September 24, 2002

John,

Thanks again for taking the time to consider my inquiry. The body of the article is composed entirely of quotes attributed to you, and my commentary appears in the footnotes. Part of my purpose will be to inform the readership of the nature of your work and theories. Since your compositions and writings raise such issues as originality, the public domain, citation/credit, and active consumerism, the very form of my piece might add to the discussion. While this might seem like a quick and easy gimmick, I have pursued collage writing for some time now. Writers and theorists such as the anthropologist Michael Taussig, South American historian Eduardo Galeano (especially his three-part Memory of Fire series), African-American novelist Nathaniel Mackey, and cultural theorist Walter Benjamin have significantly influenced my thinking and writing. The demands your work places on the listener has caused me to consider this format.

Joe

Oswald’s Theory:

“All popular music (and all folk music by definition) exists in the public domain, essentially if not legally. Listening to pop music isn’t a matter of choice. Asked for or not, we’re bombarded by it. . . . Difficult to ignore, pointedly redundant to imitate, how does one not become a passive recipient” (e).

“As a listener my own preference is the option to experiment. My listening system has a mixer instead of a receiver, an infinitely-variable-speed turntable, filters, reverse capability, and a pair of ears” (e).

Sources:

(a) an interview conducted by Norman Irgma contained within the 69/96 retrospective box set (1999) — (b) the 69/96 liner notes also include John Oswald’s “revolutions and Mister Dolly Parton: a vortex of androgyny” originally published in the British magazine Collusion (1981), (c) the plunderphonics EP liner notes, and previously published conversations with Irgma including (d) “Taking sampling Fifty Times the Expected” — originally published in Musicworks Magazine (1990) and reprinted in Negativland’s Fair Use: The Story of the Letter U and the Numeral 2 (Seeland 1995); (e) John Oswald’s article “Plunderphonics, or Audio Piracy as a Compositional Prerogative” contained within the anthology The Cassette Mythos (Autonomedia 1990); (f) John Oswald’s article “Creatigality” contained within the anthology Sounding Off!: Music as Subversion/Resistance/Revolution (Autonomedia 1995); (g) plunderphonics CD liner notes (1989); (h) an interview conducted by Brian Duguid (1994); (i) an interview conducted by Joe Allen (2002).

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1 I asked Oswald, “What do you think of someone assembling an article about you solely of quotes attributed to you?” He replied, “Sounds familiar.”
### An Oswaldian Glossary:

"Musical language has an extensive repertoire of punctuation devices but nothing equivalent to literature’s quotation marks" (e).

"A plunderphone is a recognizable sound quote . . . the derivation must maintain a substantial degree of its original character" (a).

"A major ingredient in perceiving any plunderphonic piece is the recognizability of the source in the transformation" (a).

"In order to achieve some sort of respectability, electroquoting must follow the literary example of reference and citation" (a).

"I tend to prefer to distill out the redundancy in music. To distill out redundancy in a playback media requires a thorough knowledge of the recognition of some few hundred disks are unpredictable — it might effect the market (d)."

This disc, [plunderphonics CD], may be reproduced but neither it, nor any reproduction of it are to be sold or resold. Copies are available only to public access and broadcast organizations, including libraries, radio or periodicals” (g).

### Oswald and Copyright Law:

There are fewer copies of the plunderphonics CD in existence in the world than a single record store would sell of a major hit record in a week, but nonetheless the implications of these few hundred disks are unpredictable — it might effect the market (d). 4

On Halloween in 1989, Canadian recording artist John Oswald began distributing his CD plunderphonics free of charge to libraries, radio stations, the press, and the sampled artists themselves—not their lawyers, managers, record labels, etc. The 1000 pressed CDs contained an explicit warning: NOT-FOR-SALE. Oswald composed each of his songs entirely of samples, often from a single source song or one artist or group. His liner notes clearly referenced his sources, and he also encouraged the practice of dubbing his recording to further disseminate his work.

Brian Robertson, president of the Canadian Recording Industry Association, first heard news of the collagism of Michael Jackson as a naked woman on the plunderphonics cover. After hearing the recording, he thought he heard identifiable samples of Michael Jackson in one song. “Dab” is composed entirely of samples from Jackson’s “Bad,” as the liner notes stated. First the CD pressing plant was questioned, and then the CRIA began asking him to cease distribution of plunderphonics claiming it violated Canadian copyright law. Oswald had calculated that the Jackson camp wouldn’t be interested in bothering with someone “giving away a handful of free CDs” (d). After consulting lawyers, he gave CRIA the remaining copies and master tapes for destruction.
Did you know that I played turntable in a band back in 1964? (a) ... the only thing I did that actually sounded musical was dropping a needle on a record" (b).

"Thomas Edison's professed aim was to make his phonograph 'the greatest musical instrument in the world.' It is doubtful that Edison envisioned the scatter-brained music of the descendants of Grandmaster Flash ..." (f). Also, when I was in high school, somehow I talked my way into getting jobs as a student radio station DJ" (b). The main attraction for me was access to two turntables and a boxed tape player. Many bands would ask me to simultaneously. We were through most of our record collection on air, looking for precious nuggets. (b)

"Bach burnt fame and heavy metal bands the audience (a). Grandmaster Flash doesn't need a soundproof jacket. His fingers can find the tem's right in the groove. On record playback any playback media (i) morphing into the next" (a). I did that ac

Tracks 24 and 25 on 69/96 "Black" and "Brown." "Black" and "Brown" are one continuous James Brown fest" (a). "Brown" is an unfocused mediation between the guy's who's been sampled the most and those active in parasitic creativity" (a). "I haven't listened to enough of that stuff [hip hop] to have much of an idea of what may or may not have percolated (or developed independently). Every once in a while I hear something in passing on the radio like that track which Madonna sings on 'don't (not to be confused with my track DONT on which Elvis Presley sings) which has a crudely chopped and reterated acoustic guitar which reminded me of the repetative acoustic guitar on my track Vane (90, featuring Carly Simon vs. Faster Pussy) which reminds me of time-shuffle programming (as opposed to the lock-synch of traditional tape metaphor multitracking and dub mixes) found all over the place in the past ten years, from Megadeth to Beck" (f). ... a common dance floor DJ technique — gradually speed the beat until everybody sweats. In Plexure this effect is extended to its extremities. Within the pervasive shape of the piece, which is a collage of about a thousand pop tunes, roughly organized in an accelerating trajectory, each quickly morphing into the next" (a). 10

Oswald finds a Dolly Parton!

"The last chorus features Dolly singing a duet with herself. This is the 45 rpm and 33 1/3 rpm vocals in perfect sync. 11" The last chorus features Dolly singing a duet with himself. This is the 45 rpm and 33 1/3 rpm vocals in perfect sync.
“...I just keep doing things”

Oswald’s Technoculture: Sounds Familiar

“...I just keep doing things”

“...I just keep doing things”

“The very fast part at the beginning was created on a vacuum-controlled bin loop” (a).

“The Lenco with the speed control which infinitely variable between 12 and 80 rpm's is the greatest of turntables. I can’t help but race through the possibilities of any particular disc, accelerating and gliding through various twists and turns, hurrying past redundancy and slowing into a particularly tricky passage” (b).

“The major ingredient in perceiving any plunderphonic piece is the recognizability of the source in the transformation. For Pleasure we were experimenting with the threshold of that recognition” (a). “The intention in the structure was to keep everything on the threshold of recognisability, partly because of the vast number of sources on the record, several thousand different songs being electro-quoted” (h).

“Any performance potential found in an appliance is often exploited” (e). 12

“Any playback media speed control” (a).

“Fair use’s ancestral neighbor ‘the public domain’ is featured around with my arrangements if it helps their listening experience” (a). 14

“i’m here”

11 Pretender” was partially played on a Lenco Bogen turntable with a variable speed control range between 12 and 80 rpms.

12 Oswald’s studio manipulations include: tape splicing reel to reel tape, transformation and accumulation, time stretching, time compression, speech fragmentation, technologically induced androgyny, decelerando, and alaphrate switching in a stereo field.

13 Oswald lifts this quote from This Music of Business.

14 Oswald: “Only one i can think to remember mentioning is The Wild Why (2002, on the Kid606 label), Wobbly’s indirect homage to the tape album Kissing Jesus in the Dark (from the early-mid-80’s).”

15 The Supreme Court is hearing the case Eldred v. Ashcroft in the 2002 session which challenges the 1998 law that extended most copyright terms from 50 to 70 years after the death of the author or artist and 95 for years for copyrights held by corporations. Giant media corporations lobbied for the extension to protect their interests — for Disney, Mickey Mouse was set to enter the public domain in 2003. Congress has extended copyright terms repeatedly in the last 40 years. Eric Eldred, who initially filed the suit, publishes an online archive of classic literature. No copyrights held by corporations. Giant media corporations lobbied for the extension to protect their interests — for Disney, Mickey Mouse was set to enter the public domain in 2003. Congress has extended copyright terms repeatedly in the last 40 years. Eric Eldred, who initially filed the suit, publishes an online archive of classic literature. No...