

Philip Sherburne "click/"

Rhythm is texture writ large: peaks and valleys turned to pulse. Texture is rhythm rendered microscopic: (ir)regularity encoded and impressed upon the surface of sound. Where these two break and cleave apart, the click: smooth-faced, one-dimensional, textureless and out of time. The atomic test of sound's durability; a black hole like a tiny diamond.

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.

Distances, for the military, are measured in clicks. As metaphor, the click is multifaceted and multifarious - it speaks volumes. An overdetermined word at the crux of so many vocabularies: of clocks, Glocks, safecrackers.

The "click" is onomatopoeic, and thus portable across languages; it is metaphor and metonym at once, a borrowed approximation for a non-sound that has swelled into something larger. Connect the dots, and what do you have? A new pointillism: an international network, a growing linkage of artists all in pursuit of different agendas, different intentions, different ends. The click is the hub at the center of all these nodes (even if it's artificial, the click-as-affect). The click - like this clique-of-click - itself is an accident, an accidental collision of styles and intents, noise attracted to noise and static seeking out static.

What is it about this thin sound? The word approximates the music's palette, whether the crackling emptiness of Mikael Stravösand or the gray-scale fizz of Pan Sonic. Click, tick, glitch - brittle words for data hiccups. Yet it's an empty syllable, an afterdescription, a slippery tag that won't quite affix. What's in a name? In this case, everything and nothing, as with "glitch", also almost onomatopoeic, a staple term for journalists ever since a CD was made out of the sound of skipping CDs, a word that circulates like a quasi-virus, unbidden. It has some use-value, and yet it imposes a limit. Or does it?

Cut

This is not a genre but a movement, a shared inclination or perhaps a disinclination: a collective approach to discontinuity. It is not a subgenre, even - at least, not in the way that House, Techno, Electro are subgenres. It is a movement without goal or direction (not even fractal - another popular conceit - for if it turns inward on one release, emphasizing a single tone, say, or magnifying a single recycled element, on the next it may turn outward: distressing an R&B sample with a sandpapery assault, perhaps, or introducing a click-virus into the seemingly robust body of the popsong).

It is rootless - equally free from, equally at home in, club, home, headphones, gallery. It is a music of potentials: scattering clicks as if sowing seeds. It can be slippery, like one of Larry Bell's glass cubes but reflecting nothing back - no intent, no expression, no identity.

Errors and accidents crystallize. The pearl is an error, a glitch in response to impurity. The error is the aura. Just as Hip Hop records sample scratched vinyl to lend an aura of authenticity, the click creates a kind of anti-aura, lending a pearl finish to failure.

Crucially, where electronic music (from the underground to the pop charts) is obsessed with control, the click steps in to privilege limits. Nothing new, certainly, since John Cage articulated a philosophy of Chance, but in the context of the computer age, where Moore's Law dares musicians to max out their processors and perfection is always just a compile away, the click cuts through the asymptote to the Ideal. To create click-music is to harness failure, whether the crackling of the patch cord or the system-crash in mid-sample. The click redirects the limit-curve and makes it the new baseline against which subsequent successes are measured. Perhaps the limitation is not in the hardware or software, but in the listener, whose ears are not attuned

to rhythms cloaked in static. Or perhaps the failure cuts in during playback as speakers shudder against overload, putting up a crackling argument of their own.

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.

And in still another order of abstraction, click sounds are created, sampled, and edited by visual reference alone. The graphic scores of John Cage and Cornelius Cardew have been shrunken and condensed - where once there were shapes and lines and coded markings to be translated and read into musical expositions, the graphical has been parsed down to the atomic level, to a millisecond-long game of connect-the-dots, a score conducted bit by bit and executed in a flash.

Music is the seam between hearing and not hearing: for everything revealed there is something else occluded. Often the very process of revealing cloaks that other thing. It is like a blueprint with all the text written in another alphabet, or a text printed on a substance so intractable that it slips from your fingers the moment you hold it up for inspection.

And if music is this seam - or this seeming - then the click is its perfect reduction: the blip that appears and obliterates. It is, and is not, allied with minimalism. Clicksandcuts courts the minimal, flirts with absence, bats eyelashes to the sound of rushing air, coyly repetitive. But behind this screen, beneath the gridded white expanse, a deeper order of complexity disrupts. A seismic pressure bends straight lines; signal begets noise and noise begets silence. The crack of the click fills the air, to the popping of ears.