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?: How did you as a composer get invited to a visual art show with the time-lag accumulator?

Terry Riley: Around that time I was working with Intermedia, and I was working with some visual artists, one of them being Bob Whitman, who was also in the show. It was probably my connection with Bob Whitman, who was also in the show, that I got invited.

?: Were there other visual artists you were working with?

Terry Riley: I was also working with Robert Benson, who was doing visuals for my concerts.

?: Where the visuals in any way related to the "Time Lag Accumulator"?

Terry Riley: The visuals weren't, no. Well, the only component that was a little bit related was, that he would put up mirror-like screens around the stage where I was playing, so you had multiple images and the audience got different points of view of the stage. And sometimes he would make projections, he would take polaroids of me as I was playing and would project these polaroids as soon as they were developing, so you'd get multiple images, something that you see at rock concerts now, but back now nobody was doing it.

?: Interesting. Is he still active as an artist?

Riley: I lost contact with him, when I left New York. I heard that he moved down to North Carolina, and after that I didn't hear from him again.

?: When you were invited to the show, did you develop it for the show?

Riley: Yes, I developed it for the show. I was working with tape delay and time like process with my live performances, and I just wanted to extent it into the visual area as well, by making these multiple images and these rooms, so you get this kind of labyrinth with a hall-with-mirrors-effect.

?: Do you consider the Time-Lag accumulator to be an installation or a composition of yours?

Riley: It is definitely an installation. I wanted the audience themselves to experience to some extent in any way they wanted to this kind of matrix of sound, the way the sound comes out, the way I did as a performer. But most of the audience are not musicians, so they just went for the kind of effect that it sets up. I also wanted to set up a dream-like atmosphere, where you would say something, and it would be echoed a few minutes later in another chamber of the room.

?: Was it difficult to reconstruct the piece?

Riley: I did not have any of my original plans, so I just told the people in Lille what I had done originally, and they drew up new plans. Time-Lag Accumulator II is larger and looks a lot different than the other one, especially from the outside. I think that the Time-Lag Accumulator II is actually an improvement over the first. The sound is much better and has more possibilities for different kinds of plays, and also in flight it is much more effective. The rooms are larger, and the mirrored images inside are much nicer, much more elaborate.

?: I was talking with Robert Castelli yesterday, and he said that his idea is that artists like Dan Graham or Bruce Nauman were very influenced by your work in their video installations and closed-circuit work. Do you know of any connection?

Riley: I have no way of knowing, if they saw it or experienced it. I had no idea of the impact. I know that the piece was widely seen in Kansas City, because it was a big show. But I have no idea what an impact it had on other people after that.

?: And you do not know any of these artists personally.

Riley: No.

?: It is funny that you have no documentation of it...

Riley: No, I was travelling a lot in this time, and I did not have a place to keep things, so I lost a big part of my archive.

?: Did you set it up, so people could see the tape recorders? Or was it more like a mysterious process?

Riley: The didn't see any of the equipment. Everything was up on top of the structure in Kansas City. In Lille, they can see, when they look, the microphone and the speakers. In Kansas City it was more concealed, even though I do not remember how we did it.

?: So the point wasn't really to show people what tape loops looked like or something like that?

Riley: No, they didn't see any of it, it was all up above.

?: So could you describe the audience's reaction. Did they behave you expected them to, or was it completely different?

Riley: There is so many different ways to experience the piece. Young people like to freak out inside, and run around in it, and laugh and giggle, and turn it into this kind of fun house. I haven't been there so much, when the audience was there, expect for the opening. Probably if the audience had a chance to use it musically, they would do it. But when I was in Lille, I noticed that it was mainly young people coming in, and they seemed to love to run around the structure, and open and close doors, and were more involved with the visual part of it. In Lille it is very strong visually, because there is only one entrance, and once you went through a couple of the chambers, you are disoriented, you don't know how many more you have to get out. That was kind of influencing people a lot, so they were going kind of quickly through the room. I also performed in there, doing one part of the festival. went in and sang Raga inside. I used it as a performance space, and that was also my wish to have performers in there.

?: So you used it as an instrument?

Riley: Yeah. It certainly can be used this way, by musicians and even by non-musicians, if they want to sing in there, they will be able to have this fracture, whatever they are doing.

?: Is it also a way of confronting people with themselves? This is you, this is what you look like, this is what you sound like?

Riley: That's part of it, sure. You see yourself in multiple images, you hear yourself in multiple sound-images. You can't avoid it. (laughs)

?: Where did the name "time-lag accumulator" coming from?

Riley: It seemed like a good image. I actually came up with this title before I made the piece. I used it to describe the time-delay system that I invented in the Sixties for live performance. It was two tape recorders with time delay coming from the second tape recorder. So I gave this system the name "Time Lag Accumulator", then I pasted it on the visual piece as well.

?: Was this "Time Lag Accumulator" always the same set up, that you used for your live sets and compositions?

Riley: It was always the same set-up, and I mainly just played just one piece, "Poppy No-Good and the Phantom Band", and it was created for that piece.

?: But how about your other compositions for tape, like "Music for The Gift"?

Riley: "Music for The gift" was the prototype for all of that, but after "Music for The Gift" it was only used for "Poppy No-Good and the Phantom Band". The other tape composition used tape loops, but not the time-delay effect. Actually, some of them do use a version of it, yeah. But I used the name "Time Lag Accumulator", when it was used for live performance.

? And how was the set-up?

Riley: The tape went across two machines, so the playback head from the second machine feeds back into the record head of the first machine. It just keeps recycling the material, and adding to the material, so that is the accumulator part of it. Each signal is added again over the new material, so it builds up quite quickly into a very dense sound.

?: Did that require any technical manipulation of the machines themselves?

Riley: No, I just had two Revox tape recorders, and they were just standard ones, without any alterations at all.

?: The technician from the French radio station ORTF (?) helped you with that? Was that in any way related to Pierre Schaeffer and Musique Concrete?

Riley: No, he was just a recording engineer, who was working at Florence Birmingham theatre (?), at the small radio studio there, where we put the thing together. He had never worked with contemporary music, or electronic music. So when I described to him what I wanted, he thought up this idea, that you could have tape run between two machines. I knew about Pierre Schaeffer just by reputation. I hadn't heard his work.

?: Pierre Schaeffer used tape loops in a different way, he was more about creating sound effects with it. Also Stockhausen used tape loops in a different way. They never went for this repetition aspect. Why did you get so fascinated by this repetition aspect?

Riley: I was interested in the psychological effect of tape loops, and their effect on consciousness. That aspect attracted me. Tape loops could become like a Mantra. You had a

fragment of sound, and as you repeated that over and over, you would start to sensing the minute characteristics of that sound, that started appearing, and you became really familiar with them. So that was, what attracted me to tape loops, that it gave you a chance to study a sound very deeply, very consciously.

?: What was the reaction of the audience?

Riley: Oh, yeah. This is the Sixties, so that was a time, where the audience as well as the artists, I think, were interested in a consciousness-expanding experience. And tape loops were certainly a part of it, because they changed the way, that people were experiencing music.

?: In the Sixties, cybernetics played a big role in intellectual discourse. Did that have any influence on you? Because concepts like “feedback” directly come out of cybernetics...

Riley: No, I wasn't aware of it. What I was influenced by was the French writer Alain Robbe-Grillet, and his novels and films. The film that I was most impressed with, was “L'Immortel”, where he had this repetition of scenes, which had different outcomes for each period. He would go through a scene, and have one out-come, and then he would rerun the scene, and it would have another outcome. And that kind of technique, I thought, was really very powerful, because it would give you different versions of reality. I was also reading three or four of his novels, but right at that point I cannot think of their names right now.

?: Another very influential person in the Sixties was the German Gestalt-psychologist Fritz Perls. Did you ever encounter his work? He focuses on the here-and-now and the moment.

Riley: No, I didn't run into him or his work.

?: Merlau-Ponty, phenomenology.

Riley: No, I didn't come across his work either.

?: Which of the re-releases were recorded live?

Riley: “Poppy Nogood” is really the only one, that was done live. “You're no good” was a studio production. I did it in my studio. “Music for The Gift” was for a theatre production, but what you hear on the re-release, is not live, it is the background tapes, that the musicians played against. “Bird of Paradise” was not live either.

?: The first instrument you used to create echoes with loops was an Echoplex. Is that true?

Riley: It wasn't the first, but it was an early one. I used it to do “Mescaline mix”. It was one of the first commercial looping machines available. Ramon Sender, the composer from California, had a small studio up at San Francisco Conservatory, and he had the Echoplex up there. So when I needed to make a final version of “Mescaline Mix”, I went there and we ran all of my loop through the Echoplex, and that was the only time I ever used one. I had actually made a version of the piece without the Echoplex, but then there were parts of it, that I wanted to use the Echoplex on. So when I made my final mix, we used it. We could change the size of the delay, and the kind of looping sound that we wanted. That was more sophisticated, before that I was just using mono machines, and doing sound on sound with the tape loops. I had tape loops on one machine and recorded them with the second, and both of them were

mono and both of them were low-quality machines. I think they have new digital versions of the echoplex. There are so many new looping machines, because loops became quite a rage.

?: With computers it is very easy to do loops, but in your more recent work, you never really went back to this technique...

Riley: They exist, but I use them differently now, they are not as obsessive in my early work. For instance, I complete a big piece, "Sun Rings", with the Kronos Quartet, and a lot of these sounds were recorded in space in the missions that Nasa did into the solar system. I took a lot of those sounds and looped them digitally. It also has a large choir, and visual projections, and a lot of theatrical aspects to it.

?: How did you tape loops live?

Riley: Here is what I would often do with "Poppy No Good". I would play the first set live, and it would naturally be recorded on track one, one of the two tracks of the stereo machine. Then I would play a second set, I would turn the tape over and play the second set on track two, and then if I wanted I could feed in parts of track one, as I was playing, into track two, which would be then backwards. I would do that a lot in my allnight concerts. Then for the third set, I would play back the composite, and take a break, and then I would put in a new tape and start set four. In that way, each set was a bit different, but had some of the same material. I was using an organ for drones, and I would play saxophone. It was a lot of improvisations, but the patterns of course were always created with the time lag process, so no matter what I played it was put in a loop format. Whatever I played very freely, it would turn into loops. There are two performances on Corti, and I have some tapes that we did not put out. I think it was quite powerful, and there is no way to duplicate that today, if you did not use the same technique. If you would try to do it today with computers, it would come out differently. The tape machines had a very distinct sound and the noise aspect for instance was very important. The distortions were very important, because it would accumulate on magnetic tape, and it build up a sound, because it would over-load the tape, and you would get these really grungy sounds – which a lot of people like today. I also liked it, because you could create some very dark, sonic imaginary with all this really dense sound.

But it wasn't only noise, noise was only an aspect of it. It was a cosmic sound, of what the universe would sound like with all this vast workings of molecular activities. To me it had this cosmic aspect to it, that was bigger than life on earth.

?: Don Buchla Story, Sequencer, Tape Music composition, did you

Riley: I knew Don Buchla since the days of the tape music center. In the early days I couldn't not afford to use one of the Buchla Synthesizers, so I never got hold one of one. It was probably for the better, because I developed my whole way of sequencing through the way of live performance. I was using a mechanical one. Over the years, I got to use them, because they were build into computer programs. But originally it was important to me that I developed my sound through live performance. Because it is not machine-like, it is man-made, and it has that feeling.

?: people who worked with repetition were after developing a difference within the repetition, a difference within the loop

Riley: It was one of the only techniques available in the pre-synthesizer days for trying to see what I could do with it.

?: The loop has become very important in pop music such as house or techno. Do you follow this development at all?

Riley: I even thought it was the Beatles in the Sixties, who started with it. Someone told me, that he saw an interview with Paul McCartney, where he cited me, just saying that I was doing it before them. Actually those guys in England were very aware what I was doing. Later on I did a lot of touring in Europe and especially Germany, and groups heard me playing, and it was very influential on the pop scene. The Who, for instance, did "Bob O'Reilly". I think the repetition had a natural way of marrying itself with rock music. Rock music is very kinetic, and obsessive, and the loops are seemed like a natural thing to do, to be assimilated into rock culture.

?: Techno? Have you ever been to a rave?

Riley: Yeah, I have. (laughs) You cannot avoid this music, it is everywhere. I actually think it has an aspect to it that is very similar to what I was trying to do. It is the obsessiveness, it is the way of obliterating consciousness with a very compulsive sound. Once you are drawn into it, you cannot avoid it, you are just drawn up into it. It just frees the mind, in a way. It is very similar to what we were trying to do with tape loops.

?: Another parallel is that the experience is that it is not limited to music,

Riley: I was trying to get the performance out of the concert atmosphere, so that people could experience sound in a different way...

?: Music or sound?

Riley: Both. I thought that people if people come to a place with very realistic sound, like a concert hall, it was very hard to get into the same kind of stage. If you use lighting, or set design, or any other theatrical aspects to surround the music, that people would relax into it in a different way. The other thing was that I liked the stage, so people could lie down, if they wanted to, that they could rearrange in different position. If they wanted their back to the stage, or sit sideways, or whatever. So art galleries became good places for the performance, so many musicians beside me started to gravitate towards these kind of venues for performances. There was also the economic aspect of it. When we were young, we oft couldn't afford to get into the good halls, no way. Nobody would bring us in. So we ended up selecting these kind of spaces. I actually prefer them myself. I just did a concert last week on a house boat in South Salito, with the light show, and people lying around on the floor. And in fact the guy who has the house boat, puts on these electronic concerts (??), so the light people were really good (??). So yes, I am very interested in this kind of culture, and plan to do more of concerts like this, which are more related to what I was doing in the Sixties, which were not necessarily concerts. I was playing, but I was more part of the general atmosphere. Not sitting on the stage facing everybody, not the general focus of attention.