

Interview with Lars Åkerlund

UN Can you tell me how you made this piece, "Chiang Mai Live"?

LARS ÅKERLUND It's an old recording from radio, in which a reporter is commenting on a boxing match. I actually used the same recording for another piece too. But anyway, this reporter goes into some sort of ecstatic state while commenting on the fight. And somehow I like this total ecstasy. It can seem a bit ridiculous to get ecstatic over a boxing match, but that's not really the point. His ecstasy, you can hear it in his voice, and I like that. That's what interests me.

UN OK. It surprises me a bit. I didn't think I was listening to a boxing commentary. You must have processed the sound material a lot, you must have worked hard with it...

LÅ Yes.

UN You can hardly hear any voices at all...

LÅ No.

UN Can you describe how you have processed the material?

LÅ I've taken some of his screams and I've broken them down with different methods. I've lowered the resolution of the material radically, and I've distorted it a lot. Then I've chopped it up, sometimes using very short loops. But I think it's clear that it's a voice, at least it's clear to me.

UN OK, that's true, you can hear there's a voice. But you can't hear what he's saying.

LÅ I hear a few words, but I suppose that's because I know the material. I call this piece "Chiang Mai Live" because I made it in Chiang Mai, Thailand, and because some sounds resemble certain Thai instruments. But it's only made from this one voice, that's all the material I've used. Nothing else.

UN Wow. Can we talk about the idea of the ecstatic? You make music, or sound pieces, that are very repetitive and monotonous, and then you've chosen to work with a voice that goes into ecstasy. What fascinates you about this?

LÅ I believe that in a state of ecstasy, if you're able to reach it, which is pretty difficult – but if you reach this state, then you're as close to total freedom as a human being can get. Then you're completely open - open

to yourself and to the world around you. I think of it as a way of reaching some kind of understanding.

UN OK. So it's about transforming the body, by subjecting it to the treatment of certain sounds.

LÅ Yes. If you're treated really hard, if you're exposed to certain stimuli, then it will have a physical effect on you. What interests me is the state of non-control you can reach. In a sense, totally uncontrolled thoughts and experiences can appear. This type of sounds can have hallucinatory effects as well.

UN This is something you're usually working with, aren't you?

LÅ Yes, or at least it's always been there as an element. Hypnosis is another state that interests me, on the side of ecstasy. It's a similar state, a state on the same level but at another end. It's somehow always present in what I do. And it's really not about anything else than entering into a certain state.

UN You work quite differently from other contemporary sound artists. I imagine it has to do with the fact that you want to produce a very concrete effect. It's as if the sounds themselves have no meaning of their own, but only work as stimuli. And this leads to your working a lot with rhythms, which not so many others do. Can you say something about this?

LÅ I think the pulse is extremely important, especially when you use this kind of chaotic sounds. It creates a structure that makes it possible to somehow look into the sounds. One is always looking for structures. And a pulse is an incredibly simple structure, isn't it? Somehow chaos stands in opposition to... The pulse beats something into your mind... It creates a structure in the chaos. And somehow you can enter deeper into it. Pure, random chaos does not interest me. I like it when there's an intention behind the music. A lot of people work with very random sounds. That's not interesting to me. For music to have a meaning it needs to have an intention. You can listen to field recordings if you like, you know, sounds recorded in nature, and there's no intention there, which could be interesting. But as soon as you make a selection you have processed the sound. If you just stick your head out in the woods, you'll hear no meaningful sounds...

UN I'm thinking about the similarity to dance music here. The connection is clear. How do you understand your own practice in relation to traditional rhythmical dance music?

LÅ The difference is that, even though there's a pulse in my pieces, it's within the sound itself it happens. The pulse is a means for entering into

the sound. Traditional dance music focuses on the pulse, the sounds work for the pulse. But sure, I think that a lot of contemporary dance music is far more interesting than much contemporary sound art. Often, contemporary sound art has simply another angle than mine.

UN So it's about... if one logs onto the UN homepage, one is supposed to listen to your work at a really loud volume, and then, in the best-case scenario, one will become hypnotized, or go into an ecstatic state?

LÅ Yes. As long as the volume is loud enough... It works on me anyway. If it works on others that'd be good, I suppose. It's music for entering a certain state. But I can't guarantee ecstasy... hopefully though...

UN Good. No guarantees.

LÅ No guarantees. But there's a possibility.