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FUSE

M A G A Z I N E

Negotiating Dissent



Naomi Binder Wall, Hanadi Loubani,
Sara Matthews, Ilana Salama Ortar,
and Stephen Wright engage in
Negotiations

Daniel Munro queries *Cultural
Looting and Ethical Consistency*

tobias c. van Veen
decodes Canada Council spin
on House & Techno

sound.bytes

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.

Glenn Gould ¹

We don't play music, we play programming.

Marshall McLuhan ²

FUCK ART

by tobias c. van Veen



LET'S DANCE

The author @ Plush 1998, Vancouver. Photo: Jane Weitzel. All images this article courtesy the author.

WHAT DOES “POP” OR “AVANT-GARDE” MEAN IN A CONTEXT THAT

rhythm.smitten

In 1937, John Cage was all ears:

Percussion music is a contemporary transition from keyboard-influenced music to the all-sound music of the future. Any sound is acceptable to the composer of percussion music; he explores the academically forbidden “non-musical” field of sound insofar as is manually possible.

Methods of writing percussion music have as their goal the rhythmic structure of a composition. As soon as these methods are crystallized into one or several widely accepted methods, the means will exist for group improvisations of unwritten but culturally important music. This has already taken place in Oriental cultures and in hot jazz.³

What Cage heard was rhythm — a hot rhythm of percussion, and later, like Glenn Gould, a rhythm of computer recorded and generated sound. But today, rhythm is not the mark of the “new” music. Rhythm is rather the hallmark of pop music, and arrhythmic composition — including Cage’s own pioneering random chance operations — the stamp of high-art.

How, then, to fund techno? Or, rather: is it surprising that techno, house, jungle, IDM and other rhythmic, innovative and experimental electronic music is barely recognised as “art,” if

at all? How do I explain that Detroit Techno, oft misunderstood, is the electronic heir to not only Kraftwerk, but to Sun Ra’s jazz? (The releases of Detroit’s *Underground Resistance* (UR) make this clear as the black night.) Or that Chicago house — the extension of disco as the Sonic Church — is a place of incorporeal worship, artistic sacrifice? What does “pop” or “avant-garde” mean in a context that is *AfroFuturist*? Oh, rhythm, you are not of Western Art Music ... rhythm you are of the body ... and this body knows nothing of pop/high-art territories. Nobodies do.

The Canada Council, although open to all applications including those from experimental electronic musicians, has stated that “house” and “techno” music are not its “domain.” From an email in response to Christine McLean of AEMusic/Someoneelse, a lobby organisation for Canadian electronic musicians:

Frankly, we just aren’t going there right now, and may not ever end up funding in this area. As you know, this is new territory for the Canada Council and we are educating ourselves, but I am confident in saying that techno and house is very unlikely to be funded by the Council. I really believe this is the domain of our colleagues at FACTOR.⁴

Let us consider FACTOR. At Mutek 2002, the Montreal international festival of experimental electronic music, a panel was held

IS AFROFUTURIST?



Donald Glaude @ Plush 1998, Vancouver. Photo: Jane Weitzel.

with representatives from the Canada Council and FACTOR. While the Canada Council revealed that it knew experimental electronic musicians — composers of minimal techno, micro-house, IDM, ambient, glitch/microsound, drill-core jungle and so forth — were acknowledged but often excluded from receiving grants, FACTOR revealed it was simply not set-up to properly fund electronic music production. Simply, most experimental electronic releases are quantitatively *too small* to be funded by FACTOR. In fact, a successful 12" is usually 500–1000 copies — about the same numbers for electroacoustic albums. While electroacoustic music is recognisably funded by the Canada Council (after its own series of struggles to achieve recognition), innovative and experimental forms of techno, house and other electronic music of the rhythmic variety — and thus, apparently, the “pop” nation — are often directed to FACTOR.

But FACTOR provides loans, not grants. And loans are little good when they are structured to fund a recording studio and a self-produced demo — the tactics and requirements of a rock band, not of the electronic musician, many of whom require a laptop and software, not a studio and roadie. A demo is designed to sign a band to a label, and thus reap the cash to pay back the loans. Electronic music doesn't *factor* this way.

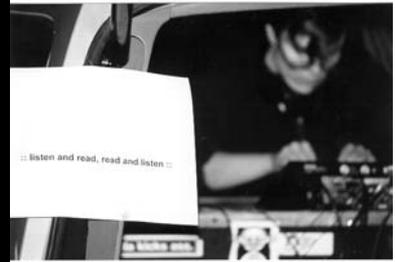
Moreover, to assume that electronic music is commercially viable in the same pattern as rock

music — via radio airplay and MuchMusic rotation — ignores the qualitative differences, the very challenges that the AfroFuturist soundwave and the electronic earsplit unleash on the music industry. The *mutant* industry, constantly in a state of movement ...

As Will Straw spun in 1991, *movement-music* cultures not only “value the redirective and the novel over the stable and the canonical,” but, unlike rock, flip “the lines of fracture” which run through audiences and producers into “the bases of that music's own ongoing development.”⁵

Genetic genre splicing won't factor.

During the panel, frustrations became evident, highlighted by electro-star Tiga's tirade on the lack of homegrown support for a Canadian electronic music scene that, predictably, has found its success elsewhere. “A new territory for the Canada Council” has been very much deterritorialized by a networked and globalized electronic music scene that has come to realise that the nation-state is failing to provide the supportive structures necessary for the cultural industries to survive. Either one is a pop artist — and thus sequencing for the lowest common denominator — or *unpopular*, as a member of the artistic elite. Remix the point: it's not about



Forest Green @ qork/oddiy 1998, Vancouver. Photo: tobias van Veen.

the *popular*. We can see that in the numbers released. As Aimé Dontigny of the experimental No Type label states, “the difference lies not in ‘popularity’ but in the ‘commercial intent’ of the project.”⁶

While Tiga’s releases arguably *are* electronic pop, they also play the ambiguity of the divide.⁷ And it is perhaps because the reception is non-existent for encouraging experimental *electronic* forays born from rhythm and non-High-Art Tradition that, in order to survive, Canadian electronic musicians — and here I speak specifically of those working with rhythm — are continually pressured to produce in *consumer-music* domains in order to sell, or to produce “art music” to receive funding.⁸ Today, the binary of high/low art is a construction of the funding bodies; the wired world sees the production of sound as a market distinction, consumerable or non-consumerable. Any judgment of funding based upon high/low art value is drawing its power from another record, for the numbers spin another tale. But before we scratch the analysis, we should learn from the struggles of electroacoustic music in having its practitioners recognised as *composers*. Dontigny continues:

In the last fifteen years, new music practitioners have done a lot to force public agencies to update their terminology and program objectives, especially on expanding the definitions of “composer” and “composition” to reflect

the realities of improvisers and self-taught electronic composers.⁹

From these efforts arose the National New Music Coalition (NNMC). While the welcome and inclusive NNMC is striving to incorporate all forms of “new” electronic music, the emphasis is primarily on electronic *composers*. Working with the definition of *composition*, a tradition of the artist is reinstated on a terrain that is, on the other channel, continually being rewired at the limits of compositional practice via the practices of turntablism, sampling, files sharing, copyleft and networked performance, around debates of laptop performance, and via the histories of Afro-Futurist and non-Western sound that operate via parameters that are exterior to the compositional framework. Not the factors but the *fractures* of electronic music propel its numerous identities as exterior to traditional stages.

The experimental *composer* also benefits — via institutionalization — from the benefits of a university support system. Although Dontigny disagrees on this point, and claims that the networking of clubs provides electronic musicians with a sustainable market while the university does not, it remains easier to facilitate grants for institutionalized electroacoustic music, or *composed* music. To attempt to try and *produce* experimental electronic music by receiving grants for such production, as a full-time practitioner, or *to produce* the events and

THE AFROFUTURIST SOUND RICOCHETS RHYTHMS FOR CYBORGS, SPINS LOVE REFRAINS FOR A RACED AND GENDERED, INCORPOREAL YET EMBODIED POSTHUMANITY.

(club) “nights” required to support the practice “within the market,” is all but financially untenable. While all forms of New Music have their concert halls and departments, the commercial and cutthroat atmosphere of the club will not tolerate techno, house, IDM or jungle that deviates from the commercial norm. Drinks must be sold: while *consumerable* music draws large numbers in clubs (such as *progressive trance* and other commercially-driven genres), the experimental and AfroFuturist mixes and their offshoots are shut out from spaces for sonic exploration. *Space IS the place.*

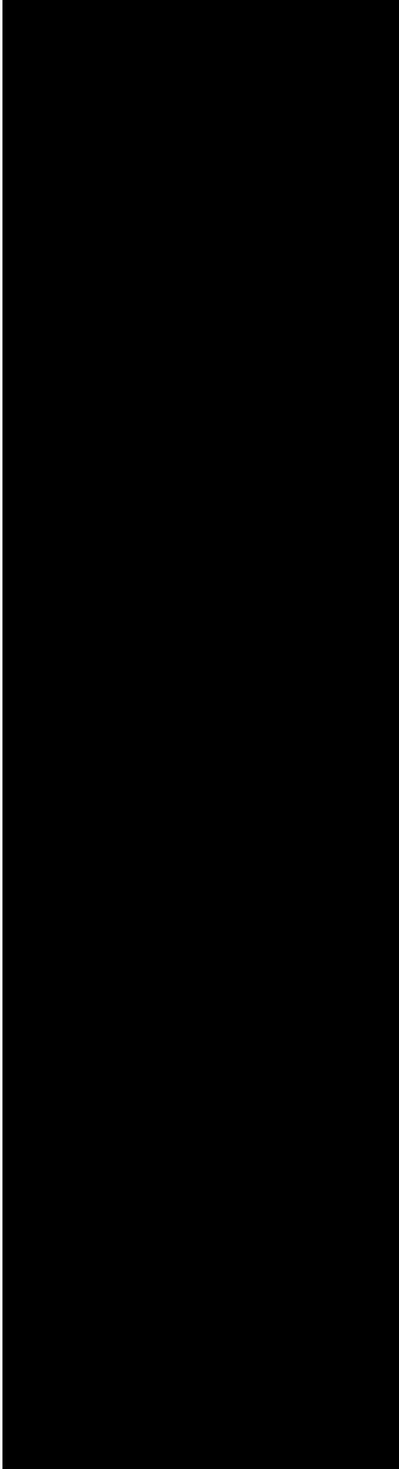
What is needed is a recognition of the in-between or liminal status of experimental electronic music among institutional knowledges and practices as well as within the funding bodies. Neither electroacoustic nor the domain of New Music, neither with commercial intent or consumerable, experimental electronic music has yet produced pinnacle moments in unique sonic achievement of the last Century and into the Aughts, and by all accounts is the challenge the AfroFuturist narrative offers to the transcendent virtual narratives of the dot-com era, the claims to the bodiless perfection of cyberspace. The AfroFuturist sound ricochets rhythms for cyborgs, spins love refrains for a raced and gendered, incorporeal yet embodied posthumanity. Rhythm is movement excluded from colonial histories of Music, like all histories of the body, especially the coloured body.

In failing to acknowledge the artistic elements of rhythmic electronic music, several structures of aesthetic value are put into replay. The ascendancy of non-rhythmic or “difficult” music is ascribed to the unpopular, and thus, the aesthetically *valued* (by funding and by the pantheon of “high art”). “(Un)Popularity” becomes the criterion of Art. AfroFuturist rhythms of the dancing-body are negated in favour of an arrhythmic and colourless, genderless “avant-garde.” The sounds of percussion, those noises of the body — that “hot jazz” and those “Oriental cultures” — are not heard.

It is possible that the tactics of *circulatory production* herald a new politics (and a new political). Also a new sense of *production*. We all know the turntablist & sampler, but now we speak of the networks of sound-sharing and the sound of networks. La Société Anonyme: “The artist as producer intervenes, more and more, in the real time of the dominion of experience, not in the deferred time of representation... More and more, the artist is a producer of liveness... .”¹⁰

Rhythm in a much broader sense than simply that of timed music.

Rhythm echoes in the sense that Derrick May pronounces “Rhythim Is Rhythim”¹¹ and that Deleuze and Guattari say that “Rhythm is the milieus’ answer to chaos,” and that “what chaos and rhythm have in common is the in-



between — between two milieus, rhythm-chaos or the chaosmos”.¹² This is in stark contrast to an “avant-garde” — and here we mean not an artistic elite, or even a truly groundbreaking crew of headz, but the power structures that *materially define the term today* — which still pronounce rhythm as a simple music structure that seduces the listener from a “higher appreciation” of non-rhythmic sound to the dark and questionable world of dance-infused listening events...

We have much to owe to rhythm. We are in debt to what is a pragmatic and joyful — yet “political” — deconstruction of the sitting, listening, audience (ensconced in their chairs, the “proper” place of music appreciation).

Spin the refrain: the force of John Cage’s hearing lesson has not yet scratched the record of history — nor the funding structures that support Canadian artists.



UNDERGROUND RESISTANCE IS A LABEL FOR A MOVEMENT.
 A MOVEMENT THAT WANTS CHANGE BY SONIC REVOLUTION.
 WE URGE YOU TO JOIN THE RESISTANCE AND HELP US TO COMBAT
 THE MEDIOCRE AUDIO AND VISUAL PROGRAMMING
 THAT IS BEING FED TO THE INHABITANTS OF EARTH.
 THIS PROGRAMMING IS STAGNATING THE MINDS OF THE PEOPLE.
 BUILDING A WALL BETWEEN RACES AND PREVENTING WORLD PEACE.
 IT IS THIS WALL WE ARE GOING TO SMASH.
 BY USING THE UNTAPPED ENERGY POTENTIAL OF SOUND
 WE ARE GOING TO DESTROY THIS WALL.
 MUCH THE SAME AS CERTAIN FREQUENCIES SHATTER GLASS.
 TECHNO IS A MUSIC BASED IN EXPERIMENTATION;
 IT IS SACRED TO NO ONE RACE; IT HAS NO DEFINITIVE SOUND.
 IT IS MUSIC FOR THE FUTURE OF THE HUMAN RACE.
 WITHOUT THIS MUSIC THERE WILL BE NO PEACE, NO LOVE, NO VISION.
 BY SIMPLY COMMUNICATING THROUGH SOUND,
 TECHNO HAS BROUGHT PEOPLE OF ALL DIFFERENT NATIONALITIES
 TOGETHER UNDER ONE ROOF TO ENJOY THEMSELVES.
 ISN'T IT OBVIOUS THAT MUSIC AND DANCE
 ARE THE KEYS TO THE UNIVERSE?
 SO CALLED PRIMITIVE ANIMALS AND TRIBAL HUMANS
 HAVE KNOWN THIS FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS!
 WE URGE ALL BROTHERS AND SISTERS OF THE UNDERGROUND
 TO CREATE AND TRANSMIT THEIR TONES AND FREQUENCIES
 NO MATTER HOW SO CALLED PRIMITIVE THEIR EQUIPMENT MAY BE.
 TRANSMIT THESE TONES AND WREAK HAVOC ON THE PROGRAMMERS!

LONG LIVE THE UNDERGROUND...

tobias c. van Veen is a sound & net.artist, techno-turntablist, and writer, and is author of the _2003 Canadian Electronic Music Directory_. He has been enmeshed with musikal resistance cultures (i.e., raising shit) since 1993.

Above: The creed of *Underground Resistance*, Detroit.
 <<http://www.undergroundresistance.com/creed.html>>

Opposite Page: *Underground Resistance*, Detroit.
 <<http://www.undergroundresistance.com>>

Notes

- 1 "Glen Gould Interviews Glen Gould About Glen Gould."
<http://www.gould.nlc-bnc.ca/docs/ehf.htm>
- 2 *Medium Is the Message*. CD.
<http://www.webcorp.com/sounds/mcquote.htm>
- 3 "The Future of Music: Credo." *Silence: Lectures and Writings by John Cage*. Hanover: Wesleyan UP, 1973. p. 5.
- 4 This quote has been provided to the producer by Christine McLean.
- 5 "Communities and Scenes in Popular Music." In *The Subcultures Reader*. Eds. Ken Gelder and Sarah Thornton. London: Routledge, 1997. p. 500, 502.
- 6 Email to the remixer, 6.9.03.
- 7 Tiga's most well-known hit, the *Sunglasses EP* on International Deejay Gigolos, samples (Canadian) Cory Hart's classic, "Sunglasses at Night," to a revivalist, retro-electro beat. It went Top 40 in most of Europe, although this has more to do with interpenetration in the pop/underground music divide in the EU that is nonetheless sustained by commercialised and corporate rap, R'n'B and rock hegemony in North America.
- 8 David Turgeon, one of the owners of experimental label No Type, posted to the microsound.org email list the following observation (6/7/03): "What i do know is that 'music with beat' is just as eligible as anything else to a CCA grant, but it has to make sense as some sort of avant-garde or contemporary composition. David Kristian's *Room Rone* (which is pretty 4/4 at times, if very murkily so), for example, has been awarded a CCA grant. I understand that they will more likely give a grant to a more typically 'non-popular' composition (i.e. without beat & melody) which is basically a risk investment for a label. As a matter of fact, a few months ago No Type sent out three grants applications to the CCA (for future Canadian artist releases) and only one was accepted: interestingly enough, the least accessible of the three."
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 "Redefinition of Artistic Practices in the Twenty-First Century (LSA47)." *Parachute* 109. p. 134.
- 11 May is one of the artistic pioneers of techno born from Detroit. His track "Rhythim is Rhythim" (note the spelling) is considered to be one of the classics of the "First Wave" from the mid-to-late '80s, fusing funk and cold drum programming in a melancholic yet strangely revelatory oasis of kicks, high-hats and synthesizer.
- 12 *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1987. p. 313.





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