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More Brilliant Than The Sun:
Adventures In Sonic Fiction:
Kodwo Eshun



More Brilliant than the Sun amplifies the disconcerting strangeness of today's music. Where most music writing absorbs the future shock of Sun Ra, Alice Coltrane, Lee Perry, Dr Octagon, Tricky, Parliament, Goldie, Underground Resistance and other Afrofuturist auditionaries, Kodwo Eshun breaks brand new ground by activating the concepts these figures themselves invented, assembling an entirely new field which he terms sonic fiction: the intersection between science fiction and sound. *More Brilliant than the Sun* explores the new kinds of perception that emerge from this breakthrough: the machine mythologies and the cyborg mindstates, the Unidentified Audio Objects and the sensory lifeforms thrown into earshot by a sonic world long since blown to pieces. *More Brilliant than the Sun* is a machine for travelling at the speed of thought; Press REWIND if it doesn't remix your mind.

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Adventures In Sonic Fiction:
Kodwo Eshun

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For the Newest Mutants

WORLD 4: MUTANT TEXTURES OF JAZZ

World 4

The last 2 decades of jazz constitute a collective machine for forgetting the years '68-'75, the Era when its leading players engineered jazz into an Afrodelic Space Program, an Alien World Electronics. 70s fusion, 80s neo-classical, 90s Acid Jazz, jazz rap, freejazz : all these bitter enemies are united in their absolute aversion/amnesia to the Jazz Fission Age. All hark back to before or after the Electronic Era that starts with George Russell's '68 *Electronic Sonata for Souls Loved by Nature* and ends with Macero's & Miles's *Dark Magus* in '75.

From Ra to George Russell to Miles & Macero to Alice Coltrane to Pharoah Sanders to Herbie Hancock to Eddie Henderson to Julian Priester to The Tony Williams Lifetime to Larry Young and on, the Inner Space Age generated the most audacious, ambitious and awe-inducing music to emerge from America.

But today in '98, it is as if the Futurhythmachines of this Electronic Era had never existed. Music has utterly retreated from the towering, overwhelming ambition of this era. Just like Techno, Jazz Fission – America's greatest moment – has been utterly disappeared.

Electronic jazz is when the engineer crosses the glass. Electric Jazz

peoples the world with hallucinations. Astro jazz is Alice Coltrane blaspheming against jazz by remixing *A Love Supreme*. Jazz Fission dissolves the border between mute and trumpet, wah-wah and organ, effect and instrument. Psychedelic Jazz derealizes sound into hornets and quasars. Cosmic jazz is unease, the monstrous deliquescence of the mixing desk. World 4 jazz is an ominous drift towards origins unknown.

Attribute: Assassin

Jazz Fission did more than melt the hierarchies which jazz tradition works so hard to maintain. As the cyclotron that produced mutant matter and polyrhythmic psychedelias, it triggered a post-jazz universe. The dates for the assassination of jazz are numerous and all its assassins have long since stepped forward: Coltrane, Ornette, Ra, Miles. Unlike the Art Ensemble's declaration of jazz as 'Great Black Music', Futurhythmic Fission treats the Tradition as *effects*, inputs to be fed into its giant Connection Machine.

Liquefying everything generates a confusion that quickly calcifies, into orthodoxy on one hand and into near-total amnesia on the other. Both responses were accelerated by the engineer-musicians themselves, who, dispirited and drained by poor sales, switched from fission to fusion and disparaged the Afrodelic era as a rash experiment, a failure.

Anachronic Cybernetics of the World: George Russell

The 2 versions of composer George Russell's *Electronic Sonata for Souls Loved by Nature*, from '68 and '80, are auditions of jazz augmented for the unknown hazards of inner space. In the Cybernetic Age, jazz must move through the centre of the cyclone, implode and be reassembled as electromagnetic dub. Instead of invoking jazz as an art, a beautiful soul which defies the military industrial complex, Russell technologizes jazz until it becomes an art-industrial complex: 'The tape was prepared at the Electronic Music Studios of the Swedish Radio Ensemble on a huge computer. It is meant to suggest that man, in the face of encroaching technology, must confront technology and attempt to humanize it, to explore inner, as well as outer space.'

Mixillogical

For Russell, the *Electronic Sonata* is a global music, a 'panstylistic electronic tape; a tape composed of fragments of many different styles of music, avant-garde jazz, ragas, blues, rock, serial music etc, treated electronically... a palate upon which non electronic musical statements of a panstylistic nature could be projected.' This convergence of collages turns the *Electronic Sonata* into a mixillogical machine: the fleeting friction of timbral incongruities, incompatible sound blocs rubbing against each other. Blurring the realtime ↔ tape distinction creates a fictional sonata of impossible music. The collage of heavy rock, Indian ragas and Moroccan voices is processed into an electromagnetic mirror mix, then looped into tapes which Terje Rypdal slashes at with guitar and Jan Garbarek corrodes with astringent tenor sax.

Tape + electronic treatments + live musics = Texturological Stratusphunk: 'There are three people playing at once on that tape but the tape is so integrated with the other electronic material it's hard to distinguish what's what.' Electronic mirages descend in palls, shrouding the outlines of sound in amorphous reefs of fog through which midrange attacks surge.

Journey to the Centre of the Head

Unlike Holger Czukay's shortwave or Lee Perry's tv sampling, Russell's electromagnetic forcefield falls in a haze as indefinite as a neuromantic sky tuned to the colour of dead tv. The vapourdrift of tapehiss seeps through the jagged guitar signals and sax tones, derealizing the borders between live and synthetic noise, and unreal and real time, into colourfields that flipflop at the periphery of perception.

Listening to the *Electronic Sonata, Events I-XIV* is like growing a 3rd Ear. The perpetual palimpsest of impossible events demands a new neuromuscular interface. You become a human Oncomouse, ear sprouting from your neck in a fleshy umbrella.

Fragmental

At 6 mins fog seeps in over test-tones and clanking chains. Applied intensively, electrons confuse solids with signals and metal with information, mystifying the ear as sounds escape their acoustic body and shed their envelope to become formless. Space coagulates then crinkles, altering its density, convoluting perspectives until sounds reach you in fractions and fragments. Your powers of recognition are shot to hell as

you move through a baffling republic of indistinct matter. Current attracts you towards a powerstation that shrinks into coins spinning on glass. At 13 mins everything is suffused in an unlocatable roar, heard through fog banks like Vittorio Gelmetti's ominous drones in Antonioni's '64 film *Il Deserto Russo*. At 15 mins, Garbarek's Shepp-style sax, all acrid Twombly-ized scribbles, starts dueting with a high frequency. Violins swoop abysmally. Gravity drops out, opening a horizon at the far edge of perception. Organ spirals through in curling flames as African percussion fades into hearing. At 20 mins, oscillators materialize into earshot, forming unknown metallophonic alloys, melding with marimba maze. 'The thing that sounds like a marimba is actually an old African man and his two sons. The voices heard on the *Electronic Sonata* are of a 70-year-old African and his two sons. An African lute is being used. A friend brought me a tape of Ugandan folk music so we just ran that through some ring modulators.' Textures superimpose each other before being swallowed up by the reverberations from a hidden powersource. At 23 mins, tape-simulated synthetic sonorities strafe across a harmonic curtain of church organ. Tumbling motion, like urchins drumming in the cavities of cast metal, slowly resolves itself into percussion, pulling focus on your hearing.

Textural Strata of the Mix

In *Part II of Electronic Sonata for Souls Loved by Nature*, North African lute and voice signals travel across space, panning past each other. Hand drums throw out rustling bridges of intermittence. The second voice fades into earshot, materializing out of cymballic shimmer.

The voices in *Part II Event VIII* exist in the simultaneous future-past time of the mix. The *Sonata* is mixology in un#real time.

At 3 mins, Rypdal's guitar crashes in and is sucked into the maw of ring modulation. At 6 mins, the tape is treated until it becomes a ghost orchestra. Cirled by escalating radii, you hear a new world, a wraithscape of delocalized chimes, echoes arriving from origins unknown, distant splashes. At 12 mins, space undergoes topological involution, rotating oscillations through a helical scan. Bass and piano momentarily surface, acoustic relics flung from the edge of the electromagnetic vortex. At 16.50 mins, sheets of wah-wah cut through space, are baffled by a fogbank which falls before your ears. You stop hearing through to the guitar; the space through which sound travels turns gaseous. Instead of transporting sound, space thickens and impedes it.

The Conceptual Technics of Destratified Dub

By reconfiguring jazz through the magnetic labyrinth, Russell and the engineers at the Swedish Radio Electronic Music Studio manufacture the magnetic vortex of dub in '68.

At 18 mins, percussion tumbles like a drum is being kicked over. The church organ plays underwater. Shortwave leakage fuses with the transient tones of radio, mobile and belltrees. At 22 mins, the drone modulates into the whine of aeroplanes taxiing on the runway. Sounds lose their harmonic profile, alter their stabilized identity in the electromagnetic process of folk implosion.

Electronics, as McLuhan recognized, massifies listeners into electribes. But electronics doesn't decant tribes from tradition into the present, because Trad sonic technologies are *already* futuristic. 'The old Norwegian church organ was the material this whole tape is based on – in conjunction with this African music which fits into the world cultural implosion. I wanted to reflect the cultural implosion occurring among the Earth's population, their coming together.'

Subsumption Rhythm

Russell's magnetic mixology accelerates a discontinuum in which the future arrives from the past. The percussion choir is a Rhythmachine simplified by the tapedelay of Steve Reich-era minimalism. The Ghanaian drumchoir distributes polyrhythms into strata that Russell terms Vertical Form: 'In the African drumchoir, one drummer is the rhythmic gravity while the others gradually layer on sophisticated rhythms on top of this tonal centre. The whole isn't really evolving in a horizontal way; it's evolving in complexity and density. It's vertical energy getting higher and higher, compounding.'

The drumchoir complexifies the beat into distributed Polyrhythmachines, webbed networks of poly#counter#contra#cross# staggered rhythms that function like the dispersed architecture of artificial life by generating emergent consciousness. Russell: 'Music is architecture. I build structures. Buildings go up – they're vertical forms. My focus is on the vertical evolution of a form, not necessarily on the horizontal/linear exposition of that form.' Rhythm = webs of intermittence, cyclic rhythms that are in synch but out of phase. The classical musics of the Ghanaian drumchoir, Balinese gamelan orchestras, Indian and Jajouka master musicians are what producer Kirk DeGiorgio terms ARTs – Advanced Rhythmic Technologies – already centuries old.

The older the Rhythmachine, the more futuristic it is. For George Russell — like Stockhausen, Coltrane and Holger Czukay — to go back into a Ghanaian or Indian or Vietnamese sonic past is to go forward into a new future. To listen to an ART is hearing the evolution of technology 5 centuries down the line.

Electronic Swarm Program: Teo Macero & Miles Davis, Herbie Hancock

The Medusa Complex of Mutantextures

Launched by producer Teo Macero and composer Miles Davis, amplified Afrodelia transmolecularized the solid states of sound into a continental drift. Inputs include Hendrix-era rock, fuzz, wah-wah pedals, Sly and the Family Stone's spaced funk, the electronics of the clavinet, the Arp, the Moog, tape-delay dub, the tense nervous string attacks of Varèse, the tabla and sitar of Badal Roy, the hyperrhythmic percussion webs of Hermeto Pascoal and Airtio Moreira.

Between '68 and '75, Macero & Miles, Hancock *et al* turned effects into instruments, dissolving the hierarchy by connecting both into a chameleonic circuit which generated new mutantextures. Amplified trumpet, wah-wah pedal, clavinet, echoplex unit, organ, guitar: all these became new instruments, grafted hybrids, unicorn sounds, centaur sounds. Effects are now acoustic prosthetics, audio extensions, sonic destratifiers, electric mutators, multipliers and mutagens.

Cyberneticist Kevin Kelly hears an electronic ecology emerging, where 'one machine's input is another machine's output.' In this Medusa Complex of feeds and leads, sound machines 'form foodwebs' and prey upon each other. In Herbie Hancock's '73 *Hornets*, the seething, treacherous 19 min 36 sec futurhythmaze exemplifies the mutagenic matrix. Passing the clavinet signal through the fuzz-wah pedal sends the synthesizer through the body of the guitar, producing a boaconstrictor tone that combines the clench of the clavinet with the choke of the wah-wah. Moving through the echoplex, constriction is cloned from a singular sensation into an environment that dunks you headfirst in a horde of heat-seeking killer bees.

Listening becomes a chase through the thickets of percussion. Motile tonalities, origin unknown, swarm after you, bugging you out as they disappear around the edges of the rhythmaze, obscured by overgrowth,

rebound off the walls of the webweave.

On Macero's & Miles' *Gondwana* from *Pangaea*, the organ is sent through wah-wah until it plays sustained chords from an impossibly elongated guitar.

DeStratifiers

Electronic effects are destratifiers because they dissolve the organization of the instrument, liquefy the stratification of sound. In the Afrodelic Era, effects defect from cause, redistributing themselves until it's impossible to hear which instrument generates which sound. A sound-vision schizmatix emerges; audio escapes from its acoustic body, compelling a new menagerie of sound machinery, tweaking you to invent fictional instruments from World 4.

The distinction between real music and soundeffects collapses, in a stream of sonic matter that crosses from the liquid state of piano sustain into the gas state of mute horn vapourdrift. *He Loved Him Madly* is all derealization, vapour trails of originless sound, viscous drift of organ = trumpet = guitar. Macero remixes the organ from another session onto the PolyRhythmengine, filters the trumpet through the mixing desk, through effects designed by Columbia's engineers.

The Schizophonic Era

Schizophony is R. Murray Schafer's term for the audible inferno of the post-war soundscape, the era when industrial communications split sound from its sources, 'becoming a fearful medium because we cannot see who or what produces the sound: an invisible excitement for the nerves.' With Macero & Miles, schizophony becomes endemic.

Insectile Texturhythm

You're in what producer Dr S. Gachet calls the audiomaze, the electric insectland that incites invisible excitement. Invisible because albums from the Electronic Era teem with percussion that's evolved into unseen insectile lifeforms. The sleeve for '75's *Dark Magus* shows Miles wearing bug-green fly shades, adapting to the audiomenagerie by becoming insectile himself. *Superfly* shades access the tsetse fly's magnified vision. Sight becomes compounded, triggering the reticulated hearing electronic jazz demands.

Chittering, cawing, creaking, shrieking, rattling, shaking: percussion becomes a nonlinear malevolence. Rhythm is a biotechnology. The

Hancock PolyRhythmengine is a biotech in perpetual motion. Its texturhythmfields are too distributed and too fugitive for the ear to catch. Percussion becomes a rhythm shower in which distributed beats – treacherous underfoot, glimpsed overhead – fall through the body like rain through lianas.

The skin hears the polyrhythmic shower as a creeping, writhing tactility. Sudden yet imperceptible shifts across the amplified percussapellid field – from rattling to chittering – conduct these across the skin, dropping body temperature as they writhe and seize the dermal terrain. Crickets, cicadas, treefrogs, hummingbirds flitting between the carbon-based rainforest. Hence the Rhythmengine of Maupin, Henderson *et al* calling themselves 'Headhunters', taking on Pygmy magic.

Side 2 of '73's *Sextant*, the final album in his convulsive, brilliant World 4 Trilogy – after '71's *Mwandishi* and '72's *Crossings* – is taken up entirely by the malignant hybrids of *Hornets*. Hancock's clavinet and Buster Williams's fuzz bass double each other in throttling chords that coil and unfurl like flaring cobras.

Against a trunkular superheavy bass, Billy Hart's cymbal hiss simmers maintaining a pneumatic pressure which stokes the PolyRhythmengine, the imminent threat of the groove. Julian Priester's bass clarinet insinuates a sinister motion like a subterranean sidewinder undulating over shifting sand. Patrick Gleason's synth oscillates from bassdrones to treefrog croaks to squeals that lead into abysmal squawls.

***By the alien power of distributed being agents can
be lifted into a type of colony intelligence by
connecting them in bulk***

Kevin Kelly

The Parahuman Biology of Sound Machines

In the Afrodelic Era, percussive strata and polyrhythmic engines converge in a zone of parahuman elusiveness. Fugitive and tensile, World 4 hyperrhythm makes audible the treacherous biocomputer of Amos Tuotola's '58 novel *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts*. Tuotola's carceral Bush of Ghosts, like the Amazonian jungle or the Central African rainforest, is a distributed biocomputer, an example of Kelly's 'massively parallel bioengineered adaptation. Natural evolution is a computational process of adaptation to an everchanging environment.'

My Life in the Bush of Ghosts accelerates 'the alien power of distributed being' into a medium, across which signals and frequencies crackle into electromagnetic ghosts. Tuotola opens a technology-magic continuum in which radio becomes an Invisible Magnetic Missive sent to you from Home. TV turns into a ghost medium haunted by the television-handed ghostess: 'When she told me to look at her palm and opened it nearly to touch my face, it was exactly as a television.'

It is the entire globe pulsating in my brain

Mati Klarwein

The Electrival Continuum <> The Past Arrives from the Future

Electric machines feed forward into the past. Tribal technology arrives from a marauding future. Mati Klarwein's and Tadanoori Yokoo's Miles Davis and Robert Springett's Hancock covers are Sonic Visions, soundings in paint which dramatize this electrival continuum.

On *Sextant* a North African boy and girl dance on a desert planed like a runway. A cratered moon hangs over them. A giant chain of beads, its 2 strands breaking out of an amulet like metallic antennae, floats past a ziggurated pyramid, a Babylonian <-Egyptian observation tower. Flip the sleeve over and there's an alien African in a robe, his bony fingers pointing to the giant chain. Behind him is an azure Buddha mask with roseate eyes, sun bursting behind it, clouds billowing.

With *Bitches Brew* Klarwein illustrates his electrival cyborgs, paradisaical girl-boy couples. On the front, the girl's hair twists into a swirl of striped gas that hurls itself across the thermal currents into a blue-black stormcloud. It's a reversible weather circuit, so the electric storm simultaneously generates Dali's atmosphercephalic current which produces the girl. On the back, a singing man, face set in delirious concentration, is surrounded by a stellar forcefield. Against a star cosmos, an albino boy, the reverse of the calm black face with blue lips on the front, weeps brown tears.

For the cover to *Thrust*, Hancock's an Afronaut – a pilot operator looking disdainfully out of the bubble window, as his fingers play the synthesizer-control panel that will guide his ufo down through the purple mists and onto the mountain-top runway. The runway is Assyrian tech, with a city carved into the plateau. A giant moon, its mauve craters like planetary pustules, looms overhead, blocking out the sky.

Crossings reveals that the wizened men with elongated skulls, standing in their white robes, are North African necromancers, alien visitors. The scene's anachronized by a boy with the same Pharaonic profile as the ageing viziers, sitting on the edge of a wave which sweeps across the back sleeve into the black sea-depths of the front sleeves. The necromancers are standing in water. There's a boat pulling in but there's no beach; the jet-blue waves lap onto more water instead of a shore. Refugees huddle against the coast wind.

In Yokoo's *Agharta* sleeve, the title forms a phonotron that blasts off from a city framed in lush foliage and a red liquid flux which arches out of the skyscrapers. On the back a tractorbeam draws a ufo out of a city and up through an underwater sky of coral reefs.

Pan<>Alien Astro<>African Space Program

In the Age of Afrodedia, the jazz composer becomes the audio alchemist. Afrodedia triggers an alternating current of technology and magic in the SleeveNote artwork of Yokoo, Springett and Klarwein. The futuristic and the archaic reverse polarities, and chase each other down into an anachronistic futurepast. On *Mwandishi* and *Sextant*, the Herbie Hancock Septet take on Swahili names. Herbie Hancock = Mwandishi. Benny Maupin = Mwile. Dr Eddie Henderson = Mganga. Julian Priester = Pepo. Buster Williams = Mchezaji. Billy Hart = Jabali.

This doesn't ground them or earth them in their roots. Instead, it arealizes them for take-off, a Buddhist <Swahili septet launched on the Pan <Alien Astro <African-American Space Program.

Collapsar

Klarwein, Yokoo and Springett exemplify Afrodedia, anachronizing past and future into what Miles calls Yesternow. As Sarah Connor says to Kyle Reece in *The Terminator*: 'You're talking about things I haven't done yet, in the past tense.' World 4 Art-Sound opens up what Joe Haldeman in his novel *The Forever War* terms a collapsar. The collapsar, a slippage in time, is a collapsed star in which the times between what's to come and what hasn't happened yet implode and fold upon each other. Tape plasticizes time into malleable material.

Afro<>Electric

Hendrix adopts Bob Dylan's Afro and wires it for feedback. Gunter Kieser's '69 *The Medusa Head* poster shows Hendrix's Afro electrified to transmit alternating current: 'Everything is electrified nowadays. That is why the name Electric Sky Church flashes in and out. I am Electric Religion. We're making music into a new kind of Bible, a Bible that you can carry in your hearts. One that will give you a physical feeling.' *And the Gods Made Love* psychedelizes cybernetics by turning the guitar into a jetstream engine: a 90-second sound painting of the heavens, a tone generator of sound spectra.

Chaosmos

Electronic Jazz's rapid transitions from extreme turbulence to prolonged static lulls suggest that it exists at the dissipative edge of ordered chaos, making audible the chaotic order being discovered by Benoit Mandelbrot. Whoever controls the effects controls the means of mutation. Effects inaugurate an alchemical era, a science of nonlinear synthesis.

Electric Jazz incorporates the sound of reversed tape – the gradual ominous buildup, the abrupt cut-off attack – as a new panic dynamics. Or the tapes could be reversed in the studio by the engineer. With *You'll Know When you Get There* from '71's *Mwandishi*, there's a new electronics of jagged edges, screaming attacks and appalling pauses, the futurepast of time running backwards while it's playing forward.

The Past Feedsforward into the Future

With '74's *Nobu*, Hancock invents hi-tech fusion, Techno before the event that opens a new plateau in today's electronics. Ignored on its release, *Nobu* compels a switchback in time as its forgotten past arrives from the future to scramble the present. *Nobu*'s sequences are the aural parallel of Op Art's retinal rivalry. Unable to resolve the Op Art image, the eye vacillates. Hearing wavers as it struggles to keep up with the track's psychoacoustic illusion of 2 speeds that run ahead of the electric piano's bass rhythm. Its arrangement is what Patrick Gleason terms syntharmonic, not melodic but rhythmic attack velocities. Drumbeats are replaced by Moog texturhythms. It spirals off into a solo interrupted by open-throated choral chords which pull focus, zooming out to the endless horizon of the synthetic sublime.

Dissolve Techno's faith in Kraftwerk as the foundation of today's

electronics, and Alien Music's lines of inheritance break up, go Wildstyle. With the collapse of Kraftwerk's consensual future, Techno doesn't die. It just loses its sense of itself as the definitive, single direction of music's future. Atlantic Futurism is always building Futurhythmachines, sensory technologies, instruments which renovate perception, which synthesize new states of mind. World 4 Jazz is a transmolecularizer which fluctuates the steady states of organized sound. Seeping in from the futurepast, it feedsforward into the present, anachronizing everything it reaches. Assembled from molecular components of rhythm, the Breakbeat is an Applied Rhythmic Technology, an ART that sets cultural velocity and cultural inertia in motion. By mobilizing rhythms across the communication landscape, the Rhythmengine crosspollinates the eager fan, transmateralizes your sensorium through the onomatopoeic illogic called HipHop.

TRANSMATERIALIZING THE BREAKBEAT

The Metamorphic Machine is Motion-Capturing Your Nervous System: Grandmaster Flash, Knights of the Turntable

The Possibility Space of Breakbeat Science

'The discovery of the DNA code, for example, is focusing on how you can create different species of beings by starting from the very smallest particles and their components,' Karlheinz Stockhausen has said. 'That is why we are all part of the spirit of the atomic age. In music, we do exactly the same.' By opening the possibility space of Breakbeat science, dj, mixer and rap pioneer Grandmaster Flash extends and deepens this '71 observation.

'After I took the title [of Grandmaster Flash] I knew I had to start going to a laboratory, so to speak, and invent new ideas.' For Flash in '81, going to the lab means approaching the studio as a research centre for the breaking down of the beat. In the lab, the Breakbeat is isolated and replicated, to become the DNA of rhythmic psychedelia.