

Interviewed by
Chris Hontos



Death Comet Crew, c. 1985

— **Chris Hontos:** I was wondering if you could begin by bringing me up to date on your projects?

— **Stuart Argabright:** I began forming groups in the late 1970s and continued to do so until the end of the 80s: the Rudements 1977 - 78 / The Futants 1978 - 80 / Ike Yard 1980 - 83 / "Dominatrix Sleeps Tonight" 1984 / Death Comet Crew 1984 - 86 / Black rain 1989 - 98 / The Voodooists 1989 - 92.

All these projects were defining underground electronic / postpunk / club / "riphop" or avant hip-hop / "cybervoudou" and postpunk/hardcore/thrash, especially for critics & writers once they began looking back.

I played drums, did vocals, wrote lyrics, programmed drums, played synths and keyboards, learning as we went along.

That was great fun and a lot of work. Then around 1996 Dominatrix started to get licensed and placed on comps. By 2000, Ike Yard and DCC got into reissue realm; in 2004, DCC was reissued on Troubleman; in 2005, DCC toured internationally and played the Venice Biennale, and by now has more reissues. In 2006, IY reissued on Acute, reformed, recorded a new LP, did some shows and then reissued again in 2012, on Desire (Fr). That's gone very well, as we went from being known by dozens to having many, many more listeners, and also, generationally, to younger and younger listeners.

I should also mention I was working with Robert Longo & Gretchen Bender in the 1980s and 90s on projects which took us into large-scale art performance involving many collaborators. Then there was scoring for the Rotterdam Philharmonic in 1988, alongside music by Arvo Pärt and Phillip Glass, and I eventually did music for Longo's **Johnny Mnemonic** (1995), as well as IBM's Advanced CG division, and so on. Some of these projects are also being restaged (Gretchen Bender @ The Poor Farm last year).

Point being—all of that has happened and to some extent is still going on, but the bulk of it is in the past. Every group found a home, did a new record or two, and toured. The last one reissued is Black rain's William Gibson soundtracks from 1994 - 95 on Blackest Ever Black. Black rain is doing a new LP and playing live. So the future is v interesting and dense. Today I am working on developing app software, writing two books (one is based on diaries of club life, 1978 - 89, and the other is science fiction) and thinking about where I want to live next.

— **Hontos:** Given your history of experimentation and your longstanding relation with technologies, it seems like you're in an interesting position to reflect on the changing paradigms of media, and how new generations of media have impacted the perception of your work.

— **Argabright:** I was born in 1958 so I have seen waves of media sweep over our mind's eye. I remember seeing the newspaper headline of The Beatles stepping off the plane. Soon it was The Stones doing the same, and then The Sex Pistols stepped off their plane...

I learned a lot by working with different media through the decades—vinyl records, CDs, Laser Discs, and CD Roms. There was 1994's Innerware, a digital lingerie catalog, which led to the Digital Shiatsu project for Nippon TV. Then there was the web, and digital formats. My tech work probably comes to some extent from my father's work at The Pentagon during the end of the Vietnam War. He was in Army communications and, as he says, "worked on the Monet"—DARPA's beginning of the Internet. I used to go there with him as a kid.

I felt moving to NYC when I was 20 was like having a giant bookstore on my block, and free access. There was so much info, art, and history bits to glean while I was in my formative years. At first I was drawing, painting, and then working as a music artist. Learning about video and editing led to our first music video production, "The Dominatrix Sleeps Tonight," directed by Beth B, which is now in the MoMA collection (see the **Blank City** documentary). During these years, my friends Gretchen Bender and Amber Denker were experimenting in Computer Graphics out at the New York Institute of Technology, where pioneering CG research and experiments went on until 1984. I got involved with CG and multimedia conferences at the same time, and met many interesting people, including Jaron Lanier, who developed virtual reality gloves.

— **Hontos:** How did you get interested in developing an app?

— **Argabright:** Seeing Bradbury, Asimov, and Arthur C. Clarke movies growing up, and later reading Russell Hoban, J.G. Ballard, John Brunner, and William Gibson got me thinking about survival in a more complex society. It was 1984. I was interested in tech waves. I did some research for Japanese business magazines, went to tech conferences on multimedia, computer graphics, future computing, interface and virtual reality, and I experimented with media as an artist. By this point in the mid-1980's, Death Comet Crew was into a machine rock phase and playing with Max Headroom.

After meeting William Barg at The Palladium nightclub on 14th Street (now an NYU dorm) in 1986, he and I began a great run of electronic music and entertainment projects. In 1986—87, we co-created the audio-video performance **Hip Tech High Lit** for the Caravan of Dreams in Fort Worth Texas. The next day a Bass Brother's jet took us out to Arizona to the site of the Biosphere to meet the Biospherians. Around that time we produced a movie idea with Gibson and Japanese director Sogo Ishii, and formed The Voodooists AV project based on Gibson's idea of cybervoudou (we licensed "Queen Of Voudou" to Jonathan Demme for the soundtrack of **Married To the Mob** in 1989). The Voodooists released a 12" and a Japanese Laser Disc of **Video Voudou** for Toshiba / EMI / Kodansha in 1992.

We met many interesting people along the way, including Syd Mead, the "visual futurist" and designer of **Blade Runner**, **Aliens**, and **Tron**, writer Charles Lecht, Lance Williams of the New York Institute of Tech-

