

LECTURE 2:

**PRODUCTION, COMPOSITION, SOUND
WORLDS AND PHILOSOPHIES**

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**MUS302: ELECTROACOUSTIC COMPOSITION AND
SOUND DESIGN TECHNOLOGIES**

RECAP

- ▶ History of Electronic Music: how many different 'memes' can you remember?
- ▶ Which geographical locations were particularly active in early electronic music? Can you guess why?
- ▶ What aspect of sound and perception does Stockhausen's *Kontakte* play with?
- ▶ Why did James Tenney sample Elvis's voice?

MUSIC TECHNOLOGY AS MEME C.1950

MUSIC TECHNOLOGY AS FRACTIOUS 'ALLIANCE'

CAGE AND CONCEPTUALISTS

MUSIQUE CONCRÈTE

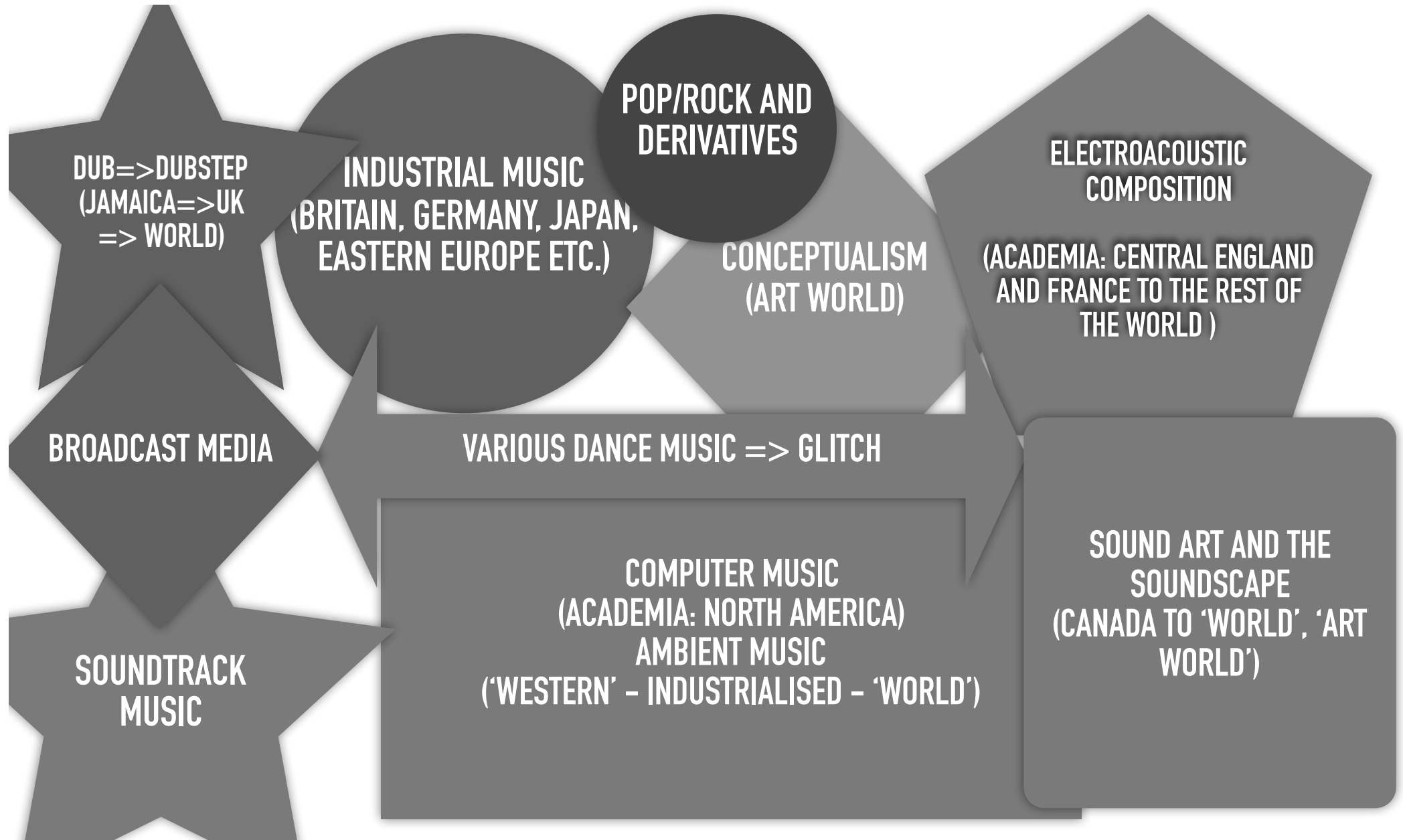
ELEKTRONISCHE MUSIK

COMPUTER MUSIC

MUSIC TECHNOLOGY AS MEME C.2016

EXPLORATORY USE OF MUSIC TECHNOLOGY AS FRACTIOUS ALLIANCE

WHERE DO WE SITUATE OURSELVES? WHO DO WE ALLY WITH?



BRIEF TIMELINE OF EARLY TECHNOLOGY-BASED MUSIC

- ▶ 1913--Luigi Russolo, *Art of Noises*
- ▶ 1939--John Cage, *Imaginary Landscapes No. 1*
- ▶ 1948--Pierre Schaeffer, *Etude aux chemins de fer* (first piece of musique concrète), studio established at French national radio
- ▶ 1951--Studio for electronic music (Elektronische Musik) established at WDR in Cologne
- ▶ 1957--first computer music program (application) written at the Bell Labs research centre, New Jersey

CAN YOU SPOT DEVELOPMENTS WHICH ARE MISSING FROM THIS HISTORY? WHICH ASPECTS DOES THIS HISTORY FOCUS ON?

- ▶ Focus on technical institutions (or, later, universities)
- ▶ Focus on composers and theorists rather than performers
- ▶ Focus on the US and Western Europe
- ▶ Focus on men! (White European males, to be precise!)
- ▶ Focus on experimentation rather than the mainstream

TECHNOLOGY, COMPOSITION, SOUND DESIGN AND PRODUCTION

- ▶ What 'use' is such experimental music?
- ▶ Experimental music could be thought of as the 'R&D of pop'-- think of Raymond Scott's pioneering sequencer-driven jingles in terms of the R&D of techniques and technologies, but does it stop here?
- ▶ It could also be thought of as driving **sonic awareness for sound design** (ear-training for sound design)
- ▶ Of course, you could argue that it is simply for **artistic expression** as an end unto itself

SAMPLING, PLUNDERING AND/OR HOMAGE (PART 1)

- ▶ *Mild und Leise* by Paul Lansky, Princeton University (1973)
- ▶ Can you spot a link with a more recent work?

SAMPLING, PLUNDERING AND/OR HOMAGE (PART 2)

- ▶ 'Idioteque' by Radiohead, from *Kid A* (2000)

GLITCH AND ELEKTRONISCHE MUSIK– SEPARATED AT BIRTH?

- ▶ Three examples will be played
- ▶ They will include a piece from a Dutch-German Elektronische Musik composer from 1969
- ▶ They will also include a piece from a Berlin-based **glitch** electronica artist from circa 2005 (glitch is popular music constructed to highlight sound materials which sound like digital failures and other brief noises...clumsy edits, bursts of noise, 'skipping CD' looping)
- ▶ A second piece by one of these two will be played
- ▶ Are there similarities in approach/sensibility?

GLITCH AND COMPUTER MUSIC – SEPARATED AT BIRTH?

- ▶ Example 1: 'Funktion Grau' by G.M. Koenig (1969)
- ▶ Example 2: 'Bit' by Alva Noto (2005)
- ▶ Example 3: 'module 1' by Alva Noto (2008)

COMPOSITION AND PRODUCTION: CONVERGENCE OR DIVERGENCE?

- ▶ Discussion: If modern-day producers use the same techniques to engender the same effects as electronic / electroacoustic composers, are they now composers? If not, why not?
- ▶ If so, what are the features of their work which draws them closer to composition than had previously been the case?
- ▶ Have the goalposts in composition moved? Have the goalposts of production moved? 'Illusion of reality to reality of illusion' Can you give any examples? What are your own personal preferences?

DISCUSSION

- ▶ Witts, Richard and Rob Young, 'Stockhausen versus the "Technocrats"' (set reading from last week)
- ▶ Where do the differences in their approaches and philosophies lie?
- ▶ Can you summarise the respective positions?
- ▶ Do you have any sympathy with some of the views expressed? Do you agree wholeheartedly with any one viewpoint?
- ▶ Do you think meaningful communication between the two 'camps' is possible?

MORE EXAMPLES OF ELECTRONIC AND EXPERIMENTAL MUSIC—DISCUSSION

- ▶ Steve Reich: *Come Out* (1964) and *It's Gonna Rain* (1965)
- ▶ Aphex Twin: 'Bucephalus Bouncing Ball' from *Come to Daddy* (1997)
- ▶ Xenakis: *Concret Ph* (1958)
- ▶ Various Alva Noto (c.2010)
- ▶ Edgard Varèse: *Poème Électronique* (1958)

- ▶ What is (or isn't) experimental about these examples? Can you describe any sonic/textural details you particularly like?

WHAT DOES ELECTRONIC MUSIC 'TELL' US? (WHERE DOES IT 'FIT' WITH OTHER MEDIA?)

Forbidden

Planet

(1956),

electronic

tonalities by

Louis & Bebe

Barron



Ideas: the strange, the other-worldly, the uncanny

See:
Sigmund Freud (1919)
'The Uncanny'

WHAT DOES ELECTRONIC MUSIC 'TELL' US? (WHERE DOES IT 'FIT' WITH OTHER MEDIA?) HOW DOES IT FIT WITH OTHER CULTURAL IDEAS?

A Clockwork

Orange (dir.

Kubrick, 1971)

soundtrack by

W. Carlos



Modernism or
postmodernism?

Modernism refers to the broad movement in Western arts and literature that gathered pace from 1850 (but particularly associated with early-mid 20th century) characterised by a deliberate rejection of the styles of the past; emphasising instead innovation and experimentation in forms, materials and techniques in order to create artworks that better reflected modern society. (Adapted from [tate.org.uk](https://www.tate.org.uk) glossary)

WHAT DOES ELECTRONIC MUSIC 'TELL' US? (WHERE DOES IT 'FIT' WITH OTHER MEDIA?)



Modernist architecture (brutalism and international style)

'modernity and the future'

How does the music of 'A Clockwork Orange' fit such spaces? Is it for when these spaces 'go right' or 'go wrong'?



ELECTRONIC MUSIC, POSTMODERNISM AND THE UNCANNY (PART 1)



Come to Daddy by Aphex Twin (dir. Chris Cunningham, 1997)

ELECTRONIC MUSIC, POSTMODERNISM AND THE UNCANNY (PART 2)



Windowlicker by Aphex Twin (dir. Chris Cunningham, 1999)

MODERN OR POSTMODERN ELECTRONIC MUSIC?

Comments on the last examples? Do they make an impact? How/why?

Which attributes do they have?

warped sounds as much as new sounds...dramatic 'unnatural' edits...uncanny transformations (original source may be just about recognisable)...repetition and subversion of expectation...what sort of use of visual references?

MODERN OR POSTMODERN ELECTRONIC MUSIC?

Come to Daddy: visual references (dystopian modernist/brutalist flat-blocks, TV as metaphorical object within scene, birth from TV, etc...sonic references (beat/breakbeat-driven, edits to subvert expectation/comfort, loud drones and noise bursts (music as noise)

Windowlicker: mediatised uncanny...subverting film and music video conventions, loops with odd, interrupting edits (but not as aggressive as previous video), uncanny half-reference of pop sound worlds? (vocals, bass sounds)?

Leaving the visuals aside, which aspects of the sound world of the latter seem particularly uncanny to you?

LISTENING COMPILATION

- ▶ Most of the key examples we've covered over the last two classes can readily be found online (on services such as Youtube); many can also be found on CD in the Library (if you value high fidelity listening)
- ▶ You can also find my Spotify playlists at the links below
- ▶ Lecture 1 playlist: <http://open.spotify.com/user/impulseresponse/playlist/6zEWPS3iXoNvrryixj8gyy>
- ▶ Lecture 2 playlist: <http://open.spotify.com/user/impulseresponse/playlist/0EJ7KB01T5ogf5HGFjq8GL>

ABOUT YOUR READING HOMEWORK

Your reading homework for next week will touch on modernist and postmodern tendencies in electronic music

Read the articles linked on the next page and make a few notes

Identify their philosophical position: modernist or postmodern.

Which ideas do you agree with? Which do you disagree with?

Have any ideas dated badly? Have any 'stood the test of time'?

READING FOR NEXT WEEK

- ▶ Cage, J, 1937. The Future of Music: Credo, in Cox, Christoph and Daniel Warner (eds) *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music*, London: Continuum, 2004. Also online at http://www.elemental.org/element/said&did/future_of_music.html
- ▶ Russolo, L. 1913. The Art of Noises: Futurist Manifesto. in Cox and Warner (eds) *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music*. Also at: <http://www.unknown.nu/futurism/noises.html>
- ▶ Varèse, E. 1966. The Liberation of Sound. in Cox and Warner (eds) *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music* [this is a compilation of various articles by Varèse, presented as a chapter in *Audio Culture*]. Also at: http://www.zakros.com/mica/soundart/s04/varese_text.html
- ▶ Cascone, K. 2000. The Aesthetics of Failure. *Computer Music Journal*. http://www.ccapitalia.net/reso/articulos/cascone/aesthetics_failure.htm
- ▶ Feel free to also consult the other books/articles mentioned during the lecture - Magee Library is there to be used!