

to purchase the journal and view the virtual exhibition themselves—they will not be disappointed.

Repeating my opening remarks, this is an important issue of the *HYLE* journal for all interested in the liaison between art and science generally, and art and chemistry specifically. I hope it will spawn further heated debate in this exciting and almost limitless enterprise.

## AUDIO CDS

### PRINTS, SNAPSHOTS, POSTCARDS, MESSAGES AND MINIATURES 1987–2001

by Fred Frith. ReR Megacorp,  
Thornton Heath, U.K., 2002.

*Reviewed by Stefaan Van Ryssen, Hogeschool  
Gent, Jan Delvinlaan 115, 9000 Gent,  
Belgium. E-mail: <stefaan.vanryssen@  
pandora.be>.*

Fred Frith has always been a millipedic musician, and this record testifies to the point. It shows some of the thousand skills he masters, the main one being, of course, improvisation.

Six of the songs, as the CD insert notes,

were recorded for a WDR radio production by Alexander Schumacher. The aim of the program was to explore the nature of improvisation. I was supposed to create pieces spontaneously, using my choices from a long list of sampled fragments which I heard only after arriving in the studio. The texts were derived from whatever was in the newspaper on the day of the recording. All these songs were composed and constructed directly onto tape without preparation.

The result has a certain immediacy and urgency. The songs are constructed over some simple bass lines mixed with the sample, with the addition of guitars and keyboards and finally a voice. Simple elements do not make a simple dish, however. “Stones,” for example, reinvents the waltz, limping as if hit in the leg by a bullet, and not inappropriately the accompanying text is about the Palestinian Independence Celebrations in Hebron, 1997. “I want it to be over” is a frightening song on a text from the *International Herald Tribune*, repeating over and over a phrase from an interview with Bill Clinton about Monica Lewinsky. Frith uses samples

of broken glass and an Escher-loop for this miniature drama. As improvisation goes, this is top class. The interactions between the samples and the instruments are subtle and never obvious. What starts as a banal song suddenly turns into a universal message (Reduce me), and what appears to be mere camp at first hearing is a sarcastic comment on manipulation and mass hysteria (Levity).

The other songs include a remake of Serge Gainsbourg’s “The Ballad of Melody Nelson,” dark, morose, mysterious, criminal, vintage Gainsbourg with an ironical twist because of the funny accent in the French lyrics.

One needs to listen carefully to these seemingly simple tracks, but they will reveal themselves after a while, leaving the listener not with insight into the nature of the process of improvisation, but with awe at what a master improviser can do in real time.

### ARCANE DEVICES: ENGINES OF MYTH

David Lee Myers. ReR Megacorp,  
Thornton Heath, U.K., 1988–2003.

*Reviewed by Curtis E.A. Karnow, 685  
Market Street, 6th Floor, San Francisco  
CA 94105, U.S.A. E-mail: <ckarnow@  
sonnenschein.com>.*

David Lee Myers bemoans J.S. Bach. Myers makes closed electronic feedback loops, and so even the Moog keyboard violates the implied rule: No outside input. “[E]lectronic sound is a pulse of the cosmos which never heard of J.S. Bach, much as I might appreciate the genius of that other music. The electron rules its own universe” <<http://www.pulsewidth.com>>. Myers fabricates machines, including the Feedback Workstation, which he used to make most of *Arcane Devices*’ tracks. The “improvisations for feedback” album was originally released in 1988 and subsequently re-mastered for the 2003 CD.

These are not free-range electrons, though. Myers very carefully massages their stream, and bits of the music are indeed indistinguishable from early Moog, such as Dick Heyman’s *Electric Eclectics*. To be sure, Myers is far more abstract and industrial than popular Moog, but the tone intervals and timing are surgically composed. Imagine patches contributed by Jimi Hendrix, arranged on the fly by an infinitely flexible metronome. This is

little more than a proof of concept, however: Perhaps because Myers works alone, the tapestry is thin, no more than one to two tracks. A guy in a junkyard, hammer in one hand and tongs in the other, starting up motors, shredding cables, methodically smashing hoods and breaking glass, just to see what he can come up with.

## LEONARDO REVIEWS ON-LINE

The reviews published in print are but a small selection of the reviews available on the *Leonardo Reviews* web site. Below is a full list of reviews published in *LR* from May to August 2004 <[leonardoreviews.mit.edu](mailto:leonardoreviews.mit.edu)>.

### August 2004

*Activity-Centered Design: An Ecological Approach to Designing Smart Tools and Usable Systems*, by Geri Gay and Helene Hembrooke. Reviewed by Rob Harle.

*Artful History: A Restoration Comedy*, by Jason Simon and Mark Dion. Reviewed by Roy R. Behrens.

*The Cinema Effect*, by Sean Cubitt. Reviewed by Yvonne Spielmann.

*Design Research: Methods and Perspectives*, edited by Brenda Laurel. Reviewed by Maia Engeli.

*Frank Lloyd Wright and the Johnson Wax Buildings*, by Jonathan Lipman. Reviewed by Roy R. Behrens.

*Ghouls, Gimmicks, and Gold: Horror Films and the American Movie Business, 1953–1968*, by Kevin Heffernan. Reviewed by John F. Barber.

*God’s Man: A Novel in Woodcuts*, by Lynd Ward. Reviewed by Roy R. Behrens.

*History after Apartheid: Visual Culture and Public Memory in a Democratic South Africa*, by Annie E. Coombes. Reviewed by Andrea Dahlberg.

*La Commune (Paris 1871)*, by Peter Watkins. Reviewed by Roy R. Behrens.

*Les défis du cybermonde*, edited by Hervé Fischer. Reviewed by Stefaan Van Ryssen.