

HYPERNATURAL SOUNDS #3

EXIT STRATEGIES

texts by
**Mikko Savela,
Liz Allbee
and Martyna
Poznanska.**

curated by
**Desiree Förster
& Pedro Lopes**



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Part I

EXIT HERE.

In our current western society, **we experience “Exits” everywhere** – we long them, we fear them, we can hardly believe them when they happen to us, we exit our affiliations, we exit identities and genres, we exit everything. Exit strategies in culture or artistic practice can provide structures for distribution and creation, enable creativity or trigger our deep-down utopian visions in form of escapist arrangements.

The concept of "exit strategy" has been leveraged by businessman to describe capitalist strategies for start-ups and selling companies. For entrepreneurs such as John Hawkey an exit strategy is a “means of leaving one’s current situation, either after a predetermined objective has been achieved, or as a strategy to mitigate failure.” Strangely, in this business world “exit” leans towards an escapism of “failure”, considered as something to be avoided.

Luckily **art is a mechanism of exposing and destroying habits and ill-habits**. Art itself is an exit strategy, artists themselves are the strategists of "exits" to some of our contemporary puzzles, mainly an **exit to capitalism**.

At the Hypernatural Sounds #3: exit strategies we engaged directly in the heart of this discussion. Not by merely theorizing it from a distance but by engaging in conversation (and in concerts) with three musicians which in their own way testify for different exit strategies: Mikko Savela, Liz Albee and Martyna Poznanska. The performances were followed by an extended discussion round which included the artists and three guests: Allegra Solitue (from our host venue Liebig12), Lieke Ploeger (from SPEKTRUM) and dj shluchT (from DIYChurch). This panel was kindly broadcasted by DIYChurch.

In the pages you hold now you can read the reflections written down by our dear artists upon the subject of their *own* exit strategies:

Martyna Poznanska discusses the roles and possibilities that sound art, sound practice and listening strategies entail in creating new forms/meanings of art. Martyna triggers our active role in listening: an open invitation to explore the listener’s side inside the performance.

Liz Albee: reflects on exit strategies in an idiosyncratic and poetic form. An invite to corrupt, then strengthen and ultimately play out our means of resistance.

And lastly, **Mikko Savela** discusses unique ways of playing an acoustic guitar by destroying it through percussion, which are also a reflection on how break away from musical norms and instead work on physical performance.

When it comes to artists, the question of positioning oneself and oneself's artwork in relation to society is crucial. In art, unlike in the aforementioned business world, one can easily "sell out" while seeking survival-in-this-harsh-capitalistic-empire and quickly become uninteresting; on the contrary many opt for hiding in "underground" niches and find funding sources outside the art world; many gray scales in between exist, and all of these together inform each artist's position and exit strategies. But what do artists try to escape?

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What are we all escaping from?

...

—Desiree Förster & Pedro Lopes, 2016

Part II

THREE REFLECTIONS ON EXIT STRATEGIES:

Chapter 1

Exit Strategies vs. Topology of Entrances [Martyna Poznanska]

1. On Artistic Practice

Thinking of exit strategies I thought, I should first outline the territory I could be possibly exiting from, understanding it as an enclosure of artistic practice with its potentiality, content and weight.

For me: *Artistic practice is being conceived through creation of different **textures**. Textures are a kind of writing.* A texture constitutes at the same time:

A landscape with a liquid and porous line of the horizon.

A particular field, a surface that is created with thousands of particles.

Although a single particle might not reveal its importance to the process, the intricacy of the texture can't be conceived without participation of every single element. Hence every single gesture is pregnant with meaning and contributes to the process. The writing of a texture is a permeable, absorptive process. It is alive matter and I can observe it, witnessing its growth, multiplication, transformation and decay. Through the observation and reflection, I participate in the happening, I am the one who writes it and nourishes it.

An artistic practice understood as an always changing texture can be compared to many processes occurring in nature. It could be imagined as a process of a tree growth. The slowness and gradual rising of the layers in the trunk, which defines the stability, the expanding complexity of the roots; the growing branches reaching further and further, without designated borders, nor limits except for the neighbouring trees. To bestow the needed time for consistent growth and development, accepting also the decay, which follows.

Exit strategies redefined for the needs of this reflections become a certain type of an intruder - an external factor introduced to the layer of artistic practice. It can be imagined as a crack, which divides. The surface of the texture not in order to let it fall apart but rather to mark a new direction to enable crossing of a boundary, a transgression.

I've been searching for new ways of understanding the artistic practice and separate it from so called artistic research. Having many elements on board makes it almost impossible to make that distinction. [For there is no artistic process and practice that doesn't include thinking and researching. However thinking and researching not always leads to the artistic practice. Sometimes it stays in the air not receiving any prominent tangibility.]

To abandon one's own well known practice and to dip into the unfamiliar and unknown, **foreign territory could constitute for me an exit strategy**. However, the abandonment as such do not have to follow a failure but rather a decision to leave the comfort zone and proceed towards a set of new containers in which to place one's work. To create an ongoing cognitive dissonance and to be surprised. To fall into the unexpected and to intervene in it.

Whatever artistic activities I am realising they usually come from my very intuitive and personal level. They comprise a need for expression as much as a phenomenological experience and auto-ethnographical investigation. One of my exit strategies understood as a search for a new territories could be an observation of absences.

'Here where I am now time took a form of different absences. I experience them as emerging from my body as well as them emerging from the bodies of the persons I encounter, deliberately or not. The passage of time marked by the growth of trees in my courtyard, the absence of anyone age 92 but my aunt, who is suffering from loneliness, the absence of certain buildings in favour of the others. The absences expanded the narrow streets. Turning around made me realise I felt another absence that of nobody standing beside me.'

—Berlin, 7th July 2016

2. Listening. The inaudible.

To listen and to pretend that the abandonment of the visual is possible, **to create this 'hearusion' I could imagine it being an exit strategy**, exiting from the visual into the audible and the inaudible at the same time through creation of a dense sonic environment. I do not exclude the visual from my concepts however, during live performances my intention is to suspend audience's attention on the listening and to invite them to cling to this experience, to feel embraced by it. Allowing oneself to close the eyes to diminish the visual stimuli and

start hearing and listening instead. Digging into those senses and immersing oneself in this experience allowing it to continue in one's body, allowing it to become an extended gesture of listening towards the inside, to let it merge with the skin tissue and the cells and to let it dissolve influencing the plasticity of the body's structure.

My being in the world is expanded and limited by my senses. I hear and I listen as much as I don't hear and don't listen or can't hear and can't listen.

The inaudible has no particular direction, however it can appear and disappear in time changing into the audible only to fall into the inaudible again. Salomé Voegelin [1], philosopher and sound artist writes that it is the extension of the audible and the visible. It is either what we are unable to hear, or what we decide to ignore for different reasons. *"The inaudible is what expands the invisible, what questions its boundaries and confirms the inexhaustible nature of sound."* Further she adds: *"[...] the inaudible changes what we see and hear, and how we inhabit an audio-visual world knowing that there are other slices, variants of the same world, that coexist but are seemingly inaccessible, because for various reasons we are not equipped or willing to reach and experience them."*

In my search for sensing the inaudible I thought of the process of evaporation as something that could resemble the process of **when the audible becomes inaudible**. While Voegelin situates the inaudible somehow in the *"unheard or the not yet heard"*. I find it also in the *"already heard and not heard anymore"*. The process of evaporation I want to describe occurs when the sounds, noises, voices, whispers are transformed into echoes dispersed unevenly in the air that I breath in and out. Their quality resembles those four new elements that has been included last year in the Mendeleev Table¹: *"The four new elements, all of which are synthetic [as in man-created], were discovered by slamming lighter nuclei into each other and tracking the following decay of the radioactive superheavy elements. Like other superheavy elements that populate the end of the periodic table, they only exist for fractions of a second before decaying into other elements."* However, the evaporated sonic traces, unlike the decaying elements, can still reappear and resonate or reverberate within my body like a poetic image sometimes does. They are already others.

A sonic event which occurs in a restricted period of time, and which evolves undermined by a strong affect, although it ceases at some point, it is carried away by the affected bodies. In these bodies it is buried, asleep. It slowly undergoes a process of evaporation but not disappearance. It is being transformed. It dissolves and defuses in the air turning into the inaudible - the sublime, and soaks into the wet, soft and porous flesh and organs of the body. *"It is the emotion of the subject at the limit.[...] Suspended life. Breath cut off - the beating heart. [...] But it is absolute sentiment as well, not determined as pleasure or as pain but touching the one through the other, touched by the one in the other. [...] One could say that it is what remains of feeling at the limit, when feeling no longer feels itself, or when there is no longer anything to feel."* [2]. One could say that it is what remains of the heard at the limit, when the heard is no longer *hearable*, or when there is no longer anything to hear.

The ability to perceive the sound as the audible and the inaudible reconnects the self with

¹ Ed. Note: also known as the Periodic Table of (Chemical) Elements.

the deepest tissues in the body. Its directness, the intrinsic and at the same time intricate and ungraspable relation, situates it in the limits of our perception of the world, always on the edge, between the pleasure and pain where the body can fully feel itself and simultaneously not feel anything at all. The inaudible is the mesmerising beauty in the heard and the listened, it is a dark tunnel dug out through the liminal experiences.

The inaudible can feel as if it was coming from afar, even when it emerges from the nearest point - it is the presence which is always situated in absence, obliterated as if imprisoned and confined, which only sometimes trickles through a porous valve into the audible and can be heard or listened to. It can be the ungraspable of the sonic, and it can transform itself into a resonance and reverberation in the body, even when it has already disappeared.

—Martyna Poznanska, 2017

Chapter 2

Thoughts On Modes Of Resistance [Liz Allbee]

VALVE 1

WHAT is resisted?

Resisting the tendency to perform correctly in a certain vain, aesthetic, categorical imperative.

Resisting assumptions of what is to be expected.

Resisting being good (musically-speaking, and otherwise naturally).

Resisting value.

Resisting low, high, conceptual borders, and any stable place among them I may be assigned.

Resisting beautiful, but open to beauty manifesting itself.

Resisting graceful, but open to stumbling upon grace.

Resisting rational-only, the set-of-itself.

Resisting the conscription of all experience to words.

Resisting conscribing resisting.

Resisting inscribing in myself, the right way to do it.

VALVE 3

I offer up instead the wrong way, a wrong way, another wrong way again.

Four more wrong ways!

I lose count. I stop needing to count. I stop counting in other areas of my life. I count out of order.

I stop counting order.

More wrong ways bring more questions than answers.

More grey areas.

More brilliant gray.

What is resisted when really nothing has been done?

No lives are changed. No laws passed.

I like to look for openings within our mental maps. Where we can squeeze through.

I think about what else has been communicated.

I think about where do we stop and how do we ripple outwards.

How we are all, each one of us, lots of little contained Wholes and also strange Parts, scattered all over.

Strewn about in pieces and entirely composed of nothing complete nor sorted.

And intertwined?

Much more beautifully fucked (up) than we imagine.

Surely more fucked than we know.

VALVE 2

Strategies of Resistance - #14

One strategy of resistance is taking yourself apart into pieces.

Mail yourself to trusted friends.

When the time is right they can put you back together again.

For now there is safety in numbers.

Or at least a kind of risk that is survivable dismembered.

VALVE o

Melodies for Resistance - #42

*Air is my lung (it breathes me).
Trumpet is a condensation machine.
Together we water the plants.*



—Liz Albee, 2017

Chapter 3

Imperfection as an exit strategy, a talk with [Mikko Savela]

A conversation between Pedro Lopes (**P**) and Mikko Savela (**M**) on the matters of strategies *versus* the spur of the moment in performance, self-imposed limitations as exit strategies and confronting the audience's mind.

P: *In your music I think you are dealing with limitations/obstacles all the time, I mean, you chose to play acoustic/analog guitar with mics and effects instead of sitting behind a laptop with all those sounds prerecorded at home, why?*

M: First, because I want to physically touch the instrument. I want to be in direct contact with the instrument with my hands. This is very important, especially regarding dynamics and the shaping of rhythmic patterns, even the bodily movements are important. The music is really dependent on my physical ability at that precise moment. The live setting that I'm using is deliberately constructed in in that way. Besides the guitar which I play by plucking the strings with both hands, I'm pushing hitting and dragging contact-mics on the guitar-neck... and I came to the conclusion, after years of working various setups that this highly physical approach suited me best.

Secondly, it's about the quality of sound. For me working with computer results in "perfect sounds". I want instability too, imperfections. Hence, there are some unstable elements in my set-up, that I think is not possible to do with computer in the same way. To me, these unstable elements create a "alive" performance, rather than a scripted one.

P: *Do you have strategies to deal with these instabilities and self-imposed imperfection?*

M: Yes, I work within a structure both musically and technically. Within that all the sounds are deliberately set (this means I create EQs and Levels for them). Most importantly, the music follows a structure to a certain extent.

P: *All these uncontrollable elements you have in your music, such as the pickups, the feedbacks, the objects on the table, etc... Given that one cannot control exactly what happens to them all the time, one loses control. So how does giving up control shape your music?*

M: The uncontrollable elements are important for the musical expression and outcome. I can't and I don't want to have total control of what is happening.

P: *Why not? What excites you about not having total control?*

M: It's the character, that it adds to the whole, that I like. It's not perfect.

Naturally, there are two sides to it: regarding the technical aspects, control is obviously very important, like my equalization, levels and microphone/pick-up placement. On the other hand, there are things that are hard to control and also as I said, something that I don't want to control, like the vibrations and feedback from the sound-transducers and the rhythmic outcome of the metallic objects that I drop on the guitar and table.

P: *I'm sure you could have played in a rock band and got a lot of money for it, but you chose to play perhaps one of the most innovative guitar styles I've experienced in recent years (maybe you don't even call it guitar, how do you call it?)... why is that? And how do you see that decision and what motivates you through that path of exiting a mainstream option?*

M: I still call it guitar. If someone asks, usually my answer is something along the lines of "I work with guitar and electronics, but the outcome is more like percussion". It has never been a decision to exit mainstream or anything else, I don't think about it in that way. After years of playing different genres with various bands, I got interested in a more direct/instant way of expression. And by then, while still playing conventional guitar, I started to work more and more with improvised music. Then I spent years exploring different electronic sources and ways of using the guitar. The result is what I'm doing now.

P: *...but you did differentiate "conventional guitar," from "your music". Do you think when people hear/see you they assume you are outside conventional music or ... what do*

you think goes in their heads when they listen to you?

M: I'm using the term [conventional] to describe, that by then I didn't have the guitar laying on the table, playing on it in the way I do today. Yes, I think that people think, what I'm doing is outside conventions. What goes on in their heads - I can't tell. But one of the most common positive comment is that they like the energy of the performance. I think this also has to do with the visual aspects of the performance, that it's embraced through a highly physical approach.

P: *What the infrastructures you might want to exit from or have exited already?*

M: You can say I wanted to exit from some of the habits I had while playing the guitar. And also to achieve a bigger sound by using different sound sources, not only the guitar.

—Mikko Savela and Pedro Lopes, 2016 (Edited by Pedro Lopes)

References (all texts)

[1] Salome Voegelin, *Listening to Noise and Silence: Towards a Philosophy of Sound Art*, ISBN: 9781441162076, published by Continuum.

[2] Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Sublime Offering*, an essay from the book: *Of the Sublime: Presence in Question*, published by the SUNY Press.

Part III

BIOGRAPHIES

Mikko Savela: a guitarist of Finnish origin, born and based in Umeå, Sweden. Mikko's work entails not just unique ways of playing a guitar by destroying it through percussion, but also a manual on how to break away from trends, norms, which are deeply embedded in the acoustic guitar – perhaps the most mainstream musical object of all times. Mikko's work is as physical as it is creative.

Liz Allbee: is a composer/performer residing in Berlin, Germany. She performs most often on trumpet, self-designed quadraphonic trumpet, electronics, and voice. Her work encompasses improvisation, electro-acoustic composition, and instrument creation, often focusing on issues of embodiment and extension. Besides solo work, main projects and collaborators include the Splitter Orchester, Pareidolia (w/Marta Zapparoli), Mensch Mensch Mensch (w/Burkhard Beins), The Zoo (w/Michael Vorfeld), Ganzfeld (w/Sukandar Kartadinata), Elks (Fagaschinski, Roisz, Zapparoli), AnimalNacht (Wassermann, Hochherz), and interdisciplinary group The Liz (w/Liz Kosack and Korhan [Liz] Erel).

Martyna Poznanska: is a sound artist whose investigations dig into all those small sounds around us, those omnipresent pieces of acoustic ecology: noise within urban environments. Her work, through field recordings, compositions and installations, is as much about the sounds that she triggers as about your role in listening: an open invitation to explore the listener's side inside the performance.

Desiree Förster is a Berlin based curator and researcher collaborates within various disciplines such as (synthetic) biology, computer science, philosophy and humanities. Currently writing her PhD at University of Potsdam. She gave presentations about her research on interspecies relationships, human-machine entanglements and new artistic practices at conferences such as the Annual Meeting of the Social Studies of Science Copenhagen 2012 and Denver 2015.

Pedro Lopes is a turntablist metamorphosed into a percussionist by night and a Human Computer Interaction researcher by day. When playing live he deconstructs his instrument, the turntables, into a vehicle of a rapid musical dialog of analog intonation and acoustic overtones. In Pedro's music the needles are microscopes that enable us to hear otherwise unheard micro-realities, such as the sound of a fingernail scratching a membrane or a coin revolving as it falls. Pedro's music work has been presented at Serralves Foundation, Ljubljana jazz festival, Fylkingen, Ausland, and Goethe Institut.

Hypernatural Sounds is a series curated by Pedro Lopes and Desiree Förster. This series brings together musicians and theorists for sharing with the audience the philosophy behind sound art and music.

Part IV

~~*EXIT THROUGH THE GIFT SHOP*~~

SAMPLE THIS WORK



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