

Laptops & Loops: The Advent of New Forms of Experimentation and the Question of Technology in Experimental Music and Performance

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g. g. : Well now, you've been quoted as saying that your involvement with recording - with media in general, indeed - represents an involvement with the future.

(Glen Gould)

We don't play music, we play programming.

(Marshall McLuhan)

[abstract]

The role of the laptop in artistic production has become ubiquitous: it records, transmits, receives, creates, edits, effects, and performs; it is mobile, fast, and light. For the audio-artist, experimental electronic musician, video-producer, or visual-artist working in new media, the laptop is increasingly becoming an indispensable device. And yet how does the laptop affect artistic production? How does this technology change our relationship to art, and its creation and performance? Heidegger's question of technology takes a serious turn when one considers the increasing control and dominance laptop computer technology is having on our lives and the creation of art. It is in the field of experimental electronic music that a response born of the failures, or "glitches" of technology, has been made to the "Grey Mobile Room" of control. The genre of "glitch," which emphasises the failures of hardware and software through misuse, abuse, and experimentation, and is most prevalent in the "microsound" and "lowercase" subgenres, offers a possibility to forge a new, poetic, relationship with the "failures" of technology, allowing us to explore what Kim Cascone calls "the 'post-digital' aesthetic" through a reconsideration of, among others, the theories of Deleuze and Guattari on sound and Glen Gould on music.

[object introduction]

I'd like to execute two programs. 1. Provide a screenshot of contemporary glitch music and its interactions in composition and performance with the technology of the laptop. 2. De-program a few lines of code that have, in their attempt to theorise glitch, superimposed a mastery of technological discourse in an attempt to construct systems and histories that compress the sonic potentiality of glitch performance and creation. We need to hack this code to copy its source files, engage a virus or two and avoid a firewall to clear free access for sonic glitches. To prepare, we'll need to lose control of our mistakes. That the first program will invariably require a set of subsets, or presuppositions from the second, and that the second overcoding has reoriented the potential graphical interface of the first is the site of today's glitching of the two.

[1. screenshot of glitch]

"Glitch" music, like much of post-modern art and music, is concerned with the limit and the law, and where this amounts to an inversion of historical practices of perfection, representation, and similitude, an "aesthetics of failure" marks itself as a counter-force. By embracing those moments where not only technology breaks down, but a certain listening experience is questioned—and thus raising various questions as to the interpretation, reception, and force of the glitch and its interactions with the human—and, by exploring the where, how, when, and why these frameworks and systems skip, fail, leave open a gap, slide into indeterminacy, and collide with unexpected contexts and other forms, not only does contemporary "glitch" open a questioning of traditional forms of art, including the early and mid-Twentieth Century avant-garde, but glitch music—and sometimes quite unwittingly—performs its own self-examination, if not a micro-dissection of its mistaken histories at the site of its musical production.

In glitch we encounter microsound, clicks n' cuts, post-ambient, glitchscapes, microhouse, lowercase sound, and a host of other combinatory and cross-over forms that all prey and play upon each other, their limits, the technology, and a recorded history of sound, utilising sampled material to synthesizers to software, field recordings to chance operations to conceptual parameters. All of which is kept under the umbrella of the "glitch." I am going to avoid using Kim Cascone's term, "post-digital" music, as I am not sure how well it mixes. Most of this experimentation is non-academic and on the periphery of "electronic music," including its primary forms of house, techno, drum 'n bass, ambient, and IDM, or Intelligent Dance Music. The construction of the "glitch" genre can be briefly ascribed to two popular movements, "popular" insofar as they are non-academic, and yet, bound with the late-Twentieth Century rise in subcultures and the "underground," they perform a counter-force to the pop culture of mass media.

The first movement is "interior" to electronic music. A sampling of electronic music producers, moving on from the commercialization of rave culture and the

attendant stereotypes this imposed on their music, if not their careers and personas, began to experiment beyond the limits of their respective genres. For example, dub techno producer Joshua Kit Clayton now works in conceptual video-sound performance with label-mate Sue Costabile; Chris Sattinger, a former hard techno producer and DJ, assembles broken noise-beats and skipping sample tracks; and Taylor Deupree, another former hard techno producer and member of the gearhead techno trio Prototype 909, has gone on to found one of the most influential labels in the genre of ultra-minimalist glitch sound, 12k records.

The second movement is "exterior" to electronic music, and comes from a wealth of rock-influenced producers often playing with the electronic musings of post-rock. At the same time, musicians who had never come out of the rave scene or its genres because of age or interests, now began to produce "glitch" as the production of electronic sound shifted from gear and hardware to computers and software. Likewise, certain sectors of older and industrial-music influenced producers regained an interest in current "popular" music developments.

Both the interior and exterior—insofar as they can be actually separated—undoubtedly owe a debt to the avant-garde roots of electronic experimentation, including John Cage, Morton Feldman, the Futurists, Musique Concrete, Karlheinz Stockhausen, Iannis Xenaxis, Steve Reich, Terry Riley, etc. However, that they also owe a debt to Wendy Carlos, Vangelis, Keith Emerson, Can, Pink Floyd, Laurie Anderson, David Bowie—this cannot be cut from the record. And overall, these sounds have echoed within a general electronic framework developed in the *last quarter* of the Twentieth Century, stemming from Afro-American sounds that have sampled funk, soul, and jazz alongside the machinic workings of Kraftwerk. Ian Andrews says as much when he notes that microsound would "not have become a movement," as "popular or widespread" without techno (quoted in Ashline, 98). Andrews traces this linkage directly from Detroit techno through minimal techno and on into glitch with the result of a "rejection of textual elements" in favour of a "sensual affect" of sound—and to the chagrin of some glitch-theorists—a return to the experiments of not only La Monte Young, but rave culture. We might also consider the primary influence of Afro-American music in general: hip-hop, disco, house, Detroit techno and the entire interpretation of technological instruments, such as drum machines, to create a music *of these instruments*. Likewise, a radical *popular* experimentation with turntables to create the art of DJing, and a sustaining environment and range of artistic practices—including but not limited to the Sci-Fi Futurism of Detroit techno on the one hand and the 4 Elements of hip-hop on the other—is in part through an engagement with Jamaican Dub Soundsystem culture and Studio One production techniques.

The sonic nexus of Afro-American-Jamaican experimentation oscillated and collapsed racial boundaries through a movement at *work with rhythm*—rhythm in a much broader sense than simply that of timed music. Rhythm here becomes a

modular temporality of living, a modular approach to the sound-system, a virtual dance of future desire and past history through the DJ as a "Memory Selector," or, as we can see in Detroit's Underground Resistance, a political re-encoding of the Sci-Fi Futurism of Sun Ra and George Clinton via Kraftwerk into a mythology of Saturn, Mars, and the battles between the Underground and the Programmers. Rhythm echoes in the sense that Derrick May pronounces "Rhythim Is Rhythim" and that Deleuze and Guattari say that "Rhythm is the milieu's answer to chaos," and that "what chaos and rhythm have in common is the in-between—between two milieus, rhythm-chaos or the chaosmos" (Mille Plateaux 313). This is in stark contrast to the common themeatic that resonates with the "avant-garde," and which still, from time to time, pronounces non-rhythmic sound as superior, and rhythmic sound as a simple music structure that seduces the listener from a "higher appreciation" of non-rhythmic sound to the dark and questionable world of the dance-infused underground. This amounts to a culturally-centred, if not pseudo-ethical imperative to avoid becoming the immoral and demonic dancer of a brutist cultural sound that is only useful insofar as it can be appropriated, even as Russolo's noise-percussion, or, that the "I" can be inserted, as the vertical pronoun, into brute to make it "bruit."

We have much to owe to rhythm: the '80s genres of electro, New Wave, New Age, industrial, and acid house are in debt to what is a pragmatic and joyful—yet "*political*"—deconstruction of paradigms of the "listening, sitting, audience" of the Aristocrat. Rhythm, when played at high volume in a larger sphere of cultural interaction, foregrounds the much more serious cultural judgments and reductions at work in the declarations of static-sound. As much as luminaries such as John Cage still influence the academic world, the most we can perhaps ascribe to Cage in the scene of experimental electronic music—rhythmic or not—is his realisation, as early as 1937, that rhythm and percussion, in the deconstruction of tones and scripts, are to provide the potential for the future, and that, already—as of 1937—an Afro-American tradition of "hot jazz," if not one of "Oriental cultures" in general, is far, far ahead of the supposed avant-garde (Future 5).

To say that glitch music occupies a liminal space would be to particularize its microscopic sonic status accurately, and yet, it would also gloss the affect glitch has had on contemporary pop music and the academic art-world. When Kim Cascone says that "Over the past 15 years electronic music culture has drifted from being situated primarily in art culture space to that of pop culture space" (Deleuze), we must also reverse and rewind the statement when recognising the popular roots of electronic experimentation and its subsequent desemenation in not just one, but parallel lines of musical development that owe their sonic delimitation to where these lines cross: pop music, underground electronic music, mainstream electronic music, the popular avant-garde, and academic music. Electronic music is comprised of several movements, not just one. As glitch-beats are heard in the work of Björk and R'n'B, and festivals such as *Ars Electronica* award their electronic music awards to primarily glitch artists over the

electroacoustic elite, glitch travels the fissures between these discursivities that genrify sonicities, thus making the disjuncture and absolute separation problematic of not only glitched-genres but of the genre itself. At the same time, glitch is rife with its own internal contradictions as to its own constitution, musically and theoretically, and as to its representation within the music world. A recent article by William L. Ashline that attempts to situate and explain the relation between glitch sounds and theory, especially the work of Deleuze and Achim Szepanki's label *Mille Plateaux*, ends up replaying an already-spun out sonic history. "It was only a matter of time," says Ashline, soloing an echo of satire, "before an electronica solely servile to the dance floor would become conceptually and aesthetically boring, where the need to rediscover its origins and histories in the forms of *musique concrète*, minimalism, experimentalism, in short, in the avant-garde, would become manifest" (87). What's missing from the record is its blackness, a selective forgetting that foregrounds a convenient erasure of the sonic experiments found throughout the '70s to the '90s, concurrent to rhythm, and at the edges of the musical *praxis* of rave, industrial, New Wave, ambient, New Age, and techno movements. A blackness that hinges not to race but to an imperceptibility in today's discourse. For Ian Andrews, this passage has been "conveniently bypassed...in order to make this link between the old minimalism of the 1960s and the new" (Ashline 97).¹ Thus, when Ashline says that "Contemporary 'high-art' electronica has been soiled by its techno precursors," one gets the feeling that he's placed a delay on his seriousness in an attempt to remix the debate at the level of its frivolity.

Microscopic, miniscule, and indeterminate sound transversing liminal fissures through the sonic topoi, glitch plays the boundaries of listenability and danceability, pop and academe, throwing into confusion the question of the proper, be it the listener, the context of the social performance, or the structures, both musical and social, the glitch should adhere itself to—if indeed it *should* at all, or if it indeed it *can*—all the while its mistaken seriousness elicits an echoing laughter.

Mistaken Theorizations

Laptops and glitch music have become a site of a nano-niche moment of theorisation on behalf of both academics and artists. An entire issue of *Parachute* (107) was devoted entirely to "electro_sounds." Although the sounds being dealt with and the audiences in question are microscopic in comparison to many globalized arts, what is at stake in the interaction between artist and laptop has become quickly realised as a flashpoint for the ubiquitous question concerning technology. Although actual references to Heidegger are few, and few still are those willing to undergo a serious reading of Heidegger's work on technology's paradox—and if not the problematics of thinking a Heidegger in light of a Derrida and a Deleuze and Guattari—a recurring interest in the affect of technology can be seen in, for example, on the one hand, the essays published by microsound.org founder, glitch artist, and writer Kim Cascone, who is primarily concerned with the role of the audience in receiving glitch music as well as in

parsing glitch music from pop spectacle, and on the other hand, Arthur Kroker's latest CTheory missive on Heidegger, where he says with typical aplomb, "The question of Heidegger is proximate to understanding the twenty-first century" (Hyper). At the same time, articles such as Robert Stanton's "Music Is For An Audience of One" attempt to define a proper listening context to what can be complex and sonically miniscule. The locked-groove that plays negative interpretations of rhythm—despite its prominent place in the genre—has fuelled a social reception that opposes dance or other attributes of "spectacle," if not the possibility of a social itself, to the point where Stanton declares sonic social gatherings futile and irrelevant. Such views play out the implications of Glen Gould's retreat into the studio and the glassopticon box above the audience. The power dynamic of the mobile laptop becomes a portable Grey Room of Control faxed from the burning towers of Burroughs. This in itself raises many questions, including: how does a community form, as such is the purpose of the microsound email list, around a group of listening individuals opposed to the social "as such"? How are these contradictions played out at international festivals, such as Montreal's MUTEK and Barcelona's SONAR? That the arguments of the theorists of glitch often fail to account for a thriving global sociality can be likened to similar pronouncements made by theorists at the discovery of the Internet. Yet, in the calls for a solitude of sonic listening, or of a passive audience delimited as to its proper receptional modes, there lies a concern with the dangers of gathering. We shall scratch this record with more precision a bit further on in the mix.

Ghosts in the Glitch Machine

I am now going to turn to some of the code permeating Kim Cascone's work which I think will scroll a few miniscule encounters with the question of technology and the way in which Deleuze and Guattari load as the boot-disk of glitch-theory.

That said, the spectre of laptop music has largely been overblown. Yet the ghosts in the glitch machine—or the glitches in the ghost machine—haunt every laptop performance: a movement of the human to the posthuman, a cyborgian connection between performer and circuitry, even a shift in the nature of performance "as such," perhaps to what Cascone recognizes as "broadcast." It is the interpretation of these sonic shifts by the audience—a development which is hardly new—that worries Cascone, who argues that glitch music—caught up in an economy of the spectacle which re-produces its aura and authenticity through mass media and pop music codas—is being scorned and placed under scrutiny, if not misunderstood and misrepresented, and overall given a bad rap, for *not* repeating the tired illusions of mass music in its production of "aura" and the "authentic performance" through spectacular entertainment. "Gestures and spectacle disappear into the micro-movements of the laptop performer's wrists and fingers," says Cascone (Laptop 56). The audience's interrogation of the "lack of gestural theatre" in performance, as well as a vague unease as to the role the

laptop actually plays in performance, and the general nagging suspicion that the performance is "fake" or "counterfeit," is seen by Cascone as an effect of the "constant din of pop media" that produces an audience that not only must fight to find this subculture, but an audience that is apparently unfamiliar with the technology and has been convinced by mass marketing that the "laptop's signifier [is] as a business tool" (Laptop 56).

Insofar as we can homogenize and reduce the "audience," Cascone's assumptions of the "corruption" by mass media overcodes the set of productive mistakes that launch audience interpretation as well as strictly sequences the diverse aurality of the listener. The binary spectrum of corrupt pop-audiences and pure non-pop audiences glitches when one considers that listeners know *exactly how easy it is* to simply use iTunes, for example, to play music on a laptop, or indeed, that most people in their 20s and 30s—the primary age-group for this music—*own and use easy-to-operate music software*²³, indeed it is *because of the general familiarity with the laptop as a creative tool*—and again, we can point to Apple's marketing of the ubiquitous Powerbook as a music and video editing machine in this regard—that the audience is critical of the performer. It is also *because, indeed, most of the time the performers are, to an extent, "faking it,"* that the plebeians become bored with the interminable clicks in the Grey Mobile Room. Yet, this boredom is apparently not new. Cascone notes that "This is not a new issue for electronic music: the lack of visual stimuli while performing on technological "instruments" has plagued electronic music for over 40 years with little progress in providing solutions" (Grain 1). On channel one, solutions are needed in the form of a *resolution*, a braking down of listener to audience, a *synthesis* of the contradictions of the glitch-genre; on channel two, at a different tempo, Cascone must keep as other the audience of pop-music, exterior to the operative synthesis of channel one. But the technology is failing; there is a bleed between channels in the mix. In the middle of the mix arises a problematic laid out in such a way that it enframes its potential into the *telos* of finding a *useful solution*. It is here that the *techne* of technology incorporates a few lines of code from a synthetic utility instead of opening to *poesis* through the failure of technology. Yet before we flip the record, we must briefly note two preconditional mixtapes that were playing before the advent of the laptop in *contemporary* electronic music performance.

1. The role of the DJ. In rave culture and all cultures that stem from the dance application of DJing as an art-form, there has been a prevalent mysticism of the DJ's art, which, once exposed, leads to a subsequent criticism of the DJ as "just somebody playing records," especially playing "other people's music," or, hear this recent post to Microsound: "Beatmaching is for wanker DJs fueling dancing alcoholics, and sound collage is for a more mind stimulating sensory exploration."⁴ The advances of turntablism, of experimental phonography, and of talented dance-turntablists have helped create a general recognitional schema to differentiate between different practices, such as scratching and battle-DJing in the international DMCs, thereby opening a sonic discourse of a DJ's skills. And I

feel that there is nothing new here: the same development and criticism can be traced back to the electric guitar, for example. However, the main differences between a DJ and a laptop performance is that a *DJ cannot fake it*. A bad DJ trainwrecks the records, bombs the mix, and sends everyone flying from the dancefloor in disgust or provokes a diss, whereas the laptop performer *can fake performance*. In broaching the question of live performance, it becomes performance *as such* and its transposition to the broadcast. I want to note here that the DJ provides an alternative way to open the lid of the laptop through a sampled and pirated sonic tapestry that engages with *techne*.

2. What do we mean here by "fake"? What is a "performance"? What is "counterfeit," as Cascone's title to his essay proclaims, "In the Age of Infinite Reproduction"? According to Cascone, the answer is "aura." What is the relation between "aura" and the "fake," and if these polarities are at play, "aura and truth," and therefore the "original" and the "impostor"? Cascone's argument proposes a truth-value of "aura." Heard in one ear, aura as a performative effect of the spectacle excludes any musical or artistic practice that does not follow its code, such as glitch. Heard in the other ear, "real" aura resides exterior to the spectacle in a tightly sealed chamber of resonance. In the case of the former, a gap in the frame is noticed through an overproduction of aura, of spectacle; as Mackenzie Wark speculates, "the digitization of information at one and the same time advances capital's goal of making the commodity completely abstract and interchangeable, but also threatens to undermine its value by removing any connection to a unique material object." The ultimate deterritorialization of capital threatens to undermine its own apparent aura. This gap—a micro-sound—offers a space for a glitch to traverse the fissures of capital, offer a few lines of de-code, a sonic virus or two, maybe even a sonic meme that un-stitches the *semes* of *production*, of the enframing of music as utility, and of its subsequent discourse that re-orient it *as such*.

Cascone's Glitch

Instead of engaging with this sliver of opportunity to dance the tango with capital in the paradox of digital value, Cascone's response is to reinscribe aura, and therefore authenticity in non-popular music, and to make imperative a flight from popular music into a stunning retreat to the ivory tower. We should not be worried with laptop music's apparent inauthenticity in the eyes of the spectacle, for, according to Cascone, "in actuality an aura *does exist*, and resides in the 'distance that separates a sound from its origins'" (Laptop 56). Aura is reinscribed, through a quote from Jerome Peignot in an essay on acousmatic music, in a classical paradigm of the telematic: sender, message, receiver—origin, aura, authenticity. And so, Cascone's move is quite simply thus:

Thankfully, the history of electroacoustic music provides a pretext for this seemingly counterfeit manner of performing music. Typically, in acousmatic music, a composer, seated by a tape recorder, mixing board or computer, pushes a button and the music is "performed" for the

audience. The academic music community has engaged in acousmatic music for many years without the need for "the social rituals prompted by the interaction of stage performer(s) and audience."

(Cascone, Laptop 56)

Rewind to 1997—Geert Lovink prophesizing the "fall of the intelligentsia and the rise of new media:" "With technology confused for 'popular culture,' a return of the highbrow-lowbrow distinction seems to be in the making" (32). Yet this distinction is not only wrought as Baudrillard's "tragic complaints" and the gasp of a digitized pataphysical metaphysics; this distinction has now been transferred into the realm of Lovink's "Virtual Intellectual." Although the utopian side of the Virtual Intellectual embraces the "mixing and sampling of the local and the global while flying through self-made hybrid data landscapes" (39), the downside is that the VI "lacks any sentimental drive to represent unprivileged offline groups" (38). The crisis of representation is deferred; but at what cost? The VI is the *The Wired's* Libertarian Virtual Intellectual in Lovink's incarnation, direct from Kroker and Weinstein's "virtual class," complete with its own "*Wired* ideology" (Lovink 36). And here, pinging the limits of the sonic arts, a transference through domains digital and analog, of the performance, the audience, and aura: a class distinction.

And further back, to the late '60s: Deleuze and Guattari call Freud, in their moments of exuberance, "Father Freud." I would feel uncomfortable lauding such a term on the father of microsound.org who has done much for the music and its reception and theorization. But it's a question of hearing out one's children, of a patronage, of the founding, here, of a chamber of resonance. And perhaps this is the kernel of the problematic: Cascone is theorising and not thinking. To paraphrase Sylvère Lotringer, he is an artist, not a thinker. "Artists are only responsible to their work, not to the integrity of the concepts," says Lotringer. Indeed,

They don't have to subject themselves to the discipline of philosophy as philosophers do, but extend themselves to theory *as artists*, finding in philosophy the tools and ideas, or the intellectual gymnastics, that they might use for their own purpose without betraying their own integrity as artists. It is this integrity that counts, not the amount of theory one is exposed to, or actually understand. Artists can *lift* ideas from theory the way they lift them from any other domain—freely, *irresponsibly*.

(Doing 151)

But it is another "philosopher," Hakim Bey—insofar as we can call him as such, so let's re-name him a "thinker"—who says the same for thinkers, following, in fact, from similar hints in Deleuze and Derrida. Steal ideas, produce the bastard children of philosophy. But *irresponsibly*? Must this be done with no *responsibility*? A summary reading of Derrida and Deleuze, and Bey as well, suggests not only a responsibility but a responsibility to rethink what

responsibility entails. We are asserting this not to re-cement the divide between the "responsible" philosophers, even "anti-philosophers," and the "irresponsible artists," but to perhaps realise the other of Lotringer's statement: that artists, in their irresponsibility, open themselves to engaging with an-other responsibility, a responsibility not to the rigour of what is called here "philosophy"—and what exactly does Lotringer mean here by "philosophy," anyways?—but of what Lotringer names "integrity." When considering Cascone, we must realise that his tactic is a strategic one: to save the integrity of microsound from an exploitive realm of capital. Yet, at the same time, one must act with extreme caution when one posits salvation. We must—and here's the imperative—pause and think the other of responsibility here whenever such a statement is made, however responsibly or irresponsibly. We must think the preconditions for this salvatory moment and the machine that puts it into motion.

Cascone's dedication to a Deleuzian framework is marked in his paper, delivered at the Refrains Conference, "Deleuze and Contemporary Music." It is here that Cascone identifies a resistance to theory, what he sees as a "tendency to resist intellectualizing [what he calls] post-digital music and this contributes to the lack of aesthetic discourse." This is a precondition for the apparent danger of losing glitch's real aura to pop music, for Cascone says that "This results in disabling new forms from breaking free from the orbit of pop music culture and establishing their own authenticity." Here, Cascone identifies a force needed to break glitch from its pop music circulation, a force that must first subdue the inertia of anti-intellectualization through an intellectualization of the music as "aesthetic discourse." This provides the precondition for Cascone's later assertion that not only does glitch already contain authentic aura through its collapsed, or at least microscopic, distance of the sound from its origin, but that glitch music must, in its flight from the pop music orbit, fly only to acousmatic or electro-acoustic music to save itself from a misunderstanding of fake-aura by pop music standards of spectacle. Implicit in this argument is that the spectacle has the power, the fake-authentic, the false aura to erase the truly authentic, a fake-aura that dwarfs that of its patron, the original, real aura.

The *prescriptive force* of this argument, despite its contradictions, calls for hearing its tune with open ears, as it also speaks in the name of a Deleuze; and as a symptom of a resonance in contemporary art that is taking its shape as a backlash against the popular populism of a postmodernism which, in its populism, included its exterior antecedent, that of "underground" music in electronica and "indie" music in rock, insofar as this simulacra of postmodernist metaphysics resonates, it seems to, in response to its overcoded popularity, have re-spawned its originary dialectic, a violent divide of sonic aura, of a truth value, of a sonic reality and a sonic fiction. At the beginning of the Twenty-First Century, we travel backwards in sonic temporality towards our phonofuture: a sonic orbit that brings us around, not to the same, but to a different echo of a problematic that has been played down through the ages: that of the boundary of the orbit as *such*, or what we could call the *frame of techne*.

Yet, we are re-programming a return to what can be affirmed as a response to—and despite the overtones of the problematic terms "intellectualization" and "aesthetic discourse"—*thinking*, at least a *thinking of the (dis)juncture between the artist and technology*. That this thinking, in this case, and nevertheless, turns readily toward a false mastery of technology, that it, in the moment of the glitch, prepares its prison, or at least its ivory tower, is another symptom of our attempt at a poetic relation to technology. Again, it is not that a turn toward the acousmatic is inherently negative. Indeed, I would offer up an alternative interpretation: that the acousmatic be *irresponsibly thieved but with an attention to a sounding-out of integrity*, that the techniques of the academy be incorporated and appropriated, but not at the expense of abandoning or negating pop music roots, and indeed, of presupposing a *pure boundary* between pop and the academy, as if either move could be possible, though it may concur with a timely presumption of musical teleology, complete with the requisite moments of salvation. When Cascone says that "I imagine that the laptop could be seen as a "war-machine" in that it establishes, occupies and extends smooth space setting up current electronic music culture as a nomadic culture," we must keep in mind the dangers inherent to the war machine, namely, its ways of incorporation into a state apparatus, its possibility of affecting a solitary line of flight that invokes the passion for abolition, and although the war machine is always the source of creation, it is also the source of destruction and danger as the central apparatus to any authoritarian or fascist State at the macro-level to a micro-fascism at the level of putting the glitch in its proper place. Every regime has its marching-music. The war machine—we transform-scratch here Deleuze and Guattari and Heidegger—is an engagement with *techne*.

We are led, then, to a few last musical notes. When Cascone plays down an entire history of pop music that it has served as the *beginnings of glitch and microsound*, and strangely plays down the contemporary movements of glitch that works its fissures and plunders pop's archives,⁵ he reinscribes a polarity of values, that of acousmatic and pop, hierarchizing aura, and with it, a set of cultural codes, of proper contexts and social situations for listening. In the becoming-laptop of the artist as his engagement with the war machine, even though it be "imaginary," not smooth space but striated space has been programmed. In consequence, with this inscription of a safe haven from the vicious world of mass music, we witness an exclusion of rhythm and its cultures, a sonic meme that goes completely unremarked and unnoticed, as Kodwo Eshun notes in *More Brilliant Than the Sun*: that of Afro-American music and its differing orientations of sonic practice, an Afro-Futurism that hedges the game of representation and renegotiates rhythm through an alien sampling of "white New Romantic English kids" (Eshun 178). Afro-Futurism is boxed as a general negativity through its association with the *real fake aura*, that of the "spectacle." The critique of spectacular rhythm becomes a "future shock absorber," its purpose to maintain homeostasis, "to maintain manners in terms of proper music, or true music, or respectable music—and that's always a way in which people try

and hierarchize the body" (Eshun 182). Which is not to say that Afro-Futurism does not hierarchize its own purities of sound, as, for example, Underground Resistance's War against the Programmers of mainstream music. However, here we are witness to another formation of exclusionary community. As the *real aura* is delimited to the acousmatic chamber of resonance, and its proper modality of listening to an attentively listening audience, one that is implicitly, it would seem, seated, the body is organized and the sound is granted its true domain. The critique becomes what Kodwo Eshun calls "Trad Journalism" or "CultStud," where "theory always comes to Music's *rescue*...restores it to its proper place, reconciles it to its naturally belated fate" (-004).

Along the sides of the dancefloor, the Black Box of Indeterminate Reception, we witness the assembly of chairs. All music concerned, it would seem, with rhythm, with the movements of the dance, with a certain potential of indeterminate transactivity, of an aesthetics of interruption, of an Undefinable Music Experience, perhaps what we may inscribe as a *desire to breakdown hierarchies, even, between performer and audience through call-and-response*, through a leaving-open of the terminations "audience" and "performer," is here ascribed to the realm of the "pop-authentic." The affect of this theorisation is a passifying of listening experience, despite Cascone's claim that "Electronic music is best appreciated when an audience is engaged in a contemplative mode of 'active reception'" (Grain 1). Indeed, upon re-playing that sound-byte, one hears the motility of the "active" overdubbed by a primacy of the "contemplative" and, the key word, this idea of "reception"—which is part of Cascone's general dedication to a telematic and linear "reception theory" (Grain 1)—erases networked modes of interaction of the kind proposed by Achim Szepanski. In "Digital Music and Media Theory," Szepanski proclaims the obsolescence of "so-called telematic interactivity...with its implicit permanent feedback stream between sender and receiver" by dealing it a blow from Guattari, who "grants machines a proto-subjectivity whose connection with human subjectivity cannot be understood through language-based communication or interaction models." Indeed,

Their ongoing mode of transmission and translation is one that is characterized by transaction and not interaction. The autonomy of poles, the intentional subject and object all lose their importance in the face of these different connective modes.

(Szepanski, 27)

The prevailing theorisation of the laptop and its mistaken music returns to an acousmatic telematics of distance from the audience and proximity to sonic origin in an attempt to redirect these mistaken sounds played primarily at the gates of the university, or at the doors of pop music, to the chamber of resonance. Glitch is instrumental in foregrounding the actuality of sound: that sound echoes as exteriority as *sound has no interiority*. It is only when sounds become enclosed in a chamber of resonance that we claim the meaning of its interior and rescue its (mis)interpretation with theory. In the chamber of resonance, the micro-glitch has

made the final mistake, and it seems that it flees to its certain death, this turn to the the acousmatic, the very essence of what Tim Hecker calls "this rational, striated space where quantized meters and linear grids serve to produce music which sings the song of its tools" (Sound 63). In striating this creative space of in-between indeterminacy and of transaction with the multiple nodes of the machine and the sound as network, of consigning it to a certain coda of performance and audience, Cascone invests glitch music with not only meaning, but essential authenticity, a *content*, a present-to-itself *aura*, and once again reinscribes all the values so foreign to the aesthetics of failure: the primacy and origin of the artist, the origin of authenticity and a telematics of distance, of a sampling of the "return" to an origin when meaning was music and music meaningful, a chamber-time before the advent of the Spectacle, in short, a nostalgic metaphysics of the sonic future-past. These are all of the resonances that Achim Szepanski desires to cancel out when he says that

As long as the theoretical *power* implications of media music remain unthought, it appears that one will continue to endow music with *meaning*—as in the interminable theorizations equating pop with rebellion—to see it as a signifier of a force that is actualized in it, whether as an expression of a subject's truth, or as the collective subversive force of social groups.

(my italics, Digital 25)

A quick FAQ. It is not that today's producers should not turn to acousmatic music and a history of the avant-garde—my own work is heavily in this direction—it is the assumption, however, that pop music has been the bastard father of the prodigal son of the avant-garde, and that glitch music, in its historical positioning under the umbrella of pop, has been a "mistake," and that acousmatic music somehow holds the password for glitch music in finding its "proper context," indeed, if not a *home for technology*—it is this string of theorisations that I find troubling, not a "mistake" as such, but an overcoding, an enframing of sound, and overall, perhaps performing exactly what Cascone wishes *not* to do: to delimit and possibly affect negatively the creation and hearing of glitch, to program *telos* into the ghost of the random mistake machine, to hardwire aura and authenticity to the sonic, in other words, to invest music with meaning, and to *control and master the mistakes*.

Cascone's is a symptomatic and admirable attempt to save glitch music from its own indeterminacy, that which is, nonetheless, inherent to its very constitution, an indeterminacy that un-stitches the viral sonic meme, the *seme*. By reinforcing sonic borders, an invitation is extended across the threshold to the frame of *techne*, and into the home, *oikos*, where, offering only a few chairs by the hearth, *techne* programs barriers against the browsing others and further restricts the network of aural accidents. And yet—here, through this radical hospitality to what is most dangerous, are we not deep in the Legacy code of the system, close to the saving power? The question is one of the very possibility of the home for

sacrifice in a *desemenated* network of glitches that must strive to digitize the sacrificing of sacrifice.

There is an understandable desire in the wish to protect the glitch, to see it through its safe childhood, to stave off dangerous strangers, especially if you have given it birth, stitched a few sonic memes—lets call them *semes*—in the bosom of sound. It is because of this respect for the semes that Cascone has attempted to gather them, to give them shelter. But the task of gathering leaves lonely the rampant renegade, the one over there on the edge of the sound cloud that is always fleeing off the frequency of hearing. It inscripts the seme and seme-seals the chamber of sounds, stifling their echoes into the world and broadcasting only a powerful resonance to an empty audience. And so, it is only out of the same deep respect for these semes that I attempt the granulation of the chamber and its dimensional sonic desementation. Let loose the echoes through the networks. The semes will suture sound through their echoes of difference. They need not guidance, nor control, nor mastery or strict prescription, but space and time to play out their differing echoes. Although the seme has no interiority, it stitches the semantic as it stitches our sonic moments with all the potential of desire. "Music as a meaningless meaning carrier is not closed to meaning. Whereas machines transmit information and signals, which contain and relay the information of other machines, meaning is a temporary, codified condition that fills the gaps between these modes of information" (Szepanski 27). Out through the gap stitches the seme.

--end of lecture version.

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¹"I feel that a significant amount of cultural history (and cultural theory) has been conveniently bypassed—the period roughly between the 1970s and the 1990s—in order to make this link between the old minimalism of the 1960s and the new" (Ashline 97).

² Especially Reactor, Reason, Fruity Loops, and Live; knowledge of the programmable and interactive semi-academic software Max/MSP is still relatively rare due to a steep learning curve and the requirements of somewhat of a base knowledge in programming, if not in the least a desire to learn a language.

⁴ Re: [microsound] 4/4's for neanderthals," halluciphile, Tuesday, October 22nd, 2002. Also see my response, "the anti-rhythmic imperative of the 21st Century neo-Brutists," tobias v, Tuesday, October 22nd, 2002. Both posts on www.microsound.org email list.

⁵ This is stranger all the more as Cascone seems interested in the possibilities of sampling pop music to produce glitch. Yet perhaps this is only insofar as one steals and mangles the source into an imperceptible sliver, and thereby is engaging in a destruction of pop's inauthentic aura in the process.