

**Simon Reynolds
Katja Diefenbach
Technodeleuze
and Mille Plateaux**

**Achim Szepanski's Interviews
(1994-1996)**



series of books
**THE
strong**
OF THE FUTURE

5



THE
strong
OF THE FUTURE



SF005 eng

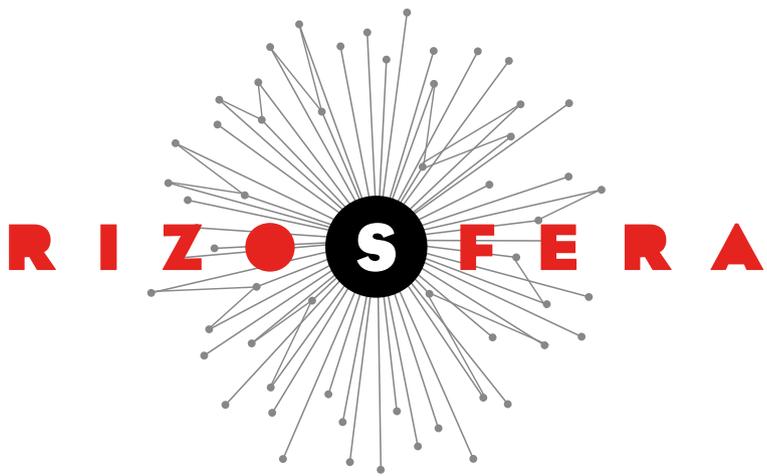
The book series entitled «The Strong of the Future» deals with accelerationist philosophy, in particular with the thought based on Nietzsche, Klossowski and Acéphale magazine, Deleuze and Guattari, Foucault and Lyotard.

Issues:

- SF001 :: OBSOLETE CAPITALISM, **The Strong of the Future** (July 2016)
- SF002 :: OBSOLETE CAPITALISM, **Acceleration, Revolution and Money in Deleuze and Guattari's Anti-Oedipus** (August 2016)
- SF003 :: EDMUND BERGER, **Grungy Accelerationism** (September 2016)
- SF004 :: OBSOLETE CAPITALISM, **Deleuze and the Algorithm of the Revolution** (October 2016)
- SF005 :: SIMON REYNOLDS - KATJA DIEFENBACH, **Technodeleuze and Mille Plateaux. Achim Szepanski's Interviews (1994-1996)** (January 2017)

Next issue:

- SF006 :: SARA BARANZONI - PAOLO VIGNOLA, **Bifurcating at the Root** (February 2017)
- SF007 :: LAPO BERTI, **Accelerated Fantasies** (March 2017)
- SF008 :: EDMUND BERGER, **Underground Streams: A Micro-History of Hyperstition and Esoteric Resistance** (April 2017)



Katja Diefenbach/Szepanski ::
translated in English by NON, Letizia Rustichelli and Paolo Davoli.

Low End Theory, Copyright Text by Simon Reynolds
Making Sound Streams Quake, Copyright Text by Katja Diefenbach

Everything Else, Anti-copyright, January 2017 Obsolete Capitalism

Obsolete Capitalism would like to thanks: Simon Reynolds, Katja Diefenbach, Achim Szepanski, NON website, Algorithmic Committee (for Decomputation), Edmund Berger.

Creative Commons 4.0 :: The licensor cannot revoke these freedoms as long as you follow the license terms under the following terms:
Attribution

—



Creative Commons 4.0

The licensor cannot revoke these freedoms as long as you follow the license terms under the following terms:

Attribution — *You must give appropriate credit, provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made. You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use. No additional restrictions.*

<http://obsoletecapitalism.blogspot.it>

ISBN 9788875591007- 2

Technodeleuze and Mille Plateaux

Achim Szepanski's Interviews (1994-1996)

Simon Reynolds - Katja Diefenbach

Index

Preface :: Welcome to the New Electronic Era	11
di Algorithmic Committee (for Decomputation)	
Making Sound Streams Quake	15
by Katja Diefenbach	
Low End Theory	31
by Simon Reynolds	
Biographies	47

Welcome to the new electronic era!

by Algorithmic Committee (for Decomputation)

Achim Szepanski has been one of the “heroes” of the ‘90s thanks to the creation and the visionary promotion of his *Mille Plateaux* (1994-2004), the famous record label based in Frankfurt. Due to his peculiar philosophical theory applied to the digital culture, Szepanski has totally changed the electronic music panorama from top to bottom. His talent to choose an unusual and original direction and to give a radical cut to his discographic productions testified by the many labels he created (Force Inc., Mille Plateaux, Riot Beats, etc), has been widely recognized by the whole music stage and critics. In the present e.book we introduce two interviews done in the magic moment of the European mass explosion of the electronic music that coincided with the high quality level of Szepanski’s radical proposal. The first one *Making Sound Streams Quake*, conducted by the German philosopher Katja Diefenbach, was inserted in the anthological book *Techno* edited by Philipp Anz and Patrick Walder (Verlag Ricco Bilder, 1995), the second, conducted by the English journalist and music critic Simon Reynolds, was published with the title *Low End Theory* on the April issue of the English music magazine *The Wire* in 1996.

Why a «hero»? Achim Szepanski has proved a «heroic» pioneering ability to translate and apply Deleuze and Guattari's philosophical theories to the first musical and cultural wave of the electronic revolution of the 90s, bending and folding the rhizospheric concepts to the core of the new sonic esperanto. In such way he has created a subversive pragmatics of musical productions, aware listenings and social alternative dancing practices in differentiated contexts as raves. Not only «electronic politics» but a philosophy of sound which turned into a guerrilla against the aural mainstream. Through his mutinous audio-activism Szepanski has built a war-sonic machine that enables him to be inserted together with Nietzsche and Deleuze in the present series of books about an accelerated archeology of the «strong of the future». Such sonic-war machine has supported in a chaotic and amusing way Italian oblique underground experiences like Kom Fut Manifesto, Red'ko, Maffia Illicit Music Club and other entities able to raise the sound and the experimentation from the dance floor to a real political and artistic operation subtracting it from the «steel cage» of entertainment. To close the circle of the historical references and contaminations, we would like to remind that *Low End Theory* by Simon Reynolds was translated for the first time in Italian by the philosopher Massimiliano Guareschi for *Ultratomato* magazine (n° 13/2002) - the *house organ* of Maffia Illicit Music Club - in the *Technodeleuze* dossier.

The first reason for Szepanski's importance is connected to the movement towards the outside of Deleuzian philosophy - a fitted abstract rostrum thought that hooks electro and cybernetics. In the '90s in fact it was necessary to connect such movement to more urgent and popular requests of the electronic scene, building a short circuit between «inside» and «outside» of Deleuzian philosophy and maintaining a high level of artistic and philosophical proposal. The second reason is linked to the revolutionary intensity expressed by Mille Plateaux. Szepanski's and Mille Plateaux artists' work has made the Deleuzian-Guattarian rhizospheric accelerationist theories real in a very peculiar way: testing in the heat of the night and in the schizophrenic stamina of the dance floor the quality and the intensity of the revolutionary link among very heterogeneous elements. Hence we are here dealing with an «outside» - a native intensity - that violently enters an «inside» - an unexpected Return - of the Deleuzian thought: a populated noisy chaos jumping into a silent plane of immanence, framed by the philosopher. The concept of Deleuze's musical thought - his refrain - won't be the same after Szepanski's intervention, due to the destruction made by his explosive electronic grimace to the araldic *Mille Plateaux* music offer which ranges from the classic intellectual avantgarde from Schumann to Berg, to Cage and Stockhausen.

The revolutionary link evoked in *Anti-Oedipus* becomes for Szepanski an unexpected positive feedback which continuously absorbs *input* and *output* and subverts the wall between the entertainment and knowledge industry.

The pragmatics built by Szepanski's *Mille Plateaux* have become one of the moments - the most discordant, strident and noble - of the «machinic stratagem» which, once set free from the book page chain, avoids the bridles of the overall interpretation of the rising digital epoque.

Making Sound Streams

Quake

Katja Diefenbach
interviews Achim Szepanski**

*** "Den Klangstrom zum Beben bringen", Achim Szepanski im Gespräch mit Katja Diefenbach, in Philipp Anz und Patrick Walder, techno, Zürich: Ricco Bilger Verlag 1995, S. 137–142.*

Originally the interview has been made for and has been published in the German music journal Spex (No. 1/1995). The interview was realized in 1994 when Achim Szepanski founded Mille Plateaux after a long correspondence with Gilles Deleuze. Ten years later, in 2004, the label was destroyed by a kind of mafia-assemblage, consisting of the distributor EFA, the German state, Gema and other rackets.

Katja Diefenbach [KD] :: Force Inc. has established a sub-label that is named after the most important book from Deleuze and Guattari, MILLE PLATEAUX. What connection do you see between Techno and post-structuralist theory?

Achim Szepanski [AS] :: According to statements from Foucault his books should function as little tool kits. The thinking of powers and knowledge is also thinking as strategy and subversion, which escapes even the writer's intentions. Foucault himself said that the more unplanned uses that his books take on the more it would please him. I think that it is in this sense that we are trying to use the thoughts of Deleuze and Guattari in Mille Plateaux; to find instruments and tools that directly inspire the process of producing sounds. The central theme of this book, in the chapters about music, is that today the essential relationship in music – but also in philosophy – is the one between material and forces. This means that the sound-machines that have structures, like the synthesiser or the computer, produce sound material which molecularises, and thus break down particular forms of music and expand it at the same time. Music is then more than the reproduction of tones, it is a process to produce sounds. The tone is first of all just a noise that is bound up in a canon of rules – and only under these circumstances, it is a tone. The music of the whole Occident builds a dispositif, creates a model that filters noise, electrical interference and flows of sound, and so controls what is audible and

inaudible. For example, the Paris School in the 1950s turned against this exclusion by treating concrete sound material like hissing, water drops, street noises, as genuine musical sound qualities. The synthesiser is a structure that, through the varied possibilities of sound synthesis, not only makes new sounds audible, but also the process of the production itself. It is the musical work with its sound material to allow new energies, intensities to be captured.

KD :: On the first CD of your label, *Modulation & Transformation*, you quote a line from Mille Plateaux; “*a song of praise for the synthesiser as a consistency machine*”. How would you explain that?

AS :: The synthesiser is a machine to generate sounds. Particular flow of sounds and sound spectrums are created through the connection and combination of individual modules. This refers to the analogue synthesiser. It is a creative process that holds the various sound materials together, the various elements in the material itself – one thinks of oscillators, generators – that serve the working of the original signals. At the same time the sound material must be able to float between the various synthesisers, sequencers and computers, and be accessible for synchronisation. Deleuze refers to this mechanical form as the synthesis of heterogeneity and multiplicity. This synthe-

sis of sounds needs a certain consistency; the synthesis must not make the individual elements unrecognisable, otherwise everything ends in a suffocating din. The question that arises with Deleuze is the following: how can the inaudible be made audible by these machines? Capture energies, allow intense quantities to flow, question the music about the degrees of fastness or slowness; all this gives music a cosmic dimension. Music however seems powerless when it creates a jumble of sounds and tones; a permanent overflow of signals makes us become unconscious. We also become unconscious when we hear nothing but perfect harmony, just repetition and its refrain. Perfect melodies and chords, that's what folk music and pop music offer us today, just the circulation of clean sounds, rinsed of the noises that could disturb prosperity. The masses can also be forced into deep sleep by a synthesiser. So the harmony, the chord, even the tone itself must be exploded; one must open the door to noise itself, make even the channel of the sound flows quake. That is the place for electronic music to strike in, whether one calls it techno or whatever.

KD :: Guattari has been a lifelong supporter of a movement for the use of machines. For example, he spoke on the Italian pirate radio station Radio Alice. Do you see your techno production within a movement, somewhere between radio pirates,

computer hackers and techno producers?

AS :: What the system always tries to shut out, of course the world wide computer net system too, is the interference. The hackers create noise when they break into other systems, that leads to the destruction of some areas of that system. But at the same time this noise can signalise the beginning of a fresh news. This depends on the complexity of the system and place from which I move. This means that the exclusion function is at the same time also an inclusion function. The systems rely on noises, on malfunctions, and they develop mechanisms to correct and regulate deviations and disturbances. They acclimatise themselves to the deviations. In the same way we have become acclimatised to the lunatics, the pirate radio stations and all other dissidents of the seventies, we have become acclimatised to hackers, the techno dissidents of the nineties. The media industries occupy the subculture but at the same time lines of flight develop, potentials build up that cannot so easily be occupied by the system. In the same way that computer hackers operate with sign sequences in electronic space, so do the techno dissidents using sound material in electronic sound space which is free from any semantic that would force the thought into One. A euphoric movement could look something like that. But at the same time one wanders in these sub-systems, dismissed by large systems, as it happens in military organization and is reduced as a user who is allowed to

operate with the gadgets that the leisure industry offers him.

KD :: What are the consequences for you? Do you still use the term techno and move around the edge of the scene, or do you try to move along your own path?

AS :: It can be assumed that the music industry causes forced restrictions not only through the building of the hardware and the employment of software, but also reforming the manner of distribution and the listening habits of the masses through music's own suppliers, the former independent labels. The scene, however, is a conglomeration of heterogeneous groups. Is it on the periphery as opposed to the centre? One spends time on the periphery and is then suddenly in the centre again. In some cases, the periphery of one system leads directly to the centre of another one. The interaction of the system itself produces a net of centres and peripheries. "*Moving on the edge*" is an unsuitable metaphor. Molar machines are systems with many variables and changing control mechanisms. The periphery is repeatedly surrounded and vice versa, the scenes work on norms that are greedily adopted by the systems, as long as they serve as development of complexity and control. In this way systems and scenes can strengthen each other, but of course always under the dominance of the molar machines. Analy-

zing the reactions to Force Inc., by both the industry and the techno-scene, one sees that the same mechanisms are at work in both the exclusion and the distribution of honours. Under such conditions it is important today to look for strategies and lines of flight, to make every molecular machine work, to free flows of sound, to look for new interfaces on which machinic structure matches. It's about making music resonate and then again being in a place where no one expects to find us.

KD :: Can you explain the new principles and borders of the Techno Music?

AS :: Take for example a project like Oval, published on Mil-le Plateaux label. At first, Oval differ their production process in their techno tracks that are produced through the so called mixing process, a certain synthesiser and its sounds are synchronised through a sequencer, the midi-line transfers all parameters between synthesiser and computer. All the sounds are layered one over another through the mixer, and then cancelled or added. A dramaturgy of the track often appears, audible as planned; it shows up as the creativity of the producer. OVAL however find themselves in an acoustic empty space and their «organisation» allows the development of music, that by their own statement was not required because it was unimaginable

a priori. How does that happen? On the basis of computer games and simulation. What is found is music, an organisation of sounds developed through filtering the *rauschen*. That means signals are sent through time variation filters or added to sinus waves. They are stored on a digital medium, for example, the CD. In the practical execution OVAL show the production of what they call sound design: their music not only has to reject the world of noise, but also to integrate it. The interference noise, in the case of the OVAL CD - being skipping noise or accidental noise - are the found materials that are not layered as in the mixing process, but flow simultaneously into one another; loops with loops joined in a completely additive and cumulative manner: the midi software builds the door that opens to time horizons, beyond the linear chain of time. Time becomes molecular, a time of jumps, reversals, delays. OVAL create a music that goes forward but at the same time it skips strangely, but this skipping is always a micro jump. These micro jumps are audible as clicks and serve the joining of loops and different time environments that are peculiar to these loops. Rhythm, when the sounds and tones are proceeded, becomes a web of pure speed. In this way the conception of music becomes available for arrangement. Here minor strategies are built to erase concepts of making music and music listening.

KD :: How far has the development of the production means and the productive forces changed the concept of music? Which reality has music under digital conditions?

AS :: Music seen as creation of new sounds and not simply reproduction of tones, is the condition to start from. As the composer could previously review the sound results of his notation only retrospectively, and because the demands of the composer on the music machine could only be relatively realised through the interpreter's increased practice, the interface – man / machine – must become the issue. Then the individual types of the instruments are to be called into question, they proved to be like compositional straitjackets. In this century the first electronic instruments developed were tape recorders and acoustic mines - this was important for concrete music. Therefore real existing material could be processed; cuts, transformations, techniques of slowing down and speeding up came into use. The analogue synthesiser was already being talked about, the invention and mass distribution of the microprocessors allowed sound passages and compositions as the generation of music through the use of algorithms appeared. At the same time music became a phenomenon of frequencies and vibrations that can be dangerous for the human ear and that no composer could have ever notated. If the copyright disintegrates, how can people be author or owner of frequencies and sounds? The storage media keep sounds that had always

been just copies of copies. The composer or author works under contingency. Consistencies, according to Deleuze, works only connected to the sound-machine. Also on the side of the receiver totality dissolves. Echo effects allow sound hallucinations to occur and perception apparatus to delocalise: we are dealing with forms of perception that formerly were attributed to lunatics or schizophrenics.

KD :: I would like to concentrate on the term schizophrenia. How would you describe that in music: the disintegration of structures like identity, ego / alter ego, in a subjective sense?

AS :: Since the fifties, in *musique concrète*, later in rock, in industrial music up to techno, you can hear diverse noises, screaming, chirping, creaking, hissing - noises related to madness. With the machinic production of these noises it becomes clear that madness is a metaphor of technique. The use of these techniques in music leads to de-territorialisation streams, disintegration of musical forms, breakage of sound material into varied elements that are ordered according to new speed and time relation which move from fastness to slowness. Also spatial relations become unstable. In the stereo-system the sounds wander from below to above, from left to right and vice versa. The place from which the signal is audible is a non place.

Schizo hearing becomes necessary because the schizo himself is deterritorialized; he follows the sound-streams, he plays with the effects and the forces of drugs, without taking any drugs. He is not a clinical case – quite the contrary to the masses of ecstasy eaters at the large raves, who quickly become objects of the clinical and pharmaceutical industry. The schizo must log on to the sound-machine, he makes it function producing multiple sound events. Techno is also schizo music in the sense that it deconstructs certain rules and forms that pop music imposed on sounds; on the other hand it has to invent rules itself that are subjected to sound consistency operations. Thus music repeatedly dismisses the old rules, or builds new static models and blocks the process of de-territorialisation.

KD :: Deleuze and Guattari described the movement of the de- and re-territorialisation in the first book “*Anti-Oedipus*”, the forerunner to “*Mille Plateaux*”.

AS :: Both are types of movement. The de-territorialisation is the movement by which one leaves the territory. It is a process of disintegrating blockades, the exploding of established channels, etc. Without discussing the individual processes of the de-territorialisation that Deleuze names, one can say, somewhat simplified, that the de-territorialisation is always accompanied

by re-territorialisation which cannot be understood as the simple return to the territory, but as a blockade in the process of deterritorialization itself. And this is what happens in Techno today. This is more than an integration of techno-sound into pop, which would be just be a return.

Of course this is the same when we think about the phenomenon of the DJ. It is taking on the character of the star cult again, with all the imaginary identifications, that always see the self in the other person. This is a comedy of mistakes, that becomes completely obscene. The other only exists as a special image, an image manufactured by the media industry. The expansion of these images, the manufactured star type, is the hero-worship of the average, according to Adorno. Or take the music itself. The use of melodies and voices, that claim to be the music, create an aesthetic of boredom, a self sufficient repetition. The tracks are overwhelmed by identifiable melodies, the potential fascism that Deleuze speaks of in music. Masses are moved through images and values of inscription and therefore silenced. Individuals are caught in a hypnotic state and trance, both aspects of Return of pop context. Particularly important is the shift of differential relations within the deterritorialization which cause the reterritorialization. This means that both processes influence each other. Reterritorialization doesn't link Techno to Pop context only but leads it to blocking and damping up lines of flight, in which Electronic music/Techno star-

ts to free itself from the traditional rules. Suddenly producers outputs consist only of sounds and signals that are «a priori» programmed in the synthesisers; producers are happy with the regurgitation of a standardised repertoire of sounds that result from certain switches. The principles of the production associate with each other again. The order from order principle, as the system theory calls it; not the order from noise principle, order that doesn't reject noises, rather welcomes them and plays with them. There are techno contexts which need to be avoided and that bond the music to hardware (Roland, etc.) and software (Cubase, etc.) syntax. This can be done by switching the machines away from their regular use and making the interfaces a new issue; repeatedly transforming the sound itself through differential effect machines. One could similarly discuss the effects of techno on the body or the space that it is being performed in.

KD: Can you describe the beginning of the raves and techno parties – where the subversive impulse was to be found?

AS: The immediate subversive moment at all small illegal events, warehouse parties, was that the face check at the door of every disco didn't take place. The production of the events still contained all the theatrical characteristics found in the di-

scotcheques. These are spaces that are not formed by walls and partitions but by light and music; a simulated space that creates a mobile image of itself, through lasers and spotlights, that is indistinguishable. The illegal events, however, reduce the streams of light radically – fog and strobe light – so the music can multiply its effects. These events are more sound events than visual space. Logging on to the sound-machine and its noises, the body becomes part of its surroundings and accepts the synthesis of light and music. Dancing the body disintegrates into elements, elements that accept varying degrees of speed, elements that can be influenced in completely different ways and manners. Flowing stimulations are translated into speed; speeding up, bringing into circulation, whirling rotations, that create their own space, as if the discovery of speed serves to capture forces, forces transmitted by the music. In the same way space comes into place where lines of flight are broken or tumbled into catastrophe. This is the place where rave seems to be today. Newly defined are the visual and non visual pillars of the traditional geometric order of the rooms. This type of room is not peculiar to the illegal events; it is a connection for many different room elements, a space in which the reinstatement of a middle point, or centre, controls the dimensions of the room, defines the positions within which the masses are to move. An organised model develops what is thought out into the last detail, made of tactile, visual and sound dams that control the sound and body flows. Even the theatricality of the

discotheque disappears. In short: reduction of sound to the identifiable melodies and stupid metrics – the kick drum leads all. Perhaps Adorno's phrase is right: "*Fun is bathing in steel*".

Low End Theory

by Simon Reynolds

By applying philosophical rigour to sonic disruption, the German Mille Plateaux label has become a nexus for resistant musicians such as Oval and Alec Empire. In Frankfurt, Simon Reynolds meets label boss Achim Szepanski and makes the connections between Teutonic Hardcore, post-structuralist theory, digital disobedience and hypermodern jazz.

Frankfurt is simultaneously Germany's financial capital and a longstanding centre of anti-capitalist theory. Most famously, it gave the world the 'Frankfurt School' of Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer et al: neo-Marxist thinkers who fled Nazism and landed up in Southern California, where their eyes and ears were affronted by the kitsch outpourings of Hollywood's dream-factory. Today, the Frankfurt School is mostly remembered for its snooty attitude towards popular culture, which it regarded as the 20th century's opiate-of-the-peo-

ple, a soul-degrading inferior to High Modernism. Adorno in particular has achieved a dubious immortality in the Cultural Studies world, as an Aunt Sally figure ritually bashed by academics as a prequel to their semiotic readings of 'anti-hegemonic resistance' encoded in Madonna videos and Star Trek.

There's no denying Adorno deserves derision for his infamously suspect comments about the "eunuch-like sound" of jazz, whose secret message was "give up your masculinity, let yourself be castrated... and you will be accepted into a fraternity which shares the mystery of impotence with you". But in other respects Adorno's critique of pop culture's role as safety valve and social control is not so easily shrugged off. Witness his remarks on the swing-inspired frenzies of the 'jitterbug': "Their ecstasy is without content... It has convulsive aspects reminiscent of St Vitus' dance or the reflexes of mutilated animals." Adorno's verdict on jitterbuggers - "merely to be carried away by anything at all, to have something of their own, compensates for their impoverished and barren existence" - could easily be transposed to 90s rave culture, which - from Happy Hardcore to Gabba to Goa trance - is now as rigidly ritualised and conservative as Heavy Metal.

The Frankfurt-based label Mille Plateaux shares something of Adorno's oppositional attitude to mass culture. For label boss Achim Szepanski, Germany's rave industry - which dominates the pop mainstream - is so institutionalised and regulated it verges on the totalitarian. Adorno-style, he psychoanalyses Ecstasy culture as "a metonymic search for mother-substitutes - Ecstasy can be your new mommy". Alec Empire, a Mille Plateaux solo artist and prime mover in his own Berlin-based anti-rave scene Digital Hardcore, is more blunt: "Rave is dead, it's boring. House is disco and Techno is Progressive rock." As for Oval, Mille Plateaux's 'star act', when asked about their relationship to Techno, they seem astonished by the question. "Relationship?!" they reply.

*

Influenced by post-structuralist theory and named after a gargantuan tract by French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, Mille Plateaux release deconstruction Electronica. Situating their activity both within and against the genre conventions of post-rave styles like Intelligent Techno, House, Jungle and Trip Hop, Mille Plateaux identify these musics' premature closures and seize their missed opportunities. The results may not offer the easy satisfactions of less ambitious Techno labels/auteurs, but they do constitute the most consistently stimulating catalogue in the post-rave universe.

One January weekend, I met Szepanski at his Frankfurt apartment, which doubles as HQ for his four labels (Mille Plateaux, Force Inc, Riot Beats and Force Inc USA), and is located in the city's sleazy equivalent to King's Cross (handy for trains, lots of junkies and hookers). Having read his Deleuze-style press releases (lots of references to "sound-streams" and "disjunctive singularities") and conducted a theory-dense e-mail conversation, I'm expecting a rather severe individual. But over the course of the weekend, Achim reveals some unexpected sides to his character: a dry sense of humour, a soft spot for plastic pop (he owns CDs by TLC and Kylie Minogue) and an awesome talent for piss-artistry.

Plagued by a mystery ailment, he spends most of Saturday sipping homeopathic remedies and complaining that he's too ill to undertake a planned excursion to see Chicago House DJ and Force Inc artist Gene Farris spin at a club in nearby Mainz. At midnight, he decided he's just about up to it. For the first five hours, Achim's spirits remain low, despite an alcohol intake rate of three beers to my one. But by 6am and beer number 12, Achim is flailing on the dancefloor, enraptured by Farris's trippy set. Every few minutes, he accosts someone to blearily proclaim: "Gene Farris is the best House DJ in the world. I don't care, I will tell anyone - Josh Wink, Laurent Garnier - to their face: Farris is the best."

Now aged 35, Szepanski got involved in student politics in the radical, post-1968 climate of the mid-70s. He read Marx, flirted with Maoism, protested about conditions in the German prison system. Later in the decade he immersed himself in the post-punk experimental scene alongside the likes of DAF, playing in the Industrial group P16D4. In the 80s he went back to college, watched the Left die and got very depressed, consoling himself with alcohol and the misanthropic philosophy of Cioran.

Two late 80s breakthroughs pulled him out of the mire: his encounter with the post-structuralist thought of Foucault, Lyotard, Derrida, et al, and his excitement about Hip Hop and House. While still working on a doctorate about Foucault, he started the first DJ-orientated record store in Frankfurt and founded the Blackout label. By the early 90s Szepanski was tripping out to Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism And Schizophrenia*, a colossal tome that Foucault hailed as "an introduction to the non-fascist life".

For Achim, the experience was revelatory and galvanising: Deleuze and Guattari's theories showed him "that you don't have to be negative or sad if you want to be militant, even if what you fight against is very bad. The Frankfurt School and Marxism has a very linear interpretation of hi-

story and a totalising view of society, whereas Deleuze and Guattari say that society is more than just the economy and the state, it's a multitude of sub-systems and local struggles.”

From this notion, Achim conceived the strategy of context-based subversion which informs his labels: hard Techno and House with Force Inc, Electronica with Mille Plateaux, Jungle with Riot Beats, Trip Hop with the Electric Ladyland compilations. These interventions are somewhere between parody and riposte, demonstrating by deed not discourse what these genres could really be like if they lived up to or exceeded their accompanying ‘progressive’ rhetoric.

*

Founded in 1991, Force Inc was initially influenced by Detroit renegades Underground Resistance; not just sonically, but by “their whole anti-corporate, anti-commodification of dance stance”. In its first year, Force Inc’s neo-Detroit/nouveau Acid sound had a lot of impact. At the same time, the label was involved in the underground party scene, organising “guerilla events at strange locations, without all the tricks and special effects that you get at normal discos”. But in 1992, as the Acid revival took off and trance tedium took over, Force Inc “made a radical break”, towards a breakbeat-oriented Har-

dcore that was a weird parallel to the proto-Jungle emerging in Britain. Szepanski and Force Inc deserve respect for recognising so precociously the radicalism of the then universally deployed 'Ardkore. They even loved the much derided accelerated 'squeaky voice' tracks that ruled in 1992.

“Maybe it was just our peculiar warped interpretation, but the sped-up vocals sounded like a serious attempt to deconstruct some of the ideologies of pop music. One dimension to this was using voices like instruments or noise, destroying the pop ideology that says that the voice is the expression of the human subject.”

And so Force Inc embarked upon its own “abstract Industrial take on UK breakbeat”, mashing together harsh sonorities and angelic samples over ultra-fast breakbeats, as on Biochip C’s marvellous “Hells Bells”, available on the recent Force Inc anthology *Rauschen 10*. Achim also licensed UK tracks such as NRG’s super-sentimental “I Need Your Lovin’” and material by Force Mass Motion. “We did some great parties, our DJ friend Sasha playing much faster than the English DJs, at 200 bpm, using an altered Technics [deck] cranked up to +40. At this velocity, it was very abstract, coming at you like a sound wall. It worked good for us but nobody else! We were very isolated in Germany.”

In 1993-94 Szepanski watched aghast as rave went overground in Germany, with “the return of melody, New Age elements, insistently kitsch harmonies and timbres”. With this degeneration of the underground sound came the consolidation of a German rave establishment, centred around the party organisation Mayday and its record label Low Spirit, acts such as Westbam and Marusha, and the music channel Viva TV. The charts were swamped with Low Spirit pop-Tekno smashes such as “Somewhere Over The Rainbow” and “Tears Don’t Lie”, based on tunes from musicals or German folk music. And the alleged ‘alternative’ to this dreck was moribund, middlebrow Electro-Trance music, as represented by Frankfurt’s own Sven Vath and his Harthouse label.

For Achim, what happened to German rave illustrated Deleuze and Guattari’s concepts of “de-territorialisation” and “re-territorialisation”. De-territorialisation is when a culture gets all fluxed up - punk, early rave, Jungle - resulting in a breakthrough into new aesthetic, social and cognitive spaces. Re-territorialisation is the inevitable stabilisation of chaos into a new order: the internal emergence of style codes and orthodoxies, the external co-optation of subcultural energy by the leisure industry. Szepanski has a groovy German word for what rave, once so liberating, turned into: ‘Freizeit-

tknast', a 'pleasure-prison'. Regulated experiences, punctual rapture, predictable music: "Boring!" sneers Achim

Would he go so far as to describe a kind of aesthetic fascism at work in rave culture? "The techniques of mass-mobilisation and crowd-consciousness have similarities to fascism. Fascism was mobilising people for the war-machines, rave is mobilising people for pleasure-machines".

In 1994 Achim started Mille Plateaux. Just as Force Inc worked with and against the demands of the dancefloor, Mille Plateaux is a kind of answer to 'electronic listening music' and the Ambient boom. Achim sees the label's output as the musical praxis to Deleuzian theory, fleshing out concepts such as the rhizome (a network of stems that are laterally connected), which is opposed to hierarchical root-systems (such as those found in trees). In music, 'rhizomatic' equates with the Eno/dub idea of a democracy of sounds, a dismantling of the normal ranking of instruments in the mix (usually privileging the voice or lead guitar). Instead, says Achim, there's a "synthesisation of heterogenous sounds and material through a kind of composition that holds the sound elements together without them losing their heterogeneity". Anticipated by the fractal funk and chaos-theorems of Can and early 70s Miles Davis (the 'nobody solos, everybody solos' principle), rhizomatic

music today takes the form of DJ cut 'n' mix (at its rare, daring best), avant garde Hip Hop and post-rock. And the output of Mille Plateaux, of course.

*

Another key Deleuze and Guattari trait shared by Mille Plateaux is an interest in schizophrenic consciousness. Achim talks of admiring darkside Hardcore for its “paranoia”, and mourns the way Jungle traded its vital madness for “serious” musicality. “Since the 50s, in musique concrete, in Industrial music, in Techno, one heard diverse noises, screaming, creaking, hissing - all noises one related more to madness,” he explains. “Echo-effects allow sound hallucinations to occur, they delocalise the perception apparatus, allowing forms of perception to emerge that one had previously attributed to lunatics or schizophrenics.” For Achim, as for Deleuze and Guattari, such sensory disorientation is valuable, acting as a deconstruction of ‘subjectivity’.

Last year Szepanski contacted Deleuze himself, sending material by Oval and other Mille artists, and asking if he'd write an essay for Achim's planned anthology of techno theory, *Maschinelle Strategeme*. The great man wrote back saying he couldn't do it, but gave his blessing to the label,

and said that he particularly dug Oval. “He even wrote about specific tracks!” exclaims Achim. “Later, the German publisher of *A Thousand Plateaus* told us this was really quite unusual, to get such a letter.”

Not long afterwards, the terminally ill, 70 year old Deleuze committed suicide. Szepanski immediately organised the double CD tribute *In Memoriam Gilles Deleuze*. Featuring contributions from American post-rockers Rome and Trans Am, DJ-philosopher Spooky, a gaggle of Achim’s old allies in the European experimental music scene, and all the usual Mille Plateaux-affiliated suspects (Oval, Mouse On Mars, Cristian Vogel, Ian Pooley, Scanner, Gas, etc), *In Memoriam* is probably the best thing the label has put out yet. Stand-out tracks include the electroacoustic jiggery-pokery of Alec Empire’s “Bon Voyage”, the musique concrete Jungle of Christophe Charles’s “Undirections/Continuum”, and Rome’s Cluster-like drone-mosaic “Intermodal”.

The ubiquitous Jim O’Rourke also appears, and is working on a sort of O’Rourke versus Mille Plateaux remix project, using the entire Mille catalogue as source material. Techno Animal may also be doing a remix project based around the ‘versus’ concept, *Techno Animal Versus Reality*, which will involve five guest collaborators, material will be shuttled back and forth between each artist and the group, eventually resulting in ten

versions of five tracks. And then there's Oval, who are currently scheming their way towards a sort of Listener versus Oval scenario: a digital authoring system that will enable the punter to make their own Oval records.

*

Interviewing Oval is, shall we say, challenging. Their methods are obscure, their theory fabulously rarefied, their utterances marinated in irony. All that can be safely said is that Oval's 'music' - however irrelevant aesthetics may be to the trio - offers an uncanny, seductive beauty of treacherous surfaces and labyrinthine recesses.

Ironically, given Oval's polemical engagement with digital culture, my encounter with the trio takes place in one of Frankfurt's new cyber-cafes. Immediately there are communication problems. Humble enquiries about backgrounds and influences are met with rolling of the eyes, sniggers, and "Next question!" Tentative characterisations of their activity are treated as a reduction or misrepresentation of the Oval project. So what are they trying to do?

Put as simply as possible, Oval is “not so much about music as the technical implementation of notions of music,” says Markus Popp. “It’s an effort in sound-design rather than music with a capital M. The main content of our effort is to have an audible user-interface.”

In nuts and bolts terms, this means fucking with the hardware and software that organises and enables today’s post-rave Electronica. Most critical of these technologies is MIDI (Musical Instrument Digital Interface), which allows different pieces of equipment to be co-ordinated like the players in a group, or instrumental ‘voices’ in an orchestra. For Oval, this is precisely the problem. “MIDI is basically a music-metaphor in itself, one that’s so deplorably dated. It’s so constraining in every way, you have to go beyond these protocols.”

Despite, or rather because of, this technology’s reliance on “traditional music syntax and semantics”, Oval deliberately use the set-up, because their real interest is in standardisation. Their first Mille Plateaux release *Systemisch*, explains Sebastian Oschatz, “was done with a very cheap MIDI set-up and a borrowed copy of Aphex Twin’s *Selected Ambient Works Vol II*.” This later turns out to be an Oval in-joke; apparently, Richard James is one of many artists who have claimed that *Systemisch* was based on their material. “That album is composed of material that is really old, and it got edited, layered and recombined

so many times, it's stupid to ask whose music is this?" says Popp. "That is the only truly negligible aspect in our music. Most of the CDs we used were rented, and often they didn't have their covers!"

Getting back to MIDI or a sampler/sequencer software such as Cubase (the power tool of choice for the post-rave generation), Popp complains that, "There is so much determinism within these programs, working with them involves so much compliance to principles that are highly critical. In a social context these technologies are mostly used in a controlling way: monitoring the workplace, workplace efficiency, optimising the user-interface. On-line newsgroups are full of people who e-mail back to the manufacturers saying, 'We'll need this, change that', and all of this keeps them in front of their computers even longer. Our way of dealing with this is to overcome the manufacturer's distinction between 'features' and 'bugs'.

Which brings us to the famous Oval deployment of deliberately damaged CDs to generate the raw material of their music: the glitches, skips and distressed cyber-muzik that makes Systemisch and its sequel 94 Diskont so ear-boggling. The CD-thang is another 'reduction' that irks Oval: "We did use CDs, but that is neglectable, there are so many other things we could have used...The important point was that the CD player has no distinction if it's an error or a proper part of the recording, it's

just doing calculations, algorithms.”

This recalls Hendrix’s aestheticisation of feedback, a ‘bug’ or improper effect immanent in the electric guitar but hitherto unexploited. Oval reject terms like ‘sabotage’ to describe the CD treatments and the more esoteric forms of algorithmic mischief they wreak within hardware. But they do use the word “disobedience”, which also has a frisson of subversion, and talk, deconstruction-style, of engaging in a kind of non-antagonistic dialogue with corporate digital culture: Sony, IBM, Microsoft, et al.

*

Contradictions abound in Oval’s own rhetoric. They speak in almost punk ‘anyone-can-do-it’ terms of deliberately keeping their activity at the “lowest entry-level”, of not wanting “to convey an image of arcane technology and years of expert study in digital signal processing and programming”. Yet their discourse is often absurdly forbidding and user-unfriendly. Then there’s the way they deny any musical intentions, only to later come close to characterising their project as an enrichment of music. They talk of not wanting to produce a merely “predictable outcome” of the hardware and software, of wishing to “offensively suggest” the existence of sound worlds “from ‘outside’

the digital domain”, of having invented a “completely new music-paradigm”.

Says Popp, “Another aspect of what we wanted to achieve musically is to generate a new kind of perception. In the beginning, some labels sent back the demo tapes because they said there’s no music on it!” In that respect, Oval’s audio-mazes induce a ‘perceptual dissonance’ akin to the Op Art of Bridget Riley, or the perspectival chaos of Escher. Sebastian adds: “It works the other way: obvious mis-pressings on the albums, or DAT drop-outs on certain compilation tracks, don’t get spotted during the production process!”

Future Oval projects include some kind of EP for Mille Plateaux; the US release of Systemisch and Diskont, accompanied by “exclusive material, possibly predating Systemisch”, via the ultra-cool label Table Of The Elements; and an ‘interactive’ product designed in collaboration with British computer boffin Richard Ross.

First published in 'the wire' #146 (4/96)

Biographies

Katja Diefenbach, philosopher, professor of Aesthetic Theory at Merz Akademie in Stuttgart. Former lecturer at the University of Fine Arts (Berlin) and Humboldt University (Berlin) and director of the research project *After 1968. On the notion of the political in the post-Marxism* (www.after1968.org) at the Jan van Eyck Academy of Maastricht (Netherlands). She writes of post-structuralism, Marxism, deconstruction and new forms of capitalism under the aegis of neoliberalism. Among the publications noteworthy is *Encountering Althusser: Materialism and Politics in Contemporary Radical Thought*, which she co-authored with Sara R. Farris, Gal Kim, Peter D. Thomas (Bloomsbury, 2013). Forthcoming *Politik der Potentialität. Spinoza-Rezeptionen postmarxistischen in der Philosophie* (2017).

Simon Reynolds, writer, journalist, pop critic. He has been hailed as “the foremost popular music critic of this era” (*Times Literary Supplement* [UK]), “unassailable” (*New York Times*), and “the most provocative pop music writer of his generation” (*Boston Globe*). Reynolds started his journalistic career in 1986 as a staff writer for the British weekly music paper *Melody Maker*. His

writing has appeared in the *New York Times*, *Spin*, *Village Voice*, *Rolling Stone*, *Artforum*, *The Wire*, *The Guardian*, *Slate*, *Frieze* and the *Los Angeles Times*. He is the author of *Energy Flash* (Pan Macmillan, 2008), *Retromania* (Faber & Faber, 2011), *Rip It Up and Start Again: Postpunk 1978-1984* (Faber & Faber, 2005), *Totally Wired* (Faber & Faber, 2009), *Shock and Awe: Glam Rock and Its Legacy from the Seventies to the Twenty-first Century* (Faber & Faber, UK, 2016).

Achim Szepanski, philosopher, musician, record producer, writer, blogger and political activist. He directs his subversive media operations from his HQ in Frankfurt. Since 2015 worldwide cutting edge texts have been published on his radical information website Non-Copyriot (<http://non.copyriot.com>). He worked for the leftist German newspaper, “Langer Marsch”. In the 80’s he was a member of the electro-noise and industrial-punk groups PD and P16.D4. Later on he founded the label Black Out (1989), Force Inc. (1991), A Thousand Plateaus (1994), Position Chrome (1996), Forcetracks & Ritornell (1998). Among the publications noteworthy is the trilogy of novels *Pole Position* (Rhizomatique, 2011), *Saal 6* (Rhizomatique, 2011), *Verliebt ins Gelingen* (Rhizomatique, 2014), and the philosophical-political writings *Kapitalisierung Bd. I - Marx ‘not-Ökonomie* (Laika Verlag, 2014), *Kapitalisierung Bd. II - Non-Ökonomie des gegenwärtigen Kapitalismus* (Laika Verlag, 2014), *Der Non-Marxismus. Finance, Maschinen, dividuum* (Laika-Verlag, 2016).