

Universität der Künste Berlin
Masterstudiengang Sound Studies - Akustische Kommunikation
Klanganthropologie und Klangökologie
Prof. Dr. Sabine Sanio

Jaap Blonk: the voice oktopus

Berlin 2009

Marco Montiel-Soto
Geb. am 16.07.1976 in Maracaibo, Venezuela
Matrikelnummer: 359442

I have days of listening
only to Jaap Blonk.
It is like having the sensation
of being a foreigner or
living in a country where
nobody speaks your language.
But I don't feel lost in translation,
because to understand
his voice poesie,
I don't need any translation.
My ears are open and free,
just one step to drive me crazy.

thursday 3 September 2009

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“Experiential time is also dependent on the density of alteration: the more surprising events take place, the ,quicker‘ time passes; the more repetitions there are, the ,slower‘ time pass. But there is surprise only when something unexpected occurs: on the basis of previous events we expect a particular kind of succession of alterations, and then something occurs that is quite unlike what we expected. At that moment we are surprised: listeners are extremely sensitive to absorb the unexpected alteration, to adjust themselves to it. This after a short time a constant succession of contrasts becomes just as ,boring;‘ as constant repetition: we stop expecting anything specific, and cannot but be surprised the overall impression of a succession of contrasts is levelled down to a single information. The degree of information is this greatest when at every moment of a musical flow moments of surprise (in the sense we have described) is greatest: the music constantly has ,something to say“.(1)

Structure and experiential time
Die Reihe, vol II, Vienna, 1955.
Karlheinz Stockhausen

(1) <http://209.85.129.132/search?q=cache:6AHbKZTiWQJ:www.dxarts.washington.edu/courses/460/structure%26Time001.pdf+Karlheinz+Stockhausen+-+Structure+and+Experiential+Time&cd=1&hl=es&ct=clnk&client=firefox-a>

Jaap Blonk

(born 1953 in Woerden, Holland)

Jaap Blonk is a self-taught composer, performer and poet. He went to university for mathematics and musicology but did not finish those studies.

In the late 1970s he took up saxophone and started to compose music.

A few years later he discovered his potential as a vocal performer, at first in reciting poetry and later on in improvisations and his own compositions. For almost two decades the voice was his main means for the discovery and development of new sounds.

From around the year 2000 on Blonk started work with electronics, at first using samples of his own voice, then extending the field to include pure sound synthesis as well.

He took a year off of performing in 2006. As a result, his renewed interest in mathematics made him start a research of the possibilities of algorithmic composition for the creation of music, visual animation and poetry.

As a vocalist, Jaap Blonk is unique for his powerful stage presence and almost childlike freedom in improvisation, combined with a keen grasp of structure. He performed in many European countries, as well as in the U.S. and Canada, Indonesia, Japan, South Africa and Latin America. With the use of live electronics the scope and range of his concerts has acquired a considerable extension.

Besides working as a soloist, he collaborated with many musicians and ensembles in the field of contemporary and improvised music, like Maja Ratkje, Mats Gustafsson, Nicolas Collins, Joan La Barbara, The Ex, the Netherlands Wind Ensemble and the Ebony Band. He premiered several compositions by the German composer Carola Bauckholt, including a piece for voice and orchestra. A solo voice piece was commissioned by the Donaueschinger Musiktage 2002. On several occasions he collaborated with visual computer artist Golan Levin.

Blonk's work for radio and television includes several commissioned radio plays.

He also makes larger-scale drawings of his scores, which are being exhibited.⁽²⁾

Temporary succession
of sounds.

Three moments:

I.the voice

It is evident that Jaap Blonk, for the last 20 years, has been searching for a new language, a pure and absolute language.

The voice is his principal instrument, a scream is not just a scream, it is a way to liberate an idea.

Jaap Blonk lets us know that the voice is not only for speaking in a coherent form or for singing a song, because he has developed the idea that there is no words to express the meaning of the sound.

The performances of Jaap Blonk are loaded of an enormous vocal complexity, provided with admirable sound textures. He demonstrates this through variation of the voice, intonation, expressions and gestures.

His corporal and vocal expression is a poem in itself. To realize this phenomenon, it is only necessary to listen him.

“there is not accidental that the German word Stimmung means humor and mood at the same time, but also tolerates the idea of voice and syntony. We are been in tune by the music that sizes of us. the music can transmute to us, can return to us crazy at the same time as it can cure to us”.(3)



the man like sonorous experiment
Dr. Adolfo Vásquez Rocca

(3) <http://www.observacionesfilosoficas.net/sloterdijkylhombre.html>

In the interactive piece “Blonk-organ“, he demonstrates the variations of his face and sonorous expression. On his website, anyone can activate the recordings of his voice by simply clicking on the different self-portraits and therefore improvise their own Blonk vocal poesie.

The piece makes us believe that his facial expressions correspond to the sounds of his voice. Without any explanation, we can perceive his principal intention, through the piece’s power and quality.

The “Blonk-organ“ also shows the beginning of his vocal manifest, phonetic studies and the necessity of interactive improvisation.

“Do you have the feeling that you have started to speak another language?”

I believe that I have expanded my vocabulary quite substantially, and it is still growing. For me, as a composer, electronics are an extension of my possibilities for instrumentation. As a vocalist I will keep looking for new possibilities, but at the same time I know that through electronics I can achieve sounds that no human voice will ever be able to produce. The voice can be a carrier of semantic, psychological and musical meaning, but so can electronically processed vocal sounds and electronically generated sounds.“⁽⁴⁾

“Music aspires
to be a language
without intention“⁽⁵⁾

BLOK-ORGAN



“Blonk’s work is witty, it is charged with tension. And it’s international to boot, as it short-circuits any language barrier. There may be a certain looseness about the pieces themselves, but his approach is one of dedication and preciseness. Exactly because he leaves overt meaning and melody behind, he turns his voice into an instrument. Indeed. An inspiring experience.”⁽⁶⁾



“The title piece, which translates more or less as „flow of the mouth“ is a purely improvised tour de force, with Blonk letting fly and seemingly covering every sound known to man (and a few perhaps hitherto unknown) in just over three minutes. But the most extreme piece is the closing „Brüllt“, written by celebrated Dadaist Tristan Tzara. A nine-minute repetition of a single word (apparently translatable as either „roar“ or „scream“), Blonk first roars and then screams at an increasingly frenetic pace until about the six minute mark, when his physical and even mental well-being seems to be in question.” (7)



II. Sound Poesie

Theodoro Adorno position on music can help us understand the concept of sonorous poetry:

“Music resembles a language. Expressions such as musical idiom, musical intonation, are not simply metaphors. But music is not identical with language...music resembles language in the sense that it is a temporal sequence of articulated sounds which are more than just sounds..its similarity with the language is only fulfilled its spacing ”.(8)

We can observe in the works of Jaap Blonk the necessity to express something, where the meaning already is enrolled in other states of perception. Through improvisation, Blonk’s expressions change from the lightness of a child’s humor to extreme hysterics.

Blonk has become a writer, prolific composer and a specialist in the execution of sonorous poetry, supported by a powerful scenic presence and an almost infantile freedom for the improvisation.



Vocalor - second solo voice cd
Staalplaat (1998)

„the 26 clips of solo Blonk reveal the vocalist’s astonishing technique, the poet stretches, smashes, and oozes seemingly impossible sounds. He twists and stretches words and vowels, insight fully targeting true meanings. The results are disarming and disturbing, and sometimes revolting, but always challenging. Language barriers are irrelevant, as English and nonsense syllables merge with foreign tongues“ (9)

Music and Language

Quasi una Fantasia (1956), Essays on Modern Music, Theodor W. Adorno
(8) <https://www.msu.edu/~sullivan/AdornoMusLangFrag.html>

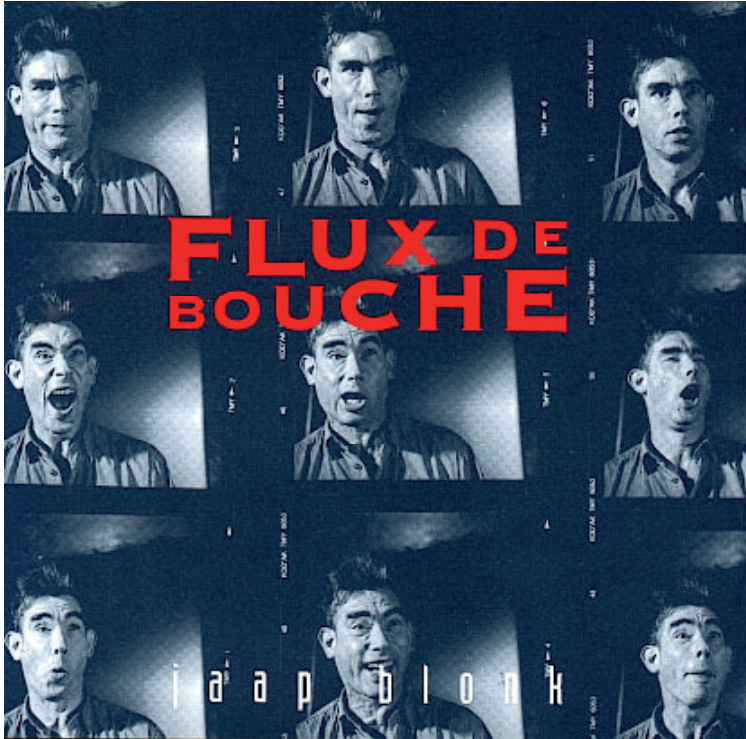
review from second solo voice cd

(9) <http://www.allmusic.com/cg/amg.dll?p=amg&sql=10:dbfpxqqjdhe>

“Sound poetry comes alive only when you hear it. Though possibly the oldest form of oral poetry, it is still a relatively unknown genre. Covering a wide area between ordinary speech and singing, it can take many shapes: poems in fantasy languages, text written in self-invented symbols, or voice sounds that cannot be notated at all. Good sound poetry is very direct communication, the human voice speaking out immediately, not bothering about meanings. The imagination of the listener is allowed to wander freely, without being directed by words (of course I also recorded some pieces to contradict this statement!)“ ⁽¹⁰⁾

Jaap Blonk
Amsterdam, January 1993

(10) http://www.ubu.com/sound/blonk_flux.html



Flux de Bouche
Solo Voice Staalplaat (1993)



“Flux de Bouche“ shows huge influence from Kurt Schwitters, one of the pioneers of sonorous poetry.

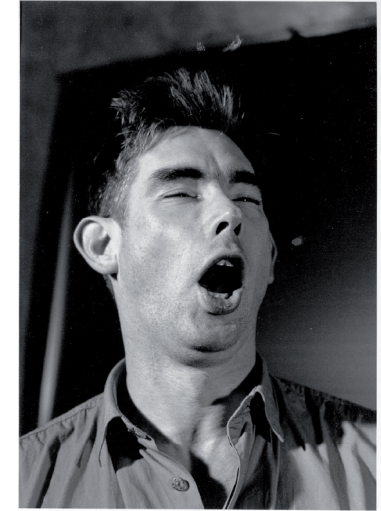
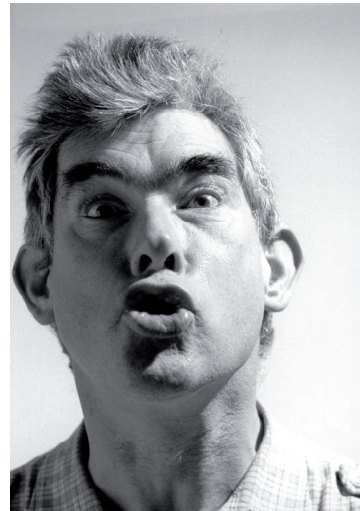
„Flux-de-Bouche is a more or less random fragment of the flow of my mouth at time I cannot help uttering“⁽¹¹⁾

Jaap Blonk

Amsterdam, January 1993

(11) http://www.ubu.com/sound/blonk_flux.html

“Flux-de-Bouche“ ist ein Staalplaat-Highlight der ganz besonderen Art, eine der extremsten Hörherausforderungen überhaupt, wirklich nichts für nur so nebenbei. Blonks Zungenfertigkeit ist stupend, von minuziösester Disziplin und von markerschütternder Abstrusität“ (12)



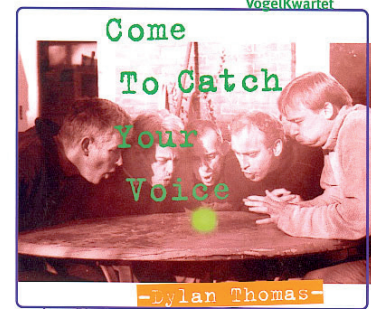
Contributions with other Artist

The history of published sound poetry begins with Dada. One of its founders, Hugo Ball, wrote a cycle of six soundpoems in 1916, which he read in the famous Cabaret Vol-tair in Zurich. I recorded the 3rd, Totenklage (Dirge) and the 6th, Seepferdchen und Flug-fische (Sea-horses and Flying Fishes). The latter was the very first sound poem I ever recited back in 1977; I still love to improvise on it. (13)

Jaap Blonk
Amsterdam, January 1993



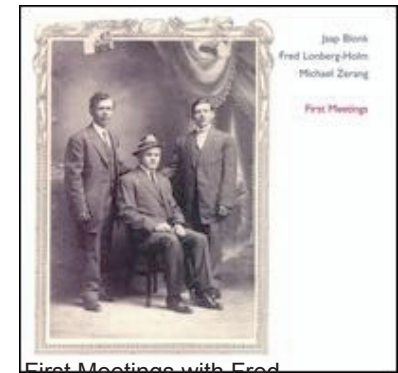
Hugo Ball Six Sound Poems
Baba-Oemf - Kontrans (1998)



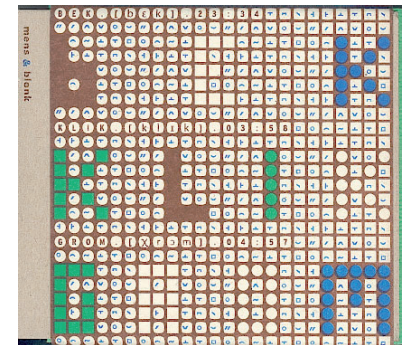
Come To Catch Your Voice
VogelKwartet & Jaap Blonk
LopLop (2001)



Bart van der Putten, Paul Pallesen
and Jaap Blonk
Kontrans (2003)



First Meetings with Fred
Lonberg-Holm and Michael Zeran
Buzz (1998)



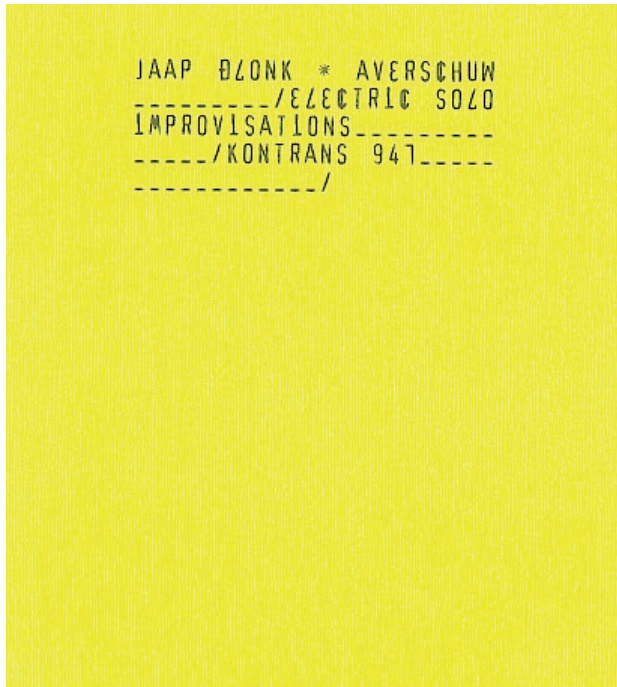
Bek - Mens & Blonk
/Staalplaat (2002)



Five Men Singing
with Paul Dutton, Koichi Makigami,
Phil Minton and David Moss
Victo (2004)

(13) http://www.ubu.com/sound/blonk_flux.html

Improvisation



Averschuw Electric Solo Improvisations
Kontrans (2001)



with Mats Gustafsson and Michael
Zerang - Kontrans (1996)



with Jan Nijdam and Bart van der
Putten - Kontrans (1996)



with Carl Ludwig Hübsch
and Claus van Bebber
Kontrans (2003)



with Maja Ratkje
Kontrans (2004)



Blonk, Zach & Grydeland
Kontrans (2004)



with Maja Ratkje Kontrans (2005)
with Cor Fuhler Kontrans (2005)

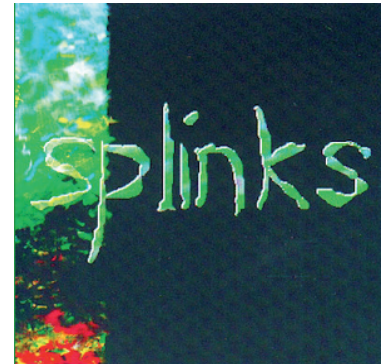
Jazz and other experiments

Blonk has organized “Splinks” orchestra, a group of eleven musicians who interpret his compositions. The orchestra is a vehicle for Blonk to compose suitable improvisation spaces.

The group “Braaxtaal” resulted from his interest in improvising with sound; his fascination for combining, juxtaposing and mingling sounds.



Dubbeltwee
with Dylan Nyoukis
Ecstatic Peace (2008)



Splinks
Kontrans (1993)



Splinks
Consensus
Kontrans (1999)



BRAAXTAAL
Kontrans (1993)



BRAAXTAAL
Speechlos
Kontrans (1997)



BRAAXTAAL
Dworr Buun
Kontrans (2001)

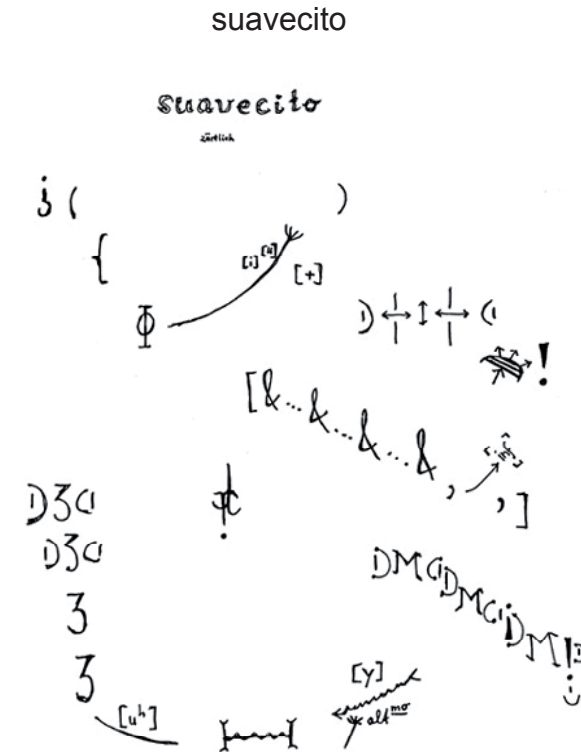
III. The composition

The Scores and Visual Poetry of Jaap Blonk's poesie are his formal element to show the line between structure and improvisation. Blonk crosses both lines, a line became a drawing and a drawing became a score.

Most of the scores are from between 1993 and 1998. At these times the scores show a big Dadaist influence and a few different possibilities of interpretation.

But his influence is not only Dadaist, because it is really difficult to put Jaap Blonk in only one box.

He persistently investigates the field located between literature and music, between poetry and language, between theater and performance and is always looking for sounds and new combination forms, as well as the semantic use of the language to developed new forms of expressions.

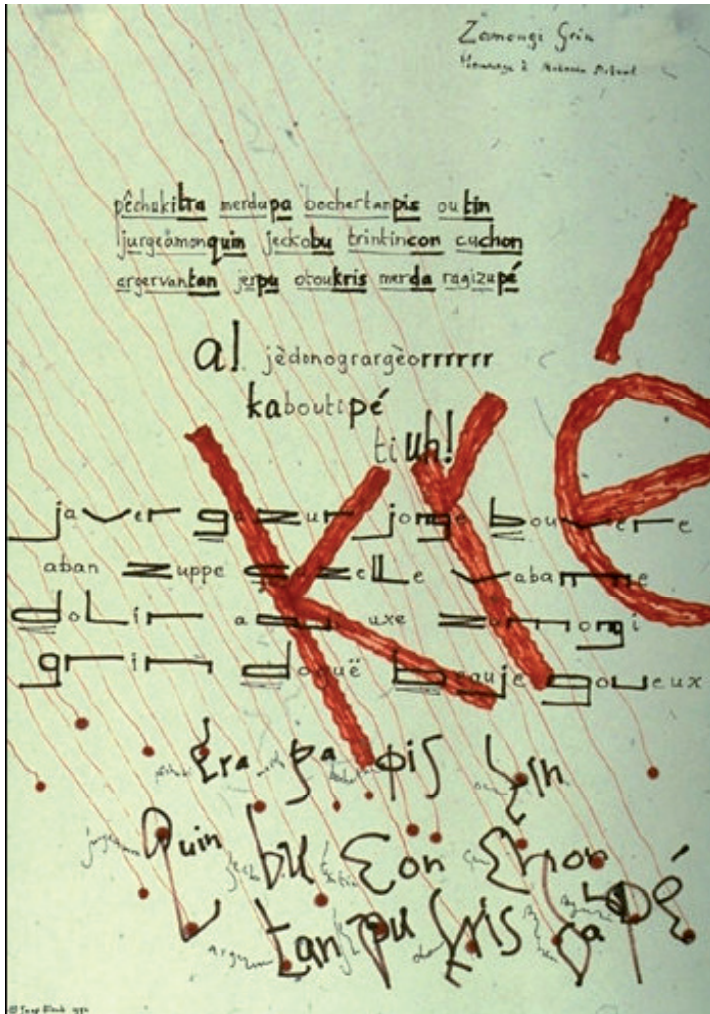


„suavecito is one of those endearing diminutives that abound in Latin American Spanish. It does not give the word 'suave' a smaller meaning but rather makes it gentler and more loving. Tenderly“ (14)

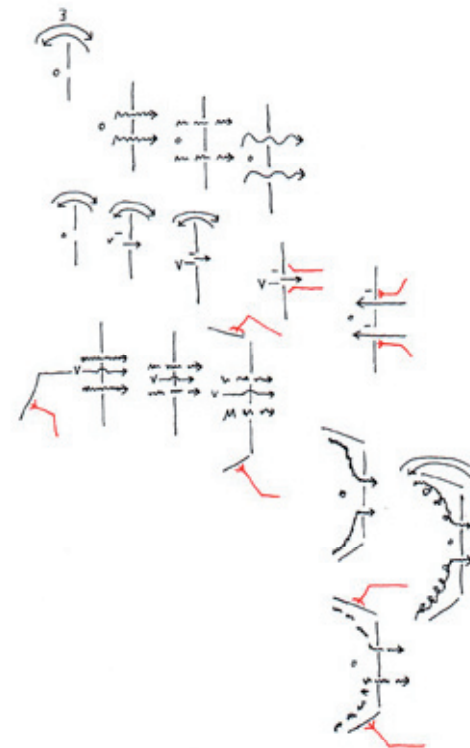
Jaap Blonk
Medellín, Colombia, January 1998

link to listen audio
http://www.ubu.com/sound/blonk_vocalor.html
(14) http://www.ubu.com/sound/blonk_vocalor.html

kre



labior



“After ‘Rhotic’ and ‘Frictional’ Labior is my third Phonetic Etude. Several years of experimentation led to this choice of favorite lip sounds, making use also of the stereo possibilities of the mouth. One day when I sat down to write a new poem in my extended Phonetic Alphabet, the signs didn’t obey me and made faces at me” (15)

Jaap Blonk
Medellín, Colombia, January 1998

link to listen audio
http://www.ubu.com/sound/blonk_vocalor.html
 (15) http://www.ubu.com/sound/blonk_vocalor.html

JUST A THOUGHT

aupe3 dφkōry3ynt
 ba3ōnvyhbrmesnemvajezn dauekwizi:
 zoφkpeφkulherāferōmbelawez nōi{y:ε
 γos_?kúdkwmbε[Arle fē z{kykφi uaukwīz dyoφIznde: rō
 zonsknōmpε'η[kon? arkarl kfily3kykfi: t-kōmpaIry:

3. xi

aupe3 dφkōry3ynt
 ba3ōnvyhbrmesnemvajezn dauekwizi:
 zoφkpeφkulherāferōmbelawez nōi{y:ε
 γos_?kúdkwmbε[Arle fē z{kykφi uaukwīz dyoφIznde: rō
 zonsknōmpε'η[kon? arkarl kfily3kykfi: t-kōmpaIry:

Mnemosyne

m n e s y n
n m o
e

flux

ʃɔnɪnu:ə 'gɔɪsənhaɪ ɣɪ:ə. 'ɑm:ɪvɔdʒə s ʃɪ: θəu:, bɑ:ɪ:ɪk bɑ:ɪ:ɪk. zɪ'hɑdln Iɪt bu:ɪhɛlk. ʔə
 ʔɪnhɑɪs 'm'hɛr: ɔgɑj bɪ:ɪ:ɪk 'biu:ɪ:ɪk. bɛzɪdɪk ʃ ʔə'gɔ, zəhɛlɣɑr 'ɛrɔspɛb, dɛznɑ'ɣɑr 'gɪgɔ
 bɛzɪnhɑ. pɑ'dɛm ɣɪ:ə, pɑdɔ ɪ'ɪʃ. ʔm'kɪhm: u:ɪl nɪ'kɔn'hɑhɛm, dɔbɛzɪdɪvɪm' ʔbɔzɔ-
 dɔdɔhm? ulhɑɪhɪhɔ nɛzɛ ɛr ɛr ɣɑ: ʃ'ɑgɑm hɪk' ɛɔzɛzɔ ɣɪɪɪv 'iɪnd. 'ɪzɔ:ʔɔ! ɣɔɪ?
 ʃfɪ:ɪs ɪnkɛ'mfɦɪp? ɣɛtɔpɛxɪ sɪ', 'skɪpɔpu: dɔdɛjɔ:ɪɪ ɔkɛɪpɔpɪm ɛɛɪt ʔhɔ! vɪnd' ɛzɔ:ɪk
 ɪɣɛ:ɪɣɑr... zɑ kɪni kɔsɔkɔbɑk 'ɛ:ɪdum ɑɪk 'hɑ:ɪkɑpɑ

link to listen audio
http://www.ubu.com/sound/blonk_flux.html

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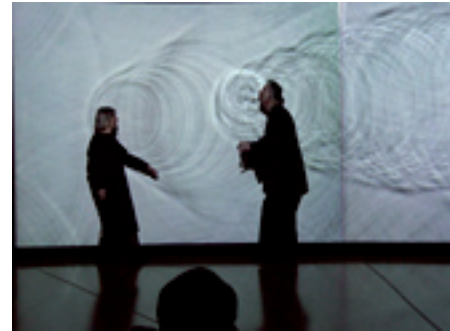
An audiovisual performance & installation for voice and interactive media

This interactive installation was created by Golan Levin and Zach Lieberman with performances from Jaap Blonk and Joan La Barbara.

The voice is the device that activates the drawing, the texture or the line of color, this software is programmed digitally according to decibels of the voice, responds to the sound generated by each in a particular way. The decibel unit of measurement is used for the power level of the intensity of the sound.

At this point, I consider Blonk obtains a kind of interactive score that gives to him the instrument to generate a possibility graphic, color or form of the voice of the sound.

The result is that they get an image from the extension of the voice, an ample field, laying the way to his voice expressing itself in other environments like video or installations.



Ripple
http://www.tmema.org/messa/video/messa_ica1_ripple_01s.mov



Insect Nature Show
http://www.tmema.org/messa/video/messa_ica1_chicken_01s.mov

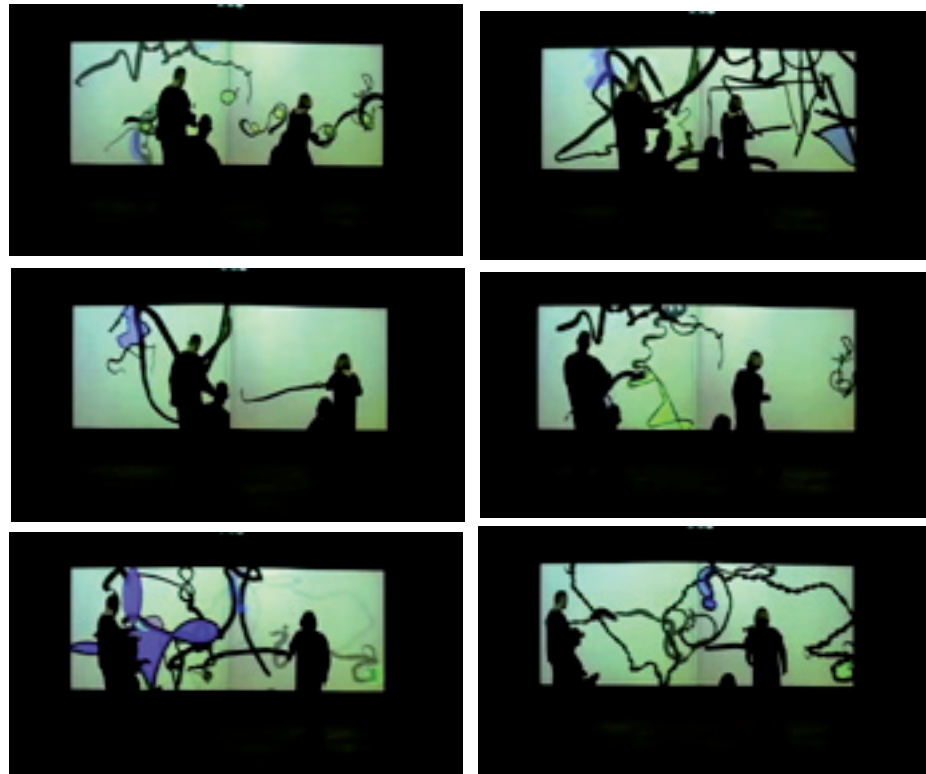


Fluid
http://www.tmema.org/messa/video/messa_ica1_fluid_01s.mov



Bounce (Jaap's Solo)
http://www.tmema.org/messa/video/messa_ica1_jaapsolo_01s.mov





Pitch paint
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k5qKkJRmlQg>

”the resignation
of the pictorial art
to the object,
corresponds
to the resignation of the
music of the tonality”⁽¹⁸⁾

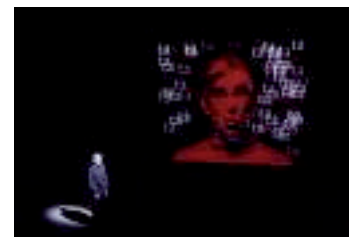
The first poem

“In the late seventies, I had been in university for about five years doing mathematics and physics and I quite not too long before finishing...I was playing saxophone...I was working at that time with a group of people who recited poetry...I came into that group to make music on the saxophone and to write pieces in between the poems...I remember, I think it was 1979, I saw a sound poem for the first time. This was one of Hugo Ball’s six sound poems...I liked it a lot more than the regular poems in Dutch or in any existing language...Not long after that I heard a performance of Kurt Schwitters’ ”Ur Sonata” and I found that very interesting. I went to the Institute of German Literature and made a serious copy of the whole piece and started to practise it. But it took more than two and a half years...I noticed that I almost knew it by heart...And out of these improvisations, the first little sound poems came. There was a little idea that came up in some improvisation...I had been doing performances of ”Ur Sonata” and some other sound poems from Dadaism and Futurism for several years, but, especially this Kurt Schwitters work is really a big thing: I was kind of intimidated by that: ”This is really a masterpiece.”(19)



Kurt Schwitters URSONATE
(1986 and 2003 recordings)

Interview with Bryan Sentes (Montreal, 2000)
(19) http://www.jaapblonk.com/Talking/BryanSentes_2000.rtf



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JgNL8-FdG-k&feature=related>

IV. The animal versus madness

fragments of a conversation with Ana Alenso (20)

Marco Montiel-Soto: Always when anyone listens to Jaap Blonk, his work makes them laugh.. but not you, because you like experimental art.

I think it is necessary to express the approach of madness in the work of Jaap.

Ana Alenso: For me, it is like a meditative experience, with extractions of the voice and the animal that you have inside, like draining a container, the animal.

M: The animal versus madness.

The rhythm and the anti-rhythm have no limits anymore, it is just like when a baby born, at first he cries.

(In the background, Jaap Blonk's poem interpretation plays through speakers: rrrrrrrr rrrrrr rrrrrr rrrrrr rrrrrrrrr rrrrr rrrrrrrrrrr rrrrrr rrrrrrrrrrr rrrrrrrrrrr rrr rrr r r r r r r. It is Man Ray's 1924 Lautgedicht).

M: This piece is total madness, because the 26.... it is like.... a train... it is the imitation of a machine, this is like.. saying that it comes in a ship, the body makes a sound, well, that is not human... partly....

A: Why partly?

M: Because no other human does. He does, but only because he is Jaap, but you know, if you say this poem to...

(Christian comes into the living room and it says: hey, that sounds crazy, can you please turn the volume down little bit?)

M: This poem is part of my work, what do you think about it?

C: Nothing....heee... in moment, I do not understand.... this is not a piece to enjoy, but to think about.

M: I think it is a poem about madness.

A: That is the animal, everything that is there within the thoughts and this separates the body. That is madness, Marco what is madness for you?

M: This is madness? The word without sense (sin sentido) is madness, the lost of reason.

A: The pure reason? Kant.

M: Well yes, in this moment Jaap screams like an animal.

A: Because there it seemed like an external language....if somebody is reciting a poem to impress somebody...

M: But that does not happen because Blonk is Jaap and when he screams is really Jaap Blonk.

A: I think the people most crazy are the ones who keep silent, when nobody says nothing, silence is madness.

M: That can be true, if Jaap keeps silence he becomes crazy.

A: Crazy like an animal.

(20) Ana Alenso is a performance artist and curator from Venezuela.

V. Usefully information

Official website

<http://www.jaapblonk.com/>

Sound library and Scores images

<http://www.ubu.com/sound/blonk.html>

Usefully information

<http://www.tmema.org/messa/messa.html>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jaap_Blonk

<http://www.answers.com/topic/jaap-blonk>

Discography:

<http://www.jaapblonk.com/Pages/available.html>

videography:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_2qOO5ersWU

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GfoqiyB1ndE&feature=related>

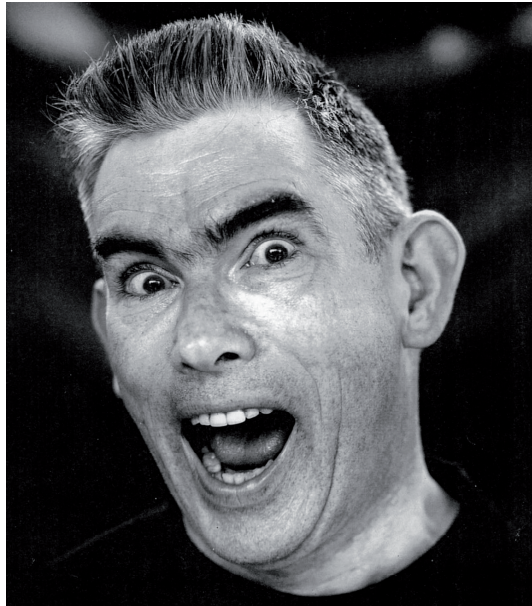
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k5qKkJRmlQg>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CgImxdZIAcA>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tD0DEX7ot4I&feature=related>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hHlfGDckD6c&feature=related>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JgNL8-FdG-k&feature=related>



“First of all, there is a widespread misunderstanding that I started out as a vocalist, and turned to composition afterwards. That is not the case. I have been writing music since 1977, and began performing sound poetry in 1983. Up till the present day I see myself first and foremost as a composer (in the widest sense, that is, as someone who wants to arrange sound in such a way that something comes into being that I find beautiful), and only after that as a vocalist. I think there’s a significant distinction between the two. If, as a composer, you want to write a piece, you will start from an image how the piece should sound, and determine from that image the means, the tools you want to use - the instrumentation. As a performing musician (a vocalist, for instance) you will try to expand your capacities through exercise and by testing where your limits are“⁽²¹⁾

Jaap Blonk