

PER PLATOU [P] IS INTERVIEWED BY AMANDA STEGGELL [A] FOR HOTROD MAGAZINE, NO.8

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Photo: Stian Andersen

A: Pepe, you have just released your second Nood CD, called "Shaped Like a Taco", together with your colleague and friend, Ulf Knudsen. "Shaped Like a Taco" is composed of many sampled elements from diverse sources; special contributions from "professional" musicians, text renditions by "real" voices and artificial voices, many samples downloaded from the internet and all other conceivable media, and samples from "real life".

The CD opens with the following statement:

This is a sound painting that is indicative of the erotic feeling of our time. The artist is very young, shows great promise, and I'm glad that the work is exhibited here.

There are several paradoxes in this opening statement. Take "The Artist is very young", for example. Ulf and yourself are not exactly spring chickens, are you? The sample also implies a sense of authenticity with regards to a single artist's vision, which is a bit weird considering the collaborative nature of the cd. How conscious was your decision to open the album with this statement?

P: Firstly, you shouldn't take this opening statement too seriously. I think it's a humorous, or fun way of looking at ourselves - it is certainly not true that we are young artists, but we feel quite young, in our minds at least. Nood is a project which consists of Ulf and me as composers and producers, but in a broader sense, the band "Nood" consists of all these different contributors working together. We just gather all the threads together to try to conceive it as one artwork. In a way it's a bit pretentious, but the sample's taken out of its original context, and I think it's a good way to give the listener a hint about how we want them to listen to the album, which is a very eclectic mix of diverse sources.

A: Regarding sampling and the music industry, you have for many years now been fighting copyright laws. Do you think it's important that your audience is aware of your anti-copyright attitude to be able to join in with the ironic humour in this opening statement?

P: No, not at all. But I think for us sampling from very different sources has become a way of working. We don't use it in a techno way, like to steal beats, or short stabs of sound. We sample long texts or voices, or even the classical flute or sitar, opera - whatever. We've not cleared any of the samples on this cd. Some of them are copyright-free as some of the people have stated very clearly that their contributions are not copyrighted, and many of the samples we've made ourselves, but I think it's a very important issue today to actually go ahead and break the law. Regarding copyright I think all artists sample from other people. I mean you can sample ideas, texts, etc, and now even authors state clearly that they do this. It's a very very dangerous situation we're in now when the big big media corporations are copyrighting the culture of our times. I think that to be able to say anything about popular culture of today you have to use references taken directly out of pop culture.

The Californian-based group Negativland have a very clear and good attitude which is as long you add or subtract something from the original source of the work, then it's a new work, and I think that's the way culture and history have been made for as long as our culture has existed. Take Homer for example. He sampled from other contemporary philosophers all the time. Classical music and folk music ... it's an evolution. With today's technology it's so easy to do it. It's made to do it. We get into a state of mind fascism if we can't use elements that are very common in our daily lives. So it's a political thing. It's a healthy attitude to give and take, it's shareware culture. In the hiphop scene of the early eighties it was actually an honour to be sampled. That was before the big corporations and their copyright organisations got their sleazy hands on ideas, which is a very dangerous situation. One shouldn't be afraid of these big organisations because they're just big Kafkaesque bureaucratic machines.

A: So, if we say that sampling is an evolutionary process, is it an accelerating process, since more and more of the music we hear involves sampling?

P: It's become more common, and we call it sampling simply because we've got samplers. But sampling has existed as a principle since mankind has had culture. It's about storytelling. You tell a story and it develops over time - like the whispering game. You modify it slightly to fit into your specific time and space. Inspiration can't be commodified.

You don't have intellectual property laws in Islamic societies, where ideas by default come from Allah and can't be owned by people or companies. And even most Arabic and African countries don't have the same kind of art system based on these kinds of copyright laws that we have here in the western hemisphere. Copyright is now just a way to make corporate bodies richer. It's not about protecting the artist as they'd like us to think. It's not about protecting the artists at all. It's about protecting themselves and capitalising on artists and consumers. And as consumers, all the people who buy and use culture, they also have a right to use this in their own creative life. Pop culture today is totally chaotic and diverse and postmodern. It's fragments of everything everywhere and that's our "nature".

What was the question again? Oh yeah, acceleration. Yes, the use of sampling has accelerated, but that's because culture and capitalism have accelerated as well, and unfortunately capitalism has accelerated in a very unhealthy way.

A: You say that capitalism has accelerated, the music industry is getting more power and everything, but still we're getting these tools that make sampling, composing and producing possible - and the tool-makers are also a powerful corporate industry. Do you think that the one power is going to knock out the other - that being able to get your hands on hard and software to be able to sample and put things together in new contexts will inevitably kill off the music industry as we know it?

P: I certainly hope so because it's a very unhealthy business, I have been there, and I think artists nowadays can make their own music, produce their own cd's or mp3 files, or expressions of any kind, and distribute them without too much capital. You can spread your artistic vision to the whole connected world, or at least the internet connected world, and that's what the international corporations try to stop. So it will lead to the death of the industry as it is today, because they haven't shown any signs of trying to actually adapt to the emerging technologies until very recently, and that's too late. So I wish the music industry a messy and painful death.

A: Is "Shaped Like a Taco" in fact a very political work? Do you want to bring up the copyright debate again with this album?

P: If I could, I'd really like to be sued big time again by a corporation, but I don't think it will happen and "Shaped Like a Taco" is not a political work in that sense. It's a good mix of sounds as inspiration. It's an album to make you happy, to make you dance, to ponder and listen to sounds combined in a way that's a bit untraditional for today's music industry.

A: Do you mean that it's possible to separate the political Per Platou from Per Platou's work?

P: My political views are probably reflected in everything I do, but that doesn't mean that this album is meant as a political statement. It's a piece of music which has artistic qualities, I hope, but that doesn't mean that artistic qualities can't imply politic or religious qualities, for that matter. Basically it's just a bit of plastic.

A: So, "Shaped Like a Taco" is music with artistic qualities. It shall make you happy and dance, and it's a piece of plastic - but where then would you put the balance. Would you say that the balance leans more towards art, or entertainment, or what?

P: Art can entertain, but it's not entertainment, because entertainment to me is something made just to fill up empty heads in front of the tv screen, or on the radio inbetween commercials. So it's not a piece of entertainment and it definitely does not fit into the commercial way of programming radio, for instance. In this respect, "Shaped Like a Taco" has become something that doesn't fit into the commercial scene.

A: Was that your intention when you started to make the album?

P: Since our first cd "hettylettynetty", which came out in '96 this record has been evolving constantly, and the product is really just a snapshot of the moment when we sat down to make the final mix. So you could say it's a documentation of the work Ulf, myself, and our friends have been doing over the past years. Still, we would of course like to make a mega-hit, or pop music - I love pop music, by the way.

A: So, if this is a documentation of the past four years work, tell me about your work methods and the changes you have experienced during these evolutionary years. What makes "Shaped Like a Taco" worthy of documentation and publication?

P: In 1995 when we made "hettylettynetty" it was all about finding, downloading and decoding interesting little sound snippets from the net. Remember, this was before the Netscape browser came, so it was all pretty laborious and geeky stuff. Since then, things have developed very rapidly, so for the past couple of years we have been using other technologies on the net to actually be able to collaborate live online. It's been like jamming with ten people from all over the world at the same time, with time lags and really choppy, crappy sound quality as a result of all these people trying to cram their soundbits into the tiny little wires. However, things are "improving" in the sense that we now have much faster access than a couple of years ago, so it's in some way important to document what the net sounded like in, say, 1997 or 1998, or to make a sound snapshot of a particular moment in time. Every technology has its own qualities and limitations, which is often the same thing. The sound of two hundred mosques recorded on a dictaphone out a taxi window in Cairo sounds very lo-fi, but still it contains qualities I could never find or recreate elsewhere. And so on and so on... I personally find it very rewarding to record live performances and then sample from them at a later point. There are always a few moments of genuine magic involved.

A: "Shaped Like a Taco" moves through many landscapes, from the rhythmical groovy to the poetic sublime, with sporadic elements of techno and rock, and much culture jamming. Many of the tracks have an intro which often juxtaposes the track it's introducing. As I listen I experience the complete album as a journey through a meandering dramaturgy where the voice samples play an important part of my journey. Though english seems to me to be the default language of the cd, there are also many languages I cannot understand, which makes me feel like I'm being whisked through layers of exotic orientalism, only to be dumped back home to familiar surroundings. However, you have used several literary references, samples of William Burroughs and Hakim Bey, etc, and in this way I feel that I'm also being drawn into a fusion of the sensual, the intellectual and philosophical. Now, if I didn't understand english, I don't think I'd experience this cd in the same way. What do you think about this? Is it important for a listener to get the text?

P: "Shaped Like a Taco" is a mixture of sounds. Whether or not you get the actual text, you will hear from the sound and the tone of the voice that it's a message spoken in a certain way. Lots of times we get samples in that we don't understand at all, but still we feel that they have

philosophical or religious qualities. Most people won't recognise Hakim Bey, for instance. But for myself it's important that they're there as philosophical reference points to free thinkers whom I respect and admire. It creates a context to refer to as you listen to the album. Like the religious samples of the people of the desert in North Africa who chant to exorcise snake poison from the body. The meaning of their words is not important, it's the quality of the chanting, the quality of the sound that we're after.

A: Even so, many of the statements I understand have to do with the meta-life, changes of state, drugs, and so on. And as I listen to these as part of the total soundscape, I get the impression that the essence of "Shaped Like a Taco" has strong roots in the concept of parallel times and spaces. Do you think of the album in this way?

P: I think we live in a constant state of parallel realities, and if that can be conceived in an album, then that's great. I'm a big fan of the science fiction writer Philip Dick, and like him I think that time isn't one thing. One moment of time and place will live on forever in its own entity and so time runs on, in clock form, constantly reminding us of death, and therefore life as well. I think that we all have very complex brains which have the capability to conceive and process different time layers at any point in linear time. The way I see it, time moves in waves of fragments and bubbles, a bit like

A: ... a Taco?

P: No, not like a taco. More like one-celled little creatures, or macro pictures of the universe. The world consists of an infinite number of parallel timespaces.

A: To move on now to one specific moment in timespace, you personally suggested and insisted on posing for your portrait in Hotrod naked, as you waterskiied past Oslo's city hall. Was this to experience another timespace, or are you just an exhibitionist?

P: I love swimming and I've only been waterskiing once before, about twenty years ago. It was an experience I wanted to repeat. I did have to push myself to exhibit myself in front of Oslo's city hall, but basically I just did it for fun. I thought it would be a good picture. I'm not sure if this question is going to be printed.

A: It's definitely going to be printed! Did death flash before your eyes?

P: Absolutely not. I was just having immense fun, and it felt really, really good to be on the water naked in the sun, the only truly sunny day of this summer 2000.

A: Did you feel that time and space came together in one kind of conglomerated experience in a celebration of life while you were waterskiing?

P: The timespace of the picture still lives on in my mind, even though I haven't seen the picture yet.

A: Can a work of art die?

P: A work of art cannot die, if it's a good, genuine work of art. If it's only referring to the surface of society it will die because it won't be noticed. An idea cannot die, so if it's got an idea behind it, the answer is no.

A: But we CAN forget an idea, can't we? Or we can be made to forget an idea.

P: That's just a memory leak from the human mind. The idea itself will never die, even though people may forget, or die. It's like the holy spirit .. Jesus and so on ... the holy spirit can never die.

A: Are you religious then?

P: Someone called me a zippo-buddhist once. I guess that meant a postmodern eclectic new age pop-mix of different religions. Religion's about thinking out of what we now call reality and I think reality is, to quote Philip Dick ... what's the quote again? Can I look for the quote because it's a good one? Hang on, I just have to restart my mac, it's on my other hard drive. What's going on. It just takes some time to retrieve. Am I religious? No. Yes. Well, I think there's some forces around that we can't explain logically and maybe that's religion, and maybe it's not. I'm not a member of any church and I won't ever be.

Okay, here's the quote. It's from a text by Philip Dick called "How to build a universe that doesn't fall apart two days later" which is funny because Philip Dick builds universes which fall apart all the time. He was asked to describe reality, and he answered:

Reality is that which, when you stop believing in it doesn't go away.

That's all he came up with. But he believed that we all live in our own universes, and that reality is just waiting to agree on certain rules for interacting with each other.

A: What is the first memory you have of your life?

P: I think it's lying naked with my mum and dad in bed and getting a hard-on.

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