

In 1988 John Oswald sends a 4-track EP to radio stations across Canada & by '89 the lawyers of Michael Jackson & Dolly Parton issue a cease and desist order. Though no copies were sold—it was freely given out just as the samples used were without any permission—the PLUNDERPHONIC(2) EP & expanded album had to be totally destroyed.

A few years earlier, with hip hop in full swing, Oswald first presented his ideas of kleptomaniacs. The increased proliferation of music reproduction equipment, meant it was ever-easier to make copies, to sample & appropriate audio material, & to create one's own version out of the never-ending flux of sound. All sounds should be deemed public domain: the hip hop producers were already exploring this as modus operandi.

But, if in the mid-1980's we were already constantly bombarded by (pop)music, it is now evermore the case. Streams are everywhere; music is ubiquitous. Commercial vs non-commercial artists appear on the same platforms & your noise-cancelling earbuds won't phase out one from the other. We're in great seas of readily available music.

& the question posed by Oswald's plunderphonics is as valid today as it ever was: with publication & mass dissemination are we not able to take personal snapshots, a few keepsakes to play out another moment?

One thing that begins to distinguish what Oswald gets up to and what hip hop got up to is the transparency of the sample. The 1991 lawsuit against Biz Markie sent producers of hip hop into hiding or at least people began to clear & or obscure samples in order to avoid any legal action. & any 'sample-snitch' could end up in stitches.

On the continuum of plunderphonics samples recognizability is key. The delight comes from the juxtaposition of 'known knowns'. Whether it is a lazy layering that puts a track onto another or a hilarious collage of splice+dice virtuosity, plunderphonics

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sounds out a hidden music within pre-made musics. It prompts an electro-quotational mode of '( )reading' (Bernstein) where the 'ready-made' (Duchamp) mates with others. Every dj knows this method & dances somewhere on the continuum of 'known knowns'.

Sure. Identifying samples is also a thing in hip hop, but economic worries required information to be better off withheld. Once rap becomes the dominant american genre & once whosampled.com begins to support our collective memory with more crowd-sourced indices of 'related-songs', a phase-shift occurs in relation to artist rights. With napster, .mp3s, AI sample-detection we're in an alternative rapgame then 1980-90's.

& still plunderphonic artists continue on making tracks out of other's sounds. When we reach the 2000's the mashup turns into its own popular genre, creating a möebius strip-like timeline where snippets of pop—in totally recognizable gloss—get used to make more pop. Fractals make fractals.

As a certain 'retromania' (Reynolds) sets in & endless throwbacks rehash the public domain, plunderphonics of the 2010's digs into more obscure regions of a collective unconscious by pulling out the threads of nostalgic ephemera. Vapourwave sets a new tone of recycling. But venture capitalism began to maximize its nostalgia-factor to capture listeners in the mechanics of that algorithmic audio purgatory of playlists. Maybe that's a dead-end, & we can instead evoke Oswald: 'Bettered by the borrower'.

Some of what was heard:

john oswald.....PLEXURE '24  
&  
double dee & steinski.....nmes  
james tenney.....xenaudio  
girl talk.....v/vm  
people like us.....danger mouse  
mr scruff.....the avalanches  
negativland.....dj screw  
j dilla.....carl stone  
dj rashad.....spinabenz

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why have you done today?

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