

## Deconstructing the E-Musik/U-Musik Canon. Glitch, Dirty Electronics and *Jouissance*

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Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup>-Century in Germany, one concept that has conserved and embodied musical hierarchies is the pair of terms ‘E-Musik’ and ‘U-Musik’. Meaning literally ‘serious’ and ‘entertaining’ music, the pair of characterizations is often associated with value judgments of high and low art or of good and (depending upon point of view) less-good. The canon of these categories permeates broadcast programs, record products, academic funding requests, music shops, and more. Like a Berlin wall, it has divided the world of music into two separately functioning domains.

In the few years of the young 21<sup>st</sup>-Century, many new trends have been sighted that could contribute to a deconstruction of this division. In electronic music, I would like to consider two: glitch music and dirty electronics, which are finding enthusiastic acceptance among young artists in Germany and elsewhere. In an age in which cutting-edge technology is globally available, glitch and dirty electronics reject the veneer of state-of-the-art technical perfection. Instead, they employ simple elements or discarded electronic snippets. Following an electronic tradition marked by such diverse figures as Oskar Fischinger, Karlheinz Stockhausen and Kraftwerk, these techniques have found fertile ground in the music and labels of the Berlin electronica scene (Oval, Mille Plateaux, Carsten Nicolai...).

One composer who uses these techniques is Terre Thaemlitz. Born in 1968, Thaemlitz worked as a DJ in the New York club scene in the late 80s while studying art at the Cooper Union School. Through his extraordinary productivity and analytic writings, Thaemlitz has moved into high-art technology temples such as Ircam (1995-96) and the Linz Ars Electronica festival (Honorable Mention, 1999).

Thaemlitz cuts up bits of music and/or out-takes, drawing heavily on music history, politics and cultural theory as sources, and combines them to re-create elements of traditional music syntax: rhythm, harmony, meter, sounds. The outcome of his work is ultimately “Genrecide” (the title of a 1999 song), in the course of which existing economic and aesthetic structures are subverted.

In order to examine how these new practices subvert existing hierarchies, I draw on deconstructive theory, in which a central theme is the notion of hierarchical binary oppositions (life/death, west/east, high/low...). The gradual disappearance of these hierarchies could to a new kind of pleasure, which Hélène Cixous calls *jouissance* (“*Le Rire de la Méduse*”, 1975) in creating art. Hence, in the rise of glitch and dirty electronics we might make out a sign of the slow dissolution of an essential component of the Western European music canon, the E-Musik/U-Musik opposition.

Through a Cixousian reading of Terre Thaemlitz’ music, I propose to trace this element of deconstruction in the musical canon and the dissemination of *jouissance*.