

Kiezsalon

HKW, Berlin, Germany

The wandering Kiezsalon concert series in Berlin has settled into a unique position within the city's musical landscape: with public subsidies that keep ticket prices very low, it promotes curatorial diversity and affordability, pairing obscure and well established artists from new music, experimental electronics, indie and the avant garde. That might not sound remarkable, but it is. First, because everything is expensive. And second, in a city teeming with venues and established subcultural gatekeepers, it is hard to create convincing new performance contexts for artists – and draw audiences who are willing to take a risk. Kiezsalon consistently does both, invoking the idea that subcultures do not need to be monocultures.

This episode, held in the newly renovated auditorium of House of World Cultures, offers three very different cultural strains of 21st century folk revivalism, oscillating between avant garde and avant pop. First up is the Chicago based artist (and sound studies adjunct professor) Whitney Johnson aka Matchess, whose latest album *Sonescent* was recently released by Drag City.

Lighting a single candle on a table placed centre stage and adorned with a mixer and variety of electronics, Johnson combines a single wavering, harmonically shifting drone with a tuning fork, which she hits off mic and then brings closer, the vibrating hum acoustically mirroring the oscillations' electronic purity. From there, she speaks and sings from a book of her writing, unconventionally looping her phrases – sometimes with rhythmic regularity, other times feral and aleatoric – complemented by long melody lines played on an electric viola.

Jack Callahan & Jeff Witscher + Territorial Gobbing + Ash Reid

Cafe Oto, London, UK

The majority of the genres we know as avant garde music have not changed all that much since they broke their respective moulds. This is not to say that these various modes are moribund, but most musique concrète sounds like it could have been made in the 1950s; most free improv sounds like it could have been made in the 60s and 70s; most laptop music sounds like it could have been made in the 90s, etc. This gig at London's Cafe Oto is different. The music is definitively in familiar avant garde idioms, but the choice of material means it could never have been made in any other era than ours.

First up is something of a Cafe Oto house band, consisting of venue employees Ash Reid, Jackson Burton and Regan Bowering, performing a piece by Reid. Full disclosure: I have been friends with Reid and familiar with her work for many years. I usually make it a point not to review my friends at any length, but she

Arpeggios shimmer through a dense but consonant harmonic fog, most likely compounded from the vocal phrases sped up, filtered, delayed and decayed. Like a palindrome, the piece peaks and returns to its initial state after 20 minutes, the tuning fork realigning the meditation and drawing minimalist-inspired connections to psych, folk and sacral music.

She is followed by British composer and songwriter Alison Cotton. Wielding a viola, vocal mic and metal percussion (wind chimes), she offers both a gothier and more historical take on Anglo-Irish folk tradition. Using the Suzuki Omnichord as a harmonium stand-in, the dirge-like sound is felt immediately on "Violet May", from Cotton's recent album *The Portrait You Painted Of Me*.

The song is hers but could easily have been written centuries ago. Yet, far from retrospective, both her instrumentation and soaring, narrative vocals-only approach are boldly minimalist. Pitched somewhere between lamentation and incantation, her cover of Dorothy Carter's "Shirts Of Lace" is a highlight. The only drawback is the heavy reverb enveloping her viola and vocals, which adds melodrama to an already pathos-laden music.

That said, Cotton's performance also set up the starkest musical contrast to Ichiko Aoba's complex J-pop-folk. Big in Japan and with a deep background in anime, film and video game soundtracks, Aoba mostly performs songs from 2020's *Wind Swept Adan*, which, in true J-pop style, unselfconsciously combines every conceivable genre reproducible on a Spanish guitar in different time signatures and speeds.

Hers is an ethereal, 7th chord heavy, Japanese language math-folk. There are surprise vaudevillian moments, like when

was added to the bill after I committed to write this piece, and I can say this is the most accomplished composition I have seen by her. While the parts which comprise it amount to an argument about the control imposed by sartorial bureaucracy, and the hypocrisy of those who enforce it, this argument is not delivered syllogistically, and instead the parts exist in a tense constellation.

It begins with Reid and Burton mimicking smoking against the cold, while Reid reads the dress code of an institution with "no staff uniform", which nonetheless requires employees to wear "plain (non-patterned) black or dark clothing" and "a staff badge at all times" with a list of prohibitions such as "vests, sleeveless T-shirts, cut downs or ripped clothing, and any form of beachwear including flip-flops". The performance proceeds with, inter alia, a loop of BBC newsreader Clive Myrie's claim that the cost of living crisis is "insignificant now" upon news of Queen Elizabeth II on her deathbed, before Reid proceeds to read through an octave pedal



Ichiko Aoba

Aoba walks her fingers up the neck of her guitar like a spider, which she then feigns to swallow. This, together with the whistling and wistful melodies, sometimes teeter on the saccharine. But Aoba's stunning guitar work and songwriting

craft, projected without any effects, more than make up for it. Fans line up for photos and signatures after her show, which ends with a standing ovation to her current single "Hello".
Alexander Samuels

the sumptuary laws of the first Queen Elizabeth, which prohibited "superfluities of silks, cloths of gold, silver, and other most vain devices" lest young men "run into such debts and shifts as they cannot live out of danger of laws without attempting unlawful acts". The set ends with Burton reading UK Prime Minister Liz Truss's expenses before a grand finale of rubbing honey on Burton's teeth (as was Queen Elizabeth I's predilection).

Following a very fun performance with cassette tapes by Theo Gowans aka Territorial Gobbing, which culminates in him eating the content of an entire cassette, headliners Jack Callahan and Jeff Witscher take to the stage. The duo have recently launched the new music and contemporary composition label FLEA. Sitting opposite each other with MIDI controllers, their set consists of an onslaught of hundreds and hundreds of samples from throughout their lifetimes (Callahan was born in 1990 and Witscher was born in 1983). Here are a few which I noted down during the gig: the voice of Jar

Jar Binks, the Windows start-up music, the intro to a song by The Killers, the intro to a song by Dr Dre, Flava Flav's famous "yeah boy" catchphrase (with the final syllable extending into a buzzing drone); Ronald Reagan's "tear down this wall" speech; Super Mario sound effects; and the music from the production company logos at the end of *The Simpsons*.

At one point in the proceedings Callahan moves to a piano to virtuosically pick out atonal lines while Witscher proceeds with the collage, and the melee is intermittently interrupted by prerecorded questions directed to either Callahan or Witscher, upon which the respective performer will step up to a mic and answer.

Adorno once wrote that modern art adheres to a "canon of prohibitions", and during one of these interludes Witscher is asked what he would impose as a universal law for music. Witscher replies that he would "outlaw digital delay", and then this law is almost immediately broken with a large excerpt of "Flim" by Aphex Twin.
Daniel Neofetou

On Site

Exhibitions, installations, etc

Future Shock

180 Studios, London, UK

In his 1970 book *Future Shock*, Alvin Toffler describes how “we have in our time released a totally new social force – a stream of change so accelerated that it influences our sense of time, revolutionises the tempo of daily life and affects the very way we feel the world around us...”. He goes on to cite the “great growling engine of technology” as a major accelerative force for change, bringing new machines, new techniques and fresh creative ideas.

The 14 installations in the subterranean chambers of 180 Studios are brought together under the same Toffler masthead. They employ the latest digital tools to zip between the virtual and the physical, interrogating our perceptions of space, time and reality. There’s nothing static in the transient world of *Future Shock*: as we step into UVA’s humming threshold of *Topologies* (2022) unstoppable laser

beams sweep and dart, mapping blue trapezoid frames and sloping walkways over the former parking bay; in Nonotak’s *Daydream V.6* (2021) layered gauze screens carry holographic projections that breed spinning Catherine wheels and strobing tabs and bars of light to the accompaniment of out of body Zen meditative music by Takami Nakamoto.

Reviewers have commented on the lack of ideas underpinning this show but themes will out, deliberately or incidentally. Environmental fragility, impending climatic catastrophe and human absence emerge across the stronger works. First up, Ryoichi Kurokawa’s *Subassemblies* (2020–22) depicts contrasting environments in two wall-sized cinematic videos, one rural, the other urban, both deserted. A gigantic forest of pine trees drifts on air while opposite is the interior of an abandoned building with stairways leading nowhere; then BOOM! The pine forest tips upside

down, its trees melt and bend; on the other screen, windows are malformed, rooms twist into snail-shell cavities, floors become floods, and over it sounds the sizzle of damaged electrical circuits. *Subassemblies* presents a hybrid world of the natural and the artificial, where the laws of physics have been upended to create a new reality.

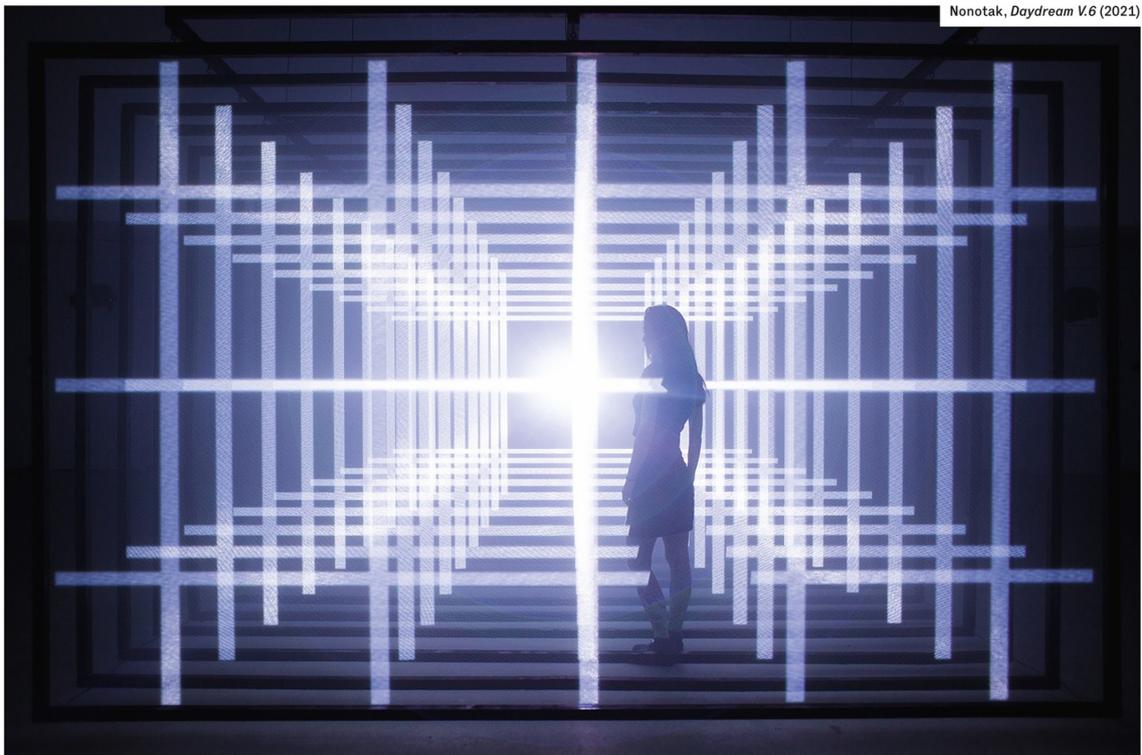
Lawrence Lek’s animation *Theta* (2022) features a self-driving police car patrolling an empty post-apocalyptic cityscape. Stripped of purpose, the vehicle is monitored by a traffic camera and is not free to roam, in the same way we are unwittingly under surveillance from the technology we carry around in our pockets.

In the opening pages of the Spring/Summer 2022 issue of *Fact*, the magazine published by the organisation that co-curated *Future Shock* with 180 Studios, editor Sean Bidder quotes philosopher David Chalmers, who proposes

in his most recent book *Reality+* that “virtual worlds are real; virtual objects are real; simulations are not illusions”. At a recent Queen concert at London’s O2 arena, Freddie Mercury appeared in life-size digital form, singing a call and response alongside a live audience. Here, creative studio Actual Objects conjures up a set of digital humans on multiple screens who inhabit the southern border of the US, awaiting the arrival of tropical storm Vicky. They address us with their takes on the situation, but whether they’re in a car, gesticulating out in the yard or indoors, their settings are frozen and their emotions plastic.

When it’s working well, digital technology enriches the imagination and deepens our engagement with reality, while the physical world confers meaning on the virtual. But whichever way you cut it, a digital hurricane is not the same as a real one.

Deborah Nash



Nonotak, *Daydream V.6* (2021)

Nonotak Studio