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Uncertain Rhythms

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uncertain rhythms

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1. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

This work is a continuation of my research into developing new performance ecosystems for improvisation [1, 2, 3]. For this project I developed a new *volatile assemblage*, aka *VOLA* (Fig. 1). My self-designed musical instruments are shaped by my history as a performer working in acoustic, mechanical, electronic and digital musics, blending and exploring the boundaries and breaking points of these different domains. My instruments support many of my existing techniques originally developed on more conventional instruments, while also affording the development of extended and novel techniques and performance strategies. In much of my work I am particularly focused on the exploration of musical timbre and texture; however, for this project my attention is also directed towards time, flow, pulse, duration, friction, disruption – in short, *qualitative rhythms* and *defamiliarisation*.

My approach to temporality here draws on Elizabeth Grosz's *Feminist Futures?*: “An event occurs only once: it has its own characteristics, which will never occur again, even in repetition. But it occurs alongside of, simultaneous with, and in succession to many other events, whose rhythms are also specific and unique. Duration thus defines qualitative multiplicities, events, singularities; [...in contrast...] the counting of time, its linear representation, reduces and extinguishes its qualitative differences and restructures them as quantitative” [4]. In this project I aim to place in dialogue the time of machines (e.g. clock time) with the felt time and irregularities of human movement. My intention is to explore a sense of rhythmic flow that blends between something like techno, scratch DJ-ing and swing time in jazz; however, I am equally interested in moments of fragmentation, chaotic feedback, noise and unpredictability, with the aim to make familiar rhythms *strange*. My motivation here is influenced by Viktor Shklovsky's *Art as Technique*: “The technique of art is to make objects ‘unfamiliar,’ to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged” [5]. My view is that if we are interested in “New Interfaces for Music Expression”, we should also be developing new aesthetic forms – ones that build on diverse musical traditions while also reimagining (or perhaps *re-sounding*) the future of these traditions and yet unrealized traditions. This project is a modest attempt to search out this new terrain. I hope that it also makes for compelling listening.

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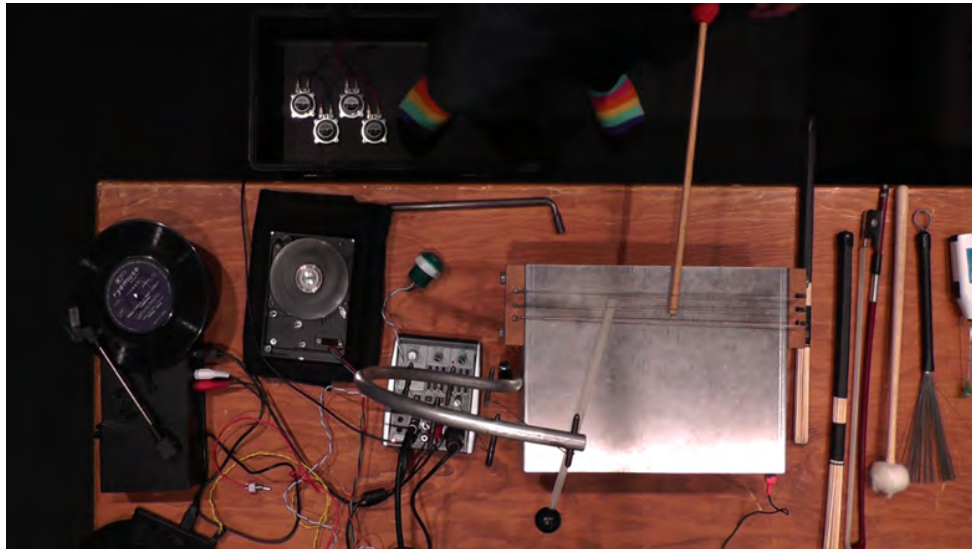


Fig. 1. *volatile assemblage*, aka *VOLA*

2. TECHNICAL NOTES

VOLA brings together a metal resonator with strings and contact microphone, belt-driven turntable with modified vinyl records, upcycled HHD drive controller with a LattePanda Alpha embedded computer running Arduino and Max/MSP patches, and two Bugbrand Postcard Weevils all connected via a mini-mixer to an amplified array of transducers, along with an assortment of actuators (e.g. bow, beaters, cappuccino whisk, ping pong balls). The system is battery powered, and fits into a carry-on size flight case. Additional audio output can be sent to an amplifier or PA for both spatialization and to allow for the system to adapt to different acoustic spaces. The portable, self-contained and adaptable features of *VOLA* are explicit design choices that I hope will assist in my aim of further developing my performance practice through diverse collaborations in diverse locations.

3. PROGRAM NOTES

Uncertain rhythms / crackling metal / improv vinyl
Human-machine disco / glitchy re-sounding futures

Paul Stapleton is an improviser and sound artist originally from Southern California. He designs and performs with a variety of modular metallic sound sculptures, custom made electronics and found objects. Paul is currently based at the Sonic Arts Research Centre (SARC) in Belfast, where he teaches and supervises research in new musical instrument design, music performance, sound design, and critical improvisation studies. He has received critical acclaim for several artistic projects, including his duo album *FAUNA* (2013, pfMENTUM), and for his sound design and composition work as part of the immersive audio theatre piece *Reassembled, Slightly Askew* (2015). His newest trio project *Ens Ekt* with Simon Rose and Adam Pultz Melbye has

received funding for a UK tour from JazzDanmark, as well as from Initiative Neue Musik Berlin to support a forthcoming site-specific performance work.

4. MEDIA LINK(S)

- Video: <https://vimeo.com/313577099>
- Website: <http://www.paulstapleton.net/>

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