

'Tattoo parlour'

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1. PROGRAM NOTES

Tattoo Parlour is an improvised performance centred around developing instrument, *The Performance Record Lathe*. Using a blank disc and a handheld transducer (a 'cutterhead'), sound is 'tattooed' on to the record surface, while multiple tonearms track the evolving grooves. Unlike in traditional 'record cutting', which generally lacks agency, the performer can modify anywhere on the disc as well as adjust angle and pressure during inscription. As a result, it is possible to create commercial record-like grooves or undertake more experimental practice such as cross-groove inscription, or overcutting, eliciting sonic characteristic and/or tonearm behaviour change. The cutterhead is fed by audio from looped sections of Maholy-Nagy's 1933 optical sound film *Tönendes ABC* and the signals from the pickups are subjected to further processing and effects during performance. As in turntablism and sound art practices, the limitations of phonographic disc as recording medium are celebrated: the repetition of locked grooves are employed to build performance and clicks, pops and other artefacts of process are incorporated into the overall aesthetic. By using a handheld inscription approach, human 'inaccuracy' in a medium dependant on microvariation manifests as medium liveness and thereby enables the record and interface to act as performance partner.

2. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

It has been over a century since Bahauss professor Maholy-Nagy prophetically suggested that using a sound recording medium could be a productive, rather than solely a reproductive activity [1]. His vision of directly inscribing a composer's intention to gramophone disc was unworkable given the complexities of using a medium dependant on microvariation and precision (amplitude difference in records can be as low as 0.5 microns) and his attention shifted to sound creation using image in the optical soundtrack of film. Revisiting the idea of direct disc inscription as a contemporary musician with different intentions and sensibilities – i.e. one engaged with medium 'liveness', sonic qualities [pl.] rather than 'hi fi' and in a performance, rather than composition context – enables a tactile and familiar interface to be explored in an embodied way.

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The Performance Record Lathe is a hybridised and modified ‘record cutting’ lathe focused towards disc-based composition and improvisation practice. More ‘standard’ record cutting methodologies can be employed by the performer, but experimental practice alongside agency to respond to changing sonic environments separate this instrument from its disc mastering counterparts. Without a need to create an accurate representation of a performance, notions of fidelity (both high and low) are less applicable. Difference in sonic characteristic or stereo information (whilst using a monoaural transducer) can be affected by embodied actions with a handheld cutterhead.

Human inaccuracy in precise physical media is akin to circuit bending a black box system, offering unexpected sonic behaviours, accident and interesting interrelations between intention, physical action and outcome.

3. PERFORMANCE NOTES

Technical description:

- 2 x DI (for 2 channel TRS output to PA)
- 1 x microphone stand
- 1 x the ability to project visuals (HDMI output)
- 1 x 13A power connector

Space requirement:

A table top no smaller than 55 x 95 cm

Preferred location:

The work could equally be performed at Tivoli Vredenburg, or in a club setting.

Duration:

The work is improvisational in nature, 15 minutes is an acceptable length but 25 – 30 minutes is preferable if this is possible.

Feasibility:

The work is a solo performance and the system has been successfully transported and performed at numerous venues in the UK and EU. Given the somewhat sensitive nature of the equipment, the setup time/soundcheck required for this performance is a minimum of 30 minutes.

4. MEDIA LINK(S)

- Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BbLTI-DIuSw> (an early studio-based improvisation using a single tonearm and overcutting sound within a locked groove)
- Video: <https://youtu.be/TzN5hWMRpr0> (excerpt of performance at WORM's S/ash gallery, Rotterdam, October 2023)

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ETHICAL STANDARDS

The submitted work does not involve research with people or animals.

REFERENCES

- [1] László Maholy-Nagy in Krisztina Passuth. 1987. *Moholy-Nagy*. Thames & Hudson, London, 289-292.