A Whisper or a Scream? Experimental Music Sounds a Warning for the Future of Theory.

In his posthumously televised series of interviews with Claire Parnet, released on video under the moniker *L’Abécédaire de Gilles Deleuze*, Deleuze comments:

There is one thing which seems certain to me, which is that a philosopher is not someone who contemplates, and it’s not even someone who reflects. A philosopher is someone who creates, he just creates a very special kind of thing: he creates concepts. Concepts don’t come ready-made, they don’t float in the sky, they’re not stars, you don’t contemplate them, you have to create them, to fabricate them.

(Deleuze, 1996; my translation)

For Deleuze, the *démarche* of the philosopher is, then, intimately linked to that of the artist, for both create something which is generative of affects: concepts and percepts respectively. Against the scientific mentality which wishes to enclose the world within the theories it devises, then, the philosopher must constantly engage in what Deleuze terms becomings, must ceaselessly strive to produce sensory affects just as the artist attempts to distill, in the percept, a whole range of sensations which exceed the person experiencing them. As Deleuze and Guattari state in their book *What is Philosophy?:*

Art takes a bit of chaos in a frame in order to form a composed chaos that becomes sensory, or from which it extracts a chaoid sensation as variety; but science takes a bit of chaos in a system of coordinates and forms a referenced chaos that becomes Nature, and from which it extracts an aleatory function and chaoid variables. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1996, p. 206)
This is not to say, however, that all those who call themselves philosophers behave in this manner, as Deleuze knows well. Indeed, in *L’Abécédaire* he talks of those “philosophers” who do not create concepts but are content merely to explicate existing phenomena, a vocation which can only produce commentary (or, at best, “bad” philosophy). Philosophy of this kind, like science, creates out of a system of coordinates a referenced chaos that presents what appears to be a stable, fixed ontology since it is always comprehensible in terms of the set of axiomatics originally employed for its analysis. Philosophy of this kind, then, deals not in the dynamic forms inescapably implicated by the concept of becoming, but in fixed forms.

Even if Theory (if such a thing exists / has ever existed) is built upon the ruins of philosophy — as Fredric Jameson suggested in his plenary address at the 2001 Cultural Studies Association of Australia Conference — it should nonetheless operate in the philosophical manner outlined by Deleuze, creating concepts, extracting percepts and generating affects at the same time as it makes us see new things, for it is an eminently dynamic practice. Indeed, Theory is perhaps (amongst other things) that branch of philosophy proper to Cultural Studies, itself an eminently dynamic and non-reductive discipline due to the seemingly infinite range of texts (in that term’s widest sense) that its horizontal trajectory surveys. However, in its use of Theory (or philosophy) as an analytic tool, Cultural Studies constantly runs the risk of deploying a scientific model of thought, of practising the “bad” philosophy invoked above, of applying a pre-existing set of axiomatics (extracted from one or more of those volumes which have come to constitute the canon of Theory) to its objects of study in an attempt to render the latter comprehensible and apprehensible according to the terms of the theoretical knowledge accrued and assimilated by the practitioner.
Cultural Studies (or Theory) of this kind produces not concepts, not dynamic forms that enter into becomings, but static, enclosed forms such as that of the circle. To create forms of this kind is to colonise, to territorialise as Deleuzeans would have it, to impose a stable ideological architecture upon the inherently disparate, to deny the individual, all of which are anathema to the leftist impulse from which Fredric Jameson has suggested that Theory is born.

That the spatial territory formed by Cultural Studies — or, indeed, Theory — might resemble a circle is, perhaps, not surprising, for it could be argued that this discipline is born not only of a horizontal accumulation of texts and examples but, at the same time, an endless attempt to bring to bear upon itself a vertical self-examination and space of reflection. The challenge raised to Cultural Studies, then, is that of finding the means to convert the circular form created by the interaction of its horizontal and vertical axes (the latter constantly pulling the former upwards and back on itself) into a dynamic, properly philosophical practice. In this paper, I will suggest that the figure of the loop, the horizontal bent back on itself, proffers an example of such a dynamic circular form. Simply to assert this, however, is not enough, for logically this model does not make sense: if the horizontal axes of Cultural Studies and Theory are constructed of the texts that these disciplines take as their objects of study, then by bending that axis back on itself their range of possible texts becomes finite which, of course, contradicts what we have identified to be one of the defining characteristics of Cultural Studies — and, by inference, of the philosophical practice proper to that discipline.

[New para suggested] Rather than the circular movement of the loop trajectory we have posited as the one most fitting to trace the movement of Cultural Studies and Theory coming from the deviation of these discipline’s objects, then, let us
hypothesise that the circularity of the loop comes from the very systems employed by these disciplines. In this scenario, Cultural Studies and Theory would operate in the manner of a feedback loop in an electroacoustic system in which the output of the system — or, in our analogy, the chosen object of study — is fed back into the system, only to become output, exponentially increased, which again feeds back into the input and so on. In this manner, the product of the system is the result of an intensification of the actual product — the original input or text — fed into the system and not a new product resulting from a synthesis of product and system, which is to say that the product of the system (like “good” philosophy) creates something new and does not merely amalgamate pre-existing entities. To put this in electroacoustic terms, we might say that the feedback howl, composed solely of the original external input, is augmented by the system to produce a new expression. This expression is rendered possible only through the introduction of the original source into a system which does not impose an external architecture onto that source but uses the original architecture of that source to exceed itself (and, indeed, the system to a certain extent) and create a new expression.

If, indeed, Cultural Studies and Theory operate in this manner, there is, then, an inescapable symbiosis between these disciplines and the artistic products upon which they cast their attention, just as there is, for Deleuze, an undeniable similarity between the work of the artist and that of the philosopher.

In one sense, this symbiosis goes even further than was the case with philosophy and art, however, since the excess produced by the affective forces of the work of art and philosophy (‘affects are becomings, becomings which overflow whoever passes through them, which exceed the forces of whoever passes through them’ says Deleuze in *L’Abécédaire*) is an inherent aspect of the very system we have posited as a model for
Cultural Studies, which forces the products it comes into contact with to exceed themselves. [Can the previous sentence be broken down – it is very long? WOULD YOU BE HAPPY TO DO THIS BY PUTTING THE PARENTHESES AS A NOTE? IN WHICH CASE THAT SHOULD COME INSERTED WHERE PARENTHEtical QUOTATION IS AT THE MOMENT.] In order to carry this examination of this kind of system further, therefore, I shall now turn our attention to some works of art from the musical realm (in which Deleuze finds the supreme creators of affects) which make use of the loop in order to create a new form of expression. In so doing, we shall implicitly articulate the symbiotic relationship between Cultural Studies / Theory and these artistic practices and suggest why, following our musical examples, it is important for these disciplines to listen to these musical examples if they are to avoid some of the pitfalls to which they too often fall prey. If, as we have inferred, some Cultural Studies practitioners practice “bad” philosophy, using Theory as a pre-existing set of axiomatics to apply to texts, those who, on the contrary, then to do so, it will be suggested, is fundamentally to disregard the very nature of the system in which they operate. Operate in a loopy system, like the musician using feedback, cannot do so due to the very nature of the system in which they operate. For feedback, like Cultural Studies, has no ontology of its own, it is an expression which can only come into being through contact with the external source or text that it is transforming, a system that has no being in and of itself, that cannot be said to have a stable centre, therefore, and which cannot then be used as an agent of territorialisation. Performing a transformation to bring source to expression, and not a deformation as normally happens when content is filtered through form to come into being, content here decides its own form and can then only produce an expression of the new.
In 1975, Lou Reed released *Metal Machine Music*, a double album composed of four sides of guitar feedback, partly due to legal wranglings with his record company, but also because of a desire to return to the ‘Real’ of rock and roll, that is to say an expression infused with the original passion (or we might say desire) that gave birth to that form, and one that avoided the axiomatics within which heavy metal rock had become encoded: ‘parties / dancing / background, romance’.3 The recording process for *Metal Machine Music* was simple, consisting, essentially, of two guitars leaning up against two large amplifiers left to their own devices. As Reed explains: ‘I would record tracks of guitars, at different speeds, playing with the reverb, tuning the guitars in unusual ways. I would tune all the strings, say to E, put the guitar a certain distance from the amp, and it would start feeding back. The harmonics would start mixing, going into something else. It was as if the guitar was hitting itself’.4

Apart from the possibly facetious intent behind *Metal Machine Music*, there lies a desire to create an expression that cannot be apprehended in the same manner as most musical forms, to make music intended to provoke extreme reaction and music that would escape the commodification in which rock and roll was becoming increasingly entrapped at this point in its history. As Reed wrote in his original 1975 sleeve notes:

This is what I meant by ‘real’ rock, about ‘real’ things. No one I know has listened to it all the way through including myself. It is not meant to be. Start any place you like. Symmetry, mathematical precision, obsessive and detailed accuracy and the vast advantage one has over ‘modern electronic composers’. They, with neither sense of time, melody or emotion, manipulated or no. It’s for a certain time and place of mind. It is the only recorded work I know of seriously done as well as possible as a gift, if one could call it that, from a part of certain head, to a few others. Most of you won’t like this, and I don’t blame you at all. It’s not meant for you. At the very least I made
it so I had something to listen to. Certainly Misunderstood; Power to Consume (how Bathetic); an idea done respectfully, intelligently, sympathetically and graciously, always with concentration on the first and foremost goal. For that matter, off the record, I love and adore it. I’m sorry, but not especially, if it turns you off. One record for us and it. I’d harbored hope that the intelligence that once inhabited novels or films would ingest rock. I was, perhaps, wrong. This is the reason Sally Can’t Dance — your Rock n Roll Animal. More than a decent try, but hard for us to do badly. Wrong media, unquestionably. This is not meant for the market.

Reed’s intention would appear to have been successful. It is reckoned that the vast majority of the 100,000 copies estimated to have been sold have never been played right the way through — and yet, ironically, it is notoriously difficult to track down a second-hand original vinyl copy of the album. Even today, this album regularly figures in the reader’s polls of magazines under the category of both ‘Greatest albums of all time’ and ‘Worst albums of all time’, and, in his liner notes to the recent re-issue of Metal Machine Music, David Fricke emphasises the extent to which this album defies analysis or containment, asking ‘How do you dissect, or describe, random, mad-animal tone?’.

Lou Reed was by no means the only artist experimenting with pure feedback around this time. Already in 1973, the avant-garde pianist, David Tudor, created a work, entitled Microphone, solely from the sounds of a microphone feeding back in an echo chamber. Steve Reich, for his part, conceived of a piece in 1968 called Pendulum Music whose “score” reads as follows:

Pendulum Music
For Microphones, Amplifiers Speakers and Performers.
Three, Four, or more microphones all suspended from the ceiling or from microphone boom stands by thin cables so that they all hang the same distance from the floor and are all free to swing with a pendular motion. Each microphone’s cable is plugged into an amplifier which is connected to a loudspeaker. Each microphone hangs a few inches directly above or next to its speaker.

Before the performance each amplifier is turned up just to the point where feedback occurs when a mike swings directly over or next to its speaker, but no feedback occurs as the mike swings to either side. This level on each amplifier is then marked for future reference and all amplifiers are turned down.

The performance begins with performers taking each mike, pulling it back like a swing, and then holding them while another performer turns up the amplifier to their pre-marked levels. Performers then release all the microphones in unison. Thus, a series of feedback pulses are heard which will either be all in unison or not depending on the gradually changing phase relations of the different mike pendulums.

Performers then sit down to watch and listen to the process along with the rest of the audience.

The piece is ended sometime shortly after all mikes have come to rest and are feeding back a continuous tone by performers pulling out the power cords of the amplifiers. (Reich, 1974, pp. 12-13)

The use of pure feedback, a concentration on the sounds of the system used for the production of sound, is not confined to the progressive era of the 1960s and 70s. Indeed, certain of the works of the contemporary sound artist Koji Asano can be seen
as the direct descendant of these works. His *Momentum*, for instance, is a work created from the sounds of the air pressure emanating from the woofers of a speaker, this sound being picked up by microphones physically touching the paper cones of the speakers and then amplified repeatedly, whilst his piece *Avalanches* consists of 70 minutes of manipulated feedback made by hanging microphones in front of a speaker. David Lee Myers, formerly of Arcane Device, is also fascinated by feedback and its potential as a tool for auto-genetic production. Myers terms much of his music ‘Feedback Music’, and has built a number of feedback machines for both studio and live performance of his music. For Myers, the interest of feedback lies precisely in the self-organisation that it is built upon. He has written, ‘I am interested in this concept of Feedback, how something presented with its own output begins to function in a completely new way. […] For me, it is all about routing, about flow — if the machine is allowed its “own flow”, then what comes forth says something about the entire structure, points up the details of said structure’. The tech section of his website elaborates on this statement saying,

> A big interest for me in making electronic music has always been to unleash the electron, to let it be itself rather than forcing electrical impulses to imitate violins. A focus of the Feedback Music was always to allow devices to ‘sing their own songs’—well, within certain chosen parameters of course.

So… feedback music, processor music. The idea is that an effects device is fed some of its own output — much like a squealing speaker which accidentally feeds the microphone supplying its input — and electrons begin to flow as they wish. The trick is to shape this flow, select the feedback paths which create an aesthetically pleasing
(or whatever) direction and shape. What is required is several devices whose business it is to bend sound into various shapes, and a routing scheme which allows them to speak to each other and to themselves. Any effects device and a decent mixer with a couple of ‘effects sends’ can do the job, but for me the only way to go about it is to build a dedicated mixer. This way I don't have 200 knobs doing lots of other things I don't need done; I can see the paths more clearly and get to the work of massaging the flow.6

What all of these works have in common is not only feedback, but a heightened awareness of the very system or hardware that enables their artistic expression. Tudor’s *Microphone* is accompanied by a diagram of his electronic circuitry (figure 1), Myer’s website contains circuit diagrams of his feedback machines (figures 2 and 3), [where would you like the figures to go in the text? DEPENDS ON YOUR LAYOUT. I GUESS THAT THEY CAN BE INSERTED IN BETWEEN TEXT OR ELSE GO ON A SEPARATE PAGE, DEPENDING ON THE SPACE YOU WANT TO DEVOTE TO THEM. IF YOU’RE GOING TO PUT THEM IN I SHOULD PROBABLY CHECK COPYRIGHT. DO YOU KNOW IF YOU CAN USE THIS KIND OF THING UNPROBLEMATICALLY? I DON’T THINK THE LOU REED WILL BE A PROBLEM AS IT’S MOSTLY TEXT, DAVID LEE MYERS WILL GIVE ME PERMISSION I’M SURE, BUT DON’T KNOW HOW I’LL GET IN TOUCH WITH CRAMPS RECORDS. VERY OBSCURE LITTLE OPERATION WITHOUT WEB PRESENCE.] Reich’s composition is, essentially, a diagram transcribed in words, and the back cover of Lou Reed’s *Metal Machine Music* contains a (partly fictional and somewhat facetious) list of the acoustic hardware used:

Specifications

Sony ½ track
Uher ¼ track
Pioneer ¼ track
5 piggyback Marshall Tube Amps in series
arbitor distortor (Jimi’s)
Marantz Preamps
Marantz Amps
Altec Voice of America Monitor Speakers
Sennheiser Headphones
Drone cognizance and harmonic possibilities vis a vis Lamont Young’s Dream Music
Rock orientation, melodically disguised, i.e. drag
Avoidance of any type of atonality.
Electro-Voice high filter microphones
Fender Tremolo Unit
Sunn Tremolo Unit
Ring Modulator/Octave Relay Jump
Fender Dual Showman Bass Amp with Reverb Unit (Pre-Columbia) white
No Synthesizers
No Arp
No Instruments?
–10 db + 57 db
–20 hz→30,000hz
–12 kz→28,000 kz
Distortion 0.02 bass and treble ceilings
Combinations and Permutations built upon constant harmonic Density Increase and
Melodic Distractions
STRICT STEREO SEPARATION
No panning
No phasing
No
Reed’s work does not only bring to bear a heightened consciousness of itself at the point of genesis but at the point of reception also. The fourth side of the original vinyl version of Metal Machine Music ends with a locked groove which ensures, as Fricke notes, ‘that listeners with manual turntables had to physically shut the music off — or surrender to infinite squeal’. Reed himself has commented on this aspect of his record saying, ‘I thought Metal Machine Music would be such fun if you actually had to get up to turn it off’.7 This deliberate manipulation of the very hardware required by the consumer to listen to the product has been taken up by a section of the contemporary electronic music vanguard, sometimes referred to as the clicks and cuts generation, but also by many artists who would not normally be included in this genre — if indeed a genre it is. This ‘glitch’ music (for such is another of its monikers) or post-digital music takes as one of its primary sound sources the faults of the digital — or analogue — technology used to create it and recreate or reproduce it at the point of reception, using static, interference, CD skips, vinyl and tape hiss, decayed circuitry and digital misreadings to create music which draws attention to its form since its
form (in a degenerated state) becomes its content. In transforming form into content, this music pulls its two axes — the vertical axis of form and the horizontal, linear axis of content that corresponds, roughly, to the plane of narrative of other artistic forms — together into a loop, a loop from which emanates an expression built on an unstable and undefinable centre. Rejecting the perfectibility offered by digital high-fidelity technology which represents a transcendent grand master narrative that can only be removed from the reality of an increasingly accelerated and complex modern world — ‘only digital machines cover up meaning, disrupt sense, delete historic markings and traces. They do not distinguish, they do calculate’, as Achim Szepanski writes — this music cannot be apprehended in the same way as the highly compressed and reductive form of the 3-minute pop song or the grandiose orchestral epics that still dominate much classical music. [The previous sentence is very long – can it be broken down? CAN THIS BE DONE BY PUTTING PARENTHE TICAL QUOTATION AS NOTE AGAIN? ]The 3-minute pop song in particular, as Antoine Roquentin in Sartre’s La Nausée knew only too well, has an internal coherence, every element being integral and necessary to the whole, its melody, for instance, being dependent on the strict arrangement of notes within a fixed structure that is broken as soon as any one element is extracted from it. The new musical forms to which we are referring, however, create a musical expression which — when done well — cannot be apprehended in any complete way, which is critical of itself and its own systems, which is highly aware of its own faults — indeed, which is built upon its own faults and interstices — and which, then, is truly non-representational, thrusting us as listeners back into the world, never allowing us fully to inhabit it.

A prime example of such a form can be found in the “absolute music” of the Spanish sound sculptor Francisco López who follows takes the lessons of Pierre
Schaeffer’s EXAMPLE AND RIPS to rip the musical signifier from its realm of representationality. [the grammar here “take the lessons … to rip”– seems odd] As López notes in interview: ‘I think this is actually completely different from the traditional conception of listening to music, in which you listen to melody or rhythm or whatever. What I want to do is something that is more blurred, something that does not have a definite structure’ (Cox, 2000a, p.33). López’s music also invokes a return to the real similar to that which we have identified in Lou Reed’s *Metal Machine Music*, as well as a refusal to enclose his listener and a desire to place him/her rather on a plane of consistency. On the first of these points, Christoph Cox notes, for instance, how López’s ‘rejection of titles recalls the work of abstract visual artists such as Barnett Newman and Donald Judd, who freed painting and sculpture from figurative representation so that they could explore the real stuff: colour and shape, space and mass’ (Cox, 2000a, p.33). COMMENTING ON THE SECOND OF THESE POINTS, MEANWHILE, whilst on the second of these points, López himself remarks, ‘For me, it’s essentially to destroy the symbolism of sounds, the communicative aspect of sounds. Once you do that, you’re dealing with a different universe, a universe that is not related to meaning. What you create is a blank space for people to decide the meaning, the possible meanings’ (Cox, 2000a, p.33).

[Another long sentence – can it be broken down?]

Similarly, highlighting the open and imperfect nature of the system created by glitch, Philip Sherburne writes in the liner notes to the recent compilation, *Clicks & Cuts 2*:

> The click is remainder, the bit spit out of the break. The indigestible leftover that code won’t touch. Cousin to the glitch, the click sounds the alarm. It alerts the listener to error. The motor fails, the disk spins down, and against pained silence
there sounds only the machinic hack of the click. It is the sound of impatience at technology’s betrayal, fingernails tapped on the table while waiting to reboot. It is the drumming against the thrum of too much information.

Music achieves a new virtuality thanks to the click, a second order of abstraction. Because if pop and dance music aim at the perfect simulation of the Real by electronic means, then clicktech, microhouse, cutfunk graft a secondary structure onto the first — not imitative or hyperreal, but substitutive, implied, made clear by context alone, a compressed millisecond of static stands in for the hi-hat, recognizable as such because that’s where the hi-hat would have been.

It is the very self-critical reflection on the imperfectability of its own system within glitch that enables it to form a loop from which emanates an intensive, non-representational expression that cannot territorialise but can render possible an infinite number of possible connections. ‘Clicks do not express meanings or essences but only intensity and connections’, writes Achim Szepanski.9

[new para suggested] This, I suggest, should be the manner in which Cultural Studies and Theory, if they are to be truly critical, should operate. In saying this, I am not suggesting for one moment that it never has operated in this way. To take but one example, Deleuze and Guattari’s Mille plateaux shares many characteristics with Metal Machine Music. Reed invites us to ‘start any place you like’, just as Deleuze and Guattari, in the introduction to Mille plateaux, state that they wrote the book as a rhizome and intend it to be read as such:

We call a ‘plateau’ any multiplicity connected to other multiplicities by superficial underground stems in such a way as to form or extend a rhizome. We are writing this book as a rhizome. It is composed of plateaus. We have given it a circular form [or the form of a loop?], but only for laughs. Each morning we would wake up, and each
of us would ask himself what plateau he was going to tackle, writing five lines here, ten there. We had hallucinatory experiences, we watched lines leave one plateau and proceed to another like columns of tiny ants. We made circles of convergence. Each plateau can be read starting anywhere and can be related to any other plateau. To attain the multiple, one must have a method that effectively constructs it; no typographical cleverness, no lexical agility, no blending or creation of words, no syntactical boldness, can substitute for it. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, 22)

Similarly, just as Reed realises that, because of the radical new intentionality of his work which redefines the very essence of reception, his work will not be liked by all, is not intended to be liked by all, so Deleuze and Guattari implicitly suggest that even those readers sympathetic to their thought will not, should not accept all of it unconditionally. As Brian Massumi writes in his Translator’s Foreword to A Thousand Plateaus (evoking, interestingly, a musical analogy):

How should A Thousand Plateaus be played? When you buy a record there are always cuts that leave you cold. You skip them. You don’t approach a record as a closed book that you have to take or leave. Other cuts you may listen to over and over again. They follow you. You find yourself humming them under your breath as you go about your daily business.

A Thousand Plateaus is conceived as an open system. It does not pretend to have the final word. The authors’ hope, however, is that elements of it will stay with a certain number of its readers and will weave into the melody of their everyday lives. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, pp. xiii-xiv)

The question is not: it is true? But: does it work? What new thoughts does it make it possible to think: What new emotions does it make possible to feel? What new sensations and perceptions does it open in the body?
The answer for some readers, perhaps most, will be “none”. If that happens, it’s not your tune. No problem. But you would have been better off buying a record. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. xv)

I have also suggested that music based on feedback or glitch cannot be apprehended in its entirety and thus used as a transcendent form to flee the world, but rather that it thrusts us back towards the real. (LET US NOTE AS AN ASIDE THAT THIS IS a movement akin to that observed in contemporary art by Hal Foster in his book The Return of the Real in which contemporary art is seen to refuse the ‘age-old mandate to pacify the gaze, to unite the imaginary and the symbolic against the real […] as if this art wanted the gaze to shine, the object to stand, the real to exist, in all the glory (or horror) of its pulsatile desire, or at least to evoke this sublime condition’, all of which is achieved through a move ‘not only to attack the image but to tear at the screen, or to suggest that it is already torn’ (Foster, 1996, pp. 140-141).) [Another long sentence – can it be broken down?] This is to say that this is a music of affect and not music used for a representational end, much as Francis Bacon’s paintings, in Deleuze’s analysis, strive to break with representation, narration and illustration as he paints the cry and not the horror (Deleuze, 1981, p.10). And so it is that Deleuze and Guattari’s thought can never be fully apprehended, being (sometimes) necessarily dysfunctional. The most striking example of this dysfunctional thought is perhaps the idea of the body without organs, a concept borrowed from Antonin Artaud that Deleuze and Guattari posit as the only possible model of a perfect body in spite of (or because of?) the incompleteness and imperfectability upon which it is founded and that constantly traverse it. Carrying this incompleteness and dysfunction through into their use of this idea, the Deleuzoguattarian body without organs is a concept in the true Deleuzean sense of this term, which is to say that it is unavoidably productive since it cannot be
reduced to one simple entity nor explained fully. The pseudo-explications of it, especially in *Anti-Œdipus*, are built upon a series of irreconcilable contradictions which ensure that if it is to be apprehended at all, it can only be grasped not as a whole, but as a transformatory force, as an agent of deterritorialisation which pushes us back to the real with fewer pre-givens than previously.

Similarly, Jean Baudrillard’s thought, as Rex Butler argues, is based on a number of irreconcilable contradictions. Dividing Baudrillard’s thought into the categories of ‘simulation’, ‘seduction’ and ‘doubling’, Butler is at pains to stress how the very possibility of the systems that Baudrillard addresses is itself dependent on their impossibility and how these systems are also imbued with a notion of reversibility, by which he means that a system can easily produce the opposite effects from those intended when pushed too far. In arguing these points, Butler ultimately wishes to prove that there exists in Baudrillard’s thought the same movement towards the real that we have situated at the heart of the experimental music under consideration here and that Hal Foster finds in contemporary art. For Butler,

Baudrillard’s work, therefore, is not simply to be understood as the celebration of simulation, the end of the real, as so many of his commentators would have it. Rather, his problem is how to think the real when all is simulation, how to use the real against the attempts by various systems of rationality to account for it. In a surprising twist, then, Baudrillard emerges as a *defender* of the real against all efforts to speak of it — including, of course, his own. As he says in his interview with Lotringer: ‘But I hold no position on reality. Reality remains an unshakeable postulate towards which you can maintain a relation either of adversity or reconciliation. The real — all things considered, perhaps it exists — no, it doesn’t exist — is the insurmountable limit of theory. The real is not an objective state of things; it is the point at which theory can do nothing. This does not necessarily make
of theory a failure. The real is actually a challenge to the theoretical edifice. But in
my opinion theory can have no status other than that of challenging the real’. (Butler,
1999, pp. 17-18)\textsuperscript{10}

In proposing this reading of Baudrillard, furthermore, Butler himself imposes an
analytical system upon himself which might be likened to the feedback loop discussed
above. Asking what it might mean to read Baudrillard in his own terms, not through
the external architecture of another ideological system as so many have previously
done, he writes:

[To read Baudrillard in his own terms] is to think the issues involved in comparing
his work to that of other thinkers (as Gane does), or, more specifically, how his
notion of the sign might compare to others (as Genosko does). It is to suggest that,
before doing this, we must try to grasp the internal logic of Baudrillard’s work, what
it is already saying about its relationship to the external world, the possibility of
applying theory to examples, its affinity to that of other thinkers, how the sign works
and whether it can even be represented. It is not definitively to stop the possibility of
such things, but it is to think how it is a problem — a problem that Baudrillard
himself might be addressing. It is to admit that there is a dilemma in approaching his
work, that a complete and impartial understanding of it cannot be taken for granted.
For, before all else, it imposes a \textit{choice}, a choice which implies a certain decision and
risk. On the one hand, we can take an \textit{external} perspective onto Baudrillard’s work,
as his commentators have largely done so far, and risk merely begging the question
about it, criticizing it in terms that it would not recognize or that it would reject in
advance. On the other hand, we can take an \textit{internal} perspective onto it, reading it
only in its own terms, completing it as it were and risking giving it a wholeness and
coherence it might not have had before us. (Butler, 1999, pp. 15-16)\textsuperscript{11}
If theory and theoretical scholarship have operated in this manner in the past — and sometimes still do — the question might then be asked as to why I am proposing an old model (or, rather, a new formulation of an old model that follows the genealogical shift identified herein from feedback to glitch) for theory as the way forward, basing this analysis in a musical analogy. The very fact that Theory has often inspired experimental music indicates that an affinity between these forms exists: in 1998, a compilation album of experimental artists was released entitled *In Memoriam Gilles Deleuze*; the label that releases much of this experimental music is called ‘Mille Plateaux’, and one of its divisions is called ‘Ritornell’, a name which explicitly invokes Deleuzean philosophy and which aims to release music in which can be heard the refrain of a sound machine, a bursting structure torpedoing the point system and releasing the musical lines from their subordination to the points and notes of music. But whilst experimental music is heeding the lessons of Theory, it cannot be said that this is a two-way relationship of reciprocity.

**CULTURAL STUDIES AND THEORY SHOULD LISTEN TO EXPERIMENTAL MUSIC NOT ONLY TO END THE PAUCITY OF STUDIES ON THIS KIND OF MUSIC — ALTHOUGH THAT WOULD NOT BE A BAD THING —, BUT ALSO BECAUSE THIS MUSIC HAS SOME VALUABLE LESSONS FOR THEM.** The reason why Cultural Studies and Theory should listen to experimental music (and by this I do not simply mean that we should end the paucity of studies on this kind of music — although that would not be a bad thing) is because it has some valuable lessons to return to them. [The ‘it’ is a little ambiguous, on first reading at least, in the previous section; can the sentence be reordered to avoid this?] In the digital age, much Theory or scholarly work using Theory has fallen prey to the seductions and anaesthetics that the new technological era has put at our disposal in a
way that experimental electronic music, at the forefront of the digital economy, by nature and necessity, has not. The unprecedented access to information and knowledge that this world of speed has laid at our fingertips is too often used by scholars and theorists in an uncritical way: too many are surfing the superhighway without having a true foothold. Scrambling to keep up, the result is a superficial survey, or what we might call a theory of gloss, whereas I would advocate a theory of glitch, a theory that recognises that speed cannot be arrested, that the apparent opening up of all knowledge can never be complete and that we must therefore recognise that our Theory will always be inadequate unless it recognises its own inadequacy first. The artists of the glitch movement — and other genres or movements such as Japanese noise — have understood this within the realm of their own practice. They reject the perfectibility that digital technology offers, wary of the idyll that it represents because this latter is markedly at odds with the social and political realities of the world we inhabit, because it is a new mythology. In this context, then, Cultural Studies and Theory should be similarly explicitly aware of their own ontology which (like Blanchot’s conception of literary space) can only be based on their own impossibility, which can only come into being, like glitch, at the very point at which their system fails. (This is a notion similar, although not identical, to the Deleuzoguattarian conceptualisation of the Body without Organs which can only exist by injecting anti-production into the processes of production.) If these disciplines are not traversed by this recognition of themselves, we risk a number of things:

i) There will be those who are critical of our practice for us, and sometimes rightly so. Bricmont and Sokal’s book of 1997, *Impostures intellectuelles*, is one example.
Although fairly puerile in itself, THIS TEXT NONETHELESS ELICITED A GOOD NUMBER OF SUPPORTIVE REACTIONS AMONGST THOSE WHO CONSIDER THEORY TO BE THE EMPEROR’S POST-68 CLOTHES — A VIEW WHICH MAY WELL BE SHARED (ALBEIT IN SILENCE BECAUSE OF THE STAKES) EVEN BY PRACTITIONERS OF THEORY WHILST READING CERTAIN TEXTS OR STUDIES. the supportive reactions that it elicited are indicative of a perception of Theory as the Emperor’s post-68 clothes, a perception which I would imagine all of us have shared at times whilst reading certain texts or studies, but rarely admitted to because of the stakes. [grammar – the subject to which ‘itself’ refers should come after the comma; can the sentence be reordered to avoid this?] Unless we do become more self-critical, however, bad parodies such as Bricmont and Sokal’s (or BS for short) will continue to pose a threat to the future of Cultural Studies and Theory as disciplines within an increasingly rational, corporate academic climate that responds to market forces and suffers the use of science-based models within the humanities only when it comes to funding criteria.

ii) Linked to this last point is the risk we run when using the poststructuralist invocation of an infinite number of possible connections to juxtapose disparate elements. Operating on a plane of consistency, the idea that our sphere of reference is unlimited and that all texts are infinite does indeed enrich the potential of our work in unprecedented ways, but unless we retain an explicit recognition of the processes that allow these connections to be made — as does the sound of the scratch in the cut and paste aesthetics of hip hop and the glitch and hiss that link sections of much experimental sound collage work — we lay ourselves open to accusations of absolute arbitrariness in our choices and juxtapositions.
iii) If we employ Theory not as a ticket to return to the real (in the sense that this term is employed by Butler on Baudrillard and Lou Reed, seen above, and which, for Deleuze and Guattari, would equate to desire), aware of its limitations in itself, but rather as a prophylactic — an all-enclosing sheath that kills desire, sensation and creation, which is slipped over cultural objects as phallic symbols whose importance and size is always greater in the mind of the master than in reality — then we risk losing a sense of perspective. Without this perspective, the danger is that we will impose the architecture of our own imaginings upon the objects we study without regard for the ontology of those very objects (for their ontology, even if not auratic, must be asserted before it can be refuted). Theoretical systems, especially those that work along the lines that I have sketched, intensifying the immanent terms of the product under examination, will magnify the objects of our attention exponentially, increasing an often insignificant / almost-imperceptible input to a great volume. If we lose sight of the very system that facilitates this intensification, if we do not lay out before our readers the diagram that we are using, then it may appear that we are attributing an excessive importance to the products upon which we focus our attention, or we may even take them to be something they are not. In doing so we can only become divorced from the real which, ultimately, is surely the realm in which all passionate about Cultural Studies and Theory believe them to be grounded — or, we might say, to take up Baudrillard’s idea seen above, that Cultural Studies and Theory must be anchored within the real since they can only exist as a challenge to the real. If we allow this divorce from the real to continue, rather than interacting with the Capitalist world in a schizophrenic manner — a manner true to the mechanisms of that world according to the analysis of Deleuze and Guattari, that is — we will be
distanced from it, enclosed within an autistic realm and subject to the kind of Orientalist gaze that we deplore when it cast is cast upon others.

A Theory that follows a loopy trajectory, that is governed by a model premised on feedback or glitch, will elude all of these criticisms because it will be inherently self-critical (founded upon its own insufficiency and simultaneous self-sufficiency in the instant of its creation) inevitably self-aware (coming into being only through dynamic activation of its internal architecture) and always returning to the real without which the process that creates the conditions for its very possibility cannot exist.

Greg Hainge
Adelaide University, Australia.

1 The dominance of the horizontal axis for Cultural Studies and Theory bring them in line with much contemporary art, many of whose artists, according to Hal Foster, ‘treat conditions like desire or disease as sites for work’, which is to say that they work ‘horizontally, in a synchronic movement from social issue to issue, from political debate to debate, more than vertically, in a diachronic engagement with the disciplinary forms of a given genre or medium’ (Foster, 1996, p. 199).

2 In *L’Abécédaire*, Deleuze elaborates a lengthy analogy between a philosopher entering into philosophy for the first time and a painter entering into the realm of colour.

3 In the original sleeve notes.

4 In the liner notes to reissue.

5 In an email to the author of this paper.

In the liner notes to reissue.

In the liner notes to *Clicks and Cuts 2*, translated by Judith Funk.

In the liner notes to *Clicks and Cuts 2*, translated by Judith Funk.


It might be argued that the model proposed herein based on electroacoustic feedback avoids the pitfall of coherence that Butler outlines at the end of this quotation since the expression of feedback, as has been shown, has no stable centre in itself.

This description of Ritornell is paraphrased from a Forced Exposure description of one of the label’s releases. See the description of Marvin Ayres’ *Cellosphere* at <http://www.forcedexposure.com>.

In the introduction to his online project, *Theory Music*, Bernhard Loibner poignantly writes: ‘In the emerging digital economy, music is again the avant garde. Since the introduction of the Compact Disk in the early 1980’s, music has been more purely digital than any other commodity. It is no surprise that music is the test pilot for the new forms of on-line distribution and consumption’.

<http://www.allquiet.org/theorymusic/>

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