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THEORY BEYOND THE CODES

Compression and Oppression

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Compression, at the best of times, softens the blow. It is, however, defined by the force of its misuse, a military grade weapon [1] used to enhance the audio-virological power of sonic capital. [2] It is nothing more than the stifling of dynamic range in the hyper-competitive economy of attention. [3] It is where nuance, that cultural pocket of whispers, of silences, no longer exists because it is dragged up to compete with the rest of the sky-scraping peaks, where, if something decides to cross the set threshold (which can be changed at any given time), it is forced to back down in order to fit within the general wall of sound. If such singular entities are not complicit with this process then they are edited out as non-desirables through non-destructive editing, [4] the process where one can redeem oneself from his or her past mistakes by changing historical commands to suit oneself at a keystroke (at the speed of light). The compressor is the machinery of the noise war, [5] but to Castro the music was louder than war. [6] Is this, however, a compliment? Or did he mean that the noise of the music itself was nothing but the assimilating mask to the protest against the injustice of globalisation, a theme tune to the tragedy of dying silence? Or was he simply poking fun at Western music? Should one not feel tortured, as Adorno felt, [7] by the hypocrisy of those commodified, homogenized assimilations of dynamic political participation? What does this noise do to those who subject themselves to it? Is it a shock to thought, or a provocation to boredom? [8]

Compression is also the governor of the geography of nowhere, [9] the condensed space where one can't move without being BOMBARDED with the excess of signs, resulting in hyper-stimulation towards consumer fetishism and complicity to the system in which one thinks they are rebelling against. It is the barrier, the oppression of dynamic activism, of dynamic protest. It is the unnecessary permission needed to move in public areas owned by private companies. It is the demand for certain conducts of behaviour on pain of a lengthy jail sentence, on pain of death in some other destinations -- it is the police escort who marches the marchers trying to stand up against such tyranny. It is the entire system of law. Compression condenses dynamic cultures by assimilating them in the name of globalisation, where everyone is screaming yet not one person is heard. It is the squeezer of small businesses in niche communities who have no choice, through the force of globalisation, to adapt to the VOLUME of global industry, losing all identity, losing their own unique singularities, and becoming an extension of the greater.

Compression leads to the loss of autonomy. [10] It is the state war machine [11] that diminishes nomadic cultures, those true war machines who fought for the right only to move and be free, whereas now the only warriors in this world are those who fight for the state, who fight to feed a system that cannot move for being constipated with its concentrated power. It is the reason the pilgrims have become tourists [12], the reason the pilgrims have become cannibals, stealing off each other to accumulate MORE VOLUME in world already OBESE WITH VOLUME. Not even terrorism is loud enough to break the threshold of compression. After all, we have non-destructive editing to take care of such things. Compression is the theft of dynamic knowledge long lost to those who misunderstood and perverted the mysteries of the universe because they couldn't handle the fact that the mystery was just that, and thus had to make the fluid unknown become a concrete static truth to squeeze down every opposition in the name of *reason*. [13]

In fact, the process of compression owns history. It has squashed it down to a single event by means of turning it into a recycling bin made out of its own waste material. [14] Was Lanier correct? [15] Can we not define music after the year 2000; has it really died of nostalgia? [16] For no longer do historical events exist in their own time and space, but rather they now exist in the ground zero of events, [17] where the global singular has dragged everything down with it in a grand act of self-inflicted harm, of a failed suicide attempt which one can see to this day in the museum of accidents, [18] on replay -- the condemnation of humanity to witnessing the never-ending event of Armageddon. [19] A VOLUME of hell.

Compression is the agent of fear which assumes its role as the curer. It is the healer of dispositions and the agent of realignment to fit the continuity of the VOLUME of the overall mass. It is Xanax, it is beta blockers, it is the American military leaving Cambodia, or Iraq, on its quest for editorial perfection, leaving its host in a worse state than it had found it in, where the space itself, as a result of the withdrawal, becomes the sound of rushing blood, of adrenalin, of sheer panic.

The compressor is judge, jury, and executioner. It is the device that outputs the original master. It is the maximizer, the expander, the limiter, the finalizer. [20]

The compressor's word is final. The compressor is the CAPITALIST DEATH SENTENCE that ends with a full stop. [21] It is that which oppresses the movement of the word to the limits of the beginning and the end. The CAPITALIST DEATH SENTENCE cannot breath. The lower case, that niche, that nuance, that pocket of dynamic movement which can jump from one space to another is now static and LOUD, but no one can hear it for the NOISE.

And thus nobody cares, for care itself is dynamic -- it is the sanity of prudent distance. [22] The compressor is the agent of indifference. It is that which diminishes the exotic niches through the compression of time and space [23] into commercial nullity. [24] It banishes illusion to the depths of banality. There is nothing to wait for -- it comes at you, hard and fast, all at once, because compression is the agent that doesn't allow information that opportunity to retract, to expand, to clarify, or digress -- or disappear (for there is always remembrance).

Within the compressed space, there is no listening government. [25] There is no sonic economy, [26] there is no dynamic engagement to political discourse. Listening is not an option for political strategy, only forte dialogue -- the assimilation of democratic political debate.

This is the politics of NOISE. [27]

Notes

[1] "Military grade" is a popular marketing term for high-end audio equipment.

[2] Steve Goodman, *Sonic Warfare: Sound, Affect, and the Ecology of Fear* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2010), 191-92.

[3] *Ibid.*

[4] "Non-destructive editing" is an industry term used to describe the way in which one edits digitally. It is here one has access to past events and the ability to recall and alter them at one's will. Recording onto tape is destructive editing, because it involves getting rid of past events by physically cutting up the medium.

[5] "Noise wars" is an industry term used to describe issues of compression within the mastering stages of recording. Goodman (191-92) explains that the need for more volume on a song was a marketing strategy for record companies in order to bring more focus to their product. Indeed, the term also refers to the conflict between audio purists and mastering engineers who are in charge of the decision-making process regarding such things as volume levels of an overall piece of audio.

[6] Andrew Smith, "Our Manics in Havana," *Guardian Online* (18 March 2001): <http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/2001/mar/18/life1.lifemagazine> (accessed on 3 January 2013). Smith discusses the Manic Street Preachers show in Cuba -- one of the first western rock shows ever to be held in the country, in which Fidel Castro reportedly said "your music is louder than war."

[7] "Theodor Adorno ? Music and Protest," *Youtube*: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-njxKF8CkoU> (accessed on 3 January 2013).

[8] Goodman, 192.

[9] Naomi Klein, *No Logo* (New York: Picador, 2000). Klein utilises the term "geography of nowhere" to discuss the state of modern activism in a world where public spaces are no longer owned by the public. The term was originally coined by James Howard Kunstler, *A Geography of Nowhere: Rise and Decline of America's Man Made Landscape* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993).

[10] Robert Freedman, *Noise Wars: Compulsory Media and Our Loss of Autonomy* (New York: Algora, 2009).

[11] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (New York and London: Continuum, 2004): 460-61.

[12] Zygmunt Bauman, "From Pilgrim to Tourist: A Short History of Identity," *Questions of Cultural Identity* (London: Sage, 1996): 18-36.

[13] Deleuze and Guattari, 401?03.

[14] Jean Baudrillard, "Reversion of History," *L'illusion de la fin: ou La greve des evenements, Galilee: Paris, 1992*, trans. Charles Dudas (Paris: Galilee, 1992): <http://www.egs.edu/faculty/jean-baudrillard/articles/reversion-of-history/> (accessed on 3 January 2013).

[15] Jaron Lanier, *You are not a Gadget: A Manifesto* (New York: Knopf Doubleday, 2010): 85.

[16] Frank Zappa, *The Real Frank Zappa* (New York: Simon and Shuster): 203.

[17] Jean Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism*, trans. Chris Turner (London and New York: Verso, 2002).

[18] Mark Featherstone, "Virilio's Apocalypticism," *CTheory.net* (16 September 2010): <http://www.ctheory.net/articles.aspx?id=662> (accessed on 3 January 2013).

[19] Paul Virilio, *Landscape of Events*, trans. Julie Rose (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001): 54? 61.

[20] Each of these four descriptions are various names given to devices, either by generic terms or brand names, used in the final stages of audio mastering -- each of which contains in its primary function a compressor (or a limiter, a much more extreme version of the compressor).

[21] Tom Leonard, "the case for lower case," *Tom Leonard* (n.d.): http://www.tomleonard.co.uk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=47&Itemid=47 (accessed on 3 January 2013).

[22] Iain Crichton Smith, "TV," *Collected Poems* (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1992): 324?25.

[23] Barney Warf, *Time Space Compression: Historical Geographies* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

[24] Jean Baudrillard, *The Conspiracy of Art*, trans. Ames Hodges (New York: Semiotext(e), 2005): 28.

[25] "Listening government" is a catchphrase of current UK Tory prime minister David Cameron.

[26] Steve Kennedy, "A Sonic Economy," *CTheory.net* (20 May 2010): <http://www.ctheory.net/articles.aspx?id=649> (accessed on 3 January 2013).

[27] Goodman, 192.

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