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THE MECHANICS OF DESTRUCTION

*An analysis of authorship and political engagement in the work
of Matthew Herbert*



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The Mechanics of Destruction¹

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Photo by Helen Woods²

Cover design by Stephane Kaas

¹ This thesis is named after Matthew Herbert's 2001 Radio Boy record *The Mechanics of Destruction*. The different chapters are named after, respectively, 2004's compilation *The Unnecessary History of Dr. Rockit*, the first track on 2006's *Scale*, the first track on 2001's *Bodily Functions*, the title of Doctor Rockit's first full length in 1996, track eight on 1998's *Around the House* and the last track on *The Mechanics of Destruction*.

² Photo published in Yamey, 2006

1. The Necessary History of Matthew Herbert

It looks like your average petition: a list of eighteen signatures with names, residence and occupation. Almost all undersigned are musicians: 'saxophonist,' 'trumpeter,' 'drums,' 'guitarist'; there is also a 'music agent' and someone handling 'business affairs.' And indeed, the petition has everything to do with music: “we, the undersigned,” it reads “believe that music can still be a political force of note and not just the soundtrack to over-consumption.”

However, on closer look, it turns out this it is not a petition at all: right above the date (“September 5th 2008”) and the petition number (“0001”) it reads, in colourful letters, “The Matthew Herbert Big Band” with next to it a stamp saying “there's me and there's you.” What this in fact is, is the cover art of the forthcoming album by British electronic musician and house producer Matthew Herbert, the follow up to his first 'big band' album *Goodbye Swingtime* (2003), entitled *There's Me and There's You*, scheduled for a release on October 28th 2008.

the
MATTHEW HERBERT BIG BAND

Date: September 5th 2008 Petition No.: 0001

Petition to:

We, the undersigned, believe that music can still be a political force of note and not just the soundtrack to over-consumption

No	SIGNATURE	PRINTED NAME	RESIDENCE	OCCUPATION
01	<i>Math Herbert</i>	MATTHEW HERBERT	KENT	MUSICIAN
02	<i>Philbert</i>	PHILBERT	ASHBOURNE	MD
03	<i>Russell Swift</i>	RUSSELL SWIFT	TODDINGTON	FIXER
04	<i>Ben Castle</i>	TOBY DONNELLY	LONDON	ACCIDENTAL VICE PRESIDENT
05	<i>Ben Castle</i>	BEN CASTLE	HAZLEMERE	SAXOPHONIST
06	<i>Bob McKay</i>	BOB MCKAY	WINDSTON - UPPER WINDSTON	BARI SAX BASS CLARINET
07	<i>Chris Cole</i>	CHRIS COLE	UPPER DEAN	TROMBONIST
08	<i>D.O'Higgins</i>	D.O'HIGGINS	BELTON	SAX
09	<i>David Okumu</i>	DAVE OKUMU	LONDON TOWER	GUITARIST
10	<i>Esra Mtunhazi</i>	ESRA MTUNHAZI	NUMBERS LONDON	VOCALIST
11	<i>Espen Laob</i>	ESPEN LAOB	AARHUS DENMARK	DRUMS
12	<i>Mark Williams</i>	MARK WILLIAMS	ONE WINDMILL CLUS, CANTONMENT	TENOR SAXOPHONE
13	<i>Adam Lislet</i>	ADAM LISLET	BRISTOL, NORTH AVONDORE	TRUMPETER
14	<i>H.D. Hill</i>	H.D. HILL	PALMIST GREEN LEWISBURG	SAX PLAYER
15	<i>Tobias Bjornson</i>	TOBIAS BJORNSEN	SILKANDERBORG DENMARK	BASS
16	<i>Andrew Cook</i>	ANDREW COOK	NOTTINGHAM	TRUMPETER
17	<i>Tommaso Sisti</i>	TOMMASO SISTI	CANTONMENT	MUSIC AGENT
18	<i>John Jones</i>	JOHN JONES	WINDSTON	BUSINESS AFFAIRS

The cover of “There's Me and There's You” by The Matthew Herbert Big Band³

It is an unusual gesture to put such a statement prominently on the cover of an album and the question is what it has to do with the music on the record and the musicians that made it. But Matthew Herbert is an unusual musician and those familiar with his work know very well what the “political force” of music has to do with his music and its creator: everything.

³ The album cover was pre-published by web magazine Pitchforkmedia.com. Solariski, 2008

Herbert's political engagement has since the beginning of the new millennium formed the backbone of and driving force for almost all his artistic output. In a number of ways Herbert fashions his music into a political forum, expressing his concerns about environmental questions, the influence of global capitalism, the cultural and economical imperialism of the West and various other issues.

This thesis is about the work of Matthew Herbert. And it is also about the artist, performer, musician and author Matthew Herbert himself. It is about his composition methods and his public image, his artistic vision and his position as an artist. Throughout all these matters it deals with the incorporation of political engagement in his work and the premises under which this happens. Most importantly: this thesis is about the way these various things are related.

Matthew Herbert (United Kingdom, 1972) emerged in the second half of the 1990's out of Britain's rave underground, issuing house music under various guises. His early projects, Wishmountain, Doctor Rockit and Herbert, stood out for various reasons, but most prominently they are renowned for the unusual and unconventional way of sampling their creator developed.

His contempt for the music business and disappointment in the leading trends in his genre, made Matthew Herbert to go look for less obvious and artistically more challenging ways of making his music. Inspired by various sources, under which unmistakably the music and writings of John Cage, Herbert came to fashion his music primarily out of self-recorded samples. As such, every possible sound could form the basis for his tracks and songs.

As Wishmountain, he made tracks called “bottle,” “toaster” or “jam jar,” all using the object from its title as sole sound source. As Doctor Rockit, he made songs compiled of sounds from “a quiet week in the house,” from television shows, from a night with friends at a bar. On 1998's *Around the House*, released under the name of Herbert, the song “In The Kitchen” transformed a recording of him and his wife (and musical partner) Dani Siciliano making and eating breakfast, into an a moody, 12 minute, electronic piece [🎵 cd, track 1].⁴

These processes – recording sound, sampling, editing, splicing, treating them with various analogue devices and computer software – are backed by a conceptual approach to music. Herbert sets himself limits about what is and what isn't allowed: how the samples should be treated, how the technology has to be used, what the relation is between the title, theme and subject of a song and the samples used for it.

⁴ “From start to finish the hole process is in real time. There's no edits. From walking into the kitchen to taking it out and eating it.” Matthew Hebert in Eshun, 2000: 37

More often than not, Herbert's music is not just the music, but it is also a concept with an idea underlining it. The Wishmountain song “Rose” is an instrumental obituary to his mother, the songs on *Around the House* are all constructed of sounds recorded, yes, in and 'around the house,' most Wishmountain songs deliberately use only one sound source and eight different sounds derived from it. For Herbert “when you sample, you take a little snapshot, you’re taking an atmosphere, you’re taking a temperature, you’re taking a memory and building up a photo album,”⁵ so sampling is not a perfectly neutral gesture and taking the one or the other sound is a conscious decision, influencing the outcome of the piece.

All these things run through Herbert's oeuvre from his first records in 1995/1996 to the turn of the millennium. By then, they were condensed in a manifesto of which the first version was written in November 2000: the “Personal Contract For The Composition Of Music” (P.C.C.O.M.), intended as “a guide for my own work and not [...] as the correct or only way to write music either for myself or others.”⁶ In eleven rules, expanded with five more in 2005, Matthew Herbert laid down the basic premises under which his music was to be written. It deals with the use of sounds (“The use of sounds that exist already is not allowed”), ways of mixing (“the mixing desk is not to be reset before the start of a new track”), and a correct attitude towards the audience (“a notation of sounds used to be taken and made public”). It also incorporates “The Manifesto Of Mistakes,” encouraging the “The inclusion, development, propagation, existence, replication, acknowledgement, rights, patterns and beauty of what are commonly known as accidents.”⁷

The conceptuality of this approach and an increasing interest in the specificity of sounds, their background and what one can tell with them, inspired Herbert to combine his interest in politics, his engagement with anti-globalisation, with his work as a musician. On *The Mechanics of Destruction* (2001), issued as Radio Boy, the music was “designed through content, process and distribution to present a personalised reaction to an increasingly homogenised world.”⁸

While working with sampling in the way he had been doing for several years, he “realized everything I hated made a noise, so [...] I could actually go into Starbucks, grab a load of that shit stuff, pour it down the sink and make a track out of it.”⁹ Consequently, on *The Mechanics of Destruction* he did not sample toasters, talking friends, sports commentary or kitchen utensils, but specifically used sounds associated with companies, governments and

⁵ Matthew Herbert in Young, 2003: 28

⁶ Herbert, 2005

⁷ Ibidem

⁸ Herbert, 2003

⁹ Matthew Herbert in Katigbak, 2005

people he wanted to criticize: “a Big Mac meal,” “10 Marlboro, matches and a bottle of Bacardi rum,” “2 cans of oil and 1 can of brake fluid” and “Henry Kissinger.”¹⁰

This engagement, stemming from Matthew Herbert's conviction that it is “part of our job as artists with a social or political philosophy [...] to try and extract some of the ambiguities and paradoxes and lay them bare,”¹¹ forms an important, much discussed part of his work since 2001. Although the details and methods change from one album to another, there is always a critical aspect attached to a Matthew Herbert-record.

However Matthew Herbert's political engagement, as well as his conceptual approach, is also to blame for the fact that, as the author of Herbert's biography on www.allmusic.com remarks, “his methods may provoke more discussion than his music (at least among chin-stroke types and the British and American dance music presses).”¹² Evidently, these chin-stroking types include me, since the conception of this thesis is certainly provoked by Matthew Herbert's curious and remarkable methods. My main concern for discussing these methods, though, lies with my interest in questioning Herbert's political engagement, the way he attempts to integrate it in his work and his artistic persona and how it interacts with, shapes and influences both.

Nevertheless, before asking *how* his music is produced and *how* he incorporates his engagement in his work, the most important question is *whether* it is possible at all for the musician, artist and performer Matthew Herbert to make something like “political music.” It is this question that I address in chapter two and three of this thesis.

In chapter two, “Something is not right,” I begin my analysis by establishing a ground on which Herbert's conception of political music becomes conceivable. By evoking Adorno's concept of the Culture Industry, I discuss the way in which artistic autonomy and commercial commodification are interdependent and, though contradictory, unavoidably linked. I describe how, as such, it is possible to function both within *and* against the industry by means of a self reflective and self critical mode of artistic production and how this position, typical for the avant-garde, is essential for the production of critical, subversive and resistant music. Through attaining this position, Herbert aims at countering the meaningless and empty experiences of the Culture Industry by regenerating meaning and value in his music.

In the following chapter, “You're unknown to me,” I take a closer look at the artist Matthew Herbert himself and investigate how he tries to develop the self reflective and self

¹⁰ Herbert, 2001(a)

¹¹ Matthew Herbert in Young, 2003: 28

¹² Cooper, 2008(a)

critical mode of artistic production described in chapter two. Based on Richard Dyer's concept of the 'startext' I dissect the multiple sides that together form the images of the artist Matthew Herbert. Using the material of which these images are compiled, my analysis focuses on the concept of the 'author' as the key to read Matthew Herbert's startext. Slowly moving away from his roots in British early rave culture it appears Matthew Herbert does not want to be a *star*, but an original, authentic, consistent 'author'-figure, shifting the focus towards the music and its content, instead of the artist himself.

However, I also underline the contradictory side of this position, since Herbert's author function is both based on an avant-garde and a pop/rock discourse. The first (the avant-garde) focuses on the work, its content and meanings, but the second (pop/rock) puts the authenticity of the artist himself in the spotlight, causing the integrity of the *avant-garde author* Matthew Herbert also to create the image of the *pop star* Matthew Herbert as a product on the global market of popular music. By the end of this thesis, this author function and its contradictions prove to be essential for the conclusions of my analysis.

But first, after having established *whether* it is possible at all for Matthew Herbert to make something like "political music," what position this requires and how he tries to reach it, it is time to look at the question *how* he envisions producing political music, where he considers it to become political and on what discursive preconditions these methods and beliefs are based.

Chapter four, "The music of sound," looks into Herbert's use of technology and his way of sampling. First, taking my cue from Jacques Attali's book *Noise; The Political Economy of Music* I draw upon the possibilities of technology for holding a potential for subversive reversal. Herbert's use of technology closely connects to Attali's concept of a new "composing," which takes the instruments of commercial, capitalist music and turns them around, in order to design a new way of making music, a new creativity, outside of the commercial, capitalist realm these instruments were originally designed for.

Secondly, chapter four deals with the question of meaning and information in acoustic material. Herbert, not interested in the radical non-representational 'noise' music some consider to be the ultimate consequence of Attali's concept, invests in the possibility of sounds containing information. This possibility finds its origin in a discursive shift described by German media theorist Friedrich Kittler: the conceptualisation of frequency and the invention of audio recording. Using Kittler's work, I describe the media-historical developments on which Matthew Herbert's method of using sampling to introduce more or less specific

meaning in mostly instrumental music is based.

Since the conclusions of these theoretical exercises in chapter four focus on the necessity for Herbert to (re)contextualise the sounds he uses in a meaningful way and the difficulties he has in doing this, chapter five, “We Still Have (The Music),” finally takes a closer look at the actual work. On a musical level, this involves pinpointing characteristics of Herbert's music and tracing these throughout his body of work. But, since Herbert's work and image are, though sometimes contradictory, nevertheless always interdependent, just dealing with the music is useless. One must place it in the context of the larger, critical, framework set up by Matthew Herbert himself and the context of his artistic persona. Therefore, taking into account the preconditions for making political music of chapter two, Herbert's author function established in chapter three and the discursive preconditions for his methodology described in chapter four, chapter five looks at the whole of his work.

Lastly, in the conclusive chapter, number six, “The Whisper Of Friction,” I wrap up by bringing all important facets of this thesis – Matthew Herbert's position as artist, his authentic authorship, the preconditions for his compositional methods, his political engagement and its place in his work and persona – together, in order to draw the final picture of how Matthew Herbert and his work can be understood. As it turns out: one of the aspects treated in the course of the thesis forms a red thread through most of it and as is such essential for the understanding of Matthew Herbert's oeuvre, including its many inherent contradictions. This red thread, Herbert's author function, is also the ground for a critical addition, which I feel is absolutely necessary to mention. Therefore, the last pages of this thesis are written on a more critical note, pointing, after analysing and explaining it in the course of this thesis, to the pitfalls of and objections to Matthew Herbert's conception of political art.

So, as its subtitle says, this thesis is an analysis of political engagement in the work of Matthew Herbert and of the concept of authorship which underpins it. As such, I sincerely hope its conclusions might implicitly reach beyond the specific case of Matthew Herbert to tell something about the complex relationship between art, (popular) music and politics in our society.

2. “Something is Not Right” – Adorno and the Culture Industry

Since the main focus of this thesis is the way Herbert attempts to integrate his political engagement in his work and his artistic persona and how it interacts with and influences both, one must first establish the grounds on which such an engagement is possible at all. As such, the first important question is that of the possibility of a music which is both critically potent and commercially viable. Such an idea of a *popular* music with a *critical* content contradicts many common assumptions that commerce and critique do not match and that the inherent commercialism of popular music automatically rules out the possibility of a genuine critical moment – in order to be engaged one has to stay away from capitalism and the industry and try to be as independent and autonomous as possible.

Since Matthew Herbert's engagement focuses primarily on issues associated with the international anti-globalisation movement – environmental issues, the U.S.'s cultural and military imperialism and most importantly the excesses of modern, global, corporal capitalism – he indeed strongly feels such a need to stay away as far as possible from the very powerful and influential industry he himself is part of: the recording industry. In order to do so, he started and manages his own record company, Accidental Records, which enables him to keep control over the entire process from writing, recording and producing the music to packaging, distributing and marketing the record.

Nevertheless, as David Hesmondhalgh effectively describes in his article “The British Dance Music Industry; A Case Study of Independent Cultural Production,” due to the strength of the industry and the complex, interdependent, relationship between independent music labels, such as Herbert's, and the major record companies, it is virtually impossible for artists to function *entirely* outside of the industry. It is very difficult to navigate between this dependence and some sort of ‘independent,’ ‘autonomous’ status. The shift from an ‘underground’ position to a more ‘mainstream’ popularity, which in many cases has to be made at least to some extent by musicians and independent record labels to be able to make some profit and survive, is almost impossible without alliance with a major record company. These alliances, he writes, cause severe problems for the ‘credibility’ of the artists or labels and present both with incompatible differences in ideology between themselves and the music industry.¹³

But I consider these issues of interdependence and friction not as crucial for the

¹³ At least up to the current 'crisis' in the music industry, due to the rise of the internet, MP3 and peer-to-peer file sharing. Although, as far as I'm concerned, it still remains to be seen how far stretching these developments are actually going to be.

question of a possibility of critically potent music in a commercial environment. They are an inherent aspect of all cultural production. The creation of a unified concept of autonomous 'art' by the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century tied this autonomy, immediately to the demands of the simultaneously developing market.¹⁴ Artists, once independent from clergy and nobility ordering a work and providing the money for it, had to sell their work on the market in order to make a living. Since then, there has been a constant navigating between more autonomous art production and a process of commodification by the industry.

Therefore the question is not *whether* Herbert has to navigate between the two poles of relative autonomy and commercialised industry, but, since there is no escaping it, it instead regards *if*, and if yes how Herbert is able to create the meaningful artistic, musical, product he desires, whilst navigating between the two poles.

As such, in order to establish a ground on which the conception of critical popular music is possible, it is unavoidable to devote this first chapter to a discussion of Theodor Adorno's concept of the Culture Industry. Since, although sometimes flawed, it remains the most influential and fully developed concept on the production of culture under late capitalism. The understanding of both Herbert's rejection of the music business and his insistence on the possibility of musical resistance against the hegemony of cultural, political and economical globalisation will therefore benefit from dealing with Adorno's concept. By explaining the workings of the Culture Industry and the critical position Adorno attributes to the avant-garde it becomes clear where critique and resistant may be positioned – even within popular music – and which position musicians like Matthew Herbert therefore aspire. After which important questions on *how* this is attempted and whether the conditions laid out in this first chapter are actually met, can be addressed in subsequent chapters.

According to philosopher Frederic Jameson Adorno's (and Horkheimer's) concept of the Culture Industry is “not a theory of culture but the theory of an industry, of a branch of interlocking monopolies of late capitalism that makes money out of what used to be called culture.”¹⁵ The words 'Culture Industry' thus designate first and foremost the description of a capitalist *industry* occupied with the production and marketing of cultural products. For Adorno, the main aspect of the Culture Industry is not necessarily its opposition against

¹⁴ See, among others, Hamilton on Adorno: “growing autonomy goes hand in hand with the commodification of artworks. As Jacques Attali pithily put is: 'The artist was born at the same time his work went on sale.'” Hamilton, 2007: 168

¹⁵ Jameson, 2007 (1990): 144

autonomous art-production, but rather, as Jameson says, the way it turns objects that could have been considered art and are modelled after traditional art-production into solely and purely reified commodities, “torn away from any function which would give them meaning.”¹⁶

The offerings of the Culture Industry are essentially fake, since the experiences they offer are pre-fabricated, as to mirror the experience offered by traditional works of art. In the case of popular music Adorno describes how this effect is reached through a combination of a high degree of standardisation coupled with pseudo-individualisation: minor variations and deviations from the standardized schemes introduced to simulate an authentic experience. Basically, the consumer of popular music does not really have to listen to the music himself, since the listening has already been done for him or her – it is a pre-fabricated experience.

This, however, does not necessarily designate an absolute split between popular music and 'autonomous' or 'serious' music, the former being a capitalist commodity and the latter staying outside of the marketplace. In Adorno's negative dialectical scheme both the Culture Industry and authentic, 'autonomous' art are incompatibly joined together, exactly because of the historically determined relation I mentioned before: in order for art to become autonomous, no longer depended on the clergy or nobility paying for works of art, it had to introduce itself in the market in order to generate money, necessarily becoming a commodity.

As Andy Hamilton explains “the autonomy of art is, for Adorno, a kind of illusion, and vice versa – each position is false from the terms of the other. They are not two sides of one coin but are irreconcilable.”¹⁷ All autonomous art is thus always also a commodity and “the split is much more,” writes Max Paddison, “between [...] music which accepts its character as commodity, thus becoming identical with the machination of the culture industry itself, and [...] *self-reflective* music which critically opposes its fate as commodity.”¹⁸

Adorno's accusation at the address of the first, popular commodities (sometimes also including much of what is most commonly called 'classical music'), is the selling of the illusion of a pure experience of happiness and pleasure, since, “what is inauthentic in the offerings of the Culture Industry,” writes Jameson “is not the remnants of experience within them, but rather the ideology of happiness they simultaneously embody: the notion that pleasure or happiness ('entertainment' would be their spurious synthesis) already exists, and is available for consumption.”¹⁹ The pleasure of pop, the bliss of rock, the eroticism of disco, the

¹⁶ Adorno in Paddison, 1996: 88

¹⁷ Hamilton, 2007: 179

¹⁸ Paddison in Hamilton, 2007: 173

¹⁹ Jameson, 1990 (2007): 147

aggression of metal, the ecstasy of house are, as Max Paddison writes “illusory, as with all commodities, and [...] given only to be denied.”²⁰ Popular music, in its most negative instance, thus offers an illusion of pleasure, of happiness, of escape, neatly packaged and for sale in a constant repetition of the same.

It is the industry which renders its products essentially meaningless and deprived of any real or valuable experience. The second category however, avant-garde art, *self-reflective* music, suffers, while facing and attempting to resist its nature as a commodity, the fate of obscurity, as Adorno clearly describes regarding the position of the work of his most beloved example: Arnold Schönberg. The complexity of the relationship between the music of the avant-garde and society lies primarily in the fact that although the music does not hold the possibility of expressing anything outside itself, it is still influenced by society. The critical potential of Schönberg's music lies above all in its musical material, which, as an *antithesis* to society, confronts its listeners with the lack of freedom the Culture Industry imposes. In order to maintain this position, to keep on critically confronting its commodification, the music has to defend its radical autonomy without concession, thereby sealing its faith to remain obscure and unheard by the masses.²¹

This contradiction, of only being able to be critical when one stays a radical outsider and thus virtually without any real influence, is (according to Adorno) crucial for the position of the avant-garde, since “those who succumb to the ideology are precisely those who cover up the contradiction instead of taking it into the consciousness of their own production.”²² So, opposite to music uncritical to its commodification, offering pre-fabricated experiences, holding the empty promise of happiness and pleasure, of escape and dream, critical music is consciously aware of the process of commodification and the contradictions inherent in autonomous music productions, and deliberately moves away into obscurity.

As Richard Middleton repeatedly states in his discussion of Adorno in *Studying Popular Music*, the force of much of Adorno's argument was and remains unmistakably great, regardless of all the justified criticism it has generated over the years.²³ As most writers on Adorno and popular music acknowledge, there is indeed a certain, rather large, section of popular music production which resembles Adorno's description of the products of the Culture Industry, especially when one focuses on the way the international music industry functions in

²⁰ Paddison, 1996: 91

²¹ See most importantly Adorno, 1958 (1949)

²² Adorno, 1979 (1947)

²³ Middleton, 1997 (1990): 34-63

order to put these artists and their music in the market.²⁴ But in order to really make the concept useful in a discussion of popular music, one still has to set his sweeping criticism of all popular (and much more) music aside and try to establish a more nuanced position.

For Adorno, his negative dialectics require an exposition of interrelated, but incommensurable extremes, leaving little room for the (grey) area in between. The fact that the music of the radical avant-garde is *self-critical* and *self-reflective*, conscious of and thereby resistant to its unavoidable commodification, but consequently doomed to obscurity and marginality, does not exclude the possibility of a different kind of music, also trying to cope as consciously, self-critically and self-reflectively as possible with its position, aspiring both artistic autonomy and commercial success, without the radicalism of self-imposed exile into the margins.

Adorno's argument, formulated against the background of 1930's/1940's Tin Pan Alley hegemony of standardized song writing, prevailed in the rock/pop dichotomy from the nineteen sixties onwards: rock's insistence on authenticity and its basic struggle to maintain independence within the ever growing structure of the powerful music industry, as opposed to pop's supposed inauthenticity and 'sell-out' nature. The opposition between various 'independent' musics (punk, industrial, house, hip-hop, to name a few) and 'commercial' music is a constant factor in popular music culture. Independent music, on the one hand, is focussing on 'authentic,' 'anti-commercial,' 'real,' artistically daring and renewing production. The music industry, on the other hand, attempts to a. (often successfully) incorporate new independent cultures as soon as possible into their ranks and b. produce standardized music whilst selling it under the same premises as the independent branches: 'authentic,' 'real,' artistically daring and renewing. These dynamics are indeed adequately described by Adorno's scheme of the Culture Industry – standardisation, pseudo-individualisation and fake authenticity.

So, within the first, 'independent,' category there may indeed exist the possibility of a significant way of navigating between autonomy and commodification, of consciously confronting the music's status as commodity. Richard Middleton endorses this view and quotes Hennion and Stratton's argument that within a larger market and commercial environment “the 'romantic' image of the creative artist is no false veneer nor confined to 'mass culture,’” but rather implicates 'individualism,' thereby creating “spaces which the system cannot close off or remove, however much it wants to, and which ensure the

²⁴ See for instance Hamilton: “current extremes of commodification are, however, as shocking as any conceived by Adorno.” Hamilton, 2007: 174. And for a concise sociological study of the music industry: Negus, Keith. *Music genres and Corporate Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1999

possibility of conflicts within the productive forces as a whole.”²⁵ In other words: there are spaces, holes in the system which the industry cannot close off and which grant the individual, creative artist the possibilities of resisting it.

For Richard Middleton, the result in what he calls “avant-garde commodities,” a term which partly misses the point, since, as said, even avant-garde art is a commodity to some extent and the tension is not caused by the opposition between the avant-garde and commodities, as his term implies, but by the opposition between commodities *accepting* their position as such and commodities *resisting* it, a true avant-garde being the latter.²⁶

The attempt of creating such critical, self-conscious music, using holes in the system, will be countered by the music industry as soon as possible, incorporating the void in its system, shutting down its resistant capacity. Therefore, popular musicians who indeed try to maintain this position, for instance Frank Zappa, an example mentioned by both Paddison and Middleton, are always submitted to the question, as Paddison puts it, “to what extent and for how long [are they] able to maintain [their] knife-edge position in the tension between the two opposites [...]? And [are they] able to withstand the strong tendency to fall into either popular or radical, unable to be both at the same time?”²⁷

It is this knife-edge position as a consciously self-reflective, authentic, independent artist, instead of a fully commercialised pop star, which Matthew Herbert aspires. To distinguish himself from the bluntness of the Madonna's of this world and the opportunism of the average house-DJ, he constantly insists on the uniqueness of his musical material, his samples, his pre-sets, his use of technology, since he believes that only in the “quest for the unique” lies the key to true authenticity.²⁸ For him, electronic music holds the promise of the creation of something sonically entirely inconceivable before.

Producing critical popular music obviously is not just a matter of owning an independent record label and staying away from the record industry, since this does not guarantee a successful negotiation between autonomy and commercial interdependence. Even an independent record label has to earn money and is dependent on the larger capitalist infrastructure. It is rather a matter of reflecting critically on one's own musical output and its position, of being aware of the trap of becoming stuck in the machination of the Culture Industry; it is a matter of *creating* instead of *reproducing*.

²⁵ Middleton, 1997 (1990): 39

²⁶ Ibidem: 43

²⁷ Paddison, 1996: 103

²⁸ Matthew Herbert in Birchall, 2003

The Culture Industry, as Adorno showed, renders all its products virtually meaningless, since they are based on pre-fabricated experiences. Matthew Herbert tries to make use of the spaces and holes, the unmonitored places in the industry. His project is to regenerate meaning, to make the music meaningful again, by offering real, authentic experiences instead of pre-fabricated ones, by not avoiding but highlighting the contradictions of his position as an artist working in a commercial field.

Herbert criticises modern mass culture and global capitalism, whilst using and playing with aspects that are inherent to it. As such, a music which is both critically potent and commercially viable may indeed be possible. But, on the other hand, it remains to be seen how successful this attempt indeed is. As Paddison wrote, it is not easy to maintain this position and the mechanisms of the Culture Industry are powerful and difficult to grasp. In order to find out which aspects of mass culture Matthew Herbert uses and plays with, how he tries to stay critical and self-conscious and which exactly is his position as an artist, it is necessary to take a close look at the *artist* Matthew Herbert and see how his established position as an authentic 'author' holds several inherent contradictions, proof of the contradictory nature of the dynamics I just described: the authentic integrity of the author/performer Matthew Herbert also creates the image of the pop star Matthew Herbert as a product on the global market of popular music.

3. “You're Unknown To Me” – (*Constructing*) *The Artist Matthew Herbert*

Matthew Herbert's official biography, as published on his website www.matthewherbert.com, begins with the following sentence: “restless innovator, sampling wizard, classically trained pianist and superstar collaborator, Matthew Herbert is one of electronic music's most versatile and prolific figureheads.”²⁹ Already from this one sentence it is possible to get a sense of what or who it is Matthew Herbert aims to be.

In it, four different aspects of his artistic persona are mentioned in order to establish Herbert's own legitimacy as an authentic artist, a house producer and a pop star. He is a “restless innovator”: a ground breaking, original artist, ahead of his time, with avant-garde credibility. A “sampling wizard,” meeting the conditions of the genre he works in, in possession of the skills required to make the music he makes, and being extraordinary good at it. A “classically trained pianist,” not your average pop star, house producer or DJ, but someone aware of the classical tradition, capable of real composing and musicianship, instead of just digitally scraping bits together. And lastly a “superstar collaborator,” not only elitist or underground, but knowing his way around the music business, working with and appreciated by big stars.

It is clear already from such a little bit of information the artist Matthew Herbert is and wants to be many things, some of which are contradictory – some of which aim at recognitions as a musician and an (avant-garde) artist, others at maintaining his credibility and authenticity in different popular scenes, most prominently the electronic music scene. As I concluded in the previous chapter, in order to thoroughly understand these different aspects of the musician/performer Herbert it is necessary to take a close look at the material of which these images are compiled, to dissect the different ways he establishes and confirms the multiple sides that together form the image of the artist Matthew Herbert.

As film scholar Richard Dyer writes in the introduction to his influential 1986 book *Heavenly Bodies*, three analyses of film star texts and their relation to society, “star images are always extensive, multimedia, intertextual.”³⁰ Therefore, the analysis can include all material that is at hand: pictures, interviews, the actual works of the artist, reviews, audience responses, websites etc. etc. “A star image,” writes Dyer, regarding the film stars he analyses, “consists both of what we normally refer to as his or her 'image', made up of screen roles and obviously stage-managed public appearances, and also of images of the manufacture of that 'image' and of the real person who is the site of occasion of it.”

²⁹ Anonymous: 2006

³⁰ Dyer, 1986: 3

Dyer's three analyses of "startexts," of Marilyn Monroe, Paul Robeson and Judy Garland, all focus on one central theme or concept, respectively female sexuality, race and homosexuality, which is determining their star image and the relation between the star in question and society. The "coherent continuousness" of these themes in the oeuvre and life of these artists "becomes what the star 'really' is." This aura of realness and individuality of the artist is a crucial aspect in the formation of startexts. In order for the public to identify with the star in question he or she has to be "real" and "authentic." But, besides "real" and "authentic," the star has to be "perfect" and "larger than life" at the same time. Such contradictions are exemplary for the concept of the startext, since "each element" of the analysis "is complex and contradictory, and the star is all of it taken together."³¹

For my analysis of Matthew Herbert in this chapter I will use a similar method. I will focus on the artistic persona of Matthew Herbert using the concept of the 'author' as a central theme. As discussed in the previous chapter, being able to produce critically viable music both within and resistant to the force of the Culture Industry, requires a specific, self-conscious and -reflexive position. As such, the position aspired by artists as Matthew Herbert is that of an original, authentic, consistent 'author'-figure rather than a pop star. By wanting to regenerate the 'meaning' lost in the prefab, unauthentic, uncritical media figures, stars, of popular culture, products of the Culture Industry, he wants his fans to focus on the music and its content, most importantly the critical messages it contains. Herbert's does not want to be a *star* but an *author*.

And indeed, Herbert's crave for control over his work and for an authentic and consistent artistic personality, reflects Foucault's definition of the author as a figure of which we are accustomed to think of as "an indefinite source of significations which fill the work [...] a genius, a perpetual surging of invention," but also a figure who, in his historically *real* function, is rather "an ideological figure by which one marks the manner in which we fear proliferation of meaning."³² The author function fills the work with meaning, but also aims at limiting its meanings, keeping out the unwanted proliferation of multiple meanings, which is always presents.

The startext, as I quoted Dyer, always holds contradictions, which nevertheless form an inherent part of it, and Herbert's insistence of his author function works in many ways contrary to what he intends and believes. It became apparent in the previous chapter the avant-garde, 'art,' position, is, unavoidably contradictory, always also tending towards commodification. As Dyer writes: "stars are involved in making themselves into

³¹ Dyer, 1986: 7-8

³² Foucault, 1984: 119

commodities; they are both labour and the thing that labour produces. They do not produce themselves alone.”³³ Because of this, everything Herbert does in order to avoid being part of the regular music industry and the star system creates at the same time the contradiction between what the artist, musician, activist and pop star Matthew Herbert’s wants and says to be and what he appears to be for his fans and the media. Although he keeps on insisting he wants fans to focus on his *work*, the very things he does to assure this also contributes to the image of the pop star and public figure “Matthew Herbert,” shifting the focus away from the work and onto the marketable performer.

In the course of this chapter several different ‘author’ functions can be distinguished, expressing a rock-discourse, an avant-garde mentality and the position of the rave-performer; sometimes indeed contradicting each other, but all contributing to the whole of the startext of the author/artist Matthew Herbert. I begin my analysis with the third of these three positions – the rave performer – zooming in on Herbert’s background in nineties British rave culture, a subcultural environment opposed to the aesthetics and ethics of mainstream pop culture, where the development of his artistic persona originates and much of the basic premises of his work are derived from.

Developing by the end of the 1980’s and the beginning of the 1990’s, the early rave-culture found at its core several resistant ideological features which formed much of its initial appeal. As is described in “Mixed Messages: Resistance and Reappropriation in Rave Culture” by Brian Ott and Bill Herman, the political and ideological potential of rave culture “lies primarily in its privileging of communion, which is facilitated along the intersecting axes of social space, authorship, the body, and the drug ecstasy.”³⁴

The politically-minded Matthew Herbert was attracted by rave-culture as “a movement that was deliberately politicised, [...] the coming together of people of all classes and backgrounds [...] arranging huge peaceful gatherings.”³⁵ In opposition to the neo-liberalism of 1980’s England, rave’s main attraction were its anti-individualism and its move away from modern consumption culture, created in non-commercial places through the temporary illegal appropriation of abandoned warehouses. The communality and egalitarian atmosphere at huge, illegal, gatherings was heightened by the use of ecstasy and by what Ott and Herman call its “dephallicizing effect on the male body,” causing “feelings of collective love rather

³³ Dyer, 1986: 5

³⁴ Herman, 2003: 249

³⁵ Matthew Herbert in Birchall, 2003

than targeted lust”³⁶ among male visitors. Musically, this ideology was expressed by the ritualistic aspects of techno music: the infinite, trance-like repetition of a 4/4 beat and slow mood and tension building, combined with the physicality of endless dancing.

Furthermore, rave provided, as David Hesmondhalgh points out, a firm opposition to the mores of the music-industry by breaking with its author centred star cult through the anonymity of DJ’s, the absence of a stage and the focus on “style rather than on the identity of performers.”³⁷ Herbert was attracted to the fact that “dance music has tended to be based around genre rather than big personalities.”³⁸ In order to maintain this anonymity, artists were constantly using new pseudonyms to hide their identity and to be able to produce music in multiple (sub)genres. As Herbert said in an interview in 1998, this habit of using multiple aliases “allows me to record on different labels. I can do whatever I want so it’s quite fun for me and I like to keep people guessing.”³⁹

Apart from these features rave culture had the advantage of a relatively easy distribution system, based on an extensive network of small, do-it-yourself (DIY) labels focussing on specific (sub)genres and backed by small, local, record stores. In 2006, Herbert declared he mainly started making house music “because there was an immediate distribution system available” and although it is not at all an exclusive element of rave culture, these small, independent record labels are traditionally an important aspect of marginal, subcultural genres with a strong and loyal community.⁴⁰ Similar to the early punk scene or industrial music, many people started a record label to release their own music and that of befriended artists. This remained not entirely without consequences: it “has been,” as Hesmondhalgh describes, “the basis of a significant *decentralisation* of British subcultural music productions.”⁴¹

Herbert initially grounded several small labels, reserved for different aspects of his work, separated by his different aliases (“Soundslike” for *Herbert*, “Lifelike”/“Lowlife” for Doctor Rockit). In 2000 he united these sub labels in “Accidental Records,” under which flag he issued all his subsequent releases up to the present day.

Rave-culture created an alternative space, away from mainstream society, in what author Hakim Bey called a “Temporary Autonomous Zone” (TAZ), offering communality instead of

³⁶ Herman, 2003: 259

³⁷ Hesmondhalgh, 1998: 238

³⁸ Matthew Herbert in Beatty, 1998

³⁹ Ibidem

⁴⁰ Matthew Herbert in Juzwiak, 2006

⁴¹ Hesmondhalgh, 1998: 236

individuality and providing an escape of the sometimes rather grim social reality caused by the economic depression in 1980's and early 1990's Britain.⁴²

Indeed, a significant part of Matthew Herbert's work and image can be traced back to the subcultural subversion of rave culture as a "modern, technologically-clad form of non-verbal, ecstatic communion": his use of numerous aliases during the nineties (although he later almost entirely abandoned those, as I will discuss shortly), his wish *not* to be a pop star, his independent record label and of course a fair portion of his musical idiom – the basic features of techno music and its strong attachment to ritual, trance and dancing – are all reminiscent of rave's anti commercial DIY ethics.⁴³

But the subversion of rave is not at all unproblematic or uncontested. In their analysis of the politics of rave-culture, Jeremy Gilbert and Ewan Pearson point to the fact that "the idea of rave as a return to carnival can easily be understood [...] as a turning away from the possibility of real political engagement, democratic struggle, and progress for society as a whole."⁴⁴

They describe how both the failure of much of rock music's engagement in the 1980's, which focussed on the authenticity of the singers voice and its message, and the association of newer forms of rock (such as Britpop) with relatively conservative politics, caused dance music to formulate a "radical deconstruction of the status of the audience, artist, music and dance. Making no claim to musical integrity [it] offered pleasure [...] *entirely* for pleasure's sake."⁴⁵ Rave was a culture of the radical *here* and *now* and had "to be *used* rather than to be *understood*."⁴⁶ This echoes Adorno's distrust of exactly this aspect of popular culture: the illusionary promise of the experience of pure happiness and pleasure inherent in the products of the Culture Industry.

This makes it understandable why these hedonistic and anti-political aspects of rave-culture – the turn away from a politics of representation and *real* debate, the inherent hedonism and the assumption that resistance is created by 'just being there,' by partying and by *not* participating in mainstream society – were so problematic for the more politically minded, resistant, ideologists in the movement, such as Matthew Herbert. Especially since these aspects became even more apparent as the culture developed.

⁴² Twist, 1995: 205. See also Hakim Bey. *TAZ. The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism*. New York: Autonomedia, 1991 (1985). Available for free download at http://www.hermetic.com/bey/taz_cont.html

⁴³ *Ibidem*

⁴⁴ Gilbert, 1999: 163

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*: 166

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*: 167

As Ott and Herman describe, the increasing 'reappropriation' of rave-culture by mainstream popular culture and the music industry caused its ongoing popularisation, consequential commercialisation and development into a club culture. When this happened, Gilbert and Pearson write, the culture became more and more elitist and hierarchic. Expensive, 'glamorous' and increasingly 'sexy' clothing started to dominate the scene.⁴⁷ Furthermore, the criminalisation of ecstasy triggered a renewed increase of alcohol-abuse and consequential demise of the non-aggressive atmosphere at house parties.

With this, much of the initial subversion disappeared. Parties were relocated into clubs, which, according to Herbert, were "being designed to make money, often illegitimately" and instead of breaking hegemonic social codes and promoting equality, they "divided people along the traditional lines."⁴⁸ Simultaneously, DJ's were more and more marketed in ways similar to the promotion of traditional stars of pop and rock music and, as Hesmondhalgh writes, "the star system [...] destroys the conditions which allow an independent music sector to thrive."⁴⁹

For Herbert and many others, this delocalisation, commercialisation, commodification and globalisation of dance music meant the definite end of its already precarious critical potential. Since rave culture turned into club culture, he declared, although "every weekend millions of like-minded people all gather together, [...] it's all about escapism."⁵⁰ So, although Herbert took several distinguishing features of rave culture with him he turned away from it already quite early in his career and drifted further and further away, both ideologically and musically, as the years progressed.

In 1998, Herbert told to a reporter of the website for online label Ambient Soho that the first records he made in the early nineties were "well...shit. [...] it was sort of cheesy stuff – we were trying to release records to make money." According to him, "the first record that did well was Doctor Rockit – 'Ready to Rockit' double 10" on Clear in '95 [...] and yet it was the first record that I didn't care if it only sold 5 copies. It had integrity [...]" [🎵 cd, track 2].⁵¹

The word *integrity* is very significant here. The depiction that a record designed "to make money" and consequently *without* integrity, does not make money, whereas the first record *not* intended to make money, but *with* integrity apparently did make money, lies completely in line with the desired credibility of non-commercialism and pure intentions

⁴⁷ Gilbert, 1999: :174-177

⁴⁸ Matthew Herbert in Birchall, 2003

⁴⁹ Hesmondhalgh, 1998: 248

⁵⁰ Matthew Herbert in Clarke, 2003

⁵¹ Matthew Herbert in Beatty, 1998

towards fans and fellow musicians, especially important in music subcultures such as the rave-scene. But Herbert's first two successful projects, Doctor Rockit and Wishmountain, *were* indeed something completely different. With both, Herbert distinguished himself considerably from his peers, since on these projects he first started using samples of ordinary, everyday objects as sources for his music.

As Doctor Rockit he created some kind of audio diary: recording and taking samples of various objects, events and places in his daily life and turning them into his music. With the more conceptually oriented Wishmountain he used only one object for an entire track ("Pepper Pot," "Jam Jar," "Radio," "Cheesegrater.") and treated it following specific, self-imposed rules – as he described in a German interview: "take eight sounds from an object, no synthesizer, no presents, length no more than four or five minutes, with minimal use of effects."⁵² On top of this, the Wishmountain-project was accompanied by live shows in which he reproduced the same process live on stage.

This abnormal choice of samples, the rigorous treatment of those and the conceptual approach to his music already indicated his move away from rave-culture early in his career, but the decisive moment came around the turn of the millennium, with two crucial developments in his work: firstly, around the time he released the album *Bodily Functions* in 2001, the development and constitution of the "Personal Contract for the Composition of Music" (P.C.C.O.M.) and secondly the introduction of explicit politics in his music with the Radio Boy-record called *The Mechanics of Destruction* released that same year.

The "Personal Contract for the Composition of Music" is the culmination of the rules Matthew Herbert imposed on himself since his work on Wishmountain. It consists of two parts: the "Personal Contract for the Composition of Music (Incorporating the Manifesto of Mistakes)," conceived in November 2000 and updated in June 2003, and the "P.C.C.O.M. Turbo Extreme," added in 2005. Herbert drew up the contract to trigger his own creativity by imposing his own limits and restrictions and to assure he stays away from commercial music production as far as possible.

Conceiving and publishing a manifesto like the P.C.C.O.M. is a telling gesture. With it, he explicitly ties his work to a long-standing tradition of manifesto's in the history of avant-garde art and the links between these avant-garde movements and various political goals, such as Marinetti's "Futurist Manifesto" (1909), the futurist "Art of Noises" by Luigi Russolo (1913), Hugo Balls's "Dada Manifesto" (1916), the "Surrealist Manifesto" by Andre Bréton

⁵² "Nimm acht Sounds von einem Objekt, keine Synthesizer, keine Presets, eine Länge von vier bis fünf Minuten, minimale Effekte." Matthew Herbert in Bunz, 2007

(1924) and the Situationist International's "Situationist Manifesto" (1960), among many famous and less famous examples.⁵³

Matthew Herbert's contract, although a more modest and personal example, clearly reflects some of the intentions of these avant-garde manifestos: dada's non-conformism, the association with progressive and communist politics of both pre-war surrealism and post-war situationists and futurisms focus on technical progress and machines. With publishing the P.C.C.O.M., something uncommon in popular music, Matthew Herbert clearly associates himself rather with avant-garde art than with popular culture, establishing a ground for making serious, well-contemplated, conceptually grounded music with an avant-garde credibility.

But the P.C.C.O.M. also signals Herbert's move towards the more author centred tradition of the rock and pop music discourse, firmly placing the author Matthew Herbert, and Matthew Herbert alone, "a genius, a perpetual surging of invention," in control of his music, imposing limits unto the "proliferation of meaning."⁵⁴ The rules of the P.C.C.O.M. and the P.C.C.O.M.-turbo extreme, printed on the next page, can in one way or another all be attached to these threads of originality, authenticity, craftsmanship and authorship which undercut the contract.

"If my desire as a musician is to be original," says Herbert, "[...] then why start five paces back by sampling someone else's music? My ability to call myself the author/artist/composer is immediately undermined. We have the ability to create a unique musical language every time we write a piece of music."⁵⁵ It is from this conviction, the believe in the "ability to create a unique musical language every time we write a piece of music," that the rules concerning technology and sampling stem; they express a traditional view on the author/composer as someone completely in control of all the musical material he creates.

For Herbert, the sampling of other people's music is proof of a lack of authentic material. Although not many would agree all sampling of other peoples work necessarily leads to unoriginal music, Herbert insists that it is a lazy habit and an easy way to make money: "When someone spends 50.000 pounds of his own money to employ musicians and uses all his savings to record, after which someone comes with a sampler, uses it and

⁵³ For a concise overview see the Wikipedia article on the topic: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Art_manifesto

⁵⁴ See 31

⁵⁵ Matthew Herbert in Birchall, 2003

P.C.C.O.M. (Personal Contract For The Composition Of Music)
[Incorporating The Manifesto Of Mistakes]

This is a guide for my own work and not intended as the correct or only way to write music either for myself or others

1. The use of sounds that exist already is not allowed. Subject to article 2. In particular:
 - No drum machines.
 - All keyboard sounds must be edited in some way: no factory presets or pre-programmed patches are allowed.
2. Only sounds that are generated at the start of the compositional process or taken from the artist's own previously unused archive are available for sampling.
3. The sampling of other people's music is strictly forbidden.
4. no replication of traditional acoustic instruments is allowed where the financial and physical possibility of using the real ones exists.
5. The inclusion, development, propagation, existence, replication, acknowledgement, rights, motives and beauty of what are commonly known as accidents, is encouraged. Furthermore, they have equal rights within the composition as deliberate, conscious, or premeditated compositional actions or decisions.
6. The mixing desk is not to be reset before the start of a new track in order to apply a random eq and fx setting across the new sounds. Once the ordering and recording of the music has begun, the desk may be used as normal.
7. All fx settings must be edited: no factory preset or pre-programmed patches are allowed.
8. Samples themselves are not to be truncated from the rear. Revealing parts of the recording are invariably stored there.
9. A notation of sounds used to be taken and made public.
10. A list of technical equipment used to be made public.
11. optional: Remixes should be completed using only the sounds provided by the original artist including any packaging the media was provided in.

Matthew Herbert 27-11-00/updated 05-06-03

P.C.C.O.M. Turbo Extreme

All rules of pccom apply, plus the following additions

1. Once the subject of the track is established, only sounds directly related to that topic may be used. For example: if the track is about coffee, only sounds made by coffee farmers and their relatives; cups and spoons; milk; colombia etc, may be included.
2. finished tracks written under the terms of pccom turbo extreme may not be licenced to anything that is contradictory to the intention of the music.
3. Remixes will not be done with sounds used in the original. New noises on the same theme must be generated by the third party.
4. As much technical information shall be provided in order for others to reproduce the intention of the track, and to underscore the structural integrity of the work.
5. The piece shall endeavour to be good. Mediocrity is not an acceptable conclusion.

Matthew Herbert (2005)

The P.C.C.O.M. and P.C.C.O.M. Turbo Extreme, as published on www.magicandaccident.com⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Herbert, 2005

generates lots of attention and money – that is a pure consumer attitude.”⁵⁷ Hence, the P.C.C.O.M reads “the sampling of other people's music is strictly forbidden” (3). Furthermore, Herbert does not want the fabricators and designers of the technological devices he uses to determine what his music sounds like. He wants to control and adjust the devices himself and “no factory presets or pre-programmed patches are allowed.” (7). Matthew Herbert takes pride in using only his own samples and his *own* settings and patches, because everything Herbert produces has to be created by Herbert.

Continuing on the same strand is rule number four, concerning the use of *real* instruments “where the financial and physical possibility” exists. This might appear as an unusual statement for an electronic musician, but similar to his mistrust of factory presets and sampled music, this rule expresses his wish to avoid any suspicion he might not be an actual musician and composer.

Rule number four clearly echoes the commonly heard, anti-technological assumption that making music with computers is easy, maybe too easy – something anyone can do. As such, working with presets, synthesised sounds and other peoples samples will make all music sound the same: prefabricated, unauthentic, deprived of depth and humanity. Synthesizers, computers and other technological devices are ‘less real’ than actual (‘old-fashioned’) musical instruments. And, as Richard Dyer writes, it is important for the credibility of artists to be ‘real.’ Herbert's ‘realness’ is expressed through the use of real, warm, human instruments in favour of fake, cold, dehumanized machines, through the hard-labour of assembling and manipulating his own samples, instead of stealing other peoples work, and through the careful creation and adjustment of his own settings, instead of using factory presets and patches.

To some extent and notwithstanding how much his music relies on technology, Herbert creates an anti-technological discourse, which aims at putting the *humanity* back into the spotless world of the computer. For Herbert, electronic music is too perfect. This explains his insistence on the importance of accidents (rule 5 and 6); accidents are essentially *human*, machines don't make mistakes. Or, as Herbert says, with “a computer [it] is ironed out - there's no chance of getting any of these accidents and that's where the real fun happens: in accidents.”⁵⁸ As his biography states: “Herbert considers mistakes in programming or recording as the welcome intervention of random humanity in a sterile world.”⁵⁹ Again, one

⁵⁷ “Wenn man 50 000 Pfund des eigenen Geldes ausgibt, um Musiker anzustellen, und da sein ganzes Erspartes hineinsteckt, aufnimmt und dann kommt jemand mit einem Sampler, nutzt es und bekommt jede Menge Aufmerksamkeit und Geld - das ist die pure Kosumhaltung.” Matthew Herbert in Bunz, 2001 (Translation by MK)

⁵⁸ Matthew Herbert in Beatty, 2008

⁵⁹ Anonymous 2006

sees him aiming at controlling, directing and manipulating his material in such a way as to construct wholly original and truly human music.

Part of rave's appeal was its secrecy, obscurity and mysticism, derived from the habit of keeping the identity of the performer disguised and keeping it unclear how the music exactly was created. For Herbert, this “was this really big thing for a while. I didn't like taking photos in the studio; I sort of inherited this position.” But after a while he “realized it was absolute rubbish. It's what you do, not what you do it with. So I started telling people what I did and how I did it.”⁶⁰

Rule nine and ten read “a notation of sounds used to be taken and made public” (9) and “a list of technical equipment used to be made public” (10). Like a journalist, who should reveal his sources to make sure his writings are reliable, trustful and objective, or a scholar, who is supposed to annotate his writing to avoid plagiarism and maintain verifiability, Herbert reveals his sources and annotates his work, making it clear what went into it, where it came from and what it is about.

And indeed, from Herbert's first commercially successful record, 2001's *Bodily functions*, onwards, his records were always accompanied by booklets and websites explaining which objects were used for the samples and how the tracks came into being (although on 2006's *Scale* he partly abandoned this tactic and instead only published pictures of all the objects that went into the recording of the album, without telling how and on which song they were used). One can always check on Herbert's work and find out how truthful and honest it is.

All this confirms Matthew Herbert took some of rave's defining features with him, but added new colours to the pallet of his artistic persona along the way. Colours identifiable with the strong ideological and conceptual groundings of the avant-garde, the progressive artist in control over his works and his authorship, as well as with a rock-discourse, focusing on the individual expression and authenticity of the artist/performer – a trope which has been very dominant in Western artistic and musical discourse since Romanticism and which prevails strongly in popular music culture, from the 'soft,' easily adapting, calculated, carefully conducted and prefabricated authenticity of the most commercial pop stars, to the 'hard,' rigid focus on authenticity and individual expression, in opposition to fake, imitating or sell-out acts, in rock music.

⁶⁰ Matthew Herbert in Richardson, 2006

Rule number eight of the P.C.C.O.M reads: “samples themselves are not to be truncated from the rear. Revealing parts of the recording are invariably stored there.” On first read this rule has to do with the ‘correct’ treatment of samples and the obligation to reveal the sources of the sample. But, on a closer look, it more importantly deals with the issue of the music's subject matter.

This brings me to the second of the two crucial developments in Matthew Herbert's work which determine his author centred startext: Herbert's engagement with political goals. Herbert's firm believe, expressed in rule eight, in the existence of the *identity* of a sound (‘what’ sound it is), makes him convinced this identity will remain clear to the listener, if even only subconsciously, when one does not truncate it from the rear. The importance of this identity, the subject matter of the song and its connection to Herbert's engagement become clear in the “P.C.C.O.M. Turbo Extreme.”

Rules one, two and four of the “P.C.C.O.M. Turbo Extreme” read as follows: “Once the subject of the track is established, only sounds directly related to that topic may be used” (1), “finished tracks written under the terms of P.C.C.O.M. turbo extreme may not be licensed to anything that is contradictory to the intention of the music” (2) and “as much technical information shall be provided in order for others to reproduce the intention of the track, and to underscore the structural integrity of the work” (4).

This is how Herbert's goals of musical integrity and authenticity, his aim for artistic control and originality team up with his political engagement, which he started to structurally integrate in his music in the years between the development of the P.C.C.O.M. in 2000 and the “P.C.C.O.M. Turbo Extreme” in 2005. That same year, he said in an interview he had “always been political, but it took a few years though to work out how to present it constructively in [his] music.”⁶¹ Around the time of Doctor Rockit's album *Indoor fireworks* in 2000, he had realised that “all the sounds I used before, told the world as much about me as what I did with them.” This made him understand “the sampler is a political and social tool, with which one can analyse one's environment.”⁶²

From that realisation onwards, samples were no longer neutral sounds which he could freely use to make music with. It was no longer just a Cagian 'emancipation of sounds' in which everything which makes sound can be a part of music. Instead it became of crucial importance *which* sounds where used and *how* they were used.

⁶¹ Matthew Herbert in Polecat, 2005

⁶² “Der Sampler ist ein politisches und soziales Tool, mit dem man seine Umwelt analysieren kann.” Matthew Herbert in Bunz, 2001 (Translation by MK)

This introduction of explicit political engagement is clearly visible in the transition from Herbert's 2001 *Bodily Functions* record to Radio Boy's *The Mechanics of Destruction*, released later that same year, in the wake of the events of 9/11. In a German interview regarding *Bodily Functions* he still stated he did not incorporate politics in his music and "politics rather takes place in interviews or in discussions on my web page,"⁶³ but a few months later, on *The Mechanics of Destruction*, he nevertheless turned the subtle, personal politics of Doctor Rockit's *Indoor Fireworks* into explicit, musico-political statements.

The thematics of the album and the separate tracks, with telling titles such as 'McDonalds,' 'Hollywood' and 'Oil' are incorporated in the music through the use of sounds derived from destructing objects related to those themes: in these cases "a Big Mac meal," "a Bug's Life on DVD and Starship Troopers on video" and "2 cans of oil and 1 can of brake fluid."⁶⁴ In Herbert's own words: instead of making music *about* these subjects "it actually was those things."⁶⁵

Since the release of *The Mechanics of Destruction*, all records Matthew Herbert issued were fused with this political engagement, accompanied by artwork, extensive liner notes and a website providing statements about his intentions, background information on the album, a more detailed description and explanation of each track, as well as links to websites of people and organisations dealing with the issues the album addresses.

For Herbert, his political engagement forms a crucial aspect of his work. His disappointment in the failed political potential of the rave scene and its inherent inability to incorporate representational politics, made him to put it as his task to put the politics back into dance music, "to imagine a completely different world"⁶⁶ through his music; the incorporation of his engagement into his work is all about integrity, consistency and responsibility. He wants his records to be firmly and consciously rooted in the world in which they exist and to tell stories at every possible level about issues he deems important, since, after all, "things don't exist in isolation."⁶⁷

On the most rigorously pursued attempt to do this up to now, 2005's *Plat du Jour*, he "tried to use every possibility you have of telling these stories, through sound."⁶⁸ The smallest level of Herbert's commitment to the story is the sample and *Plat du Jour* contains over 3000

⁶³ "Politik findet eigentlich mehr in Interviews oder in Diskussionen auf meiner Webpage statt." Matthew Herbert in Bunz, 2001 (Translation by MK)

⁶⁴ Herbert, 2001(b)

⁶⁵ Matthew Herbert in Birchall, 2003

⁶⁶ Matthew Herbert in Juzwiak, 2006

⁶⁷ Matthew Herbert in Wyse, 2005

⁶⁸ Matthew Herbert in Emmerald, 2006

samples of food, food packaging and things related to the food industry, for example on the track “Hidden Sugars” [🎵 cd, track 3]. In his work, the consistency of the relationship between subject matter and musical material is crucial and it does not always matter that much what the music actually sounds like, to the extent that on *The Mechanics of Destruction* “the process became much more important than the music. It didn't matter what the music was like, it was just the fact that it was music.”⁶⁹

For Herbert, the most important aspect separating him from other musician-activists is this ‘consistency’ – the fact that *he* tries to incorporate his political engagement consistently into every element of his work with what he calls “an integral vision.”⁷⁰ Which is why, as he told web magazine Pitchforkmedia in 2006, he “really minded how people took [*Plat du jour*], because I tried my very hardest to eliminate 'me' as an artist and make the music a forum for the stories.”⁷¹

Within the construction of his 'author'-image, Herbert's engagement is an important part of his attempt to stay away from the image-driven, star-centred world of the music industry, contributing to his integrity as an author. For him, the musical and political *content* should be the main focus of the audience, not the man or artist Matthew Herbert. The processes with which he produces his music – his use of the P.C.C.O.M., the incorporation of politics – grants his work its critical edge and makes, according to Herbert, for the fact “that we, as musician are less interesting than our topics,” something which he calls “a true achievement in our celebrity-crazed times.”⁷²

But, seen from a different perspective, the exact opposite might also be true. Since one should not forget that this avant-garde position always also holds its counter position, that of the commodified author in pop- and rock music. In contrast to the politics of rave, which largely disappeared with the reappropriation of the music through the global music industry and which was precisely opposed to individualism and authorship, Herbert heads towards a position where, although he insists that his firm focus on the *content* of his music draws away the attention from the *artist* towards the work and its messages, it is exactly this focus on the political *content* which becomes the main aspect with which the *artist* Matthew Herbert is identified. This focus ties together both his different personae and the different aspects of his work, creating a unified body of work as an apparently coherent whole.

⁶⁹ Matthew Herbert in Birchall, 2003

⁷⁰ Ibidem

⁷¹ Matthew Herbert in Richardson, 2005

⁷² “So haben wir dafür gesorgt, dass wir als Musiker weniger interessant sind als unsere Themen, und das ist in unserer celebrity-verrückten Zeit eine echte Leistung.” Matthew Herbert in Sander, 2005: 12 (Translation by MK)

Instead of returning to the anonymity and collectivity of early rave culture, Matthew Herbert's conceptual use of the P.C.C.O.M. and the incorporation of politics in his music form the basis on which the media figure, 'star,' Matthew Herbert is built. One cannot read a review, interview or article about or with Matthew Herbert that does *not* prominently tackle Herbert's engagement. Matthew Herbert's image *is* 'the guy that brought politics into dance music.' As it turns out he slowly constructed a figure of a coherent, sophisticated marketable pop star, making use of means intended to do the exact opposite.

The biography of Herbert's Doctor Rockit alter ego on the website of his Accidental-label closes with the prediction "there may indeed come a point in the not too distant future when all of Herbert's music is recorded under his own name."⁷³ This definite dissolution of Herbert's alter ego's signals the completion of his transformation from rave performer – anonymous, obscure, underground – into an independent recording artist, an authentic author.

This position which, as I have shown, strives for the dissolution of the actual, individual artist in favour of his original work and its meaning(s): an avant-garde art position, highlighting the autonomous status of the artwork, but also the various, heterogeneous links between the artwork and the world in which it exists, of which the art-manifesto, similar to Herbert's own P.C.C.O.M., is an example: a conceptual, high art, approach to his work.

On the other hand, though, it also results in the opposite: the authoritative position of the artists/performer in the pop/rock discourse, a stronger focus on the artist himself, in whose name and image all aspects of his work are unified. Herbert's attempt at *not* being a star, at, through the authenticity of the author Matthew Herbert and his "integrity of vision," shifting the focus away from the *person* Matthew Herbert, with use of a conceptual approach and political content, is always *also* the thing which defines Matthew Herbert as a pop star, as a commodity, as a marketable image.⁷⁴

With this inherently contradictory position, Herbert tries to combine the critical and self-conscious position necessary to counter the Culture Industry with the unavoidable reappropriation of his music by the industry. His adaptation of the author function as a strand which on the one hand enters into avant-garde territory and on the other hand plays with, uses and triggers the workings of the culture industry is his way of navigating the knife edge position of a critical popular musician.

As for his explicit political engagement, it is a curious observation that, in an almost circular reasoning, his critical, self-conscious positions towards the workings of the Culture

⁷³ Anonymous, 2008

⁷⁴ Emmerald, 2006

Industry is necessary to legitimize the political engagement of his work, whilst his political engagement is a crucial aspect of the way he established and maintains exactly this critical, self-conscious position.

So, now I have described the complex and contradictory author function of Matthew Herbert, necessary for his project of making the music meaningful again, countering the meaninglessness of the Culture Industry, it is necessary to have a closer look at how Herbert aspires his music to become meaningful. What does it mean he uses samples, sounds, with specific references to specific objects and events to fuse his music with political engaged meanings? Can sound become a meaningful medium in such a way, and if yes, what is presupposed?

4. “The Music of Sound” – *Technology and Sampling: Herbert's Methodology*

From approximately 2001 onwards, Herbert's goal has been to seek out ways to introduce forms of political representation in “a forum that doesn't really have much of that,” namely electronic dance music.⁷⁵ He wants this to be done at every possible level of his work, not only through the platform he creates *with* his music, but also in the music itself. He is looking for ways to reintroduce meaning in a form of music that, at least to his opinion, is or has become meaningless.

As such, the question is on which premises his believe in the possibility of a meaningful electronic dance music is based. How is it possible to consider such music to be politically critical in the way Herbert envisions? To answer these questions, I first turn to the topic of modern technology, the precondition of Herbert's music, and, based on ideas of Jacques Attali, the way it holds a possibility for subversive reversal. Secondly, making use of the work of Friedrich Kittler, I deal with the specific technique of sampling and the discursive, media historical grounds on which Matthew Herbert's chosen method for introducing more or less specific meaning in mostly instrumental music became possible.

In 2003 Matthew Herbert told Rob Young of *The Wire* magazine: “that was the revolution electronic and computer based music afforded, that absolute sense of exerting a totally unique vision of every note, and playing itself out in its own way and entirely its own logic.”⁷⁶ Herbert, indeed, as did so many of his contemporaries, recognized the possibilities new technologies for music production had to offer. Finally, as Edgar Varèse already envisioned in the 1930's, the composer had complete control over every aspect, every note, every sound of his composition with the aid of relatively affordable and user-friendly equipment.

The introduction of the most important technological device for Herbert, the sampler, had meant the liberation of the necessity of using sounds that already existed. With the sampler *every* imaginable sound can be created and each one holds the potential of becoming a musical sound. For Herbert, the most fundamental aesthetic feature of sampling is the fact “its operating system is based almost entirely on accidents.”⁷⁷ You never quite know how a sample will turn out and what it exactly will sound like when you treat it afterwards.

But the infinite freedom of the technological developments, just as the subversion of rave-culture, was replaced by ever more standardized sounds and forms. The manufacturers of music soft- and hardware incorporated new developments into their products, quickly

⁷⁵ Matthew Herbert in Juzwiak, 2006

⁷⁶ Matthew Herbert in Young, 2003: 28

⁷⁷ Matthew Herbert in Birchall, 2003

standardizing new sounds and sound treatments. For Herbert, this meant that “the technology began to define the principal themes of electronic music. What should have been the revolution of absolute freedom became a series of repetitions.”⁷⁸

Just as the tension discussed in chapter two, between the commercialism of the Culture Industry and the resistant avant-garde position, there is a constant negotiation at play between the developments of new ways of (mis)using available technology and the reappropriation of these uses by the industry or, as Chris Cutler puts it “between on the one hand, the commercial imperatives of the commodity, and their deep involvement with bourgeois relations, and, on the other, the expressive and progressive imperatives of the new media of musical production.”⁷⁹ This is not a recent development. An early, significant example is for instance the misuse of amplifiers by The Who in the 1960's: they deliberately used a broken amplifier – pushed beyond its limits – in order to get a distorted sound, a sound which soon would become common ground in rock music with the development and distribution of distortion-pedals.

These dynamics, between experimental (mis)use of music technology and its reappropriation by the industry, are described by French economist Jacques Attali in his famous book *Bruits; Essai sur l'Economie Politique de la Musique* published in 1977 (translated in 1985 as *Noise; The Political Economy of Music*), which, not coincidentally, Matthew Herbert has read.⁸⁰ Attali argues that in (the political economy of) music changes in the socio-economic and political situation are visible at an early stage, before they become apparent in other facets of society. As such, music, musical development and musical life are prophetic of broader social developments. Throughout history, music has therefore both served as a confirmation of the power of the state and the status quo, and as a powerful force of subversion, pushing boundaries and feared by those in power.

For Attali music and power are always in each others proximity. It is therefore possible “to trace the political economy of music as a succession of orders [...] done violence by *noises* [...] that are *prophetic* because they create new orders, unstable and changing.”⁸¹ Noise is resistance against the normalisation and disciplining of and by the status quo, resistant against the exclusion of disorder. It is the source for the construction of new musics, which can themselves again become the status quo, again challenged by a new noise. Music is for Attali

⁷⁸ Matthew Herbert in Birchall, 2003

⁷⁹ Cutler, 1984: 286

⁸⁰ See Herbert's text accompanying Radio Boy's *The Mechanics of Destruction* record: “as my imagination has caught up with my worldview, helped in no small way by writers such as John Cage and Jacques Attali, the music on 'The Mechanics of Destruction' has become my forum.” Herbert, 2001(a). As well as Matthew Herbert in an interview in 2001: “Die gleiche These verfolgt ein Buch, das ich gerade lese. Der Umgang und die Verteilung, die Netzwerke und all die anderen Facetten der Musik nehmen gesellschaftliche und soziale Veränderungen vorweg.” Matthew Herbert in Bunz, 2001

⁸¹ Attali, 1985 (1976): 19

an ongoing “channelisation of noise,” which holds the capacity to “speak of society and speak against it.”⁸²

In four developmental stages Attali aims to “understand through music” the ways in which Western society has changed.⁸³ For him, music is a battlefield and in the first stage, *sacrificing*, it still held the memory of an original violence and atavistic energy.⁸⁴ It was a simulacrum of ritual murder, a channelisation of sacrifice, imposing order and normality onto the unregulated freedom he designates as “carnival”. The second stage, *representing*, encloses the build up to the classical period in which wealth and harmony are introduced in music and music itself becomes represented into monetary value, through the full development of the score and that of bourgeois society. Lastly, in *repeating*, the third stage, music has become a commodity. Records make it possible to stockpile music, to collect it, which reduces it to silence and smothers all noise. This third stage is indeed not entirely dissimilar to Adorno's description of the Culture Industry and its ways to create meaningless, standardized commodities out of objects formerly associated with art production.

In the last chapter of his book however, Attali envisions a fourth stage, a reaction to this pessimistic depiction of late-capitalist *repetition*: his concept of *composing* is a new kind of creativity that counters the forces of repetition. Composing holds “the seeds of a new noise.” It is “not a new music, but a new way of making music,” individual, for one’s own pleasure and with “tolerance and autonomy.”⁸⁵ By taking pleasure in the act of making music, in creating a new way of making it, freed from the focus on stockpiling, collecting and possessing so determining repetition, composing brings forth “a music produced by each individual for himself, for pleasure outside of meaning, usage and exchange.”⁸⁶

Such a new noise does not come into being out of nothing. Instead, “composition is tied to the instrument” and composing “is to take pleasure in the instruments, the tools of communication.” At its core, composing finds the tools, devices and instruments, the mediators, of music. Since every stage in Attali’s development comes forth out of the previous one, the development of *composing* finds its seeds in *repetition* and the “amazing increase in the availability of music” that it created.⁸⁷ Composing becomes possible through the “general availability of new tools and instruments,”⁸⁸ which repetition provided. Samplers, synthesizer, computers, turntables, affordable speakers, microphones, music studios, home recording devices etc. are the stuff of the music industry, of repetition, but just as well of its

⁸² Attali, 1985 (1976): 26, 12

⁸³ Ibidem: 18

⁸⁴ Ibidem: 20

⁸⁵ Ibidem: 133, 145

⁸⁶ Ibidem: 137

⁸⁷ Ibidem: 134-137

⁸⁸ Attali, 1985 (1976): 147

counter position: composition.

Composing a new noise, resistant against the present distribution of power relation dominated by the music industry, is, to use Foucault's terms, making use of the possible points of reversal of the apparatus – the practices, the techniques, the tools, the means, the methods of making music. This lies at the heart of Attali's composing.⁸⁹ Dealing with the apparatus means dealing with the material, factual, practical things that are at hand.⁹⁰ It has to be *bended*, transformed, manipulated in order to resist the leading distributions and configuration, the normal way of dealing with the apparatus, the status quo. Activating the inherent points of reversal, of resistance, happens in “a relation to oneself which resists codes and powers,” because “the relation to oneself is [...] one of the origins of these points of resistance.”⁹¹

Through the musical mediators (“technical objects, material support, carriers and instruments, discourse, practices, performance devices.”⁹²) and its relation to its individual user, composition comes to light, can be traced and located. The mediators are, says Antoine Hennion, “not passive intermediaries, but active producers.”⁹³ According to Attali, the instruments and tools, music's mediators, are the prime site where musical resistance can take place: the choice of different mediators will open up a field of possibilities that enable yet again other choices and possibilities, making the musician act differently, creating different music in a different way, developing a new creativity. Musicians and listeners wanting to push the boundaries and investigate uncharted territory, such as Matthew Herbert, have to stay, writes Hennion, “on the fence as long as possible [...] among the unlikely mediators which trigger their imagination.”⁹⁴

Herbert's relation to technology fits this description of the possibilities of reversal within the use of music's mediators – of bending the apparatus in new and unpredictable ways. As I showed in the previous chapter, his insistence of accidents and mistakes tie up closely with an anti-technological discourse, which aims at reintroducing ‘human’ mistakes into a sterile world, but it is also just as much an attempt at contesting the reappropriation of new technology by the industry.

It are both the unforeseen failures of new technology, creating new and exciting sounds such as “the brilliant failures of the Roland 909 drum machine to sound like a real

⁸⁹ I elaborated on this argument on Attali and Foucault more extensively in my essay “Composing Resistance; Jacques Attali's ‘Composing’ explained from a Foucauldian perspective.” Kromhout, 2007(a)

⁹⁰ Foucault, 1980: 194-195

⁹¹ Deleuze, 1988: 103

⁹² Hennion, 1997: 416

⁹³ *Ibidem*

⁹⁴ *Ibidem*: 432

drummer,” and the results of deliberate or accidental misuse of equipment, random decisions in sound treatment, which Herbert prefers above using standardized sound, presents and perfect-sounding imitations.⁹⁵

The nature of the process of sampling suits these purposes well, since, as Tara Rodgers explains, “sampling is a process that unfolds in direct relation to the imperfections of technology, and often explicitly calls attention to technological ‘glitches.’”⁹⁶ Sampling, especially the kind of environmental sampling Herbert practices, shifts the focus to the small details of sounds, to those aspects that usually don’t draw attention: rhythmical ticks are suddenly revealed, meaningless noise is turned into trippy rhythms, a fraction of a second is transformed into a melodic sequence. At the very heart of these practices lie the failures of a technology designed to be flawless, combined with the careful listening of the musician skilled to filter out all the accidental sounds that draw his attention and which trigger his musical imagination.

Kodwo Eshun remarks in an article in *The Wire* that “Herbert’s microworld of imperfections and ambushes, hisses, sighs and atmospheric variations, depends on glitches and errors.”⁹⁷ Glitches, hisses, clicks, cuts and sighs are noises caused by digital errors and technological imperfections, by hardware malfunctioning or software misprogramming. These are the sounds which producers want to eliminate, since they are the sound of failure, of the system breaking down: hard ticking sounds, short eruptions of white noise – the digital equivalent of a record stuck in a groove. They are what Greg Hainge calls “technology’s spasms as it attempts to escape itself.”⁹⁸

Hainge considers pure noise music, solely based on glitches and hisses and therefore often simply referred to as 'glitch,' as the ultimate example of Attali’s *composing*: a final break with repetition, a music fully focussing on the self, on its material and its instruments, incapable of becoming commercialized and incapable of expressing anything not true to its intention, carrying “the scars of its own genesis that mark the point at which the representational act becomes transparent and thus dissolves.”⁹⁹ It does not claim any reference to the sound source, to the artist or anything other than the technology misused to produce the noises. Two examples of this kind of music are Merzbow, a famous Japanese noise musician [🎵 cd, track 4] and Ryoji Ikeda, a glitch artist [🎵 cd, track 5].

For Herbert, this pure non-referentiality is too far stretching. His music relies heavily on glitches, hisses, clicks and cuts, but they are the basis for the music and not its final

⁹⁵ Matthew Herbert in Birchall, 2003

⁹⁶ Rodgers, 2003: 316

⁹⁷ Eshun, 2000: 37

⁹⁸ Hainge, 2002: 56

⁹⁹ Hainge, 2002: 56

instance. Herbert does intent to use his technology in a subversive way, relying on the indeterminacy and randomness of technological failure and accidental sounds, such as glitches, hisses and cuts, highlighting the unpredictable, malfunctioning aspects of technology – turning noise into music. But, unlike Greg Hainge’s ideal, he seeks after a use of samples which *is* referential and representational, to maintain the more specific, referential, meaningful aspects of these sounds. With his music, through sampling, he wants to “[take] the chaos around us and [give] it an order according to the principles we respect the most.”¹⁰⁰

So, for Herbert, the possible subversion of Attali's composing in turning new technologies into devices to imagine and create new ways of making music and through that new kinds of music, is not sufficient, since it is his goal to incorporate the “principles he respects the most,” his political engagement, into every vein of his work. He wants to use more specific meanings and clear representation, instead of moving away from representation altogether, such as the final instantiation of noise music. Herbert is “a massive believer” in the assumption “there might be something transmitted through sound even if people don't know what it is,”¹⁰¹ which forms the basis for his use of samples in a referential way, using the samples for the more specific, though multi-interpretable, meanings that are attached to the sounds.

In order to understand what discursive background supports this believe in the possibility of investing in specific meaning(s) of sounds and how the non-referentiality of noise music actually is part of the same discourse, I turn to the work of German media historian Friedrich Kittler. Even more than Attali, Kittler emphasises the primacy of technological media for discursive shifts. The importance of new mediators for the development of new relations between humans and the world and the way humans are conditions by the media they use are central in Kittler's work. For him, one of the most important instances of such a shift in recent times is marked by the same developments which Attali signalled as the beginning of repetition: the conceptualisation of frequency and its consequential invention of audio recording. For Kittler, these caused the crucial shift in the discourse surrounding sound and noise in the twentieth century.¹⁰²

The invention of audio recording, fully developed with Thomas Edison's phonograph in 1877, was not just a practical way of recording and reproducing sounds; its effects were way more far stretching and eventually caused the concept of *sound itself* to become something else. But

¹⁰⁰ Matthew Herbert in Birchall

¹⁰¹ Matthew Herbert in Richardson, 2006

¹⁰² Parts of this argument on Friedrich Kittler and noise were developed earlier in my essay “The Impossible Real Transpires; The Concept of Noise in the Twentieth Century-a Kittlerian Analysis.” Kromhout, 2007(b)

this invention already relied on a crucial discursive shift in the conception and representation of sound: frequency. Without the concept of frequency as a way to measure and study sound waves, the idea of audio recording – the etching of these waves as grooves on a surface, the most fundamental break with the pre-modern soundscape – would not have been conceivable.

“The logic upon which was founded everything that, in Old Europe, went by the name of music,” writes Kittler “was [first] a notation system that enabled the transcription of clear sounds separated from the world’s noise; and second, a harmony of spheres that established that the ratios between planetary orbits (later human souls) equalled those between sounds.” But “the nineteenth century’s conception of frequency breaks all this.”¹⁰³ The theoretical *and* practical conceptualisation and use of audio frequencies, of breaking up and measuring noises and sounds in discrete airwaves, initiated a new and entirely different discourse concerning sound, noise and music.

When sounds became frequencies, they all became equal, since everything could be measured equally and understood within the same theoretical framework. Frequency meant the end of the clear cut separation between clear sounds – notated, categorized and distinguishable – and non-clear sounds: irregular and uncontrollable: noise.

In his book *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, Kittler, whose media theory draws heavily on both Foucault and Lacan, links the discursive break caused by the invention of phonograph, film and typewriter – the first three storage media of the modern age – to Lacanian psychoanalysis. For Kittler, these three late nineteenth-century media correspond exactly and not coincidentally to “Lacan’s triple register of the Imaginary, the Real and the Symbolic.”¹⁰⁴ The typewriter, ‘linguistic signs in their materiality and technicity,’¹⁰⁵ corresponds to the Symbolic – the world of language and discrete signs, leaving out all the ‘noise’ of handwriting. Film, associated with dreams, optical illusions and making the impossible possible, is the Imaginary and “the Real [...] has the status of phonography.”¹⁰⁶

For Lacan, the Real is primordial; its overwhelming presence can only be sensed through cracks in the framework of the Imaginary and Symbolic. The Imaginary, in which young infants are introduced in the ‘mirror-phase,’ and the Symbolic, the subsequent realm of language and the linguistics, together make up what humans experience as reality. Of the Real “nothing more can be brought to light than what Lacan presupposes– that is, nothing.”¹⁰⁷ It can only appear as a sudden apparition, but it can not be put into words. Since it is pre-lingual, the Real can not be represented.

¹⁰³ Kittler, 1999 (1986): 24

¹⁰⁴ Ibidem: 24

¹⁰⁵ Ibidem: 16

¹⁰⁶ Ibidem

¹⁰⁷ Ibidem

The phonograph is the only device capable of storing the Real, of recording ‘the impossible.’ Instead of film, which records frame after frame with short intervals, and the typewriter, translating streams of language into discrete signs, the phonograph is the only device which stores *everything*. The phonograph captures the real-time event, almost captures time itself. It is capable of capturing even the unspeakable and untranslatable – all the hidden desires and dark corners of the psyche.

Humans, introduced in the Symbolic order of language, “have been trained immediately to filter voices, words, and sounds out of noise.” The phonograph however “does not hear as [...] ears” and “registers acoustic events as such.”¹⁰⁸ Only the phonograph is able to “record all the noise [...] prior to any semiotic order and linguistic meaning,”¹⁰⁹ independent of its relevance. The phonograph records *everything*: signals, information, meaning, noises and nonsense and as such, since audio recording is based on the conception of frequency, all recorded sounds become equal – one bulk of noise. Noise is emancipated from being unwanted sounds to an all encompassing sound.

When everything is equally meaningful, specific meaning becomes obsolete. For Kittler, this signals the passing of *meaning* in the old discursive sense of the word, which prevailed during the centuries of the Gutenberg-era, and the rise of *information*. Information, the prime focus of the modern age, is fundamentally different from meaning: the purely mechanical act of transferring data – all sounds, all data, all transmissions, everything contains information that can be read, analysed, uncovered and understood.

Noise is reminiscent of a world before meaning, a world which we left as soon as the infant left the Real and entered the Imaginary. In our age, it has become the threshold where information becomes disinformation: nonsense. But on the other hand, humans, drenched in the linguistic realm of the Symbolic, are always searching for meaning. Therefore, noise can also be interpreted as the infinitely meaningful: the overload of information. Noise means all and/or nothing and “articulateness becomes a second-order exception in a spectrum of noise.”¹¹⁰

So, Herbert’s conviction their might be “something transmitted through sound,” even in short clips of noise, other than its purely musical content or its sonic qualities, is directly derived from the discursive shift triggered by the conception of frequency and the invention of audio-recording: the emancipation of *all* sounds as equal, potentially meaningful and (musically) useful; but also, just as much, by the loss *or* infinite proliferation of meaning, through the indiscriminate recording of the Real, causing all sounds not only to become equal,

¹⁰⁸ Kittler, 1999 (1986): 23

¹⁰⁹ Ibidem: 16

¹¹⁰ Ibidem: 23

but also to be capable of potentially holding and transmitting information. Herbert assembling of acoustic data to reconfigure in his music is truthful to the twentieth-century media-discourse which renders every sound nonsense, but a source of information just as well.

But Herbert does not record with a phonograph, nor reproduces them with a gramophone. He uses computers, digitalized media, which do not play recorded audio in one chunk of unmanipulable noise; on the contrary.

Although the Lacanian interpretation (linking audio recording to the domain of the Real and initiating the loss and proliferation of meaning in sound and its shift to a bearer of possible information) has not disappeared, the subsequent developments in audio recording and reproduction are crucial in fully understanding the premises of Herbert's methods. Since, as Kittler said in a speech in honour of Brian Eno, "music has always been just as complex, dynamic and full of overtones as its technical media permitted."¹¹¹

Herbert, using samplers and computers, records sounds and cuts, pastes, treats and manipulates them to create his music. This kind of treatment of acoustic material first became possible with the discovery in 1944 by the Allied Forces of a machine the German Army developed in order to make and transmit recordings that *sounded* like they were transmitted live (without the usual recording and play-back noise of a gramophone that is), but weren't: the magnetic tape-recorder.

"The world-war audiotape inaugurated the musical-acoustic present. Beyond storage and transmission, gramophone and radio, it created empires of simulation," writes Kittler.¹¹² The big advantage of the audiotape, except a significant reduction of noise, was the technique that would come to determine sound-recording from then onwards: cut and paste – editing. Audio was no longer only possible in real-time, recording everything without the possibility to edit, splice, manipulate it afterwards, instead, with the audiotape "editing and interception make the unmanipulable as manipulable as symbolic chains had been in the arts."¹¹³ It became possible to cut audio signals in order to create new, unimagined, sounds and combinations.

The magnetic tape recorder meant the introduction of the Symbolic and Imaginary in the world of sound recording. It became possible to filter information out of recorded noise. To produce chains of symbolic meaning instead of an unmanipulable, fundamentally incomprehensible manifestation of the Real. The impossible Real of the phonograph was

¹¹¹ "Die Musik war immer nur so complex, dynamisch und obertonhaltig, wie ihre technische Medien das erlaubten." Kittler, 1998 (Translation by MK)

¹¹² Kittler, 1999 (1986): 107-108

¹¹³ Ibidem 109

replaced by the Imaginary and Symbolic of modern-day sound-recording, increasing the distance between the recorded, the recording and the receiver. As Hans-Joachim Braun says in the introduction to the book *I sing the body electric; Music and Technology in the 20th Century*: “improved sound reproduction technology has rather increased the difference between sound recording and sound reproduction than diminished it.”¹¹⁴

Digital sampling is this development pushed to its limits: the complete manipulability of sound. As Kittler said in his speech for Brian Eno, “the tape recorder did not yet provide a language for sound, for unpredictable, unthinkable, unimaginable acoustic events. At best, it offered [...] elements to codify [it].” Computers, on the other hand “provided a language for sounds, which grasps all its fractal dimensions, as well as its analytic, synthetic, elementary and constructive ones.”¹¹⁵ With a computer “everything that sounds is programmable.”¹¹⁶

These different stages in the development of audio recording add up towards the discourse in which Herbert’s method functions: the end of the difference between meaningful and meaningless sounds, between sound and noise, made the incorporation of *any* sound into music possible. In the noise of modern (communication) media, all sounds are as potentially meaningful as all others. All sounds carry information, waiting to be subtracted. However, instead of music referencing *nothing* but the noise of the Real, as Greg Hainge says of glitch – prior to semiotics and linguistics, reaching the threshold where information becomes nonsense, Herbert invests in the potentiality of sounds carrying information. Cutting, pasting, editing, making use of the fact that every sound is programmable with digital media, make it possible to create endless streams of information – revealing different connections, newly imagined possibilities and strings of symbolic meaning.

In his book *Strange Sounds: Music, Technology and Culture* Timothy Taylor writes about two more or less politically engaged electronic musicians, not entirely different from Herbert, who “can digitally manipulate the music they sample [...] but their manipulations don’t necessarily have anything to do with their discourse and their message about the music.”¹¹⁷ In comparison, he says, “almost all hip hop sampling practices are involved with making meanings, meanings that make sense to the musicians and to their fans.”¹¹⁸ The general recognisability of samples in hip hop make them a logical site for intertextual and

¹¹⁴ Braun, 2000: 22

¹¹⁵ “Eine Sprache für Sound, also für unvorhersehbare, unausdenkbare, unvorstellbare akustische Ereignisse war aber auch das Tonbandgerät noch nicht. Es bot mit seinen Knöpfen und Regeln, seine Scheren und Echoschleifen bestenfalls Elemente, um den chaotischen Innenraum von Maxwells Dämon einigermaßen zu codieren. Erst Digitalcomputer bieten eine Sprache für Sound, die all seine fraktalen Dimensionen zugleich analytisch und synthetisch, elementar und konstruktiv erfasst.” Kittler, 1998 (Translation by MK)

¹¹⁶ “Alles was erklingt ist programmierbar.“ Ibidem (Translation by MK)

¹¹⁷ Taylor is discussing British musicians Banco de Gaia and Muslimgauze. Taylor, 2001:153

¹¹⁸ Ibidem: 153

intercultural references and the formation of meaningful relationships between music, lyrics, musicians and listeners, especially if the samples are derived from a shared cultural and historical environment.

Herbert operates exactly on the border of these two ways of sampling. On the one hand, he finds it of the utmost importance to keep the source, history and context of the original sample at close hand, to construct what Tara Rodgers calls “an archive of sounds that can be employed to express specific musical and political statements.”¹¹⁹ “It is important [...]” she writes, “not to dismiss the circumstances of a sample’s ‘past’ meanings and the politics of its reconfiguration into a new musical environment.”¹²⁰

On the other hand, Herbert highly aestheticizes his samples with extensive manipulations, through which the original sample very often becomes unrecognisable, thus almost entirely recontextualising the sound. As Rodgers quotes DJ Spooky, “each and every source sample is fragmented and bereft of prior meaning – kind of like a future without a past. The samples are given meaning only when re-presented in the assemblage of the mix,”¹²¹ which emphasises the importance of recontextualisation for the understanding of the samples.

Herbert’s work shows his adherence to the believe that every sound is equal in musical potential, his believe in the information stored in every single sound and his understanding of the fact that by digital cutting, pasting, splicing and editing these sounds, strings of new symbolic can be generated, since the audiotape and later the computer created the possibility of creating *symbolic* meaning, replacing the meaningless pile of noise/information on old records.

Herbert is concerned with the assembling, reproducing and spreading of information to inform his audience about his political concerns. With the sampler every possible sound holds the potential of becoming a musical sound. The sampler is a device opening up new, uncharted, musical territories. It can construct new constellations of sounds, of recordings, of information – add connections, de- and reconstruct, disconnect and reconnect, to speak with Deleuze: deterritorialize and reterritorialize sounds and their meaning. Therefore, it is the perfect tool to construct intertextual musical pieces, drawing from different sources, referencing different fields, objects and subjects.

His struggle, though, is with the way to (re)contextualise the sounds. This struggle is inherently tied to the fact that the loss of specific meaning has also meant the endless proliferation of meaning. As I described in chapter two, Herbert’s author function is exactly what Foucault called, “an ideological figure by which one marks the manner in which we fear

¹¹⁹ Rodgers, 2003: 315

¹²⁰ DJ Spooky in Rodgers, 2003: 318

¹²¹ DJ Spooky in Rodgers, 2003: 318

proliferation of meaning.”¹²² In order not to lose control over the interpretations of his work, Herbert has to remain at close distance, to make sure both the “specific musical and political statements” he makes by the use of his samples and the meaning given to them “when re-presented in the assemblage of the mix” hold their place in the larger context of the multidisciplinary and intertextual works he creates.

The sounds/noises, separated from their former context, are meaningless and infinitely meaningful at the same time. And the new context, the new configuration of symbolic meaning, within the music and between the music and the other aspects of Herbert's work, are just as important for the retrieving of information out of the music by the listener. Herbert's ideal to “make a record and don't tell anybody what the sounds are and see if it has some kind of emotional or political impact,” is not at all senseless or completely utopian, but the difficulty lies at the possibility to be able to control this impact.¹²³

Therefore, it is time to have a close look at Matthew Herbert's work: his music, his albums and all the secondary material he provides: liner notes, websites, booklets, statements etc. This in order to draw the map of the relations between the different aspects of his work and his artistic persona, to trace in his output the points of friction that became apparent in the previous chapters and see whether and how he does or does not deal with them. To be able to conclude afterwards what it is Herbert says, wants to do and actually does and at which points these do not coincide.

¹²² See 31

¹²³ Matthew Herbert in Juzwiak, 2006

5. “We Still Have (The Music)” – A Closer Look at Matthew Herbert's Work

As I have established early on, analysing the work of artists like Matthew Herbert involves more than just looking at the music. As described in the previous chapters, especially chapter three, the music is, although a large and important portion of it, only part of his body of work, which also includes the larger framework of artwork, liner notes, websites etc. and the even larger context of the author/artists/performer Matthew Herbert. On the other hand, up to now the actual music has been rather underexposed and, given the fact that I am after all dealing with an artist who considers himself to be first and foremost a musician, it is of crucial importance to have a closer look at his music, in order to be able at all to draw weighed conclusions in the following, last, chapter.

Therefore, in this second last chapter, I will look at the development of Matthew Herbert's work throughout his career, focussing on the aspects discussed in the previous chapters: firstly his move towards a position of authentic author, functioning, contradictory, in a pop/rock and an avant-garde discourse, meanwhile also maintaining some defining features of rave culture. Secondly, his relation with the subversive possibilities of technology and sampling and how he came to introduce a specific way of adding meaningful sounds to his music, in an increasingly conceptual way, drawing from a discourse which made the interpretation of sounds as carriers of information possible.

On a musical level, I look at characteristics of Herbert's music – its form, the sounds, the way the tracks are constructed through repetition and variations, etc. After pinpointing some defining aspects of Herbert's style it is possible to trace both the consistent elements and changing features throughout his body of work. But, while dealing with the actual music, I always keep the intertextual and heterogeneous links between the musical and non-musical aspects close at hand, placing the music and its development in relation to the larger, critical, framework set up by Matthew Herbert himself and the context of the discourses creating his artistic persona.

Although he moved away from it further and further over the years and his music clearly shows significant influences by other styles and genres, most obviously jazz, the clearest field of reference for Matthew Herbert's music still is house, more specifically techno, music. In 1994, when it still held a considerable 'underground' position, musicologist Philip Tagg described house as a post-representational moment in music history, in which “there is no guitar hero or rock star or corresponding musical-structural figures to identify with, you just 'shake your bum off' from inside the music. [...] The music is definitely neither melody nor

melody plus accompaniment.” Tagg, deliberately provocative, even goes as far as to say “that perhaps techno-rave puts an end to nearly four-hundred years of the great European bourgeois individual in music,” signalling exactly the subversive potential participants of the subculture attributed to the music.¹²⁴

Matthew Herbert, however, although definitely attracted to this revolutionary potential of the music and the movement, leaves this post-representational interpretation aside and places house firmly in a tradition of popular dance music, in which “the tempo, the feel and structure can be traced back through disco, through jazz, through the popular music of the 30s etc. etc.”¹²⁵ More true to the author function he established than to the remains of the anti-individuality of rave culture, Herbert often deliberately roots his music in an historical tradition; not only that of popular dance music, but also of classical and contemporary composed music. This more historically grounded interpretation is fed by the decline of rave culture and its reappropriation by the industry, which triggered two opposite developments.

Firstly, nowadays there remains the way house music was consumed when it still was an 'underground' subculture: not as discrete, specific 'songs' with an identifiable beginning, middle and end, such as in rock and pop music, but rather in long, inseparable sequences of multiple tracks, ordered regardless of their maker, but rather according to 'mood' or specific position within the build-up of a DJ-set. This way of consuming the music was incorporated in the traditional scheme of the music industry through the transformation of DJ's from anonymous figures to marketable, commercial stars, replacing the actual author.

Secondly, more and more artists, including Matthew Herbert, traded in the anti-individuality of rave for a more traditional, Romantic authorship. They established a specific, recognisable, individual sound. Setting themselves apart from most house through more traditional and recognisable use of the musical material – rhythms, harmonies, melodies, song structures, dynamics, tension building – and the specific devices and sounds they use, for instance this or that synthesizer, plug in, software or, indeed, sample

As Tara Rodgers writes, following Roland Barthes concept of the 'grain' in a singers voice: “the 'grain' of a sample might be thought of literally as the producer's 'body in the music' – the audible result of decisions regarding sound design made during the recording process and embodied in musical gesture,”¹²⁶ thereby attributing considerably to a personal specificity, one may call it 'style,' as an inherent aspect of an oeuvre in house music.

¹²⁴ Tagg, 1994: 219

¹²⁵ Anonymous, 1999

¹²⁶ Rodgers, 2003: 317, Based on Barthes, Roland. “The Grain of the Voice.” *Image, Music, Text*. New York: Hill and Wong, 1977: 179-189

As such, indeed, Herbert's music always sounds distinctively 'Herbert.' Most of it is, as almost all house music, confined by the standard 4/4-beat convention. But, as Kodwo Eshun comments in *The Wire* in 2000, Herbert's "art of the accident caresses and grooves, gets you on the good foot."¹²⁷ What sets a Herbert track apart from other house producers is his subtle feel for a groovy, swinging beat, which, although still hardly never *not* in 4/4, is beyond the average with heavenly syncopated, skilfully layered rhythms and groovy ("wobbly" as the title of an article puts it) bass lines.¹²⁸

Other significant features of his music are the clear influence of jazz, for instance in the use and specific harmonic arrangement of brass and woodwinds sections (most significantly on the big band album *Goodbye Swingtime*, 2003) and the vocal attributions of his partner Dani Siciliano (most prominently on *Around the House*, 1998, *Bodily Functions*, 2001 and *Scale*, 2006). And, of course, there are his strange and funny samples, his recognisable treatment of those and the way he meticulously records, chops up, cuts, edits and pastes the instrumental parts, such as the big band on *Goodbye Swingtime*.

This personal style, his musical autograph, is supported by the way Herbert releases his music. Early house music, as well as to some extent its present commercialised forms, relied predominantly on 12" records, compilation albums, remixes and an indexation system based on genres and styles, held together by DJ sets. Matthew Herbert still holds on to some of these habits – releasing EP's, 12" s and remixes of his own or other people's work, as well as occasionally appearing on stage as a DJ, playing, as DJ's are supposed to, mainly other people's work. But for most of his own musical output he chooses a format that has been one of the cornerstones of popular music production since the 1960's: the album.

The album perfectly supports the focus on the artist as authentic and original author. Rather than songs and tracks, albums can be presented as closed and finished works of art. An album provides the perfect medium to create larger structures and present themes that exceed the limits of a single song or track. Over the course of multiple songs and combined with artwork and packaging it can be used to present a conceptual entity – the 'concept album.' As such, the album is the perfect medium for Herbert and its growing predominance in his oeuvre can be traced throughout his career, as the focus shifted from individual tracks, more or less conveniently compiled on 12", EP's and albums, to carefully constructed products, on which the whole is more than the sum of its parts.

¹²⁷ Eshun, 2000: 37

¹²⁸ "Wonky, wobbly music full of messages." Polecat, 2005

Meanwhile, Herbert's *early* work still stands very clearly in the tradition of rave's politics of a bodily oriented music of pleasure, as most of it is still pretty much house oriented: predominantly rhythmical, repetitive motives, 4/4-beats, slow developmental progression towards climaxes and always very danceable. The three pseudonyms he used between approximately 1995 and 2000, Herbert, Doctor Rockit and Wishmountain, served as outlets for different aspects of his work. Sometimes, though, it can be hard to set them apart, since there are unmistakably stylistic overlaps. This suggests that part of the decision whether a track belonged to either one or the other alias sometimes depended more on Herbert's personal feelings towards the music than on clearly separate identities of the three pseudonyms.

Nevertheless, in general, the Herbert moniker, the only one still in use nowadays, issued the most accessible, mainstream “techno” music – straightforward house-tracks, suitable for clubs, with a steady groove and dominant bass drum, synthesizer melodies, identifiable song structures, slowly unfolding towards a musical climax. Starting in 1996 with three EP's called *Part 1, 2 and 3*, which were compiled on the successful first Herbert album *100Lbs* later that same year, early Herbert records are unmistakably dance records [🎵 cd, track 6].

Secondly, Doctor Rockit served, as mentioned earlier, as an audio diary. As a result of its looser approach, Doctor Rockit's music is often a little more experimental than Herbert and definitely contains a larger variety of styles and influences.

But, lastly, Wishmountain was the first instantiation of Herbert's rigid, dogmatic and conceptual side. Doctor Rockit was an investigation in the nature and possibilities of sounds, without carrying a clear conceptual framework (the first Doctor Rockit record, released in 1996, is tellingly called *The Music of Sound*) and with Herbert one can trace the seeds of the more accomplished song writing and influences of jazz and funk that would come to determine later works, but only Wishmountain initiated the strong focus on a conceptual approach that sets Herbert apart from almost all of his peers and from rave culture and techno music altogether.

This conceptual approach to sound and composing, described by the aforementioned rules regarding Wishmountain tracks (“take eight sounds from an object, no synthesizer, no presents, length no more than four or five minutes, with minimal use of effects.”¹²⁹) laid the basis for the P.C.C.O.M. and, combined with the environmental approach of Doctor Rockit, also for the possibility of Matthew Herbert's political approach. As such, it marked the

¹²⁹ See 51

beginning of Herbert's aspiration as an avant-garde author, just as involved with conceptual art as with house music.

Musically, though, the Wishmountain tracks sound like short exposés of the possibilities of a single sound source. The only developmental gestures are the addition and withdrawal of different *sounds*; there are no melodic or harmonic elements, the music is purely rhythm based, with a simple 4/4 beat, neatly divided in sequences of an even number of bars, mostly four or eight. The tracks are often relatively short for house music and contain almost no tension building, but they are too rudimentary to be accomplished songs as well. Wishmountain tracks are exercises in form and sound.

Take for instance the track “Pepper Pot” [🎵 cd, track 7]. It first appeared on Doctor Rockit's *Recorded in Swingtime* EP in 1996, but apparently, Herbert deemed it closer to Wishmountain later on, since in 1998 it appeared on the compilation album *Wishmountain is Dead, Long Live Radio Boy*. And it indeed includes all characteristics of a Wishmountain track. “Pepper Pot,” clocking no more than two minutes and ten seconds, starts with a simple, syncopated motive, lasting twelve bars – joined with a low, screeching sound for the last four bars. After this introduction the basic beat kicks in, made up out of the initial motive, a second one and an offbeat ‘bass’ sound.

The track subsequently consists of five sequences in which the basic beat is accompanied by a different sound in every sequence: after the first one, introducing the basic beat and lasting eight bars, a second sequence of four bars adds a high sound on every whole beat. The third sequence, again four bars, reintroduces the low, screeching sound from the introduction. In the fourth part, lasting twice as long – eight bars – a tambourine-like sample is added on every offbeat, which transforms into a continuous sound in the last, and fifth, part, before a break disrupts this structure.

The break consists of an element which was already present, but is now taken to the foreground: the continuous tambourine-like sound, accompanied by a new (third) rhythmic motive. After four bars, the basic beat returns, with the addition of all previous sounds and after eight bars, the break reappears in a different guise: the continuous tambourine-like sound accompanied by the high sound on every whole beat, leading, after eight bars, to a final outro of four bars consisting of a sonically slightly altered version of the first, syncopated rhythmic motive together with the second rhythm.

Musically, both the early Herbert songs and most Doctor Rockit tracks are more appealing than this Wishmountain track: containing more musical material, more sounds, a larger amount of variation and development, tension, vocals, harmony, melody etc. On the

other hand, the *focus* of the material in a song like “Pepper Pot” and its meticulous pursuit of the standards and limitations Herbert imposed on himself are proof of his wish to, as I quoted Antoine Hennion in the previous chapter, stay “on the fence as long as possible [...] among the unlikely mediators which trigger [his] imagination,” since “Pepper Pot” is the result of an attempt to get the most out of one sound, without making use of an infinite amount of possible technological treatments, but instead, forcing the imagination to do the work, working against the technology rather than with it.

The nature of the track, being nothing more than its own bare framework with only the most necessary material, systematically introducing and withdrawing sounds, is not the result of an idea which initiated the crafting of a track, but rather just the idea: it is the concept itself put into sound.

But one could also argue Wishmountain remains close to Philip Tagg's description of a music that “is definitely neither melody nor melody plus accompaniment” and as such, does not break away from the defining aspects of house music, which include not only the revolutionary anti-individualistic characteristics Tagg attributes to it, but also its problematic counter position described in chapter two and three: its refusal to be involved with representational politics, its focus on the body and its offerings, as Gilbert and Pearson wrote, of “pleasure [...] *entirely* for pleasure’s sake” – the promise of happiness and pleasure so distrusted by Adorno.

On the other hand, Gilbert and Pearson also described house music as “making no claim to musical integrity” and rave as a culture which “has to be *used* rather than to be *understood*.” Despite its close ties to the pleasure-mode of house, Wishmountain clearly is, or wants to be, a music that also has to be *understood*. As for the musical integrity: this became an increasingly important issue for Herbert in the following years, which shows in the influence of both formal song writing and jazz arrangements, coinciding with his move away from rave culture and techno music towards both a more author centred pop production and a concept oriented avant-garde position.

These more traditional ‘song’-based, jazzy, tracks, with a clear melody, harmonics and an often identifiable verse/chorus/verse structure, including lyrics, developed primarily under the guise of Herbert. Given what I concluded in chapter three, it is no coincidence that the part of his music developing in a direction closest to a tradition of song writing and pop music is released under his own last name.

Initially, though, these differences were not that apparent yet and the music of the different aliases contained, as I already mentioned, many similarities. Herbert has always been Matthew Herbert's outlet for more accessible work, but his first record *100Lbs* is, according to www.allmusic.com, "evoking the best aspects of all-night sweaty warehouse parties in top form," which still underlines its general "techno"-credibility.¹³⁰ In the following years however, Herbert developed further away from techno with *Around the house* in 1998 and the artistic (and commercial) highpoint *Bodily Functions* in 2001. The latter combined, for the first time, sophisticated, jazzy harmonies, more instrumentation and a more pop/rock based song structure and, most importantly, almost all vocal tracks (sung by Dani Siciliano) with the trademark layered, subtle, groovy, house beats he had been developing both in earlier Herbert-oublings and as Wishmountain and Doctor Rockit.

On *Bodily Functions* these characteristic beats are no longer the main element: they form the backbone on which the songs (one can speak of songs now, rather than tracks) are built. They obviously still determine the general groove and flow of the song, but are buried underneath other musical layers: synths, bass, brass, strings and vocals. Furthermore, the sampled sounds are far less prominent and in general even less recognizable; the samples become part of a bigger picture (or soundscape, for that matter), serving, as Matthew Herbert called it in 2003, as "additional sounds."¹³¹ They are much more incorporated in the larger structure of a song, instead of serving all for themselves.

Bodily functions is the first album entirely produced under the terms of the P.C.C.O.M., which, as I explained, further established Matthew Herbert, avant-garde credibility, and as such holds strong conceptual ties to the Wishmountain material, since that is where this kind of self-limiting composing found its origins. And, although far less strict as it was to become on subsequent records as, for instance, 2005's *Plat du Jour*, *Bodily Functions* is based on a more complex conceptual framework than is the case with Wishmountain material.

Whereas Wishmountain offered no more than a self-reflecting and self-referencing gesture, music commenting on its own genesis, on *Bodily Functions* there is a conceptual link running from the general theme of the album, the choice of samples, the subject of the song and the subject of the lyrics. Like on "Pepper Pot," Herbert is critically reflecting on the music through the music, which, as became clear in chapter two, is absolutely necessary in order to maintain a certain distance towards the repetition of the Culture Industry. But with

¹³⁰ Cooper, 2008(b)

¹³¹ Matthew Herbert in Birchall, 2003

Bodily Functions, Herbert also musically and conceptually underlines the anti-technological discourse apparent in the P.C.C.O.M.: by incorporating unmistakably *human*, bodily, sounds into the music. The best example of which is the song “Foreign Bodies” [🎵 cd, track 8].

On “Foreign Bodies,” one can read from the liner notes (which, as a matter of fact, are printed *on* the CD), all percussion sounds are “taken from bodily functions sounds kindly donated by strangers and friends around the world,” together with “vocals and digestion by Dani Siciliano.”¹³² So the conceptual ties in the song run from this the sampled material (the sounds of strange(rs), 'foreign,' bodies), the lyrics (“things you hear. Someone's knee, clicks just here. Foreign bodies start to appear”), the overall theme and title of the album (*Bodily Functions*), to the compositional premises under which it was made (the P.C.C.O.M. and its anti-technological, 'human', content).¹³³

Furthermore, musically “Foreign Bodies” is a good example of the way Herbert uses the rhythmical structures and beats developed in his earlier work as a basis for his song oriented music. The song starts similar to “Pepper Pot”: introducing the basic elements of the beat, in this case a sound which appears to be ticking on teeth and a short, two beat motive, accompanied by some background noises of voices and breathing, before introducing, after eight bars, the basic, layered beat and bass line. But, instead of leaving it at just that, the beat and bass line are accompanied by two repeating chords and when, after 12 bars, the vocals kick in, together with a prominent clap-sound on the fourth beat, “Foreign Bodies” follows a fairly standard verse/chorus/verse structure.

First comes a verse (A, “Be ... bend your ear”), in which the vocals take the lead from the chords. This is followed by a modulation leading into the chorus (B, “What. What is this”), with a call and respond structure. The chorus is followed by the second verse (A', “Fee ... feel the bones”), in which, as in “Pepper Pot,” a new rhythmical sound is added, which continues in the second chorus (B', “What. What is this”). A third verse (A' “Li... listen here”) follows, with the beat left out. This leads into the third chorus, which is heavily processed and digitally completely chopped up (B", “What.”).

A short break, with the sound of brushing teeth, leads to the bridge (C) consisting of a variation of the basic beat, as in “Pepper Pot” foregrounding less prominent elements of the beat. A sample of a (maybe Matthew Herbert's own) voice saying “okay, stop it” introduces a coda, consisting of the basic beat, bass line and vocal snippets of the verse and the chorus.

¹³² Herbert, 2001(c)

¹³³ Song lyrics transcribed by MK

The song subsequently ends with an outro, reintroducing the initial ticking on teeth and a softer version of the “okay, stop it”-sample.

Just looking at the formal aspects – the way the beat is constructed, how it progresses through the addition and withdrawal of different sounds and the nature of the break – there is a clear consistency between “Foreign Bodies” and “Pepper Pot,” which, to say the least, underlines the fact both tracks/songs are the product of the same author. But the introduction of the P.C.C.O.M. and Matthew Herbert's increasing interest in more developed song writing, make “Foreign Bodies” a more accomplished musical product, where he manages to maintain a balance between the conceptual backbone and the musical material.

On *Bodily Functions*, however, the concept, “bodies,” is still quite easily translatable into sounds. The sounds of a body, being an actual, physical, thing in the world, represent, whether they are clearly recognisable or not, without too much trouble a human body or, for that matter, “bodily functions.” But these clear links between the used sounds and themes of the album became increasingly problematic, as in 2001, Matthew Herbert also made the first strides towards his political albums with the transition from the subtle, soothing sounds of *Bodily Functions* to the harsh, mechanical beats of *The Mechanics of Destruction*, released later that same year under the guise of his younger alter ego Radio Boy.

The sounds on *The Mechanics of Destruction* represent not just the thing they are derived from as with Wishmountain and *Bodily Functions*, but serve a far more metaphorical function: representing Herbert's political intentions – abstract ideas, opinions. As such, the importance of the concept grows and the conceptual ties become still more complex. The focus on the different meanings in sounds and the possibility of sounds containing and transferring information, as well as its relations with both their former context, the thing they are derived from and its position in the world, and their new context, a critical piece of music, increasingly determined Matthew Herbert's work.

With *The Mechanics of Destruction*, he says, “the time had come to present an overt critique [...]” and to do it “without lyrics,”¹³⁴ It is the first album to which Matthew Herbert explicitly attached his political engagement and the framework he created around the music exceeded everything he did before. It was all meant to underline the politics and support the subversive nature of the album.

Firstly, there is the unconventional distribution method: looking for and using the spaces and holes the industry did not close off, in order to avoid any involvement with the

¹³⁴ Herbert, 2001(a)

production, distribution and marketing mechanism of the Culture Industry, and thereby being consistent with the anti-capitalistic ideologies that formed the basis for the album, Herbert gave away the music for free at concerts and on the internet.

Furthermore, before the actual album came into being, the *concerts* initially formed the backbone of the *Mechanics of Destruction* project. At these events, Matthew Herbert, dressed in “a butcher's black apron, a shirt and a tie,” used a hammer to smash “symbols of our consumer society, [...] before throwing them in a garbage can.”¹³⁵ With the use of microphones and samplers he created music out of this process. These live shows literally showed, with powerful images and gestures, the process of the destructions of consumer's goods and the construction of something else out of it: music.

As for the downloadable version of the music: this was, and still is, accompanied with a website on which Matthew Herbert provides his audience with extensive background information about the music and its intention.¹³⁶ Most importantly in an essay called “the story so far,” a polemic statement addressing the issues underpinning the album: the worldwide exploitation by international corporations, the dangers of post-industrial globalized capitalism and its links with governments and politicians around the world in post 9/11 Western society.¹³⁷

Of the eleven paragraphs of this essay, the last three are devoted to the music. For the first time Herbert clearly presents his views on the possibilities of an instrumental, political music and his need to introduce his political discontent, expressed in the first eight paragraphs, in a musical context, “without lyrics and without the use of computer plug-ins.” He states, paraphrasing Attali, that “the selection and structuring of [...] noise becomes a metaphor for the organisation of a society.” As such, it is not just the sounds or the resulting music which are political, but, “the selection is part of the message.” This means “the music on *The Mechanics of Destruction* has become [his] forum.”¹³⁸

Already prepared by the conceptual experiments of Wishmountain, the environmental sampling of Doctor Rockit and the more complex ways of incorporating samples in a larger musical *and* thematic context on *Bodily Functions*, it is here that Herbert's attempt to make the music meaningful again gets into full shape. Because of the scarce nature of this music and the clarity of its intentions *The Mechanics of Destruction* might represent not only the first, but also the clearest example of this attempt – not just conceptually and in its reworking

¹³⁵ Richard, 2008

¹³⁶ www.themechanicsofdestruction.org

¹³⁷ Herbert, 2001(a)

¹³⁸ Herbert, 2001(a)

in the framework of concerts, websites, free distribution and firm statements, but also in its music and compositional methods.

Musically, many tracks on *The Mechanics of Destruction* are very similar to Herbert's earlier work as Wishmountain. The track "Starbucks is Coming" [🎵 cd, track 9], for instance, shows great similarities with "Pepper Pot": there is no melody, no harmony, just 3:39 minutes of a pretty straightforward, groovy, dance rhythm. Just as on "Pepper Pot" it starts with a simple, syncopated motive, joined after a few bars with the basic beat. The track is divided in seven sequences and in every sequence a different additional sound is introduced or withdrawn. Furthermore, again just as in "Pepper Pot," but also "Foreign Bodies," a short break after 1:13, foregrounds two of the three more quiet motives during eight bars.

So, considering these musical similarities to Wishmountain, *The Mechanics of Destruction* might be considered as a step backwards from *Bodily Functions*. Conceptually, though, it proves to be a wholly different deal.

With *The Mechanics of Destruction*, Herbert is very clearly involved with using the possible points of reversal of the apparatus that lie at the heart of Attali's composing, thereby making extensive use of chance and accidents. As described on the French Matthew Herbert fan website www.matthewherbert.net, he firstly records several sounds, after which "he assembles these sounds and records the result obtained on an eight tracks tape recorder." Every track of these eight tracks is treated ('grinded' and sampled) and the result is again recorded "on his eight tracks tape recorder." This procedure is repeated several times, until the result is "a piece with abstract bizarre tones which differs a lot from the original ones."¹³⁹

Listening to the opening track "McDonalds" [🎵 cd, track 10], it can be argued that the harsh, abstract, noisy result of this process – the music on *The Mechanics of Destruction* – comes close to Greg Hainge's description of noise music: harsh, non-representational, anti-commercial, the sound of failure and the system breaking down. As such, it forms an interesting and contradictory mix between on the one hand this non-representational nature of noise, and on the other hand the representational aspect of the album, expressed through the intentions of the record, the source objects of the sounds and the way these sounds are generated through the gesture of 'destructing' these source objects. In "McDonalds," one can indeed hear the abstract residue's of the original sounds, but there are also clearly recognisable samples of slurping and eating audible.

Here, his use of samples becomes increasingly dominated by the discourse described in the previous chapter, which deems every sound infinitely meaningful and makes it possible

¹³⁹ Richard, 2008

to create new strings of symbolic meaning. These songs are the instantiation of the development of noise into something which can mean all and/or nothing, of both the confrontation with the Real in noise and its function as a bearer of information. As Matthew Herbert himself already noted, noise is the backbone, the raw material, but the “selection and structuring” of it creates its newly generated meanings.¹⁴⁰

However, the increasing amount of information provided along with the music, is proof of the difficulties he has of (re)contextualising the sounds and controlling the unavoidable proliferation of meaning. The samples are no longer, as with *Wishmountain*, almost entirely self-referential, and although the song “Starbucks is coming” contains as its sole sound source “One Caramel Latte and one Frappuccino,” the track is not just about these two objects and their sounds, but both the sounds and the objects hold their place in the larger context of the multidisciplinary and intertextual work.

On *The Mechanics of Destruction* “the process became much more important than the music.” and “it didn't matter what the music was like, it was just the fact that it was music.”¹⁴¹ It is no longer music commenting on itself, but unmistakably music commenting on something outside of itself. *The Mechanics of Destruction* has become Herbert's forum: the music of “Starbucks is coming” addresses the company Starbucks as “a perfect example of part of the new-school of post-Reagan/ Thatcher economic ‘miracles’”; which on its turn takes its place in the even larger context of the entire album's concern with capitalism, liberal politics and international injustice.¹⁴²

As such, conceptually, the album finds its high point when the music is at its low point: the track “Rwanda” is 8,5 seconds of silence, “one second for each 100,000 people killed, a conservative estimate.”¹⁴³ There is no more music, just a concept and a message. On *The Mechanics of Destruction*, Matthew Herbert laid the foundations for a work which expresses his political intentions, through the process of incorporating political sounds in his music. But along the way, the music itself almost entirely disappeared.

Whilst earlier, on *Bodily Functions*, the musical side gained importance as he moved closer to the position of the pop/rock/jazz artist, composing and arranging songs, *The Mechanics of Destruction* had returned to the experimental conceptuality of *Wishmountain*. The challenge was to combine the two: to make a political album, without pushing the music out of sight. The first album on which he did this was 2003's *Goodbye Swingtime*, credited to

¹⁴⁰ See 138

¹⁴¹ Herbert in Birchall, 2003

¹⁴² Herbert, 2001(b)

¹⁴³ Ibidem

The Matthew Herbert Big Band. On *Goodbye Swingtime* Herbert almost entirely left the sounds of his techno roots and traded it in for almost nostalgic, jazzy, song based bigband music with clever arrangements. The album marks the final instalment in Herbert's turn away from rave-culture and the completion of his journey to fill his music with meaning.

Matthew Herbert's love for jazz and his ambitions as a composer, arranger and classically trained musician, already apparent on *Bodily Functions* and, to some extent, earlier Herbert and Doctor Rockit records, culminated in an album where he finally is a true composer: the *front man* of a big band, the creative mind. But, just as well, Chris Cutler reminds us, compositions, arrangements and harmonies are exactly the stuff of elitist, traditional, bourgeois, avant-garde culture and Herbert, always the avant-garde artist, wants the work itself to be of central importance. Since *Goodbye Swingtime* is an “unashamedly political record,” it is all about the music and its message, the artist and his image are to remain secondary.¹⁴⁴

As he explains in a text published together with an interview in 2003, the album is meant to be political on two levels: firstly, referencing certain classical traditions, “the politics of the record exist both within, and parallel to, the central harmonic themes,” intended to represent “the struggle of living in a world in which one's personal ideals are constantly ignored or overruled.” Secondly, in the tradition developed with *The Mechanics of Destruction* and *Bodily Functions* it is “in the nature of the additional sounds [...] that the politics becomes embedded in the music.”¹⁴⁵

These additional sounds are meant to “give the pieces of music extra information, about war, about George Bush or Donald Rumsfeld.”¹⁴⁶ On the song “The three W's” [ cd, track 11], a piece often mentioned by Herbert himself, one can hear “vocals by Mara Carlyle, typing of the URL for www.soaw.org, the School of Americas Watch website detailing American involvement in Latin American military dictatorship. Printing of pages from the same website.”¹⁴⁷

True to the P.C.C.O.M., all these sounds are listed in the booklet accompanying the album. Furthermore, printed on the disc itself is a reading list of books recommended by Herbert. The attentive listener/reader is notified: “something is happening here: continue reading.”¹⁴⁸ As such, Herbert investment in the potentiality of sounds carrying information,

¹⁴⁴ Cutler, 1984: 289-292; Herbert in Birchall, 2003

¹⁴⁵ Matthew Herbert in Birchall, 2003

¹⁴⁶ “Ik wist dat ik geluiden wilde toevoegen die de muziekstukken extra informatie gaf, over oorlog, George Bush of Donald Rumsfeld” Matthew Herbert in Jager, 2003 (Translation by MK)

¹⁴⁷ Herbert, 2003

¹⁴⁸ “Er gebeurt hier iets interessants, lees verder.” Matthew Herbert in Jager, 2003 (Translation by MK)

information he wants his audience to receive, are conceptually enclosed through the framework he creates. Because, since sounds can mean all or nothing, one cannot expect it to just speak for itself, without offering a symbolic framework. Sounds can indeed mean anything, but they mean *nothing* without a contextualisation – a new field of reference. Matthew Herbert wants “to add sounds to emphasise the meaning,”¹⁴⁹ but also needs meaning to emphasise the sounds.

In “The three W's,” a slow, moody piece, Herbert's trademark layered beat, in which one can indeed discern the sound of typing and printing, is still there, but slowed down considerably. The song is instead dominated by vocals, with lyrics written by Matthew Herbert himself, connected to the theme of the song (websites with information of American involvement in Latin American military dictatorship): “these words are calling. Just so, so simple. Act on principle” and “We should be learning this. Hear stories start. Here stories end.”¹⁵⁰

For Herbert this song is his “most complete vision of how modern music should sit,” since, according to him, it works in four instances: first “it is a protest song,” secondly “it is a carefully crafted, scored and recorded big band piece,” thirdly “it is a contemporary piece of music,” made with technology “only available in the last two years” and lastly “it uses sound for explicitly political purposes.”¹⁵¹

In these four instantiations of 'modern music,' all elements that dominated this thesis are in place: Herbert's positions himself in both a specific tradition of popular music, that of protest songs – a tradition of outspoken individuals, expressing personal views on political issues in authentic songs – and in a tradition of composers, of avant-garde artists, “carefully crafting” their music. But there is also the technology fetishism, reminiscent of rave culture, apparent in his use of technology “only available in the last two years,” which exemplifies the importance of technology for Herbert's music and his attachment to the subversive potentiality of new technological developments. Lastly the sounds used for “explicitly political purposes” express Herbert's political engagement and his ambition to make music that makes a difference; meaningful music, instead of the empty products of our consumer's society.

With *Goodbye Swingtime* the conceptual ties thus run, like on *Bodily Functions*, from the sampled material, the lyrics, the overall theme and title of the album, to the compositional choices made in crafting the album.¹⁵² But they unmistakably also run, like on *The*

¹⁴⁹ “Ik wilde geluiden toevoegen om de betekenis te benadrukken.” Ibidem (Translation by MK)

¹⁵⁰ Song lyrics transcribed by MK

¹⁵¹ Matthew Herbert in Birchall, 2003

¹⁵² Song lyrics transcribed by MK

Mechanics of Destruction, from the music to things that lie outside of the music – explicit political topics, things, ideas and issues in the world, as well as the position of Matthew Herbert as an author, legitimized to express his view on these topics.

As such, Herbert's believe “there might be something transmitted through sound even if people don't know what it is,”¹⁵³ is only partly true. The sounds are just a small part of the work and only just become meaningful in the larger context they are put in. With *Goodbye Swingtime*, Herbert's ambitions as an author, both in the traditional pop/rock discourse as in the avant-garde sense of the work catch up with his political aspirations. One can say Matthew Herbert is a conceptual artist, as much as he is a popular musician: his works only gain its full meaning when taking into account their entire conceptual framework. In order for the music to actually become 'a forum,' it is true, like Matthew Herbert himself wrote, that the actual politicisation of the work happens “in dialogue with the audience, in a live situation, through interviews or accompanying texts.”¹⁵⁴

I described how the development of Herbert's musical idiom runs parallel to his interest in conceptual music on the one hand, and his drive to become a more genuine, respectable composer and musician on the other. Initially, only Wishmountain expressed the rigid conceptual tendency, whereas especially Herbert stayed predominantly within the margins of rave culture and techno music and Doctor Rockit was an outlet or all kinds of sonic experimentation. But slowly, the sound experimentation of Doctor Rockit caught up with the conceptual limitations of Wishmountain. They were united in the P.C.C.O.M. and combined with the growing interest in traditional forms of music on *Bodily Functions*.

But the conceptuality of Wishmountain and the sonic 'snap shot'-sampling of Doctor Rockit also initiated the possibility for the introduction of Herbert's political engagement. On *The Mechanics of Destructions* the self referential, 'concepts put into sound' pieces of Wishmountain were transformed into representational pieces of political music. Consequential, the concept almost entirely took over, leaving the musical side behind.

Goodbye Swingtime is the consensus between these developments: a musically well-crafted, arranged and performed album, but also a conceptual piece of art expressing different layers of politically fused meaning, which are explained in a supporting framework, only to become effective “in dialogue with the audience.” The struggle to combine these two sides, the musical and the conceptual/political, remains a focal point in Herbert's oeuvre. 2005's *Plat*

¹⁵³ Matthew Herbert in Richardson, 2006

¹⁵⁴ “Im anschließenden Dialog mit dem Publikum, ob in einer Livesituation oder durch Interviews oder begleitende Texte.” Matthew Herbert in Sander, 2005: 12 (Translation by MK)

du Jour, credited, significantly, just plainly to Matthew Herbert, remained, although far more melodic and complex than *The Mechanics of Destructions*, largely on the conceptual side, resulting in significantly less accessible music. 2006's *Scale*, a Herbert album, was on the other hand predominantly accessibly, almost easy-listening, jazzy. Although there definitely was a political side to the project, it was the first album since *Bodily Functions* of which Herbert did *not* tell which sounds appear where.

So, now the relation between Herbert's musical development, his development as an artist/author and the development of the non-musical aspects of his work has been described, I've come to the final part of my thesis. In the last chapter, I tie everything together and stretch the central importance of Herbert's author function for understanding his work, since it is in that position that his choices, methods, musical developments, non-musical developments, decisions and images are united, even if just by themselves, they are contradictory

6. “The Whisper Of Friction” – *Conclusions*

Matthew Herbert lets there be no mistake about it and the cover of his forthcoming album, described in chapter one, show this: his work is intended to be a “political force” and not, as he considers most music to be, “a soundtrack to overconsumption.” Since 2001, except for a compilation of remixes (*Secondhand Sounds*, 2002), he has not released any album without a political message attached to it, but these strong convictions of Matthew Herbert himself do not at all mean his political engagement and the way he incorporates it in his work are unproblematic and uncontested.

In the course of the previous chapters I sketched the contours and determined the position of Matthew Herbert as artist, author and performer, situated his political engagement in his body of work and his artistic persona and described the development of both. Now, the time has come to draw my conclusions. First by answering the questions whether someone like the artists/performer/musician Matthew Herbert is in the position to make something like 'political' or 'critical' music and, if yes, what this position is. Second, by describing in what ways he does this, what his methods are and on which requirements and discursive preconditions these rest. Along the way, at various instances I will also reflect shortly on aspects of my theoretical framework and its use for the analysis of popular music and culture. I close my argument on a critical note, posing my doubts about the kind of political art Matthew Herbert produces and the dangers of it becoming to propagandistic at the cost of losing its multi-interpretability and artistic ambiguity.

All important facets of the analysis in this thesis – the position of Matthew Herbert as artist, author and performer, his political engagement, its place in his body of work and his artistic persona, the development of both – are difficult to pinpoint: Herbert's work and image are complex and often contradictory constellations, which nonetheless form a more or less coherent whole. Most importantly, one has to keep in mind that both, work and image, are highly interdependent and the position and interpretation of the one is always determined by the other.

Having said this, it is understandable why the question whether the kind of political music Herbert envisions makes any sense can only be answered when one first has a clear picture of his position as an artist – the image he creates for himself and the way it works out, again two things that do not necessarily coincide. Matthew Herbert, as a contemporary musician unavoidably trapped in the global machination of the music industry has first and

foremost to establish a position towards this industry which makes critique, resistance and subversion possible at all. As such, Adorno's concept of the Culture Industry still proves a fruitful depiction of the workings of late-capitalism and its relation towards cultural production.

Firstly, there is Adorno's description of the way in which late-capitalist industries massively produce cultural products that are inherently meaningless and deprived of any real or valuable experience, offering a promise of instant pleasure and happiness that is given only to be denied. These mass-produced products of the industry, to which a part of contemporary music production definitely belongs, are exactly the kind of meaningless products of globalization Herbert despises – they serve as a counterpoint to his own musical output, which aims at reinstalling meaning, value and genuine experience in music.

But secondly, just as important, one must not forget Adorno's dialectical scheme, based on the premise that the one position always also, contradictory but unavoidably, contains its counter position; which is to say it is impossible to fully escape the force of commodification exceeded by the Culture Industry. Autonomous art is always *also* subject to commodification and thus moving towards meaninglessness, *and vice versa*.

Stemming from this contradiction is the third important contribution of Adorno's theory to my argument: the possibility of a position which takes both incompatible extremes into account. Assuming there are always spaces and holes in the networks of the industry which cannot immediately be closed off by it, there exists the possibility of artists and works of art consciously reflecting on their own commodification, thereby certainly not escaping it, but still resisting its force – a role Adorno only grants to the radical avant-garde of Schönberg and the likes, but which can be expanded to encompass a greater variety of art and music, less bound to the black and white extremes, but instead situated in a grey area in between.

The most commonly heard, and for the most part completely just, critique on Adorno's theories of the Culture Industry in general and popular music specifically is directed towards his strict dismissal of so many forms of music, including all popular music, and the little room he leaves for theorizing any musical resistance outside of the radical avant-garde, which itself is doomed to obscurity. However, this critique also sets aside the richness and intellectual wealth of much of Adorno's argument, throwing away the baby with the bathwater. As my use of Adorno shows, there is much to gain from his work, when one sets the harshest elements of his critique aside and acknowledges for the fact that, as Max Paddison also reminds us,

Adorno's negative dialectics requires extreme position and hyperbolic examples.¹⁵⁵ Therefore, by accepting works of art are never solely autonomous, nor purely commodified, but constantly navigating in between, scholars in popular music studies have far better tools for analysing popular music without either fighting for its acceptance as "art" or only attributing value to the sociological or mediatic aspects of the music. Instead, Musician as Matthew Herbert, and many others, are consciously looking for the possibility of spaces and holes in the system, the grey area in between the extremes, which might grant their music the necessary critical edge. Awareness of this in between position grants the analysis far more accuracy.

His search for the possibility of this position inspires Matthew Herbert aspirations to be an authentic, critically viable *author*, offering real, authentic experiences. And it are these aspirations that form the most important key to the understanding of his work. Recapitulating the things I described, analysed and concluded over the course of this thesis, it appears to me the *author function* has been the red thread through most of it, and its inherent contradictions, caused by the juxtaposition of different author discourses and the tension already inherent in the position to begin with (given Adorno's negative dialectical scheme) give likewise rise to the problematic and contestable sides of his oeuvre and artistic personality. As I quoted Max Paddison: the "knife-edge" position as a consciously self-reflective, authentic, independent author is not easy to maintain.¹⁵⁶ But, nevertheless, Matthew Herbert's political aspirations are supported by it.

Herbert's author image is compiled out of elements of three discourses: his background in the early rave scene fuelled his ambitions to be independent, outside of the mainstream. Furthermore, it inspired his initial use of multiple aliases to distinguish between different stylistic characteristics and brought him to the establishment of his own record label, granting him a substantial distance from the music industry. Last and importantly, his musical roots lie firmly in techno music and the stylistic, aesthetic and ethical roots of electronic music production: bodily oriented, anti-individualistic, repetitive music with a strong focus on technological media and a certain obscurity. Although he left some of these characteristics, those which proved incompatible with a more author centred discourse, behind, he still holds on and keeps returning to others, never fully betraying his roots in the scene.

But Herbert deliberately roots himself not only in rave-culture, in which he eventually got disappointed, but just as much in other forms of dance music, especially jazz, as well as in

¹⁵⁵ Paddison, 1996: 82-85

¹⁵⁶ See 26

classical and contemporary music. I described how his move away from the early British rave scene towards an ever increasing independent authorship, established Herbert as an authentic, individual author, creating original and unique works of art. This development proves to be of central importance for the introduction of his political intentions in his music, later on in his career.

He turned his head on the anti-individualism of rave-culture and sought after more individual and author centred discourses: firstly the pop/rock discourse, a focus on individual creators, stars and authenticity, prevailing in both the independent branches of popular music production as well as its commercialised forms; and secondly an avant-garde attitude, foregrounding the importance of the work itself and its possible meanings, instead of its creator, and encouraging an increasingly conceptual approach towards art.

The words *integrity* and *consistency* stand out as central in the development of this approach to his artistry. For him, to be a respectable artist, one has to be both integer in ones approach towards art and the world and consistent in the pursuit of ones goals. The two developments which further established his move away from rave-culture and towards the figures of the pop/rock and avant-garde author, the drawing up of the P.C.C.O.M. and the introduction of political engagement in his work, were designed to underline exactly these two properties of his work and artistry: integrity in his methods and consistency in the pursuit of his ideals and goals.

The traces of the rigid conceptual approach to his work had been already visible from his releases as Wishmountain and it is clear that the avant-garde intentions implied by this music, such as the influence of John Cage, have always played a role in Matthew Herbert's work and methods. But it was not until the conception of the P.C.C.O.M. and the more song based approach of the first record written under its terms (*Bodily Functions*) that both the avant-garde attitude and the partly contradictory pop/rock discourse were set into full swing.

The first instantiation of the P.C.C.O.M., written in 2000, still primarily emphasised prescriptions dealing with the use and treatment of technology. On the one hand this is reminiscent of the obsession with technology characteristic for electronic dance music, but on the other hand it is also the expression of Herbert's attempt to stay “on the fence as long as possible [...] among the unlikely mediators which trigger [his] imagination,” forcing himself not to be seduced by the endless pre-set and pre-programmed devices the industry offers, but instead to use the instruments in a personal, subversive and resistant way: by both controlling and manipulating everything himself as well as relying on accidents, coincidences, errors and failures to set his creativity in motion.

As I wrote in the first half of chapter four, Attali's description of the possibility of resisting the prevailing forces of repetition by using newly available mediators in unpredictable ways, and the attempt of the industry to constantly reappropriate these uses by fashioning them again into new devices, is a dynamic similar to that between autonomy and commodification described by Adorno: Attali's 'repetition' equalling Adorno's Culture Industry and the formers composing being the latter's description of the radical avant-garde. As such, Attali's theory forms a perfect tool for the theoretisation of the spaces and holes that create the possibility of resistance against and *within* the commodification of the Culture Industry. It underlines the importance of the roles of musical mediators for the development of new styles, genres and forms and in the case of popular music, firmly puts the focus on the crucial importance of technology. Herbert's insistence on the specific use of technology as described in the P.C.C.O.M. is a direct expression of his wish to stay outside of the realm of the Culture Industry/repetition and be an avant-garde artist – being consciously self-reflective of his own methods and goals. Wishmountain, almost nothing more than concept put into music, was the first stride on this road, the P.C.C.O.M. its completion.

On the other hand, the anti-technological sentiments visible in the P.C.C.O.M. are an expression of a wider shared distrust for technology as a threat to the humanity, individuality and true authenticity in music. Popular music, although fundamentally relying on the advances of modern technology, has always struggled with this contradiction. The authenticity of rock music relies primarily on the individual expression of the musician and his craftsmanship as an instrumentalist. On the other end of the spectrum, house music, determined by technology, is often associated with anti-individualism and non-authenticity. Herbert's two-sided approach towards technology is a move away towards the individuality and authenticity of rock music. And although this matches with the author centred intentions of his avant-garde credibility, it does *not* match with his intentions to keep the focus primarily on the work itself, since the authenticity of the pop/rock discourse is highly depended on the figure of the individual artist himself.

Bodily Functions can be considered the compromise between these two conflicting discourses. On the one hand its use of samples, underlying themes, lyrics and compositional methodology form a highly conceptual whole. On the other hand the accomplished song writing, all vocal songs and more accessible music make it a more traditional pop record. As such, it is a good example of a work in the “grey” area between commodity and avant-garde. And, as such, underscribing my conviction that the art/pop dichotomy, which not only elists and artbuffs, but just as much popular musician, journalist and scholars in popular music

studies uphold, is a limiting and confining approach, neglecting the far more nuanced and complex relationship between the world of art and that of popular culture.

For Matthew Herbert this dual position, prepared by the formation of his image as authentic, independent author, was necessary for his attempt at finding a way “to present” his political views “constructively in [his] music,” which he first did with Radio Boy's *The Mechanics of Destruction*. Since Herbert's critique mainly focuses on subjects associated with the anti-globalization movement, he was forced to find a niche that made it possible to be critical of it while functioning within its structures. Initially, the anti-individualism and anti-consumerism of early rave provided such an environment, but both its reappropriation by the industry and its lack of possibilities for representational politics, due to its turn away from society altogether, rendered it unfit for Herbert's purposes. So the avant-garde position as a self-critical, self-reflective author served as the right angle to be able to function both within the industry and against it.

Furthermore, the author function granted him the authority to legitimately raise his voice. As an author/artist in the tradition of the individual expression of political engagement in the history of popular music – protest singers, activist rock stars, etc. – he could be a activist and musician at the same time. Herbert's subversive way of using technology combined with his relative independence from the music industry already granted a critical edge to his methods of making music, but the way of sampling he developed provided the key for the incorporation of political references *in* his music.

Wishmountain used sounds of a single object and exhausted its possibilities, thereby referencing nothing but itself. Doctor Rockit sampled Herbert's life – soundbites of places, events, people – and turned such field recordings, 'snap shots,' into music. Both rely on the discursive shift triggered by the conceptualization of frequencies and the invention of sound recording: when sounds became frequencies and were recordable, they all became equal – equally usable as musical material. Furthermore, the difference between meaningful and meaningless sounds disappeared: all sounds were potentially infinitely meaningful and utter nonsense at the same time. This shift laid the foundation for the modern discourse which deems all sounds capable of holding and transmitting information. When the subsequent invention of the audiotape made it possible to cut, paste and edit audio material, making “the unmanipulable as manipulable as symbolic chains,” Herbert's investments in the information transferred through sounds became conceivable. Digital sampling, Herbert's methodology, is the latest step in this development: it initiated the *complete* manipulability of sound.

Making use of the potentiality of all sounds carrying information, Herbert recontextualizes his samples in his music, constantly creating new strings of symbolic meaning. This had been relatively easy with Wishmountain, given the limited amount of material used and its highly self-referential character, as with Doctor Rockit, given the loose character of the conceptuality, and even on *Bodily Functions*, where the actual and conceptual contextualisation stayed very close to the sound's original source. But, on *The Mechanics of Destruction* it became more complicated.

Firstly, there is the navigation between Tara Rodger's insistence "not to dismiss the circumstances of a sample's 'past' meanings" and DJ Spooky's believe "each and every source sample is fragmented and bereft of prior meaning [...], a future without a past."¹⁵⁷ These two conflicting views, to which Herbert both adheres, can only be reconciliation through the aid of a conceptual framework providing the ground for interpretations both taking the sample's 'past' meanings into account and acknowledging its new meanings when they are, as DJ Spooky said, "re-presented in the assemblage of the mix."¹⁵⁸ Secondly, there is the bridge to gap between the actuality of the musical material, the 'past' meanings of the sample, what it is derived from, where it comes from, and the abstract ideas and opinions they are meant to represent. The music is no longer commenting on itself, but on something outside of itself, which requires a far more complex metaphorical jump.

The reason that on *The Mechanics of Destruction* it did not matter what the music was like, only that the music served as a forum, was proof of Matthew Herbert's difficulties in creating this reconciliation and bridging the gap. Only through the conceptual framework set up around the music, the work gains its relevance and meaning. On *The mechanics of Destruction* this struggle almost results in the disappearance of the music itself.

The Mechanics of Destruction and to some extent also 2005's *Plat du Jour*, are the purest expression of Matthew Herbert avant-garde sensibility. On *Plat du Jour* he "tried [his] very hardest to eliminate "me" as an artist and make the music a forum for the stories," which is the quintessential gesture: positioning the work, its meanings and interpretation in the centre of attention, interacting with the public and the world, meanwhile pushing its creator, its author, in the background. Seen from this point of view Herbert is as much a conceptual artist as a house producer or popular musician.

But on *Goodbye Swingtime*, as well as to some extent on 2006's *Scale*, he tried making a political album without neglecting the accessibility of the music. He combined the

¹⁵⁷ See 118 and 119

¹⁵⁸ See 118

conceptuality – the use of specific sounds, his own intentions, the political subject matters, the explanatory nature of the liner notes – with the song writing and arranging that fully emerged earlier, on *Bodily Functions*. With this, the figure of the pop/rock author resurfaces more clearly: Herbert as band leader, writing lyrics, arranging string sections – the authentic, individual creator.

On closer look, however, this authoritative pop/rock figure is never far away. I already sketched how the fulfilment of Herbert's political aspirations depends on the formation of his image as authentic, independent author. But it is just as true that his image as authentic, independent author depends on his political aspiration and the conceptual approach to his music: they form the basis for Matthew Herbert's public image. His image as an authentic, individual pop/rock performer is partly based on his intentions to be an avant-garde author; notwithstanding the fact both positions contradict each other. This again underlines the complex and interdependent relationship between the different aspects at play.

Since, as Dyer wrote, startexts always hold contradictions and, as Adorno reminds us, the avant-garde, 'art,' position, is always also tending towards commodification, Herbert's attempt at reinstalling meaning in meaningless music – avoiding the mechanism of the music industry, erasing himself as an artist and foregrounding the music's messages and stories – just as much form the focal point for the marketable performer and pop musician Matthew Herbert. This conclusion, based on my use of Dyer's startext method, stretches the complexities and contradictions at work in the interplay between the industry – commercial, globalised, media driven – and individual artists. Again, the tendency to either promote critical, 'serious' popular musicians to the ranks of 'art,' or to dismiss the possibility of popular music as 'art' altogether, does not do justice to these complexities of this interplay. Instead, it neglects them by avoiding the points of friction entirely. One should remember that the increasing commodification and commercialisation of the artworld itself already unavoidably blurs the border between (the myth of) 'autonomous' art and 'popular' commodification. My startext analysis of Matthew Herbert, with the author function as its focal point, shows that, similarly, the aspirations of popular musician to be treated as genuine 'art' authors can just as well turn against them when this image takes its place in the workings of the music industries.

Every interview, review or article with or or Matthew Herbert and his work, mentions and discusses his political intentions and conceptual approach. It is what sets Matthew Herbert apart, what holds his body of work together and what defines him as an artist. Although the avant-garde position aims at an author function which puts the work, and not its author, in the

centre of attention, Herbert's attempt to do just so, paradoxically reinstalls him back at that centre, which, as it turns out, is both unavoidable and necessary.

The difficulties of (re)contextualising the sound in such a way that his political view would come across in one way or another, forced Herbert to extend the framework designed around the music in order to solidify its conceptual bases. These difficulties and the attempts to overcome them are, as said, largely caused by the unavoidable proliferation of meaning, triggered by the opening up of the possibilities of meaning in sound, of information stored in acoustic material. The emancipation of sound, its aesthetic liberation, meant the impossibility of attaching fixed, solid meanings to it, since meanings and information are floating free for interpretation.¹⁵⁹

On *Goodbye Swingtime*, the conceptual ties not only run from the samples, the subject matter and lyrics to the themes of the album, they also tie up with things outside the music: political topics, opinions, ideas. Significantly, they are also linked to Matthew Herbert own position as its author. His legitimation to express these ideas is what eventually holds the entire thing together. Because, in the end, notwithstanding all the contradictions, friction and tension, it is all about showing an apparently coherent picture.

In this light, the remarks from Foucault's "What is an author?" I quoted in chapter three gain its full significance: the *real* function of the author, Foucault writes, is "an ideological figure by which one marks the manner in which we fear proliferation of meaning."¹⁶⁰ The author fills the work with meaning, but at the same time limits its possibilities, stopping the multiplication of possible readings and interpretations, stopping its "free circulation, the free manipulation, the free composition, decomposition and recomposition."¹⁶¹ The author is a controlling force, whose name "can group together a certain number of texts, define them, differentiate them from and contrast them to others." Furthermore, it "establishes a relationship among the texts."¹⁶² In other words: the author is what holds together an oeuvre, what establishes its possibilities and creates its expectations: "that one can say 'this was written by so-and-so or 'so-and-so is its author,' shows that this discourse is not ordinary everyday speech that merely comes and goes, not something that is

¹⁵⁹ Compare Jacques Rancière's remark on Plato's denouncement of the written word: "Plato had castigated the form of disorder brought about by the circulation of the written letter: in its random circulation the 'mute' letter spoke to anybody. Anybody could appropriate it for him- or herself and break away from the order which sets in good harmony the authority of the voice and the distribution of bodies in society." Rancière, 2005: 16

¹⁶⁰ See 31

¹⁶¹ Foucault, 1984: 119

¹⁶² Ibidem: 107

immediately consumable.”¹⁶³ Lastly, the author function straightens out all differences and contradictions, since it functions as a limitation to its own discourse: “the author [...] serves to neutralize the contradictions that may emerge in a series of texts.”¹⁶⁴

As such, Matthew Herbert's author function is the key to understanding his work. By establishing himself as authentic, individual, legitimate *author*, the focal point and binding element of his work, who's *image* is that of the avant-garde author, of whom the conceptual approach and political intentions are more important than his own biographical details, the inherent contradictions between the two are apparently resolved. Furthermore, Matthew Herbert-the-author, in control over his material, over his technology, over his samples and his way of sampling, in everything his own boss, is also in control over the possible *interpretations* that his work can be subject of, and the *meanings* it is supposed to have, limiting their proliferation. Since, after all, his opinions, the topics he addresses and the questions he raises are not meant to be too multi-interpretable. There are certain firm limits as to how his work is to be understood.¹⁶⁵

As far as I'm concerned, it is exactly this inflexibility which forms the weak point of his work. The biggest problem with Herbert's work and its critical intentions is the limiting discourse of the author function. The political inclination of the works is only open for discussion in a very narrow sense and the way it has to be interpreted and understood is pre-determined by the framework Herbert creates. Adorno, whose theories provided the groundwork for my analysis of Herbert's position, is very critical of such kind of explicit political art and as Jameson writes, he rebukes “the impatience and philistinism of the militant.”¹⁶⁶

For Adorno, art should not get involved in the formation of too specific meaning, for this attaches it to ideology and therefore causes a lack of freedom. The meaning of radical music for instance is, according to Paddison, the “very negation of accepted meaning.”¹⁶⁷ To attach specific meaning to art and music is to deprive it of its heterogeneity and multiplicity, thereby sacrificing it to ideology and unfreedom. Herbert does exactly this: attach specific meaning and prescribe interpretation. And, as Hamilton interprets Adorno “the greatest art is not prescriptive but allows for freedom of response – a freedom that does not rule out the

¹⁶³ Foucault, 1984: 107

¹⁶⁴ Ibidem: 111

¹⁶⁵ As Herbert said himself: “I don't buy this kind of postmodern critique that all meaning is subjective or morals are subjective or everything is open for discussion. I mean, certainly intellectually, it's open for discussion, but when it gets down to the nitty gritty, the Iraq war should have never happened and Madonna should stop making records immediately.” Matthew Herbert in Juzwiak, 2006

¹⁶⁶ Jameson, 2007 (1990): 131

¹⁶⁷ Paddison, 2006: 89

possibility of misinterpretation.” When this freedom of interpretation is limited, the danger of a too authoritarian discourse looms and art might turn into propaganda art, which “tells the audience what to think” and “leaves little room for freedom of response.”¹⁶⁸

French contemporary philosopher Jacques Rancière, on his turn, does not consider the autonomy of Adorno's radical avant-garde to be of crucial importance and does acknowledge the heterogeneous relation between works of art and things and people in the world. But he too considers political art to be art in which gestures, dispositions and meanings are put to work, which *by themselves* can be an emancipatory instrument, through the way in which they present themselves and how their relation to the world is different from the current state of affairs. For Rancière it does not lie within the power of the artist, and it is naïve to think it does, to determine what the specific effect of a certain work of art will be, since it is the artwork itself which is or is not critical, through its underlying heterogeneous position causing it to constantly redefine the connections between art and non-art, high and low culture, art and life. As Paolo Lafuente writes, “the impact of a political or emancipatory act can be chosen just as little as we can determine what the impact of a certain work of art [...] will be.”¹⁶⁹

This is why Matthew Herbert keeps on having so much trouble explaining what his intentions are, why he keeps on reconfiguring the ways in which he incorporates his political engagement in his work, keeps on searching for the right distribution of the different elements, the right dosage of all ingredients: because the danger of becoming too propagandistic, too authoritarian, is always just around the corner. Ultimately, his ideal to “make a record and don't tell anybody what the sounds are and see if it has some kind of emotional or political impact” is, utopian or not, the ideal of making a record *without* this danger, but *with* the effects he is after.¹⁷⁰ For it is much more difficult to produce a work of art which is critical, subversive and political by the merits of the multiple heterogeneous ways in which it engages with the rest of society, with itself and with other works of art, than to produce a work which remains stuck in an authoritative and limiting discourse set up by its creator.

These problematics are apparent in all forms of politically engaged art, especially when it relies on a complex conceptual framework. The question whether and how popular music can be critical or political relevant therefore does not focus, as so many seem to think, around the question of the possibility of critically engaged commodities and the difference

¹⁶⁸ Hamilton, 2007:178

¹⁶⁹ “De gevolgen van een politieke of emancipatoire handeling kunnen niet worden gekozen, net zomin als we kunnen bepalen wat de effecten zijn van een bepaald kunstwerk [...]” Lafuente, 2007: 29 (Translation by MK)

¹⁷⁰ See 123

between works of art and products of popular culture. The question rather involves the way this engagement is expressed and incorporated in the work, through the specific navigation of the artists and his work to maintain the knife edge position between autonomy and commodification, as well as the flexibility, ambiguity, heterogeneity of the work of art and the multiple possibilities for interpretation it leaves its audience.

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8. Example-CD content

01. Herbert - “In The Kitchen” (*excerpt*)

- Herbert. *Around the House*. Phonography, 1998: track 9

02. Doctor Rockit - “Cameras and rock” (*excerpt*)

- Doctor Rockit. *Ready to Rockit*. Clear, 1995: track 2

03. Matthew Herbert - “Hidden sugars” (*excerpt*)

- Herbert, Matthew. *Plat du Jour*. Accidental, 2005: track 6

04. Merzbow - “Denki No Numa” (*excerpt*)

- Merzbow. *Frog*. Misanthropic Agenda, 2001: track 3

05. Ryoji Ikeda - “Cuts”

- Ikeda, Ryoji. *0°c*. Touch, 1998: track 5

06. Herbert - “Thinking of You” (*excerpt*)

- Herbert. *100 Lbs*. K7/Accidental, 2006 (1996): track 3

07. Wishmountain - “Pepper Pot”

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08. Herbert - “Foreign Bodies”

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09. Radio Boy - “Starbucks is Coming”

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10. Radio Boy - “McDonalds” (*excerpt*)

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11. The Matthew Herbert Big Band - “The three W's”

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