

04[062]

INNER SPATIALIZING THE SONG

[Towards a] MythScience of the Mixing Desk: The Upsetter

Far from Rastafari's flat-earth metaphysics, its fundamentalist blood and fire, Lee Perry's productions and theory fictions open up an entirely new field: the MythScience of the mixing desk. The Upsetter taps into the secret life of sound machines, opens the cybernetics of the studio.

Remix Your Head

In the Upsetter's concepttechnics, the mixing desk is a mental machine, a mind-machine interface. Perry diagrams the neurocircuitry of the Soundcraft mixing board, its thought flow: 'I put my mind into the machine and the machine performs reality. Invisible thoughtwaves, you put them into the machine by sending them through the controls and the knobs or you jack it into the jackpanel.' It is a medium that forms reality, violently bending the environment, massaging it.

04[063]

I introduce myself as a mistake

Indelible MCs

The Secret Life of Sound Machines

Perry is the analyst of the studio's ability to extend perception. The mixing desk decomposes *The Song*, leaving a skeletal ribcage. The Black Ark studio is a machine lifeform: 'I see the studio must be like a living thing, a life itself. The machine must be live and intelligent. The jackpanel is like the brain itself so you got to patch up the brain and make the brain a living man.'

Dub demands symbiosis that externalizes the mind, drastically reconfiguring the human producer into a machine being, an audio cyborg: 'You are listenin' to a machine. I imitate human being, I'm a machine being, I don't work with human beings.' When you sculpt space with the mixing desk, these technical effects – gate and reverb, echo and flange – are routes through a network of volumes, doorways and tunnels connecting spatial architectures.

*We're taking over the sun, we're changing time, we're
changing space*

The Mighty Upsetter

Meteorology of the Echoplex

Using the Echoplex to clone echoes and the Roland Space Echo to delay time and accumulate shocks of reverberation, Perry reremixes nth-dimensional impacts, neither snares nor syncussion but perplexing, confounding SonoMatter. In the electromagnetic nth world of '75's *Revolution Dub* and '78's *Return of the Super Ape*, *The Song* is disinterred until its ghost universes populate the world.

Return of the Super Ape is dub that disturbs the atmosphere until it yields poltergeists. Arriving ahead of cause, sound turns motiveless, premonitional, inexplicable. 'Well, [the drums] were going through the Echoplex and with the Echoplex we can do anything. We can change energy and feelings.' Stray sonic debris crashes through space, looms into closeup. Effects decelerate until they become baffling, frustrating ricochets from an unloaded gun. The wind of Baudelaire's wings of madness sends sounds careering across living space. 'The drum controls the heartbeat and the bass holds the space. I dub from inner to outer

space. The sound that I get out of the Black Ark studio, I don't really get it out of no other studio. It was like a space craft. You could hear space in the tracks.'

Space between sound doesn't drop out, it's pulled out from between beats until it convulses, buckles, folds up into fists of solid air that buffet you with what Perry calls the Shocks of the Mighty. Giant pulsations trample space like colossal youth. Glass shatters, slows down into collapsing cardboard. The ghosts of ghosts of effects, 5th generation fx, unforeheard screams, rattles and rustles agitate the air.

Separated from its cause, the Echoplex creates an ominousness without an object, an all-pervasive feeling of force undefined, of atmospheric energies, which rends *The Song*, tears it apart. The mixing desk accesses the magnetic fields. It is a control tower from which the turbulence of technology is reconfigured: 'We are here at the Turntable Terranova, it means we are taking over. We're taking over the air, we're taking over the mounts, we're taking over the star, we're taking over the sun, we're changing time, we're changing power, we're changing grace, we're changing space.'

In a World of Echo

As soon as you have echo, listening has to completely change. Your ear has to chase the sound. Instead of the beat being this one event in time, it becomes this series of retreating echoes, like a tail of sound. The beat becomes a tail which is always disappearing round the corner and your ear has to start chasing it. If you're wearing headphones or a walkman it becomes a chase through the headphones. The Echoplex turns listening into running. You can't catch the beat, the tails of sound as they turn the corner, disappear down a corridor. From King Tubby to Basic Channel, the cymbal is always just out of reach, always taking the corner of perception. Where rhythm should be there is space, and vice versa. Spectral dub pivots around an absent beat. *Revolution Dub* is The Upsetter's mindfield. Every track ambushes you, confounds the process of pattern cognition by leaving the expected beat implied. By opening holes at the tightest moments of the groove, pulse falls through subtracted space, polyrhythm wrongfoots you, tugs and pushes at expectation, yanks the floorboards from underneath you. Echo turns the beat from a localized impact into an environment with you inside. Refractions bounce back from any surface. Initially the snare hits a stretched drumskin, the pedal depresses air between 2 cymbals so it

hisses. Pneumatic metal pressure. Now the impact that run away from your hearing rebounds back at you from the wall, the ceiling, the floor. The world turns into a giant drum with you at its centre. Beats ricochet off 360°, curving around the walls of the world.

Sitcom Ghosts Stalk the Spectral Song

By bringing the outside into the inside of The Song, Perry releases sitcom ghosts into the spectral Song. Perry samples tv before the sampler, just as Holger Czukay uses radio, drawing signals down through the aerials into The Song, crackling open another timezone inside the track. Space changes places. Reality reverses itself.

The bursts of smashing glass, squawling babies, trickling water, toilet flushes, rustling wind scatter The Song to the winds. Perry enlists a crying baby, a cow, a horse and a 70s tv sitcom on backing vocals. Like a great grandfather clock gone loco, each production becomes a percussion contraption, sprung open and haywired. Shakers, rattles, whistles, croakers, bells, toy piano, arthritic drum boxes in a perpetual rhythmshower, a molecular motion.

The Black Ark studio switches on a technology-magic discontinuum. Operating the mixing desk demands you explore its network of altering spaces. Perry crosses into its ghost dimension, walks through the temporal maze of aural architecture. 'So me join the ghost squad longtime and them notice me as the Ghost Captain. I am the Ghost Captain.'

'*Revolution Dub* is not so much produced as reduced by Perry. The Song is x-rayed into exoskeletal forms through which tv leaks. For *Woman's Dub*, the distorted snares drum like needlepoint magick, but rusted, ferric. *Kojak* is an intoxicated mix, an echochamber of moans in which space staggers and lurches dangerously.

In *Doctor on the Go*, Perry picks out a hesitant lullaby on piano, crooning 'Doctor on the Go' over and over as if he's being bereaved while the studio laughtrack shudders in then subsides back into babble, theme tune and studio applause. Incongruous occupation of the same dimension, ambiances rub in an incompatible friction. *Bush Weed's* drums are reversed so the cymbal sustain expands in a metallic shimmer before the snares beat time. The snares drum like knitting needles on silver foil, microscopic magick that anticipates the nth-dimensional needlepoint of 4 Hero's *The Paranormal in Four Forms*. Raindrops and a nature-documentary voiceover seeps in: 'Man has always been a threat to woodland animals.' Throughout *Revolution Dub*, Perry's bereft,

tottering in a tremulous falsetto of compelling indecipherability. In *Raindrops*, he sings in an eggshell treble as fragile as Leslie Cheung, the Chinese boy-girl performer in the '93 film *Farewell My Concubine*, and tiptoes through *Bird in Hand* on lily pads. On the snare drop, his tremolo is languidity, rockabye bassmotion.

A Field Trip through an Electromagnetic Environment of Distortion

The sonic future from Kraftwerk to Pink Floyd is always balanced, quadrophonically separated. Perry makes distortion the lead instrument in his intoxicated mixology, in which balance lurches, the spatial coordinates of up and down, near and far all heave and yaw in a seasickness of the ear, a drunkenness of the head.

Balance, the Trad location and identification of sound in space, is replaced by a seesawing motion, inducing an oppression by space, a threatening sense that space is about to crush you, push you off this revolving planet. Your hearing is on the verge of throwing up.

With *The Upsetter*, depth of field is neither weightless and empty nor vaulting and overwhelming. Instead it's crowded with crackle, seething, heaving, teeming with wraiths deprived of definition, lost from history, jostling for space. 'His method of dumping tracks onto one track to free them for further overdubbing introduced an effect of degradation that became an essential part of the mix.' What Steve Barrow calls degradation is electromagnetic enchantment. In *Return of the Super Ape*, the fuzz and leakage of nth-generation tape-distress become lead instruments, drowning the echoscape in a haze of electric feedback. Distortion pushes at the limits of the medium until it exceeds the medium, *The Song* imploding, disintegrating into oxide, drizzling rain, sibilance, an entire spectral dimension in sound.

The tracks succumb to apparitions, become porous, crackle like the celluloid burning up at the end of Ingmar Bergman's film '66 *Persona*. Degeneration = Regeneration. Sound sussurates into an electromagnetic nth world through which ghosts grow, effects superimpose and wraiths congregate.

Listening becomes a field trip through a found environment. Everything emerges from the subaudible static of underwater electricker, perpetually rustling and granulating, fibrous and aquatic. Perry buries video tapes in soil, turning the medium environmental.