

**(EXCERPT) HOW DO YOU MAKE MUSIC A BODY WITHOUT ORGANS?
GILLES DELEUZE AND EXPERIMENTAL ELECTRONICA**

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from *Soundcultures: Über digitale und elektronische Musik*, ed. Marcus S. Kleiner and Achim Szepanski (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag).

Techno, house, and their offshoots reanimate the musical strategy of pulse-driven minimalism, generating difference through repetition. Despite a superficial resemblance, the repeated pulse has nothing to do with a ticking clock or with the objective chronometrical time it marks. On the contrary, as the classic minimalists often noted, such repetition generates a peculiar sensation of time that is not extensive (directional, progressive, goal-oriented) but intensive (static, suspended, immersive, fluid), not quantitative but qualitative: the time of duration.¹ The regular pulse short-circuits the listener's desire to listen for form, structure, or development, and instead focuses attention on the moment-to-moment appearance and disappearance of sounds, events, and intensities. In this way, repetition highlights difference. Fine-grained shifts in timbre, texture, interval and intensity take center stage, and repeated sounds begin to appear in different guises. "I was noticing that things didn't sound the same when you heard them more than once," Terry Riley told an interviewer. "And the more you heard them, the more different they did sound. Even though something was staying the same, it was changing."² Riley underscores the Bergsonian point that there is no pure repetition, since each repeated instance is inflected with those instances already accumulated in the memory.³ Minimalist house and techno tracks thrive on this conjunction of difference and repetition. Maurizio's "m6," for example, repeats the same two-note figure hundreds of times, each time bending, contracting, or drawing it out to elicit different textures, timbres, depths, and speeds.⁴ Here, electronica learns from *elektronische Musik* and minimalism alike: rich in wild, sonic matter, classic electronic music was often too busy

¹ See, for example, the comments of Philip Glass and Terry Riley in K. Robert Schwarz, *Minimalists* (London: Phaidon, 1996), pp. 9, 35. On duration as qualitative, intensive multiplicity, see Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, trans. F.L. Pogson (New York: Harper and Row, 1960), chs. 1 and 2 and *Creative Evolution*, trans. Arthur Mitchell (New York: Random House, 1944), ch. 1. Also see Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (New York: Zone, 1990).

² Terry Riley quoted in Schwarz, *Minimalists*, p. 35.

³ See the opening pages of Bergson's *Creative Evolution*.

⁴ Maurizio, "m6 [edit]," M CD (M/Basic Channel).

and structurally complex to make that matter fully audible; via minimalist-style drones and pulses, however, electronica puts this sonic stuff fully on display.⁵

Pause: The recent profusion of glitch-ridden electronic minimalism intensifies these two features of repetition (ateleological movement and the foregrounding of sonic matter).⁶ In a fine discussion of repetition in black culture, James Snead gives us a way of understanding this. Contrasting Europe's obsession with historical-cultural progression and black culture's affirmation of repetition, Snead writes:

In black culture, repetition means that the thing *circulates* (exactly in the manner of any flow [. . .]) there in an equilibrium. In European culture, repetition must be seen to be not just circulation and flow but accumulation and growth. In black culture, the thing (the ritual, the dance, the beat) is “there for you to pick it up when you come back to it.” If there is a goal (*Zweck*) it is continually deferred; it continually “cuts” back to the start, in the musical meaning of “cut” as an abrupt, seemingly unmotivated break (an accidental *da capo*) with a series already in progress and a willed return to a prior series.

A culture based on the idea of the “cut” will always suffer in a society whose dominant idea is material progress—but “cuts” possess their charm! In European culture, the “goal” is always clear: that which always is being worked towards. The goal is thus that which is reached only when culture “plays out” its history. Such a culture is never “immediate” but “mediated” and separated from the present tense by its own future orientation. Moreover, European culture does not allow “a succession of accidents and surprises” [as Hegel characterized African culture] but instead maintains the illusions of progression and control at all costs. Black culture, in the “cut,” builds “accidents” into its *coverage*, almost as if to control their unpredictability. Itself a kind of cultural coverage, this

⁵ On this feature of minimalism, see the opening section of Kyle Gann's “Minimal Music, Maximal Impact,” *New Music Box* Issue 31, vol. 3, no. 7 (November 2001): <http://www.newmusicbox.org/page.nmbx?id=31tp00>; also see Deleuze and Parnet, *Dialogues*, p. 33.

⁶ E.g., the tracks and artists on Mille Plateaux's *Clicks & Cuts* compilations.

magic of the “cut” attempts to confront accident and rupture not by covering them over but by making room for them inside the system itself.⁷

Against our expectations of formal development and narrative progress, the turntablist’s scratch or cut and the electronica artist’s glitch accentuate the value of repetition. The scratch and the glitch interrupt or pause the forward movement of the track, throwing it back upon a prior moment. Snead continues:

The ‘cut’ overtly insists on the repetitive nature of the music, by abruptly skipping back to another beginning which we have already heard. Moreover, the greater the insistence on the pure beauty and value of repetition, the greater the awareness must also be that repetition takes place not on a level of musical development or progression, but on the purest tonal and timbric level.⁸

In affirming the value of repetition, then, the cut or the glitch detaches sound from its forward temporal and harmonic movement and instead draws attention to its texture and sonic matter. In Deleuze’s terms, the scratch and glitch “stutter” music, withdrawing it from meaning and instead display “a pure and intense sonorous material [. . .], a deterritorialized musical sound, a cry that escapes signification, composition, song, words—a sonority that ruptures in order to break away from a chain that is all too signifying.”⁹

⁷ James A. Snead, “Repetition as a Figure of Black Culture,” *Black Literature and Literary Theory*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., (New York: Methuen, 1984), p. 67.

⁸ Snead, “Repetition,” p. 69.

⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), p. 6; cf. also pp. 21ff. On “stuttering,” see Deleuze, “He Stuttered,” in *Gilles Deleuze and the Theater of Philosophy*, ed. Constantin V. Boundas and Dorothea Olkowski (New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 23–29.