



ANNA ZARADNY (1977)

Sound e visual artist di Varsavia, Anna Zaradny è una delle personalità più importanti della nuova avanguardia polacca.

Il suo lavoro, a cavallo tra musica concreta ed elettronica immersiva, esplora le abitudini percettive degli ascoltatori attraverso una complessa architettura sonora fatta di texture, rumori, suoni sintetici e materiali concreti, organizzati e giustapposti a creare una dimensione sonora quasi barocca, ma estremamente compatta.

La ricchezza e la varietà dei timbri delle sue sculture sonore, unita a una latente drammaticità, fanno del suo live set un'esperienza dall'impatto fisico ed emotivo incredibile.

Animatrice della scena polacca sin dagli anni '90, Anna Zaradny è stata co-fondatrice dello storico festival Musica Genera, e ha collaborato con artisti del calibro di Christian Fennesz, Cor Fuhler, Robert Piotrowicz, Kaspar T Toeplitz, Burkhardt Stangl...

Molto attiva anche come artista visiva e installativa, ha presentato i suoi lavori nelle più importanti gallerie europee.

Anna Zaradny

Anna Zaradny, photo by Szymon Rogiński

Visual artist, composer, improviser, sound art artist, music festival animator, author of installations and objects. Born in 1977 in Szczecin.



Zaradny, as a composer and improviser continues the experience of the musical avant-garde which undermines the traditionally perceived musical composition with its closed form, appointed notion, explicit authorship and legible identity. Her creativity arises from a certain revolution in music (in electronic or concrete music), where significant elements are subjected to change. These changes affect the role of the composer, notation as well as the perceptual habits of listeners. An idiosyncratic part in this process were founded on new technologies, broadening the so-called sound universe and the possibilities in manipulating sound and arranging audio material. In an interview Zaradny says:

The term 'experimental music' itself is some sort of prosthesis and substitute package. It has a negative quality, as it basically means that it's neither pop nor classical contemporary music. This situation in Poland is particularly dramatic. We lack of references, richness of tradition and personalities that would create it, we can't constantly refer to a few names of the twentieth-century avant-garde.

Zaradny studied conducting and music theory in the Szczecin department of the Academy of Music in Poznań. For many years she was the co-organiser and curator of the Musica Genera Festival. In 2011 she was one of the top 7 artists nominated for the Views Deutsche Bank Foundation prize. She currently lives and works in Warsaw.

Zaradny started her journey in the '90s with contemporary music, free-jazz, punk-rock and ska-punk (Włochaty, Dr Mengele). At the end of the decade she began working with a band called StuckOnCeiling (with Robert Piotrowicz, Sebastian Krawczuk, Kacper Jaskiewicz and later on- Jacek Majewski), initially performing



experimental noise-rock which later evolved towards improvised music. The band held plenty of concerts, especially during 2000-2002.

In her compositions, the artist uses a saxophone or a laptop. When playing the saxophone, she uses a wide range of techniques. She improvises when performing solo as well as with an accompaniment, live or in a recording studio. Here improvisation is similar to the meaning of experimental music according to John Cage, who emphasized that experimenting is not a laboratory process leading to a particular outcome, but openness to chance and the unpredictability of the attained results. Zaradny's improvisation obliterates the classical boundaries between an attempt and a properly played composition, the creation becomes an organic experience and the final form - if not registered - emerges from the process. The artist says:

I respect traditional music, but I have my own preferences. These areas expand and the history of music continues without me, I explore and broaden a small part of it for myself. It terrifies me that there are many domains I am not familiar with and that I may not ever get to know them.

Later on, Zaradny performed solo and participated in numerous projects, sometimes more ephemeral, sometimes rather durable (eg. Terra Polska, Terra Polska, Aux Pole'n, Art Rythmic Depot, Audio Art, Muzyka z Mózgu). She often performed in arranged 'ad hoc' formations, with musicians such as: Burkhard Stangel, Tony Buck, Cor Fuhler, John Butcher, John Hegre, Otomo Yoshihide, Martin Klapper, Boris Hauf, Sophie Agnel, Ute Volker, Ingar Zach. She participated in numerous international festivals.



In years 2002-2009, together with Robert Piotrowicz the artist organised the Musica Genera international festival of improvised and experimental music in Szczecin. There also is a record label under the same name, closely related to the event. The unique formula of the festival is open to musical experiments, arranging musicians in such ensembles that would never have had a chance to work with one other, focusing on sound and the manipulation of sound. The eighth and last edition of the festival was held in 2009 in Warsaw.

In 2003, the Musica Genera label published *Can't Illumination*, recorded in the Amman Studio in Vienna. The album was an improvisational composition of only two studio sessions by Zaradny (saxophone, computer), Robert Piotrowicz (guitar, synthesizer) and Burkhard Stangl from Austria (guitar, electronics). While remaining on the outskirts of the music industry, it was critically acclaimed as one of the most interesting music releases of 2003.

By freely working, especially within the non-classical means of the instruments' articulated sounds, like guitars, the alto saxophone, synthesizer, computer and electronic devices, the artists managed to build a truly fascinating microcosmos of sounds, including everything that is delicate and subtle, as well as what is rough and predatory.

- Tadeusz Kose in Anteny Krzyku.

During the Musica Genera festival in 2006 Zaradny performed with Cor Fuhler from the Netherlands (prepared piano) and Australian Tony Buck (drums). The collective improvisation of the three artists was recorded and released a year later



on the album *Lighton*. Piotr Tkacz effectuated an interpretation of individual fragments of the concert:

The first part (...) reminds me of the sea and a beach devoid of tourists: waves (sounds from the inside of a piano) gently float onto the land, where they touch different little objects (percussion), sometimes garbage, sometimes natural objects such as shells or sticks. Saxophone: here the ship returns to the docks, gives out signals, or is it a fog horn? The second track is active and the heaviest which is mainly due to the piano. (...) The third track is an attempt to extract the highest possible sound, supported by Buck's low frequencies. At the very end, after the heap of tension, it gently melts down in the rustle of the drums.

In turn, Michał Mendyk gave recognition to the 'sense of drama' and the musicians' unconventional virtuosity.

Zaradny's first solo album, *Mauve Cycles* consisting of two electronic, minimalist compositions (25 and 13 minutes) was released not until year 2008. It received many, mostly enthusiastic reviews. The album combined rhythmicity and chaos. Daniel Brożek proposed to perceive this album as a sound sculpture and remarked that:

The first thing that draws attention is the richness of the timbre and sound textures, noisy, aggressive, dissected, digitally re-mastered. What is surprising is the virtually baroque ornamentation. These themes change very often, abundant are both the main and the remaining audio sets.



Massimo Ricci somewhat a bit effusively described one of the parts that it is probably the moment when Zaradny reaches the culmination point and it is impossible to not get carried away with the content which goes so deep, in spite the theoretical simplicity. Point-blank, it is a moment of transcendence, that only a few, who sense vibrations in a certain way, can achieve this. The artist herself emphasizes that the album is a materialization of a specific idea, evolving over time:

The processing of these compositions began in concert conditions. I redefined this experience already in purely studio conditions. The basic form and course of the composition was determined then. On the other hand I was working on the electronic structure, which is a peculiar sonic sculpture. Banally saying, I needed more time with this work. The final outcome consisted of a lot of tiny details.

Zaradny's performances also tend to be humorous. During the International Symposium on Electronic Art (ISEA) in 2010 she gave a spontaneous concert on an instrument created out of electronic installations connected to flower pots. At the same time she mastered the technique - the sound emerged when Zaradny touched the stems and leaves.

Since 2004 Anna Zaradny has been creating music for performances, including the Szczecin Kana Theatre and Usta Usta Theatre from Poznań. She also composed music for plays directed by Marcin Libera (Death of the Squirrel-Man, God/Honor/Fatherland: Catherine de Medici) and Paweł Miśkiewicz (Peer Gynt in the Warsaw Dramatic Theatre). She talked about her work with the theatre in an interview (2007):



The most important aspect of music in a performance for me is its coexistence and co-creation. It must establish an organic relationship with the other elements of the play, space, the author's gesture, the dramatic rhythm. To me it's always most important to possibly merge these means of expression into cohesion.

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The artist is also known for her activity in the so-called beyond-musical sound spaces, where it comes to integration between visual and sound arts - she creates multimedia and audio-art installations, musical-spatial compositions. It wasn't surprising that in 2011 she was one of the 7 artists nominated for the Views prize, granted every two years to visual artists under the age of 35.

Extremely interesting are the moments of Zaradny's creative output where she goes beyond the domain of music, including the domain defined as new music, going in very different directions, but grounded in the visual arts. The artists isn't afraid of changing her context for what she does or the plurality of circuits, which allows to avoid obvious pigeonholing, but then again many of the viewers may maintain in consternation. Because what exactly does Zaradny do? In an interview she says:

I don't separate music from art. This definition seems to apply only to visual arts. It's a classic division, but it can be misleading. A musician in our culture is an



instrumentalist, while a composer is someone who writes notes on staves. It's a very archaic association. Through this approach I don't feel like a musician or composer (even though I have these qualities). The sphere I mostly work in is sound which is much more than music in the traditional sense. And this applies both to when I'm composing in the studio, I perform on stage and when I create an installation or object.

This doesn't concern interdisciplinary genres specifically. 'Sound art' is considered, moreover, as a specifically 'homeless' domain, differing from music based on time perception - whether by being present at a concert or listening to recordings - and realisation, as well as the specificity of visual arts. At the same time this area hasn't developed (yet?) neither a congruent economy (because how to sell sound-art works?), nor a language that elaborates these works.

In any case, this fluency can be an asset. In Zaradny's work, sound is treated as an integral component of space - both a gallery hall, and - less frequently - urban space. The artist uses it for articulating this space. The works are usually designed for a specific place (including the audio sphere and spatial qualities). But it also rejects the traditional, linear 'from - to' music perception. The 'music' newly defined by audio installations is not confined in time, as it would last forever, being an integral part of spatial-time or a environment created by the artist. With time, more and more of Zaradny's projects became focused on the visual, rather than the sound aspect. Music becomes a function of space and image and 'vice versa'.

Zaradny and Piotrowicz's audiovisual search was led within the Musica Genera festival. In 2005 they extended the festival's formula -so far focused on improvised



music- with visual phenomena, screenings, installations, dance. They invited artists Paweł Kula and Maria Stefaniak who with the use of light and audio effects revived the historical buildings of the Gryf fishing port in Szczecin (Resurrection). The edition in 2006 presented the TOJTOJ project by Zaradny, Piotrowicz, Matylda Safejewska and Michał Kopanisz which combined such elements as: music, videos, objects and spatial arrangement. In 2007 Zaradny explained:

I have a strong belief that music is self-sufficient which does not preclude realisation and ambition in combining it with other domains. My music has a very open, often organic form, its functioning with words, images or architectural space seems natural.

A breakthrough moment for Zaradny's explorations was a scholarship stay in Vienna in 2005. It was then that hTIAL was created, composed of seven photographs and a specially composed sound. The images are seemingly abstract, but their theme is based on light, as if it froze in time. The parallel built by the artist within its nature concerns time - the length of the sound and 'duration' of light. Zaradny explains:

I am fascinated by light because it has the same intangible nature as sound does, it uncompromisingly changes space. It's sort of an element which in combination with light comprises a whole.

She developed this subject in an installation entitled Backwards towards the sun / Backwards ku słońcu, integrated with the natural cycle of night and day. The work consists of two tunnels: light and sound, with opposite directions. The installation



operated differently during the day (natural light) and night. By using light and sound as equivalent 'matter' the artist undermined the traditional subordinated relation between visual and audible, seeing and listening.

Zaradny created a characteristic sound sculpture, or perhaps rather a sound assemblage, during the Wola Art festival in Warsaw in 2008. The participants received Moleskin brand notebooks. The artist made a notebook-harmonica and installed eight modules of a music box - devices emitting simple occasional melodies, known from popular music cards with their characteristic cheesy sounds. Individual sides corresponded to one melody. Harmony of Happiness (Never Reached) carried out a certain reduction of the musical postcard, clearing it from its visual side, leaving the sound and a simple, abstract form of a notebook-harmonica. When opened it became an audio object emitting - at least during the first impression- a type of cacophony, at the same time familiar and unknown. The songs however, due to their melodiousness, formed into a new harmony. Zaradny explained:

Individually banal, high-pitched, kitschy, annoying, perhaps even perverse, overlapped on each other, after a longer commune give the impression of harmony. But this is only an appearance- a seemingly achieved happiness. The ambiguity of this project is also carried out on the original level. The person gifted with the occasional card faces a duress of contractual happiness, enriched with a falsified partial melody.

The last edition of the Musica Genera Festival organized in 2009 in Warsaw was mostly devoted to 'Sound Art' and audio installations. Zaradna created two site-



specific installations at the headquarters of the Museum of Modern Art. The first one entitled eM U Zet EU eM / eM U eS E U eM was an audio intervention in the façade of the building - it fell into dialogue within a neon by Paulina Ołowska and Mateusz Ramaszkan creating a simple inscription Muzeum / Museum. Zaradny recorded Ołowska reading this word and deconstructed it into single syllables, sounds, letters (as in the title of the installation) which was a distant reference to Ołowska's project Alphabet from 2005. In the characteristic loop, the voice broke down the word and put it together anew, in an endless process of learning and unlearning, building the meaning and undermining it, a continuous redefinition of knowledge. This way the visual object received a audio interpretation, exploring the human voice as a material. It was an attempt to compose a fragment of the urban audio sphere as well as interfering with it.

Trigonometry 7 (2009) could be called an absolute - the artist created a separate world in a small cupboard under the stairs, ruled by its own logic both in the visual (a refraction of the axis, optical illusions) and sound sphere. The snow-white space was composed of abstract geometric forms.

Sides, angles, the simplest harmonic wave are the main material of the project that is a specific sculpture cut out in space by an objective light beam and an aboriginal sound wave. The subtle being ideal to a mathematic definition, its inner poetics materializes to a physical form, aesthetically independent and autonomous.

The viewer could only take a look into this world and prick up his/her ears. At the turn of 2009 and 2010 Anna Zaradny created another installation entitled Pass | ed, this time using video techniques. It was presented during the artist's solo



exhibition in the No Local foundation as part of the Fragile Boredom project. It took on an environmental form and at the same time was a musical-visual work with a structure composed of randomness and a specific organicity. It was a conscious reference to the experience of the Fluxus artists. The visual layer consisted of abstract visual phenomena and to particular images Zaradny created continually lasting, individual songs. The whole thing was an endless composition, kind of a study of boredom. However, after a closer look in the material, the impression of quiescence turned out to be ostensible- the captured processes appears as dynamic. The subtle changes and evanescent phenomena strained the viewer's perception, drew into a peculiar state of contemplation and sensitized him to micro-events.

She continued arranging music in space in *Dzida z małymi elementami / A spear with small elements* (2010) during the Parisian Countryside seminar devoted to Edward Krasiński's *Spear* from the '60s. The *Spear* was photographed by Eustachy Kossakowski and Julian Przyboś called it the spear of the atomic age. Zaradny made its audio-spatial interpretation. The motion impression of the levitating sculpture was caused by its remaining fragments, as if traces of its trajectory. The artist handled Krasiński's sculpture as sheet music, yet not traditionally or linearly played, but simultaneously and automatically (without an interpreter) which would present the specific photographic retention of the *Spear* in space. In creating her *Spear*, Zaradny again used the small devices known from the music cards that together produced a vibrant cacophony, giving the *Spear*'s remaining traces, only now perceived as an intermittent or dissipative sound. The artist once again proved the simple truth that sound is a function of space. But the visual form of the project was also important- the usually hidden music box module was brought into the daylight and its specific aesthetics 'brought to light'.



One of Zaradny's latest works is *Castration Class* (2010) where the artist undertook the issue of classical music in popular culture. In a multi-channel video installation she used various recordings of contemporary interpretations of the *Lascia ch'io pianga* aria from George Friedrich Handel's opera *Rinaldo*. The eponymous castration refers not only to the legend around the ideal soprano, but also -as the artist says- 'the despoilment of the aria from its main attributes, seriousness and rapture'. The autonomic part of *Castration Lessons* is a collage that Zaradny created from the aria's music script and is sort of a frolic of the avant-garde tradition of converting the musical notation into an artifact.

In 2010 the artist participated in an exhibition prepared by Barbara Piwowarska *Footnote 2. Correction*. As per the idea of the eponymous footnote and correction, she recurred to her earlier work (*Harmony of Happiness, Trigonometry 7*) subjecting them to her own authorial destruction. By re-using a composition of simple, abstract, harmonious paper forms and uncomplicated sound source, Zaradny created *Cuts and Part 1* (2010) and *Cuts and Part 2* (2010). She re-interpreted previous works based on the module of music cards, by separating individual elements and depriving them of the sound itself, however not of the sound potential itself.

In 2011 she created a work entitled *Tongue of Venus*, a multi-channel installation that presented two diverse sensory perspectives drawn from the sound and visual imagery of a volcano erupting. According to the artist, "the dynamics and kinetic shape of the liquid is amplified through the vibration of sound. The straightforward physical formula creates a visceral, mobile sculpture, pulsing within



the depths of the speaker". The work is also founded upon contextual references, symbolically dipping into of the creative life of composer and pianist Tekla Bądarzewska, who has a crater of Venus after her. The work was first presented in the square before the Starter Gallery in Warsaw, incidentally named for Bądarzewska.

Author: Karol Sienkiewicz, June 2011. Translated by: Sylwia Wojda, November 2011. Updated October 2012

Individual exhibitions:

- 2011 - The Tongue of Venus, Starter Gallery, Warsaw
- 2010 - Pass | ed, No Local, Kraków

Selected group exhibitions:

- 2008 - Wola Art 2008, Warsaw
- Unpredictable Encounters, Club Transmediale, Berlin
- Something Must Break. An Exhibition on Hearing and Listening, Off Festival,

Mysłowice

- 2009 - Musica Genera Festival 2009, Museum of Modern Art, Warsaw
- 2010 - Footnote 2. Correction, Silberkuppe, Berlin
- Mediacje / przestrzeń//Mediation / Space/, Szara Gallery, Cieszyn
- Early Years, KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin



- 2011 - Dump Time. For a Practice of Horizontality, Shedhalle, Zürich, Switzerland

- Views, Zachęta National Gallery of Art, Warsaw

Selected festivals:

- 2000 - Audio Art, Kraków
- 2001 - In Between, Chicago
- 2002 - Audio Art, Kraków
- Copenhagen Jazz Festival, Copenhagen
- Musica Genera Festival 2002, Szczecin
- 2003 - Musica Genera Festival 2003, Szczecin
- 2004 - Terra Polska, Berlin
- Musica Genera Festival 2004, Szczecin
- Festival NPAI 2004, Parthenay, France
- 2005 - Aux Pole'n, Germany
- Musica Genera Festival 2005, Szczecin
- 2006 - Musica Genera Festival 2006, Szczecin
- 2007 - Ultra Hang, Budapest
- Musica Genera Festival 2007, Szczecin
- 2008 - Stimul, Prague
- Musica Genera Festival 2008, Szczecin
- 2009 - Super Deluxe, Tokio
- What is music?, Melbourne, Sydney
- Musica Genera Festival 2009, Warsaw
- 2010 - All Ears, Oslo



- Fragile Boredom, Kraków
- 2011 - Unsound Festival, New York
- Stockholm Fringe Fest (STOFF), Stockholm
- Sottovoce Festival 2011, London

Images: Zacheta National Gallery of Art

- 1) Anna Zaradny, Trigonometry 7, 2009, 7 audio cards, 7 photographs, lightbox, cables, instalacja podczas Musica Genera Festival 2009, dzięki uprzejmości Muzeum Sztuki Nowoczesnej w Warszawie

- 2) Anna Zaradny, Harmony of Happiness (Never Reached), 2008, audio, 8 melodies, an installation from the Wola Art Festival, Warsaw 2008, courtesy of the artist.

- 3) Anna Zaradny, Pass | ed, 2009/2010, screenshot from a 4-channel audio-video installation, photo from the exhibition in Shedhalle, Zurich 2011

- 4) Anna Zaradny, Pass | ed, 2009/2010, screenshot from a 4-channel audio-video installation, view from exhibition in Shedhalle, Zurich 2011



5) Anna Zaradny, Cuts and Part 1, 2010, from the audio notebook Harmony of Happiness (Never Reached) (8 occasional melodies in paper) and Cuts and Part 2, from the installation Trigonometry 7 (7 sound sources in paper, cables), view from exhibition in Silberkuppe, Berlin, 2010

6) Anna Zaradny, Castration Lessons, 2010, 3-channel video installation, screenshot