



# THROUGH THE PERISCOPE

**MICROPHONE CHARACTER IN CREATIVE STUDIO PRODUCTION**

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# INTRODUCTION

- > My paper explores the creative affordances and agency that 'character' microphones with unique voicing, strong pre-equalisation, and/or a non-linear response enable in contemporary recorded music and sound production practices, with a particular focus on the Periscope microphone by Scope Labs.
- > The paper approaches the topic from the two primary perspectives of: (1) sound engineer-microphone designers and (2) creative studio practitioner and producer, and utilises interviews with Paavo Kurkela & Mattia Sartori (Scope Labs), and Adrian Utley, to that extent, respectively
- > Quest for tone and the *desire* for colour and character - for *affect* and *intensity* production - in contemporary creative studio practices
- > Assemblage theory (Buchanan, 2021): desire, agency, intent, listening
  - > NOTE! Shift away of emergent properties and ad hoc material 'assemblages'

# META THEMES

- > Creative application of transducers and transduction in studio praxis and their feedback and feedforward effects and affects
- > Listening praxis (studio, soundscape ecology, composition, education)
- > Affordances and constraints: dynamic zones where constraints *become* affordances and vice versa
- > Affect-production and music (and sound) as *affect*
  - > “Music as an affect, an intensity that carries an ability to affect and be affected” (Hemment, 2004)
- > Application of assemblage and affect theory into re-reading creative studio production practices: production-assemblage, character-assemblage
- > Nordic audio innovation

**“In many ways microphones are the technological soul of any recording project: the effectiveness of all other tools and techniques depends upon the quality of the image that the microphone is able to deliver”**

(Zak, 2001)

# THE PERISCOPE FEATURES

- > Omni condenser capsule
- > Built-in compressor w/out any user accessible (read 'controllable') compression variables
  - > Compression control through 'management' of SPL at capsule
  - > Full-range capture which is then 'messed with'
- > Singular example in pro-audio context
  - > Note increasing prevalence of iPhone use (e.g. Fred Again)
  - > Ontological shift

# THE PERISCOPE GENESIS

- > Scopelab founders Mattia Sartori & Paavo Kurkela
  - > Live and studio sound engineering, maintenance, build and service engineering
  - > Vintage inspiration and the interest in the 'source' conditions
- > Design principles, process and intent
  - > KISS: "Keep it simple stupid": also reflected in the user experience to achieve intended results (i.e. in the 'quick production of edge, punch, and character')
  - > The golden compromise
  - > Importance of embodied and tacit knowledge in the voicing/tuning of the microphone-compressor 'circuit'
  - > 'Massive' use window afforded by the design in comparison to very small window of usages in many typical character microphones (e.g. the Copperphone) due to limited bandwidth and dynamic range
  - > Parallel workflows (i.e. not intended as the sole microphone for a given recording)

# THE PERISCOPE CHARACTER

- > The Scope Labs *proposition*:
  - > Instant 'parallel compression' and 'glue'
  - > Saturated mid-range (with "spank") and mid-range focus
  - > Ease of use ('plug-n-play' and 'set and forget')
- > (Un)expected feedback
  - > What is missing
  - > Material qualities
  - > Ease of integration into multi-microphone workflows (phase)
  - > 'Calls' for experimentation
  - > Importantly, not a 1176

**“It’s a creative enhancement tool that alters your perspective as soon as you plug it in”**

(Dweezil Zappa, N.D)

**“For us, the Periscope is the microphone you plug in first in a session and you plug it into the cheapest microphone preamp you have, so you don't have to worry about it. You put it up in the middle of the room and you use whatever \$10 preamp you have, so it's out of your way”**

(Sartori, 2023)

**“You’ll find yourself leaving it permanently set up so that you can hear, at the press of a button, what it brings to any given session”**

(Inglis, 2021)

**“Because of the way it [Periscope] is shaped, because of the way you hold it, it should point at something, it should almost drag you into doing a specific movement and being a magnifying glass into something, or function as a telescope”**

(Sartori, 2021)



# SELECT FINDINGS SHAPED AT SOURCE

- > Educational value proposition (moving beyond the fear of failure)
- > Shared favoring of reducing options and utilizing limitations as a creative affordance and drivers ('focus') for experimentation (production of 'lines of flight') and musically effective and affective capture ('stratification')
  - > Avoiding the line of flight terminating in a 'black hole' of (near infinite) options; if the options/parameters are there, one is pulled to use them
- > Intent and importance of the sound at source, preparedness, early decision making, contextual awareness ('reference frames') and listening praxis
  - > Ability to remain 'open' to the 'unfolding' of the production
  - > Value of speed and immediacy of results ('affective hit')
  - > Crosstalk: stability in live contexts and instability in studio contexts
- > Effectiveness of assemblage theory informed investigation into understanding agency, intent, affect and listening in the "nebulous" (Utley, 2023) and often paradoxical praxis of (non-normative) record making
  - > Microphone character is not a stable concept but a dynamic assemblage (content/expression)



Image source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gyro\\_Gearloose#/media/File:Gyro\\_Gearloose.png](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gyro_Gearloose#/media/File:Gyro_Gearloose.png)

**“If you can’t measure it, it cannot be correct”**

[and]

**“ it does not always have to be right”**

(Kurkela, 2023)