

The work Thomas Baldischwyler presents at the project space OSLO 10 is not an exhibition but a waiting area, complete with a digital countdown to get visitors ready for the closing party. The installation combines typical project space furniture and equipment—shelves, partitions walls, a fridge, a bar—with Baldischwyler’s current means of production—spar varnish, mirror foil, cardboard boxes, acrylic paint. Two video projections will be on display, one of them the rough cut of a documentary about the Austrian techno duo ILSA GOLD’s performance during the MAYDAY mass rave in Dortmund in 2011. This rough cut is also what inspired the installation’s title: **HOT KNOBBING**.

Hot knobbing is a slang term that has come into wider use mostly due to the rise of the “laptop performer.” It describes the practice of pretending to operate hot knobs—which is to say, control dials—during fake live performances of contemporary music. The “promise” is also what holds the parts of the spatial insertions together. The insistence on a soft opening and the use of a factory-made digital countdown counter focus attention on the “normal” opening hours of an off space, its function as a temporary social site—during the openings of shows—and administrated vacancy—during the shows themselves.

The four English musicians Mark Fell, Miles Whittaker, Ralph Cumbers, and Joane Skyler will perform at the closing party, which, by the standards of the conventional economy of attention, should probably be regarded as the opening. Whereas Mark Fell produces and presents most of his music using the software MAX, Ralph Cumbers, when working under the pseudonym SOME TRUTHS, performs exclusively on analog equipment. In Miles Whittaker’s performance, meanwhile, the computer oscillates between instrument and interface. Joane Skyler similarly manipulates chrome cassettes with both analog and digital means. All four performances will be recorded and published as a double 12” record on Thomas Baldischwyler’s label TRAVEL BY GOODS. The release is meant to facilitate reflection on the meaning of the performance, its spatial setting, and its documentation.

An interview with the Suisse zweikommasieben magazine:

zweikommasieben: Your installation **HOT KNOBBING** at Oslo 10, Basel, explores the “live” aspect of performances. What does “live” mean to you in this age of holograms, “live streaming,” and prefabricated Ableton sets?

Thomas Baldischwyler: The last thing I want to do is strike a blow for authenticity. I refuse to take part in this extremely petit-bourgeois mainstream ritual of getting all heated up over “fake” performances in which the Internet public scrutinizes everything down to the smallest detail and denounces every empty slot as fraud. The technological capabilities are just there, and a demanding commercial exploitation machine makes time scarcer and scarcer. So: why not? After all, there’s an artistic tradition of undercutting the idea of the “original.” What I think is interesting is that this general sentiment has inspired some producers, especially younger ones like araabMUZIK or DJ Pogo, to make a deliberate choice to perform on the MPC and to “exhibit” that decision as well: their gigs are carefully documented by cameras positioned at various angles and put online. But what these gigs lack is the “flaw.” These producers practice their instruments as though they were tennis rackets. In the particular instance of this exhibition, “live,” to my mind, primarily means this sort of “flaw” in the performance presented / implemented as though in a “stream of consciousness.”

zweikommasieben: Although musical events are permanently available online and offline, the craving to be part of an event still seems to be a strong motivation—festivals and mega events are a booming business. According to the abstract, **HOT KNOBBING** is likewise meant to be not so much an exhibition as a waiting room in the run-up to the closing event. Why is there still such a strong desire for the spectacular? And what are the consequences of this economy of attention for you as an artist?

Thomas Baldischwyler: For musicians in particular, gigs are an important way to make money. Records are no longer profitable and now primarily serve as nothing more than business cards. But what forces event managers to lay it on ever more thickly in the fields of music and the arts is the abundance of options people have. The “democratization” of culture (and of the means of production as well), which is a side effect of post-Fordism and the ongoing process in

which work shifts into our free time, is taking its toll. Time and again, organizers create the façade of a high-culture “entre nous” situation, but even the most exclusive event concept is accompanied by the fear that no one will come. This atmosphere makes solo presentations a tricky business, and so people mostly go for group exhibitions that can cash in on more social capital. Most such shows then also feature a performance that is supposed to function as a sort of unique selling proposition. I’m familiar with the phenomenon from Hamburg or Berlin, of course, but it really came home to me again during my residency in Basel. Let’s face it: especially with smaller institutions, after a show opens, nothing happens in the galleries anymore—which is really tantamount to administrated vacancy. But as with the question of “authenticity,” I think these empty rooms are interesting. They offer opportunities for evasiveness and new experiences. That’s exactly what I tried to express with the inversion of opening and closing and the digital countdown.

zweikommasieben: The exhibition’s closing event will feature performances by Mark Fell (SND, Sensate Focus), Miles Whittaker (Demdike Stare), Ralph Cumbers (Bassclef, Some Truths), and the London-based newcomer Joane Skyler. How do you know these musicians? Why these particular four people?

Thomas Baldischwyler: Because my artistic practice ranges across many fields and because my musical production grew out of fandom, I’ve always had ties to clubs and concert promoters. The Golden Pudel Club in Hamburg played an important role in this regard. The collective MFOC, which has curated the Sundays at the Golden Pudel for over a decade, became part of my circle of friends. So in addition to working there as a DJ every now and then, I was also invited to propose artists for these Sunday events. Ralph Cumbers came to Hamburg because I recommended him. With Mark Fell, too, I pestered the booker Ralf Köster for several years. And Joane Skyler, the youngest of the four artists, is someone I met and came to like through the MFOC resident DJ Superdefekt. Miles Whittaker, finally, is a bar acquaintance—he loves the club so much he even changed his location to Hamburg on Facebook. But the selection is not some random lineup of buddies of mine. Improvisation—and hence the “flaw” I mentioned earlier—is an important element in the work of all four musicians. There is indeed “prepared material” they present, but then they also frequently combine it with other elements and—this is important—with different technical means. Each one of them has a distinctive way of producing music, and so I hope listening to the recordings on the double 12” record to be released by Travel By Goods will be like strolling along a retrospective of what is possible in a live performance.

zweikommasieben: You run the label Travel By Goods, and as you’ve just mentioned, it will bring out a recording of the performances by Mark Fell, Miles Whittaker, Ralph Cumbers, and Joane Skyler during the closing event of your show. Can you say something about the concept behind the label? How is it connected to your art projects?

Thomas Baldischwyler: Travel By Goods grew out of a symposium I organized in the second half of the 2000s that bore the title Object VS Performance. The visual reference implicit in the label’s name were the “golden” records that NASA shot into space in 1977 with the Voyager probes. I liked the idea of the time capsule and the hope the mission embodied. Which, by extension, means: production without a direct addressee. And that should in turn be the true basis of classical artistic production, and the latter in combination with the paradoxical assertion of freedom with regard to the manifestation as a set of multiples. But Travel By Goods was not meant as a label for artists’ records. Hence also the fictional ethnomusicologist Arthur “Boto” Conley as the label’s director and the promise of cultural historiography in the accompanying texts. Contrary to the outside perception, my auditory productions were never separate, for example, from my work with classical visual formats. The music was always also designed with an object, a record, in mind, and even when it was just a white label 12”, it was always linked to the outside, the packaging. In the case of Hot Knobbing, the installation is the packaging for the performances and recordings during the closing event. The individual references—the movie Blade Runner, the California hardcore band Flipper, and the rough cut of the documentary about the Austrian techno project Isa Gold’s performance at Mayday—extend these potential questions the record as a final product raises: Where do we stand? Where are we going? Do we need this company?

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