

## **A DIALOGUE WITH AXEL BERGK (aka LOMOV)**

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*This interview was published at <http://cloneshit.hu> in Hungarian, and in English. What you are reading now is the original English version of the interview. Feel free to use this text, but please always link the source! Thank you.*

**Lomov. Axel Bergk. He started out as a painter, and he continued as a musician. He has quality releases at every important netlabel, and he co-founded the well-known Stadtgruen label as well. This mail interview has been made in February, 2006.**

- Firstly, I was wondering if you "missed" anything from the fine arts which you worked on, and started to write songs as well.

- Working on fine arts was very expensive, in terms of time as well as money (for material and workrooms). I have always tried to reconcile earning money in my job within a strategy consultancy (in order to be independent from the art business) with my creative ambitions. Independency is precondition for making fine arts, but I had to spend too much time for the job. Looking for a valve for my creativity, I recalled my juvenile dream of making music. The development of computers and music software made it possible to realize that old vision. I recognized the great opportunities to create something without spending too much space (hard disk vs. atelier), time (working step by step), and money (trial and error is not very expensive in terms of bits and bytes). Now after several years making computer music I 'miss' a little bit the materiality of the canvas, the smell of oil paint and turpentine. Digitalization means reducing the human being to two senses (to see and to hear), the more unconscious senses (to taste, to smell, to feel) are going to be suppressed stealthily. Therefore it is always a challenge to get a 'human touch' back into the digital worlds.

- *"..It seems that he expresses his philosophy through music..."* - states one guy on Discogs.com at Lomov. It made me to ask, do you connect those sciences with yourself, being an artist as well? Many people would find it paradoxical.

- While I have studied the humanities (History of Art, Philosophy, Archaeology, for a while Sinology) I made my first steps into making fine arts, but I had to recognize that it is nearly impossible for me to think about art and making it at the same time. I needed to get into a kind of meditation when the logos is switched off to be able to create something.

Afterwards I backed out of the working phase in order to consider the result, to review it, and to plan the next steps. Cerebration is always too late within the action, but it is indispensable to get on the next level.

E.g., if an artist is not able to evaluate his handiwork, he will never get better. Evaluation itself is grounded in a general system of ethics, and if you are going to think about the preconditions of the whole system you reach the philosophical level. Maybe it is not necessary to reach this level for making fine arts or music, but it is always part of it.

In a nutshell: It is not a paradox to accompany acting with thinking in your life, but it is always difficult to do it simultaneously. For me Philosophy was helpful to see all the dimensions of my daily life from a meta-level.

- As I see, sciences which are concentrating on one segment of the world were not a help to you... But philosophy, the real 'geisteswissenschaft' considers the world as a whole and was

indeed a help for you. What do you think about that opposition which lasted for centuries between 'real sciences' and philosophy...? Today people start to think about e.g. Cosmology, on a philosophical level and there is no antagonistic relationships. By the way whose thoughts do you prefer?

- For a long time philosophy tried to build models explaining the world as a whole. Hegel (and as reverse Marx) was the last who tried to describe it this way. Nietzsche's term "God is dead. The people have killed him" terminated the idea of a single truth. Philosophy was divided in sections.

Since the beginning of the 20th century a big part of philosophical discourses dealt with the upcoming positivistic 'Pragmatism' from the United States or the Neo-Kantianism. Afterwards the French School absorbed the theoretical approach of Nietzsche, Husserl and Heidegger, but up to now there is no all-embracing concept visible. It is possible that due to the lack of a global vision many people want to resume the old approaches including newer developments, but I think there couldn't be a pure occidental solution without respect to the oriental worlds. This is the new antagonism we have to face. And if we are looking for solutions we can't exclude any mindset.

- Is your gear public (your analogue/digital instruments you use)? Would you share with us what you use for creating sounds and arranging music?

- Typically intellectual approach: I started with a notation program, because I thought that it would be better to learn all about music making. Second step: 'Storm' was the cheapest choice, but soon it was too limited in terms of sound creation capabilities. Then I tried out 'Reason' but was not satisfied due to its former lack of Vst-support. Today I work with my favourite combination of 'Ableton Live' as host and the Native Instruments' 'Reaktor' as Vst, or stand alone as loop/sample generator.

- Many people state harshly that the new softwares for computers spoiled the electronic music scene, saying: "Now everyone can make electronic music." Actually, they seem to think in a way which is pretty undemocratic. How do you think about that?

- Indeed, the quality of computer software boosted, that it seems to be easy for everyone to make electronic music. People who have studied music or learned to play an instrument for a long time may consider the development as unfair. In other fields the digitalisation has displaced manual abilities too. A lot of book-keepers, typesetters, tracers for example lost their jobs. A computer is just a simple tool in order to ease processes. If you want to use it as a music instrument you need all your inspiration, empathy, and visionary innovational spirit. These capabilities help to reach higher levels of personal development, but levels depend always from the development of your competitors. Democracy means to have alternatives in order to choose the best for leading the community. For me it sounds less undemocratic but antiquated.

- Tell us a bit about the creation of Stadtgruen!

- My co-partner Martin Donath and I met at the German internet platform 'My Own Music' and realized that we had an akin sense for music: clicks & cuts, minimal music (less techno than like Steve Reich, Brian Eno, etc.), but there were only few satisfying net-releases. The netlabel scene wasn't that expanded in those days, so we decided to found our own label.

'Stadtgruen' was a title of a minimal track we worked on together, but we have never released it. Significantly there is no direct translation for 'Stadtgruen', in German it subsumes all the open and green urban spaces. It seems that here in Germany we clearly differentiate between the more natural and cultural aspects of urban life. Just like in the active and passive state of the creative process (see above) we recognize a contradiction between meditation upon nature and cultural exaltation. In a way it is similar to the Chinese yin-yang-concept of two dominating principles moving the circle of life. 'Stadt' is the propulsive pole and 'Gruen' the more contemplative. In terms of music it should sound relaxed and energizing at once, but this was an idealistic claim. Now we are driving double tracked with calmer ambient releases and impelling techno/house.

- What do you think: What is the greatest disadvantage of online releases?

- As we started our label we hoped for the small advantage to get quick and direct response for the released music. Meanwhile the netlabel scene has spread out too far to keep track of all the daily releases. The glory of independency from the music business has turned into irrelevance due to the masses. The internet is no self-regulating market, where a product vanishes when it is no success. Actually, the main servers, archive.org and scene.org are so slow that downloading is not really a pleasure.

- Did you think about any solution to the 'disadvantages of online-releases' that you mentioned in your answer?

- In terms of markets we are within the saturation phase after the first movers and first followers. Soon some netlabels will back out, the curve will come down, and only few labels with sufficient quality will remain. This could be the moment for the music industry to annex easily some of the niches they didn't want to invest in formerly. With the new digital distribution channels they can lower their costs while widening their range of products. Actually, they have to face the same challenge as we have: how to deal with an unmanageable number of releases. There are no human instances or computer algorithms which can sort and manage it.

Savour can't be digitalised so far - fortunately. Previously the music industry tried to control common savour by ruling over radio shows, pushing idols, launching own TV formats, and the whole public relations bundle (or should I say propaganda machinery). I can't see a solution: If we are going to use the same methods, we will run into their trap, and if not, we will be dedicated to be extraneous.

- Did you try sending demos to offline labels as well? You would release something physically wouldn't you...?

- So far I didn't get in contact with offline labels, but probably it could be the next step, if I consider a future project worth while.

- I see that you divide online and offline projects. To me, it seems that the line between those two worlds is fading out. Mp3 shops appear where you can buy the physical releases' music and netlabel releases become offline releases in DVD-format or vinyl, etc. What if one wanted to release a Stadtgruen work of yours on CD or vinyl?

- Actually, I see a clear difference between online and offline releases.

Less net-musicians have the experience of high end mastering studios, which is precondition to produce satisfying CDs or vinyls. The ability to hear differences between the formats may dissolve gradually by spreading out the digital formats. And maybe these formats are going to get better and better. Up to now it is still necessary for me to listen to a well produced vinyl or CD after long time hearing mp3s in order to get my ears 'clear'. Above all, we are going to loose the mentioned 'human touch'. Most music consumers still want to hold something touchable in hands. But they will only accept high prices for highest quality. I will not be reluctant to a CD release if it gets surplus quality by a high end mastering.

- Any future plans which you would like to share with the readers?

- Plans are for milquetoasts.