's interest in sound matter composed with pure tones. In fact, collaboration with other artists from a wide range of disciplines has been an extremely important means for both men to develop their artistic practices and refine their working methods.

"In a collaboration, the one thing you always do is learn," Bernier asserts. "And basically, you learn from points of disagreement with your colleague. To work with someone who simply thinks the same as you would be pointless. In this sense, I've always found that collaboration expands comprehension, whether I'm working with another composer, performer, choreographer, filmmaker, or poet. Gaining access to different ways of thinking and different expertise is important. Learning about how to move a body in a dance context, or how to put together voices, lights, costume, and set design in a theatre context expands the creative possibilities that are available to me. In any collaboration, the emerging work won't be one that I would have done myself. And if I had to rethink a collaborative project into a solo one, it would definitely become quite different in the process."

Messier agrees with Bernier on the value of finding yourself forced to view a shared project within a perspective arising from another discipline, a different training, or an alternative reserve of creative experiences. That unlocking of potential through dislocation of your own established point of view, and the recognition that constraint can often prove enabling seems to be graphically enacted in Messier's piece *Hit and Fall*, which he occasionally performs with dancer-

choreographer Caroline Laurin-Beaucage. For part of this robust dialogue, Messier plays his drums with characteristic concentration while Laurin-Beaucage struggles to constrain him, to force him away from the kit and into silence. It is a piece, Messier emphasizes, that is less concerned with music in the abstract than with the physicality of drumming.

It would be misleading, however, to suggest that there is some kind of neatly defined dualism in the collaboration between Bernier and Messier. Their creative relationship is far from being so clear-cut. "In previous collaborations, with guitarist Simon Trottier or pianist and accordionist Delphine Measroch, for example, I was the geek of the duet," Bernier points out. "So I was the one programming, editing, and mastering while they were playing their instruments. With Martin, it's the other way around: he is a far more advanced programmer than I am. And I find that because I'm not programming in *La chambre des machines*, it leaves a bit more headspace for me to actually listen and to comment upon what we are doing."

"I truly love what I can create with a computer," Messier acknowledges, "but when I go to a venue at night I don't necessarily like to see someone sitting behind a computer. So, I've had to imagine ways to present my music live and that leads me to materialize sounds, while performing, by means of objects or dancers. In my work the computer is never shown."

It is this sense of the aesthetic inadequacy of certain performance practices current in the field of electronic music, this shared aversion to concert priorities that are visually depleted or even disembodied that has brought Bernier and Messier together so forcefully.

"The very reason I chose to do electroacoustic music is because I feel that it makes everything possible," Bernier affirms. "It gives you unlimited access to the sound world, and I need that freedom. But I don't see why my work should be limited to sound. I've always had an interest in the visual, even though I tend to work a lot less with photography, video, or graphic design. For me, it's not that important to do music. I just do work, and people will take from that what they want. With the term music, I always feel there's a historical burden floating around. Our way of thinking is wider than just viewing things in terms of musicality. We think of gestures, lighting, movement, interaction, scenography."

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Messier agrees. "I don't necessarily think in terms of art forms, when I am working," he says. "That's not a concern for me. I prefer to think in terms of means of realization, to think that this project will be better if I use this, this, and this . . . Sound is always my starting point—it's where I am coming from—but what I am really aiming for is to de-contextualize electronic and electroacoustic music. *La chambre des machines* is not just about sound. It's really evident that it is a performance, and not a piece of music in itself. It simply wouldn't be interesting to listen to on CD, without the visual dimension."

The first presentation of *La chambre des machines*, at Transmediale, Berlin, in 2010, didn't include a video element. Later that year, at Montreal's Mutek festival, in a larger venue, Bernier and Messier decided to add the video backdrop. They were dissatisfied with the initial outcome, but continued to develop the backdrop as an integral part of the piece. "It was initially a video of fixed duration," Bernier explains. "There was no interactive component, and it wasn't much in sync with the music. We reworked the video visuals so they were completely synchronized when we presented the piece at Sonar in Barcelona. And then, in 2011, we decided to make it interactive for our show at the Ars Electronica festival at Linz, Austria. Now we had to use two computers—one for sound, one for video. The video can vary in two ways: there are random algorithms so that images are never triggered in exactly the same order; also, if we play smoothly there will be fewer images, while if we play like crazy, without stopping, the images will respond and go crazy too."

Although their realization of this piece has the edgy, focused, yet exploratory feel of an entirely improvised performance, strictly speaking it is not improvised at all. "The form is fixed," Bernier continues. "There is a precise timeline that we have to follow, and by now we have come to know the score perfectly. We press 'play' on our computer at the beginning of the performance, and from that moment we can't pause. The computer provides a basic electronic track, with some rhythmic elements that are not possible for us to do in real time, as our instruments are not sufficiently precise. It also supplies a few sound cues, so we know when the next section is coming and that we will have to stop or start in, say, four bars.

"There's some real-time processing too, always at the same points in the timeline. If at a certain moment there is reverb or distortion on my machine, I have to be aware of that and adjust my interpretation

in line with the processing. The electronic score is written, yet we do have some freedom in the way we play, varying the intensity, the density of events; and our gestures, our physical movements, trigger prerecorded samples. By the end, we are really fighting with our instruments, and we always have to repair them afterwards. But the element of theatricality in this work can also be subtle, brought out in small things like the positioning of lights, or the effect of a specific gel that we apply to them."

Bernier and Messier are committed to sensuous and muscular performance, but more than that, they aim—whether working together or independently—to preserve a sense of the physical properties of objects and of human bodies amid the ambiguous realities of digital flux and virtual worlds. "I arrived in electronic music exactly at the shifting point between the analog and the digital eras, and this had a tremendous impact on my work," Bernier observes. "In fact, my immediate reaction was to work against the notion of this 'everything-is-now-digital' world. Even though I have always been astonished by the laptop's capabilities, I'm attracted by obsolete objects, and I like to have physical contact with them."

"I'm a bit of a collector. My soundworks have often been constructed with collections of sounds coming from collections of actual objects, such as typewriters, antique toys, and tuning forks. My interest in the technological legacy of the industrial revolution, old mechanical apparatus, is growing stronger than ever, despite the fact that in a way I am so far from it, in the digital age. For me, this is a way of escaping the contemporary art world's pressure to be 'contemporary.' In cultural theorist Jean Baudrillard's book *Le Système des objets* (The System of Objects, 1968) Bernier found reference to "un phénomène qui accompagne souvent la passion de collectionneur, c'est la perte du sentiment du temps actuel" [a phenomenon that often accompanies the collector's passion—loss of a sense of current time]. "That is exactly where I stand," says Bernier.

"A lot of my *musique concrète* has been based on mechanical objects." So, Bernier's eight-channel acousmatic composition *Writing Machine* (2005), inspired by William Burroughs and Brion Gysin's literary cut-up technique, derives most of its nonvocal sound material from a mechanical typewriter; its shrill bell, ratcheting carriage, and percussive keys. A version of *Writing Machine* can be heard on Bernier's 2007 release *Travaux mécaniques* (empreintes DIGITALes).

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That CD also features his *Liaisons mécaniques* (2007), which draws on the evocative sounds of obsolete cameras, film projectors, music boxes, and mechanical toys, their whirring cogs and crunching gears processed into a stream of granular textures and grainy fine detail.

"We are now moving away from the analog-digital dichotomy," Bernier suggests. "So we can talk about the content instead of just the means . . . which is good news. My recent solo performance frequencies (a) uses tuning forks that I activate with motors. For me, tuning forks are a strong link between the old and the new technologies, the old and the new music, acoustic and electronic sound. We are all living and working in between, and that's the beauty of our situation." In a performance of frequencies (a), the sound of Bernier's motor-driven tuning forks is combined with pure digital sound waves. His actions trigger sequences from the computer that activate solenoids, so that the forks are struck with high precision. Streams of light accompany the release of their sound.

"I'm just fascinated when I think that there were acousticians in the late 1800s who worked on building acoustic synthesizers made with such tuning forks. This is the kind of idea that drives me," Bernier enthuses. "Generally, I'm fascinated by the beginning of things—Helmholtz's experiments in the field of acoustics, for example. Pierre Schaeffer's pioneering studies are my favourite *musique concrète*, and Stockhausen's studies in electronic [music]. And of course, Luigi Russolo is of great importance when we speak about invented instruments."

When they determined to proceed as a duo with La chambre des machines, a second Russolo-inspired machine was obviously needed for Messier's use. "We more or less gave Alexandre Landry carte blanche, as we were short of time and needed an instrument," Bernier recalls. "The main constraint was that we wanted an amplified metal plate on top, so that Martin could play with his old-fashioned clockworks. Of course, La chambre des machines is about mining the intrinsic sonic possibilities of our acoustic instruments, but it is also about exploring the ambiguous relationship between acoustic and synthetic sound, the correlation between the gestures of the players and the resulting sounds, about the visual dimension, about the light, the scenography, the energy curves on stage."

In Messier's compelling *Sewing Machine Orchestra* (2010), computer processing transforms the functional sounds of eight 1940s Singer sewing machines, mounted on stands, into a vivid, dancing weave of hums, whirrs, and beats, accompanied by suitably pulsating lights. The imaginative involvement shared by him and Bernier with everyday technologies of the pre-digital age should not be mistaken for a form of wistful nostalgia. In *Laws Of Media* (1988) Marshall and Eric McLuhan suggest that "the artist is the person who invents the means to bridge between biological inheritance and the environments created by technological innovation." Bernier and Messier are deeply involved in just that kind of inventiveness, investigating the impact and implications of changing technological environments in relation to our aesthetic, analytic, and physical engagements with reality.

—TOBIAS FISCHER, TOKAFI (GERMANY), MARCH 22, 2011

« Nicolas Bernier, whose oeuvre has forever been caught between a plethora of dichotomies, feeding from the effort of finding a balance between extremes »

To the outside observer, Canada must sometimes seem as though it were founded on paradoxes. An industrial powerhouse sporting some of the leading cultural metropolises, it is also torn one of the most thinly populated countries on the planet, with vast, uninhabited planes opening up right next to its sprawling economic centres. It should seem only logical that a nation as complex as this should give birth to

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*an artist like Nicolas Bernier, whose oeuvre has forever been caught between a plethora of dichotomies, feeding from the effort of finding a balance between extremes: It is sweet, it is bitter. It is fragile, it is rough. It is sentimental, it is cool. It feels spontaneous, it has been carefully constructed – there's no end to the list. In an unlikely conflation of influences, Bernier, who was born in Ottawa, but eventually moved to more urban Montréal, has oscillated between the fury of punk and the development of a captivating personal style in the field of electroacoustic composition, a genre otherwise associated with humourless academicism and intellectual rigour rather than the celebration of synaptic stimulation. Before making a name for himself with early stand-out piece *Les arbres*, however, Bernier left his mark on the scene as part of the *Ekumen* collective, a tightly-knit community simultaneously operating as a label, design agency and creative hotspot (in fact, its members prefer to refer to it as a "microorganism"). Today, he has definitely closed this chapter. But the focus on an allround multimedial approach has remained part of his philosophy to this day, as have the friendships with Olivier Girouard and his long-term visual partner in crime *Urban9*, who has signed responsible for the artwork to all of Bernier's albums so far. So, although he has remained connected to his past, the end of *Ekumen* also marked the real beginning of his solo career: After early composition *Ail et l'eau faille* and his strongly folk- and song-oriented work with composer and guitarist Simon Trottier, released on netlabels 12rec and Zymogen, Bernier burst onto the sound art scene in 2008 with *Les arbres*, a work which he had diligently been sculpting for years and which would eventually be awarded an honorary mention at the prestigious *Prix Ars Electronica*. Its densely layered arrangements questioned the implicit dogmatism of the electroacoustic scene, with heartbreak strings shimmering underneath sheets of metallically rustling and crackling noise. The old stylistic polarities were eliminated and merged into a new style synthesising all of his different preferences. A variety of works further defining this aesthetic quickly followed suite: *strings.lines*, which explored the sound-producing capacities and cultural implications of tuning forks. *courant.air*, which dealt with the force and flirtations of*

*wind. And *The Dancing Deer*, a quirky piece of magnetising electronics within close proximity of radio plays, guided by the playful spirit of Pierre Henry. As cohesive as all of these releases might have been, they were also unanimously marked by yet more contrasts, which delineated a fertile ground for discussion entirely without the use of words or clever liner notes. On Bernier's latest work, *usure.paysage*, meanwhile, his individual take on field recording has resulted in what is possibly his most pure piece of music. There are no obvious clues as to the origin of these sounds, but you can feel yourself drifting far, far while listening to them, your body entering a world of obscure forms and surreal shapes as your mind takes a journey to the vast, uninhabited planes stretching out all across the Canadian heartland.*

Could one regard the strong contrasts in your music as a direct reference to the contrasts of Canada, with a big city like Ottawa lying next to vast patches of wild nature?

Clever! But it is more about the contrast between my teenage years near a huge national park and my adult life in Montréal. Back then, cross-country skiing all alone in those woods was undoubtedly among the best moments of my life. And those moments disappeared as soon as I moved to a metropolitan city. By moving here, I've gained culture but lost nature, since nature here is quite tough for a big city. This nature/culture dichotomy is at the heart of most of the music I've composed.

What are the fundamentals of this dichotomy?

It's all about this love/hate relationship with the computer. I admire the computer in a way. As a freelancer, I can do so much work, from business to communication and creation with one single piece of electronics - truly incredible. And I can take the core of my studio and travel with it to anywhere in the world. On the other hand, the computer is such a boring, anonymous, unpleasant interface, especially when it's time to make music. It is making everything virtual and I still hope to live in the real world, a world that I can feel with all my senses, not only from a computer screen. So I find ways to work in the real world. Performance is one way of achieving this, collaboration and field recording are others.

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Is that why the term "handmade" is so prominently featured in your biography?

Yes, that's how I manage to beat that computer down! It's a way for me to feel that I am still living in the real world and not just inside a virtual environment.

How has this influenced your perspective on recording in the field?

In 2009, I spent a lot of time in the Canadian West. It is the perfect cliché of what a foreigner will imagine Canada to be like: never-ending forests and mountains. Canada is so big that you don't travel from East coast to West coast every day. And that year I had the chance to work with a multidisciplinary company called Theatre Junction. In the same year, I had a residency at Banff Centre, an art centre based literally in the middle of the rockies – the Canadian mountains. Composing there was fantastic. The Dancing deer was entirely created there, far from my usual studio in downtown Montréal.

usure.paysage is my first release of real *musique concrète* in a way. There are no musical instruments, mostly field recordings. For years, all my *musique concrète* was based on studio recordings of machines, old forgotten objects and musical instruments. With usure.paysage, I am breaking with this habit, bringing nature into the studio. I wanted to distance myself from the habits composers have when dealing with field recordings, where they'll usually integrate the recordings without intervening. Even when they are edited, composers often keep this gentle attitude towards recordings of nature. Or they do the complete opposite. I wanted to find a "juste-millieu" between editing while still keeping a sense of the original timbres. In usure.paysage, I wanted to find the points of articulation in the recordings to make a music that lives, that's not just nature-ambiances. It's not so much about processing but more about working with a tight "montage" technique.

How do you feel about the idea that if we attune our senses and expectations, we are constantly surrounded by the most wonderful music?

I've always thought it difficult to make any clear statement with music unless it uses voice. During the Iraq war, I composed an electroacoustic piece with a rapper singing an anti-war, anti-Bush text, but it didn't really work out. Nobody but me actually heard that piece. I would situate myself far from the John Cage or R. Murray Schafer and the philosophy that music exists in nature. The idea is pertinent but it's not where I stand. If there is a political statement in my music, it would relate to the notion of keeping our awareness faced with the predominance of technocracy.

In which way did folk and acoustic music, as typical symbols of purity, play a role in your early musical education?

This question of purity is interesting because what one could consider as pure in my early musical education is, in fact, not so pure. This is, in a way, because I started with real instruments and punk rock. I began my musical life within a wall of distortion. Now I deal extensively with timbre, with unidentified materialities. But stage performance and distorted guitars remain my own personal folk, my roots. And I think that sometimes I still make use of that punk rock energy and those hooks when composing *musique concrète* or audio performances. One thing I have to mention is that even in my punk rock phase, I was immediately attracted to blending all the different kinds of music I loved, from jazz or new age to grindcore.

You indeed seem to consider these genres as options in a giant toolbox. Can you trace this back to the music that surrounded you when you were young?

I've definitely always considered music as a "field of possibilities", to paraphrase Henri Pousseur. This is not so much a strictly musical view but a social perspective. I've never really understood why people we're hanging out in small groups, why they so badly need to find their identity by being in a closed relationship with others who share the same ideas or habits. Can one trace that attitude back to when I was young? The answer would most probably be "no", because I did not grow up surrounded by music at all. In fact, it would be more like a counter-reaction to my early social environment: a bureaucratic region where everyone had to fit in their little tight box, afraid of stepping outside. In a metropolitan city, meanwhile, the phenomenon of marginality barely exists - which was not the case in the place where I grew up.

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How and when did sound as a musical element enter into your world?

It entered progressively. It entered timidly in my early teenage years by trying to produce weird chords, weird rhythms and so forth. The big bang occurred when I arrived in Montréal. I brought my band from rock to improv-based ambient rock. Sound was entering more deeply into the practice and I was discovering modern music. I soon attended my first concert of electroacoustic music. It took place in complete darkness, with no performers on stage, nothing to see, everything to be heard. That was a turning point. There was something I did not understand about it - and I loved it. So I've tried to understand it better to be closer to that unknown.

You seem to have a special relationship with sound.

Yes, I am in a relationship with sounds. No doubt! (laughs) Sounds are my lovers. I love sound. They make my imagination flourish. They free ourselves from the visuals which imprison us. Sounds have no limits, they flow in space freely. I am attracted by sounds that come from a particular – material – reality. I've never been interested in electronic sound. Synthetic sound, more specifically.

How has this relationship changed over the years?

It's hard to say. I think that it began with a poetic relationship and grew into a more technical one. I am not a technical guy at all, but I am becoming more sensitive to technique - maybe because I feel that my relationship with sound is now mature.

In the notes to strings.lines, which uses recordings of tuning forks, I found the following description of your interests: "On the one hand, this obsession with old objects, obsolescence, dust. On the other, a fascination for bareness, sobriety and purity."

In that single object, the tuning fork, I've found not only a symbol of my musical objectives, but also of my general interest for that dichotomy between the old and the new. I think it has something to do with the relation between the inside of the mind and the real outside world. I like to spend time on old bazaars and in antiquaries. When I compose, I think I feel closer to antiquaries than to avant-

garde artist. In the meantime, I just love to be in a white museum room or to listen to minimal electronic music. I feel there is this obsession for clarity and sobriety in the art world. This is maybe what would segregate the official and the underground scene. The underground is more rough, more drafty, the works are less organized, they don't give an impression of perfection. So maybe I feel closer to the underground, maybe it is still that punk-rock thing running after me, bearing me to not cross-over into the official realms. This obsession for dust is also a counter-reaction to my tool, the oh so white - or grey or black but please not beige - the oh so sterile laptop. With strings.lines, or with the tuning fork, I think I have found the middle-ground between those two obsessions.

Tuning forks, as the project suggests, have become symbols of the occident's entire musical heritage. In which way has this lineage and tradition played a role in your life?

There this extremely purist approach in electroacoustics, based on space and timbre as the most important parameters for music. When I started out with electroacoustics, instead of falling into the endless possibilities of creating completely new sounds, I quickly faced the fact that the timbres of traditional musical instrument are the most high-class timbres of all. They've been developed over centuries to achieve perfection and richness. So I never really understood why one should not use them when doing sound art. I am not that much engaged in occidental classical music. I am engaged in it, but for me it is just another aspect of this giant toolbox called music. What strings.lines is stating is that if we look closely, the boundaries are not as insurmountable as we think. Like the sound of those tuning forks, which is so close to the sound of electronic music. Is it important in any way to do „electronic music“? Or is it electroacoustic? Or instrumental music? Are these good terminologies? Not sure at all. Here, one could argue that my approach is post-modernist. But I do not feel that my music is a melting pot of whatever. I think that even if there are multiple influences, all projects are tied to a coherent aesthetic. The pejorative image of post-modernism is over. We are now beyond all of this, I think.

"Projet Perault" was, if I'm not mistaken, your first public work. What role did it play in your development towards these goals?

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It's funny to bring that project up. I've put it in my list of works just because I don't want to forget it and also because I don't want to forget that Pierre Perrault, an important poet and cinematographer from the province of Québec - we owe him the "cinéma-vérité" - was the main influence which inspired me to start with field recording. When he was working for the radio in the 60s, he was speaking about how the recorder was an important tool for keeping our collective memory and the words of our predecessors. At that time, I was barely aware of electroacoustic music but that reading left a big impression. In the multidisciplinary "Projet Perrault", I was only taking care of the video part. My friend Olivier Girouard was composing the music. Curiously, when I started out with electroacoustics, I was more attracted by the visual arts. For me, the music scene was a bit boring, so I was digging elsewhere. Afterwards, in 2007, I had to make a choice between those two full-time jobs: Sound or video. I choose sound. My first musical education was that of a self-taught-punk-rocker. But even then I was working like crazy, playing my instruments eight hours a day after school, getting up in the middle of the night to rehearse or to note down new ideas. After learning the guitar and bass, I finished my rock "career" on the drums. I hope to get back to it someday.

When did you decide you wanted to be an artist?

After those years, I've tried to convinced myself that music was not an option, as you could barely live as a musician. But you cannot decide to become an artist. There's a force that make you involved in what you like the most. It's not a choice, you either do it or you don't. When I was about eighteen, I tried to convince myself that I had to study something more common. So I studied radio, which I thought was close to music but it's not at all, and marketing - I actually wanted to be a graphic designer. Always keeping some rock and improv projects, I worked as a web programmer/designer for almost ten years. And that's how I made my musical education: I had money to buy CDs and books, so I was digging and digging and reading and reading and learning. This is how I discovered about electroacoustic composition. As a personal challenge - I didn't have any classical theoretical education, after all - I decided to go to University and return to my real love: music. After a couple of courses on musical history, I found out about the electroacoustic program. I didn't understand this music, but I was incredibly curious about it. So I did my Bachelors degree, and then a master degree with Robert

Normandeau at Université de Montréal. I am now starting a PhD at the University of Huddersfield in the UK under the direction of Dr. Pierre Alexandre Tremblay and Dr. Monty Adkins and it's really awesome! But I don't consider myself as an academic. For me, studies are just one part of life, which is always made up of different aspects. For me, it is really important to be involved in more than one circle so I don't get lost in a tiny micro-community or in one way of seeing things. I don't believe in academic thinking and I don't believe in profane thinking either. I think it is the relationships between all the different visions that ultimately make life and the arts interesting.

With its Honorary mention at the Prix Ars Electronica 2009, Les arbres must have been a first highlight in your career.

It was a huge highlight indeed! I wouldn't say it was the first one because there are little highlights every day, it all depends on your need for big things. Personally, I am still fascinated by small events. Les arbres was a long and really organic process which had more to do with sensuality than cerebrality. At one point, an artist will always have to verbalize his work so it looks more intellectual than it really is. I could even say that Les arbres is my first work in a way because it all started in 2004, quite at the beginning of my electroacoustic introduction. As I was super-occupied with school and with a job to pay tuition fees, I was working on Les arbres really slowly, sharing the time between all the others obligations. And as I was at the beginning of my learning curve, I quickly grew dissatisfied with the music I was composing. So all the movements have changed quite a lot over this five year process. I was testing all of it with Urban9, the one I gave total confidence to judge a piece of music, because music is not his job, he just feels it, he doesn't think about it. I think I could say that if I am doing the kind of music I am doing today, I owe it mainly to Urban9. When I met him, I was still working in the web and there was this awesome experimental music shop called feu-Esoteric just in front of our office. I was more purist in those days, looking for only "serious" art. Urban9, on the other hand, was listening to a kind of glitch-drone stuff that I wasn't into at all and he made me discover all this wonderful music. Urban9 and I were exchanging some images and sounds and while sharing this, the work was slowly evolving into what it has become today. No matter what, it's with this project that I found that I could merge my pop side and my electroacoustic side.

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Would it be correct to refer to *Les arbres* as a catalyst in many respects?

I've always been producing like crazy actually. I just can't help it: making music is like breathing. When *Les arbres* was published, it was already an old project for me in a way. One always wants to search further and further. Between the first draft of *Les arbres* in 2004 and the mention at Prix Ars in 2009, I had the time to work a lot and to make contact and to learn and to grow and now I feel that everything is coming together and is going well. But of course *Les arbres* brought a lot of positive effects - even though they are not as tangible as one could hope.

What have been your main compositional challenges over the past two years?

One of my main challenges was ... to find myself! I cyclically get lost, every three or four years. Most of my works between 2005 and 2008 were collaborative. After an overdose of collaboration, I wanted to work alone. There will always be collaborators, but in the last projects, I decided to live alone with the challenges of creation. *courant.air* had its load of challenges: after two albums of improvised folk/electronic with Simon Trottier, I wanted to bring this amalgam of timbres into a strictly compositional field. How to achieve this? How to work with an interpreter of a non-classical formation, with the forces and weakness of a more intuitive oriented playing? How to write a score for this kind of work? I've never written scores before, I barely read and write traditional music. Especially, how to write the electroacoustic part? How to stay conceptually coherent when, on the one hand, I want to play with more noisy textures, and on the other, I am working with completely acoustic timbres? The most important challenge, and this is what I am still working on and I am not rushed in finding some answers if there are some at all, is how to make an electronic music performance appealing, interesting, coherent gesturally and musically thrilling? How to make a "spectacle" with electroacoustic music? I will not be the first one trying to find some elements of answers. But I am still rarely convinced with the shows I see so I want to engage myself more and more in this way after some years of work oriented for fixed media.

In the preface to *Les arbres*, you mentioned the "abolition of boundaries" as one of your main goals. Do you, in sync with the old saying that "all art aspires to music", believe that sound has the strongest potential of all forms of art in achieving that elimination of borders?

I would never say that sound is the art form, not in an absolute way. Of course it is for me because it suits my personal interests. But this is only a personal matter. Besides, as soon as you get into a concert hall or exhibition space, it's not just about sound anymore. It's a ritual, it's a show, it's always a multi-sensorial, multi-aspect experience. Shows are great. But this is maybe why I love so much to compose for a fixed medium - CD, digital, DVD - because I know that some of the audience will be appreciating the work quietly, in the intimate setting of their homes, not expecting any spectacular show but with the more modest aim of simply listening to the music. Besides, there are art forms that impress me even more. In dance, for example, all you basically need is a body. Most of the shows are complex and involve music, stage design and lighting. But in its most simple form, when the movement of a body can move me, this is a truly amazing thing.

Concerning the abolition of boundaries, we come back again to that question about this giant toolbox, this "field of possibilities". I just don't see the point of segregation. The world is rich and sharing this richness is about all we can do here. A couple of years ago, when I was active in different fields of sound creation, I was putting all my different approaches into different boxes made for different sensibilities, different people. But over the years, those different approaches have all collapsed into one entity made of various components, that still can be identified as one single thing. I hope you are following me?

Perhaps one could say that *courant.air* and *The Dancing Deer* are good examples for this?

Yes, they are combining tonal perspective alongside some noise, drones, clicks, acousmatic gesture, pop and rock influences. When I did *Les arbres* for instance, this was for me my "pop" side. But now it just doesn't matter to me anymore to have different sides. It just what it is and sometimes it's closer to purer forms like the pieces included

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on usure.paysage. And sometimes it's a combination of its own unique blends. But I will no longer separate my more "pop-experimental" compositions and my more "serious" ones. It's all related to each other in one way or another. I even like to shut my brain off altogether from time to time. This is where playfulness resides, I guess. The Dancing Deer is close to my very first solo release called *Ail et l'eau faille*. There is something really light and loose in those works. Something that tells me that I am not taking myself too seriously even though I am seriously involved in everything I do. Music, life, seriousness, playfulness ... it's all a matter of equilibrium.

And still, despite aiming at the eradication of borders, your artistic world is not without its delimitations.

I guess there is always a frontier after all? I guess we could say I am working in the contemporary world of the arts, not around works of previous centuries. I am not creating dance or theater shows, even though I am thinking a lot about how to perform electronic music in some of my latest projects like *La chambre des machines*. Oh! And there I said it ... I said "electronic music" in the previous sentence. But I never tell myself: I will make electronic music today. I just create music without having to restrain myself with this or that. The better tool to achieve what I want to is the computer. All the terms to describe styles of music are so problematic. Electronic music is rarely electronic and is often filled with acoustic or analogue sounds. Any pop artist is doing electroacoustic music, semantically speaking, because they are using acoustic sources, processed acoustic sources and electronic sources. And what is the difference between sound art, audio art, *musique concrète*, acousmatic music?

As you can see, I am not in a good position to label myself. I guess there are people better equipped at doing this. But my fundamental objective would probably be to make music that feels human despite the fact that is made with a computer. The fundamental aesthetic of my work will probably always rely somewhat on the tension between conceptual rigidity and intuition.

IAN HAWGOOD, HOMENORMAL.COM (UK), DECEMBER 14TH, 2010

« one of the brightest talents of the musical and art worlds today »

A few years ago now, I first got really really into the music of two artists who I consider to this day to be the two most talented and capable artists around. Not a lot has changed since then as they have continued to operate on their own level, in their own way, quietly but steadily releasing incredibly detailed works of beautiful organic instrumentations. The two artists in question are offthesky (Jason Corder) whose record 'Hiding Nature' we released earlier in the year, and Nicolas Bernier. The first work I ever heard by this fabulous Canadian artist was also one of my favourites that year (2007) - the excellent 'Objet abandonné en mer' on the rather special German label 12rec. The album was a collaboration with the folk guitarist Simon Trottier and the perfectly balanced melding of electronic and organic just blew me away. Not too long after this I also released my album 'Enfants Ruraux' on the same label, and they recommended using the same artist and designer for my release - the irrepressible Urban9. Through this, Nicolas and I soon got in contact and have become firm friends since then.

Over a year ago now, Nicolas sent me some work he had on the go - one being a full album of processed piano and cello pieces which will be released by Home Normal early next year, the other The Dancing Deer EP. I was against the idea of releasing an EP on Home Normal at the time, but then of course I went and put it on. Within two minutes I'd ripped my headphones off and whacked it into the studio speakers, pumping up the volume until the walls shook and my ears nearly bled. My initial reaction was to scratch my head in confusion at how an artist like Nicolas, so talented at processing and layering organic work so beautifully, had come up with the most amazingly powerful (dare i say kind of 'rocking') pop *concrète* collage if you will. Its an

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astonishing, perfectly formed work which slowly builds up using spoken vocals, crisp thin beats, melodic keys and increasing noise, only to be cut down to its bare vocal bones then back in with a wham of guitars above all else. It rocks out basically and just proves that this award-winning artist and director (he is the founder of the sound art microorganism Ekumen, member of the media art organization Perte de Signal, the art director of R Seaux, a major Canadian electroacoustic concert producer AND his works have been awarded and broadcast in festivals around the world including Prix Ars Electronica (Austria), AKOUSMA (Canada), Mutek (Canada), DotMov Festival (Japan) and Transmediale (Germany)!) is one of the brightest talents of the musical and art worlds today, even if the more mainstream world doesn't know it (yet).

— ALAIN BRUNET, LA PRESSE (CA), 25 OCTOBRE, 2010

« humaniser l'image qu'on a de la musique électroacoustique »

Akousma: la niche s'annonce pleine

«Cette programmation a pour objet d'humaniser l'image qu'on a de la musique électroacoustique, que plusieurs croient froide et cérébrale... J'ose affirmer que cette musique peut être aussi sensuelle et organique», tient à souligner Nicolas Bernier, compositeur et directeur artistique du petit festival Akousma qui se tient quatre soirs d'affilée au Studio Hydro-Québec du Monument National.

L'an dernier, ce modeste festival consacré aux musiques électroniques dites sérieuses a fait salle comble pour la majorité de ses programmes. C'est dire l'intérêt que soulève cette niche longtemps considérée comme minuscule. Depuis le milieu du siècle précédent, en fait, les musiques électroniques ne cessent de gagner du terrain dans l'imaginaire musical et ainsi s'inscrire dans les répertoires populaires et/ou sérieux.

Ce mercredi, Akousma présentera d'abord une soirée deep listening, expression que préconise l'octogénaire Pauline Oliveiros pour qualifier un mode de vie fondé sur l'écoute de tous les environnements sonores que fréquente quotidiennement l'humain. Considérée comme une pionnière des musiques électroacoustiques aux États-Unis, la compositrice vient à Montréal y présenter deux fresques qu'elle avait créé pour bande seule, numérisées depuis... la disparition des bandes magnétiques!

Au cours de cette même soirée sous le thème deep listening, le compositeur torontois Mitchell Akiyama (qui a vécu quelques années à Montréal) fera son retour sur scène au terme d'un cycle académique - il vient de terminer un doctorat sur le «field recording». Ses œuvres électroniques seront accompagnées d'un quatuor à vent, composé des clarinettistes Philippe Lauzier et Lori Freedman ainsi que des flûtistes Guy Pelletier et Geneviève Deraspe.

La soirée de jeudi sera acousmatique, une spécialité de l'organisme Réseaux qui produit Akousma; les œuvres de Mathew Adkins et Martin Bédard seront alors diffusées en «multiphonie» (traduction libre de notre interviewé du terme anglais surround), et ce dans l'obscurité totale.

Sous le thème machines, le programme de vendredi s'annonce le plus spectaculaire de tous. Le compositeur Martin Messier y présentera une œuvre pour huit machines à coudre reliées à des procédés informatiques permettant moult extrapolations et traitements sonores, tant sur le plan des textures que de ceux du rythme. Le programme sera complété d'une œuvre composée par Félix-Antoine Morin sur un «orgue sirène», instrument inventé par son collègue Jean-François Laporte qu'il combine avec des musiques numérisées.

Nommée folktronica, la soirée de samedi mettra en relief le jeune compositeur allemand Alexander Schubert (alias Sinebag), qui s'applique à lier sons de synthèse et sons tirés d'instruments acoustiques ou analogiques. Se joindront au musicien le clarinettiste Philippe Lauzier et le percussionniste Michel F Côté. Le même soir, Nicolas Bernier proposera son propre travail, qui inclura le guitariste Simon Trottier, membre de l'excellent groupe canadien Timbre Timbre.

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Les plus mordus d'Akousma se présenteront dimanche à la salle Eastern Bloc (angle Clark et Jean-Talon), pour y entendre la musique de Sébastien Roux dans le cadre de la soirée B.

La niche électroacoustique s'annonce pleine, inutile de l'ajouter.

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FABIEN DEGLISE, LE DEVOIR (CA), 27 OCTOBRE, 2010

« plus proche des humains qui permettent aux machines de s'exprimer »

Des machines et des hommes

Le festival Akousma veut renouer avec l'humanité de la musique électro

Plus éclaté, moins académique, mais surtout plus proche des humains qui permettent aux machines de s'exprimer. Pour sa 7e édition, le festival automnal de musiques électroacoustiques et électroniques Akousma, qui prend son envol ce soir au Monument-National, poursuit la remise en cause de ses fondations par l'exploration de nouvelles contrées sonores. Des univers où les créateurs vont se retrouver cette année au centre de leurs créations... et de la scène.

«On n'oublie pas l'essence de la musique électroacoustique, qui est plus faite pour s'écouter que pour se montrer sur scène, lance le directeur artistique de l'événement, Nicolas Bernier. Mais l'objectif cette année est aussi de remettre l'humain au coeur de la musique. C'est mon dada. Et ce n'est pas incompatible.»

Le slogan de la cuvée 2010 — «Vive le son vivant!» — donne le ton. Et jusqu'à dimanche, il va prendre la forme d'un défilé d'une dizaine

d'alchimistes de la musique en mode binaire d'ici et d'ailleurs. Des noms? Pauline Oliveros, cette Texane de 78 ans, fondatrice du mouvement «deep listening» qui, pour la première fois, débarque à Montréal avec le minimalisme de ses «tape musics», Mitchell Akiyama et son quatuor à vent électronique, ou encore Alexander Schubert, qui vient livrer les grandes lignes de son Sinebag avec des musiciens en chair et en os, le clarinettiste Philippe Lauzier et le percussionniste Michel F. Côté.

Dans cette programmation qui met à l'honneur la musique improvisée, la musique actuelle et la musique électroacoustique dans tous ses états, le créateur Martin Messier intrigue forcément avec son orchestre composé de... huit machines à coudre du siècle dernier. Quant à Félix-Antoine Morin, c'est Le Château de cordes, sa dernière aventure, dont il va ouvrir la porte, quelques jours avant le courant.air de Nicolas Bernier, une composition pour guitare acoustique.

«On continue de mélanger les genres, de décloisonner, pour atteindre un plus large public [la dernière édition d'Akousma s'est jouée à guichet fermé], résume le directeur artistique. Nous ne voulons pas que cette musique soit seulement le fait d'un petit groupe, on veut intéresser tous ceux qui s'intéressent aux sons et aux frontières en mouvement entre les disciplines», et ce, en rupture avec l'époque, en tournant le dos à la Toile.

Oui, Akousma fait rayonner l'électro. Mais, dans un paradoxe étonnant, pas question toutefois d'y trouver des créations qui exploitent l'Internet, son vaste réseau et ses promesses de transcender le temps et l'espace. «Ça n'aurait pas de sens, dit Bernier. Les artistes invités font un travail sur le son et sur la qualité de l'écoute. La sensualité de ces œuvres ne survivrait pas aux contraintes techniques du Web.» On l'avait compris: l'humanité d'une proposition artistique, c'est souvent en personne qu'elle se savoure.

NICOLAS BERNIER ARTICLES AND INTERVIEWS

CHARLES PRÉMONT, LIEN MULTIMÉDIA (CANADA), 21 JANVIER 2010

« créer de la musique électronique à partir d'objets »

Martin Messier et Nicolas Bernier présentent La chambre des machines au festival Transmédiale de Berlin

Dire que Martin Messier et Nicolas Bernier sont occupés ces jours-ci est un euphémisme. Dévouant tout leur temps à leur création dans le Rustine_Lab de Perte de Signal, c'est de justesse que Le Lien MULTIMÉDIA a réussi à les asseoir dans un café pour en savoir un peu plus sur leur nouveau projet audio : La chambre des machines. « Martin et moi donnions nos spectacles l'un après l'autre lors des Escales improbables, explique Nicolas Bernier. On s'est rendu compte qu'on avait plusieurs points en commun dans nos démarches et on parlait de faire éventuellement un projet ensemble. Quand le festival Transmediale nous a approchés chacun de notre côté pour qu'on vienne présenter certaines de nos œuvres, on leur a proposé d'en créer une nouvelle en collaboration pour l'occasion. »

La chambre des machines constitue un hommage aux futuristes du début du vingtième siècle. « Ils ont été parmi les premiers à faire de la musique à partir de bruits, poursuit Nicolas Bernier. Nous avons deux machines qui sont amplifiées sur lesquelles nous jouons et nous ajoutons des sons électroniques de l'ordinateur pour créer notre œuvre. » L'artiste qui construit les machines des deux compères est Alexandre Landry qui a pratiquement obtenu une carte blanche des deux artistes pour créer leur boîte respective.

Cette démarche, de créer de la musique électronique à partir d'objets, n'est pas nouvelle pour les deux artistes. Cependant, les collaborateurs s'entendent pour dire que ce projet marque un tournant dans leur utilisation des objets musicaux. S'il est vrai que les deux artistes ont déjà eu la volonté de n'utiliser que les bruits produits par leurs engins, ce n'est plus le cas avec La chambre des machines. « Le son acoustique est toujours là, explique Martin

Messier. On l'amplifie par l'ordinateur et on utilise aussi nos machines comme contrôleur. Ma programmation permet de détecter des attaques musicales et de déclencher des séquences de sons préprogrammées. Plutôt que d'être puriste dans notre approche, on a voulu d'abord servir l'œuvre musicale »

Poursuivant ainsi leur « combat » contre les spectacles de musique électronique qui se passent derrière l'écran d'un ordinateur, les deux artistes composent d'arrache-pied avant la tenue de leur première mondiale à Berlin, le 6 février 2010. « L'important, pour nous, c'est de montrer la relation entre le geste et la musique, explique Nicolas Bernier. On apprend à jouer ensemble et on passe nos après-midi à essayer de nouveaux trucs. »

Une technique de composition qui nécessite de nombreuses heures de programmation. Martin Messier étant le maître d'œuvre du duo dans ce domaine, il ne compte plus les heures passées devant l'interface d'Ableton Live ou de Max/Msp. « Ce qu'on veut convoyer, c'est notre amour de la musique électronique, explique-t-il. C'est une extension de notre imaginaire en plus d'être une performance. Nos boîtes, ce sont vraiment des instruments de musique. On apprend encore à les apprivoiser et notre relation avec elles ne va que s'améliorer avec le temps. »

Les deux artistes sont très contents des résultats de leur projet jusqu'à maintenant et sont très excités de partir au festival Transmédiale pour le présenter. Pour le moment, il n'y a pas de prestations de prévues immédiatement à leur retour, mais ils espèrent tous deux que les directeurs des festivals d'arts électroniques montréalais seront impressionnés par leur performance. Une petite tournée des maisons de la culture est tout de même au programme durant la saison 2010-2011.

NICOLAS BERNIER ARTICLES AND INTERVIEWS

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NATHALIE BACHAND, INTER, ART ACTUEL NO. 103 (CANADA)
SEPTEMBRE, 2009

« Il s'agissait ici pour l'artiste de manœuvrer la machine, véritable boîte à bruits ... »

Du bruit au Mois Multi [et quelques considérations sur le son]

[...] Il est 20 h, le 19. Une deuxième soirée de L'art des bruits s'ouvre avec *boîte*. de Nicolas Bernier. Il s'agissait ici pour l'artiste de manœuvrer la machine, véritable boîte à bruits (construite par Alexandre Landry) contenant une série de mécanismes à partir desquels le son était improvisé, généré en direct ainsi que joué par l'entremise d'une partition. Cet Intonarumori, à l'image de la « machine » de Russolo, évoquait tout à coup la Pandora électromécanique des bruits. Cette stratégie de l'instrument inventé, combinant plusieurs systèmes de production de sons, permet ainsi d'atteindre un spectre harmonique unique, ce qui précisément fut le cas. Il s'agissait également d'instaurer un dialogue entre deux boîtes, la performance ne reposant pas exclusivement sur la manœuvre de l'Intonarumori, mais aussi sur le contenu de la boîte noire, celle de l'ordinateur. Or, une autre boîte entrait alors en scène, celle de l'espace de diffusion. En effet, le son étant diffusé en quadriphonie par quatre haut-parleurs situés aux quatre coins de la salle, nous-mêmes étions dans la boîte d'une certaine façon, dans le son et non simplement face au son, comme pourrait le supposer une présentation frontale. Cet aspect – d'ailleurs cher aux compositeurs de musique concrète, comme on l'a vu précédemment – est fondamental dans la pratique de Nicolas Bernier, pour qui le travail de spatialisation sonore a presque autant d'importance que celui de la performance même. [...]

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SIMON BOMANS, GOÛTE MES DISQUES (BELGIQUE) 3
SEPTEMBRE 2009

« ... la nouvelle coqueluche electronica/ambient/
électroacoustique. »

Dossier : Nicolas Bernier

Depuis qu'elle a découvert Nicolas Bernier avec Les Arbres, la rédaction de Goûte Mes Disques en pince grave pour la nouvelle coqueluche electronica/ambient/électro-acoustique. À un point tel qu'il était temps pour nous de lui rendre un semblant d'hommage au travers d'un dossier non-exhaustif consacré à l'univers, aux projets et aux nombreuses collaborations de ce jeune Canadien.

Artiste polyvalent et créateur du collectif Ekumen, Nicolas Bernier offre depuis des années déjà son talent à qui veut l'entendre, luttant dans l'ombre au sein d'une frange musicale trop vite qualifiée d'« austère ». Et malgré son jeune âge, Nicolas n'a rien à envier à ses maîtres de toujours, bien trop occupé à perfectionner une vision musicale toujours aux limites de la sculpture sonore, de la peinture musicale. Bien plus qu'un simple acte altruiste, vous parler en ces quelques pages de ce coup de cœur instantané relevait essentiellement de la mission morale. Car tout auditeur qui se respecte mérite bien de croiser un jour la route de ce genre d'artistes, à la fois généreux, mystérieux et portés sur l'avenir. Le plus tôt sera le mieux sans doute, et il nous paraissait inconcevable de garder ce trésor caché pour nous seuls.

Amateurs de folk, de grande musique électroniques ou d'ambiances dessinées au scalpel : vous voici donc aux portes d'un monde que beaucoup s'accordent déjà à qualifier d'inédit et d'exceptionnel. Quatre chroniques, une interview et quelques photos, voilà qui constituera ici le kit nécessaire et suffisant pour entrer de manière sereine dans l'univers du génie d'Ottawa. D'avance, merci à lui.

NICOLAS BERNIER ARTICLES AND INTERVIEWS

Si tu devais décrire ton parcours en quelques dates-clés pour les lecteurs qui ne te connaissent pas encore?

1977 : naissance à Ottawa, dans une région conservatrice du Canada où l'accès aux pratiques artistiques contemporaines est difficile.

1991 : un début de parcours typique : j'ai 15 ans et je découvre la guitare électrique en cette époque de l'apothéose du "grunge". La dépendance à la musique est immédiate et je suis rapidement attiré vers TOUS ses styles : classique, jazz, folk, hip hop, grindcore et toutes les musiques underground.

1998 : déménagement à Montréal où je découvre enfin les musiques que j'aurais tant rêvé rencontrer dans ma région natale. Je suis batteur depuis quelques années et m'oriente désormais vers le drum'n'bass organique, le post-rock et l'improvisation libre. Je vais pour la première fois à un concert de musique électroacoustique. Je n'y comprends absolument rien... mais j'en veux plus! Étant du genre à être attiré vers les choses qui me troublent, je décide d'étudier cette musique.

2001-2009 : études en composition électroacoustique à l'Université de Montréal. Depuis ce jour, je navigue entre les courants "sérieux" et "populaire" de la musique, en multipliant sans retenue les différents types de projets : vidéomusique, installation musicale sous-marine, musique concrète, performance etc. «Unclassifiable» comme dirait probablement la catégorie de iTunes.

Tes productions sont souvent teintées de folk et de musiques lyriques, comment décrirais-tu ta musique à des gens qui n'ont jamais entendu tes productions?

Mon principal credo c'est de jumeler mes deux mondes : une légèreté que l'on peut retrouver dans la «pop» (dans le sens large du terme) et une rigueur que l'on retrouve dans les musiques «classiques». Bien que cela soit mon signe distinctif, il n'en demeure pas moins que mes activités sont beaucoup plus larges, mais toujours au sein de la grande catégorie connue sous le vocable «expérimental». Mes projets peuvent être parfois plus noise, minimalistes, instrumentaux, conceptuels, improvisés ou ultra-écrits. Malgré cet éclectisme, je

tâche de garder une grande cohérence dans chacun des projets, qui se nourrissent les autres des autres et me procurent un équilibre qui m'est essentiel.

On voit qu'il t'est impossible de te séparer d'instruments acoustiques. Comment envisages-tu le lien qui unit organique et électronique?

J'ai effectivement un attachement profond aux instruments acoustiques. Pas étonnant : ce sont des sources sonores qui ont été éprouvées par des siècles de lutheries! Comme je suis fasciné par le son, les instruments acoustiques me fascinent tout autant que les autres sons sur lesquels se construisent souvent les musiques électroacoustiques.

Il reste que mon intérêt vers les musiques électroacoustiques est né grâce à la possibilité de collectionner des sons concrets, des fragments de vie seuls mon microphone et moi sommes les témoins en direct. De prendre ces photographies sonores et d'en faire de la musique relevaient, et relèvent encore, pour moi, de la pure poésie, voire de la magie.

Je n'utilise jamais de sons purement synthétiques dans mes musiques. Tous les sons, qu'ils soient instrumentaux ou non, proviennent originellement du réel terrestre. C'est très old school comme démarche, très «musique concrète», mais j'ai un blocage psychologique avec l'utilisation des sons synthétiques qui sortent de toutes pièces de l'ordinateur. Ce qui compte pour moi, c'est qu'il n'y ait AUCUNE LIMITE dans la création. Des barrières, je n'en veux pas. Les matières électroacoustiques sont pour moi une extension du réel. Elles permettent la création d'extension à l'infini des matières qui proviennent du réel. Une de mes intentions est de faire ressentir l'humain derrière ma musique, non pas seulement la machine. Cela est très important pour moi même si la musique est indubitablement fabriquée à l'aide d'un ordinateur. Cette humanité ne passe pas seulement par l'utilisation d'instruments acoustiques, mais par n'importe quel objet acoustique qui ne nous semble pas sortir d'un synthétiseur.

On peut souvent penser à Fennesz à l'écoute de ta musique. Comment envisages-tu les rapports qui unissent les musiciens

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de cette scène? Quelles sont tes sources d'inspirations, tant sur le plan musical qu'imaginaire?

Je suis inspiré par la matière, qu'elle soit sonore ou physique. Je suis surtout attiré par le vieux : objets antiques, théories obsolètes, livres désuets. Cela pour me rappeler que je ne vis pas que dans la virtualité aseptisée de mon outil de création informatique, mais bien dans un monde poussiéreux. L'inspiration me vient aussi de mes obsessions. Il y a toujours quelque chose qui m'obsède, alors j'y pense sans arrêt : j'écris, je lis jusqu'à ce que cette obsession se transforme en musique. Pendant des années, une de mes obsessions a été les arbres, titre d'un album. J'ai aussi été obsédé par les mots de William S. Burroughs sur lesquels j'ai fais une pièce de musique concrète lors d'une résidence au ZKM en Allemagne (<http://www.electrocd.com/fr/oeuvres/select/?id=10345>).

Dans la littérature se trouve d'ailleurs une inspiration récurrente. Je me promène beaucoup chez les libraires pour nourrir de nouveaux projets. Par exemple, je travaille en ce moment sur un projet inspiré par le vent. Un libraire m'a parlé de ce livre publié par l'École nationale supérieure d'architecture de Bretagne : « Vents : invention et évolution des formes ». Ce titre...c'est de la musique! Non? On y parle de comment le vent sculpte des formes, change le paysage, comment il détruit et construit. Voilà le genre de choses qui m'inspire! Cela dit, il reste que ce qui compte, c'est le résultat musical alors je tente de ne pas trop rester prisonnier des concepts et des lectures. Il faut savoir en déroger afin de laisser une liberté à la musique.

Concernant les liens entre les musiciens, c'est un processus très organique. Untel inspire untel, qui inspire untel. Le grand cycle de la vie.

Comment t'est venue l'idée de créer un micro-label/collectif de producteurs en ces temps difficiles de crise du disque? Comment se passe la "mise au monde" d'un disque sur Ekumen?

Au départ Ekumen.com était un site Web personnel où je parlais de mes projets. Comme je multipliais les collaborations, je trouvais frustrant de ne pouvoir parler que de moi j'ai donc voulu faire profiter

mon entourage de cet outils et ainsi faire découvrir leurs projets à tous. Ekumen est donc devenu une compagnie à la croisée du collectif, du label et du producteur. Les artistes d'Ekumen partagent tous cette ouverture d'esprit vers les formes d'arts et les esthétiques hybrides ce qui fait en sorte qu'il était plus facile de nous produire nous-mêmes que d'entrer dans un réseau déjà existant. Par exemple, je viens de terminer un disque qui est trop bruitiste pour certaines étiquettes et trop pop pour d'autres alors que je sais que pour Ekumen, cette hybridité est toute naturelle.

La mise au monde d'un disque sur Ekumen est des plus artisanales. Nous devons trouver du temps et de l'argent évidemment, et hop, nous allons de l'avant. J'ai la chance de collaborer depuis une dizaine d'années avec un excellent artiste visuel qui nous aide beaucoup chez Ekumen : urban9 (urban9.com). Il partage notre sensibilité et est prêt à s'investir dans nos projets et cela nous aide énormément dans la production.

Ekumen est présentement dans une période de croissance et de structuration. Nous peaufinons l'organisation de la compagnie. C'est d'ailleurs désormais mes collègues Jacques Poulin-Denis et Martin Messier qui dirigent la compagnie. Je suis pour ma part nouvellement directeur artistique de la compagnie Réseaux (<http://www.reseauxconcerts.com/>), qui produit des concerts électroacoustiques, et je dois concentrer mes énergies sur ce nouvel emploi. C'est très excitant de pouvoir inviter à Montréal des artistes que j'aime!

Justement, pourrais-tu nous parler brièvement d'urban9 ?

C'est une histoire d'amitié. Ça fait mine de rien plus de 10 ans que l'on se connaît et on grandit ensemble, on s'influence beaucoup. J'ai rêvé d'être designer pendant des années...et je crois que lui rêverait d'être musicien!

Je l'ai rencontré dans une autre vie alors que je travaillais dans le Web. Ça a cliqué et depuis ce temps nous travaillons ensemble. Mais nous ne nous voyons que très rarement parce qu'il fait tout ça pour le plaisir, après le travail, et sa vie familiale est déjà très chargée. Il est bourré de talent mais travaille un peu dans l'ombre. Il fait plein de travail plastique, des gravures, des collages...mais personne ne le sait!

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As-tu le sentiment que ta musique est suffisamment mise en valeur? Que signifie pour toi le terme "expérimental" parmi les autres musiques disponibles? Souffres-tu du cliché "intellectualiste" qui entoure ta musique?

Comme c'est une question culturelle, je peux surtout parler du cas de ma métropole. À Montréal, nous sommes dans une phase que je qualifierais de «pop ou rien»! Au tournant des années 2000, je sentais un vif intérêt pour les musiques de création. Ces musiques «expérimentales» avaient une bonne présence dans certains festivals et dans les médias et, surtout, dans le public. Mais depuis quelques années, j'ai l'impression que Montréal s'est fait piéger par la popularité de ses groupes rock. Désormais c'est festif ou rien d'autre. Même la radio d'état est tombée dans le panneau. Mais bien que la différence musicale n'ait plus la cote, il reste ici beaucoup d'événements et d'artistes dit "expérimentaux". La scène demeure ultra-vivante. Il est pratiquement possible d'aller voir un concert par jour. Grâce à Internet, la communauté grandit et se soude plus facilement à l'échelle planétaire.

La musique «expérimentale», c'est pour moi sortir des terrains battus. Parce que l'on peut communiquer des messages d'autant plus riches quand l'on trouve une façon non conventionnelle de le faire plutôt que de marteler à l'auditeur sans cesse le même genre de phrases.

La collaboration avec d'autres artistes est devenue un mode courant de création chez toi, que recherches-tu dans la musique des autres? Que t'apportent-ils que ta musique n'ait déjà?

J'aime le travail d'équipe, l'échange humain. J'adore également le travail solo, mais c'est dans l'équilibre des deux que je trouve ma voie. Quand j'ai commencé la musique électroacoustique, la collaboration m'est venue naturellement de par ces années passées au sein de groupes rock où la création se faisait en collectif. Mais ce désir de collaborer vient surtout du fait que travailler seul devant un ordinateur, c'est moche. À deux c'est mieux! La collaboration apporte de l'humanité aux projets. Le travail à deux, c'est deux fois plus de matière grise et de stimulation... et de querelles qui sont essentielles à la remise en question. Quand je travaille avec Jacques Poulin-Denis, nous trouvons beaucoup de stimulation à souvent être en désaccord

sur les décisions à prendre ou sur les bases à établir au début d'un projet. Le travail avec le guitariste Simon Trottier est quant à lui complètement différent. Je ne pourrais jamais jouer de la guitare comme Simon, et lui ne pourrait jamais effectuer les traitements que je fais subir à sa musique : c'est donc un projet qui ne pourrait vivre autrement qu'en collaboration.

Quels sont les 5 disques préférés de Nicolas Bernier? Et les 5 plaisirs les plus coupables musicalement?

Ouf, nous voici à la question la plus difficile! Il est sûr que le mythe de l'intello dans son coin qui écoute que de la musique intello ça ne colle pas avec moi. Dans mes tops tu trouveras du ska, du trip-hop, du hip-hop et même du gros méchant math-métal (ou je ne sais trop comment ce style se nomme). Et je n'ai que du plaisir... je ne me sens coupable de rien. Par contre, ce que tu veux savoir je crois c'est que...je suis un méga-fan du Madonna des années 80!

Top « plus ou moins » 5 : POP

- Me, Mom & Morgantaler : Shiva Space Machine
- Portishead : Portishead
- The Roots : Things Fall Apart
- Loco Locass : Amour Oral
- Félix Leclerc : L'Encan
- Daft Punk : Discovery
- The Dillinger Escape Plan : Calculating Infinity
- Serge Gainsbourg : L'entièreté de sa discographie

TOP 5 : ÉLECTROACOUSTIQUES/CLASSIQUES

- Bernard Parmegiani : De Natura Sonorum
- Anton Webern : Musique De Chambre Pour Cordes
- Luc Ferrari : Toute la discographie
- Morton Feldman : The Viola In My Life
- Ryoji Ikeda : Test Pattern

As-tu un(e) affection/rejet particulière envers les autres scènes de la musique électronique (house, techno, abstract)? Pourrais-tu faire de la musique pour club?

NICOLAS BERNIER ARTICLES AND INTERVIEWS

Je n'ai pas de rejet pour des styles de musique en soi... mais il y a des musiques que je trouve mauvaises. C'est assez rare mais ça arrive. Je tente toujours d'aller chercher le bon dans ce que j'entends. Concernant les «étiquettes» apposées aux musiques, je suis complètement à l'écart. Je ne connais pas tellement les étiquettes alors je pourrais mal vous dire si j'apprécie un style plus qu'un autre. Je lisais récemment que mon disque "Les Arbres" était «néo-classique», ah bon? Je ne sais même pas différencier les styles de musiques électroniques mais, oui, je peux apprécier les musiques dansantes, bien que ce ne soit pas ce que je vais chercher à entendre naturellement.

Quels sont tes projets à court/moyen/long terme?

Il y en a toujours des tonnes! En voici quelques uns :

Courant.air : je travaille présentement sur une nouvelle pièce pour le festival Sound Travels à Toronto. La pièce inspirée par le vent dont je parlais plus tôt. C'est une pièce avec la guitare acoustique de Simon Trottier mais dans laquelle la musique est hyper-construite contrairement à nos projets précédents qui émanent de l'improvisation. Pour ce même festival, je prépare une version surround du projet «Les arbres».

Musique For Tuner, Strings and Other Things : mon prochain grand projet (à moyen terme) après Les Arbres. C'est le genre de projet où je ne m'impose aucune date de tombée, préférant prendre le temps qu'il faut. Projet dans lequel je tente de tracer une ligne entre sons acoustiques et électroniques, utilisant des sons de diapasons acoustiques qui sont mélangés à un violon et une viole de gambe. C'est un projet à caractère minimaliste mais toujours avec un côté très impur.

Musique de livre : un de mes plus anciens fantasmes musicaux est de faire la trame sonore pour un roman. J'y travaille présentement avec l'auteur Marc-André Moutquin.

The Dancing Deer. The Dead Deer. : court disque avec deux longues pièces que je viens tout juste de terminer. Un projet à la croisée du bruitisme et de la chanson électroacoustique. Disque toujours à la recherche d'une étiquette d'ailleurs... avis aux intéressés ;)

Je pars à l'instant pour une résidence de 2 mois au Banff Center où je pourrai me concentrer etachever mes nouveaux projets!

Pourra-t-on apercevoir Nicolas Bernier en Europe d'ici peu?

Je l'espère! J'ai fait quelques voyages en Europe ces dernières années mais cela fait un bout que je n'ai pas eu d'invitation...

—
RICHARD CAUMARTIN, LE MÉTROPOLITAIN (TORONTO, CANADA) 19 AOÛT, 2009

« Le génie de Nicolas Bernier se retrouve dans son art de créer des sons par le biais de la musique populaire. »

Nicolas Bernier et Simon Trottier hypnotisent les amateurs d'art sonore

La onzième édition du festival de l'art sonore de Toronto, Sound Travels 2009, se poursuit jusqu'au 31 octobre, de même que le troisième Symposium électroacoustique de Toronto. Parmi les artistes invités ce mois-ci, le fondateur du regroupement d'artistes Ekumen, Nicolas Bernier, a formé de nouveau un duo avec le guitariste d'avant-garde Simon Trottier.

Nicolas Bernier travaille avec un souci d'équilibre entre intellect et sensualité, entre matière organique et traitement numérique. Il a d'ailleurs produit avec Simon Trottier un album émergeant de la

NICOLAS BERNIER ARTICLES AND INTERVIEWS

rencontre de ces deux passionnés de composition électroacoustique, Objet abandonné en mer... et retrouvé en forêt.

Leur musique propose des ambiances feutrées qui se balancent entre le folk, le bruitage et des sons nouveaux au pouvoir hypnotique. On peut y entendre des rythmes hachurés et des paysages sonores se rapportant au thème de l'eau. Faisant côtoyer tradition et technologie, on y trouve d'un côté des mélodies influencées du folk américain et de l'autre des boucles électroacoustiques envirantes.

Le génie de Nicolas Bernier se retrouve dans son art de créer des sons par le biais de la musique populaire. Sa curiosité le mène rapidement à la composition électroacoustique qu'il aborde sous plusieurs formes : acoustique, électronique live, installation, vidéo, musique pour la danse, le théâtre et le cinéma.

Quant à lui, Simon Trottier joue dans plusieurs groupes de musique, genre instrumental. « J'ai toujours été curieux en musique, admet-il lors de son passage dans la capitale ontarienne le 7 août dernier. J'ai étudié le jazz à Montréal, et un programme de musique en électroacoustique à l'Université Concordia. Il y a un public à Toronto pour la musique improvisée comme par exemple au club Tranzac et au Music Gallery. »

Le musicien joue de temps à autre avec le groupe folklorique instrumental Timber Timbre de Toronto. « J'essaie d'amener des ambiances dans cette musique bluesfolk et indierock. Avec Nicolas, pour ce festival, je joue de la guitare dans deux de ses pièces. C'est une commande spéciale qu'il a eue de l'organisme New Adventures in Sound Art et du festival Sound Travels. La première pièce a été écrite pour notre duo électroacoustique et la deuxième est intitulée *Les arbres*, une adaptation pour guitare acoustique de 30 minutes. Nous faisons des collaborations de ce genre depuis sept ou huit ans. »

Simon Trottier est un musicien qui provient du courant de musique improvisé, dont les meilleurs se produisent au Festival des musiques actuelles de Victoriaville, à Suoni Per Il Popolo, un festival de musique avantgardiste et de libération expérimentale à Montréal. « Après le festival Sound Travels, je pars donner une série de concerts électro-acoustiques en novembre pour le Réseau des arts médiatiques Akousma, puis je retourne à Montréal et je pars en

tournée avec Timber Timbre au Canada et aux États-Unis », confirme le musicien.

En plus de plusieurs projets de collaboration avec des artistes de Montréal, Simon Trottier joue avec son nouveau duo Ferriswheel, formé en 2007 avec le pianiste montréalais Mathieu Charbonneau. Le résultat est un mélange étonnant mais magnifique de genres musicaux en passant par le piano classique, la guitare acoustique folklorique et le indierock.

—
KHADIJA CHATAR, L'EXPRESS (TORONTO, CANADA) 4 AOÛT, 2009

« Dans *courant.air*, il s'agit de combiner une couleur folk avec de la musique électroacoustique. »

Les artisans du son

Un festival électroacoustique sur le son environnant! Cela peut paraître assez futuriste et pourtant cela fait 11 ans qu'à Toronto se tient le Sound Travels Festival of Sound Art présenté par New Adventures in Sound Art. Les 7 et 8 août, au Artscape Wychwood Barns (601 rue Christie), plusieurs francophones, dont Nicolas Bernier, Annette Vande Gorne et Hervé Birolini, viendront divulguer leurs nombreux talents à jongler avec tout ce qui fait du bruit!

« Le 7 août, je vais présenter deux spectacles, *courant.air* et *Les arbres*, Dans *courant.air*, il s'agit de combiner une couleur folk avec de la musique électroacoustique que j'aurais déjà préalablement enregistrée et sur laquelle Simon Trottier jouera en plus de sa guitare acoustique », annonce le Montréalais Nicolas Bernier.

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Dans les enregistrements, M. Bernier a pensé à inclure quelques éléments spécifiques au titre, *courant.air*, comme le bruit du vent. «Le vent a été réellement l'inspiration. Je voulais que l'on se rende compte de son existence. C'est comme de la musique que l'on ne voit pas. Il est pourtant là, et il est créatif. Il fait des vagues et des formes», dit-il.

Son deuxième spectacle intitulé *Les arbres* est un projet qui lui tient très à cœur et pour lequel il a consacré de nombreuses années sans pour autant estimer l'avoir encore achevé. Cette pièce, généralement, présentée avec violon et violoncelle, aura une petite touche qui se veut plus «post-rock», comme Nicolas Bernier aime à le dire.

«Ce sera une nouvelle version avec guitare électrique. C'est un drôle de mix qui travaille sur le son et sa matière. Je dirais que c'est un peu intellectuel d'un côté et pas du tout de l'autre.»

Autre point, le concert *Les Arbres* sera présenté avec une projection vidéo réalisée par un certain Urban9, avec qui Nicolas Bernier travaille depuis longtemps sur le projet.

Pour permettre à l'auditeur d'entrer davantage dans l'univers électroacoustique, les deux musiciens, Nicolas Bernier et Simon Trottier, ont pensé à se placer en plein milieu de la salle. «Notre but c'est que le public ne s'attarde qu'au spectacle. Nous voulons qu'il entre dans le son sans se laisser divertir par les gestes des musiciens», confie-t-il pour terminer.

D'autres artistes francophones venus cette fois-ci d'un petit peu plus loin seront aussi présents au Artscape Wychwood Barns. [...]

—
SVEN SWIFT, 12REC BLOG (GERMANY) JUNE 22ND, 2008

« Six exquisite songs of crackling textures, harmonic drones and ambient extravaganza. »

Just another genius : Nicolas Bernier

In concert with **Simon Trottier**, **Nicolas Bernier** provided one of the most astonishing, most beautiful, most adventurous 12rec.-releases. Probably many of you remember "Objet Abandonné En Mer". The guys were quite active during the last year, working hard to bring "Objet" to stages around Montreal. But Bernier's musical output is far more versatile. In close cooperation with his own Ekumen collective and No Type Netlabel, several records had been published before. Now, two new records are available for download and CD-purchase.

First of all, there's a fine EP of collective improvisation music to fetch at No Type. Alongside **Alexis Bellavance** and **Érick d'Orion**, **Nicolas Bernier** provides expanded electro-acoustic collages, field-recordings and subtle ambient textures. Especially the first two tracks "Le Duel" and "Paysage" made me listen up. The art of this Montreal triple is to bring their academic sonic research to musical forms. Fresh! Second -and here we need a drum roll!- **Nicolas Bernier** published his first real solo record. The album is entitled "*Les Arbres*" and comes off as a CD with six fine poster cards by graphic designer **Urban9** (who also did the art for "Objet"). Six exquisite songs of crackling textures, harmonic drones and ambient extravaganza. "*Les Arbres*" is released at **No Type** but NO free download. This is what the label says about it: "Sonic landscapes and slow textures meet with precise articulations, all this resting on a minimal orchestration made of guitars, brass instruments, vibes, accordions and strings. In short: a stimulating record, a remarkable attention to detail and excellent production quality, making for an unfailingly rewarding listening experience."

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ANTOINE LÉVEILLÉE, VOIR (QUÉBEC, 21 FÉVRIER 2008)

Bernier+Trottier : « Une rencontre musicale inusitée qui cultive une esthétique particulière, amenant le folk à se métamorphoser dans une conception sonore impressionniste. »

Cabaret polymorphe

Sous la supervision d'Érik D'Orion, qui était en performance lors de la deuxième soirée du Cabaret audio dans le cadre du Mois Multi, l'électroacoustique s'est fait entendre sous toutes ses formes au café-bistro L'Abraham-Martin. Le duo noise Kathleen Kelly a entamé ces soirées thématiques décontractées qui se sont conclues avec le compositeur Nicolas Bernier et le guitariste Simon Trottier, concepteurs du disque *Objet abandonné en mer*. Une rencontre musicale inusitée qui cultive une esthétique particulière, amenant le folk à se métamorphoser dans une conception sonore impressionniste. Ces trois vitrines, qui n'avaient rien d'élitiste, auront été à l'image de leur sympathique commissaire.

CHARLES PRÉMONT, LIEN MULTIMEDIA (QUÉBEC), FÉVRIER 2000

« sur la frontière entre art traditionnel et numérique. »

Milliseconde Topographie : ni de l'art sonore, ni de la musique

Nicolas Bernier est un artiste multidisciplinaire. Entre compositions électroniques, vidéos et design, il tente de rejoindre plusieurs publics. Son duo, Milliseconde Topographie, qu'il complète avec Delphine Measroch, joue sur la frontière entre art traditionnel et numérique. « Il y en a qui font de l'art sonore, d'autre de la musique. Nous, on ne fait ni l'un ni l'autre, alors on ne « fit » jamais nulle part », explique, en guise d'introduction, Delphine Measroch.

Le « problème identitaire » de Milliseconde Topographie est bien réel. « Les critiques ne savent plus où donner de la tête. On envoie nos DVD à des critiques de musique, ils disent que c'est de l'art visuel, on l'envoie aux critiques d'art, ils pensent que nous sommes des musiciens », déplore, impuissant, Nicolas.

Tirer dans tous les sens, voilà ce qui l'allume. « J'ai besoin d'explorer plusieurs avenues pour être satisfait. C'est ce qui a bien marché avec Delphine : elle s'intéressait aussi beaucoup à d'autres formes d'expressions que simplement la musique. Dans le milieu, c'est très difficile de trouver son « âme soeur » artistique », avoue-t-il.

La technique utilisée par Milliseconde Topographie pour créer leurs sons traduit parfaitement leur goût du compromis. En utilisant le logiciel Max/MSP, Delphine et Nicolas enregistrent des instruments conventionnels, mais aussi des bruits de jouets, de vieilles caméras Super8 et des sons ambients, pour ensuite y ajouter des effets.

« Ce qui est super, c'est que l'on peut enregistrer la même note sur dix pistes différentes et mettre un effet sur chacune d'elle. Ça donne un son « électro », mais on s'arrange toujours pour que l'on

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reconnaisse la facture de l'instrument organique. On veut transcender la froideur de l'art numérique », explique Nicolas.

Le duo a vu le jour en 2004, peu après que Delphine et Nicolas se soient rencontrés sur les bancs d'école. Les deux étudiaient dans le programme de composition électro-acoustique de la faculté de musique de l'Université de Montréal. « Je décrirais Milliseconde comme de « l'électro-subtile », c'est quelque chose d'ambiant où l'on reconnaît des sons de plusieurs provenances », explique Nicolas en riant.

Mettant à profit leur goût pour le visuel, ils ont produit un DVD et même des « affiches à disques ». C'était en 2005. « C'était un projet que l'on a fait avec un ami artiste, Urban 9. Nous avions fait plusieurs affiches en sérigraphie et nous y avions collé des enveloppes avec un disque à l'intérieur. Urban partait le soir et les affichait un peu partout en ville. Les passants pouvaient ainsi se procurer notre musique », raconte Nicolas.

D'autres projets

Nicolas n'a pas que Milliseconde Topographie comme projet. Pour vivre, il compose, principalement pour le théâtre et la danse. « Je travaille présentement pour la compagnie de danse O Vertigo. Avant, j'ai fait UBU et Othello à l'usine C », assure-t-il.

Un autre de ses essais est un duo électro-folk qu'il complète avec Simon Trottier. « C'était écrit dans le ciel qu'on ferait de la musique ensemble. On a fini par trouver deux jours où l'on était libre, on s'est enfermé dans un studio et on a produit un album », raconte Nicolas sous les rires de Simon. Ils seront du « Mois Multi » à Québec, un festival d'art multidisciplinaire qui se déroule du 13 au 24 février prochain.

Les deux compères s'apprêtaient à livrer une performance lorsque le Lien les a rencontrés. Heure de tombée oblige, il fut impossible de rester pour livrer une critique en bonne et due forme. Vous pouvez vous faire votre propre idée en allant sur le site de 12rec, l'étiquette net qui les a pris sous leurs ailes.

—
ERIC HILL, SURGERY (CANADA), JANUARY, 2008

« Some of the best of 2007 »

Étude no.3 pour cordes et poulies

Interview

The worlds of electroacoustic composition and dance are not ones that most people would expect to overlap.... what circumstances bring them together here? Why do you think they fit?

For us, electroacoustic music is as relevant to dance as instrumental music, if not more. Music is music. Electroacoustic music can offer a lot of space, where instrumental music can be more independant and stand alone. This quality, the aptness for ambience, is appealing for choreographers who are looking to encompass their visual work with a supportive soundscape. The fundamental link that unites music and dance is movement. Music is movement. Dance and Electroacoustic music are the composition of gestures that exist in time and space and become meaningful when being shown and heard. Thus, the wonderful union.

Unlike many electroacoustic works these pieces have definite melodic and harmonic elements that move things along besides the acousmatic sound elements... is this more indicative of how the music is being used as an accompaniment to movement, or is it a primary aesthetic choice in itself?

The use of tonic sounds (notes) is definitely intentional, almost even a STATEMENT. Electroacoustic music went through a period of total rupture with music from the past, but we don't believe in this detachment. Our music is the result of many influences including instrumental melody and harmony. The other reason why you will find tonic sounds in our music is that we use a lot of musical instruments as source material in our music. Electroacoustic music is about timbre and sonority, but for us the most beautiful timbres are often

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those of instruments that were made to be musical. All other found sounds, only widen timbral possibilities and add a level of allusion.

Outside of the academic world it usually is associated with the general public often has difficulty grasping the concepts at play in electroacoustic music... do you believe there is a strength/purity in this distance from "pop culture" or is it too self-enclosed?

This is a BIG question that points to many things. We don't really identify with genres, but believe they are important. Even if it's not obvious in the music, these labels have a heavy influence on music. The Academics do research that always influence at a certain point in time pop music, just like pop music has always influenced "academic music". We only have to think of the loop now dominant in pop music, but discovered in a radio research studio. Personally we are very influenced by pop music. It's difficult not to be!

Do we believe in distance from pop culture? We believe in the quality of arts and research. That which aspires to bring music-creation further than pop music does. We believe in the purity of electroacoustic music, close to being the only type of music solely based on LISTENING and not on performance. You have to be a REAL music fan to listen to this type of music because the concept of performance is kept irrelevant. We don't believe in the confinement of Electroacoustic music. If we want to understand the world that surrounds us, we have to be able to dialogue with others who constitute it. Academicians would gain by attending more pop music concerts, and that pop culture (also secluded in its own world, even if the mass is larger) should experience more research-based art. Wouldn't that be wonderful!?!?

The Ekumen collective supports creativity across different art forms, primarily in digital media... do you think it's possible for creative groups to flourish exclusively online or is an extension into the real world also necessary? What are difficulties you've faced when exposing your works to a greater audience?

It's possible for a collective to flourish solely through the internet... but how awfully boring! The reason behind Ekumen is to show that we

are not just artists trapped in front of their machines. We also collaborate amongst ourselves, amongst humans.

Again, for a better world, human communication, physical communication is essential. Our work only begins to make sense when exposed in the REAL life, meeting REAL people, and not when we meander through the web.

— JULIE C. FORTIER, FORUM (QUÉBEC), 18 FÉVRIER 2007

« On retrouve à la base de l'œuvre de Milliseconde Topographie une volonté de faire entendre la musique de façon différente. »

Le duo Milliseconde Topographie veut sortir du cadre de la Milliseconde topographie
La formation participera à la soirée Spatio Lumino du Festival MNM

Lorsque Delphine Measroch et Nicolas Bernier présenteront les trois pièces de vidéo musicale qui composent leur œuvre Treelogy au Festival international Montréal/Nouvelles Musiques, le 24 février, ce sera en quelque sorte une première étape de leur collaboration qui sera bouclée.

Après avoir été vue sur tous les continents – du Japon à l'Argentine, en passant par l'Italie – et avoir récolté quelques prix au passage, Treelogy, composée en 2004-2005, sera présentée intégralement à

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Montréal pour la première fois.

Les pièces qui constituent Treelogy sont les premières que Delphine Measroch et Nicolas Bernier ont écrites ensemble. Les deux étudiants à la maîtrise en composition électroacoustique ont fondé leur duo, Milliseconde Topographie, il y a trois ans, alors qu'ils étaient au baccalauréat.

On retrouve à la base de l'œuvre de Milliseconde Topographie une volonté de faire entendre la musique de façon différente.

«Au départ, c'est la vidéo musicale qui est venue naturellement, mais nous avons fini par voir d'autres avenues pour atteindre cet objectif», explique Delphine Measroch. L'une de ces avenues est l'*«installation sonore»*, expérience qui offre la liberté au spectateur de capter une pièce musicale au moment où il le souhaite.

«Il y a un côté immersif dans l'installation qui n'existe pas dans l'expérience de concert, indique la musicienne. Et l'installation sonore offre plus d'autonomie au spectateur.» Milliseconde Topographie a présenté, en juin 2006, dans une piscine de Montréal, Sub.a.quat.ic, qui proposait l'écoute musicale sous l'eau, voire la différence entre celle-ci et l'écoute à la surface de l'eau. Les compositeurs avaient élaboré des trames différentes pour les deux expériences.

En septembre dernier, à l'occasion de la manifestation Cité invisible, qui visait à mettre en relief l'architecture et l'urbanité du bâtiment abritant la Grande Bibliothèque de Montréal, les deux étudiants ont été invités à réaliser un *«parcours sonore»*. En incorporant voix parlées, sons concrets et paysages sonores, ils ont fait se croiser des personnages de l'histoire actuelle et d'autres de l'histoire passée du quadrilatère qui accueille la bibliothèque.

En plus de ces installations sonores, Milliseconde Topographie s'est associé avec le graphiste Urban9 pour produire une trilogie d'affiches... avec fonds sonores! Cinquante copies de chaque affiche ont été apposées dans Montréal, chacune d'elles munie d'un disque de la musique composée par le duo à partir du visuel. Les disques disparaissaient au cours de la première nuit!

Avec ses projets, le duo touche un public différent de celui de la musique électroacoustique. Sub.a.quat.ic a attiré des gens des milieux

de l'architecture et des arts visuels, entre autres. Et le projet d'affiches a fait l'objet d'un article dans la revue Grafika.

«Nous ne travaillons pas nécessairement avec l'intention d'atteindre un public différent, mais, si c'est l'un des résultats, tant mieux. Nous sommes certainement favorables au dialogue entre les différents domaines», déclare Nicolas Bernier.

Retour aux sources

Même s'ils travaillent en composition électroacoustique, les deux musiciens tiennent à conserver une grande part de musique instrumentale dans leurs pièces. «Nous voulons des instruments acoustiques, des mélodies, des vrais bruits, des sons concrets. Je suis instrumentiste au départ et, à un moment donné, la sensation de jouer m'a manqué», lance Delphine Measroch, qui joue du piano, du violoncelle et de l'accordéon.

En plus d'avoir recours aux instruments dont ils jouent (Nicolas Bernier, lui, joue de la guitare), les membres du duo utilisent divers objets qui leur permettent d'obtenir les sons concrets qu'ils cherchent. Pour Sub.a.quat.ic, par exemple, ils se sont servi de jouets, de boîtes à musique et de vieux appareils photo.

«Oui, nous recourons à des logiciels, nous ne sommes pas complètement détachés des outils électroniques. Mais ces outils ne doivent pas nous engloutir. Parce qu'en bout de ligne nous ne voulons pas que notre musique sonne comme si elle sortait d'un ordinateur. Notre souhait est qu'on entende une musique produite par un être humain», conclut Nicolas Bernier.

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LATEEF MARTIN, NIGHTLIFE MAGAZINE (QUÉBEC), SEPTEMBER
2006

« If you happen to be at the right place at the right time, you'll find Ekumen: poster art with music attached. »

Ekumen Make Posters You Can Listen To

This is a city of posters. Posters for bands, movies, festivals, lost animals, planned orgies and pillow fights; you know, the standard stuff. On occasion though, there are some posters that promote nothing but art, with not so much as an email address or a signature. But leave it to Montreal's craziest to take it up a notch. If you happen to be at the right place at the right time, you'll find Ekumen: poster art with music attached. In the form of a CD, you can bring home electro-acoustic music that creates tension and grace; abstract atmospheres in the haze of urban landscapes, mixing piano, voice, cello and guitar with samples, courtesy of Milliseconde Topographie. Urban9, on the other hand, combine modern design with antique pictures to create the visual counterpart. So don't hesitate if you see a CD attached to a poster. Pluck it off and run. You're supposed to.

NIGHTLIFE: This is a great, original urban concept. What inspired you to create it?

Nicholas Bernier of Milliseconde Topographie: Our work is usually entirely digital. We wanted to create something "real," something that people can touch. We (Milliseconde Topographie and Urban9) have been working together for a long time and wanted to try something different, mixing still images and music instead of moving images and music.

Any soundposter groupies yet and, if so, can you gimme their emails and say I'm the Soundposter Pimp Daddy of them all?

It would be better if I gave them your email. I don't want them to yell at me.

How many posters/CDs do you do in a run?

We look at the weather for the week, take a nice Sunday night and post two batches of 25 and sell the rest on our website. We let those live for about two months then do another run. You can still see Poster No.1 and Poster No.2 at some places around the Mile-End area, but the CDs only last one night! We always go back to the crime scene the day after and the CDs are always gone.

Isn't this bloody expensive?

Indeed.

Will you do a series based on different neighbourhoods, bagel shops, coffee shops and the smell of dirty old men walking their cats?

For now, our theme is more poetic than concrete. This series of three posters each show a character. This character is older on the first poster and will get younger by the third. The poster itself is also a representation of time passing as it is washed away by rain and poster removers.

How have other poster people been reacting to all of this?

We don't have much contact in the poster community but the feedback we received so far has been really cool. There's an art teacher who goes on the street with a pot of water and takes her favourite street art home. She probably has an amazing collection. Crazy...She talks about our project in her classes.

Any plans on opening for Radiohead or Bjork?

We were there man, at the last Radiohead concert. We were playing air guitar in the back. It was like being on the stage with them... yaaaaah! I think we could be a good fit with Mum though. This excellent band from Iceland is one of our inspirations.

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Will you have remixes by Kanye West and Timbaland with interpretations by HVW8 entitled the 'Gritty Series'? Wow! How could you have guessed! The Kanye West remix will be on the air across all the radios of the universe next month! Ha.

—
FRANÇOIS NADON, ICI MONTRÉAL #9:36 (QUÉBEC), 8 JUIN 2006

« Milliseconde Topographie nous invite à plonger avec lui dans une expérience sonore hors du commun! »

Sub•a•quat•ic : reportage en direct

À l'heure où l'on fait ses premières longueurs dans la piscine, le duo Milliseconde Topographie nous invite à plonger avec lui dans une expérience sonore hors du commun. Commandé à Nicolas Bernier et Delphine Measroch par les Réseaux des arts médiatiques, Sub•a•quat•ic est une performance qui se déroulera simultanément à l'extérieur et à l'intérieur de l'eau. Les deux musiciens proposent à l'auditeur-nageur d'écouter la trame musicale qui est à la surface de l'eau ou celle qui est submergée dans une piscine. Une expérience sur la relation entre le corps et la musique. Certainement l'événement musical le plus inusité de l'année. Notez que le tuba est fourni, mais pas le maillot de bain.

Piscine – Centre sportif UQAM. Ven. 9 juin. 20h30 et sam. 10 juin. 19h. 7\$-12\$. www.rien.qc.ca

—
RÉJEAN BEAUCAGE, LA SCENA MUSICALE #11:9 (QUÉBEC), 1ER JUIN 2006

« le public, immergé, pourra entendre la musique diffusée à l'extérieur de l'eau »

Concert (?) étonnant que celui-là! Les codirecteurs artistiques de Réseaux nous ont souvent plongés dans le noir pour leurs concerts acousmatiques Rien à voir, voilà qu'ils veulent nous plonger... dans l'eau! Le projet du duo Milliseconde topographie (Nicolas Bernier et Delphine Measroch), issu du milieu de la musique acousmatique, envahira en effet la piscine du Centre Sportif de l'UQAM, où le public, immergé, pourra entendre la musique diffusée à l'extérieur de l'eau où, en s'immergeant complètement, celle diffusée sous la surface de l'eau. L'événement est présenté deux soirs seulement. On fournit les tubas, mais vous devrez fournir le maillot...

—
RÉJEAN BEAUCAGE, VOIR MONTRÉAL (QUÉBEC), 8 JUIN 2006

« les auditeurs seront appelés à enfiler leur maillot pour écouter la musique diffusée sous l'eau »

Réseaux présente l'événement Sub•a•quat•ic, une installation sonore du duo Milliseconde topographie (Nicolas Bernier et Delphine Measroch) durant laquelle les auditeurs seront appelés à enfiler leur maillot pour écouter la musique diffusée sous l'eau de la piscine du Centre sportif de l'UQAM! Une autre installation sonore sera perceptible hors de l'eau. Les tubas sont fournis! Les 9 (20 h 30 et 23 h 30) et 10 juin (19 h et 22 h 30). www.rien.qc.ca

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EMMANUELLE MARTINEZ-CURVALLE, GRAFIKA (QUÉBEC) AVRIL 2006

« En moins d'un mois, tous les disques se sont envolés »

Affichage – La rue en image

[...] Le designer Urban9 s'est dernièrement allié au groupe Milliseconde Topographie (tous deux sont membres du regroupement d'artistes Ekumen) pour créer une affiche « musicale » accompagnée d'un CD. La première des trois affiches prévues a été reproduite à 100 exemplaires, et 50 d'entre elles ont été placardées sur les murs de la ville. En moins d'un mois, tous les disques se sont envolés, décrochés au gré des passants attentifs qui sillonnaient les environs du boulevard Saint-Laurent, du Mile-End et du Plateau Mont-Royal. Le geste a été perçu comme un initiative originale et rafraîchissante. Pourquoi l'affichage sauvage? « Il représente un moyen simple et peu onéreux de faire de la création « physique », dit Nicolas Bernier, d'Ekumen. Il sert notre projet qui est complètement autonome et n'a de sens que lorsqu'il sort de sa vie numérique et arrive dans la rue. » Pour Ekumen, derrière le concept d'affichage sonore, se cache l'idée du temps. « Elle s'exprime par l'affiche qui évolue au fil des jours et des intempéries, dit Nicolas Bernier. La musique, elle, étire le temps. Elle prend cet instant visuel figé, l'affiche en deux dimensions, et lui en donne une troisième. » [...]

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CLAUDE RAJOTTE, FRÉQUENCE LIBRE, RADIO-CANADA (QUÉBEC) 8 FÉVRIER 2006

« Un duo québécois, créateur de la musique accompagnant une affiche crée par l'artiste en art graphique, **Urban9**. Ça me fait penser à **Brian Eno**. Ça s'écoute très bien. »

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MÉLANIE RUDEL-TESSIER, GRAFIKA.COM (QUÉBEC) 8 FÉVRIER 2006

« Des affiches accompagnées de trames sonores ornent les rues de Montréal et les murs de ses cafés depuis quelque temps. »

L'affichage se fait musical

Des affiches accompagnées de trames sonores ornent les rues de Montréal et les murs de ses cafés depuis quelque temps. Il s'agit d'un projet original du regroupement d'artistes Ekumen, qui se consacre à la diffusion du travail de recherche et de création d'artistes sonores, mais également de vidéastes et de designers.

Le duo Milliseconde Topographie (Delphine Measroch et Nicolas Bernier) s'est ainsi allié au designer Urban9 pour créer trois affiches musicales, dont la première a été sérigraphiée à une cinquantaine d'exemplaires et placardée dans la ville. Premiers arrivés, premiers servis: les passants curieux de découvrir la mélodie sont invités à partir avec le CD.

Urban9 a conçu une affiche qui marie design moderne et photographie ancienne. Son travail s'inspire souvent de ses archives personnelles: il ajoute des éléments poétiques, parfois même surréalistes, à des images qui, à première vue, semblent banales. La composition de Milliseconde Topographie s'inspire quant à elle du caractère nostalgique de l'oeuvre d'Urban9. Piano, guitare, accordéon, échantillonnage et voix se côtoient dans une musique qui vise à étirer l'instant visuel.

Une série limitée, signée et numérotée de l'affiche est également en vente sur le site d'Ekumen.

NICOLAS BERNIER ARTICLES AND INTERVIEWS

— ROSARIO/12 (ARGENTINA) 29 DE NOVIEMBRE DE 2005

« Un colectivo de dos que emigra desde el video a la música electroacústica y viceversa. »

Artistas que visitan la ciudad
Fractales y acusmática

Más de 200 obras seleccionadas entre más de 1200 recepcionadas de 46 países hacen del 404 Festival, sin duda, uno de los acontecimientos culturales más destacados del año. Entre los artistas que visitarán la ciudad durante esta semana está el mexicano Juan Carlos Guarneros, un diseñador gráfico que hace dos años empezó a experimentar con fractales, gráficos que se generan a partir de algoritmos matemáticos. "Son formas muy complejas que a veces se relacionan con la forma en que se organizan los animales, las plantas, las nubes", explica el artista, que tuvo que estudiar matemáticas. "Al principio era muy complejo hacer arte con esto, porque había que generar las fórmulas que dieran lugar a los fractales. Con el paso del tiempo y el trabajo comunitario en la red, los artistas que estaban en el tema fueron generando interfaces más amigables. La principal característica de los fractales es la autosimilitud, que es como ver la parte en el todo y el todo en la parte. A partir de estos principios creo mis trabajos".

En otros territorios, no del todo ajenos, los canadienses Nicolas Bernier y Delphine Measrooh son Milliseconde Topographie, un colectivo de dos que emigra desde el video a la música electroacústica y viceversa. "En realidad lo que hacemos más puntualmente es música acusmática, un género que prescinde de preceptos tradicionales como el de ritmo", explica Nicolás, una de las caras no visibles del Cirque Du Soleil. "Es una música trabajada con máquinas, muy electrónica, con una poesía que habla de la cybicultura".

— WIBKE BANTELmann, COMPUTER MUSIC JOURNAL (USA), VOL. 29 ISSUE 3, 2005

« This composer had the power to raise and hold the intellectual interest of the listener. »

trans_canada Festival: Trends in Acousmatics and Soundscapes

[...] Mr. Bernier followed an intellectual plan, he set his rules and let them work. One always sensed the will behind the music, one always tried to follow and understand the experiment instead of just enjoying the result. But, on the other hand, this method produced a certain strong energy in the work. This composer had the power to raise and hold the intellectual interest of the listener. [...]

— FRANÇOIS TOUSIGNANT, LE DEVOIR (QUÉBEC), 21 JANVIER 2005

« son oeuvre montre une réelle sensibilité au timbre, à sa distribution »

Concerts classiques - Promesse de belles éclosions

[...] Pourtant, Nicolas Bernier manie bien les «entonnoirs» pour engouffrer ou faire s'épanouir le son; son oeuvre montre une réelle sensibilité au timbre, à sa distribution; l'effet, s'il est souvent superficiel, n'est jamais gratuit. En cela, la dernière pièce du programme va bien plus loin dans le même genre; Dorward sait en effet se protéger de la complaisance. Sa pièce est la plus courte et aussi la plus structurée. Ici, on tient un musicien. [...]