Benoît Maubrey
Die Audio Gruppe

Performances with Electroacoustic Clothes
Audio Clothes and Uniforms

AUDIO CLOTHES
The Beginning

Audio Jackets. Berlin.1983
12 volt, 10 watts.

In 1982, while recuperating from a bad case of painter's block, I started taking long walks through West Berlin: my path took me one day through a department store, where I heard a voice advertising a sale on jeans over the public-address (PA) system. This, I thought, was the solution to my problem: art happening through loudspeaker systems in public spaces -- instead of „painting„ my colors, I would "speak„ them through the air. I soon began noticing that PA systems existed everywhere around the city -- convention centers are equipped with them, as are train stations and sport stadiums. They can even be found inside buses and airplanes, or mounted on street lamps along important boulevards and city squares.

As a matter of fact, everywhere you find large groups of people the chances are you will also find public speaking systems. I proceeded to try to obtain permission to use these existing speaker systems for "audio performances". In the beginning I had some success: I performed on visitor's day at the International Congress Center in Berlin. I repeated the sentence "Yellow and blue make green" through the main loudspeaker system and had the technicians process my voice through a sound modulator. But no further offers came, mainly because those responsible for these PA systems were afraid that people might be annoyed or even panic at what I was saying -- a problem that still exists today in the case of some of my more recent Speakers Corner sculptures and projects (see SPEAKER'S MONUMENT/ Riga 1991, SPEAKER'S CONTAINER/ Freiburg 1989, SPEAKER'S MAILBOXES/ Berlin 1986).

This is why I started attaching loudspeakers to various second-hand jackets and clothes lying around my studio, transforming them into mobile loudspeaker systems. I created entire series of Audio Clothes out of my friends' and neighbors' wardrobes. I had each person make recordings and play them through portable cassette recorders while hooked up to the clothes. Eventually I sat down by myself one afternoon and made a series of recordings with pots and pans in my kitchen --creating, in effect, a "heavy metal" composition for Audio Jackets.

In 1983, I was invited to present the audio clothes at the Performance Festival of Paris, at the Galerie Donguy, and in 1984, at the Art and Media exhibition at the Staatliche Kunsthalle of Berlin. The participants in our performances were allowed to move around any way they wanted -- in other words, the performances were quite loose and individualistic. But somehow I felt that the performances lacked a framework and direction: there was no choreography, and the sound quality of these electroacoustic clothes left a lot to be desired.

The Audio Herd Costume (detail)

The Audio Herd.
Bundesgartenschau Berlin.1985 (12 volt, 30 watts).

THE AUDIO HERD.

In 1985 a public arts competition for the Berlin Federal Garden Show ("Bundesgartenschau") gave me an opportunity to conceive a complete "Audio Uniform" both in terms of electronics and sound. I founded Die Audio Gruppe (sound: Hans Peter Kuhn, electronics: Wulf Köthe, organization: Claudia Träger) and succeeded in obtaining funds for creating The Audio Herd. This electroacoustic uniform consisted of seven custom-built Audio Suits for ambulatory performances through the various landscapes of this park. These suits -- classically cut jackets with pants for men and skirts for women -- were made from a synthetic material that looked like animal fur. The idea was for them to blend into the environment like multimedia chameleons -- the participants played audio recordings of animals (monkeys, birds, human beings) that were choreographed into different areas of the garden (e.g. monkeys in the tropical sections, birds in the bushes, people in the clearings). The performers were fitted with "audio corsets", 40-cm -diameter circular pieces of leather in which a car loudspeaker was mounted. The audio corsets, worn under the jackets, were strapped to the performer's backs. The only visible electronic element was a 30-watt amplifier that was mounted on the back of the jacket. The cassettes were played on "Walkman" cassette players, and a 12-volt battery served as power source.

The Audio Herd.
Berlin. 1985.
12 volt, 30 watts.

THE SOUND EFFECT OF AUDIO CLOTHES:
A mobile and multiacoustic performance.

      Unlike most outdoor concerts where the sound is amplified through one massive PA system, an Audio Uniform concert consists of individual performers each playing his or her own sound. The music is not blasted at the listener with 30,000 watts of power from a static source, but is carried with 30 watts of power from different places at a volume that depends on how far the listener is from each performer. The Uniform wearers spread throughout an area so that it is impossible for the listener to see or hear all sound sources at the same time. As I recall, during the "monkey" part of the the The Audio Herd performance, most of the Herd was hidden behind bushes. I use the term "multiacoustic" to describe the sound effects of the Audio Herd: the cassettes, though identical and played simultaneously, are not (and cannot be, due to the portable nature of the "Walkmans" mechanics) perfectly synchronized. Synchronization is not the intent of these mobile sound sculptures anyway: the sound changes as soon as the Audio-Uniform-wearer turns his or her back or starts moving in a different direction. The same sound is propelled through the air from a variety of vantage points in space, so that it reaches the listener's ear "staggered" or like a echo. This is why the places in which these Clothes are played are so important -- the topography and architecture of the area are vital elements in the concert. In addition, the loudspeaker sources are carried by people who react spontaneously to situations (e.g. walking up stairs, waiting at a stoplight or exiting through a door), thus bringing whole new factors to these sound events that cannot be duplicated by normal "instruments" in the protective environment of a concert hall, gallery, or museum. The element of chance plays an important part in our performances. The public-at-large does not usually expect us (one cannot
choose one's public when working outdoors). The first official Audio Herd performance at the Bundesgartenschau 85 was briefly interrupted by a posse of park police, providing us with an unexpected intermission while they cleared up matters with their superiors.

In 1986 we were invited to the Ars Electronica Festival in Linz, Austria. During a preparatory visit I discovered that the city is home to the Voest Alpine, the biggest steel mill in Central Europe, so for this occasion we created **The Audio Steelworkers**. We borrowed 10 fireproof coveralls on which I mounted amplifiers and loudspeakers. HP Kuhn created a tape based on live recordings from the steel mills(a lot of hammering on anvils). During the week-long festival we realized 10 walk-on performances in various locations in and around the city.

The AUDIO SUBWAY CONTROLLERS (1987) were created for the festival Die Anweisung in Berlin. In the Berlin subway, each station has an attendant who uses the PA system to advise passengers (with more or less emphasis, depending on his or her mood) when and when not to get on the trains ("Einsteigen, bitte!" and "Zuruckbeleiben!" are the phrases they use, translating roughly as "All aboard please!" and "Step back!"). I systematically recorded all the attendants' voices along one subway line and had Hans Peter compile them them onto two separate cassettes: one with approximately 30 "All aboard, please!" voices and another with 30 "Step back!" voices. Because this was was an official festival project, the Subway Authority loaned me seven authentic subway attendant suits, under which we could fit the audio corsets. As it turned out, the suits also had extra-large inside pockets for the amplifiers, batteries and cassette players, so that we had ourselves an instant Audio Uniform -- but with no visible electronics. The performance consisted of playing the subway voice collages while "patrolling" the subways in which they had been recorded. Needless to say, the combination of subway voices being played through authentic suits caused a certain amount of consternation among the subway passengers (and employees).

The AUDIO GUARDS Ultima Festival, Oslo 1993
7 Performers wearing uniforms resembling those of the Royal Swedish Guard.
Their choreography copies the official "changing of the guard" ceremony except
that instead of rifles they use umbrellas and shoes equipped with Piezo contact
microphones that are amplified through their Audio Jackets.
Choreography: Sygun Schenk.

In 1988, we created **the AUDIO BICYCLISTS** for the Festival des Arts Electroniques in Rennes. This city in the Bretagne area of France is crazy about bicycling, which provided the inspiration for the theme of this project that I created together with the musician Ralf Buron. I had 10 "audio jerseys" (the typical nylon knit sportshirts that bicycle racers wear) built with loudspeakers sewn into the lower back area (reinforced with leather), where the cyclists usually keep their water bottles and energy rations. Conveniently for us, we discovered that that Bernard Hinault, the five-time winner of the Tour de France, lived near Rennes. He agreed to let us interview him, and the musician Ralf Buron, an avid cyclist who had joined the Audio Gruppe as sound man for this project, used the taped interview to splice together a word collage that sounded in some parts like a techno-rap: "J'ai gagné" was the basic chorus line of the Audio Cyclists' cassette. The local sports center recruited 10 amateur racers and organized a route through the streets of Rennes, complete with an official master of ceremonies and obligatory Audio Cyclist trophy for the winner. There were even solo races against the clock, during which a metronome sound was played through the speaker-jerseys.

from left to right:
R. Buron, Bernard Hinault, B. Maubrey

AUDIO BSR, 1986
Berliner sanitation worker uniform
with vacuum ceaner sound.
(Collection of the artist)

AUDIO VACUUM CLEANERS, 1986
Audio Jeans Uniform with vacuum ceaner sound.
The Mattress Factory, Pitts. Pa.

In 1985 and 86 I started installing the audio corsets inside other standard uniforms (for example **Berlin sanitation worker uniforms**) and having them play their own particular sound -- for example the recorded sound of a vacuum cleaner. This consternated passersby because of the contradiction of a non-"working" sound (vacuum cleaner noise) with that of a "normal" working clothing (sanitation worker overalls). People are confronted withthe problem of "hearing" with "seeing". One sees something normal, but it behaves in a completely unlogical way: Where is the motor? Where is the vacuum cleaner bag? Are they actually cleaning? Does this machine actually work?

AUDIO VACUUM CLEANER
Audio Jacket with vacuum ceaner sound.
Amsterdam 1985

AUDIO CLEANING LADIES
Cleaning lady tunics with amplifies rakes.
Beck Forum, Munich 1993

The **GUITAR MONKEYS** were conceived for the Berlin Atonal Festival (1986), a series of punk and avant-garde rock concerts. Ten performers with little or no experience with playing guitars wore black leather vests with loudspeakers mounted on the lower back section and an amplifier in the inside pocket into which one could plug an electric guitar or a microphone. In some cases , for extra volume, we did away with the leather vests and simply strapped large loudspeaker boxes onto our backs like backpacks . Each member of this "rock band" could individually amplify his or her instrument without having to be on stage. Most of the time we played in the middle of the audience or in stairwells, hallways, or other niches particular to the space. (Men and Ladies' rooms have unique acoustic qualities.) The Guitar Monkeys were basically a noise and feedback band -- and an intense one at that -- imagine not just one loudspeaker giving off feedback, but ten at once (from below, above, and around you). We purchased our guitars at the local Berlin flea market with a budget limit of 10 $ per instrument. Instead of standard contact microphones, we used cheap Piezo ceramic loudspeakers as pick-ups. Even after the Atonal Festival, the Guitar Monkeys stayed busy in local underground clubs and went on tour (one critic dubbed us the "grandchildren of Jimi Hendrix" and described the music as "post-industrial punk").

The Guitar Monkeys marks an important step in the development of Audio Uniforms because it made the performers personally responsible for their sounds, while previous Uniforms only permitted them to play prerecorded cassettes. It was during the Guitar Monkeys European tour of 1989 that I happened to meet the director of l'Aeronef in Lille who asked me to design a new Uniform for the festival Les Arts au Soleil ("Arts in the Sun") which was going to take place on the beaches of northern France. This is how the Audio Ballerinas came into existence (see AUDIO BALLERINAS brochure).

CELLULAR BUDDIES. Sonambiente Sound Art Festival, Academy of Arts, Berlin,1996. Five people dressed in security guard uniforms are posted at various museum venues. Each CELLULAR BUDDY carries an Audio Suitcase equipped with a cellular phone, batteries, and a complete PA system that automatically allows anyone to call them up and talk "out loud". The project works as a form of mobile high-tech version of "Speakers Corner" in Hyde Park London (where people stand on wooden crates and give speeches), but in this situation the participants can call up the CELLULAR BUDDIES from the comfort and privacy of their own home, business, or street phone and express themselves.

AUDIO JEANS UNIFORM. 1986.
The Mattress Factory, Pitts. Pa.
7 Performers equipped with electroacoustic jean jackets and
Walkmans playing pre-recorded sounds from West Berlin.
Tapes: H.P.Kuhn.

BONG BOYS . Volklinger Hütte, Saarbrücken. LICHT exhibition.1999
Performers in tuxedo jackets (no visible electronics) wearing loudspeaker corsets with the sound of a very loud "bong". The performers "work" a crowd by "accidentally" bumping into various objects or persons with their head or shoulder (a pole, a tree, streetlight, or a passersby shoulder), when they hit this object they trigger a loud "BONG". This continues over an area until all 10 climax together by "bonging" alltogether in a group choreography.

1952 born in Washington, D.C.
1975 Bachelor of Arts Diploma from Georgetown University
lives since 1979 in Berlin / since 1990 in Bruck o.T. Baitz (near Brandenburg)

Performances and Festivals (a selection):
2004 "Sonoric Atmospheres /Ostsee Biennale der Klangkunst.
  -- AUDIO IGLOO, sound sculpture in the Singuhr-Hörgalerie, Parochial Church/Berlin.
  -- Thailand New Media Art Festival/Bangkok.
  -- "Soundscape & Shadow" Musikfestival ,Denkmalschmiede Höfgen.
  -- Lowlands Festival, Holland.
  -- Schweriner Kultursommer.
  -- LEM Festival (Gracia Territoria Sonor), Barcelona.
  -- BUGA Park Potsdam, AUDIO PEACOCKS, gARTen event.
 2002 AUDIO BALLERINAS, Location One, NYC.
  -- HIGH FIDELITY production, Musiktheatre im Revier, Gelsennkirchen (co-production with
    Berndt Schindowski).
  -- AUDIO PEACOCKS, Artist in Residence at Lieux Publics, Marseille.
  -- Hamburger Bahnhof, Museum fuer Gegenwartskunst, Berlin.
  -- Potsdamer Festspiele.
2001 KunstMuseum / Wolfsburg.
  -- Berliner Festspiele.
  -- New Haven Festival for Arts and Ideas.
  -- Seoul Performing Arts Festival.
  -- Medi@terra, Athens.
  -- Musee des Arts et Industrie, Saint-Etienne.
  -- FETA Festival, Gdansk.
2000 Monaco Dance Danses Forum, Montecarlo.
  -- Tollwood Festival, Munich.
  -- Postdamer Musikfestspiele, Potsdam.
1999 IDAT (International Dance and Technology Conference),Phoenix, Arizona.
  -- Danzdag, Kulturhus Aarhus, Denmark.
  -- "Audio Ballerinas and Electronic Guys", Theatre am Hallesches Ufer / Berlin.
  -- AUDIO IGLOO, commissioned electro-acoustic sculpture at Hull Time Based Arts, UK.
  -- Les Nuits Savoureuses de Belfort, France.
1998 MALTA Festival, Poznan, Poland.
  -- Stockton Riverside Festival, UK.
  -- International Symposium for Elecronic Arts, Chicago.
  -- "Audio Ballerinas and Electronic Guys" USA tour, The Kitchen (NYC).
  -- MALTA Festival , Poznan, Poland.
  -- Stockton Riverside Festival, UK.
  -- Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam
  -- Sound Art Festival , Krakow.
1997 AUDIO GEISHAS, ICC-NTT Tokyo City Opera House.
  -- ISEA, Chicago.
  -- Ostranenie Festival, Stiftung Bauhaus / Dessau.
1996 XIX International Triennale Exhibition of Milan.
  -- SONAMBIENTE Sound Art Festival, Academy of Arts, Berlin.
  -- International Street Theatre Festival, Holzminden (1st Prize for "Mobility and
    Flexibilty").
  -- "Audio Ballerinas and Electronic Guys" Tour/ USA, The KITCHEN (NYC), Scena
    Theatre (Washington, D.C.), Buskers Fare (NYC).
  -- KRYPTONAL Festival, Berlin.
  -- 38eme Rugissants, Grenoble.
1995 Krakow (THE KRAKOVIAN MEETINGS).
  -- Sound Art Festival, Hannover.

1994 "Audio Drama", Theatre zum Westlichen Staathirschen, Berlin.
  -- International Symposium for Electronic Art, Helsinki.
  -- "Audio Drama", co-production with Theatre zum Westichen Staathirschen, Berlin.
  -- German Television Video Prize, SWF, Baden-Baden.
1993 MEDIALE, Hamburg.
  -- Art and Computers, University of Moscow.
  -- "Augenlied", Schloß Pluschow, Mecklenburgische Künstlerhaus.
  -- BECK Forum, Munich.
  -- ULTIMA Festival, Oslo.
1992 Cleveland Performance Festival, Ohio.
  -- The Night of Electricity, Rotterdam.
  -- TISEA, Sydney.
1991 Europeen Land Art Biennale, Cottbus, Germany.
1990 Festival les Arts au Soleil,, Aeronef Lille, France.
  -- Sound Symposium, St. John's, Newfoundland.
  -- "Urbane Aboriginale", Berlin.
1989 Festival PERSPECTIVES, Saarbrücken.
1988 Festival des Arts Electroniques, Rennes, France.
  -- "Parcours Sonores", Musée de La Villette, Paris.
  -- Festival of Europeen Street Theatre, Aurillac, France.
1987 STEIRISCHE HERBST, Graz, Austria.
  -- Galerie Giannozzo. Berlin.
1986 ARS ELECTRONICA, Linz, Austria.
  -- The Mattress Factory, Pittsburg, Pa.
    -- Berlin Atonal Festival.
1985 Bundesgartenschau 85, Berlin.
  -- "Berlin in the Gasteig Art Center", Munich.
  -- Alternativa IV, Lisbon.

Commisioned works (corporate events): BMW, VW, Volklingen Huetten, Hahn Meitner Institut/Berlin, Nokia, Sony Entertainment, NTT/Tokyo, Louis Vuitton / Seoul.

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