

# BEYOND THE LIMIT AND THE LINE

*Transgression, Proliferation and Immersion*

**featuring the ENDNOTES<sup>1</sup>  
(appropriated listening)**

/NB: put 5 blank lines between each subsection here - decrease by 1 line each section (need some room)/

## **INTRO**

This essay considers some of the consolations of listening out for noise. Three noisy anecdotes follow (with a song on the way<sup>2</sup>). There are no definitive conclusions, just some different considerations of the space between noise, technology and electronic music.

And this writing is noisy. Perhaps it'll do your head in, or possibly stretch your ears. Noise is a leaky pollutant that cannot be confined. The opening of the next chapter is a parody of this chapter's introduction. But the next chapter also provides the endnotes to this chapter. Even though you know the score, you'll have to decide which of those trajectories to follow, or whether to flip from one to the other.<sup>3</sup>

CD[28](*guitar, swooping strings, slow brushed cymbal beat*)  
Ooh, ooh. **Make yourself comfortable**  
Ooh, ooh. **Make yourself comfortable**  
Ooh, ooh. **Make yourself comfortable baby**  
(*brass wah wah, swooping string cadence*)

**NOISE Example ONE**<sup>4</sup> (see definition below)

*There's a noise at the end of the track.* The CD writer on my computer is faulty. Whenever I burn an audio CD the last track is followed by an enormous glitch. I have attempted several possible solutions to no avail. I've made various test CDs to check it out: each time I play the last track, wait for it to finish and then, after a few moments, there's that ugly burst of noise again. It's the bonus track from hell. In the time between the end of the track and the glitch I anticipate both options: I long for the sound of silence – with increasing desperation – but always get distortion. I've grown accustomed<sup>5</sup> to feeling unease.

In the fold between 'is this music?' and 'is this noise?' there's some room for manoeuvre. It takes a moment to decide, 'this is'. During that length of time there is an expectation of one kind or another. Perhaps we may hum a distracting tune...

(*ooh ooh etc repeated by backing singer - SV doubling herself. Female, soothing, behind the verse*)  
**I've got some records here to put you in the mood**  
ooh..oooh make yourself comfortable  
**The phone is off the hook so no one can intrude**  
ooh..oooh make yourself comfortable  
**I feel romantic and the record changes automatically**  
ooh..oooh make yourself comfortable baby

**NOISE Example TWO** (see definition below)<sup>6</sup>

There's something up with the machine, *it doesn't sound quite right.* Sarah Vaughan's 'Golden Hits' CD - the one I hum along to while I'm cookin'<sup>7</sup> dinner – has started misbehavin'<sup>8</sup> in the kitchen. The first couple of songs are fine, but after that the playback starts doing the hop<sup>9</sup>. Instead of ironic crooning, she's scatting wildly and uncontrollably. Perhaps it's appropriate that Sassy should escape from 1950s pop, but she's uncomfortable in the ghetto-blaster, and my omelettes are suffering too. Everything is all shook up<sup>10</sup>.

In the fold between ‘is this human?’ and ‘is this machine?’ there’s some room for confusion. It takes a moment to decide, ‘this is’. During that length of time there is an expectation of one kind or another.

**Sweetheart, we hurried through our dinner** (*first two lines doubled in close harmony*)  
**Hurried through the dance**  
**Left before the picture show was through**(*solo*)

**NOISE Example THREE** (see definition below)

*And finally, a diva who won't stop singing* - the aggravatingly present Ms. Kylie Minogue. I caught two minutes of her latest video the other day and now I .....can't get the song out of my head. <sup>11</sup> She's lurking in my subconscious, beyond reach of my ability to stop her. (Yours too?) Indeed, whenever I stop thinking, her whingey little 'la, la la la' voice pipes up in the background. This noise won't cease, and I don't seem to have any say in the matter. <sup>12</sup>

In the fold between ‘is this me?’ and ‘is this not me?’ there’s some room for flipping the pages. It takes a moment to decide, ‘this is’. During that length of time – a hiatus that has a familiar refrain - there is an expectation of one kind or another.

**Why did we** (*duet*)  
**Hurry through the dinner**  
**Hurry through the dance?**  
**To leave some time for this**  
**To hugahug and kissakiss ...now**

Now this is no time for after-dinner relaxation. Upstairs in the studio I've got a pile of discarded silver plates with a side order of digital distortion. And downstairs in the kitchen, the Divine Miss V. is skipping barefoot through a host of imperfect palimpsests. And inside my head, vacuous pop-packaged Kylie has most definitely outstayed her welcome. There's far too much. Noise.

**Take off your shoosies dear and loosen up your tie**  
ooh...ooh make yourself comfortable  
**I've got some kisses here, let's try one on for size**  
ooh...ooh make yourself comfortable  
**I'll turn the lights low while you**  
**make yourself comfortable baby**  
ooh...ooh make yourself comfortable baby  
(*cresc*)

**NOISE (some deafening definitions)**

(see **Example 1, above**) 'any sound, esp. loud or harsh or undesired one' (Concise OED)

(see **Example 2, above**) 'irregular fluctuations accompanying but not relevant to a transmitted signal' (Concise OED)

(see **Ex. 3, above**) 'unwanted or meaningless data' (Encarta World-English Dictionary)

(last two stanzas repeat)

Noise is merely too much information. Noise is already rampaging inside your head, rollicking across the cross-wired connections between half-remembered songs and other people's words. There are so many footnotes and references, numbers and examples. Are you flipping sick of flipping the pages? Perhaps you're irritated by those noisy endnotes that make no particular sense (so maybe read them later from a different perspective).

Oh shssh!

Settle down?

**Make yourself comfortable.....baby!**

*(louder)*

*(pizzicato upward scale to end)*

No, listen baby, don't you dare - be uncomfortable, be distracted, be confused. Beware of seductive B-movie sonic platitudes. Be aware that technology gives us not only the gift to hear ourselves as others hear us<sup>13</sup>, but also the tantalising possibility of feeling noise more keenly than before, and revelling in the sensation. However low you turn the volume, switching off is not an option. Are there no limits?

*/place significant quotations between horizontal lines, to delimit them (your noise is other people's information)/*

Noise is especially relevant to our expectations of listening to music. And in relation to electronic music, noise has a privileged position: the technology we use to make sound enables us to produce a great deal of noise – we can create unpredictable results, beyond our ability to understand them entirely. We dream of transfiguring our understanding, and in doing so reinventing meaning for noise. Even after fifty or so years of making music with technology we still speak in broadly futuristic terms, though more often now we seem to investigate 'new ways' of making content (algorithmic, physical or genetic models, stochastic behaviours) rather than being preoccupied with 'new sounds'. Perhaps there is a magnetic attraction between the means to make noise and artists concerned with the meaning to be made from noise. Noise attracts practitioners who want to make noise count.

This writing is a noisy attempt to think out loud. I make no claims to present anything larger than an idiosyncratic consideration of noise in some specific sonic, perceptual and confrontational guises - specifically in relation to music, electronic music and its technologies.

**TRANSGRESSION**

## **there's noise at the end of the track** **'any sound, esp. loud or harsh or undesired one'**

In the fold between 'is this music?' and 'is this noise?' there's some room for noise as transgression.

What is noise? Noise is a disruption to the current flow. Noise sends us skipping back and forth between tracks, between endnotes and the body of the text. Noise is the unexpected glitch. Noise is a song you heard by accident and without desire. Noise is in no particular order. Noise is an annoying subtext and deliberate (/or non-deliberate/) mistakes. Noise is unwanted aggravation. Noise is beyond our control. Noise is thwarted expectations. Noise is overload. Noise is an in-your-face attack – an affront to reason! Noise is every crappy love song you've ever heard, playing simultaneously on a thousand turntables, and all of them turned up high<sup>14</sup>. Noise is also a quietly intrusive revolution – gerunk, gerunk, gerunk – every time the record goes round. Noise is an invitation to think different (the noise of my computer is an intermittent advert for itself). Noise is tactile. Noise is a weed. Noise is pornographic (it obsesses over arousal). Noise is one statement after another without purpose, a relentless aggravation. Noise is 'any sound or combination of sounds' (Encarta World English Dictionary).

/if time, perhaps re-read last para, replacing 'is' with 'can be'?  
(Know your limitations, and then leap over them)/

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Transgression does not seek to oppose one thing to another, nor does it achieve its purpose through mockery or by upsetting the solidity of foundations; it does not transform the other side of the mirror, beyond an invisible and uncrossable line, into a glittering expanse. (Foucault, 1988 p. 69)

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Where is noise? Noise is in our relationship with ordinary things, in both the message and the medium (quote it again, then let's move on<sup>15</sup>). Noise is in the gaps – it is not just the glitch after the music that's noisy, but our anxiety in the space between the two. Noise is in the struggle between what we want, what we get, and how we try to rationalise the difference. Noise is there when we want to hear Sarah, but hear instead Sarah and a dodgy CD laser performing a coy duet – animate and inanimate. Are they together or apart? – we so *want* to give them both intent. Noise is a machine with a will

of its own. But ‘we cannot bear to think of ourselves as the dupes of an aimless and indiscriminate mind’, (Gould, 1987 p. 256) so noise has to be the sound of a machine that thinks for itself (and that’s uncanny – wait and see). Noise is in the interference that resides within us, it’s a previous experience that silts upwards, of its own volition – a remembered Kylie moment, or a deeper desire. Noise is in the conflict between acknowledging the presence of noise, and attempting to repress the perception. Though we may try to push it back down, noise is an inveterate scribbling that reveals a hidden message, underneath the surface.

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Transgression is neither violence in a divided world (in an ethical world) nor a victory over limits (in a dialectical or revolutionary world); and, exactly for this reason, its role is to measure the excessive distance that it opens at the heart of the limit and to trace the flashing line that causes the limit to arise. (Foucault, 1988, p.73)

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Why is noise? Well, there’s the rub, grind, crackle, buzz, glitch, and general row. There’s the subjective question (is it noise to you?). Perhaps noise is there to worry at the limits we assign for music: it looks back and stretches out a hand – ‘come on, there’s more.<sup>16</sup> (Not forgetting that percussion music once made an awful noise). Noise can be there as a pleasurable perversion, or an interesting itch. You know you want to go after it. Perhaps it even turns you(r listening) on? Noise can be at once the information-overload of our lives and our attempts to assuage it. Noise expresses itself. Noise can be the audible scream of our internal signal paths – a metaphor for the ‘too muchness’ of thinking about being alive. Noise takes us over, against our will. Noise alienates. Noise is there to get in the way. At the end of the day – or chapter - noise can scratch a stylus across familiar grooves.

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Transgression contains nothing negative, but affirms limited being – affirms the limitlessness into which it leaps as it opens this zone to existence for the first time. (Foucault, 1988, p. 73)

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What isn’t noise? (There’s nothing negative about being negative). Noise is not the opposite of music: it is not the opposite of anything at all (if anything it’s the opposite

of *nothing* at all). Noise is not defined by loud or soft, although it can be either. Noise is not cacophony: it is unplanned but not necessarily unpleasant.

Of course, all that preceded, and all that will follow, is possibility.

### **Beyond watching the performer (the merits of vacuum-cleaning)**

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I happened to be practicing at the piano one day... ..and suddenly a vacuum cleaner started up just beside the instrument. Well, the result was that in the louder passages, this luminously diatonic music... ..became surrounded with a halo of vibrato... ..And in the softer passages I couldn't hear any sound that I was making at all. I could tell, of course - I could sense the tactile relation with the keyboard, which is replete with its own kind of acoustical associations, and I could imagine what I was doing... ..It suddenly sounded better than it had without the vacuum cleaner, and those parts which I couldn't actually hear sounded best of all. ... [W]hat I managed to learn through the accidental coming together of Mozart and the vacuum cleaner was *that the inner ear of the imagination is a very much more powerful a stimulant than is any amount of outward observation*. (Gould, 1987 p. 6-7, my italics)

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Glenn Gould's various transgressions as a concert, and non-concert, pianist continue to produce a sublime noise. Here was a pianist who stopped giving live performances, had a compositional approach to studio recording, and himself composed a trilogy of sound documentaries that has had lasting influence. Gould as pianist had obsessions that were born of a sensitivity to the relationship between technology and noise: technology in the broadest and most literal sense, as a technique for both the production and manufacture of sound; noise in an inclusive sense to allow for both 'unwanted' sonic artefacts and the intellectually-perceived noise from 'obstruction' imposed by the performer. He was extraordinarily attuned to the various nuances of physical and perceptual noise that are part of a musical performance, but was somehow bent on separating them from the experience of listening to music 'itself'. He transgressed.

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Technology had positioned itself between the attempt and the realization (Foucault, 1988, p. 354)

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**Hardware transgression:** Technology itself can be a noise that comes between. The technology of the piano was a noise, and produced a noise that Gould didn't want to hear. But if keys are struck, sound will resound in mundane air, and the performer is bound to a directly literal process of physical cause and outward effect. But the outward effect does not necessarily match the internalised the internalised performance of the music – like the reading voice that coexists with (but does not require) sounding speech. By substituting the noise of the vacuum cleaner in lieu of the piano sound, Gould allowed himself the physicality of performing music alongside the internal realisation without having to accept the imperfection of the sound produced. He evaded cause and effect; or rather he extended effect inwards, beyond the limit implied by the piano, his technology. A cruder, uncontrolled technology – the vacuum cleaner – masked the sound of outward performance with a noise that wasn't worth listening to in the first place.

Aural noise also softened the intellectual 'noise' engendered by having to rely on a piece of hardware made of wire, gut, ivory and wood that 'got in the way' of internalised performance. The same preoccupation with idealised musical performance, and a dissatisfaction with the actual 'noise' offered by the instrument – merely a tool - led Gould towards sound processing and manipulation. These additional tools provided a means to extend the limit further, and so transcend physical reality through transgression:

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...if I gave it a bass cut at a hundred cycles or thereabouts and a treble boost at approximately five thousand, *the murky, unwieldy, bass-oriented studio piano with which I had had to deal* earlier in the day could be magically transformed on playback into an instrument *seemingly capable* of the same sonic perversions to which I had already introduced Maestro Scarlatti. (ibid, p. 354, my italics)

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**Error transgression:** Gould often practised and memorised his repertoire away from the piano, only turning to the instrument in the final stages of preparing for a performance or recording. By practising away from the piano, he not only avoided the noise of the instrument but also the noise of the fallible human 'technology' of the performer – and this flesh and blood technology at times fails and leads one to make mistakes (an instance of noise creation). By not performing live in concert and turning instead to a studio-recorded 're-composition' of performances he circumnavigated the weaknesses of human performance (physical and intellectual) and enabled both his instrument, and himself, to be capable of 'more'. And perhaps this enables his listener to be more capable as well.

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It would be most surprising if the techniques of sound preservation, in addition to influencing the way in which music is composed and performed (which is already taking place), do not also determine the manner in which we respond to it. (ibid, p. 99)

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**Listening transgression:** How can Gould's listener get 'inside' the performance to the same extent that he did? Playing Mozart alongside the vacuum cleaner provided Gould with 'the effect that you might get if you sang in the bathtub with both ears full of water and shook your head from side to side all at once.' (Gould, p. 7) The analogy is a bodily, tactile, physical one. But it also speaks of blockage, muting, of being shut off from the outside. It speaks of an experience that is not collective but individual, and a song that's heard through an internalised 'transmission' of sound. In relation to speech, Douglas Kahn notes that 'at the same time that the speaker hears the voice full with the immediacy of the body, others will hear the speaker's voice infused with a lesser distribution of body because it will be a voice heard without bone conduction: a deboned voice' (Kahn, p.7). This is a literal fact with regard to speech (or singing) but perhaps it also translates to our listening to performed music. Sitting at the piano is very different from sitting in the grand circle, in both practical and social terms. We are always at one remove - we cannot *be* Glenn Gould, even temporarily.<sup>17</sup> The liner notes might perhaps provide a directive to start up our vacuum cleaners each time we listen to Gould's recording of the Goldberg Variations, but that wouldn't quite do the trick. We wouldn't have access to either the physical sensation of fingers on keys, feet on pedals, vibration through body, or the internal clamour of nerves, memories, feelings and intentions that contribute to the physical realisation of a performance.

The recording is just sound, and the sound is just a recording - running a finger over the grooves while it plays won't help on this occasion. But this 'just sound' is not 'just piano'. Gould was notorious for his vocal 'accompaniments': in nearly every recording, the sound of the piano is echoed by his humming and grunting, an audible 'singing along' that rises up and breaks the surface intermittently (just think how many sound engineers must have lost sleep over this....). This noisy artefact of the externalised strivings of interpretation - the struggle to birth the music through his mind and soul to audible existence - is real and physical, but it is a mere trace of another noisy struggle between intention and its realisation, ultimately, through bodily movement. But perhaps Gould's humming does not interfere with the recorded sound of the music so much as act as a proxy for the vacuum cleaner. Both noises interfere with the way we listen by masking the sound of a mere piano being played. And perhaps this interference encourages us to turn to another noisy perceptual struggle going on within us: we are hearing the piano timbre, straining to both catch and avoid Gould's vocal mutterings, and somewhere along the way we're listening to the *music* - which is both within and *beyond* the sound emanating from the record. These are perhaps indications as to why his studio recordings do not lose out, but rather gain from this 're-integration' of the noise of performer presence. Perhaps this obstruction 'at the end of the track' is useful in drawing attention to a difference between music and its realisation.

## **PROLIFERATION** **that machine's got a mind of its own** **'irregular fluctuations accompanying but not relevant to a transmitted signal'**

In the fold between 'is this human?' and 'is this machine?' there's some room for noise as proliferation. Proliferation is a kind of noise with a metaphor whose unobserved growth wells from beneath until it cracks the surface. Those things that proliferate – viruses<sup>18</sup> rumours, mass panic, chain letters, recessions – are subject to a process that is, or is generally perceived as, at some level beyond individual control or even beyond human perception. Most often this process is 'noisy', in that it's associated with undesirability, or at least disquiet, because proliferation is a generative production that appears to be unconcerned with a single controlled trajectory. It does not appear to develop in a direct response to any human endeavour – we may we set it in motion but we conjecture rather than predict its outcome. So as a means of generating art (though not necessarily as a means of generating the materials of art) proliferation transgresses a limit: the intention to proliferate is deliberate, but the reproduction is a mindless multiplication whose machinations do not spring from a single, or even a collaborative, consciousness. Proliferation as art makes for intellectual noise because it asks for us to get our single-minded heads around the mindless nature of the process in relation to perceiving its product as art. And, often, the perceived absence of individual human intent or organisation, our encounter with this realisation and acceptance (or not) of the anarchy implied is exactly what such art is all about. Generative, viral processes abound in experimental sound-processing software. As improvising performer David Lee remarks succinctly 'Chaos theory has been embraced with open arms by artists because it validates structures that are too complicated to be explained. Art compounds complexity to effect an overall simplicity.' (*Musicworks* 54, p.5)

Proliferation discourages regulation and encourages 'the beyond'. But to go beyond implies a movement that continues after an *expected* line of demarcation; this is an extension rather than an opposition. To use one of Deleuze and Guattari's preferred terms (and processes), proliferation acts as a metaphorical 'rhizome'<sup>19</sup> that spreads by a branching root system across an endless plane.

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[Gould] is not just displaying virtuosity, he is transforming the musical points into lines, he is making the whole piece proliferate. (Deleuze and Guattari, p. 8)

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Deleuze and Guattari (who did not own up to who wrote what, thereby imposing a satisfyingly noisy anonymity<sup>20</sup>) were referring to Gould's tendency to perform pieces at a breakneck tempo. By streaking *beyond* the expected (and accepted) tempo for its

genre – a culturally defined norm that is certainly capable of fluctuation – Gould’s performance dances ecstatically towards a new finishing line. But this ‘beyond’ performance does not negate previous interpretations, performances, and listenings; it can only be ‘beyond’ in comparison to them. Gould’s flight urges us to go beyond our expectations, but not to forget them. And with a virtuoso technique that almost goes beyond what is ‘humanly possible’, he becomes a pinball wizard, a man-machine whose transformation of the work creates proliferation by running at speed ahead of the limit. But the line, where all self-control and self-consciousness is lost, will always keep moving towards a new horizon. Meanwhile, our listening proliferates: the noise of beyond-ness is our internalised comparison (not an opposition) of the known and the new. And it’s our understanding of the work that proliferates towards new ‘capabilities’ for music.

/place my listening in italics, to isolate personal response (because it’s most irregular)/

## Beyond human assumptions (it’s behind you)

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Sean: "That's the thing, what's regular?"

Rob: "You can go too far, but then that's for you to decide. We've found ourselves thinking at times that we might have gone too far. But we've always been in our own space - it's hard for us to imagine where that datum or line of reference lies." (Sean Booth and Rob Brown, aka *Autechre*, *Sound on Sound* interview)

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**CD [29]** *Autechre*, *Confield* - track 6: ‘bine’

*For three seconds or so, there’s the promise of an elegy for solo strings: distant wavering pitches, one low, the other higher. Two unnamed stems, slowly intertwining. Spreading outwards, not upwards or onwards. There is barely time to make yourself comfortable before the noise assaults expectations.*

*...someone’s warped idea of a drum machine in the foreground, it’s incredibly fast and its behaviour is completely frenzied and unpredictable. Sometimes there’s a beat to follow for a few seconds, then it’s too disordered and rapid to comprehend as more than a fast brrrr, click, thud, swish, flip. It’s unthinking, aimless and out of control.*

*It’s a machine gone mad. But going mad is only human. So is there anybody there?*

**Presence proliferation:** We associate the performance of instrumental music – its bringing to completion – with an individual (or a collection of individuals performing ‘in concert’) on stage. Significantly, the term ‘instrumental music’ draws attention

not so much to the nature of the sound required as to the necessity for *people* to be present, in order to make it happen. There is persistent dissatisfaction over the concert performance of electronic ‘tape music’ (another noisy term – what does it mean now?) most often voiced as ‘I want something to see’ but with the subtext ‘I want someone to be seen to *do* this sound’. For an audience comfortable with the flourishes of concert experience (of whatever genre of music), a human being tweaking a mixing desk or staring intently at a laptop is an incongruous and poor substitute. We want physicality, and even a lip-synching pop diva who drops her mic is preferable to nothing. But conversely, a non-demonstrative performance becomes a discomfiting and subversive act that provides a ‘no-input’ visual mockery of what might be expected (several ‘no-input’ musicians – like Sachiko M, who makes use of the mechanical and electrical sound of a sampler, rather than using any sounds stored within it – regularly sit virtually motionless on stage).

If you want to avoid making statements through performance, and to concentrate on making them through sound it’s difficult, since even a single individual on stage can make a distracting noise in the undergrowth. The ‘climate of anonymity’ prized by Gould indicates an urge to cut straight to the chase - the stuff of listening to music. So perhaps anonymity is the key. Quite a few musicians currently making experimental electronic music work in collaborative groups or, perhaps more often, in twos or threes. They conjoin in more or less stable configurations, frequently colliding for specific projects. It is often not a case of ‘where one ends the other begins’ but rather the collective ‘us’ of single-minded individuals working together – either in real-time collaborations or through less integrated exchanges of material.<sup>21</sup> In this context, the musician/maker becomes a confused and proliferating entity too. With two authors who write as an ambiguous fused ‘voice’, there’s neither one nor the other. There is an absence of presence that appears to be another solution to erasing the ‘oneself’ of the performer in favour of the ‘itself’ of the work. There’s nothing left to see here. So let’s move on...

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De:Bug: What are you doing on stage really.

Sean: Just doing tracks. (Sean Booth, of *Autechre*, ‘The Ultimate Folk Music’ web interview)

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**Uncanny proliferation:** Although *Autechre*’s track, *bine* still peddles associations with ‘fake’ human performance, this is a different drummer-machine whose simulacrum of virtuosity has no truck with pinball wizardry. Both its rhythmic processes and timbres judder against the limit for ‘instrument’ and move towards further transgressions – towards the beyond human, the beyond ‘drum-like’, towards the hypersentient, and hypersonic. The music skids violently between man and machine, towards the unconceivable - and that’s gotta hurt (because it’s too difficult to bear). This machine thrashes uncontrollably and blindly at the limits of its own capabilities. It appears to be willing harm upon itself, yet neither brakes nor breaks. Squealing, thrashing, flapping, bashing, squelching, banging...this is horrendous, and there’s nobody driving the thing.

Or is there. With an essay by Alfred Jentsch as his starting point, Freud appropriates the notion of the ‘Uncanny’ (in German *unheimlich* or ‘unfamiliar’).

Jentsch is of the view that ‘one of the most successful devices for easily creating uncanny effects is to leave the reader in uncertainty whether a particular figure in the story is a human being or an automaton’. His concern is for the fictional uncanny – the puppet that comes to life, or the automaton that appears human. Freud, however, works towards a psychological interpretation of the uncanny as being the familiar wrought somehow fearsome in the psyche. Broadly speaking, for Freud the ‘horror’ of the uncanny is acquired, and relates to an inherent appreciation of duality: ‘When all is said and done, the quality of uncanniness can only come from the fact of the ‘double’ being a creation dating back to a very early mental stage, long since surmounted — a stage, incidentally, at which it wore a more friendly aspect.’ (Freud, <http://www-rohan.sdsu.edu/~amtower/uncanny.html>) Either way, uncanniness speaks of fear and being frightened – and this is a noisy experience that attacks clear-mindedness and floods consciousness with terror. *bine*’s frenzied machine is undoubtedly monstrous, but its persistent duality – human or machine? – has an uncanny ambiguity, doubly exacerbated because it is, as music, neither fiction nor the listener’s own mental creation. We’re still not quite sure.

*Listen, there’s been some terrible mistake.*

*... there are occasional seismic jolts where the whole thing skips a beat – or maybe just skips a couple of samples as one slab of this stuff is spliced to the next. The volume bursts up a notch, or there’s a disruption in the pattern. When this happens the patterns don’t match, they’re slightly skewed. There’s no attempt to hide this botched attempt. Attempting what?*

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**It has already begun, and all of this refers, cites, repercusses, propagates its rhythm without measure. But it remains entirely unforeseen: an incision into an organ made by a hand that is blind for never having seen anything but the here-and-there of a tissue. (Derrida, 1991, p. 168)**

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If things ‘go wrong’ there must have been some thwarted expectations. There must be a mind in mind. I want to hear a mind... but there’s a gap. This isn’t Bach. This is not a 3-part fugue. This wild flight spreads on a different, microscopic scale of invention. In these random and violent shifts of tempo, pattern, timbre, nothing lasts, nothing aims, nothing fades - is this towards a ‘breaking down’ or a ‘breaking through’? Here is something that has been pushed towards its limits, and towards the line between achievement and catastrophe. But is this a failure? (and is this a line?) - beyond a certain point, catastrophe is, I suppose, one kind of successful conclusion...but it’s a double bind.

**Double proliferation:** Is there something more frightening and uncanny going on in the background? While the machine in the foreground beats listening around the ears with extrovert mania, there is another, uncannily fearful noise. It is easy to forget that *bine* also offers some softly spoken sonic tendrils that intertwine aimlessly in the background while all this activity is going on. These are the real monsters, who once

again thrive on anonymity and a lack of a single identity. For Jentsch, the true horror of uncanniness in fiction succeeds when the reader's attention is 'not focused directly upon his uncertainty, so that he may not be led to go into the matter and clear it up immediately' (Freud, p. 219). And this is exactly what *bine*'s slow, string-like timbres do. Not only are they anonymous – what timbre is that exactly? – but they are apparently aimless (but then again, perhaps not). Here are quite a few expectations of identity and direction, none of which are fulfilled. But nobody bothers worrying unduly about such ambiguity when the foreground is occupied by a percussive noise that proliferates its aggressive shoots of thwarted, ephemeral and transitory rhythms.

But listen; perhaps these tendrils are the uncanny 'double' of our wanting (a mirror of our internal intertwinings and desires). We want them to have soul because they behave as if they should. Perhaps a gradual realisation that they, too, are automata – or just might be – is the psychic breaking point for this piece. We want our world to be human, because we do not want to be alone with a machine. The possibility of listening to music with no human intent at all does not bear thinking about.

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Yes there is no real point in it either. I quite like that. [Derrida] is not really trying to define or pursue anything specific. It just kind of breaks what's available. It is quite like the way that humans think anyway. (Sean Booth, *ibid*)

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**Unseen proliferation:** Proliferation *does* perform – but through an unthinking organic cell-dividing biological process that expands exponentially. If proliferation is mindless in its reproduction that's not to say that it is inorganic in its *modus operandi*. This spreading motion (because proliferation is a constant movement outwards rather than onwards) is organic at a micro-level, and functions beyond the ability of human sight. The viral disease that invades and infiltrates does so beyond unassisted human perception, and even beyond the compass of the single-cell bacterial scale. A virus makes its liquid, viscous traverse on finer routes than our cruder, human 'regular' scales of reference can fathom. Its activity cannot be contained easily (or at all) because we cannot pick up its noise unaided. It is everywhere and alien.<sup>22</sup> But, nevertheless, its propagation makes a noise through the symptoms that indicates its presence, and also indicate to us the uncanny depths of the microscopic world within us. This 'inner' body is both familiar – it is ours – and unknown – it is other. It is an anonymous body that we contain, but that is also quite beyond us.

At this micro-level the viral procedures of proliferation are unseen – no, *unsee-able*. But this does not mean that we are blind. Autechre's *bine* is 'unseeable' in terms of gestural performance since these wild rhythmic patterns and flailing timbres are playable in push-button, mouse-cursor terms, but untranslatable through human movement. Of course those gestures can be mimicked – through projected images perhaps – but the result would be an interpretation, and this is compromise. This work performs its gestural metaphors in a more immediate sense and, I think, avoids the need for sight. To quote Virginia Woolf's equally ambiguous *Orlando*, it goes

straight to ‘the dark hollow at the back of the head when the visible world is obscured for the time’ (Woolf, 1977, p. 201). But on the way, it might light up the hairs in your ears.

*... but I can almost feel the edges of this sound - like razors, unfinished and jagged. There is some ‘body’ to it; it has a physical presence that invades...underneath the skin...*

*bine* does not travel to arrive, but it moves on. The sound conveys its own physicality: because, although there is no human referent to this tactile, tensile mass of sound, it *does* have a presence analogous to the movement of some kind of body. The rhythms and the patterns of its activity imply motion, and striving – but it’s much more than that, I think: *bine*’s behaviour is defined by movement, flux, propagation; the physicality that this behaviour produces is directly transmitted to the physical listening body, unmediated by anything but air. You do not envisage a sound-producing object. On the other hand, the sound is an object that seems to inhabit rather than reach the ear, through a ‘surgical’ invasion that cuts through the surface of listening without resistance. The sound is loud, but it is not loudness alone that leads to it taking command: because there is no ‘need’ for a performer (actual or envisaged) there is no noise between the body of sound, and the body that listens. You don’t perceive a boundary. It feels as if it was always there.

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We use machines to extend our own behaviour. (Marsden, in Reck Miranda p. 15)

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## **IMMERSION** **can’t get you out of my head** **‘unwanted or meaningless data’**

In the fold between ‘is this me?’ and ‘is this not me?’ there’s some room for noise as immersion. Immersion plunges an object into liquid, which then seeps into every crevice and every possible space. An immersed object is full up - there is no question of a *need* or desire for more. Immersion is a willingness to accede to baptism, renewal or escape. Immersion is acquiescence, a giving in. It occupies the senses completely and offers instead the prospect of a blissful dissolve. It’s the solution to end all limits and all lines. To be immersed is to become completely involved.

This section has a sound track: Merzbow – Agni Hotra Loops from *Loop Panic Limited* - CD [30]. Please press play. Listening is entirely optional. But why not take a dip in a sea of noise?

---

*The relationship between the noise performer and the*

*listener also seems to be informed by the rituals of sado-masochistic sex, as the audience agrees to submit itself to the sonic pain of white noise inflicted by the performers. (Heinritzi 2001, p. 31) Everyone has felt (at least in fantasy) the erotic glamour of physical cruelty and an erotic lure in things that are vile and repulsive. (Sontag, 1982 p.222) The antimony of gaze and view is lost in pornography - why? Because pornography is inherently perverse... ..Instead of being on the side of the viewed object, the gaze falls into ourselves (Zizek, 1992 p. 110)...it would be better to speak of sonic pornography in a literal sense: the naked mechanisms of our fetishistic relationship with the instruments of cultural domination are (over)exposed by this music. (Heinritzi, 2001 p. 32) ...this spectacularly cramped form of the human imagination has, nevertheless, its peculiar access to some truth. This truth - about sensibility, about sex, about individual personality, about despair, about limits - can be shared when it projects itself into art. (Sontag, 1982 p. 232) Listening to you, I get the music. Gazing at you, I get the heat. It is only we who gaze stupidly at the image that "reveals all."... ..we, the spectators, are reduced to a paralysed object-gaze. (Zizek, 1992 p. 110) The need of human beings to transcend "the personal" is no less profound than the need to be a person (Sontag, 1982 p. 231) *Noise music is about losing control over oneself, about losing one's relationship to the world, a music of catharsis and hysteria... ..this is more a question of the pleasure provided by this music than political violence or a critical discourse.* (Heinritzi, 2001 p. 32) (my italics)*

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## Beyond self (a significant touch)

**Immersed meaning:** We consume and subsume material and keep on with our demands for more information. We take it for granted that we will continue to boldly go, forever extending our reach (which is not the same thing as attaining a goal). In seeking to extend our own behaviour, we recognise that we are *wanting* (this means we both need and desire), and if we want some thing, that thing holds meaning for us. In striving to go beyond our limitations, we must surely yearn to be immersed in all the meaning in the world. But where does noise fit in to this? On the surface, it appears that there is no place for desiring noise, since noise is 'unwanted or meaningless data'. This brusque antinomy assumes that the flotsam and jetsam of 'unwanted' and 'meaningless' must always wash up on shore together.

If the whirring of bytes and behemoths is an exhilaration that springs from the 'beyondness' of human behaviour, then any noise that comes out of the attempt is the Russolo rustle of our own making; it springs from a desire to approach the limit and move the line. But whereas Luigi Russolo's 1913 Futurist manifesto asked for an ironic orchestration of the noise of industrial society, now we can't evade the catchy capitalist tune that keeps re-emerging inside our head. The noise we encounter is our fault, and the irony is lost: I may feel acute discomfort at Kylie's tra la la shrink-wrapped sexuality but commercial music's proliferation was just part of the digital knowledge

transaction. Now I just can't get her out of my head, without getting out of my head. It's just too much! But although I don't want Kylie (insert your own aural bugbear here) inhabiting my head, I know that her presence *means* something - worse, she represents a cacophony of meanings. The 'too-much-ness' of the rising tide of information is overwhelming (and I am drowning in crass liquid metaphors!)

But perhaps we can also want to immerse meaning for a while, and so to gain some relief from all this all-ness. So, how to drown out the noise of meaning? Immerse it. Push meaning under the surface. Yet immersion is not destruction. Once underwater, things and people do not disappear so much as digress from their normal appearance. Stones that were dull and unappealing now gleam with new lustre, clothes float and billow uncontrollably, and ordinary movement is reinvented as an incongruous slow ballet. Meaning shifts along a notch or two, and that's some kind of extension.

Much of the base material of Merzbow's *Loop Panic Limited* is derived from recordings or pre-generated sounds - white noise, other music, field recordings, and performances. What the matter is doesn't really matter, because it is reinvented as detritus that ostensibly lacks any function other than to be subject to new meaning. So in this recycling process, meaning suffers a sea change. Materials become fetishistic: now they are objects that have lost their originally intended purpose and instead serve to initiate arousal. Perversely, meaning is re-created for them through aurally noisy procedures - the 'meaningless and unwanted data' of feedback, repetitions, overloads, cutups, and de-composition. So there are at once all the discomfoting cues that indicate noise (the too much-ness of distortion and saturation), alongside some vestige of the material's previous or supposed 'purpose'. Listening is stuck in a noisy loop: the sound of noise music is a sound we do not 'want', but the 'noise' is meaningful. (Right now, as I write this, I'm being plagued by the incessant noise of a distant, barking dog. But I'm also troubled by visions of a distressed animal, outside in this cold weather. I just can't stop thinking about what the sound might mean). This interesting conflict buzzes away between our subjective interpretation of sound, and the stories that we attach to it. We even attach stories to unwanted and meaningless data - white, pink, brown, grey.....these colours serve as analogies for different flavours of aural noise. To get beyond that compulsive naming of things (which is largely to give them signification as different from one another) we have to get beyond making distinctions, and beyond associative meanings for sound.

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*as the*

audience agrees to submit itself to the sonic pain of white noise inflicted by the performers. (Heinritzi 2001, p. 31) Everyone has felt (at least in fantasy)

(Sontag, 1982

p.222) The antimony of gaze and view is lost in pornography - why? Because pornography is inherently perverse... ..Instead of being on the side of the viewed object, the gaze falls into ourselves (Zizek, 1992 p.110)...it would be better to speak of sonic pornography in a literal sense:

(Heinritzi, 2001 p. 32) ...this spectacularly cramped form of the human imagination has, nevertheless, its peculiar access to some truth. This truth - about sensibility, about sex, about individual personality, about despair, about limits - can be shared when it projects itself into art. (Sontag, 1982, p. 232) If you want to follow me, you've got to play pinball. And put in your earplugs, put on your eyeshades It is only we who gaze stupidly at the image that "reveals all."... ..we, the spectators, are reduced to a paralysed object-gaze. (Zizek, 1992 p. 110) The need of human beings to transcend "the personal" is no less profound than the need to be a person (Sontag,

**Immersed object:** The materials of *Loop Panic Limited* are immersed objects. Noise soaks into these sounds whose identities are obliterated and wrought anonymous as a result. Sampling is not, in this particular work, the means to a camp aural nostalgia of re-contextualised pop, neither is it a clever juxtaposition of diverse non-sequiturs. Instead there is – in the majority of tracks - a jagged, jumbled ‘mass’ of activity that, while chaotically noisy, appears inexorable: differentiation is apparently random and irregular, but almost immediately the sound is revealed as both predictable and static, since the initial noisy seconds are looped and repeated. So noise is controlled, within restraints. In general, after a minute or so the loop changes marginally, moving into the next track without breaking stride. Timbres shift slightly as aural noise is redistributed over the spectrum, but tempo and intensity remain largely the same. And this looped repetition creates its own noise because there is nothing more infuriating than being put on indefinite hold.

[PAUSE: This infuriation perhaps springs from a multi-level objectification. To be put ‘on hold’, and left to listen to music against our will, is to be left with a machine in ‘pause’: we are aggravated by the impossibility of interaction, in a situation where we specifically *required* interaction. And when we complain about not being able to get through to a human operator, we are acknowledging that we, too, are being treated as machines, placed against our will in a state of waiting – we are objectified. And music itself is also objectified, or rather the object of music is demeaned to functioning merely (only) as a means of audibly filling time, as a ‘proxy’ for human presence.]

To get back to it: are we also caught in another loop? An immersed listening hints at a passive acceptance of all sound. Cage repeatedly bobs to the surface with his maxim to ‘let sounds be themselves’. But, in truth, his listening philosophy asks for an enormously active commitment to all listening, and one that intends to be truly life changing. And in any case, ‘all sound’ is a fairly neutral classification while ‘noise’, as is becoming resoundingly clear, is a definition for ‘all sound’ that is open to subjective interpretation. Conversely, listening attentively to organized sound (in which category I include composed music) demands some kind of engagement in which critical and intellectual judgements gang up with individual emotional and sensory responses. Some kind of neutral objectivity informs personal response, and vice versa. Whatever the conjunction of these various responses to sound – organised or not - and to whatever extent they are consciously implemented, the process is at root an active one. We hang on in there, trying to make sense.

How to let go? In submitting to the noise of *Loop Panic Limited*, perhaps you agree to become both immersed and objectified. While noise can obliterate the indirect discourse of our more troubling thoughts, its loud, insistent and continuous presence also invades the room we made for personal reflection or reverie. Either way, we’re objectified (we’re ‘out of it’) – we have put in our earplugs and put on our eyeshades when it comes to critical perception. If you choose to listen (because you can still choose to keep your heads above water if you prefer) you are obliged to surrender to sensation and just feel. It is hardly an accident that many artists in the ‘school’ of Japanese Psychedelic Music - Merzbow is often cited as an erstwhile member – pay homage to the psychedelic heavy rock and punk that is the ugly twin of new age sensibilities.

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(at least in fantasy) (Heinritzi 2001 p. 31) *Everyone has felt*

(Sontag, 1982  
p.222) *The antimony of gaze and view is lost in pornography*

(Zizek, 1992  
p.110)

(Heinritzi, p. 32)

- about sensibility, about sex, about individual  
personality, about despair, about limits - can be shared when it  
projects itself into art. (Sontag, 1982 232) Now you can't hear me,  
your ears are truly sealed. You can't speak either, your mouth is  
filled.

(Zizek, p. 110) *The need of human beings to transcend "the personal"  
is no less profound than the need to be a person (Sontag, 1982 p. 231)*

(Heinritzi, 1992 p. 32) (my italics)

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**Immersed in extremes:** Noise music can yank us from one extreme to the other: first we are objectified (and our individuality thus 'concealed') by surrendering to the sensation, then we are exposed by our own raw discomfort. The gaze falls back on us, as dissociated 'objects', but it also reveals our arousal, since the endurance of discomfort is certainly some kind of stimulation. And endurance is itself an extremity, in which we try and 'stay' the course (through choice or not). If extremity is our choice we are like the roller-coaster fanatic who wants to break the record for staying on the ride; we regard the length of our exhilarating discomfort as some kind of goal in itself.

To Freud, as Anthony Storr points out, 'all forms of art and literature are sublimations of unsatisfied libido' (Storr, 1993 p. 91). (But Freud was also – to his sorrow - immune to the pleasure of music). Do we go to sonic extremes in some kind of explicit enactment of a Freudian pleasure principle? For even in the case of relentless noise there's always the possibility of being released by a sudden system panic induced by endless demands. In sonic terms, extremes are most often sought in intensity of amplitude or frequency, measured in relation to the limits of human perception (significantly, the limits of conscious perception since the extreme that goes beyond this is ultrasonic). Roughly translated to more overtly musical vocabulary this means extremes of loudness and pitch, and also extremes of timbre, rhythm and tempo (thumping techno meets Glenn Gould's race through Bach). And Merzbow's music is extremely loud. In performance – when I heard him at least - it can be very loud indeed. Painfully loud. Sensationally loud. But listening to a CD, you can set the knob where you will and the noise will still immerse you. I read one listener's description of playing Merzbow at low volume to 'clear his mind'. So there must be other extremes at work.

Sometimes we don't want to make ourselves too comfortable. I've got another extreme here, let's try it on for size: too still, too quiet, too uneventful, too loud, too long, too short....it's the 'too' that's extreme here. Although 'too' is different for each of us, surely there comes an extreme point where most of us would agree to 'too' as

indicating the approach towards an unwanted, and therefore noisy, line. And if 'too' looks back to some kind of normality which has been transgressed, to enjoy 'too' is to indulge in the illicit and go too far. Merzbow's *Loop Panic Limited* is 'too' long – it occupies an entire CD – and his works are 'too' much – he recently brought out a 50 CD boxset.

Extremities can enforce stillness. This can be the blissful stillness of having no time at all, or it can be something less savoury. Drones, loops and other sonic invitations to stillness crop up in everything from La Monte Young to techno, Arabic improvisation to trance. Douglas Kahn documents how 'during a highly amplified La Monte Young concert... it was not people talking in the audience that disturbed him but people moving. He stopped the performance to berate two people who had begun to move with the music and explained later that he needed to set an example to instruct people on the discipline needed for listening' (Kahn, 1999 p. 233). Noise music has a slightly different (but not unrelated) approach to discipline. It fixates us by exerting control while promising ecstatic release. But the stillness that can arise from being immersed in noise is not, for instance, the ecstatic listening to Arabic music improvisation, which arises from deep knowledge and appreciation of creative 'finesse' on the part of both the listener and the performer. 'Japanese Noise relishes the ecstasy of sound itself.' (Merzbow, 'The Beauty of Noise' web interview). Certainly the repetitions of *Loop Panic Limited* are perceptible, and enduring enough to encourage a trance listening. But just as it's getting 'too comfortable' another, more brutal loop begins. Listening is held in bondage.

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(Heinritzi 2001, p. 31)

p.222)

(Sontag, 1982,

p.110)

(Zizek, 1992,

(Heinritzi, 2001, p. 32)

(Sontag, 232) You can't see nothing

(Zizek, 1992, p. 110)

(Sontag, 1982, p. 231)

(Heinritzi, 2001, p. 32) (my italics)

---

**Immersed in intensity:** If we are immersed listeners, made 'impersonal' and still by Merzbow's relentless noise, perhaps also we are re-energised by the intensity of the sonic 'liquid' that surrounds us. Intensity is a measure of energy, in sonic terms it is a subjectively perceived quality, felt as an increase in perceived loudness. The intensity of sound is measured by the SPL (Sound Pressure Level) which also takes account of timbre, duration and other factors (Gordon, in Roads, 1999, p.1055). Noise is, or can



## (1) ENDNOTES

(Just what is it that makes yesterday's songs so different, so appealing?)

Records and recording as electronic music.  
(Featuring some popular appropriations)

/NB: 5 blank lines between text here (what comes around goes around) /

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## (2)

### MAKE YOURSELF COMFORTABLE

Lyrics Bob Merrill, Rylan Music Corp. (ASCAP).

Track 3 on *Sarah Vaughan's Golden Hits*

Duration 2:38

Prepared for Compact Disc by Richard Seidel and Paul Ramey

Digitally Remastered by Dennis Drake

824-891-2 Mercury

(CD copyright 1990 PolyGram Records Inc)

First entered the Cash Box Top 50 Week ending November 20<sup>th</sup>, 1954.

The perfect choice to be playing in the background of Richard Hamilton's Pop art photomontage, *Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing?* (1956). His notorious collage appropriates images from contemporary advertising as a parody of the post-war obsession with gadgets and household appliances, symptomatic of the new enthusiasm for technology and material objects. Everyone's sitting comfortably now.

---

INTRO (it's a cover version)

---

3)

If you keep to the left, chapter 8 becomes the endnotes for chapter 7. But then *again*, Chapter 8's opening is also a parody of chapter 7's introduction. So you've heard it all before. But still you're going to have to decide which of those trajectories to follow, or whether to flip from one to the other. It's just a matter of context.

Of course, I hope you'll recognise something familiar in all this reconstruction (otherwise it hasn't worked). I'm relying on you to turn the pages between now and then.

---

So here's the deal for chapter 8:

Several things are going to reappear. There are three 'Takes' on three familiar examples. These clues lead to three other places (see below).

(Stay with me. I try to be what I'm about,  
in a roundabout manner)

Eventually you'll come across three short essays that talk about some examples of appropriation. There are a couple of mainstream pop hits and one popular operatic diva. My three hit selections are neither an academic survey of the plunderphonic aesthetic, nor an enthusiast's record collection. If anything I've just nicked some favourite examples, to show just how idiosyncratic the reasons for appropriating a recording can be. On a personal level, I'm interested in thinking about pieces that - in their different ways - keep me hanging on. Listening to them, I get the music - and locate new meaning in things I thought I knew.

The endnotes between these essays may have been 'previously enjoyed' by the preceding chapter but now that they're second-hand, I see no reason why they can't also be used to think about recording, sampling, and models for musical composition that might have started life elsewhere.

But first, here's something I prepared earlier.

*(Ooh, ooh. Make yourself comfortable)*

**Ooh, ooh..ooh. Make yourself comfortable**

**Ooh, ooh..ooh etc repeated by Richard scale to put yourself comfortable**

**I feel romantic and the dance**  
**Left before to put yourself comfortable baby**  
*(brass wah, swooping strings, slow brushed cymbal beat)*

**AGAIN Take ONE.** (see definition below)  
There's a pleasure in spotting a secret steal.  
It makes us feel so darned ...well, *clever* to  
have spotted the clips from the favourite  
songs, or the cheesy rock opera lyrics  
embedded in some worthy academic prose (I hope  
you scored full points for Chapter 7). We  
appreciate the familiarity, we appreciate the  
difference, we appreciate the appropriation  
and we appreciate our appreciation of all  
this. In some of the more esoteric sampling  
repertoire, there's a hell of a lot of mutual  
appreciation to digest. (Re-evaluation of  
this kind can be a rather smug regurgitation).

And then again sometimes our enjoyment is far  
more earthy and juvenile: we can be reduced to  
laughing hysterics by the wrong playback  
speed. In the groove between 'is this Dolly  
Parton?' and 'is that really how it's meant to  
go?!' there's some room for having a giggle.  
**(see ESSAY: On 'again' - TAKE 1)**

*(Ooh, ooh ooh make yourself comfortable*  
*I've got some time for size)*  
**The phone is off the hook so no one can**  
**intrude**  
ooh. Make Yourself comfortable baby  
*ooh. Make yourself comfortable*  
Ooh, ooh ooh etc repeated by Richard

---

**(4)**

**YOU'RE THE ONE THAT I WANT**

By John Farrar.

A number 1 hit in 1978 for by Olivia Newton John and John Travolta.

Soundtrack to the film, *Grease* (a musical set in the 1950s)

Two 12" LPs (USA: RSO 4002) (July 1978)

Two 12" LPs (UK: RSO RSD 2001) (1991)

CD (USA: Polydor 825 095-2) (March 1998)

Digitally Remastered CD (USA Polydor 825 095-2)

***You're The One That I Want***

Cover version sung by Arthur Mullard and Hylda Baker, two veteran UK TV comics in their seventies. Reached number 8 in the charts before flopping spectacularly. Now chiefly remembered – if at all - for their humiliatingly bad performance on the UK TV pop show, *Top of the Pops*.  
(video clip at [http://www.bbc.co.uk/totp/videoclips/gallery\\_b.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/totp/videoclips/gallery_b.shtml))

---

**AGAIN Take TWO.** (see below)

While spotting the straightforward steal is one thing, enjoying the mangled travesty is also fun.

Those comfortable Golden Hits come round again. If you read the last chapter, you'll have seen it all before, but have you noticed the way things have changed? Sarah Vaughan now duets with Travesty, a program by Bertil Homberg that analyses and then reassembles text. The reconstruction attempts some grammatical rules and lets the user define how random things are going to get. Of course, I've also had a directorial role in deciding what bits I offer you to read. I'm the composer here. You want to make something out of that?

(If you do, at the time of writing you can download Travesty and some other textual goodies, *gratis*, at [www.burningpress.org/toolbox/](http://www.burningpress.org/toolbox/)).

In the groove between 'is this familiar?' and 'has there been a change?' there's some room for trying to figure out the difference. And because it takes a length of time to do that, this attempt could be music of one kind or another.

**(see ESSAY: on 'again' - TAKE 2)**

**I feel romantic and through the dance**

Left before to put yourself comfortable baby  
(*brass wah, swooping strings, slow brushed  
cymbal beat*)

Ooh, ooh make yourself comfortable  
**The phone is off the verself comfortable**

---

(5)

**I'VE GROWN ACCUSTOMED TO HER FACE**

(From *My Fair Lady*) Lerner/Loewe original recording: 1956 Original Broadway  
Cast with Rex Harrison (almost) singing. There are numerous cover versions of  
this song, many of them by female singers who generally – but not always - change  
the words to conform to heterosexual expectations. ('to His Face').  
But not all.

***I've Grown Accustomed to Her Face.***

*Marlene Dietrich in Rio.* Musical Supervision by Burt Bacharach (Bras.CBS  
1959) 15910.

---

**AGAIN Take THREE.** (see below)

And then again, poking gentle fun at popular  
icons has some rewards worth recording. The  
revered celebrity with the inescapable voice  
and the enduring following can be quite  
unstoppable. Her picture's on all the  
records, and even now she's lurking in the  
charts. Her voice is in the cultural  
background as the definitive diva. Perhaps  
there's some mileage in getting her to sing  
again, simultaneously knocking that reverence  
on the head.

In the groove between 'is this homage?' and  
'is this ridicule?' there's some room for  
comparison. It takes a moment to decide, 'this  
is'. During that length of time – (a familiar  
refrain) – there's room to start a record  
collection.

**(see ESSAY: on 'again' - TAKE 3)**

(duet)

**Hurry through the dance**

**Ooh, ooh make your dinner** (*first two lines  
doubling strings, slow brushed cymbal beat*)

**Ooh, ooh. Make yourself comfortable**

Ooh, ooh make off the phone is off the  
records here to **put yourself comfortable**

(6)

## IT TAKES TWO

(S. Moy, W. Stevenson)

The original version, recorded by Marvin Gaye & Kim Weston in 1967, reached number 14 in the Billboard Hot 100.

There are numerous cover versions, one of the most apparently incongruous couplings being Tina Turner's duet with Rod Stewart, produced by Rod Stewart and Kim Weston and recorded on Tina Turner's, *Simply The Best* (1991). (Marvin was no doubt turning in his grave).

---

*You have to play it again. The success of a parody is dependent on our familiarity with the source. Mainstream music - in particular those golden oldies or classical music hits - provides a glut of recognisable material to play about with through the medium of recorded sound. Those old sounds are always easy prey for taking a pop at mass media culture, or for making a knowing nod (we're talking nostalgia not remix virtuosity here). And there's a strange attraction too. (A knock-on effect). After all, you've got to admire something just that little bit if you want to take the cultural icon and expose it to ironic recontextualisation.*

Ooh, ooh make you in the hook so no one is  
off the records herself comfortable  
I feel romantic and kissakissakiss wah, ooh  
ooh..ooh..ooh etc repeat)  
Ooh, ooh make Yourself comfortable  
I've got soothing string string cadence)

### AGAIN (some definitions)

(see Take 1, above) 'in addition to a previously mentioned quality'  
(as in John Oswald? Essay 1)  
(see Take 2, above) 'on the other hand'  
(as in Terre Thaemlitz? Essay 2)  
(see Take 3, above) 'in return or response(archaic)'  
(as in Robert LePage and Martin Tetrault? Essay 3)

(repeats) keep going!(as a character yells in  
Berio's *Sinfonia*)

---

(7)

**GOOD LOOKIN'**

(Say, hey good lookin', what you got **cookin'** ?)

Hank Williams. Recorded on *Hank Williams* (MGM 10961, 1951)

***Good Lookin'***

on *Hank Williams, Jr. Sings Hank Williams, Sr. as featured in the film; Your Cheatin' Heart* (a biopic of Hank Williams) recorded 1964, re-issued on CD, Rhino Records, 1998. Hank Williams's grandson has also recently rebranded himself as Hank Williams III (previous connections are worth cashing in on)

---

Listen...

You want to try that again?

Behind the joshing familiarity, the silly word games, the pretence, pretension and the textual fragmentation, I'm trying for some kind of understanding. This writing is an experiment, and it's a very personal one that inevitably goes up some blind alleys. We can always double back.

---

(8)

**AIN'T MISBEHAVIN'**

(by Andy Razaf and Thomas 'Fats' Waller). Featured in Broadway musical called 'Connie's Hot Chocolates', 1929, where it was sung by 'Satchmo'. Waller recorded the song with his Orchestra in 1929 and 1938, and with the All Stars in 1947 and 1955. ([tinpan.fortunecity.com/riff/11/frame/a1.html](http://tinpan.fortunecity.com/riff/11/frame/a1.html))

***Aint misbehavin'***

on *Songs I Wish I Had Sung the First Time Around* (Decca) recorded 1956. Bing Crosby with the Jack Pleis Orchestra. A whiter shade of chocolate...

---

**Ooh, ooh. Make yourself comfortabled through  
the verself comfortable baby**  
(brass wah, ooh make yourself comfortable  
baby  
ooh etc records herself comfore to put  
yourself comfore to put you in the phone  
cadence)

Maybe, to misquote John Cage, this is indeed an experiment because 'I don't know exactly what I'm doing'. I don't particularly mind, and hope you won't either (this is a personal address). It's a risk, but, after all, we're nearly at an end. And it's customary to look back at that point, before making sage projections for the future. So I thought I'd steal that idea, since this whole book is about looking back and forth through music.

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(9)

## AT THE HOP

Danny and the Juniors, 1957 (written by Danny and the Juniors, recorded on Singular). One of the all-time hits of rock and roll, buoyantly capturing the atmosphere of youthful verve and exuberance that characterised the optimism of the post-war years.

As of 2002, Danny and the Juniors are still performing *At the Hop* and other hits, and you can hire them for corporate events and retirement dinners. They are a little less junior now, perhaps even a travesty of their former selves.

"Thank you for making out tournament fun, enjoyable and successful"  
Al Carmosino - Rocky Mountain Italian Golf Association  
(from [www.dannyandthejuniors.com](http://www.dannyandthejuniors.com))

I doubt their current audience can hop.

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/These cover versions turn a few pages between serious and pop  
(a flippantly kitsch connection...)/

Comfortable?

Or...

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(10)

## ALL SHOOK UP

originally recorded by Elvis Presley. Released 1957.

Music and lyrics by Otis Blackwell and Elvis Presley. Produced by Steve Sholes on RCA.

There's a shaken but not stirred cover version on *Elvis goes Baroque* performed by Peter Breiner and his Orchestra (in Bratislava) 1995 (Naxos) - *Concerto grosso I* featuring trumpet: **All shook up**. Can't help falling in love, Help me make it through the night, If I can dream, Don't be cruel.

---

Be cruel, bare your listening! Dare to be uncomfortable, distracted,  
confused, even if you think you've heard it all before.  
Something may change, beyond all recognition.

Ooh make  
(cre yough ooh, one Youghts hur swooping shed  
ing st sin for stried comfords Goldence  
I've dan ford comfords .....ooh..ood  
ooh, ooh, ooh soothe put bable  
Ooh.....ooh.  
Make brushe Yourself cat)  
I'some  
od mak y s conte y  
Le k aketoono... oursse you hef ow mery

Hictah... lffefosth (t sh 38  
Wh w  
I've bles  
oomar?)  
Tonoryooman've  
Tough (c)

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(11)

***Can't Get You Out of My Head*** (written by Cathy Dennis/Rob Davis) was a worldwide hit for Kylie Minogue in late 2001, staying in the charts for over 4 months - a length of time more usual in the 1950s, when hits hung around and popstars were vinyl rather than visual personalities. The video of this song is a paean to an uncomfortably voyeuristic approach to representing a sexuality that prioritises sight – revealing clothes, retro-futuristic dance group and the obligatory shots of her famously pert behind. The release of the song coincided with the aftermath of the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001, and Kylie was swiftly adopted as a rather more salacious re-appropriation of the 'force's sweetheart', visiting troops and bucking morale like some parody of Vera Lynn. Nevertheless, Kylie's appeal as a heterosexual cover girl doesn't mute her pink power as a gay icon. Her familiar image is different things to different people.

Without the pop video, Kylie would not be where she is today. In the 1980s, at the start of the digital revolution, she made an unusually successful move from soap-star to international popstar. Yet really she made a well-timed transition from one visual medium to another. Sound had very little to do with it.

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/that's enough foolery.  
(can we return?)/

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(12)

**'In my mind and in my car,  
we can't rewind we've gone too far.'**

***Video Killed the Radio Star*** by The Buggles, from the album *The Age of Plastic*, 1979, written by Geoff Downes, Trevor Horn and Bruce Wolley.

**ESSAY: On 'again' - TAKE 1**  
***There's noise at the end of the track***  
(I feel romantic and the record changes automatically)

(digital vinyl)

*Crackle*, the last track of John Oswald's *Plunderphonics* CD, might seem an odd place to start because it comes at the end. This short recording consists of a 6 second sample of 'record noise', which includes three 'bips' as the needle audibly encounters the vinyl. The duration, the number of bips, and their regularity, is precisely enough listening information to define 33 revolutions a minute, the appropriate speed for an LP record. *Crackle* is a compact essay in retrospection that speaks all the louder for its context. In this essay - embedded in its own context - I'd like to dwell on this sample of noise at the end of the track.

This is a sound that digital technology snatched away. Now, after the last CD track, there is nothing but an abrupt return to normality. Listening to vinyl, for those of us who remember, there was always some kind of finishing up: we heard the sound of the record going round, the stylus traversing the groove, and finally the lift and clunk of the returning arm. The record needle sounds the nick of time while the end of the CD is a silent jolt, back into the void of everyday listening. And unless we shuffle the playback (and perhaps even then) the last track of the CD will always be a finale - the sound that precedes the moment when listening returns to clock time. But the last track of a record doesn't labour under the same responsibility; it will always be followed by that familiar noise at the end of the track, providing not so much a barrier as a border crossing from one state to another. This small mechanical performance gently moves us back and forth - here we are, we are arrived at the end of the journey of listening to the recording. Get ready to disembark, you have been given some time to prepare.

Of course this is to romanticise the allure of the analogue, when too often such noise is obtrusive (why else would we have embraced digital sound with such relieved enthusiasm?). But this kind of romantic nostalgia is at present a familiar groove, expressed by many who cut their

listening teeth on CD technology. Perhaps the current cult amongst (overwhelmingly male) electronica performers for using 'antique' analogue equipment, and the reverence they show towards electronic music that dates from that era (early Schaeffer, Henry, Stockhausen etc) has something in common with the concurrent 'camp' enthusiasm for the popular music and fashion of the 1950s. Timothy Taylor sees the latter as a 'way of voicing our own era's disillusionment with the promises of technology' and also, more disturbingly, 'about the male anxiety over what has happened to authority of the male in the late twentieth century... ..intimately connected to questions about domestic space and technology in the 1950s' (Taylor, 2001, p. 104).

So the noise at the end of the record is a long-range comforter in sociological terms - something for little boys to hold on to? But it also comforts our ears. This remembered sound that some do not even remember, reminds us that all that preceded was (but) a recording. We knew this, but this technological riff lures us into an indulgent appreciation of knowing it. It warms us to the nostalgia of listening to the past. Listening may have been a transport of delight but we're now reminded that it was also enabled by a transport of cogs, drives, wires, rotations and electrical impulses. And while the turntable may have been resituated in a public forum ('DJs resocialized the turntable: music sounded by turntables at parties brings people together. (Taylor, 2001, p. 204)) the intimate 'crackle' of vinyl is still the antithesis to the performance of the 'scratch'.

That crackle can be a nifty little theatrical trick to borrow. That sound of the record going around, and in particular the sound of its ending, is regularly appropriated to make reference to listening to music and, more specifically, to time. The record player arm that thumps unheard against the spindle is a thriller cliché. For some unfortunate victim - no doubt lying bloody on the floor beside it - time had stopped in its tracks. A less frequent appropriation, the sound of the tape machine, and the tape being rewound and stopped, has a more functional connotation.

One can own a load of tapes, but a record 'collection' is something that carries more weight. The vinyl's crackle has an association with old or 'archive' recordings and by extension, with a disappeared but we presume, valued experience. But it also alludes more generally to the intimate familiarity of 'domestic' or personal listening - at home, in comfort - alone, or with friends. Aggravating the distance between these two associations - archive and personal- can be a powerful way to exploit our close relationship with the recorded past. George Katzer's *Aide Memoire*, originally released in 1983 on vinyl, and now on CD, is a collage made from archive recordings of nazi speeches and fascist songs. The crackle of the documentary recording here revives an horrific remembering of sound, brought right into the comfort of your home.

The domestic consumption of recorded music is more

commonly a CD listening experience at present. But in comparison to the record player, the CD machine itself doesn't offer such poetically resonant mechanics - it is largely silent. (And this silence extends to visual associations: a film close-up of a CD player's numerical display is never going to have the affective power of the record-arm moving across the LP). Moreover the CD is not tactile in the same sense as vinyl: its medium is physically hidden while it plays, and to make the machine's mechanics audible - hot-wiring the laser or reprogramming the shuffle - requires a more self-conscious invasion than spinning a disk. Whereas scratching subverts the record-deck's original function, hot-wiring just breaks the machine. Nic Collins' *Broken Light* (1991) for string quartet and hot-wired CD player allows the players to interact with looped playback of Baroque string music CDs. The aural effect is definitely one of 'looped digital sound', but is not particularly indicative of any particular technology (it could be looped from sampler or hard disk).

Oswald's brief crackle - which is the last track on a CD - alludes to all these analogue to digital conversions. But it also summarises a more stratified series of familiarities. This particular crackle is more than a plundered reference to the last sound on a record; it is itself the last in a series of sonic quotes and tropes.

*Plunderphonics* became notorious as the CD that provoked the threat of a lawsuit from Michael Jackson (hardly surprising, even though a cover image grafting Jackson's head onto a naked woman's body might seem somewhat *less* disconcerting than his subsequent forays into plastic surgery). To summarise its history: Oswald blithely raided numerous well-known pop and some classical works, and subjected these recognisable icons to amusing, and deliberately irreverent processes. Many of the processes were themselves ironic 'appropriations' of recording techniques (for instance *Don't* takes an Elvis track and adds separate overdubbed instrumental parts in the manner of a multitrack studio recording - but here the individual instrumentalists did not hear the other tracks while they recorded, and are consequently somewhat out of sync).

Though Oswald distributed the CD for free (ostensibly in an attempt to evade copyright issues) the flack was inevitable, and no doubt sought (see Oswald, 1985)

Threatened with litigation, he agreed to destroy all remaining copies of the 'original' (the defining of what is the 'original' of a digital work engendered a new dilemma), but digital copies remain freely downloadable from various online sources. In its cacophonous journey

*Plunderphonics* has intentionally rattled a great many cages, assaulted and challenged the ethics of copyright, appropriation and artistic ownership and has brutally illuminated the limitations on artistic freedom posed by the economic weight of the commercial recording industry. (For lengthier discussion see, for example, Cutler, 1994; Polansky, 1998)

But *Plunderphonics*, and the aesthetic of 'plunderphonics' that takes this CD as its eponymous figurehead, differs in intent from numerous other works that appropriate sampled music.

'The definition I'd set up for 'plunderphonic' was music that was recognisable in some way, and the transformation of that music. I think the most successful examples use music that is the most recognisable. It's more delightful to me to have these pop figures, and by pop I also include Beethoven, as the working materials.'

(Oswald, online interview with Brian Duguid, 1994)

Every track on Oswald's *Plunderphonics* CD relies on your input - name that tune, and laugh at its new incarnation. You don't have to go out of your esoteric way to spot the difference. These sources are not only familiar, but have a familiar role (to anyone exposed to pop culture) as 'hit records' - all are 'classics' and none are contemporary releases. Before you've even started, you're dealing with the past - with *your* past, *our* past.

### CD [31] *White*, by John Oswald

'Bing Crosby sounds a little pink on our version of the best-selling single of all time. We've separated him from the chorus and let his tendency to wallow in melisma (melodic elaboration on a syllable) run amok. The 2nd half of this cut features an unprecedented collaboration between African Pygmies and a tango orchestra.'

(liner notes to *Plunderphonics*, [www.plunderphonics.com](http://www.plunderphonics.com) - click on 'u')

Bing Crosby on varispeed, his croon proliferating into a wavering wail that is sickening rather than seductive. A chorus similarly prone to nausea and eventually all the voices transposed to inhuman, or at least pygmy, heights. It's a playful, albeit juvenile, bit of experimentation that refers to the mechanics of the record-player (its rotation speed) and the transpositions made facile by 'new' sampling technology. Rather than erasure, Oswald's romp through pop's 'blasts from the past' provides a pop-art amplification. It turns the volume up on both the pop hit's surface appeal and the different lengths to which our familiarity with pop, and with recording, can be taken.

The cultural and political significance of Oswald's work is such that discussion of what he actually does with sound is hard to isolate: to quote Polansky, '*Plunderphonics* is not aesthetic piracy, but piracy as an aesthetic'. But Oswald has affectionate respect for his stolen cargo.

In general he admires and likes his sources, and doesn't seek their obliteration. Each of the tracks is an amused caricature rather than a character assassination. Oswald picks up on the essential sonic features of those hits - the things we 'know' - Bing's croon, James Brown's whooping machismo, the saturated string utopia of 'Somewhere Over the Rainbow', or the pointillistic non sequiturs of Webern's op. 10. He appropriates performance too - Glenn Gould's performance of the Goldberg Variations

is taken on a new line of flight by a computer-created re-performance that meanders into a random walk where pitches are in the right place at the wrong time.

While Merzbow 'pirates' the sounds and techniques of hardcore academic electrasonic music in his *Batzoui with Material Gadgets* (De-Composed Works 1985-86) and describes the result, with noisy irony, as 'Fake Electro Acoustic Music Dedicated to GRM/INA, WERGO, DEUTSCHE GRAMMOPHON, PHILIPS&ERATO RECORDING ARTISTS', Oswald's gentle subversion aims at bigger prey.

'Listening to pop music isn't a matter of choice.  
Asked for or not, we're bombarded by it.'  
(Oswald, 1985)

There's no getting away from it, so you might as well use it rather than be used by it. Every appropriation steals a little power.

And that crackle?

Oswald's crackle is a stolen moment with a specific agenda; it is the ending to end all endings, the quote to contextualise all quotes. As a musical joke it has the last laugh.

---

### (13)

'It did not need photography to show people what they looked like – the image itself might surprise them, but not the fact of a visual representation... ..But Edison, speaking of hearing the first recording he ever made, remarked 'I was never so taken aback in my life.' For no one before this moment could know what their voice sounded like.' (Chanan, 1995, p.137).

*But* - one has to be careful when interpreting quotations of any kind: in his haste to make a particular allusion, Chanan neglects to quote Edison in full. Here's the original:

'I was never so taken aback in my life - *I was always afraid of things that worked the first time.*'  
(Thomas A. Edison on hearing his voice played back to him from his first tin foil phonograph. From <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/edhtml/edsndhm.html>)

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### (14)

Philip Jeck's *Off the Record*, featured at *Sonic Boom - the Art of Sound* (27 April - 18 June 2000), Hayward Gallery, London, consisted of an installation for 72 old dansette and beaten up record players, set on timers to play records intermittently. Chalked inscriptions inside the lid of each record player provided individual slogans for life, time, and memories of music.

They're playing our song. And so we do seem to feel we can 'rewind' time, beyond experiencing 'memory' and onwards to the past – our past - itself. (But, happiness is just an illusion).

---

**ESSAY: On 'again' - TAKE 2**  
***It doesn't sound quite right***  
(somewhat nostalgic)

(don't go changing)

Sound recordings entice varying degrees of associative retrospection, whether it's the locating of effect and cause ('that's the sound of a door'), the identification of a place ('that's a street market'), or the frisson of a Carpenters' hit ('that's so seventies'). Some of our associations with sound are individual to us and some are going to be more generally to one or other cultural grouping.

If you know the melody, feel free to hum along (hey, I haven't heard this one for a while...) and off we'll go together, wallowing in the feelings of nostalgia; happiness and sadness, regret, and perhaps a trace of longing. It's yesterday once more (sha-la-la, la-la...).

Probably, our nostalgic response to mainstream pop hits is one of our least individual, and most ordinary, responses to sound. Besides specific personal associations (essentially memories stirred up by listening) there is the simple 'gratification' of recognising something familiar. We might not like - or have ever liked - that darned song, but we recognise its appeal. And its appeal is the fact that we know it. Nostalgia is a pleasurable sensation, one that softens us up and encourages us to wallow in a self-indulgent immersion. Our willingness to do so is easily exploited - currently, on UK TV, by a glut of cheap compilation programmes and recordings - *I love the 70s*, *I love the 80s* and even (in 2001 for goodness' sake!), *I love the 90s*.

But 'love' is not really the issue, although it can be a useful four-letter word to keep emotion at a tongue-in-cheek remove (don't you just love that kind of insincerity?). We love to love, but perhaps we no longer love to dance to those golden oldies - we're happy listening in from the sidelines, a little more leery this time around. Thankfully, I no longer encounter Donny Osmond's hits with the same squealing mindset as my pre-pubescent self, but if I inadvertently come across his adolescent tones my listening is in some part a remembered

cover version of a previous response. Unfortunately.  
Nostalgia requires distance.

Now, don't go underestimating the lure of the past. The thing with nostalgia is that part of us wants to go back (we don't feel nostalgic for bad times). But going back is bound to disappoint - hey, they've pulled down the cinema! Nostalgia has to be an unfulfilled desire because the desire is for the pleasurable pang of distance. Even if there's no getting away from its schmaltzy appeal, you can use that desire to advantage.

'In nostalgia... .. we have the illusion of "seeing ourselves seeing,"  
of seeing the gaze itself.'

(Zizek, 1992 p. 114)

The 'gaze' is a construct appropriated from Lacanian psychoanalysis by film theory, which then pursued the gaze as a gendered dynamic. The gendered film 'gaze' makes the implicit assumption of a film spectator's identification with the male protagonist of traditional film. This voyeuristic 'male gaze' views the passive female 'object'. This is to make a cursory summary of a large area. In any case the 'male gaze' is certainly not the only way to look at it (see Paglia, 1998 for a vociferously alternative view). Nostalgia lets us take a good look at ourselves; we catch ourselves having another peek. It can show us just how far we've travelled on life's long journey (it feeds off greeting-card sentiments like this - but of course you know those sepia snapshots are faked?). Maybe that tantalising 'illusion of "seeing ourselves seeing"' that Zizek describes can extend to listening too. So I'll just borrow it for a while.

Or should I? The language of visual culture doesn't necessarily throw much light on sound - a sonic gesture described in visual terms appropriates a voice that may be struck dumb in the process. Too often the vocabulary of one discourse doesn't travel well when applied to another, or unhelpfully becomes a different thing altogether. Perhaps it even *restricts* our understanding of sound to speak - and think - of pink, white and grey noise. Since when did digital sound processing come with a kiddies paint palette, and who chose that decor? On a grander scale, when one ideology tries to speak through the methods of another there's always the danger that neither side will understand a word of it. Worse, both may *think*, wrongly, that they know what the other is saying. At its very worst this lazy intertextuality is a useless appropriation of someone else's toys. Academic writing on electroacoustic music regularly borrows terminology from phenomenology and information science. Sometimes this fashionable predilection seems to spring from a desire to slap on 'scientific' credence, rather than an urge to hack out new and wider routes. But on a clear day, the cross-

disciplinary sharing can be illuminating; it can really sing (as a light goes on with an audible 'ping').

In landing these sidelong glances at golden oldies, nostalgia and cross-synthesized ideas I'm meandering towards an encounter with a song.

Polemic over? Oh no, polemic just beginning - but in other words:

'Statistical: Edit, filter and resynthesize a 'politically regressive' pop standard so that the end result presents a restructuring of the original sound source while triggering an overtly nostalgic desire for that source.

Rationale: "I Love You Just the Way You Are" by Billy Joel, was chosen for its general ability to evoke a pleasant sense of nostalgia, as well as for its historical lack of appeal as an 'anti-Feminist' anthem against concepts of change. A resistance to social change may be fuelled more by a fear of unfamiliarity than any conspiratorial malice of cultural consensus that things are 'fine as they are.' Similarly, direct action groups must typically develop discourses primarily in response to their oppositions' fears of cultural loss (the threat of lower material and/or ethical qualities of life) rather than simply engaging 'positive' desires for social and/or personal betterment. In order for resistance to resign itself to change, resisters must find some semblance of their current objectives within new communal initiatives. Therefore, the long term impact of social change seems to involve transformations which engage nostalgia, rather than radical historical breaches of context which may result in repressed desires that erupt in conservative backlashes. The difficulty lies in adapting deconstructive discourses which evoke a sense of nostalgia sufficient to establish familiarity without overwhelming the resulting scenario with a desire for the past.'

(Terre Thaemlitz, liner notes for *Resistance to Change*)

**CD[32] CD[33] 'Resistance' and 'Transformative nostalgia'  
- excerpts: movements 2 and 4 of *Resistance to Change*, by  
Terre Thaemlitz**

If 'don't' is the negative rallying cry of the arch-conservative - keeping the status quo - 'change' is the positive shift from one state to another. And nostalgia is one way to rub those two up against each other. Terre Thaemlitz is someone who has chosen to try and make that friction sound. The text above is the written component of his work, *Resistance to Change*. These words are the explanation of both how and why, and the sonic component of *Resistance to Change* is created by the means he describes (in four short sections each using Joel's hit as one of their source materials).

The sonic element is the result of the interaction of a computer-spoken activist text and a popular song (as an 'anti-Feminist' anthem in Thaemlitz' interpretation, the

song is the polar opposite of any desire for change). The four short sections to the work present the results of the cross-synthesis of these two sources in different ways - most explicitly in the vocal resynthesis of the first section, 'Commentary', and the presentation of the residual sounds that are generally discarded in vocal resynthesis, in the second, 'Resistance'. The written notes for each section refer elliptically to both the techniques used to create the sound and the ideas that these sounds become representative of. Because this is a piece where sound manipulation techniques, and specifically digital ones, enable the realisation of Thaemlitz' intent: the processes that create the music themselves become allegorical of the call for social change (and the way to achieve it) expressed by a Marxist text.

To speak of 'colouring' a sound by filtering it is to employ an analogy to explain the way we perceive the audible result, whereas filtering considered as restructuring refers more directly to the means of achieving a formal change. Morphological descriptions serve analysis of electroacoustic music quite well (e.g. Smalley 1986), perhaps since these ideas centre on form and structure rather than specific properties picked up by sensory perception, such as colour or texture. Cross-synthesis - when the shape of one sound is used to filter the profile of another, provides a result where the way in which form has changed can be deduced: the appeal of hearing the sound of speech cross-synthesized with the sound of water is that we comprehend the nature of the restructuring through some kind of 'before' and 'after' comparison. The nature of the change that has taken place is audible (it can be conjectured from aural clues). Our appreciation of the change relies on the fact that there is something familiar about this strange new object.

I want to labour this point because I think Thaemlitz achieves something that is still quite extraordinary, and that is to create a truly digital work (as distinct from a work merely realised through digital media). The techniques of digital signal processing become allegorical symbols. And because these symbols are dynamic (both the process and perception of cross-synthesis occupy time) they can participate in an aurally realised allegory that is itself temporal. And that is a very interesting kind of music.

'The difficulty, or I guess I should say challenge, is to reconcile the literalness of written text with what might typically be ambiguously-defined abstract electroacoustic audio. I never want my texts or graphics to be simply reiterations of the audio... I want each component... .. to contribute somewhat different discourses around a common theme.'

(Thaemlitz online interview with Christopher Strunz)

The appropriation of a MOR hit is only the most overt of his borrowings. Other borrowings - or rather re-directings

- are appropriated from our listening; the nostalgia we feel towards the familiar song, the active deciphering to explain the dynamics of sonic processes and the way we'll always listen out for some sense of development. The last section's fragmentary re-mixing of a significant phrase from the song, with words continually cut off mid flow, frozen harmony, and no sense of going anywhere, leaves you almost crying out for change.

*Resistance to Change* as a purely sonic experience is incomplete - the first thing to do on listening is look at the liner notes to see what it's 'about' - but it is not merely a sonic illustration of a written text, or a setting of a spoken one. The sound does not depict, its role is richer than that, because it pulls us towards a different relationship with the words. We go back and forth between abstract sonic processes and linear text. But this is not an electroacoustic work that plays with the sonic content of the voice as an appealing, abstracted source, because the meaning of the words (not the voice) is hugely significant. Yet neither is it a setting of a text - since the written text is not *interpreted* by sound. Sound is just one stratum in this discourse's delivery.

Perhaps Thaemlitz's work makes a covert change in its definition of music. Music here is an exposition of ideas, a composed, sequential 'out loud' exploration of thinking that has an opinion to communicate. Perhaps this is music as listen-able prose. It sounds like a good read.

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### (15)

'the medium is the message' (McLuhan, 1964). The slogan has a nice rhythmic lilt that perhaps has contributed to it ringing, sometimes mindlessly, through the curricula of numerous Media Studies courses.

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### (16)

'... two typical slogans that pervade American advertising. The first, widely used by Coca-Cola but also frequent as a hypolic formula in everyday speech, is "the real thing"; the second, found in print and heard on TV, is "more" - in the sense of "extra".' (Eco, 1990, p.7)

Umberto Eco's virtuoso essay on his journeys around the USA, during which he hunted out theme parks, wax work museums, replicas of 'The Last Supper' and other surreal experiences of reproduced art, offers some more reflection on going that bit further than the real thing. The tacky reproductions that he visits and provides commentary on are bizarre examples of a desire for 'owning' something 'even better' than the real thing, and of making improvements on originality - with excesses of one kind or another.

(17)

But temporarily inhabiting someone else's being – rather than merely adopting their persona – is a state of becoming we can 'be' in fantasy: *Being John Malkovich* (1999, Universal Pictures, dir. Spike Jonze) had a surreal plot involving the ability to 'rent out' Malkovich's head and thus allow paying punters to become him on a temporary basis. The film sold itself with the promotional slogan: 'Ever wanted to be someone else? Now you can.'

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**ESSAY: On 'again' – TAKE 3**  
***And finally, a diva who won't stop singing***  
(I've got some records here to put you in the mood)

(for ensemble with worm)

Maria Callas is reputed to have followed a rather gruesome 1950s weight-loss fad, involving the ingestion of a live tapeworm. It's hard to imagine how it would have felt to inhale, tighten that formidable diaphragm to support the production of that extraordinary, strong voice while all the time internally, that squiggling parasite was hoiking itself about in the intestines, eating away. In 1954 (the same year that Sarah Vaughan - 'The Divine One' - was making herself comfortable) 'La Divina' apparently had to have the tapeworm's head surgically removed from her body.  
What an alarming ensemble.

But I digress, in a way. Actually, a diva doesn't need to take such drastic action to accomplish a physical disappearing act. All she needs to do is to do is sing into the microphone while someone presses 'record'. And after that, the voice takes on a disembodied, independent life. Not quite immortality, but getting there. And the record is going to be divine, for those who worship vinyl.

*Callas: La Diva et Le Vinyle* is a collaboration between two Montréal-based musicians - Martin Tétrault (on turntables), Robert M. Lepage (on clarinet) and also features Maria Callas (on disembodied voice). The tapeworm doesn't appear. But there are quite a few other people who do, because in fact this CD is quite a production. I feel bound to list the additional members of the cast:

Original idea: Réal La Rochelle  
Conception: Réal La Rochelle, Raymond Gervais, Robert M. Lepage, Martin Tétrault  
Music: Robert M. Lepage, Martin Tétrault (together or individually)

Recording, mixing and montage: Robert Langlois, Studio  
270.

Mastering: Jim Rabchuk  
Photos: Bertrand Carrière  
Text: Réal La Rochelle  
Translation: Terry Knowles  
Graphics: Nicole Morisset

I think that's everyone accounted for.

But the music is essentially a performance by LePage, Tétrault and ...well, not Callas exactly. In 16 short movements, the two performers play about with Callas recordings, variously transformed (ridiculed?) by Tétrault's turntable manipulation and imitated (mocked?) by LePage's clarinet riffs. Things go back and forth in an unpretentious fashion during which time the Diva's inimitable tones are made to swoop, speed up and slow down, now high, now in a farcical basso profundo. The introduction of an Italian language class record, and applause and audible adulation (presumably taken off original 'live' recordings) provides a few extra laughs. The clarinet improvisation is largely melodic and quite straightforward, and there is a real sense of a listening, improvising ensemble in action. To my ears it comes across as slightly dysfunctional contemporary parlour music. There is, as with much improvisation I think, an element of hermeneutic exploration, but the result is both intimate and outgoing.

But there's also a little dissimulation going on here too. This CD has the air of being a recording of a performance (a performance that entails the appropriation of recordings of another performance). But in fact there has been quite a bit of mixing, montage and additional creative work outside the 'live' improvisation. Although all CDs of recorded instrumental music have post-production input, the CD is still a 'proxy' for a live performance. Here it isn't. *La Diva et Le Vinyle* is a CD work that stands complete as it is, while playing with all those 'recorded music' associations.

It's not only the sound that is presented with a bit of fakery. The object itself is meticulous in design. The CD is charmingly decorated to look like a (rather small) LP, the CD liner notes include interesting archive photographs, and photographs of LePage and Tétrault in mid-performance, all reproduced in a similarly sombre and authoritative monochrome. On the CD cover, Callas looks on via a single, imperious and unmistakable eye.

There is a lot of detail: the archive photographs are carefully annotated - three relating to Emil Berliner and his Montréal gramophone business (he set up EMI, for whom Callas recorded), an image of Callas, resplendent on the cover of the La Rochelle's book 'Callas l'opera du disque' and a photograph of the record cover of her final Montréal concert, 'the last concert by Callas in the West'. An interesting essay entitled 'Berliner, Callas, Montréal' is contributed by La Rochelle, in French and in English

translation. The CD is - as the essay makes clear - a 'tribute to the Diva's role in recording history', and also to the Montréal connection. The title of the CD was also the title of the original edition of La Rochelle's book. The date of the CD's release, 1997, coincides with the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Callas' death. This is truly a tribute to the disembodied diva.

So far so good - a piece of kitsch that promotes all kinds of Callas connections and has some fun in the mean time.

You can either enjoy its witty pretensions, or be aggravated by such apparent delusions of grandeur. Of the several interesting reviews of the CD around, one of the more searching appraisals picks up on an interesting ambiguity that, I agree, appears indicative of intent beyond mere parody:

'... perhaps this conventional musicality is all part of another kind of joke, a sort of meta-joke about making a record of opera diva cutups with a straight face. This is a genuine ambiguity for a lot of this disk, the confusion between irony and sincerity, and that too is something of a strength in comparison with all those earnestly wry referential works which tend to dissolve into kitsch.'

(Richard Cochrane, *Earscape* #3)

*La Diva et Le Vinyle* does seem to play a somewhat equivocal, dual role as both sincere celebration and ironic reinterpretation of the voice of Callas. But just how camp is this 'production'? And what exactly is the object of its appropriation? The appropriation of the recorded voice, and the association of a popular, revered icon is a given, but the practical appropriation of bits of vinyl points towards another silent steal. Any appropriation of a recorded song is an appropriation of the historical and cultural paraphernalia surrounding the recording. But a turntable artist has this directly to hand.

Although *Callas: la diva et le vinyle* requires nothing more than listening to make completely satisfying aural sense, it is more than sound. That spiral worm trace that inhabits the record is the gouged-out remains of a distant collaboration between a sounding body (no doubt swathed in full evening dress) and the technology that captured it, and set it in vinyl for future listening. Make another copy of that vinyl, or even dub it to CD, and you're still holding that trace.

So I'm not especially concerned with the aura of the 'original artwork' here. Walter Benjamin's notion is hauled up fairly regularly in encounters with the kind of music that exists only in recorded form; it surfaces in intellectual skirmishes around the 'problem' of the 'perfect digital copy', and anguish as to whether our CD cabinets are all stocked up with an aura-free original. I'd prefer to leave that dilemma for Michael Jackson's lawyers. But, in his influential essay (Benjamin, 1968) Benjamin proceeds from the 'the original' as opposed to

the reproducible artwork (essentially film and photography) towards a related reflection on the audience. The tools of mechanical reproduction also change artistic approach, and create a concomitant change in audience perception and desire.

I think Benjamin's thought has particular relevance for works for sound alone when he comes to consider film's ability to penetrate its subject (his metaphor being the cameraman going in close, as an invasive surgeon). His observations on how a mass audience exposure to the results of this shift of perspective changes expectations of art offers food for continuing thought, particularly with regard to our listening to works for sound alone. We are that mass audience, even when we are all sitting at home alone with only our CD player for company. To quote Benjamin: 'the desire of contemporary masses to bring things "closer" spatially and humanly... ..is just as ardent as their bent towards overcoming the uniqueness of every reality by accepting its reproduction' (Benjamin, 1968, p. 223).

What exactly is made more immediate by Tétrault's real-time machinations and LePage's response? Does *La Diva et Le Vinyle* bring Maria Callas 'spatially and humanly' closer to us? The turntable performer certainly dives in with the 'invasive' close-up hands of the aural 'surgeon'; Tétrault often cuts up, manipulates and otherwise distresses the vinyl itself. And the recorded voice of Callas is certainly made 'live' by this real-time manipulation. But it is the recorded voice, not Callas, that gets the treatment: the material transformation and its aural results, provide a performed commentary on 'recordings'. We hear 'the recording' - that fixed, historic relic - in the process of being brought back into the present.

You think this is going round and round in an ever-decreasing spiral? I fear you're right. It's hard to pin down just how Tétrault entices that parasitic behind-the-scenes addition from the vinyl. Perhaps this is because there are several distinct camera angles to consider (so any appearance of continuity will have to be a composite response).

### *Camera 1: Instrumental*

Some guy outside my window has been hacking down a tree all day. He has provided me with a useful analogy. The whine of his chainsaw sounds almost human. Why? - because it's a continuous, almost vocal timbre and because the energy and rhythm of his effort is translated, directly, into sonic terms - via the response of the saw's machinery. When he has to put in more effort, the sound slides up in pitch; when he releases the pressure or meets resistance the sound slows and goes down. The shape and duration of these coloratura phrases is defined by the

task in hand, and the performer's physical ability. The sonic gestures I hear seem to have a 'human' contour, to my mind (because I am trying to bring the sound humanly, if not spatially, closer).

As an instrument the turntable can be similarly responsive to nuances of pressure, texture, and touch that create their analogue in sculpted sound - it's an interface that a hard-pressed pianist might envy. And the relationship of the human performer - Tétrault - to his instrument - the turntable - is direct, generally tactile and expert. If he slows down a recording of Beethoven, or slows down a recording of a bus, both will make a sliding descent to a halt, both will sound like 'human' gestures in that respect. (You don't necessarily need to put anything on the platter: Otomo Yoshihide's 'Solo for turntable and guitar amp' is a searingly aggressive example of performing the turntable itself).

### **Camera 2: Following the shot.**

Of course, Tétrault is using his physical gesture to extract a particular sound from his instrument - his Callas 'voice' - just as LePage is controlling the timbre of his clarinet. But while LePage moulds a sound that's under the control of a particular fingering, Tétrault sculpts a material that was already fixed in its own time. Now, set in motion by the stylus, that activated tapeworm vinyl groove acts out that time again. Controlling that involves a bit of a chase.

Because, for the most part, the recorded diva is not slotted into place as a object of sampled curiosity (though granted, on a couple of occasions she does get reduced to piping up fragments on the beat). No, the recording brings its own time, and Tétrault improvises with that past. That's quite an appropriation.

### **Camera 3: Hidden ritual.**

Early on in his essay, Walter Benjamin gives the example of a cave-painting as an 'instrument of magic'. He sees it an authentic artwork that retains the aura of ritual because although it can be viewed, it was not created to be viewed. The record of an 'historic archive recording' also has some aspect of that magic, I think. Of course, it was made to be listened to, but was also made - or has subsequently become - an object to be collected and revered for its place in history. Like the footage of Monroe singing, or Kennedy being shot, the 'historic recording' has significance for its collector as a ritual talisman that allows some kind of time travel, or at least some kind of ownership of 'fixated' past time.

The 'recording of Callas singing' is elevated beyond the actual sound of her disembodied voice to a position as a vinyl relic. The vinyl LP, and even its cover and packaging is important (even though this is itself a mass produced object, it is one that is of a time, and time cannot be mass produced). All these documentation, what it represents and what it preserves acquires its own aura. (The digital 'improvement' of old 'original recordings' is certainly an issue with regard to what is being removed along with hiss and pop).

These angles perhaps suggest some of the appropriations that come along for the ride when the voice of a disembodied diva sings. In *La Diva et Le Vinyle* the divinity of Callas, and the 'divinity' of the record are both debunked with humour. As we get further from the technology that made it, the LP is perhaps in danger of becoming even more revered - the object of a cult (whether the cult of DJ-ing or the cult of 'antique' collecting).

It seems odd to hear a record of an Italian language course now - reminding us that there was a time when vinyl was just the normal, functional way of recording and then playing back sound, rather than being constantly concerned with keeping it 'for the record'.

Edison may have reacted to the sound of the recorded voice with astonishment, but this CD work lets us react with a little more levity, but still it similarly directs us towards being 'astonished' by what technology can perform. It is not just Callas that becomes newly sounded, but the past as a subject for audible virtuosity.

**CD [34]Callaérobique (track 13 of *La Diva et Le Vinyle*)**

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**(18)**

Otomo Yoshihide's 'sampling virus' project, realised in one incarnation on his CD *The Night Before the Death of the Sampling Virus* consists, sonically, of 77 short compositions (the shortest being 1-second long) made from sampled recordings of Japanese commercials, TV, Movies etc. Yoshihide states that 'The original objective of developing this virus was for examining the condition of prejudice in Japan. However, end results will not always agree with the intents of the artist. This virus is known to ignore the artist's intention and attempt to behave according to its own will.' The 'viral' analogy he adopts extends to instructions to play the tracks in random order, to set tracks on repeat and to play copies of the CD on multiple machines. Lists of machines and technology employed take the role of conventional liner note explanation. A proliferation of mass media 'dross' is captured by sampling, and subjected to a creative destruction - both in structural terms and in terms of how one 'should' listen. Yoshihide's project perhaps encourages us to think about how we are listening to recontextualised sound, but the viral analogy remains primarily a metaphor referring to an individual artist's attitude to assembling material. The self-conscious reiteration 'The purpose...not to create a musical work'...'may sound like words, or appear to be music' is perhaps a gentle challenge concerning definitions. Unlike many

of Yoshihide's projects this CD is not itself an overt collaboration with a specific performer or performers, although the listener's collaboration – following instructions, or not- is invited from the start.

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### (19)

When high-powered number crunching emerged from the confines of mainframe computing and landed on the laptop, a whole candy-shop of 'generative music' software became explicitly available to a wider community of musicians and composers.

Proliferating, rule-based processes can be a useful broad-brush way of generating material that is textural, ambient or has ateleological stasis. It can result in inspired confluences of means and intent. The response to the tools of generative music can be naïve, but perhaps hints at the way a current zeitgeist - where the 'third culture', science, in particular biology and genetics, is the 'new intellectual thinking' - has perhaps rubbed of on the popular growth of these compositional tools. Or perhaps generative software citing has become the new techy trainspotting - now that it's no longer impressive to merely flash your hard-drive specs. It's easy to make a generative noise.

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### (20)

'We have assigned clever pseudonyms to prevent recognition. Why have we kept our own names? Out of habit, purely out of habit. To make ourselves unrecognisable in turn. To render imperceptible, not ourselves, but what makes us act, feel and think. ... .. We are no longer ourselves. Each will know his own. We have been aided, inspired, multiplied. (Deleuze and Guattari, p. 3)

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### (21)

Musicians give themselves names which are unspecific as to number or gender (though they are in reality almost exclusively male) – Autechre, Matmos, Squarepusher, Oval, Pole.... . and the makeup of groups is thus disguised, or flexible. And then individual musicians move from one collaboration to another, in a flexible performing community that has, in this respect, a great deal in common with jazz performers, and where a musician's 'sound' is also talked about in similar terms. Of course, now the performers in an 'ensemble' do not need, necessarily, to meet, if the result is a recorded CD project.

"Subject: cascone / chartier / dupree

Just wanted to recommend this .... I was really surprised at how well the three performers work together on the 20 min track. Comes off being highly musical, and

enjoyable to listen to, .... with the inclusion of kim cascone adding some more noisy elements to the overall project, personally I find that there is a noisy side to microsound out there, and I would love to see 12k maybe do something more in that

direction, ..... I just think it would be very interesting to see how taylor or richard might handle such a project as label leaders."

(a fan writing on the microsound email list).

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### (22)

'Viral tropes... ..have proven as pervasive and contagious within culture as actual viruses among their host populations, no doubt because they can choose among any number of hospitable cultures...the telematic contagion of computer viruses,

reproductive technologies, and genetic algorithms; genetic engineering and the genome project; the memetics of a mutating Darwinism...' (Kahn, 1999, p. 294)

Language is a virus from outer space  
(Laurie Anderson, under the influence of William Burroughs)

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(23)

These words were just a suggestion.