

The Sound Projector Music Magazine 17th Issue 2008-

The **SOUND** Projector 17

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HARRON KRAUS



LIGHT MUSIC



DEAD LETTERS SPELL
OUT DEAD WORDS



GEN KEN
MONTGOMERY



USA Underground
Field Recordings
Avant Rock
Tape Works
Electronica
Black Metal
Art Gallery
Drones
Noise



LAMINATION RITUALS



An encounter with GEN KEN MONTGOMERY

lamination-related projects. I wore a red hard hat during the Lamination Ritual.

EP What is the Lamination Ritual?

GK Lamination Ritual is a people-participatory activity and sonic listening experience which stimulates the mind and body in-the-moment, while producing an original, tangible, transformed personal object which will last...almost forever.

As the Minister of Lamination in the Kingdoms of Elgaland & Vargaland I perform Lamination Rituals. It's a social event and covert sound work that brings people together to celebrate the transformation of transitory objects and everyday ephemera into Official permanence. I try to make it fun. I like to wear bright suits and costumes and along with Andrea, The Enchantress of Bioluminescence, I create a lively environment to laminate in. After we initiate the first lamination we invite the public to bring their ephemera to the laminator so they can listen to The Sound of Lamination. Because of all the razzle-dazzle people are sometimes unaware of how strongly sound and listening are incorporated into this work - my laminator is modified to amplify the lamination process - in stereo! Each Lamination Ritual is unique. For this Lamination Ritual the lights were shut off in the gallery and the Enchantress danced with her bioluminescent costume in total darkness handing out chips of paint from the Ministry's headquarters in New York. The Enchantress and I and then led the crowd across the street to the King's Arms Pub where we had the laminator set up on a snooker table. People then laminated their paint chips and many other things which they brought to the ritual or found on the spot. Each person got to listen to the sound of their lamination and to keep it as souvenir of their experience.

EP Your documentary recording of New York City has always proved fascinating. It's a good idea to leave the recordings unadulterated. I assume you're familiar with Harry Smith's experiments with hanging microphones outside his window? I think he was intent on capturing psychic energy, perhaps for some magical ritual. How can a field recording capture the secret heart or the hidden face of a large city? What areas can a microphone probe that are missed by the camera or microscope? Or are they simply the aural equivalent of litmus paper?

WE CAUGHT UP WITH GEN KEN MONTGOMERY during his flying visit to London in summer 2008. He was performing his Lamination Ritual with The Enchantress of Bioluminescence on May 16. Said Enchantress can be seen on front cover this issue along with Ken in his special red outfit. Ken was also exhibiting sound work at the Laura Bartlett Gallery around the same time. In issue 11 we noted how Ken's documentary recording of 23rd Street in NYC ..."allowed [the listener] to be transported to an urban wonderland, where every strange noise from the New York street betokened some exciting adventure unfolding." Apparently these effusive words inspired the piece being selected for the gallery. We last spoke to Ken in issue ten (2002), where we were somewhat fixated on his use of household objects, such as the ice-making machine, to create unusual droning sound art miniatures. "I get excited about the sound of things that have a purpose other than making sound," said Ken. "When I see objects I sometimes imagine what it would sound like."

EP Hello Gen Ken. Very nice to see you back in London again, however briefly. What are you doing at this art gallery?

GK I have a sound work "Twenty-Third Street Recording" playing during the exhibition *Building, Dwelling, Thinking* at the Laura Bartlett Gallery - plus I have nine laminations in the show, which I sent through the post from New York. Each lamination contains a chip of paint from the graffiti covered facade of the building where the The Ministry of Lamination is headquartered - plus I performed a Lamination Ritual which began at the gallery and ended up in The King's Arms Pub across the street. So I'm kind of wearing two hats. It may be the first time that I have presented my sound work as Gen Ken and my lamination work as Egenkn under the same roof. I have traditionally used Gen Ken for my sound art / noise music projects and since 1994 I've used Egenkn (an anagram of Gen Ken that I accidentally created) for my more whimsical and especially





GK I made the "Twenty-Third Street Recording" with a microphone in my front window facing 23rd street in 2002. It seems so simple now. All I had to do was get out of bed and turn on a recorder. That recording captured a sonic moment in time that is gone for me now. I have since moved to an apartment in the back of my building facing a church on 22nd street, a totally different sonic experience. (You have made me aware that I haven't made a recording from my present apartment.) John Slyce, the curator of the show at the Laura Bartlett Gallery, was originally interested in a CD-ROM of mine called Inner Eye/Outer Ear. Inner Eye contains an audio-only maze of hundreds of recordings of everyday sounds and events which were programmed to be navigated randomly by blindly clicking and dragging the mouse around. A blindfold was included with the package to emphasize that there wasn't any visual component. When I sent Inner Eye/Outer Ear to John, I also randomly threw in my recording of 23rd street. That recording ended up resonating with him and he immediately contacted me to say he wanted it in the show. Twenty-Third Street has a lot of history to it. At one time it was the home of Dylan Thomas, Virgil Thompson, William Burroughs, May Wilson, Bob Dylan, Nico and Sid Vicious. Plus I learned recently that one of the first documented pieces of mail art (before it was called mail art) was sent from Italy to Fortunato Pepero who lived at 464 23rd street, just down the street from me.

In the 80s when I was composing with electronic instruments I was still very much influenced and inspired by John Cage's ideas on being present with all the sounds around us. I sometimes made recordings for my own enjoyment of sonic environments that I lived in or travelled through. Years later I became very fond of listening to cassettes I'd made of say - Aeroport de Paris - Orly, Stazione Centrale di Milano or my roof leaking during a rainstorm. I processed many of these recordings to use in sound compositions, like the one on *Psychogeographical Dip*, which I

think you know. There is something to be said about the pure listening experience of recorded environments. I was not aware of the tradition of field recordings when I began making mine and I don't know much about Harry Smith though I will look him up now, but hanging a microphone out the window is certainly a rewarding thing to do. On the cassette *Endogeny* (Direction Music Wales 1989 and on *Pondfloorsample XI NYC 2002*) I have a track called 'Father Demo Swears' which was recorded in the studio of David Lee Myers who lives on Father Demo Square in Greenwich Village. During the recording session we hung a microphone out the window and picked up the sounds from the square and mixed them directly into the music. I think that piece, with all its sounds of life in the city, is exceptional because of it. On *Icebreaker* (Tellus #27 + Staalplaat), I ran a microphone out of the studio to pick up the sound of a dot matrix printer that can faintly be heard in the background. The recording engineer offered me the sound of a dot matrix printer from a sound effects collection but it didn't compare with the sound out in the hall. I too believe there is an otherworldly energy that can be captured with recording sound. I've made a CD called *8 Track Magic* which is the recording of a very damaged 8 Track tape (*Led Zeppelin IV*). The screeching and wobbling of the faltering tape was beautiful. I was lucky to record it when I did because after the tape played once I could never get it to play again. I'm sorry I didn't make recordings of New York



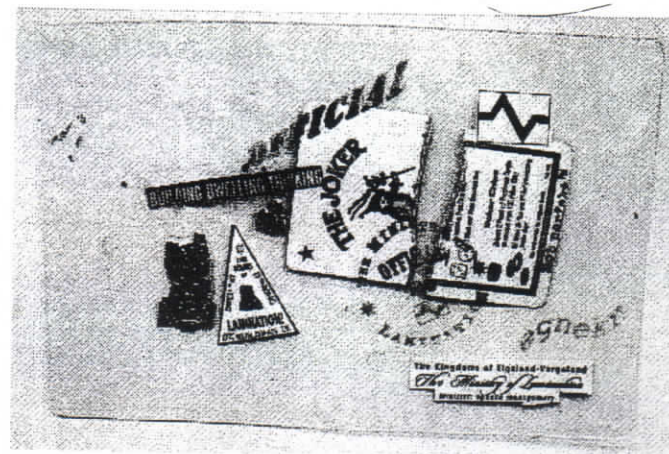
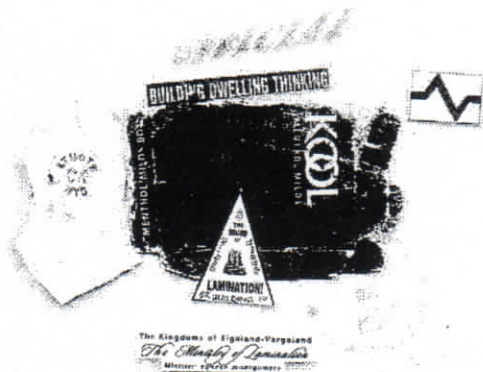
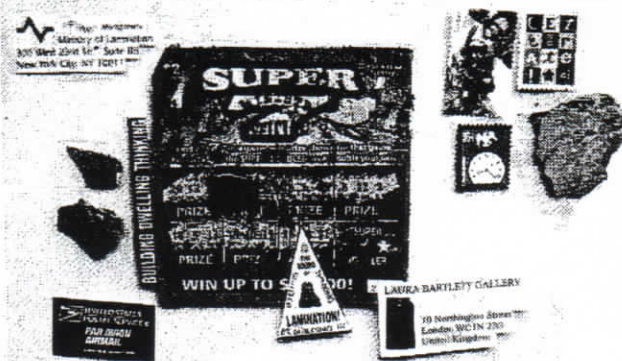
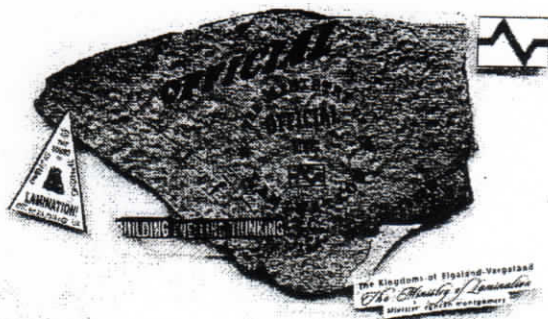
City during the Black Out of 2004 when the city was without electricity for 3 days. There was a stillness that I've never heard in New York before. I'll never forget the world of sounds that I heard right out my window. It was summer and everybody had their windows wide open and all the noisy air conditioners were dead quiet. It was magically beautiful.

EP For some time you have carried the role of Minister of Lamination for the imaginary country of Elgaland-Vargaland. Maybe the country isn't so imaginary any more. How are its parameters expanding? Outside of changing the physical nature of objects, what can lamination do to change the world? Is it a reversible process? Is anything lost through lamination?

GK I always say Lamination Ritual destroys the control freak in you. Lamination changes the moment and it is not reversible. It is both simple and profound which is why it keeps me interested. The technology behind lamination remains the same now, as it was when I began laminating in the 80s. That gives me a sense of security and satisfies my Luddite tendencies. I can't speak for the world, but it never hurts to be reminded to live in the moment and Lamination Ritual draws attention to being in the moment and listening intently. And there's also the joy of laughing at its simplicity and the digs at normalcy, bureaucracy and seriousness. I'll have to recite my manifesto now:

Lamination as a Virtual Metaphor: Lamination Ritual celebrates the transformation of the mundane into the realms of OFFICIALDOM of ordinary into extraordinary. Lamination is





Virtual Exhibition of Gen Ken New Postcards and other Laminations



Lamination Ritual celebrates the transformation of the mundane into the realms of **OFFICIALDOM**, or ordinary into extraordinary. Lamination is completely participatory and accessible to everyone. Lamination is versatile. It can be an object of utility or whimsical extravagance. It can warm the body and open the mind. Lamination preserves, brightens and protects indiscriminately. Lamination counters our increasingly fast-paced world by virtually slowing down the entropy process. Lamination provides a way to preserve for years fragile and transient items which would otherwise be lost or discarded in a few days or even seconds. Lamination kills the Control Freak by surprising us again and again. And finally, every Lamination has its own unique sound. The Sound of Lamination is the sound of anticipation, of the great process of life. In a confusing world, Lamination produces security, satisfaction and a sense that "something is happening".



GK I met Geoff around the time I ran Generator in the late 80s. Generator was my studio-turned store/gallery/club/network/hub - a before the Internet kind of place to meet like-minded people. It was filled with interesting music, many cassettes and artists. I was one of the artists on a series of compilations that deal with psychogeography, which Geoff produced. Geoff is meticulous about producing quality releases, beautifully designed and packaged on his GD Stereo label, one of those labour-of-love labels. He has collaborated with many of the artists on his label both as a musician and as a producer. We have been discussing an idea for hi label involving a sound work I recorded some years ago that is a collage of works by myself and Conrad Schnitzler that involved incidental field recordings and piano. It's quite a departure from my previous collaborations with Conrad such as *New Dramatic Electronic Music*, which was released on Generations Unlimited as an LP in 1988. I've been a fan of Schnitzler's music since hearing *Schwarz, Blau and Rot* in the 70s. I mailed Conrad a cassette of mine in the early 80s and we have stayed in contact ever since. I was lucky to have spent a lot of time with him in Berlin in the 80s and he has been very influential. When I first met Con and had the opportunity to listen to his multi-channel music surrounded by eight speakers in his studio I was blown away. This experience revolutionized the way I composed and listened to music. I immersed myself in Conrad's music for years and even travelled making live concerts of his music by mixing cassettes that he

prepared for me. We played concerts together all around Berlin carrying 4 portable cassette players and video from that period was made into a film by his son Gregor. We took stills from that video and manipulated them with a Mac Plus and I intend to use these images in the packaging of the GD Stereo release. I produced the *CONCERT* LP, which was a live mix of a concert by Conrad from 1985. Con was helped me create the Generations Unlimited record label and Con also inspired the opening of Generator where I gave Cassette Concerts by him in total darkness every week. Conrad has produced so much music in his life that it's hard to speak about all of it. I have fallen in and out of love with his music over the years, but his oeuvre continues to be a source of inspiration for me in the same way that I have been inspired by John Cage without always listening to Cage's music. Con has often remarked that nobody wants to hear his music until 20 years after its released and that's often true. I have

recently been listening to his work again, and I am again enthralled by the colossal depth of his creativity. Most of it is not easy listening but it is inspirational. Sometimes when I want to juice up my creative mind I put on some of the more wild music by Con. Besides his music, Con is a living example of an artist whose life is art. To be in presence of Conrad is a very special gift, he has a very big personality that generates a never-ending stream of idea. And with great humour too. We have remained in CONTACT over the years and we both have large boxes somewhere filled with "GENCONversation" tapes that we sent over the ocean to speak about art and life. "CON" means many things in other languages as does Gen. I began using Gen Ken for poetry and music in my teens, before I met Con. It was initially a typo but I liked it. Con and I have always made lots of puns with words and language. I never gave it much thought but probably hanging around Con got me to using Gen as a prefix for many of my projects. □



Lamination is versatile. It *CAN* be an object of utility or whimsical extravagance. It can warm the body and open the mind. Lamination preserves, brightens and protects indiscriminately. Lamination counters our increasingly fast paced world by virtually slowing down the entropy process. Lamination provides a way to preserve for years fragile and transient items, which would otherwise be lost or discarded in a few days or even seconds. And finally, every lamination has its own unique sound. The Sound of Lamination is the sound of anticipation, of the great process of life. In a confusing world, lamination produces security, satisfaction and a sense that "something is happening".

Elgaland-Vargaland is very real and is always expanding, gaining new territory even though the existing territory is already infinite. It is a living organism now. They are annexing new territory all the time. Check the web site. YOU are a part of that expansion.

EP When we last met in London it was to see Sparks ↑ making a welcome return to form as they performed their *Lil Beethoven* LP at the South Bank. Now you're here to see Sparks at one of their sold-out London concerts. Which LP from their catalogue did they perform? What would you have to say about the sound of the band? And their performance?

GK Don't get me started. I just love Sparks. I went to hear *A Woofer in Tweeter's Clothing* from 1972. That was the album that came out just before I heard them for the first time. The band was great, Ron and Russell are brilliantly entertaining performers. Everybody is applauding Sparks now. I was hailing their excellence and originality throughout their career, even back during their dormant period - the dark 90s. I will be a guest on Fabio's "Strength Through Failure" radio program on WFMU (www.WFMU.org) in New York on May 22 - just after I return. I will be giving a full report on seeing Sparks and I plan to compare their 2008 version of 'Here Comes Bob' with the original recording made in 1972.

EP You've got a release scheduled this year on Geoff Dugan's label. It's collaboration with Conrad Schnitzler. Please tell me about your acquaintance with these fine fellows. I'm keen on Geoff's psycho-geographical explorations in sound, but Conrad's work has never done much for me - despite his obvious importance, intelligence and commitment. Maybe you can convince me that I'm missing out on something. Is your own soubriquet Gen Ken anything to do with his familiar tactic of shortening his name to Con? If there's a connection here, why haven't you collaborated sooner?