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SIX IS NINE, NOW WHAT?
 NEW MEDIA.
 NEW MINDS.
 NEW BEINGS.

If all the hippies cut off all their hair...

Modal realism, according to its founding theorist, David Lewis, is the proposition that we must conceive of an infinite plentitude of alternate worlds in addition to the world or universe we inhabit. Each of these possible worlds we are to understand as varying from our own cosmos in an infinite gradation across every detail. In Lewis' words, "absolutely *every* way that a world could possibly be is a way that some world *is*." In some worlds you exist and in some worlds you do not. In this world, you may wear the blue t-shirt, while in this world the green sweater, and in this world, no shirt at all. Lewis demands that we accept the ontological equivalency of each of these worlds, that is we must accept that the blue shirt, green shirt, no shirt, and every other of the infinite variations on reality, some quite far-fetched and bizarre, are every bit as *really real* as the world in which we share this article. Lewis goes on to ask that we accept that these worlds are not temporally or spatially relatable to our own world. They are not later or sooner, nor over there or over here. Each simply *is* a complete universe sealed unto itself and causally isolated from our own world.

This infinite plentitude of alternate *universes* is very much like what jazz poet/philosopher Sun Ra had in mind when he spoke of an *omniverse* — the largest possible set of possible universes. Isn't this exactly what we're talking about when we talk about New Media? If the term has any seriousness at all, it must denote something much more than the exploration of new tools and techniques aimed at rehabilitating novelty in the studio

arts or even serving as the basis for new modes of expression. At its best, the whole thrust of artistic activity can be seen as a sophisticated exploration of possible worlds, a virtual mapping of Sun Ra's omniverse.

My medium is sound and music — music not as a particular habitus constraining the organization of sonic events, but music as a particular phenomenological stance in relation to auditory experience. Music is usually thought of as a special instance of sound. We may argue about what separates the good from the bad, but we are usually pretty sure when we are listening to music. Sound, likewise, is easy enough to talk about at its most generic and physical level. Pretty displays of sine waves with their microscopic fuzz of overtones, and demonstrations with vibrating strings, make for good classroom presentation. Over time, however, my attention has been less focused on what sound is, than the more obscure question of what *a* sound is and how this definitional chess game might be relevant to the meaning of the music of my time and its role in the evolution of human consciousness.

Just what is *a* single sound? From the vantage point of perceptual psychology a sound is a discrete compressed air event that falls between 20Hz and 20kHz above a certain energy threshold. Within the performance practice of western music, single musical tones are usually construed as individual sounds, but no orchestral instrument sounds a pure tone, an unadorned sound wave, each, even when sustaining a single note is actually presenting the ear with a complex of fundamental and secondary tones. Is this really one sound? Would a semiotician regard an anthem or a hymn as a single sound? It's not an easy question, and of course its answer hinges on whether the ear you are using to make the distinction is a social-historical one or a physical-perceptual one. Sounds in this singular way are the atomic units of sampling. And sampling is one of a very small number of major developments in musical performance that separates today's musical culture from most of prior musical history. Whether we're talking about DJs biting records or synthesists reshaping waves through digital processors, sampling is about postulating possible worlds through a sonic code and subjecting them to a kind of reality testing that is visceral and intellectual, aesthetic and critical. If we are to speak cogently about a contemporary musical stratagem that is based in the reorganization of pre-existing sounds, then we should probably have some idea of what *a* sound is.

If all the mountains fell in the sea...

Why would anyone want to embrace David Lewis' crazy ontology or ponder the limits of Sun Ra's omniverse? Lewis offers his possible worlds theory as a means of systematizing and bringing analytic clarity to one of philosophy's

most sticky arenas — that of modal logic. Modal logic is in play whenever we are asked to speculatively consider scenarios that differ from things as they actually are, which, if you think about it, it is our nature as a species to do almost constantly. Human will is metered out by the careful and not so careful parsing of counterfactuals. Statements of the *if...then* variety are our navigational equipment for translation through the complex interstices of individual and collective will, time and space.

Sampling as a *modus assemblage* for mass musical culture started out in a highly localized context driven by the functional necessities of youth dance culture. Innovations sketched out with phonograph records in the Bronx during the seventies collided with digital information technology a decade later to yield an entirely new idea about the how and what of music. The first objective of pioneers like Clive Campbell (Kool Herc) and Joseph Saddler (Grandmaster Flash) was to technologically isolate and extract the “break” from soul records. That is to sample from recorded performances (both popular and obscure) a particularly beat-heavy, funky-sweaty section, often just a few bars in length and release it from its original context to serve in repetition as the basis for a fresh musical experience. The breakbeat represented a distillation and recovery of black musical essence at a time when disco (i.e., integration) and other changes in the political economy of African-American music were seen by many as diluting this essence. By alternately backspinning and re-cuing each of two identical records containing the break, a DJ with a pair of turntables could extend the funky apex of black diasporan musical realization, in theory, forever. Out of the protean skills of the first generation of turntablists, a new way of thinking about musical creation and musical time emerged alongside a new awareness of recorded music as a random access historical archive.

No sooner had hip hop escaped its birthplace in New York’s uptown slums than some artists began expanding sampling’s plunderphonic methodology while at the same time buffering and subverting the nationalistic and nostalgic goals that had spawned the approach. The Bomb Squad — Norman Rogers, Hank Boxley, Bill Stephany, Keith Shocklee, and Eric Sadler, the production team for political hip hop unit Public Enemy — found early success in using the basic model of sampling not simply to rehear the musical past, but to disturb the sonic present. In the mid-eighties, they set PE’s black power rap against apocalyptic soundscapes that roared with the discontent and doom that characterized black urban experience of the Reagan era. Their bed of samples was rich in the sources it appropriated from, adding sound effects and environmental sound to thick beats mined from the grooves of old soul records.

But no other artist has been as influential in defining the avant-garde horizons of sampling as Paul D. Miller a/k/a DJ Spooky. Miller a critical theorist and media artist whose sonic constructions in the mid-nineties

opened up an underground musical movement called *illbient* that pointed the logic of sampling and its powerful arsenal of tools towards the future. Spooky's other nickname, That Subliminal Kid, is borrowed from the hero in William Burroughs' *Nova Express*. In that story, human society is being bombarded with a stream of reactionary propaganda being beamed to earth. These destructive transmissions are seriously stressing humankind. So, according to Miller, the Subliminal Kid who inhabits a phantasmagoric world of disembodied sound "takes his electromagnetic scalpel and cuts the loops so the future can leak through."

Got my own world to live through...

Sampling as the quintessential postmodern art form has attracted most of its critical attention for its facility in recontextualizing the sonic past, that is, its archival or conservative function. It is, however, the ability to create sonic fissures where "the future can leak through" that drew me into the game. As a consumer and student of music, I've never found the musical past to be anywhere near as interesting as the musical future. As a solo artist under the name Bushmeat and as a member of the trio Mind Over Matter Music Over Mind (MOM²), I've been applying the futuristic paradigms of sampling and digital sound production with the specific aim of poking holes in consensual consciousness and in so doing, redraw the boundaries of mental health thus (hopefully) creating an opening for the ingression of a posthuman reality.

Sun Ra used his cosmic circus of a big band as a platform to advocate for human pursuit of what he termed our "alter destiny." If something called human nature is responsible for our most incorrigibly vile behavior (e.g., violence, greed, waste), he argued, then perhaps we have reached a point in history where we are ready to try another path for ourselves, a way out of our humanity. Maybe we would do better as something else. Unlike visual stimuli, sound embeds its presence in the same intimate recesses where the inner speech of thought refracts awareness and translates the jumble of experience into the portability of narrative. Tantric wisdom conceives of sound as a powerful agent for disciplining the mind. Science has confirmed the capacity of shamanic drumming, chanting, and mechanically produced binaural beats to induce the entrainment of brainwaves.

Ra called his attempts to use music to mold minds "tone science." He was the first African American musician and among the first musicians of any background to avail himself of the unique timbral possibilities of

electronic instruments. In my own work, I am attempting to build on many of the basic laws of Sun Ra's tone science within the limitations of my skill sets and chosen instrumentalities. My tools and methods are conducive to a sound product that is more a hypothesis about music. According to what mathematician John L. Casti calls the "science of surprise," any such simulations of complex possible world scenarios are prone to extravagant and unexpected results due to paradoxes, instability, uncomputability, connectivity and emergence built into the problem and the tools applied to its solution. Paradoxes abound in my instrumentality. For example, I've programmed certain voices into my synthesizer in which the register suddenly reverses itself in the middle of the keyboard. In a similar fashion, my deliberate, exhaustive, but less than systematic efforts to de-temper the piano keyboard interface of my electronic synthesizer has resulted in a stubborn absence of computability or playability in the conventional sense. Rules are accrued slowly and are usually as tentative as they are vague. Indeterminacy can be reinstilled in sampled material with the application of secondary effects that are themselves unstable and unpredictable. Oscillating material can be overlaid in a way that takes advantage of the serendipitous gifts of audible and subaudible interference patterns without pretending to be able to bring such patterns under conscious control. My methods force me along a tightrope suspended over an ugly pit of disarticulated noise. And yes, I do fall a lot, but other than my pride, it doesn't hurt much anymore.

My i-pod weighs a ton and yours probably does too. In practice, we modern folk have become quite accustomed to deliberately manipulating our private sonic worlds in a blatant effort to condition our consciousness. Music (and sound art presented in the same space as music) become less object for aesthetic contemplation than prosthetic struts inserted directly into the tissues of consciousness to achieve effects otherwise unattainable. We change the mix and we change our minds, literally. The new media I'm most interested in performing creative operations on is the mind of my listener. The samples and effects in my laptop and keyboards are a kind of pre-palette. What's unique in their arrangement and deployment has everything to do with their immediate and transient impressions on consciousness and very little to do with how they reference or recapitulate any aspect of our shared sonic culture. To speak post-culturally, is, of course, to run a very high risk of mumbling or otherwise being misunderstood. It is, however, the only way to speak to the posthuman lurking in us, waiting to leak through.

Fall mountains, just don't fall on me...

It's not at all unexpected that African-Americans should have a lot to offer to the project of discovering a posthuman destiny. We have been on a trajectory towards just such an ontology ever since arriving on these shores defined by statute as prehuman. (What else would you call 3/5 of a human being?) It is the only authentic emancipation. What if the energy of moving out of a prehuman status was necessarily so intense that we are currently being catapulted right past human and into the posthuman? And as black culture has always led American culture, maybe this great liberating energy can pull others (those who have never enjoyed the benefits of prehumanity) along in its wake.

Modal logic. Counterfactuals. We already know what would happen if you built a city twenty feet under sea level between a massive river, a big lake, and the sea. In truth we live in a civilization that was built well below sea level and now the swollen surf of history's impeccable failure to forget is crashing against the sea wall. Possible worlds theory kicks in: We'd like to find a Lewisonian world where we survive the flood, but to survive as the bloated beings we've become, well, we'd need a much bigger ark than even old Noah could muster. So, the secret in my samples is that we can all claim our alter destiny and become subliminal kids using our electromagnetic scalpels to hack little nicks into the levy. When the waters come, relax. These cursed streets will finally be clean and we posthumans will happily find something like gills have been added to our new morphology and that swimming with friends can be so much fun. What a surprise.

