

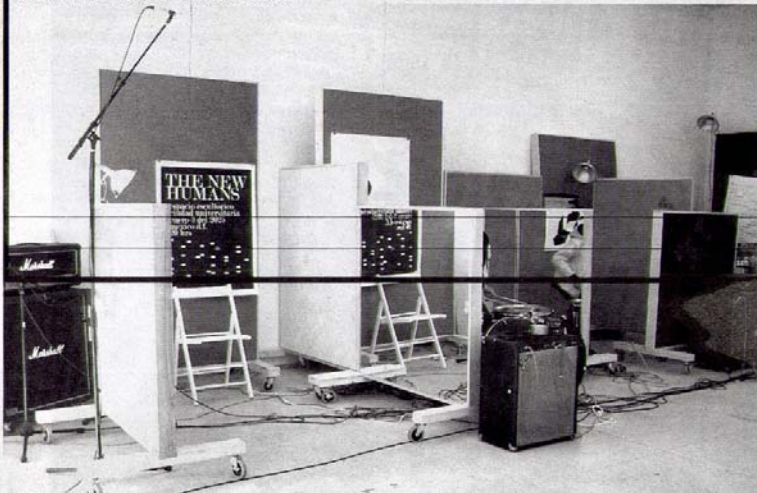
# USELESS #5

BECAUSE LIFE IS LONGER THAN YOU THINK

IRREVERENT YOUNG PERSON, MIKA TAJIMA

## new humans

DEE-LITE. NH INSTALLATION AT ELIZABETH DEE GALLERY, NYC



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The name New Humans comes from the Japanese phrase, *Shinjinrui*, which means 'the irreverent young people.' Mika Tajima, one part of this collaborative NYC-based artist group, explains, "It's usually used when expressing total generational bewilderment. We liked how weird it sounds—what were old humans?" Speaking to USELESS just after their latest performance and solo show at Elizabeth Dee Gallery, Tajima explains her position on 'relational aesthetics' and on NH's collaborations with Acconci among others.

**How did New Humans meet? What was the pretext for NH's first collaboration?**

NH started out of a sculpture piece I did back in grad school at Columbia, and exists as a collaborative extension of my work now. I did a project for my thesis show, which involved a sculptural clothing-piece I made—four striped yellow/black rugby shirts with the stripes extending off the shirt that connected to each other to form a chain over 250 feet long. I got a few noisy friends with guitars together (including Howie Chen) to activate/wear the piece and also perform a sound composition that literally traveled across the space of the exhibition ...sound moving like a chain circuit across 250 feet of the exhibition space in different patterns and sequences. When we hit our first chords, artworks in the show were literally falling off the walls—some people weren't too happy about that I think.

All of the NH projects from that point on come out of a visual practice that uses sound as another material to work with—partly in a way, inspired by Dan Graham's idea of the materiality of sound. And the music we are making continues the idea of using sculpture, form, and visual pattern motifs that translate into triggers, textures, decay, and serial sequences we would play. In this way, the music can be extreme and brutal in composition, volume, and duration at times, especially as we have really honed in on a working use of piercing drones, sheer static, and low bass frequencies recently.

**Your piece celebrating Rirkrit Tiravanija and Mark Di Suvero's piece at the Whitney in 2006 puts NH in with "relational aesthetics" company in some ways. Maybe it's a natural association.**

I have to give a big nod to Rirkrit as he was one of my teachers in grad school and whom I respect very much. I find it disconcerting how this term 'relational aesthetics' and the book has had this disarming reductive quality and has managed to flatten the understanding and interpretation of work that has somehow fallen under its name. I feel the term and its logic disallows the material conditions of the work and when it was first being made by these artists (before it was rendered into a named style or strategy) and also disallows the historical precedents they were drawing from. What I am interested in for my own practice and also in New Humans is concentrating on the idea of preconditions (namely before a French philosopher chooses a simple name for it) and the strategies that artist's are/were dealing with—collaborations, singularities, negotiation, "agonism" and situations.

**Any plans for London?**

My own work (outside of NH) was in this show at the Serpentine as part of the traveling exhibition *Uncertain States of America*. It was this sound piece in the Rem Koolhaas pavilion with an accompanying fabric graphic score. I was thinking about this piece as if a Cornelius Cardew score was somehow rendered in Miami bass (specifically 2 Live Crew). Somehow this idea of avant-garde Maoist composer and an unlikely figure for free speech like Luke Skywalker really interested me. I also liked the idea that the other manifestation of this decorative looking silkscreen print was this banging, chopped up booty mix soundtrack. There were two subwoofers that rattled the pavilion in intervals but I heard that my piece was often not on after a few weeks into the show—maybe it needed more high hats. I'm working on a new sculpture piece, which might be shown, at the Freize Art Fair coming up.

**You collaborated with Vito Acconci at Elizabeth Dee?**

The two performances in the installation at Elizabeth Dee had a very open studio session feeling to it, partly because the modular sculptural elements were reconfigured into sound baffled cubicles for the performers, as inspired by the sound studio setup in which Godard shot the Rolling Stones' recording 'Sympathy for the Devil'. We were interested in how that film reflected the process of working together with all of its contradictions, takes, trials, errors, and transparency of how things are produced. With Vito Acconci we were approaching it as creating a song together in concept and form—each bringing a certain element: sound, voice, etc. NH recordings usually have no lyrics or anything decipherable anyway—brutally instrumental. Vito has his voice, his text, his poems but never "music". We said "let's collaborate and expose the process of working together" feeling around in the dark together to make this thing. We did a rehearsal and it sounded great—voice and sound take on a whole different character, at the same time being singular and fucking noisy.

With our performance this past weekend with C. Spencer Yeh (Burning Star Core), we contrasted his amazing double-bowed violin attacks against a shifting wall of textured fuzz we created with our instruments. During the performance we also destroyed a champagne glass tower sculpture and sampled its sound in real time to add to this fracture of singular parts being played until things settled at the end. Again, the way the structures were configured (like the stalls of a recording studio, isolating each performer) lent to the idea of the modular or singular forming a whole.

**What are some of the newest things that you see in society, as innovation?**

This makes me think of a great print piece our friend and artist Matthew Brannon just made that uses the phrase "nothing dulls faster than the cutting edge."