



Anna Ceeh in Conversation with Tommi Grönlund and Petteri Nisunen

AC: Your artistic career began with your first solo exhibitions in Helsinki and in Turku in 1993. What did you do before then?

PN: Tommi comes from Turku, and I come from Helsinki. We first got to know each other while studying in Tampere in the late 1980s.

AC: What did you study?

PN: We both studied architecture at Tampere University of Technology, and I graduated from there in 1992. At the same time I also studied industrial design and furniture design at the University of Industrial Arts in Helsinki but never graduated from there.

AC: You are very successful as a team: as artists, curators, architects. How long have you been working together? What is the recipe for your success as collaborators?

PN: We started in the early 1990s by doing some architecture competitions and other projects together. We also started an architecture office, a.men architects, in 1992 together with three other friends. I guess we have been able to work together this long because we share an interest in similar things and we have learned to respect each other enough to get over disagreements.

AC: Carl Michael von Hausswolff was describing your collaboration by quoting a passage from Brion Gysin and William Burroughs's *The Third Mind*: "It says if you put your minds together . . . there's always a third mind . . . a third and superior mind . . . an invisible collaborator."¹ Is it really like that?

PN: Well, that is a very poetic way to say it. But it is true that most of our projects would not have been the same if they were realized by either one of us independently. Naturally some works of ours are more mine and some more Tommi's, but for the best projects it is common that in the end it is impossible to say how the idea was developed in the first place. We have found this good but also a time-consuming and sometimes nerve-racking way to work.

AC: You also run an architecture firm. How would you describe your architectural work?

PN: I have recently done only some minor architectural work because our art projects take all my time. Before I used to do housing, interiors, furniture design, etc. Our architectural and design work is mostly based on the same minimal and rational aesthetics as our artwork. The big difference is that you don't have the same freedom as in art.

TG: I would say that architectural qualities are always present in our work. No matter if we are working on space or just sound. The basic themes of harmony, rhythm, and perception, to name only a few, are always present when we work on something.

AC: Your oeuvre is based on creating new spaces that are independent and precisely executed. I see them as substantive living structures, futuristic organisms or civilizations, almost as if they are from another planet or galaxy.

PN: That sounds awesome. Our installations are often systems that we set up and put on, but after



always been interested in randomness as a phenomenon.

TG: The world we are living in is strange enough. I think we never refer to anything further than the existing phenomena surrounding us. Many subjects are invisible though.

AC: Your artwork seems very sophisticated and complex. You use sound, light, magnetic fields, and natural radioactivity in your artwork. How important is sound for your work?

PN: Sound is of course important, but it is still just one element we work with. We also do a lot of work with no relation to sound. Our sound installations mostly focus on the physical essence of sound and the way sound defines space.

AC: Tommi's record label, Sähkö Recordings², (in English "Electricity") is unique and legendary. What was the intention to start your own label?

TG: In 1993 Mika Vainio completed a very unique sounding series of tracks. In the very beginning Sähkö was just an instrument to distribute Mika's music. We organized lots of techno parties in the late 1980s and the record label was a natural extension of that period. Later on I started to see running a label as an art media, as an ongoing project. I feel strange hearing it called legendary; there are so many similar label projects around.

AC: Your art is an individual and unique trademark, comparable to Sähkö Recordings, in terms of sound and in the visual impression. Do you see parallels?

PN: There are definitely some parallels because Tommi is involved in both. Still, our art practice and Tommi's label are quite separate things. Usually the art context and the music context are quite far apart, but in some projects, like *The Morning Line*, for instance, they come together.

TG: Music is another language. It can be compared with our G-N work, but there are also differences. I like to make an unnatural borderline between what I want to call music and our work. In our projects we work with sound not music.

AC: Tommi, did you produce your own music?

TG: I never considered myself a musician. I have been DJing since the 1980s, but I would never call myself a DJ, since I have many serious professional DJ friends who are 100 percent devoted to music.

AC: However, a lot of people, including myself, recognize you as a great and legendary DJ. Do you also collect a lot of vinyls?

TG: Legendary, not really. Yes, I'm obsessed with vinyls. Ten years ago even more so than now, but I still buy vinyls online all the time. Vinyl is such a beautiful format. Analogue like life itself.

AC: How was the experience of working as curators for the project *The North Is Protected* at the Nordic Pavilion of the Venice Biennale in 2001, which you realized in collaboration with Leif Elggren, Carl Michael von Hausswolff, and Anders Tomren?

PN: It was great to work in the beautiful pavilion designed by architect Sverre Fehn. We wanted to make the exhibition as a collaborative project with the artists we selected instead of being curators in the traditional sense. The artists each made their own work knowing what the others were do-



ing. In the end we all signed the whole pavilion as one collaborative piece of art. The collaboration with other artists was great, but the bureaucracy and practical hassles of the project were quite exhausting.

TG: There was something in that project that came close to what I would like to see as a future of art as a translator of existence. Some kind of consciousness of time, life, death, and beauty. It was something so devastating and confusing for all of us that we couldn't put it in words at that time.

AC: In your current project for *The Morning Line* you have to deal with an architectural structure functioning as a 4-D sound space. Are these parameters interesting for you?

PN: We are used to adapting our work to different architectural structures and often use the structures as a starting point for our work. In that sense this is nothing new to us. What makes this context different is that the structure itself is an artwork that has suddenly appeared in the middle of a city. It is something new and challenging for us to work for the first time with this kind of multi-channel sound system. We are looking forward to seeing what comes out of it.

1. Carl Michael von Hausswolff, *When Taste Came to Town* in: *Grönlund-Nisunen: Works/Werke* (Berlin: Argobooks, 2009).
2. See <http://www.sahkorecordings.com/>.