

Simon Torssell Lerin/ Bettina Hvidevold Hystad
Simon Torssell Lerin / Bettina Hvidevold Hystad with Damo Suzuki
Art in the Public Realm - Konstfack
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Introduction and Brief Description of the Project

Simon Torssell Lerin / Bettina Hvidevold Hystad with Damo Suzuki explores various methods of art production. An important mode of enquiry is collaboration with other artists. For this project Lerin / Hystad have undertaken a cultural pilgrimage¹ in the footsteps of Japanese musician and traveller Kenji “Damo” Suzuki in order to explore ideas about storytelling, improvisation and chance. Lerin / Hystad works interdisciplinary, Hystad has a background in fine arts and Lerin has a background in both fine arts and music. Suzuki is today active with his music project Damo Suzuki’s Network², a project where he travels around the world and plays improvised concerts together with local bands and musicians. Damo Suzuki’s Network has been active since the early 1990’s and comprises over 5000 musicians. Suzuki calls what he is doing “instant composing”³, most of the times he has not met the other musicians before they go on stage together. He says his concerts are about creating time and space in the moment, a way to communicate through music.

Lerin / Hystad’s interest in the concepts behind Suzuki’s music grew from the resemblance they felt it had with their own methods and concepts of working with art. They sent Suzuki an email expressing their interest in his project and he invited them to come and see one of his concerts in Osaka. When meeting him after the concert they found out that he had left Japan as a teenager in the late 1960’s to travel in Europe. By placing a classified advertisement in the Swedish newspaper Expressen he ended up in the village Gräsmark in Värmland, just a few miles from where Lerin grew up 20 years later. Lerin / Hystad became fascinated by Suzuki’s story and decided to make their own journey in order to find out more about his time in Sweden, how he was accepted as a young Japanese traveller in Europe in the late 1960’s, how he became a member in the German krautrock⁴ band Can⁵ and his current project Damo Suzuki’s Network.

By appropriating the same method Suzuki had used 40 years before the duo placed an article⁶ in the local newspaper Värmlands Folkblad in order to find someone who might remember something from his time in Gräsmark during the late 1960’s. The same evening as the article was published they heard from Birgitta Engman, a local hairdresser from Gräsmark. She told them about how she was a teenager when Suzuki came to Gräsmark and how they became close friends. Lerin / Hystad travelled to Gräsmark to interview Engman. When they entered her kitchen the table was covered with old photographs, articles, and letters written by Suzuki in early 1970’s. A week later they returned to interview her again, they brought a journalist from Värmlands Folkblad and the story was made public⁷. A few weeks later the duo received an email from Suzuki saying that maybe their project had made him nostalgic and that he was coming to Sweden over Easter. The duo met him and his girlfriend Elke in Stockholm and together they travelled back to Gräsmark after 40 years⁸.

During the summer of 2012 Lerin / Hystad joined the Damo Suzuki’s Network’s tour in Japan. Documenting nine concerts and 18 different sets ranging from rock, noise, jazz, electronica and reggae. By joining the tour they explored concepts of improvisation and communication through music both from Suzuki’s perspective but also how it was received and understood by the audience. The tour was documented through recordings, video and photographs. Apart from documenting Damo’s tour the duo also explored other concerts and improvisations with other artists and musicians from the Tokyo experimental music scene, all the videos were posted on their blog⁹. The recordings they did of Suzuki’s concerts in Japan became the starting point for a concert at Fylkingen in Stockholm on February 11, 2013. The recordings were sampled and manipulated live during the concert. Together with Suzuki they superimposed the samplings with improvisation. The concert gave them the opportunity to explore Suzuki’s concept as participants. Their concert was recorded and will be released on vinyl together with a booklet about their work with Suzuki

Can and the Krautrock Movement

The rock and electronic influenced experimental music movement in Germany often referred to as *krautrock* started in the end of the 1960's. The rock music that came out of Germany at this time differed greatly from the English and American blues and rock'n roll movements. Instead the krautrock bands mixed psychedelic jamming with ideas from experimental contemporary classical music especially composer Karlheinz Stockhausen¹⁰. Most notable bands associated with the krautrock movement are bands like Faust, Amon Düül II, Tangerine Dream, Popol Vuh, Ash Ra Temple, Cluster, Neu!, Kraftwerk and Can. Inspired by new directions within the jazz movement with Ornette Coleman and Albert Ayler the krautrockers moved away from the patterns of song structure and melody of much rock music in America and Britain, some bands within the movement also drove the music towards more electronic sounds contributing to the evolution of ambient music. Jean-Hervé Peron of Faust says: "We were trying to put aside everything we had heard in rock'n roll, the three-chord patterns, the lyrics. We had an urge of saying something completely different."¹¹

Can was a band that formed in Cologne, West Germany in 1968 by Irmin Schmidt and Holger Czukay both students of avant garde composer Karlheinz Stockhausen. The group was soon joined by guitar player Michael Karoli and drummer Jaki Liebezeit. Can constructed their music largely through collective spontaneous composition which the band differentiated from improvisation in the jazz sense. Sampling themselves in the studio and editing down the results, bass player and chief engineer Holger Czukay referred to Can's live and studio performances as "instant compositions". The band enlisted the creative but unstable American vocalist Malcolm Mooney, a New-York based sculptor, with whom they released their first record *Monster Movie* in 1969. In 1970 Mooney returned to America on the advice of a psychiatrist, having been told that getting away from the chaotic music of Can would be better for his mental health. Can was now without a singer and while sitting at a café in Munich Czukay and Liebezeit discover the young Japanese traveller Kenji "Damo" Suzuki busking on the street. Can had a gig in Munich that same evening and they invite Damo Suzuki to join them on stage that same night. Damo Suzuki stayed with Can until 1973 during these years Can would release their most classic and successful records including *Tago Mago*, *Ege Bamyasi* and *Future Days*.

The Beginning of Our Story

Vill studera svensk sed

• Raskt över till dagens brevvän och blivande semesterfirare. Jag är en japansk pojke, som är intresserad av svenska seder och bruk. meddelar KENZI SUZUKI, 2-1-3 Midorigao-

ka, Atsugi-city, Kanagawa, Japan. Han har tänkt åka hit och titta närmare på våra seder och bruk och undrar om någon vill ta emot honom som gäst i någon månad.

Expressen - November 29, 1967.

Lerin

The article above was printed by Expressen on November 29, 1967 and it is the starting point for Suzuki's journey to Sweden and Europe. When I first heard the story of how Suzuki came to Europe from Japan through a classified advertisement it interested me because to me it seemed that already back then he was developing a similar method and approach to life as he has today about his music and performance. Today Suzuki does not choose the musicians that he performs with himself but leaves that decision to the promoter and trusts in the idea that as long as the musicians have an open mind it will be an interesting concert. It seems to me that he had the same strategy when

travelling around in Europe in the end of the 1960's, he was aimlessly travelling around letting one situation lead to another. Part of Suzuki's openness we have tried to apply to the process of this project as well. We have been interested in the concepts of chance and serendipity. Serendipity¹² could be explained as the act of finding something valuable or delightful when you are not looking for it, a pleasant surprise.

I have been interested in Suzuki's music for many years, not only his music but also the methods and concepts behind it. To me his method of placing himself in an unknown situation together with other people and creating something together is very interesting. I have in many of my previous projects both as a musician and an artist worked with improvisation and chance. As a musician it interests me because when performing as an improviser together with other musicians that I have not played with before it challenges me and brings completely new things out of my playing that I would not have been able to achieve if I would not have been in that situation. And as an artist I think the idea of improvisation is interesting and especially when the artwork needs other people in order to be realized. One example of this is my work *Mammoth*¹³ from 2008. In this work a life size mammoth sculpture was transported from the National Academy of the Arts in Bergen by crane, truck and train to the ski resort Finse in the Norwegian mountains. The project was realized through sponsorship and a big part of the process of this artwork was to convince the crane company, the hotel at Finse and NRK (Norwegian Television) to help me realize this project. The journey of the mammoth from Bergen to Finse was broadcasted on NRK¹⁴. After the journey the mammoth was left on the mountains in Finse where it got buried in snow. Skiers later interacted with the artwork by making excavations and digging the mammoth out of the snow.



Simon Torssell Lerin - Mammoth 2008

Hystad

To explore the methods behind Suzuki's music has been one of my main interests working with this project because they resemble a lot of the same methods as I have been using in my own artistic practise. When Lerin and I met Suzuki I soon discovered the similarities in our ways of working and what we wanted to achieve. At this point Lerin and I were travelling to different "Artist in Residence" programs where we were making art projects in collaboration with local communities. These projects were process based and revolved around music or food where we through meetings and workshops wanted to challenge people and their habits. By asking them to do their normal actions in a slightly different way we wanted to create a new entry point to that action and by collaborating it also created an exchange of knowledge and experience. When we first met Suzuki in Osaka we were "Artists in Residence" at Kyoto Art Center¹⁵. During our three months we invited 20 people of different ages and different backgrounds to participate in the project *Kyoto Dinner Experiments*¹⁶. The participants were invited to our home, alone or in groups. And asked to cook a Japanese fish dish. All whilst we showed them how to prepare a Scandinavian fish dish. After our first dinner together the participants was asked to create a hybrid fish dish mixing Japanese and Scandinavian cooking. The participants were then invited for a second workshop where we together cooked all the dishes from their hybrid recipes. A dinner was arranged within the exhibition space of Kyoto Art Center where the participants could share their hybrid dishes with the exhibition audience. Exhibited along with the hybrid dishes were also profiles of all the participants containing the recipes of their hybrid dishes as well as the recipes of the Japanese and Scandinavian dishes from our first dinner together. The cooking together proved to be a way of communicating without words making the cultural exchange an artwork in itself.

This project has similarities with the artistic practise of Rirkrit Tiravanija¹⁷, who is known for his projects where he makes installations in the format of stages or rooms where he invite people to share meals, cook, read or play music. In his work *Untitled (Free)*¹⁸ from 1992 Tiravanija transformed the 303 Gallery in New York into a kitchen where he served rice curry to the audience for free inviting the visitors to interact with contemporary art in a more sociable way, blurring the distance between artist and viewer. In *Kyoto Dinner Experiments* we tried to take these ideas one step further by creating an opportunity for the participants in the project to create and share their own recipes with the audience. We also wanted to create an opportunity for learning and sharing between two cultures, in this case Scandinavian and Japanese.



The Kunming Free-Opera Experience - Lerin / Hystad 2010

Another example of a work we did is *Kunming Free-Opera Experience*¹⁹ while being “Artist in Residence” at Yunnan Contemporary²⁰ in Kunming, China during the summer of 2010.

In Kunming there is a tradition of singing, dancing and performing traditional Chinese music in the parks and especially retired people would meet and perform together. While spending time interviewing and recording the retired musicians we decided we wanted to collaborate with one of the groups. We wanted to try and connect the old and the young so we invited a group of children from a local drawing class between the ages 3 to 14 to make a set design and costumes based on the traditional Chinese music performed by the retired musicians. We then invited the retired musicians and dancers to create a performance based on the children's designs. The result became a two hour long opera/performance in the Green Lake Park of Kunming combining traditional Chinese music and dance with the stories created from the drawings of the children.

The difference between our previous works and this one about Suzuki is that we have narrowed down our research to revolve around one person and his methods where I felt before it was more broad. Our strategies are similar as before but I now feel we are more in control of the project. By using a smaller case study I feel we get a deeper understanding and more interesting information and results.

Becoming a Part of the Damo Story

Hystad

When writing the story in *Simon Torssell Lerin / Bettina Hvidevold Hystad with Damo Suzuki*²¹ it is not a linear story from Suzuki's birth (1950) until today, it is instead structured around our common path and since we now by doing this project have come closer to Suzuki we are now also actively part of shaping the story. Both as artists making an art work, as storytellers documenting and telling a story about Suzuki and his projects and finally as musicians and members of the Damo Suzuki's Network. When gathering material for this project it has been important to not have a specific story in mind while collecting but instead find the story within the collected material during the editing process. We ended up with a big collection of material ranging from newspaper articles, photographs, excerpts from letters and diaries and interviews e.g. I think it is interesting to think about the different sources of information in our collected material. When writing the biography it is important for me to use the voice of Suzuki and Engman and use excerpts from interviews with them to tell the story especially in the first part of the project (Suzuki's time in Gräsmark) because the information we have from this time are old letters from Suzuki, notes from Engman in diaries and their memories.

I am interested in the relationship between the first hand information of an event and the later retellings and reconstructions of it, how the information gets distorted, what is lost and what is added to the story, and the power of mass media in history writings of events. One example of an artwork that interests me in regard to these questions is the work *Spielberg's List*²² by Israeli artist Omer Fast²³. In this work Fast has visited Cracow in Poland where Steven Spielberg made his film *Schindler's List*²⁴. Fast has interviewed people who worked as extras on the Spielberg film. Their memories are presented as the dry, authentic accounts of an historical event. In most cases, the 1990's Hollywood production, but in some cases the 1940's German occupation. Omer Fast juxtaposes these accounts with shots of the surviving film set, built near the remains of the actual German labour camp and never fully dismantled. Much like the two sites, which appear increasingly indistinguishable with the passage of time, the work reveals the production of history through the merger of recreation and relic.

Lerin

In regards to first and second hand information and the construction of history I also think about the Mexican artist Mario Garcia Torres²⁵ who has worked with the idea of a collective memory based upon the circulation of images in popular film and art. In his film *Some Places I Had Seen Before Moving to L.A.*²⁶ from 2005 Torres drives everyday through Los Angeles in an unsuccessful search of the image of the city he had before moving there. That image was constructed through his experience of seeing either films set in Los Angeles or reproductions of conceptual art works that were made there. I feel I can recognize some of the ideas from Torres film also when working with this project especially when I have been doing research about Suzuki through reading interviews, articles and books about krautrock and music history. Through my research I had created an image of who Suzuki was but then when I later met and got to know him it became strange because I had already gotten to know that person through reading about him and then I got know him again by actually spending time with him. Another work I think about is *The Persona Project*²⁷ by Swedish artist Sara Jordanö²⁸ where she researches the Ingemar Bergman²⁹ film *Persona*³⁰ and discovers that the film is not a historical artefact but a living work who's form and identity seems to be in constant change. *The Persona Project, No 6: Videoactive*³¹ from 2001, focuses on a video store in Los Angeles which has the same name. In the video store, the actual copy of the film *Persona* mysteriously manages to find its way, over and over again, from the shelf with Bergman's name on it to the shelf intended for films possessing a lesbian theme. A gesture that seems minute, even arbitrary, brings to light the infinite number of re/classification possibilities that a film such as *Persona* can have. Jordanö unearths conversations, records voices which might seem unrelated, she renegotiates them into view, so that the narrative intentions of *Persona*'s actors as well as Bergman's leading authority becomes a side note, muffled or muted in through the haze of translations.

Damonese, a Language Without Words

Hystad

Before documenting the Damo Suzuki's Network tour in Japan during the summer of 2012 I had read a lot of interviews with Suzuki describing the concepts behind his music and we also talked a lot about it when we travelled together in Sweden. As I understood it he clearly suggested that what he was doing was not a regular concert. Maybe the music in itself was not even the most important part of the show.

I create time and space of the moment with local sound carriers or musicians, that means everywhere I travel alone, I have different sound carriers and also music is different. I'm networking everywhere with this movement to understanding to share energy which I believe is the weapon against violence. We are composing pieces on spot call it "instant composing" and every time new experience for sound carriers on stage and audience... I have nets of sound carriers all over the world... so, that's why simply called Network. And this way I'm keeping Never Ending Tour.
Damo Suzuki³²

I was also interested in finding out more about how Suzuki communicated his political ideas through his music and what interested me was how he reached out with his message. Suzuki sings in his own language made up by sounds, but you can sometimes recognise some words or small sentences in English, Japanese or German.

- Where do you get your lyrics?

I just make any kinds of sounds from different languages and put it all together.

Sometimes it's my own language which I developed.

- What's your language called?

Damonese! Or something like that ... I like the audience to be interactive so everybody makes up their own stories listening to the music. I like this because everybody has the talent to be creative but they like to always have answers.

An answer is a kind of product. I don't really need this.

Damo Suzuki interviewed by Ananda Pellerin and Victoria Ford.³³

Lerin

It is interesting how Suzuki has created his own language to communicate with the audience. Even when singing with Can he used to mix English with Japanese to create his own language often repeating the same sentences over and over again. There were other bands in the progressive and experimental rock movement during the early 1970's who were also creating their own languages, French band Magma³⁴ created the language Kobaïan³⁵ to tell the story of a group of people fleeing a doomed Earth to settle on the planet Kobaïa, envisioned as humanity's spiritual and ecological future by the band's drummer Christian Vander. And singing in constructed language in Western music dates back even to the 12th century with composer Hildegard von Bingen's³⁶ work *O Orzchis Ecclesia*³⁵ which is performed in her own language Lingua Ignota³⁵. However what Suzuki is doing with his voice is something very different, he has not created a language like the ones mentioned above. His lyrics consists of made up words and sounds that have more in common with the poetry of Hugo Ball³⁷ and his poem *Karawane*³⁸ from 1916 which consists of nonsensical words, the meaning however resides in its meaninglessness. There are also other similarities between Suzuki and Ball, in 1916 Ball created the Dada Manifesto³⁹, making a political statement about his views on the terrible state of society and acknowledging his dislike for philosophies in the past claiming to possess the ultimate Truth. Suzuki has also many times stated that he is not interested in truths and that that is one of the reasons why he only creates music in front of a live audience and don't record anything in studios anymore. In many reviews of concerts Suzuki is often being described by journalists as a shaman putting his audience in a state of trance through his singing. I think that Suzuki's concerts in some ways resembles a shamanistic ritual but I also think it has some important differences, in a shamanistic ritual the music is in first hand directed towards the spirits and not towards the audience, the shaman's attention is directed inwards towards the spirit world, and not outwards to any listener who might be present. In a Damo Suzuki concert on the other hand the music is centered around the idea of communication and the sharing of energies between the performers on stage and the people in the audience. In the West during the late 1980's bands began to loosely apply the label "shamanic" to any music that might induce a trance state. This was partly due to the rarity of actual recordings of shamanistic rituals. In Siberia bands formed drawing on shamanic traditions, nevertheless the musicians involved, if sometimes unsure of their own role, recognized an important difference between artists using shamanic themes and shamans themselves. A British/Siberian group called K-Space developed a style combining improvisation, electronics, field recordings with shamanic Tuvan traditional music, In a review of their second album *Going Up* (2006) in Allmusic, François Couture described their music as psychedelic shamanism or the strangest krautrock you ever heard⁴⁰.

Instant Composing

Hystad

I say instant composing not instant composition because the ing is important.

If you say "ing" twenty times it sounds like "energy." When I make music I'm sharing people's energy - you only get such energy when composing music. If you have a prepared piece you are forced to operate the same way every night.

Damo Suzuki⁴¹

Music journalist Frank Gingeliet describes the differences between improvisation and instant composing like this:

Instant composing is different from free improvisation where there's usually a theme for each tune, and the musicians, especially the soloists, are free in their contributions within the framework of the respective tune. In opposition to this instant composing means no themes, no rehearsals, no prepared tunes- just going onstage and starting to play right away, following "free associations" (in Freud's terms) or the "stream of consciousness" (in terms of literary criticism especially concerning the writing principles of novelists like Marcel Proust or James Joyce.
Frank Gingeliet.⁴²

Suzuki often describes the process of instant composing as creating time and space in the moment through sharing energy with both the other performers and the audience. Musician and writer Vijay Iyer writes about music perception, cognition and performance. He writes that music is an embodied, situated activity. Meaning that music depends crucially on the structure of our bodies, and also on the environment and culture in which our musical awareness emerges. The claim that perception and cognition are embodied activities also means that they are actively constructed by the listener, rather than passively transferred from performer to listener. The process of musical improvisation can be seen as one specific way of framing the shared time between performer and audience. The main source of drama in improvised music is the sheer fact of the shared sense of time, the sense that the improviser is working, creating, generating musical material, in the same time in which we are co-performing as listeners⁴³. During our concert together with Suzuki at Fylkingen we wanted to explore these ideas further by live sampling recordings of previous Suzuki improvisations and superimposing them with new improvisations. We were interested to see how this would effect Suzuki and if it would bring something different out of him during the performance.

The Presentation, the Concert and the Vinyl

Lerin

We have worked with this project over a year, during that year we have collected a lot of material some of this material have already been presented to the public. The first part of the biography about Suzuki's time in Sweden has been exhibited in Norway and Japan. Part of the story has also been presented in newspaper articles and the videos and some of the photographs from the tour in Japan was presented on our blog⁴⁴.

On February 11, 2013 we arranged a concert at Fylkingen in Stockholm together with Damo Suzuki. The concert was based on recordings we did from the Damo Suzuki's Network Japan tour. We sampled and manipulated parts of the recordings which we then superimposed with new improvisations. To record oneself, distort and manipulate the recordings and later sample and superimpose them with new improvisations to create soundscapes in a live setting is something I have been working a lot with before in my own music. I also thought it was interesting to do in relationship to Suzuki and his history with Can. Holger Czukay bass player and sound engineer in Can used to record Can's rehearsals and end up with hours of recordings, later in the studio he would edit, cut and manipulate the recordings to create Can's albums.

Hystad

I have in several of my earlier projects both together with Simon and alone worked with sound and music, it has been a way for me to tell a story. For me the fascination with music has been the direct communication it creates, and the performativity of it. I have always been interested in music but never performed it myself. But in the last years I have been making soundscapes digitally, for me this was an important and interesting aspect of the concert together with Suzuki. To try to compose a soundscape so that the concert felt like a journey. In the book about Suzuki we mix material from the past and the present, and therefore we wanted to do this in the concert as well. That is why I thought it was interesting to use samples of previous recordings with Suzuki in our concert together. These samples were used as turning-points in the concert, we used the samples to change the direction of the music, they changed the tempo and the atmosphere of the music. The concert together with Suzuki gave us the opportunity to explore his concept as participants. The recorded concert at Fylkingen will be pressed on vinyl and released together with our book about Suzuki, presented in the form of a booklet. I think the vinyl format is interesting because it gives us a chance to continue our artwork in the design of the gatefold sleeve and the album artwork but also because I think it relates to Can and the krautrock movement when vinyl was the format for listening to music.

Lerin

There are many artists working with vinyl records inside the gallery space, one example is the Norwegian artist Talleiv Taro Manum⁴⁵ who often displays vinyl records inside vitrines or sometimes directly on the floor together with record players so that the visitors can listen to the recordings. Released as exclusive limited editions the recordings are often from concerts recorded on the porch of his house together with booklets containing photographs and texts documenting the events. I think the vinyl format is interesting because it is an everyday use object meant to be enjoyed and listened to but at the same time it often becomes a collectable valued by record collectors as a precious piece of art. Our record will be released by German record label Clouds Hill⁴⁶ in October of 2013 and get distributed world wide through Rough Trade⁴⁷. Suzuki will also bring the record with him and sell it on tour. I think that this is an interesting aspect of the artwork that it will get distributed and sold outside the traditional museum or gallery space. When it is available in record stores around the world it will reach a new audience that would have not been able to experience the artwork if it had only been exhibited within museums or galleries. As a part of promoting the release of the record we will perform again together with Damo Suzuki at the Avantgarde Festival 2013 in Schiphorst⁴⁸. Suzuki says that his Network is the biggest band in the world with over 5000 members, for our performance at the Avantgarde Festival we have gathered some of these previous members for a new concert. Musicians improvising together with Suzuki at the Avantgarde Festival will be Simon Torssell Lerin / Bettina Hvidevold Hystad, Omar Rodriguez Lopez, Faust and Bo Ningen.

Hystad

For the spring exhibition at Konstfack we will present the project as a sound installation containing the 54 page booklet. The recordings from the concert we did together with Suzuki will be played on two speakers that are surrounding a round black bench. We want to create a space for listening and reading, the booklet will be printed and there will be several examples available for the audience to read. On the wall behind our bench we will also present three posters, one from the concert at Fylkingen, one promoting our concert at Avantgarde Festival and one promoting the release of the vinyl on Clouds Hill in October. This information will also be present in the catalogue that will be printed for the exhibition.



Simon Torssell Lerin / Bettina Hvidevold Hystad with Damo Suzuki - Album cover released on Clouds Hill in October 2013.

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