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Tracking

The Tin Pan Alley songs that have become what we know as "standards" typically derived from a specific songwriting process: the composer, responsible for the music, settled first on a melody and second on a harmonic accompaniment, consisting at this stage of usually no more than instructions regarding the chords that would inflect the vocal line in a particular way. The lyricist, presented with the completed music, would then set words to it, and the result would be something like "My Romance" (Rogers and Hart), "Someone to Watch over Me" (George and Ira Gershwin), or "Stardust" (Hoagy Carmichael and Mitchell Parish). Occasionally, of course, these jobs might be performed by the same person: George M. Cohan, Irving Berlin, and Cole Porter wrote their own lyrics, although Berlin relied on professional harmonizers to write down chord progressions he could only hear. At times, the order of this process was reversed: while Larry Hart always required Richard Rogers's music to get started, Oscar Hammerstein preferred going first, writing

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lyrics (to a dummy melody's scansion) that Rogers would frequently orchestrate. In general, however, the standard pattern became the norm, persisting into the rock & roll era. Lieber and Stoller, Goffin and King, and even Jagger and Richards worked in this way and in doing so, they confirmed the traditional definitions of "song" and "songwriting."

The metaphysics of this method have become obvious only in retrospect: the division of labor, the priority of music over words, the idea of an AABA song—these aspects of traditional songwriting issue from a culture whose worldview Derrida has labeled "logocentric."³ Recently, however, new ways of writing songs have begun to challenge the standard procedure. For both *Graceland* and *The Rhythm of the Saints*, Paul Simon built songs up from rhythm tracks—some found others recorded with no particular song, or even kind of song, in mind. "I waited for the melodies and words to emerge from the tracks," Simon has said about *The Rhythm of the Saints*, but this emergence, unaided by teleology, often had to proceed by trial and error.⁴ Having recorded one unaccompanied drum track, Simon worked to "find a song by trying out genres (New Orleans rhythm & blues, gospel) before settling on doo-wop for what became "The Obvious Child."

Rap composing, of course, is the prototype for this songwriting procedure. Concentrating on rhythm (to the extent of eliminating the vocal melody line), working almost entirely with found music (sampled and recontextualized into new combinations), rap, in one writer's words, "is the scavenger of the music business."⁵ In another sense, it represents the pop analogue to a similar activity, one that also turns on knowledge of a tradition which can be reactivated by quotation for new purposes: scholarship. With his 19,000 record collection, Akai Sgoon sampler, and Ensoniq EPS sequencer (tools for effecting infinite recombinations), Public Enemy's Hank Shocklee seems less like the aural "shoplifter"⁶ he has been compared to than the specialist scholar whose impulses, Walter Benjamin observed, lie proximate to those of the collector.⁷ As Susan Buck-Morss points out, the collector represented for Benjamin someone "who assembles things that have been set out of circulation and are meaningless as the values," an apt description of rap composition.⁸ Think, for example, of the backing track to De La Soul's "Eye Know," an aural montage of

elements, including the whistling from Otis Redding's "Dock of the Bay" and a horn phrase from Steely Dan's "Peg." Benjamin, the scholar and collector resembled still another man that he called "the ponderer," "the man who already had the solution to great problems, but has forgotten them. . . . The thinker of the ponderer stands therefore in the sign of remembering":

The memory of the ponderer holds sway over the disordered mass of dead knowledge. Human knowledge is piecemeal to it in a particularly pregnant sense: namely as the heaping up of arbitrarily cut up pieces, out of which one puts together a puzzle. . . . The allegorist reaches now here, now there, into the chaotic depths that his knowledge places at his disposal, grabs an item out, holds it next to another, and sees whether they fit: that meaning to this image, or this image to that meaning. The result never lets itself be predicted; for there is no natural mediation between the two.⁹

The result never lets itself be predicted—in this element of surprise lies the great advantage of the ponderer's method. Indeed, the terms of Benjamin's description anticipate communication theory, with its redefinition of information as precisely a function of unpredictability.¹⁰ By this account, then, the initial difficulty of aural collages like records issued from the "informational density" of aural collages like "Flight the Power," with its seventeen different samples in the first eight seconds. This move is not without risks: it increases information by minimizing the redundancy on which easy reception depends. It wins its bet when it tells us something new. Scholarship, collecting, pondering, information theory—these activities may seem heady company for rap songwriting. Benjamin, however, has taught us to detect the similarities between occupations normally regarded as unrelated, and having done so, we might begin to see in contemporary songwriting suggestions for a new writing practice. What if academics were to write essays the way Paul Simon now composes songs? Given the predictability of so much contemporary criticism, this question seems worth taking up.¹¹ Hence the form of this essay. I decided to begin with "sampling," building up individual tracks (the essay's rhythm?) by appropriating familiar infor-

mation, while keeping open the purpose to which it might ultimately be put. I hope that as in rap, while the contents of the individual tracks may sometimes sound familiar, the final mix may be less so.

This essay is composed of six different tracks (two more than the Beatles had at their disposal), conceived at different occasions (as recorded parts might be), and brought together only in the final mix, which you are reading. Just as any modern mixing board allows you to "solo" any given track (to hear it alone, isolated from the others) and just as such soloing is typically the first step in mixing, I will begin here by running down the contents of my individual tracks, so that you can see (or hear) the parts before they dissolve into the blend.

Track One. During the past two years, a group at the University of Florida has participated in something called the Institute for European and Comparative Studies (recently renamed the Florida Research Ensemble, to suggest our interest in music and collaborative work), one of many such institutes whose cropping up suggests the increasingly widespread desire for interdisciplinary approaches to subjects perhaps not comprehended by traditional departments—subjects, for example, like rock & roll. Our institute organized itself around a single topic, the orality/literacy opposition described by Walter Ong, Jack Goody, Jacques Derrida, and others. What has interested us is the notion of writing as a *technology* whose advent and development have dramatically altered human consciousness. As both Ong and Goody demonstrate, a person surrounded by writing thinks differently from someone without it, and he will do so even if he himself cannot write.¹⁰ Abstract definitions, critical analysis, particular logics of ordering—these things that we take for granted in fact depend on the presence of writing and its various apparatus: lists, indexes, alphabetization, charts, paragraphs. Without writing, the kind of thinking dependent on those categories does not exist.

Here is an example, first described by A. R. Luria, and summarized by Ong: given a set of drawings of four objects (a hammer, a saw, a log, and a hatchet), subjects were asked to point to the one dissimilar from the rest. While literate subjects will inevitably exclude log, the

one item not a tool, illiterate subjects see the problem differently, not in terms of abstract categories, but in terms of practical situations involving use. As Ong observes: "If you are a workman with tools and see a log, you think of applying the tool to it, not of keeping the tool away from what it was made for—in some weird intellectual game."¹¹ Thus, one peasant replies:

"They're all alike. The saw will saw the log and the hatchet will chop it into small pieces. If one of these has to go, I'd throw out the hatchet. It doesn't do as good a job as a saw." Told that the hammer, saw, and hatchet are all tools, he discounts the categorical class and persists in situational thinking: "Yes, but even if we have tools, we still need wood—otherwise we can't build anything."¹¹

Even more important than this example is Ong's conclusion that were he living in a fully alphabetic culture, the peasant would respond differently, would understand the concept of "tool"—and would do so even if he himself did not read or write. For my purposes here, I don't intend to develop further the orality/literacy distinction, except to point out the obvious parallel to performance/recording, and to suggest that like writing, recording changes consciousness, and that people surrounded by records will develop different attitudes toward music, and will do so even if they do not know how to make records themselves.¹²

Track Two. The debates over sampling have called attention to the rapid development in recording technology and the attendant reevaluation of the recording process. Recording itself has been possible only since 1877, when Edison invented it; writing, of course, is much older, invented by the Sumerians around 3500 B.C. As Ong reminds us, almost everything we take for granted about writing took centuries to arrive: the alphabet itself, for example, appeared years after the Sumerians' script, and paper was first manufactured in Europe only in the twelfth century. Other familiar uses of writing, Ong points out, arise still later, like the personal diary, which remained virtually unknown until the seventeenth century.

Recording, by contrast, almost certainly because of writing's *ritual* presence, has developed more quickly. Nevertheless, most of the major changes have occurred in the last twenty-five years. Before the mid-1960s, most engineers and producers, especially those working with jazz and classical artists, regarded their job as capturing a live sound, as simply recording (reproducing) the sound the musicians made while playing together in a room built for its ideal acoustic properties. Again and again, we hear producers like John Hammond lamenting the difficulties of catching something like the sound of the 1930s Count Basie Band in full flight. In the 1960s, Glenn Gould scandalized the classical community by openly acknowledging that his recorded performances consisted of multiple takes joined by inaudible splices. The Beatles made such things famous, with "Strawberry Fields" resulting from two takes, played at different tempos and in different keys, spliced together and matched by speeding up one and slowing down the other. Simon and Garfunkle's "Bridge over Troubled Water" made the punch-in respectable with the revelation that Garfunkle's vocal had been pieced together from dozens of takes, often of a single word or phrase.

In the 1980s, these procedures began to seem primitive. For those musicians still playing in studios (many had been replaced by drum machines and synthesizers), the punch-in (or "drop") became so routine that songs were rarely played all the way through. Recording came more and more to resemble cinematic acting, as mixing (the analogue to editing) *constructed* a performance out of fragments often played on different days (and even in different places: the phenomenon known as "flying in" a part became standard, whereby a musician is sent a multitrack take, to which he adds his part before returning it).¹³ And then the explosion of computer-aided recording: MIDI (musical instrument digital interface, the linking together of multiple instruments through a digital signal), sequencing, sampling. The effect of this technology has been increasingly to remove recording from performance, to create sounds that cannot be readily reproduced in live situations. In semiotic terms, a record, like a movie, has become a sign without a referent: behind *Casablanca* or "Fight the Power" lies no single, "real" event which has been transcribed and reproduced. Instead, there are only fragments of behavior, snatches

of sound: a turn of the head filmed one Monday for a sequence completed a month later, a drum beat sampled for mixing with a radio announcement. In 1967, situationist leader Guy Debord warned that in "societies where modern conditions of production prevail, all of life presents itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles. Everything that was directly lived has moved away into a representation."¹⁴ For film and music, we can amend this last sentence: "Everything that was directly performed has moved away into a construction, a recording composed of performance's surviving fragments.

Track Three. It would have been surprising if these developments in recording had not begun to affect live performances. If, as Ong points out, the existence of writing modifies the way we speak, we would expect that the existence of recorded music would affect the way people play. And of course it does. From the start, jazz musicians played differently for having heard Louis Armstrong's records.¹⁵

But I have in mind here less records' influence on musical styles than their impact on protocols of performing, an influence which begins with the rise of the microphone, first for singers (replacing the megaphone, used anachronistically by Rudy Vallee), then for orchestral or band sections too quiet to compete with louder instruments. The microphone's redefinition of popular singing, immediately audible in the shift from Jolson's stentorian bravura to Crosby's quiet intimacy, is the first dramatic result of performance's admission of recording technology. This development flourished in rock, first with the spread of the electric guitar and bass, then with sound reinforcement systems (P.A.'s), which by the late 1970s had spawned electronic drums, triggered by hitting the acoustic set. Inevitably, this "contamination" of the live by the recorded has resulted in the actual replacement of the live, as Madonna, Janet Jackson, New Order, Milli Vanilli, and almost every rap group perform to taped music and/or lip-synch to prerecorded vocals. If we want to understand why so many people are upset about this trend, why state legislators in New York and New Jersey have proposed regulating the use of recorded music in live concerts, we need to look at the next track.

Track Four. If Ong's observations about orality and literacy account for recording's increasing power to shape performance in its own image, it is Derrida's demonstration of Western culture's historical preference for speech over writing that explains why this process has been so resisted. For, surely, recording amounts to simply another means of writing, and thus it becomes regarded as secondary or supplemental to performance. Indeed, many of the objections raised to the new recording technologies (especially to sampling) reiterate precisely the Platonic objections to writing made in the *Phaedrus*, the dialogue so carefully remarked upon by Derrida.¹⁶ Writing, Plato argued, by providing mankind with an artificial method of storing knowledge, eroded our real powers of memory. Sampling and sequencing, go the current complaints, make musicians unnecessary; you can make records now entirely by recombining bits and pieces sampled from other records; you don't have to play a musical instrument at all.¹⁷

We can detect here the historical complaint against every new technology and every avant-garde movement that embraces it: the new technology makes things too easy. What previously was possible for only a few (storing large amounts of information, producing a figurative representation of a person or object, making a record) becomes possible for many with, respectively, writing, photography, and sampling. Plato dismissed writing as *artificial* memory. This characterization issued from his own anxious, prescient intuition of all technology's fundamental *automatism*, its potential to continue producing long after the control exacted by human consciousness has been relinquished. For Plato, the ghost in the machine was language that survived not only its author, but also every context of its own enunciation. In the twentieth century that fear has persisted, finding representation in the movies' fatal robots (*Blade Runner*), Frankensteinian monsters devouring assembly lines (*Modern Times*), and computers-run-amok (2001). But the rock community has developed an alternative attitude toward its technology's independence. After the Velvet Underground and Jimi Hendrix, concerts frequently ended with guitarists leaving their instruments onstage for the self-sustaining feedback that would accompany the audience's departure. At the other end, the Who began opening shows with "Baba O'Reilly's" pro-

grammed synthesizer pattern, set to continue throughout the song. Were these strategies part of a ritual, whose basis was precisely that loss of self which Plato feared? Or were they simply a sanguine (and loud) promise of future songs, future shows?

Disciplines such as film studies and the history of science have shown us that, far from being disinterested, technology follows the route of ideology. Western culture's animus toward writing, therefore, would help to explain why, in a culture of headlong change, recording technology has taken such a relatively long time to develop. If one conceives of live performance as the privileged instance, and of recording as only a supplemental means of capturing it, then such things as multitrack tape recorders, reverberation and delay units, compressors, pitch controllers, harmonizers and doublers, sequencers and samplers, will all seem less important, and their invention and implementation will have to wait.

Track Five. I should reveal here something about my own interest in what I am writing about. Since 1982, I have been an active member of a rock band armed with a strange name, for which, I hasten to add, I am not responsible: the Vulgar Boatmen. In fact, as I write, I have just emerged from a two-week session for a second record, during which many of the technologies I have mentioned were used. I will give only one example. For one song, our drummer happened by accident upon an unusual and pleasing snare drum sound. I won't go into details, but only mention that achieving this sound involved a kind of juggling act, holding the drum between the legs so that one foot rested against the lower drum head (slightly muffling the snares) while striking the other head with a combination of cross-sticking and taped brush. Well, it seemed worth it at the time. A week later, however, in mixing, he discovered that for all of its appealing sound, the snare was poorly played (perhaps because it was so difficult to hold), often falling so far behind the beat that any sense of pulse was lost. How to fix it? The drummer started by honoring speech and performance: he wanted to replay the part from start to finish. But five hours' work convinced him that a sound he had achieved by accident could not be reproduced by calculation. He then chose to sample one

snare hit (which, after all, he had produced himself) and reply the part by simply triggering this sampled sound in the appropriate, and now properly timed, places.

This process has come to seem normal. What nevertheless still seems strange about the Vulgar Boatmen, especially to the rock press which never fails to mention this fact when writing about us, is that there are two sets of Vulgar Boatmen, one in Florida that records and one in Indianapolis that tours. Only one person, the Indianapolis leader, regularly participates in both groups, since he also works on all recordings. While this arrangement derived from practical circumstances (I have a job which prevents my touring, I have a family, my idea of a tour resembles Brian Eno's: I stay in one place and the audience comes to see me), I now realize that having two bands of Vulgar Boatmen enacts the performance/recording dichotomy at the heart of so many debates about contemporary rock & roll. Walked off-naled his acceptance of technology's automatism by calling his studio The Factory, by basing his serial paintings on found photography, by sending other men to fulfill his speaking engagements. Having cloned ourselves once, the Vulgar Boatmen might become available for franchising—a Vulgar Boatmen in every town, always accompanied by a sign: 6,352 records sold.

Track Six. In a recent issue of the MLA's journal *Profession*, Marianna Torgovnick calls for an "experimental critical writing," but admits that she does not yet know how to produce it.¹⁸ For the past few years, my own courses have asked students to do such experimenting, and I have worked from the assumption, proposed by my colleague Gregory Ulmer, that the avant-garde arts might provide ideal models for different kinds of writing.¹⁹ My own project has been to start with a group of films, the Andy Hardy movies, that beg for the kind of ideological, semiotic, psychoanalytic criticism current in cultural studies, but then to prohibit students from taking that conventional approach. Instead, I have asked them to extrapolate from such models as surrealist games, Derrida's signature experiments (in *Signature and Glas*), Julian Barnes's *Flaubert's Parrot* (a hybrid text, part novel, part biography, part criticism), Benjamin's *Arcades Project*

(a never-finished collage of found material on nineteenth-century films), Godard's films and television programs, Barthes's autobiography (with its alphabetized fragments).²⁰ Six months ago, when I first thought about this essay, I assumed that recording might provide yet another model for experiments with critical writing, which has traditionally resembled simply transcriptions of spoken lectures. What kind of academic writing, I asked myself, would result from the alphabetic equivalents of studio effects like reverberation, delay, sampling, flanging, phase-shifting, doubling, equalization, compression? But just as mixing or editing can often produce a different song or movie than one expected, so mixing these tracks here has led me to a different conclusion and to three final propositions.

1) What distinguishes rock & roll from all the music that precedes it—especially classical, Tin Pan Alley, and jazz—is its elevation of the record to primary status. While classical and jazz recordings for the most part aimed only at approximating live performances, regarded as the significant event, many of rock's most important musicians, beginning with Elvis, made records before ever appearing in public. In fact, the performances that began rock & roll, Elvis's Sun recordings, could not be reproduced in any live situation except a very small and empty (to permit reverberation) room, since Elvis's acoustic guitar and Bill Black's acoustic bass simply could not be heard. (Having grown up in Memphis, I know. I attended several early Elvis performances.) Thus, any complaints against Madonna or Janet Jackson for not starting as live performers ignores rock's history.

(2) Derrida and others have alerted us to postmodernism's defining condition: the triumph of an opposition's previously suppressed term. At the end of the twentieth century, we live in a world in which we almost always encounter a representation of something (the *Mona Lisa*, Mikhail Gorbachev, Bruce Springsteen) before we encounter the thing itself. Where once records hoped only to provide a souvenir of a live performance, concerts now exist to promote records, and to do so they use technology to reproduce as much of the recorded sound, and associated imagery, as possible. In embracing this state of affairs and the technology that has created it, rock affirms its postmodernism.

In rejecting this situation, in clinging to speech/performance as the authentic site of musical presence, jazz clings to previous traditions, especially those of modernism.

(3) As I have said, I began preparation for this essay by thinking of recording (not songwriting) as a model for academic writing. But I now realize that the relationship is the reverse. For writing, the more advanced technology, has been the example for recording. What, after all, is sampling except quotation, which writers do all the time? What are punch-ins except revisions? What are multitracks but columns? I would argue, however, that *academic* writing, a particularly retrograde subspecialty, continues to make very little use of the technology's resources, and that it might begin to notice how much more willingly recording engineers, producers, and musicians have begun to experiment with what is possible.

Notes

- 1 The term "AABA song" refers to the Tin Pan Alley norm of chorus/chorus/bridge/chorus. Show tunes typically began with a "verse," an introductory section that occurred only once. While maintaining the AABA form, rock & roll dropped the verse, except in such rare cases as the Lennon-McCartney "Do You Want to Know a Secret?" with its opening "You'll never know how much I really love you / You'll never know how much I really care." This move, and the inclusion of Broadway's "Till There Was You" on their first American LP, suggests how much the Lennon-McCartney team owed to Tin Pan Alley.
- 2 Quoted in Stephen Holden's "Paul Simon's Journey to Brazil and Beyond," *New York Times*, 14 October 1990.
- 3 Public Enemy's Hank Shocklee, quoted in "Ebony and Ivory," an interview/conversation between Paul Simon and Hank Shocklee, *Spin*, January 1991, 84.
- 4 Mark Dery, "Public Enemy: Confrontation," *Keyboard*, September 1990, 84: "Rap, by definition, is political music. Fabricated from stolen snatches of prerecorded music by smash-and-grab producers who frequently thumb their noses at copyright laws, it is the musical equivalent of shoplifting." Despite this remark, Dery's article displays considerable sympathy for rap in general and Shocklee in particular.
- 5 See Walter Benjamin, "Eduard Fuchs, Collector and Historian," in *One-Way Street and Other Writings*, trans. Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter (London, 1979), 349–86.
- 6 Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge, Mass., 1989), 241.
- 7 Quoted by Buck-Morss in *Dialectics of Seeing*, 240–41; emphasis mine.

⁸ "The more probable (banal) the message, the less information it conveys": Gregory L. Ulmer, *Applied Grammatology* (Baltimore, 1985), 308.

⁹ Meaghan Morris puts the matter bluntly: "I get the feeling that somewhere in some English publisher's vault there is a master disk from which thousands of versions of the same article . . . are being run off under different names with minor variations" ("Banality in Cultural Studies," in *Logics of Television: Essays in Cultural Criticism*, ed. Patricia Mellencamp [Bloomington, 1990], 21).

¹⁰ While the *Wall Street Journal* has denounced this tendency as indicative of American academics' overwhelming leftism (see "Politically Correct," *Wall Street Journal*, 26 November 1990), it in fact signals precisely the opposite: a commitment to capitalism and business-as-usual. Since at least the eighteenth century, ideas (like any product) have been subject to commodification. But what marks contemporary intellectual life is the intense speed with which even the most critical positions can become the newest way to make a living. With the chronic oversupply of Ph.D.'s enabling the humblest colleges to link promotion, tenure, and now hiring itself to publication, more and more people are producing more and more books and articles. Because these people are often working on dead-end lines (at my university, assistant professors have only five years before the tenure decision), they inevitably gravitate to hot areas, those methodologies and topics that insure publication. As a result, cultural criticism, more than ever before, is now subject to the boom-and-bust cycles that have always haunted capitalism. This development has real effects: at any given moment, everyone seems to be writing about the same thing—and then, no one is. Morris cites a Japanese media analyst's coolness toward a collection containing several essays on Foucault: "Ah Foucault . . . I'm very sorry, but there's no boom" ("Banality in Cultural Studies," *Discourse* 10 [Spring–Summer 1988]: 5—this essay is a slightly different version of the one cited above). Again the pop analogy seems appropriate: a hit parade of critical ideas that changes every month.

¹⁰ See Walter Ong's *Orality and Literacy* (London, 1982) for a summary of research on this topic. Jack Goody's books are more specific, but equally interesting. See especially his *The Domestication of the Savage Mind* (Cambridge, 1977) and *The Logic of Writing and the Organization of Society* (Cambridge, 1986).

¹¹ Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 51.

¹¹ The pioneer in extending this argument to music was Glenn Gould. In his famous 1966 essay "The Prospects of Recording," Gould stated flatly that "[w]e must be prepared to accept the fact that, for better or worse, recording will forever alter our notions about what is appropriate to the performance of music" (*The Glenn Gould Reader*, ed. Tim Page [New York, 1984], 357). In particular, Gould maintained that the advent of tape splicing, by means of which perfect performances could be constructed in the studio, created for live performances audience expectations impossible to satisfy. In this context, classical performances became what Gould called "the last blood sport," something like a high-wire act where the audience waits breathlessly for the fall.

Significantly, Gould argued that this development cut both ways. On the one

hand, it encouraged conservatism among performers, afraid to take on new or difficult pieces for audiences grown unaccustomed to, and ultimately intolerant of mistakes of any kind. On the other hand, recordings create active listeners, who themselves could, by taking charge of their own editing, develop utterly nonconformist attitudes toward music and its history. If rap recording seems the result of this latter development, the spread of hip-synching and tapes in "live" performance appears to issue from the former. All discussions about contemporary music and its technology should begin with Gould's warning that "[t]he technology of electronic forms makes it highly improbable that we will move in any direction but one of even greater intensity and complexity" (Page, ed., *Glenn Gould Reads* 352).

13 Glenn Gould was quick to spot the obvious analogy between the recording process and filmmaking: "[O]ne should be free to 'shoot' a Beethoven sonata or a Bach fugue in or out of sequence, intercut almost without restriction, apply postproduction techniques as required, and . . . the composer, the performer, and above all the listener will be better served thereby" (Page, ed., *Glenn Gould Reader*, 590).

14 Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit, 1977), sec. 1.

15 In his interesting book *The Recording Angel: Explorations in Phonography* (New York, 1987), Evan Eisenberg proposes that "[r]ecords and radio were the proximate cause of the Jazz Age. . . . [R]ecords not only disseminated jazz, but insinuated it. . . . [I]n some ways they created what we call jazz" (143-44). To avoid paying royalties, groups like King Oliver's Creole Jazz Band and Armstrong's Hot Five replaced published songs with on-the-spot improvisations whose recording granted them a permanence they would otherwise never have had.

16 Jacques Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy," in *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago, 1981), 61-171.

17 Public Enemy's Hank Shocklee has made explicit the implications of sampling and sequencing:

We don't like musicians. We don't respect musicians. . . . In dealing with rap, you have to be innocent and ignorant of music. Trained musicians are not ignorant of music, and they cannot be innocent to it. They understand it, and that's what keeps them from dealing with things out of the ordinary. . . . [Public Enemy is] a musician's nightmare. (*Keyboard*, September 1990, 82-83)

Another Shocklee remark indicates what's at stake: "You get a person who says, 'I don't have time to study an instrument.' Rappers sample" (*Spin*, January 1991, 61).

18 Marianna Torgovnick, "Experimental Critical Writing," *Profession* 90 (1990): 75.

27. Gregory L. Uimer, *Teletheory: Grammatology in the Age of Video* (New York, 1989), 18-19.

20 For a preliminary report on this project, see my "The Avant Garde Finds Andy Hardy," in *Moderernity and Mass Culture*, ed. Patrick Brantlinger and James Naremore (Bloomington, 1991).

Mark Dery

Signposts on the Road to Nowhere: Laurie Anderson's Crisis of Meaning

The world is disappearing. Oliver Wendell Holmes augured this surreal state of affairs in "The Stereoscope and the Stereograph," in his 1859 essay on what was then a newly arrived technological marvel: photography. "Form is henceforth divorced from matter," he declared. "In fact, matter as a visible object is of no great use any longer, except as the mould on which form is shaped." Jean Baudrillard, in his 1975 essay, "The Precession of Simulacra," posited the notion that the world as we know it is a hyperreality of simulacra, a hall of mirrors where the original is lost in an infinite regress of reflections. And Bryan Fawcett argued, in *The Public Eye: A Deliberation on the Disappearance of the World*, that mass media images of desire-commodified, strategically deployed by Madison Avenue, constitute the better part of reality for all who view the world through the cathode-ray tube.

The assertion that reality is undergoing a gradual process of dematerialization is

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