





# 4/DISTURBING SLOWNESS IN SPEEDY TIMES





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**Manu Luksch**

1996/2008

35 mm transparencies

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## ***DIAMONDS & CLOVERLEAVES***

During a visit to Beijing in 1996, I captured images of newly built, empty road intersections. Between 1966 and 1996, more than 160 intersections were built in Beijing, some over 500 m long and covering areas of 250,000 m<sup>2</sup>. This grandiose construction project necessitated the demolition of many hutongs and the mass resettlement of their inhabitants. Over the past decade, the city's highways and intersections have become clogged with private cars that are major contributors to its pollution problem.

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**Manu Luksch**  
2004

Call for works, *Video as urban condition*

[www.video-as.org](http://www.video-as.org)

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**URBAN ROAD MOVIES**


February 2003: the Congestion Charge is introduced in London. The fee applies to all vehicles entering the central zone. Compliance is ensured by a surveillance apparatus that records vehicle registration plates. Vehicles are monitored throughout the charging zone. In mediaeval times, city walls signified to those entering them that they were approaching the centre of political, economic, and religious power. Today's guardians, closed-circuit TV cameras that peer down from posts on every street corner, ensure that modern citizens are no less aware of this fact.

In 1995, at the *Telepolis* symposium in Luxembourg, an attempt was made to redefine urbanism for an emerging digital age, in which trade, communication, and information exchange would be increasingly carried out by means of e-commerce, video conferencing, and chat- and newsgroups. Today, media convergence is a reality, but the predicted decline in the physical movement of people has not occurred. The increase in traffic is not just across national boundaries, but also across the economically more significant city borders. Former inhabitants leave older European and American city centres, now turned into lifeless zones of speculation. The influx of people into newer urban centres in Asia and South America is creating mega-cities. The European city plan is mediaeval, its nodes of activity are crossroads. The new Asian media cities (attached to Dubai, Seoul, Kuala Lumpur) are growing around an infrastructure of data highways, and their nodes of activity are the access points to these highways. To what extent can electronic media impose or create an urbanism? What kind of urbanism will this be? could this be? Or, will the urban appear only in the interstices, despite the planners' best intentions?

Media convergence and the diffusion of digital technology, coupled with increasing anxiety and paranoia in the city, has greatly expanded the realm of video. The telephone conversation, the journal entry, the eyewitness account, the infant's room – all are enhanced, supported, substantiated, monitored, or otherwise qualified by the use of 'moving' image. Video is most prevalent not in any 'pure' form, but in such hybrid manifestations.

**Video as  
urban  
condition**





This symposium and exhibition will examine the extents to which mediation forms our urban experience, and urban experience influences video culture. We invite works that throw light on the place of video in the city, and of the city in video. Works that situate urban experience around networks of traffic (human, vehicular, or data), or that examine the relationship of newer, developing cities to media, would be of particular interest.

### *Video as urban condition*

*Video as urban condition* examines a medium whose most distinctive characteristics are multiplicity and diversity, a form which is not contained by the norms of art institutions or the exclusive domains of professionals. Video is a medium of mass production — that is, mass participation — as well as of mass consumption.

The project was launched in 2004 with an interdisciplinary symposium which took place at the Austrian Cultural Forum, London, with: Juha Huuskonen (Katastro.fi), Manu Luksch (ambientTV.NET), Anna McCarthy (New York University), Paul O'Connor (Undercurrents News Network), and Ole Scheeren (Office of Metropolitan Architecture), and chaired by Anthony Auerbach.

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### **Anthony Auerbach**

Project statement, *Video as urban condition*. The project is ongoing; in 2006–07, it toured to Paço das Artes, São Paulo, the Armenian Center for Contemporary Experimental Art, Yerevan, and the Lentos Museum of Modern Art, Linz.

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Manu Luksch

2006

Statement on *Broadbandit Highway* for *VBI: the ambient.lounge* at Witte de With, during the 35th International Film Festival Rotterdam

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## BROADBANDITRY

Six years ago, ambientTV.NET was invited to participate in *Please Disturb Me*, a show at the Great Eastern Hotel in London (24 March–8 April 2001). Each artist was offered a space of their choice. We (Ilze Black and myself) decided to inhabit the media-space of the hotel's cable TV system rather than a room: we wanted to make 'ambient television'.

It was around this time that webcams and streaming video had become practical and popular on the Internet. I was very enthusiastic about this development: I thought that it could have a positive effect on TV programmes if expensive airtime was undermined by do-it-yourself television. After all, anyone could run a little broadcasting (or narrowcasting) station from their kitchen table by using the Internet.

I researched how people were using webcams and discovered an uninspiring reality: the most widespread use was pornography, followed by weather cams (to help office workers decide about surfing or skiing on the week-end), and thirdly, traffic surveillance cameras. The traffic cams were operated by city administrations, universities, freeway departments, tourism offices, and even individuals who simply stuck a cam out of the window overlooking the local street crossing.

Our idea was to use these traffic cam streams to make a road movie – an endless, self-generating road movie. We took on the roles of 'bandits' of the Information Superhighway by implementing JavaScript code that chose a new cam source every 40 seconds from an array of about 100, hijacked the video stream, and resized it into full-screen format. We diverted the video onto the hotel television network, where it ran 24/7 on *Channel 26*. The soundtrack was created live by Supermodem (Kate Rich and Sneha Solanki) during the opening of the show. The result was *Broadbandit Highway*, a film that eventually became five years long, ending only when the last of the traffic cams we tapped went offline in March 2006.

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MAC

PC

plasma screen

videoprojector

hotel TV system



composite video feed

Cha

Phono-mini Jack



PC

rewire

DV rec

mixer

broadband

Ethernet cable

Hub

ISDN modem

128K

pho





1



2

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## MEANWHILE, OVER ON CHANNEL 26...

Franko B: *I miss you*  
[13 min, UK 1999]

Shu Lea Cheang: *I.K.U.*  
[3 min, UK/Japan 2000]

F5: *Bloody TV*  
[3 min, Latvia 2000]

Bureau of Inverse Technology: *BIT Plane*  
[15 min, UK/USA 1999]

Andree Korpys & Markus Löffler: *3 US buildings*  
[15 min, Germany 1997]

Chapman Brothers: *Bring Me the Head Of*  
[10 min, UK 2000]

Derek Ogbourne: *Gutter*  
[3 min, UK 2000]

Motoko Ohinata: *Rabbit People*  
[6 min, UK 1999]

Richard Wright: *LMX Spiral*  
[8 min, UK 1998]

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Ilze Black & Manu Luksch  
2001

*Channel 26* was a programme of contemporary video art curated for an internal TV channel of the Great Eastern Hotel, London, as part of the *Please Disturb Me* show.

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1  
*Broadbandit Highway in the ambient.lounge at Connecting Worlds, NTT ICC (InterCommunication Center), Tokyo, 2006*  
Photo: KIOKU Keizo

2  
*Broadbandit Highway*  
(Manu Luksch & Ilze Black)

3  
*BIT Plane (Bureau of Inverse Technology)*

4  
*I.K.U. (Shu Lea Cheang)*

5  
*LMX Spiral (Richard Wright)*

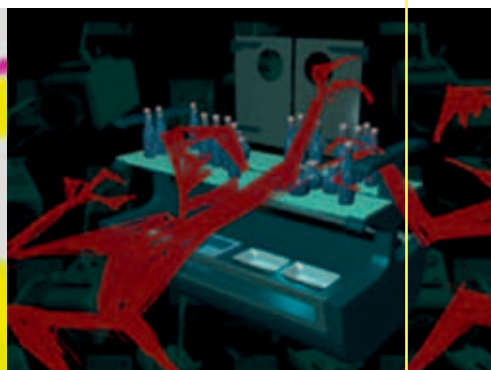
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3



4



5




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Mukul Patel


2002

Official report on 2002  
*Arabian Nights*, the New  
Year's Eve tent-warming at  
ambient.space

Photography by Chris  
Helgren

Once upon a time  
Fair Cleopatra of Slackney  
the Black Queen of Balsam Green  
Khalifa Khera (head of the harem)  
pipe/line layer Badmash Basmachi  
and Plastic Smoking Camel Jockey  
played host to a multitude of mullahs  
imams and cantors  
calligraphers of light  
mosaic artists of the night  
chess players and tea drinkers  
OPEC sheikhs  
Ukrainian rebels  
a Transoxianian Emir  
pursued by shooting Tsars  
a band of Tuareg  
a worshipper of Ra   
and Olive Ra herself (princess-in-waiting)  
Parsi percussionists  
Afghani viola players  
hashishin and harafish  
a Goth and a camel  
five Yasser Arafats



A crowd of people is silhouetted against a dark night sky. Several bright blue laser beams radiate from a central point above the crowd, fanning out in all directions. A single, bright red light source, possibly a flare or a small fire, is visible in the upper center of the image, casting a red glow. The overall atmosphere is one of a large-scale event or protest.

Mr. Et Mrs. Leila Khaled  
and all kinds of lesser terrorists  
who Rocked the Casbah for 14 hours  
and Painted it green and white  
and red  
and Black

Turbans were worn  
and torn off  
eyes gazed at  
and averted  
games won and lost  
incense inhaled  
and senses inflamed  
sweet wine imbibed with sweetmeats  
a dervish whirled desert discs  
and a story was whispered  
that began:

"Once upon a time  
Fair Cleopatra of Slackney  
the Black Queen of Balsam Green  
Khalifa Khera...





*"CNN-ESPN-ABC-TNT but mostly B.S.  
where oxymoronic language like  
'virtually spotless'  
'fresh frozen'  
'light yet filling' and  
'military intelligence'  
have become standard*

*"T.V. is the place  
where phrases are redefined  
like 'recession' to 'necessary downturn'  
'crude oil on a beach' to 'mousse'  
'civilian death' to 'collateral damages'  
and being killed by your own army  
is now called 'friendly fire' "*

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*The Disposable Heroes  
of Hiphoprisy, 'Television,  
the Drug of the Nation'  
(4th & B'way, 1991)  
Lyrics: Michael Franti*

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## OUR MAN IN BAGHDAD

### *Ramadan in Kuwait, November 2, 2002*

Merhaba from Kuwait.

It's a dry country here (no booze) and due to get even drier: Ramadan starts Nov 6. So, beginning next Wednesday, I'm gonna have to learn how to smoke without anyone knowing it, sneak a drink of water or hide a bite to eat during daylight hours. Maybe I'll return looking like Twiggy. If I'm not dead from thirst. This place has beautiful mosques at every corner, paid for in part by the cash certain multi-national corporations give the country. Boys race the streets in Maseratis chasing girls driving Mercedes, eventually they catch each other and go off to park. Apparently though, they are not as rich as they look ... my friend says most of the youth are in perpetual debt, leasing a hot car, then selling it for cash so they can live it up in places like New York and London (you can't get personal loans from the banks but they will happily finance a car). Then they spend five years paying it off. All because their other friends do it, and there's no sense being left out, is there?

There is also a darker side... Sri Lankans arrive here with promises of \$200 a month as security guards, then the security companies get them to sign a contract for \$100 and if they don't like it they can go home. Which they can't, because they've already taken a loan to come here in the first place. Also, bus services that run intermittently, so the story goes, in order that employers can squeeze an extra four hours out of the workers, who eventually go home to sleep in a squat with 14 others. And horrific tales of rape – on Filipino maids by employers, or the uncle, father and brother abusing the girl in the family. Apparently it's quite common. And as far as alcohol goes, guess who runs the illegal cartel?

But there are nice things too. I went to cover a story today about old shipwrights who used to be the toast of society, and now after the oil boom they just make wooden models of the once grand dhows which plied the seas. Bahrain was a good story in that women were allowed to both vote and run as candidates for national office, for the first time. And I got to hang out of a helicopter, my favourite mode of transport, for

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[Redacted]

2002-04

ambientTV.NET's roving optoelectronic eye was based in the Middle East in the build-up to and during the early part of the current war in Iraq. He shared his second thoughts on the situation via a web log.





the first time since Bosnia, while covering speedboat races. The sunsets are stunning, the food always fresh, and fishermen bring back some of the best prawns to be found anywhere.

Tomorrow we are off to shoot pix of falcon hunters kicked out of their desert grounds due to upcoming 'war games' where one-third of the country is to be out of bounds. Right in the midst of camping season, a Kuwaiti tradition.

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### *Birthdays on the road, Kuwait, November 2002*

We celebrated my birthday with a nice curry and played pool at a Filipino karaoke bar. At first, no alcohol, since this is a dry Islamic country, and we got banned from the British embassy pub, but then a friend of mine provided some ethanol (actually Kodak computer screen cleaning fluid) and we mixed it with lemonade. The plastic bottle it came in had been sitting on a shelf for a year, so at least it was aged. My friends here gave me a portable shisha kit in a padded briefcase. And the hotel head chef brought me a birthday cake for breakfast... then another one came to my room in the afternoon.

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### *Embedding with the U.S. Army, December 18, 2002*

I was shooting the opening match of the Arab Cup soccer tournament here in Kuwait City and got the Moroccan fans to chant 'Vive le Canada, vive le Canada'!



Kuwait is getting a bit chilly, down to 16°C in the evening and dropping out in the desert to 9°C at night. So I guess tomorrow will be a shopping day for a winter coat as I'm going out on another four-day junket with the Yank army. Last week I was with a company of Abrams tanks and we got stuck in the sand three times (I think due to a Brit driver who we won't name), and got pulled out by a monster of a tank that all of a sudden loomed in my night vision goggles. Later, we returned the favour when we got lost with another tank in some massive sand dunes and I found us a route back to base using a bit of common sense rather than satellite tracking devices. And the next night, we were being escorted by a sergeant with 18 years experience who started freaking out when his GPS broke. I calmly pointed to the Big Dipper and taught him how to find North. Then I suggested we drive to a place with lights a couple of kilometres away, which we did and it turned out to be

an engineering base where we found help. I guess the learning curve is so great when teaching them how to push a button on a tank's computer that they miss the basic stuff that I learned in boy scouts. Please bring on the British Army, who would know how to use a hammer to fix a tank rather than calling in an MIT graduate – and even how to find Kuwait on a map.

Christmas is coming up and I expect I'll be dining with the troops on the same turkey that we had at Thanksgiving – meat pressed from several different birds/species, washed down with a lovely 1998 'Cabaret' (sic) nonalcoholic wine/grape juice variant.

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### *The march to war, Kuwait, January 2003*

Another year gone by, and the march to war continues. The Kuwaitis are used to this monotony by now – every three years or so there is some sort of 'crisis' where certain members of the world press announce that we are 'on the brink of war', with tanks massing on the borders etc. If you read the *Sunday Times* any given week you'd think the Yanks were to invade Oct 30, Nov 6, Nov 30, Dec 7, Dec 16, and so on.

In reality there are enough US troops in Kuwait to police a Rolling Stones concert, that's about it. But yes, there is a big deployment underway, though it's gonna be a lot longer than anyone thinks before they are up to battle strength. In the meantime, the circus is forming. The media circus, I mean. One network has just booked the entire Ritz Carlton hotel, and I overheard an executive say that if there isn't a war, they bloody well hope they can make one, as the costs will start to spiral. Think I read the same thing about newspaper magnate William Randolph Hearst before the Spanish American War. Next week we expect a huge influx of American wannabe Pulitzer candidates, just like in all the other wars...By the way, Joseph Pulitzer was just as guilty of sensationalising the war in 1895.

The U.S. Army and Marines have been attempting their own version of Spin Doctoring. Seems they don't want to go 'off message' from the White House saying they're hoping for a peaceful settlement, while pictures and video show up of troops firing rockets during exercises. So when we visit American bases, questions on Iraq are banned and reporters are shadowed by minders. Even the word 'censorship' seems to be banned. Personally I think they are testing us to see who will





bend over for them, who will or won't report on a fuckup if it happens. Soundbite from a U.S. trooper next to a huge desert bonfire on New Year's Eve: 'See that? That's what Baghdad's gonna look like.'

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### *Northern Kuwait, March 20, 2003*

My view on the invasion of Iraq is from a farm's water tower just a kilometre or so from the frontier. It's different than the 'shock and awe' in Baghdad that everyone else was watching on TV. Mostly, it's the flash and thud of artillery landing, arcing of rockets, and drone of fleets of helicopters traversing the front lines. We go in tomorrow.

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### *Umm Al Qasr, Iraq, late March 2003*

Oh my lord, I shouldn't have done that. You cannot imagine what it's like to sleep on open ground for three weeks in the desert, bathing with bottled water, using a filthy petrol station toilet in a war zone, and cooking tins of beans with mango pickle chutney to flavour them. It's a hot, horrible, poverty-stricken place with children who look like they've never seen a bar of soap, and convoys of tractors laden with tasteless tomatoes criss-crossing the roads in search of non-existent customers after the electricity lines were bombed, crippling the canning factories.



Anyway, this is the background to the day the power came back to Umm al Qasr, which lies just across the border from Kuwait. Everyone was taken by surprise, and all the locals rushed back to their homes to start filling refrigerators at long last. And some enterprising souls found large freezers in which they stuffed bottles of Iraqi Pepsi. The first problem was, these freezers had been full of rotting fish since the electricity went off. Second problem was, I didn't smell the fish, nor did I want to, as I guzzled three bottles of the gorgeous cold liquid in 45 degree heat. To make a long story short I got so sick that I was taken back to Kuwait City to lie on a hotel bed for three days.

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### *Baghdad, April 17, 2003*

A week after I arrived. Things are settling down now, if that's a word for it. At least no masses in the emergency wards due to



nervous American troops shooting and blowing up anything they deem suspicious. That includes us journalists...both Reuters and Al Jazeera lost cameramen (plus several others suffering injury) to a tank crew who didn't realise that the Palestine Hotel was full of press and not snipers. Even though it has been the main press hotel for months. That knowledge also didn't stop the U.S. Air Force from heroically giving freedom to the Iraqi people by dropping a 2,000 lb JDAM bomb across the street last month. Friends embedded with the U.S. Marines warned that those guys shoot first and ask questions later, claiming scores of innocent lives in their wake. Even our armoured Land Rover, Brenda the Defender, didn't escape their notice as twice now Army soldiers and Marines have fired their M-16s in the air when we slowed to cross a checkpoint. Brenda has TV stickers all over her as well as bright orange markings, but I guess Army opticians aren't so good.

The final leg of the trip into the capital was the scariest drive I've ever done – three hours on a deserted, no-man's land highway on which we had to manoeuvre through chicanes of destroyed Iraqi armoured personnel carriers. The three of us in the armoured car, which would not have withstood much more than a burst from a Kalashnikov, were chain-smoking over an ashtray overflowing onto the carpet.

When I first arrived at the top of Highway 8 en route to Baghdad's Saddam International Airport, I was horrified. We were met by shell-shocked embedded journalists and the sight of charred bodies still entombed in gutted cars, with spent shell casings carpeting the road. Smoke rose from every vista, and the pall of death made its way through Brenda's air conditioning. The road to the airport told a story of mayhem – trees split by shellfire, full size cars turned into compact ones under the wheels of Abrams tanks, bodies lying helter-skelter in the woodlands alongside the boulevard. I was thankful I wasn't around to see the place when it had been a battleground.

Then there were a few days of chaos...looting, shooting and sniping amid the thump of artillery shells landing. Relatives looking for lost prisoners crowded the former secret police bases, shouting down wells in the unfounded hope their loved ones were still alive in what they claim are underground dungeons. We visited a Muhabarat jail and saw eerie pictures of a family drawn on cement walls without light, and in other cells the days of the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan were scratched. It must have been hell living through solitary confinement in that place.





Now, after the looting, the shopping spree begins and one can pick up bargains on street corners staffed by 'Ali Babas', what the locals call thieves. The best buy seen today was diesel powered electricity generators. The local police are now patrolling the streets with the U.S. Marines, to some effect.

Yesterday we came across the aftermath of a bank robbery... three suspects lying on the ground, receiving the odd kick or whack from a cop (20 more got away). All of a sudden there was some commotion and about 15 Ali Babas were fighting amongst themselves for a loose bag of Iraqi dinars abandoned by the robbers. One policeman took it upon himself to chase down the new group of blighters, armed with only his truncheon. A few moments later he was bounding at full speed past me, minus his baton, with some thieves in pursuit throwing bricks. Then they stole his Toyota Landcruiser, fishtailing out of sight. I told a Marine what had happened and he replied, 'Oh great, not only do they have a getaway car, we don't even have the means to transport the suspects we did arrest!'



It's now been over six months since I arrived in the Gulf to help organise our presence here. In that time I've choked in sandstorms, gotten food poisoning and a chest infection, slept in the desert for weeks on end, and been regarded as scum (as an independent journalist) by the British and American press officers. If I had been embedded into an army unit I would have been given more respect, but even worse living conditions – go figure. We were first into Basra, greeted by a mortar attack, and first to have linked up teams from north and south Iraq in Tikrit – Saddam's birthplace and site of the last battle of the war. Very fitting as the guy I linked up with in the driveway of Saddam's palace was no less an icon than [redacted], my old partner and great friend from [redacted]. I wouldn't trade the experience but it's time to take a break, and I have been promised one in about 10 days.

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*Baghdad, August 7, 2003*

The city has no water, power, or gas and petrol is in such a short supply that motorists are forced to queue for hours. Tempers flare and there is a growing insurgency. Arson blazes break out amid a lack of firemen. Riots over unpaid salaries turn deadly. The answer to the problem at hand is to throw in more security forces or ...build more mosques?



It sounds like Iraq but actually is one of the main scenarios for the computer game *SimCity*, made by Electronic Arts of Redwood, California. While Bechtel seems to scoop up all the contracts, yet to be fulfilled due to insecurity, and American servicemen are under daily attack, nobody seems to have the answer to the problem. So why not consult EA? Many gamers seem able to build villages from scratch, turning them into a metropolis. Others watch as the cities they create implode, but then there is the restart button, and all turns out fine in the end.

If only one could pop a CD into a laptop drive and run a country, in a perfect world. But then again with all the talk about cyber warfare, maybe that's exactly what has happened at Central Command?

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**PARTY**  
**HAPPY NEW YEAR 2004**  
**LIVE MUSIC- FARHAD BAND**  
**D. J**  
**THE BEST QUALITY OF DISCO TEK**  
**ORIENTAL BELLY DANCER**  
**VIVIAN**  
**SALAHIDIN BALL ROOM**  
**31-12-2003 AT 9:00 NIGHT**




كل عام وانتم بخير ٢٠٠٤  
 حفلة يحييها كل من  
 فرقة فرهاد الغربية **دي جي**  
 الفنانة الاستعراضية «الراقصة»  
**فيثيان**  
 الاعمى ٩ على قاعة صلاح الدين  
 ٢٠٠٣ / ١٢ / ٣١



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Manu Luksch &amp; Mukul Patel

2002

The Net art work *Stealth Waltz* was commissioned for *KOP (Kingdom of Piracy)* at the Acer Digital Art Center (ADAC), Taiwan. A pilot site was launched in December 2001 at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Taipei. In April 2002, as Taiwan initiated a major anti-piracy drive, the leadership of ADAC changed. *KOP* became politically sensitive and the curators and artists were denied access to the *KOP* server at ADAC. By mid-June, the *KOP* site was taken offline, with ADAC demanding editorial rights and a change of exhibition title. The curatorial team rejected these demands and sought ways of preserving the project as both a Taiwanese initiative and an international online art project. Through the efforts of ADAC's former director Ray Wang, server access was restored. However, the use of the domain name was denied.

First public exhibition:  
Ars Electronica, Linz 2002

(text adapted from the curators' statement by Shu Lea Cheang, Armin Medosch, and Yukiko Shikata, at <http://kop.fact.co.uk>)

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## STEALTH WALTZ

### *The Corporation's Announcement to Stakeholders: Heritage License Agreement*

Following the highly successful appropriation of bio- and eco-knowledge and techniques through patent legislation, The Corporation today announces the extension of its reach to the regulation of folkloric production—in particular, music. Folklore encodes traditional wisdom that rightfully belongs to everyone. The current inheritors of these forms do not have the means to adequately preserve or share them. The Corporation, with the support of a consortium of publishing companies, will safeguard this global cultural heritage, develop efficient distribution mechanisms, and conduct an archaeology of the traditional wisdom encoded in folklore through the Heritage License Agreement (HLA). The HLA is effective immediately. Only instrumental electronic music in 2/2 time (binary beats) is exempt from the Heritage License, and may be distributed and consumed without reference to an agent of the HLA. The Corporation will be the exclusive licensing agent for traditional music production and distribution. As a valued stakeholder, you are assured of high rewards.

### *Ambient Information Systems' response*

Ambient Information Systems, Ltd. responded to The Corporation's HLA by launching a server that stores ostensibly legal, HLA-free 2/2 music files. These files are, however, also containers for other files, hidden using steganographic techniques. The hidden file is designed so that when a user extracts it and combines it with the wrapper file, the result is a piece of non-2/2 time folk music. Thus, the server allows users to securely and covertly exchange folk music without the knowledge or interference of The Corporation.

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## IST: NEW CLOCKS FOR THE CITY OF LILLE

The Indian subcontinent has accumulated a complex set of relationships to time. Hindu philosophy (and by extension, Jainism and Buddhism) marks time with a scale of units ranging from less than a millionth of a second (a *truti*, the time it takes for a needle to penetrate a lotus leaf), to over 300 trillion years (the life cycle of Brahma). Indians are also philosophical about time in a more quotidian sense – Indian Standard Time<sup>[1]</sup> is, so a long-standing joke goes, always a little late (though the trains tend to run on time). There also exist many other standards of timekeeping, more in proportion to human lives or habits, or bound into performance genres (music, dance).

IST is a suite of idiosyncratic public clocks – some precise, others vague; some highly regular, others not – that provide novel ways of marking life's passage. Some clocks are synchronized to UTC and others to the Sun, so they naturally meander in timekeeping relative to each other. Several of the clocks are programmed in the Max/MSP/Jitter environment.

### Raga

A tonal clock based on Indian melody, linked loosely to the seasonal position of the sun. The melodic material of classical Indian music is structured by raga – a very complex framework for improvisation, more than a scale but not yet a tune. In Hindustani music, a raga is associated with a season and time of day (as well as mood). For example, Lalit, a sandhi-prakash (twilight) raga usually heard in the morning, has both an augmented and natural fourth; Shree, another twilight raga associated with the evening, has an extremely flattened second degree; and Malkauns – deep in the night – is pentatonic.

This clock signals time by generating tonal material and light according to the position of the sun in the sky (found in a look-up table). The sound is a mixture of tanpura (drone) instruments tuned to different raga. Volume is modulated, peaking at times of transition – sunrise, sun in the south, sunset – and generally lower at night. Architectural lighting is used to flood the surroundings. Light intensity and colour are modulated in sync with the sound, most actively at times

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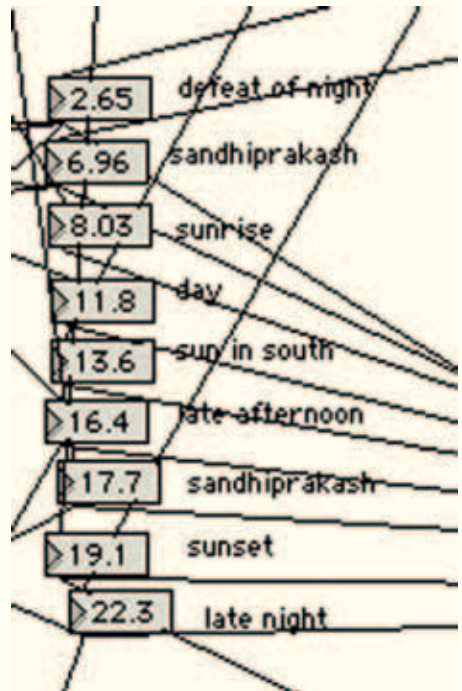
Mukul Patel

2006

IST, a series of public sound, light and video installations, was commissioned by Lille3000.

[1] IST = UTC+5.30.

Pakistan is UTC+5, Nepal UTC+5.45 (!), and Sri Lanka and Bangladesh UTC+6.





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*Public address control  
system, Gare Lille Flandres*

of transition. Conceived for the Jardin de l'Abbaye de Loos; installed in the rue des Débris St. Etienne.

### *Timetable*

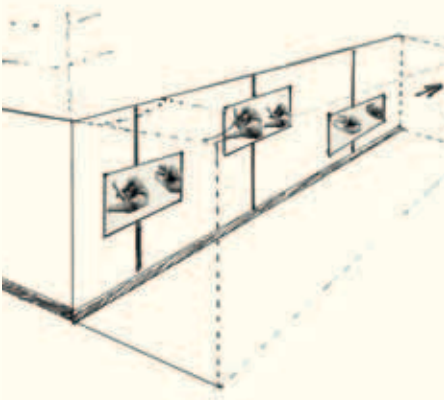
An audio clock that inhabits the public address system in Gare Lille Flandres, marking the time precisely but eccentrically by announcing the arrivals and departures of Indian trains, using recordings made in railway stations around India. Trains may be scheduled to depart at any number of minutes past the hour, so this clock 'chimes' in irregular intervals. The clock is in Indian time (so at 2350 CET it marks the departure of a train leaving Calcutta at 0350 IST). The Indian Railways timetable also varies with the days of the week, and this is reflected in the clock.

### *Tala*

Digital video clock based on gestural counting systems of Indian music. Each 'digit' of the clock is a discrete video monitor that shows a hand in close-up. Three hands mark rhythmic cycles of 7, 12, and 16 beats, coinciding once every three days. Installed in the vitrine of boutique Série Noire.

### *The Birth of Fables*

*Designed for the Vielle Bourse (now a book market), this clock was not installed due to planning restrictions.*



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*Sketch for Tala*

Based on the Jataka Tales – moral fables of the Buddhist canon, dating back to 300 BCE, which are well known in France through adaptations by Jean de la Fontaine, the clock punctuates the activities in the book market with a fable for each day of the week. Recordings of versions of each fable are made in 15 major languages of the subcontinent, from Nepali to Tamil. Every 30 minutes, one of these recordings (c. 3 minutes long) is played back. Speakers are installed just inside each of the entrances to the Bourse. The volume is conversational. Excerpts from the written texts in different scripts are projected (bright white text) continuously on the floor of the shadowed entrances from ceiling-mounted slide projectors. A panel by each entrance includes the French text of the seven fables.

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Manu Luksch & Mukul Patel  
2008

The mixed-media installation *A New and Exciting Experience* was commissioned for 'THE NOT QUITE YET: On the Margins of Technology', a collaboration between Queen Mary University London and SPACE Media. Gallery show at SPACE Studios, Hackney, January–March 2008.



'THE NOT QUITE YET' began as a research project with a series of workshops with three community groups in East London, using techniques drawn from Lois Weaver's performance practice. The artists, who also included Lorraine Leeson and Stacy Makishi, explored the human-machine interface with focus on the experience of senior citizens.



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## A NEW AND EXCITING EXPERIENCE

*This is the story of a woman who does everything by the booklet. The booklet in question could be a user manual, warranty papers, terms and conditions, or any other relevant instructional or cautionary notice. For her own safety and that of those around her, the woman acts only on such explicit printed instructions.*

*There follow excerpts from the forthcoming volume of her electrifying adventures...*

Security and safety are key contemporary concerns, inflamed by extravagant assessments of risk and an environment that is increasingly regulated and litigious. People relegate the calculus of danger to experts, pursue risk-averse behaviour, and surround themselves with products that limit exposure to novel experiences and cater to a culture of fear. *A New and Exciting Experience* addresses these perceptions and behaviours while poking fun at the technobabble and nannying tone of user manuals.

The work has a number of manifestations, including a sound and text installation, a book, and a film. For the exhibition at ambient.space in August 2008, the text of the woman's adventures was printed on large banners, hung by the objects she uses. Visitors were immersed in a surround-sound environment made in collaboration with the SPACE Age Sirens, a choir of senior women from London's East End led by Laka D. The choir set extracts from washing machine user manuals to popular melodies including '(How Much Is That) Doggie in the Window' and 'Rum and Coca Cola'.

The installation at NIMK (Nederlands Instituut voor Mediakunst), Amsterdam (November 2008–January 2009) took the form of a decagonal prism of 10 text banners and sound sources that formed a script for a day in the life of the woman.

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The law did not allow for a civil marriage to take place in a private house, in open air, a tent or marquee, or in any other movable structure, such as a boat or hot air balloon.

Under no circumstances could any part of the ceremony have any religious connotations. Extracts from the Bible, the Quran, the Torah, the Prophet (by Gibran), and Howards End were not appropriate. This still left her millions of readings to choose from. She was asked to supply a copy of the text, the title and the author for approval.

She arranged to walk in to music accompanied by windmills and pageboys. The Government Officer had appropriate music on tape and disc: Ave Maria, Pie Jesu, or any Mass or Requiem were not acceptable. She reminded all concerned that mobile phones should be turned off, otherwise she could have the Flight of the Bumblebee or Dr MacDonald going off.

She declared that she knew no legal reason why they might not register as each other's civil partner. She pledged to share her life openly with her, and gave her the ring as a token of her love.

The only advice she was given for young children was to offer surgery as and when required.

Coroner's Court, County Council Civil Partnership Commission  
County Council Civil Partnership Commission

She set the player to turn off automatically, so she could go to sleep to music. When the operation was correct, a short beep sounded, and when the operation was not correct, two long beeps sounded. The surroundings were filled with gentle sounds.

Placing an ear plug between thumb and forefinger, she rolled and compressed it into a crease-free cylinder. She pulled her ear downward and outward. While the ear plug was compressed she pushed it into the ear canal. She held her ear until it was fully expanded.

She pressed SLEEP.

It was the most luxurious and advanced form of sleeping comfort she could enjoy.

The alarm sounded at the set time; it was a three-second buzzing sound which would repeat in intervals of 30 seconds for approx. 30 minutes every twelve hours, if she did not switch it off sooner.

Story: 2014 Portsmouth Community System  
Portsmouth Community System (PUS)  
Mainstreaming automatically sub-merge documentation  
Streamlined support system: AR 215

She removed the beads from the hand.

Gripping the handle in one hand, she gripped the leg with the other and removed the lid. She then removed the handle - there was a risk a night suit, boiling water.

Returning the lid, she checked that it was closed. She pressed the handle for the second time, and the light went out.

The bucket lit up, and the handle moved up. When the water had cooled, the handle switched off automatically, the bucket returned to the left position and the light went out.

She removed the handle from the water before pouring. To avoid splashing, she poured slowly and didn't touch the handle.

By this time, her hand had pressed up and given 1000. Luckily, the water cooled a bit before boiling.

Story: 2014 Portsmouth Community System  
Portsmouth Community System (PUS)  
Mainstreaming automatically sub-merge documentation  
Streamlined support system: AR 215



**She thought that the power was off when the switch was off, but she was wrong.**

**Pressing the automatic curl release, she placed the curling iron midway up the hair section, then spread the hair evenly between spoon and barrel. Releasing the automatic curl release to hold the hair in place, she gently slid the curling iron down to the hair ends. She remembered to always place the spoon above the hair strand when making a curl she wanted rolled under, and under the hair strand when making a flip style.**

**To reduce the risk of electrocution, fire, or injury to persons, she never used it while sleeping or while drowsy. To avoid a burn hazard, she did not touch the hotplate (it was hot).**

**For a Straight Look, she pulled the straightener parallel to the section she had made at the scalp. For a Rounded Look, she positioned the straightener so that it rounded the hair under. With the salon-quality tool, she was able to style her hair from curly to sleek and straight in no time!**

- *AC International AC8PRO5 Professional Straightener*
- *CONAIR Curling Irons CD101/IC8, CD103/IC8*

**She removed the kettle from the stand.**

**Gripping the handle in one hand, she gripped the lid knob with the other, and removed the lid. She did not overfill the kettle – there was a risk it might spit boiling water.**

**Replacing the lid, she checked that it was closed. She gently positioned the kettle on the stand, taking care not to spill any water, and pressed the switch down.**

**The switch lit up, and the kettle heated up. When the water had boiled, the kettle switched off automatically, the switch returned to the 'off' position and the light went out.**

**She removed the kettle from the stand before pouring. To avoid splashing, she poured slowly and didn't over-tilt the kettle.**

**By this time, her toast had popped up and gone cold. Luckily, the toaster offered a reheat facility.**

*• Russell Hobbs Montane Kettle*

*• Morphy Richards 2 & 4 Slice Contemporary Toaster*

**She wasn't surprised when she heard the toilet flush in the middle of the night. A cat could learn how to do it.**

**To reduce the risk of burns, electrocution, fire or injury, she never used the toilet when she had consumed a great deal of alcohol or when she was extremely tired and might have fallen asleep. She did not use it while smoking.**

**The person detection sensor had trouble because of the colour of her clothing. The toilet lid didn't open automatically. She put cardboard under the lid and prayed. From then on, it was just a matter of time.**

**She sat squarely on the toilet. The wash alternated between a gentle and a forceful spray 70 times per second for a thorough rear wash while using less water.**

**She flushed the toilet using the remote control. The most difficult part was over. She moved away from the toilet and waited 90 seconds. At this point, she realized that she had won.**

**• TOTO Washlet S400**

**• Charles Mingus CATalog for Toilet Training Your Cat**



To enter the BART system, she inserted her ticket into the fare gate. The ticket was returned to her, then the fare gate opened.

She was about to enjoy a new and exciting experience.

She turned the Control Knob on the Control Unit clockwise until the locomotive had reached the desired speed. A short circuit caused a derailment, which she corrected at once by lifting up the rolling stock that had contacted the live rail. She had some difficulty, so she sent them a postcard describing the trouble and they put her right immediately.

Later, she used the same ticket when she exited the station. The correct fare was automatically deducted from it. If the ticket had had too little value, a sign on the fare gate would have read Underpaid: Go to Addfare. A nearby Addfare vending machine would have told her how much additional fare to pay.

- Bay Area Rapid Transit
- Hornby Digital Select Unit
- Hornby Dublo 12V Electric 4-6-2 'City of London'
- Hornby R.2349 GWR King Class King Henry VIII Loco

**She treated her camera as she would treat any valuable precision instrument.**

**To adjust the viewfinder eyepiece for her own eyesight, she looked through the viewfinder and turned the eyepiece adjustment ring until the image circle in the centre was sharp.**

**Before beginning the filming session, she established a general story line to follow. In this way, her movie would contain scenes that took place in a natural, logical order.**

**She aimed the camera so that an edge of the subject fell within the central focusing spot and turned the focusing ring until the two halves of the image coincided to form one continuous sharp image.**

**It was no exaggeration to say that the true enjoyment of shooting 8 mm movies lay in the technique of panning. The trouble was that when she actually released the shutter button, even an instant seemed very long. She tried to think up some appropriate sentence and timed it with a stopwatch. After she had decided on a particular sentence, she used it to time her sequences. The result, however, was dizzying footage which left her audience bored by repetitiveness.**

**• Nikon RB Super Zoom  
• Ricoh Zoomlax**

**She depalletized the bomb body and placed it on the appropriate bomb skid. Inspecting the bomb for stripped threads, cracks, or broken welds, she checked to see that the V-groove was clean and undamaged. She checked the electrical connectors to ensure they were not bent or corroded, and pressed gently on them with wooden dowel to ensure that they were firmly seated. While handling the weapon, she was particularly careful to avoid damaging the safety switch.**

**She employed only certified procedures, personnel, equipment, facilities, and organizations, authorized by the appropriate level of authority, to conduct nuclear weapon system operations. She did not intentionally expose nuclear weapons to abnormal environments, nor did she use them for training or troubleshooting.**

**She would not expend the nuclear weapons until she received a properly authenticated, valid nuclear control order conveying release or expenditure authority.**

**Deviations from safety rules were permitted in an emergency.**

*• US Navy Aviation Ordnanceman  
• Department of Defense General Nuclear Weapon System  
Safety Program Manual*



The law did not allow for a civil marriage to take place in a private house, in open air, a tent or marquee, or in any other movable structure, such as a boat or hot air balloon.

Under no circumstances could any part of the ceremony have religious connotations. Extracts from the Bible, the Koran, the Torah, the Prophet (by Gibrán), and *Howards End* were not appropriate. This still left her millions of readings to choose from. She was asked to supply a copy of the text, the title and the author for approval.

She walked in to music accompanied by bridesmaids. The Government Officer had appropriate music on tape and disc: Ave Maria, Pie Jesu, or any Mass or Requiem were not acceptable. She had reminded all concerned that mobile phones should be turned off, otherwise she could have had the Flight of the Bumblebee or Old MacDonald going off.

She declared that she knew no legal reason why they might not register as civil partners. She pledged to share her life openly with her, and gave her the ring as a token of her love.

The only advice she had been given for young children was to offer bribery when required.

- Cambridgeshire County Council Civil Partnerships
- Scottish Borders Council Civil Partnership Ceremony

**She set the player to turn off automatically, so she could go to sleep to music. When the operation was correct, a short beep sounded, and when the operation was not correct, two long beeps sounded.**

**The surroundings were filled with gentle sounds.**

**Placing an ear plug between thumb and forefinger, she rolled and compressed it into a crease-free cylinder. She pulled her ear downward and outward. While the ear plug was compressed, she pushed it into the ear canal. She held her ear until it was fully expanded.**

**She pressed SLEEP.**

**It was the most luxurious and advanced form of sleeping comfort she could have enjoyed.**

**The alarm sounded at the set time; it was a three-second buzzing sound which would have repeated in intervals of 30 seconds for approximately 30 minutes every twelve hours, if she had not switched it off sooner.**

- Sony 301e Personal Component System*
- Fortuna Torpedo Foam (PU)*
- Monogrem automatic all-night overblanket*
- Braun signal quartz AB 21S*

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Mukul Patel

2007

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## MUSIC LANGUAGE INDETERMINACY LUCK

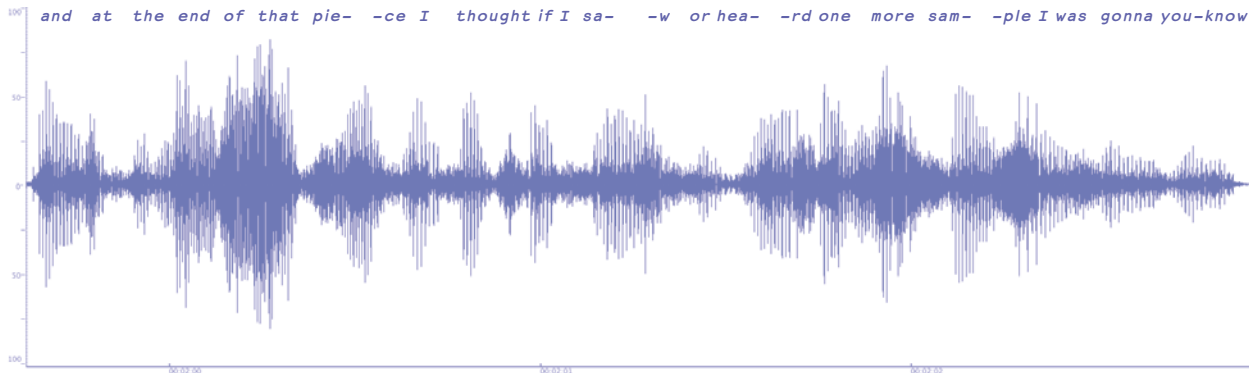
To have witnessed Reich's *Four Organs* performed once may be regarded as good fortune, but twice within four years can only be described as Wilde – so testified one of the performers after the show at the Almeida Theatre, London, 2005. The programme *Systems in Time 1* (featuring *Come Out*, *Pendulum Music*, *Vermont Counterpoint*, and *Four Organs*) was devised to complement the *Open Systems* show at Tate Modern. *Four Organs*, like many of Reich's early works, remains powerful. The LP (a split release with Cage's *Three Dances*) is worth it for the cover picture alone – and, also, alone, for the sleeve notes on the back, which include his important essay, 'Music as a gradual process'.

I chanced across Reich speaking about music (in an interview on BBC Radio 4 in the early 1990s) before I'd heard any of his works. I immediately sought out both his writings and his music. 'Writing about music is like dancing about architecture' – attributed variously to Elvis Costello, Laurie Anderson, Zappa, Mingus, Monk, and others – describes Reich's texts. (I take it as axiomatic that architecture is to be danced about).

In 2000, in Berkeley, California, I heard him speak again – this time unmediated, at the University's Department of Music, ahead of a concert series. Reich's visit to Berkeley was a keynote of my time there. To attend so many performances (of a music that must be seen to be fully heard) with the composer playing, to be led by him through a group listening of *Different Trains*, to be directed to Alvin Lucier when I asked him to suggest a path for my enquiry – these were all elements of great fortune.

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From a radio interview with  
Steve Reich, KPFA Berkeley,  
November 2000





I was not so lucky with my seat allocation at the Almeida – in the wings, by the door – or so I thought. But as soon as I sat down, I recognized the fortuitousness of my position, and regretted not having brought some binaural microphones and a recorder: the performance began already with the usher. Young, bored, and a little stern, his instructions looped with insistent melody and rhythm – ‘move right across the hall, as quickly as possible, please switch off your mobiles’. And then, semantic variations: ‘take your time, slowly as you like, leave your mobiles on’, with the speech melody and rhythm intact. Then, *Come Out* – and for nearly two minutes I could barely contain my anger. Instead of a performer with open reel tape recorders, manually phasing and dubbing them live, as Reich had done when he created the work, there was – a CD, identical with the one I had at home, being played back. After the usher’s prelude, this was a sore disappointment. But as the playback progressed, the work revealed itself to me in an entirely new manner – and yet again I had to be grateful for my ‘sub-optimal’ seat. I was about twice the distance from the far speaker as from the near one. The sound stage exploded into three dimensions: pulsing lobes of sibilance chasing each other around the auditorium, revealing sweeping new depths in the work. This is a music that one must move around in (writing about music dancing about architecture).

After the show, I asked one of the musicians about the ‘performance’ of *Come Out*: apparently, the score instructs for CD playback. When I suggested that it might be more interesting for all if the piece were to be reconstructed on stage live, he became quite excited about the idea of a ‘period performance’ of Reich’s work. He elaborated: to perform *Pendulum Music* using 1960s vintage microphone cables!

To which I could only respond, ‘gavagai’.<sup>[1]</sup>

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[1] ‘A carrot is as close as a rabbit gets to a diamond’ (Don Van Vliet), or:

‘A sudden silence in the middle of a conversation... reveals how dearly we must pay for the invention of language’ (E. M Cioran).

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## SIDELONG GLANCES

### 2. The sterility of a digital death

Sam Taylor-Wood’s *Still Life* (2001) might be more than a Sisyphean video pun beguiled by its technological substrate if only it employed VHS, or other medium that decayed smoothly at a humanly-perceptible rate. (The plastic pen reinforces the point). The work will mature when the playback begins to skip. Until then, there’s a conceptual glitch.

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Mukul Patel

2007







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*Mukul Patel & Tuomas Toivonen  
Digital Analogue Soundclash  
at Kiasma Theatre, Helsinki  
during pixelACHE 2004*



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Arfus Greenwood

May 2005, New York City

Interview with **Mukul Patel**,  
first published in July 2005  
at THE THING. [http://  
post.thing.net/node/371](http://post.thing.net/node/371)

Photos by **Jee Won Kim**

AG = Arfus Greenwood

MP = Mukul Patel

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## SPEAK SLOWLY AFTER THE TONE

*On the telephone, artist Wolfgang Staehle stated that I should get out of the house, that we all should get out of the house. 'It is a kind of exercise.' He suggested a small gathering at 149 Ludlow. The ground floor was being prepped for a sound installation by THE THING residency artist Mukul Patel, and a table could be set centre to host 8 to 10 people, sipping on bouillabaisse. It is a very grand idea, indeed, to have a dinner party and an installation simultaneously. I was there.*

*The nonchalant hostess, Gisela Ehrenfried, floated through the empty space in a flowing black dress, dripping off her small frame like Gena Rowlands in Positano. Wolf began by mopping. He had an air – there is no task too big or too small. Meanwhile, Mukul was manipulating fields of data on his laptop set at the bar – as though he was the bartender – pouring out a mixture of quivering and exalted sounds. But as the dinner party came together, I could not determine whether I was listening to him creating music for the evening or in 'exercise' for the performance two days away. I took a chair next to his at the table...*

AG – First let me ask, am I listening to an exercise or a work? Take something like Queneau's *Exercices de Style*, or Spoerri's *Topographie Anecdotee du Hasard*, I consider these a kind of exercise in narratology. Or like Cage's *4'33"* that seems to exist as an experiment – as a thing in itself.

MP – Well, a relevant definition of 'exercise' from the OED would be something like a task or activity to practice or test a skill, or a process or activity carried out for a specific purpose, or the use or application of a faculty, right, or process. Whereas, the same dictionary would give the relevant definition of a 'work' as a literary or musical composition or other piece of fine art. But let's ignore this definition of 'work' which seems useless! If we take the first definition of 'exercise', then I'd agree that Queneau's piece is primarily an exercise. Since it declares itself as such, we can also leave it at that. Though, if I had to defend its status as a 'work', then for me, its comic qualities suffice. But I don't think it needs redemption. Cage's *4'33"* seems to be an entirely different matter to me, and I'm approaching it with little knowledge of the commentary. It's a conceptually well defined piece, albeit an experimental

one, since its outcome is not determined. And while it is an exercise by the second and third definitions, it is not by the first. While I might subject others to an incomplete work, I would hope that I never mistakenly present an exercise – first definition – as anything but that. We at ambientTV.NET are conducting a series of exercises called *The Spy School*, which turns surveillance technology against the operators: sous-veillance, which demonstrates what is possible with widely-available devices, and provides a toolkit. But there is a work emerging from this, Manu Luksch's film *Faceless*, which is conceptually whole, and which has a coherent aesthetic. While it deploys many of the techniques of the *Spy School* exercises, it is conceived and presented very differently.

*Across the table from us, the architect Jee Won Kim chimed in with an import-export scheme, while the Danish artist, Jakob Boeskov, responded with a doomsday weapon scheme. Such is the tangential nature of a dinner party.*

AG – Earlier you mentioned that much of electronica does not seem concerned with a linear narrative structure.

MP – What I meant precisely was that much contemporary electronic music does not seem to be interested in structure. Let's avoid the term 'electronica,' which I think means something very specific in the US. We could just talk about music. (How much music today is non-electronic? As soon as you have an amplifier in the chain... I think it was Björk who once gave a pithy description of 'techno' as 'music made with electricity'). There are two time scales over which structure could be explored much more in electronic music: First, over intervals of seconds. Whether its in the dance club, lounge, or serious concert hall, too few composers and performers break out of rhythmic cycles of 4s, 8s, 16s. So much of what I hear is rectilinear. Where is the triangular music, or the heptagonal? Is it the legacy of rock? Secondly, over the duration of the 'work', and particularly in the forum of dance clubs, where DJs or bands typically play 1-4 hours, there is a lack of overarching structure. The DJ, or increasingly, iPodJ, has access to an unlimited catalogue. Sarasvati, the Indian goddess of music, is lost in an ocean of sonic possibilities without her instrument to help her navigate. In the club, the audience is similarly lost unless the DJ accepts the responsibility to steer a passage – beautiful, terrifying, efficient – but few DJs know where they're starting from and where they're going to. Or perhaps more generously, few are willing to explore unusual routes in



public. We could blame the commercial boom in electronic music, or – what could be thought of as a response to this – the fracturing of scenes into micronations of sound.

AG – So there are a few artists exploring unusual routes...

MP – Yes. For instance, in a set in Montreal in the late 1990s, Kid Koala was turning records in 4/4 time round by hand, juggling the beats into waltz time, spinning a 30-minute story punctuated by sly and self-deprecating jokes. On their *Tsuginepu* EP, Asa-Chang and Junray construct a song that is superficially Japanese Modern – the sonic material is spoken word and sine tones – but structurally, classical Indian, in a time cycle of 12. And recently I heard an astonishing piece by Jonathan Harvey, performed by the Arditti String Quartet with electronic manipulation and spatialisation by Gilbert Nouno.

*At the end of the table, three women clustered around artist Christoph Draeger – Heidrun, Ruth, and Nasanin. For a moment, at least, they listened to Christoph as though they might hear something of resonance.*

AG – The audience, the reader ... what are you providing? What void are you hoping to fill? What experience?

MP – To be specific about this piece, and literal... there is a space – not quite a void – on the ground floor of 149 Ludlow. It will be occupied by the sounds of speech, and a light situation that I will create, but also by various bodies doing things quite independently of my intention. I provide an environment, and some people play in it. Perhaps, during and after the installation people will describe a range of experiences to me that I would not have imagined. The piece is a work-in-progress: conceptually, it is not realised. I already know that I want to further develop the way that the piece is read through the recitations of Sanskrit and Japanese phonemes. And in general, I want to research more into phonetics and the possible historical links between South Asian and South East Asian languages. But in terms of pure sound and light in space, I expect to be satisfied – an aesthetic dimension that will, perhaps, draw people off the street.

*The artist Simone Huelser turned to me – her beautiful long neck extended – and asked, 'What are you up to?' I didn't know how to answer and turned back to Mukul.*



AG – So, what are you up to next?

MP – I feel like I've only just started working with sound and language. So, more of the same, only different. I aim for my work to be true to its medium, to be internally consistent, to cohere with its environment, and to jolt. It's difficult to achieve all those things at once, but if you do it, then there's the possibility of striking an illuminating impact with the user, audience. In Indian art music, authority is shared between the audience and the improvising performer. In 'Music as a Gradual Process', Steve Reich discusses a music that does not privilege the composer, and that is forthright about its own making. I have a definition of ambient works – those that make everything that is not them, appear as a performance. These are not themes in a manifesto, but I keep them in mind. Also, I want to trace histories. This is one way that a work can have a political dimension without becoming reactive.

AG – To trace histories sounds like a wonderful journey. Unfortunately, it seems to me that once you begin to trace it, you will be compelled to resolve it.

MP – Any resolution that happens is temporary and contingent. I'm committed to rigour, but I'm highly allergic to most conceptions of purity, which deny the evolution and migration of form. Ali Akbar Khan, for me the most significant Indian musician of the 20th century, and one whose sensitivity to classical form is exemplary, said in response to a question about Indian versus Western musics, 'Music is music, like potato is potato.' In light of recent battles over patents and ownership, rice would make for a richer metaphor, but the simple, banal truth that long-term historical understanding brings about identification with the other, remains.

AG – It is totally unreasonable of me to monopolize so much of your time at a dinner party, but I am thinking of making this into an interview. I don't know how it will be structured, the tempo, the rhythmic cycle, allegorical or abstract, but I do think that it will be a kind of exercise.

MP – I suppose you mean a conversation.

AG – Yes.

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*phoneme*, developed by Mukul while in residence at THE THING, New York City in 2005, is a generative sound/light installation that explores the basic sounds of two or more languages. The greatly retarded articulation of language sounds exaggerates the textures of consonants, and stretches vowels into tones. The boundaries of a projected colour field shift according to the varying relationship between the sounds of the languages.

The first version used Sanskrit and Japanese speech sounds, and was installed at 149 Ludlow Street on the Lower East Side in May 2005. Both of these languages organise their basic sounds in a rational manner (Japanese: a i u e o... ka ki ku ke ko... ga gi gu ge go...; and in many Indian languages: k kh g gh... t th d dh... tt tth dd ddh...).